



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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

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Official Report (Hansard)

Assembly Sittings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 5 November 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Matter of the Day

Murder of Prison Officer David Black

Mr Speaker: The Rt Hon Peter Robinson is given leave to make a statement on the murder of Prison Officer David Black, which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. I remind the House of the recent changes to matters of the day. Members other than Mr Robinson should indicate clearly if they wish to be called by rising in their place and continuing to do so, as happens very much at Question Time. I expect that a number of Members will wish to speak, and I ask them to assist me by being clearly on their feet when I look down the Chamber. All Members called will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject. If that is clear, we will proceed.

Mr P Robinson: Mr Speaker, last Thursday morning, Northern Ireland was stunned and distraught to learn of the cowardly murder of a brave public servant while he was travelling on his way to work at Maghaberry prison. David Black, a prison officer, was attacked on the motorway between Portadown and Lurgan. A car with Dublin registration plates drove up beside him, a number of shots were fired from it, and his car veered into the ditch. David Black was declared dead shortly afterwards, murdered by terrorists.

All those who have spoken and those who knew David have described him as being a thoroughly decent Ulsterman and as someone who was devoted to his wife, Yvonne, his two children, Kyle and Kyra, and his elderly parents. I visited Mrs Black and her family at their home in Cookstown. As I held her in my arms, listening to her sobbing, I could not help but sense the utter futility of that assassination. Here was a family completely devastated, a family who would never be the same again, a family who would feel the pain and loss for the rest of their lives, and what had been gained? The Assembly and the Executive will not fall or collapse — far from it. We are united in condemnation and reinforced in our determination to create a stable, shared and peaceful society. The murder will not bring about any changes to the prison regime at Maghaberry, and every sane person in the land believes that those who carried out the killing are odious, hate-filled deviants and psychopaths who should be locked up for life.

So let the Assembly speak out today with one voice in condemning those responsible and calling on the community to co-operate with the police by providing any information that may build a case to convict those who were responsible. Let us also remember David's prison officer colleagues, who serve day and daily on our behalf

in the most difficult and trying circumstances and who are vulnerable, not just while working in the prison but on their way to and from work and even in their home. I endorse the calls of those who have raised their voice to ask for greater security measures to be given to prison officers and to ensure that measures that have been withdrawn or not maintained are brought up to date and are functioning properly. Three Executive Ministers have some responsibility that touches on this issue, as does the Secretary of State, and I trust that they will get together. Although I have no direct responsibility, I am happy, if they wish me to, to co-ordinate a meeting to ensure that we have means at our disposal to give the utmost security to prison officers as they move forward. However, most of all, let us send to Yvonne, Kyle, Kyra and David's elderly parents our sympathy and condolences, our prayers and our love and our expression of resolve that those who murdered David will never win. We will give our complete support in the hunting down and convicting of those responsible.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Sinn Féin believes that the death of David Black was utterly pointless. It will resolve nothing in the prisons or in wider society. It is not part of any strategy or campaign. All that has happened is that a family has been plunged into grief. The people responsible or those who act as their political spokespersons need to explain themselves to our communities. Time and again, when these factions carry out violent acts, we get complete silence from those who, at other times, are only too willing to come on to the airwaves and attack the political process. It is patently obvious that the peace process will not be derailed by killings such as this. It has not in the past; it will not in the future. That is the reality. People need to realise that these actions are absolutely pointless. Our thoughts are with the family: Yvonne, Kyra, Kyle and David Black's parents. Táimid ag smaoineamh orthu inniu.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I wish to speak on behalf of my Alliance Party colleagues and all my colleagues in the justice system: the Department, the police, probation, youth justice and, most of all, the Prison Service. As the First Minister said, the murder of David Black is, first, a tragedy for his family. As I stood and named David to the media last Thursday morning, I was very conscious that I was speaking just a few minutes after his children had been told that their father had been murdered and their lives had been turned upside down. So let us remember today the bereaved family: David's wife, son and daughter and his parents and sister. They are in the entire community's thoughts and prayers. I hope that they will take some comfort from that knowledge and from

the utter revulsion with which David's murder has been greeted universally.

I condemned the murder last week, and I stand here to condemn it again today. It was a crime of the worst sort: the murder of an innocent man. It was cold-blooded and utterly ruthless. He was a defenceless man going to do his work, a man who, as we know, served this community well and with dedication and courage as a prison officer. It was a crime carried out in a way that put at risk the life of everybody who was travelling on the M1 at the time. Those who planned and carried out this dreadful murder seem more wedded to the struggle than to any possible cause, for they know that nothing that they do will change the mind of the vast majority of us, all the people of Ireland, whom they claim to speak for. The past is the past, and we are building a different future. The response to this murder must surely make it clear to them how utterly out of touch they are.

Others who know David personally have spoken well and eloquently in the past few days of him as a family man, as a representative in the community and as a member of his family and his Church. Last Friday, I had the opportunity to find out the kind of man he was as a prison officer. When I arrived at Maghaberry prison, I found the governor and the deputy discussing how they could accommodate the wishes of prisoners to show their sympathy to the Black family. That surely speaks more eloquently than anything that any of us could say. He was clearly somebody who, to use the biblical phrase, had gone the extra mile on numerous occasions to show his care for those whom he looked after.

When I went over to the committal landings in Bann House, where David worked, there was an utterly subdued atmosphere. I have never known any part of a prison to be so quiet. Staff and prisoners alike were in a mood of great sadness and great respect for David and were utterly upset by his loss. I was told there of David's concern for the welfare of the most vulnerable prisoners who had come through the committal process. One young man there was an orderly who was able to say that he had got that post because David had put his trust in him and recognised what he could do. Colleagues spoke of his friendship as a colleague to them.

The murder of David Black has united the people of Northern Ireland in grief and opposition to those who carried out that deed. Those of us in the Assembly, the Church leaders, the civic leaders in Cookstown and the local clergy of all denominations have spoken with a united voice. That has been matched by our colleagues across the border. One of the first to ring me last Thursday was Alan Shatter, the Minister for Justice and Equality, who was passing on good wishes, sympathy and support at this difficult time to those of us in the justice system and, most particularly, the Black family. President Higgins rang me personally on Thursday afternoon to ask me to pass on his condolences to Mrs Black, which I did on Friday. It is clear from that kind of response that the terrorists stand in total opposition to the people of Ireland, North and South.

I know that the police, with the support of the Prison Service, will do all that they can to catch the perpetrators and see that they are brought to justice. I will do what I can to ensure that the Chief Constable has the resources that he needs to carry that out. I know that the PSNI is already receiving the full support of an Garda Síochána, but, of course, as

the First Minister also said, it needs the support of the community and any possible bit of information that might help to catch the perpetrators and ensure their conviction.

In the House, we are united in opposition to those who committed the crime, but let us remember most of all those who are suffering particularly at this time — David's colleagues in the Prison Service and, supremely of all, his wife, Yvonne; his son, Kyle; his daughter, Kyra; his parents; and his sister, Lorraine — and let us assure them that they are in our thoughts and prayers.

Mr Nesbitt: The Ulster Unionist Party stands united in expressing our sympathy to and solidarity with the Black family. The murder has implications for all of us, but it is, first and foremost, a human tragedy. It is something with real meaning lying only with the Blacks, with Yvonne — a wife now a widow — the son and daughter, the wider family circle and Mr Black's friends and work colleagues. Nobody who has visited the Black household can be in any doubt of the human tragedy and the almost bottomless grief that is being expressed.

David Black did nothing more extraordinary on Thursday morning than get up and drive to work. Why and on whose authority was that journey denied him? Who made the decision that he had to die? It was not the people of Northern Ireland, because they voted in 1998 on an agreed way forward. They voted for a political process so inclusive of every shade of opinion and political grouping, no matter how comparatively small, that everybody had the chance of a place at the political table. They voted for this House and this set of political institutions. They voted for a new start that would put the economy, education, health and housing at the heart of the political debate and would give new-found respect for the rule of law and make a career in policing or in the Prison Service as respectable and as sought after as it is in any modern democracy. It was in that context that David Black drove to work on Thursday morning, a context in which for 14 years our arms have been open offering an inclusive process for all. So, why was David Black denied the chance to go to work? On whose authority? It was not mine and not that of the people of Northern Ireland or the people of the Republic of Ireland.

It is chilling to the blood to try to understand the mentality of those who sat down and planned and then executed this murder. Like Members of this House, I have listened to people speculating on the sort of person who carried it out. We can have that debate all day long and get nowhere. Are they psychopaths, simply wedded to the thrill of murder? Possibly they are, but let us not allow that this murder was the result of someone or some people with some form of mental illness. They chose to do what they did. In doing it, they also chose to reject the offer of inclusion that has been theirs for 14 years. They have rejected inclusion, as did the killers of Constables Stephen Carroll and Ronan Kerr and those who murdered Patrick Azimkar and Mark Quinsey at Massereene army barracks or those who horrendously injured Constable Peadar Heffron. The people who carried out those acts had 14 years to choose inclusion. They have chosen exclusion, and that must have consequences. They have no place on this island.

12.15 pm

Dr McDonnell: Like other Members, I offer my deepest sympathy to the family, friends and work colleagues of David Black on the atrocity that took place last Thursday

morning that was his murder. Although it is natural that much of the publicity in the press and around this Building surrounding this cruel murder assassination relates to the wider political implications for us all, in my mind I cannot help but think again and again of the family that he has left behind, a family to whom he was a husband, a father and a son. I extend my sympathy and humble prayers and the sympathy of the SDLP to that decent family.

This foul murder achieved nothing. Those who planned and perpetrated it have, by their own hand, in many ways excluded themselves from any role in our future, in the political processes and in political progress. They stand condemned by all in Northern Ireland and across the island of Ireland today and every day.

Again, I extend my sympathy, prayers and best wishes in this very difficult and grief-stricken time to that family, who did nothing to deserve this.

Mr I McCrea: David Black was well known in the Cookstown area as a loving father, husband and son. Finding the words is very difficult. He was known not only as a father, a son and a husband but as a friend to very many people in the Cookstown community, of whom I was one. David was a gentleman and a very easy-going man who was always up for a laugh. In many people's eyes, he was a very easy target for those who wanted to carry out this brutal murder.

As my party leader said, David was brutally murdered last Thursday morning. The shock when the news reached the local community of Cookstown was unbelievable. People whom I have spoken to and received messages from find it difficult to believe that David has been brutally taken. The killing of prison officers did not become wrong on Thursday; it has always been wrong, and it always will be wrong. The family have made it clear that they do not want any revenge, but they do demand justice. The family has gone through quite a bit. David's wife lost her father in a tragic farming accident almost a year ago. She was preparing to deal with that anniversary. David's murder has brought back many memories and made things worse.

What has this achieved? I do not believe that the assassination has achieved anything for those who carried it out. As Yvonne said when the First Minister, Lord Morrow and I visited her, if only these people would come and see the tragedy and how this has left a family to grieve, they would see that it has achieved nothing for the cause of Ireland, if that is what they believe it was for. I welcome the condemnation from across Northern Ireland and many other parts of the world. The family will be more than grateful for that.

Sadly, Mid Ulster is a constituency that has suffered at the hands of republicans for many years. People there hoped that it had ended, but, sadly, they have witnessed another atrocity. I condemn it, and the local community condemns it. The local community has been united in its condemnation. We will not accept the continuation of this type of activity. I appeal to anyone who has information to come forward, as do the family. It is important that they get justice, and the only way that can happen is by getting information. I appeal to anyone with information to come forward immediately.

Mr Allister: This was undoubtedly a dastardly IRA murder. One's thoughts and sympathies immediately are with the Black family: the widow and the two fatherless children. They stand in a very dark and difficult place, where so

many people have stood in the past. Little comfort as it brings, it is relevant and necessary at this time to say that the community as a whole is thinking of them.

Some say that the murder was utterly futile, but we have to face the fact that this dastardly murder followed a well set Provo template in which you create discord, difficulty and protest inside the prison and then you begin to murder prison officers outside the prison. Where did we see that before? Many, many times. Indeed, 29 prison officers were butchered by the IRA in pursuit of the same template. People say it was futile, and yet we look at the structures of this House and we see that, sadly, the violence of the past paid. That is still a motivator for those who perpetrate today's IRA violence. They look at those who perpetrated previous prison officer and police murders and conclude, sadly correctly, that it worked for them. The structures of the House are an ineloquent testimony to that sad, hideous reality. These structures are built on the reward of terrorism and the buy-off of terrorism.

The odious, hate-filled deviants who murdered David Black are no better or worse than the odious, hate-filled deviants who butchered in the name of the Provisional IRA and whose murders are still justified today in the House as those of the IRA. Part of the driving force for that continues to be the sad reality that this community rewarded that. Politicians in this community, for the sake of office, rewarded that, and in doing so they set their own template that violence, alas, can pay. I trust that on this occasion it will not, but, given the history of the past, one can have little confidence that that will be so.

Mr Givan: David Black was well known to my family. Indeed, I went to school with some of his relatives. Having visited the home, I know the grief that that family has been plunged into and the devastation that that family faces is something that I never want to have to face in my home. David's wife, Yvonne, best described to me how she feels about the attack. It was Yvonne who used the word "futile". That is exactly what the attack was. It was futile, best described by the widow of David Black.

It was almost 20 years since this society had witnessed the murder of a prison officer. The officers that I spoke to at Maghaberry on Friday had hoped that those days were gone. Sadly, it has been brought back into our community. Poignantly, this Friday sees the annual memorial service for the officers murdered during the terrorist campaign. David was due to take part in that service to honour colleagues of his who had been murdered. Now, David will be remembered by all of us on Friday.

There is no political strategy and no amount of public support that can ever justify murder. It was wrong in the past when 29 officers were murdered, and it is wrong today. As for those who believe that they may get away with this, I encourage the community to provide information to the police to bring them before the courts so that this family can have justice. There will be a day when all of us are held to account before the almighty judge, and justice will be brought to those that have perpetrated this crime and the countless other crimes in our past.

Mr McGlone: The murder of David Black was a callous and pointless act of violence, and my thoughts at this time are with the Black and Hyndman families, two very well respected families locally.

During the past few days, the phrase frequently on people's lips in regard to those families was "good people". They were well respected, well got and good people in the local community. My sympathies also extend to his colleagues at his place of work.

12.30 pm

Those responsible for this despicable murder must be given no hiding place in this society, and I urge anyone with any shred of information to pass it on to the police. In their use of violence, those responsible have demonstrated that they have learnt nothing from the failure of and suffering caused by violent campaigns of the past. There is no united Ireland at the end of that violent path. The Provisionals eventually realised it, and the latest incarnation of violent republicans must, too. The rest of us cannot wait for that penny to drop again. Together, all parties now committed to the political process must show that politics can and will deliver a better future for all people in this society. All our political parties need to redouble our efforts together to show the real responsibility for delivering effective policies and to build that new society. If there is to be a truly shared future here, the people need to see genuine building of that future together.

In their loss of David, I offer my sincerest personal sympathy to the entire family circle.

Mrs Overend: I stand here this afternoon with a heavy heart and offer my sympathies to Yvonne, Kyle, Kyra and the whole family. This is an absolute tragedy for the family, and my thoughts are with them and with David Black's colleagues as they attempt to deal with the aftermath of this shocking murder.

Like many others, I visited the family on Friday morning and saw the utter devastation that this thoughtless act has caused to David's widow, Yvonne, his children and the whole family. They had been preparing for the anniversary of the death of Yvonne's father, Glenn Hyndman, who was a member of our party. He was killed almost a year ago in a farming accident. I know that Yvonne was going to find that particularly difficult. They thought that that tragedy could not be beaten, and then this happened, and they are now dealing with another absolutely tragic loss. Yet again, the actions of the minority have ripped apart a family and the community.

As I spoke to Yvonne's family, it was clear that this has brought many in that family back 20 to 30 years, when tragedy visited so many families of those working in the security forces to protect the people of Northern Ireland. I know that many others in the Mid Ulster constituency still suffer from the heartbreak that terrorism brought over the troubled years, and we must find ways to support those people.

These people will not be allowed to succeed, and their views are not held by any right-thinking people in Northern Ireland. I call on anyone with information to contact the police and to bring these terrorists to justice.

I call on everyone to continue to pray for Yvonne, Kyle, Kyra and the whole Black and Hyndman families at this time so that they can find strength in the time ahead.

Mr McNarry: On behalf of UKIP, I offer our genuine and heartfelt condolence to Mrs Black, her family and her husband's friends and colleagues in the Prison Service

and the Orange Institution. There is sadness because this murder of a good man should not have happened, coupled with anger that it did happen and despair that even today's commentators are saying that this execution was no surprise. I hear the nauseating apologists say that these recycled Provos are a minority, represent no one and have no mandate. Is the point not that they do not care about Mrs Black and her grieving family and do not require or seek a mandate? Any nonsense about prison rights is particularly galling this day or any day when used to excuse the capacity to seek out and execute an innocent man in cold blood. I say to my friend beside me, Mr Allister, that it has not worked for anyone else, and it will not work for anyone else, because this is Northern Ireland. It is because we believe that it will not work. So, one way to tell others to stop is to say today to your erstwhile friends that your activity in terrorism did not work and was wrong, and it is still wrong today.

Our thoughts, Mr Speaker, must be with Mrs Black and her family, so that she knows that we are with them, as the First Minister said, in their dark times; that this House is not full of hypocrites; and that what we say today, we mean and will put into practice. What we are saying is that this House is resolved to put into prison those who carried out this murderous crime. This House will be content when it sees that action happening.

Mr Bell: David Black's life stands as a testimony to hope. The terrorists who cruelly and evilly assassinated him stand for hatred. David Black's life will be the legacy of a man who served everyone in the community without fear or favour. He rose from his bed early in the morning and worked until late at night. He worked every day of the year to keep this community safe. The legacy that the terrorists offer will, ultimately, be defeated because life will always triumph over the death squads of hatred, and good will always triumph over evil. That is a cold comfort for his wife, Yvonne, and his children Kyle and Kyra, who have had stolen from them a good husband and a good father.

Let us be very clear that the murder of police officers and prison officers did not become wrong in 1998; it was always wrong. It was wrong in 1988 and 1978, and it was wrong from the day and hour that it started.

I pay tribute to the First Minister. From 1970, you have been with the prison officers. On 30 occasions, you have stayed in the front line of politics to stand with those people who have lost their loved ones and to offer hope and commitment. Let the terrorists be in absolutely no doubt whatsoever. They are delusional if they think that, while we will suffer pain, grieve and feel empathy for children who have lost a father, we will ever submit to terrorists' dogma. We will never give up on the rule of law; we will never give up on democracy. They are defeated before they start.

Let us pay tribute to the prison officers. Many of us have family members who have served in that capacity. My late uncle served for many years. The prison officers of today are no different from those of before. They could not take their children out to the cinema. They had to watch their wives as they put washing on the line, so that a uniform was not put out. They had to change their routes to work. Prison officers whom I know in Newtownards could not even answer their front doors; other members of the family had to do it for many years. They lived under the most unbelievable stress and faced vile evil and hatred.

Today, there are a number of prisoners who stand as an excellent testimony to the work that the Justice Minister has spoken of. Those prisoners have offered their support to a prison officer who did his duty with integrity and decency and supported them in prison in the course of their rehabilitation. However, make no mistake that there are other prisoners who feel that it is right to taunt other prison officers with hatred about the death of a colleague and with the names of their wives and children as they go about and serve us. The prison officers of today, like the prison officers before, will continue to do their duty with integrity and decency. They will uphold human rights against the death squads of terrorism, and they will face the vile abuse that they receive in prisons with the courage and dignity that they have always shown. We pay tribute to them, and we do not underestimate the nature of the hatred that is being piled against them. It is for us all as a society today to stand with each and every one of our prison officers and say to them that we will support you, as you face this evil threat against you, and we will support your families, who come under a secondary level of threat because you do a job for each and every one of us in the House.

I turn back to Yvonne, Kyle and Kyra: your husband and your father served us all. We will never, ever be able to pay back the debt that we owe to that man who was cruelly murdered. He offered us life and hope; he offered us decency and human rights; and he offered us courage in the face of terrorism. His legacy, ultimately, will be successful over the terrorists.

The murder of David Black was unjustified and unjustifiable. The murder of the 29 other prison officers was equally unjustified and equally unjustifiable.

Mr Speaker: We are out of time. However, three Members have indicated that they want to speak on the subject. I will call them if they will be brief.

Mr McCarthy: Thank you. I will be brief. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to say a few words on this totally and utterly despicable act of violence. When I first heard about it, I was shocked to the core. The first thing that comes into your mind is this: it is someone in my neighbourhood? I know some of my constituents who serve the community in the capacity of a prison officer. However, it was not; it was David Black. David Black served the community for 30-odd years, and for this to happen at the end of his career is unbelievable and shocking. I offer my absolute and total sympathy to the Black family. Everything good has been said about David, and that is the way that it should be.

May I just say, briefly, that this has been a horrendous week. On Saturday morning in my constituency, along with other Members, I stood at the cenotaph in Comber to remember the young officer, Channing Day, who lost her life. Together, those things have shattered our community. On behalf of myself, my party and my family, I offer to Channing's family and to David Black's family my total sympathy and sorrow. If there is anything that can be done, I will certainly do it.

Mr McClarty: Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to express my revulsion at and condemnation of the heinous murder of David Black. As other Members have said, this despicable act has achieved absolutely nothing except to plunge a family into deep grief. The actions of these evil individuals are futile and will not succeed. Like others, I

pray for the family of David Black, and I call upon all right-thinking people to co-operate with the police investigation, so that the perpetrators of this vile act can be brought to justice.

Not all murders of prison officers have been carried out by republicans. A terrorist, therefore, is a terrorist, is a terrorist, no matter what clothes they wear.

Mrs D Kelly: I join others in expressing my sincere condolences to the Black and Hyndman families. On behalf of the people of north Lurgan in the area where the murder was committed, I put on record our utter revulsion at those who, in the midst of that community, have brought such shame and horror to that community and shattered that family. I ask those who have not yet come forward to put the courage in their hands and come forward and assist the police in their investigation. Last week, the people of Inglewood made tea throughout the night for the police while they cordoned off the area where the car was abandoned. I commend those good people and call for all those with any scrap of information, no matter how small, to please come forward so that the perpetrators can be put behind bars.

12.45 pm

Mr Speaker: I ask all Members to stand for one minute's silence in reflection on the matters spoken and as an expression of support for the Black family at this time.

Members observed one minute's silence.

Assembly Business

Public Petition: Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim

Mr Speaker: Mr Trevor Clarke has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. The Member will have up to three minutes to speak.

Mr Clarke: It gives me great pleasure to present this petition on behalf of the parents and supporters of Parkhall high school, some of whom are in the Public Gallery today. I know the passion that the parents, friends and supporters of Parkhall have for this newbuild. The fact that one of the grandparents, who was one of the main organisers of the petition, is here today is testimony to that.

Parkhall school was built over 40 years ago and has served the community particularly well. However, we are all aware of the pressures in education, and Antrim borough in particular has had a very dramatic time. The cuts in education provision have left us with just one controlled school in the area, Parkhall, and one in Crumlin.

Antrim is the principal and largest town in the borough. It is unfortunate that the school has fallen into such disrepair, but, as I said, other schools have been removed, which has left exceeding pressure on Parkhall. The school is falling into such disrepair that, when visiting on a particular day, buckets to collect water could be seen in the corridors. We understand the pressure on the education system and the maintenance cuts, but those cuts over the years have resulted in the school's demise. As I look around the Chamber, it is interesting to see that every political party has been represented and has supported the representations that the school principal made to the Minister and the board. That says a lot for Antrim's Parkhall school.

The other factor is that because of the state of the budgets and the pressures that schools are under, Parkhall shares two sites: one is the former site of another school, the other is Parkhall's original site. More than 725 children attend the school every day, but it is unfortunate that the pressures on the budget mean that staff have to travel between the two sites to educate them. That is putting exceeding pressure on the school at this time.

Two to three years ago, the school went through a transformation to change to controlled integrated status. Part of the education board's promise and pledge at that time was that the school would get a new building. It is unfortunate that the promise that was made to parents for the past two to three years —

Mr Speaker: The Member must draw his remarks to a close.

Mr Clarke: I appreciate that. The new building that was promised to parents for the past two to three years has not been forthcoming. I am handing you the petition, Mr Speaker, on behalf of those parents to pledge support for that newbuild in Antrim.

Mr Clarke moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for the petition. I will forward copies to the Minister of Education and the Chairperson of the Committee for Education.

Public Petition: Artillery Youth Centre, Belfast

Mr Speaker: Mr Alban Maginness has sought leave to submit a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. The Member will have up to three minutes to speak on the matter.

Mr A Maginness: It is an honour to represent the Artillery Youth Centre, which is situated just off the New Lodge Road in north Belfast. The centre has served the community since 1969. Since then, it has been dedicated as a youth club. It has been at the heart of the community since it opened its doors just before the Troubles broke out. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Artillery Youth Centre was a refuge for children and young people from the area. Since 1997, the centre has been operated by the Artillery Steering Group, which is a voluntary group of parents, former members of the youth centre and, indeed, young people themselves. It has received next to no money from the Belfast Education and Library Board.

Towards the end of August 2012, out of the blue, the Belfast Education and Library Board served notice on the centre to close its doors and vacate the premises. That was done without giving any notice whatsoever to the club. Since that happened, because of the public reaction, its closure has been deferred until 31 December. Of course, that is to be welcomed. However, it should not be the final state of affairs. The centre must go on. It has served the community in an outstanding fashion.

In appreciation of the work that the centre has done, an evaluation that KPMG carried out on behalf of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister found the centre to have:

"Inspirational, dedicated, dynamic, suitably qualified and experienced Youth Workers who are cognisant of the issues facing the local community."

The report continued:

"The commitment of both staff and volunteers was apparent."

That says a lot about that youth centre and the value that it gives to the whole community. Artillery Youth Centre is a rare example of youth-led practice. It is a service that is valued highly by families in the area and by children and young adults right across north Belfast. That is evidenced by the petition that is being presented, which has over 3,000 names, including those of 500 children and young people.

Mr Speaker: The Member must draw his remarks to a close.

Mr A Maginness: The threat of closure remains over the premises. I believe that the petition is a fair and just call to the Assembly and, in particular, to the Minister of Education and the Minister for Social Development to support the continued work of the centre.

Mr A Maginness moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for the petition. Once again, I will forward copies to the Minister of Education and the Chairperson of the Committee for Education.

Ministerial Statement

Employment Law Review

Mr Speaker: The Minister for Employment and Learning wishes to make a statement to the House.

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): With permission, I wish to make a statement on my review of employment law in Northern Ireland. As Members will be aware, many of the fundamental rights and protections of workers and employees are established at European Union level. However, national and regional Governments have some discretion over how they implement and administer employment law. Northern Ireland is the only region in the UK where employment law is devolved. We, therefore, have the opportunity to locally develop a modern, efficient and integrated employment relations system in which economic competitiveness and workers' rights are balanced and, indeed, placed in harmony with each other.

The purpose of today's statement is to provide Members with an understanding of the very broad scope of the employment law review, set out what progress has already been made and explain how I intend to proceed on a number of critical aspects of the review. Unfortunately, the debate around employment law is often pitched as the interests of business against the rights of workers. I reject the argument that this has to be a zero-sum situation. We can fashion an employment law system that works in the interests of business, helps our economy to grow, attracts investment, encourages companies to recruit new staff and, at the same time, provides sufficient protection for the rights of employees, with opportunities for redress.

Devolution allows us to shape employment law and its implementation to suit the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland. However, we must also recognise that many companies are transnational and trans-regional in respect of how they do business, and unnecessary differences in law and in the administration of law can be problematic. Northern Ireland is not on its own in looking to reform its employment law system. Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland have also embarked on very ambitious programmes of reform, which are being presented as strategic responses to the current economic downturn.

Historically, Northern Ireland has sought to mirror Great Britain, by and large, with respect to employment law matters. The clear advantages of consistency have been recognised. Therefore, legislation in both jurisdictions is strikingly similar. However, that is not always the case. During the previous mandate, the Assembly passed the Employment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which made fundamental changes to the way in which workplace disputes are resolved in Northern Ireland. In contrast to the situation in Great Britain, it retained the statutory procedures that employers are required to follow when taking disciplinary action or dismissing an employee. Our legislation also modified our already unique fair employment legislation to make it possible for fair employment tribunal and industrial tribunal cases to be considered in a single hearing.

Since coming into office, I have continued to develop and maintain the Northern Ireland employment law framework, and last year, I secured the Assembly's agreement to

transpose the agency workers directive. There was a compelling case for opting into the 12-week derogation, which had been agreed between the social partners at UK level. That achieves an estimated 60% reduction per annum in the regulatory costs to business.

In September this year, I launched the Labour Relations Agency's (LRA) enhanced statutory arbitration scheme, which now offers a viable alternative to employment tribunals. That service is not available in the rest of the UK. It confirms my commitment to deliver on early intervention and prevention in government.

My Department's employment law review is a key action in the Executive's economic strategy. I issued a discussion paper in May 2012. The Department received 35 substantive responses to the paper, and I am very grateful for what were thoughtful and measured contributions. I have just completed a further series of meetings with some key stakeholders that proved invaluable in helping me to determine how we should now proceed.

Before publishing my response to the discussion paper, I want to share with Members some of the key messages from what has been a very positive engagement with stakeholders and set out the next steps that should lead to a formal public consultation in early 2013.

The first review theme deals with the early resolution of workplace disputes, and it generated significant comment. Concerns had been raised by all sides about the costs of tribunals and not just the cost of legal representation. There are the opportunity costs, the associated reputational risks and the uncertainty of outcomes. The process can be stressful for claimants and employers. We all know that tribunals were intended to offer a quick, low-cost legal consideration of workplace disputes.

However, they have taken on many vestiges of a formal court setting. It is said that the adversarial nature of tribunal proceedings deters many potential claimants from pursuing a case, which, for me, raises concerns about access to justice. It is also suggested that many employers, in particular smaller ones, settle a case, even when the claim has little merit to avoid significant upheaval to business operations. Again, that is unsustainable in economic terms.

1.00 pm

I have given a commitment to make tribunal proceedings more efficient, but the reality is that a full legal process of this kind will always be resource intensive. The real solution is for employers and employees to use their best endeavours to resolve their differences through early and less formal resolution processes. Accordingly, there is strong support for increased use of early resolution as a viable alternative to employment tribunals.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy] in the Chair)

The services provided by the Labour Relations Agency are highly valued by stakeholders. It offers a range of high quality and responsive early resolution services that, in many cases, obviate the need to go to an employment tribunal. The view of all stakeholders is that there is a need to identify effective mechanisms to encourage or incentivise parties to use early resolution mechanisms as an alternative to formal litigation. There is a need to increase the uptake of the agency's pre-claim conciliation

and arbitration services. However, opinion is divided on the proposal that all potential tribunal claims should be directed, in the first instance, to the LRA.

Finally, there is a need to explore the feasibility of introducing early neutral evaluation to give parties a realistic appreciation of their options at the pre-claim stage, and even when a claim has been lodged with the industrial tribunal. That should provide an effective filter mechanism for weak or out-of-time tribunal claims that could be handled more effectively through alternative dispute resolution services.

I recognise that the employment law framework has become very complex, which has implications for the conduct of tribunal proceedings. Nevertheless, we need to look for opportunities to improve the quality of the tribunal experience for employees and employers.

Turning to employment tribunals, the following points were made by stakeholders. There is a strong view that tribunal proceedings should be more consistent. Many suggest that the rules committee, which advises on the procedures governing employment tribunals, should actively consider the recommendations of the Great Britain review led by Mr Justice Underhill. In turn, many argue that the tribunal users' forum needs to be more representative of employee and employer interests. In addition, there is strong opposition to tribunal chairmen sitting alone in unfair dismissal cases.

There is also little support for the payment of witness expenses, and opinion is divided on the introduction of a fee structure. Finally, and unsurprisingly, there is only limited support for an increase in the maximum pre-hearing deposit from £500 to £1,000, and no meaningful support for an increase in the maximum amount of costs or the introduction of financial penalties. However, we will wish to consider a greater use of deposit hearings, where that is merited.

The third aspect of the employment law discussion paper focused on measures to reduce the regulatory burden of existing employment legislation. Opinion is polarised on a number of legislative proposals, with employer interests viewing them as pro-growth measures, and employee representatives arguing that they will undermine employment rights.

The UK Government increased the qualifying period for unfair dismissal across Great Britain from one to two years from 6 April 2012. Employer bodies suggested that Northern Ireland will be less attractive to foreign investors unless we follow suit. Unions and other citizen interest groups argued that there was no evidence to support this measure, and that any increase in the qualifying period will simply introduce unwelcome volatility or distortions to the labour market.

Similar positions have been adopted in respect of proposals to reduce the consultation period for collective redundancies and to amend the TUPE provisions. However, there was consensus in relation to the compensated no-fault dismissal proposal, which was rejected by the vast majority of stakeholders.

The discussion process has achieved a shared understanding of the policy proposals that need to be taken forward as part of the employment law review. Equally, it has identified the proposals that do not merit further consideration. I have, therefore, decided to take no

further action on the following policy proposals: tribunal chairmen sitting alone in unfair dismissal cases; the introduction of new requirements on parties to pay witness expenses; any increase in the maximum amount of tribunal costs awards; and the introduction of financial penalties for breaches of employment rights, as that would, in effect, be a double punishment. I also reassure people that we will not be pursuing compensated no-fault dismissals for small and medium-sized (SME) enterprises, as was suggested in the Beecroft report in Great Britain.

I am committed to taking forward initiatives that have a positive impact on the way in which workplace disputes are resolved. To facilitate potential action on certain issues, I have asked my officials to immediately commence work on the following projects: a benchmarking exercise to identify international best practice in employment relations; a research project to establish the correlation between levels of employment regulation and competitiveness; and an evaluation of the outcomes of the research project that was recently commissioned by my Department to identify the support mechanisms that the SME sector requires to comply with employment law.

I will also ask the Labour Relations Agency to undertake the following early resolution projects: the development of a detailed delivery model for routing all claims through the agency; enhanced promotion of the agency's pre-claim conciliation and arbitration services, with a view to substantially increasing the uptake of those services; and a study to determine the feasibility of introducing early neutral evaluation as part of the agency's package of early resolution services. Those steps should further consolidate an emphasis on early intervention and prevention.

There is also a need to improve the experience of people accessing employment tribunals and to produce a more effective service. I will ask the tribunal rules committee to produce a single, consolidated set of tribunal rules that take into account the applicability of the recommendations of Mr Justice Underhill's review in Great Britain. Mr Justice Underhill has produced draft rules that are designed to be clearer, simpler and more concise. His recommendations include better guidance on matters of good practice and internal procedures; stronger powers to manage cases and set timescales for the consideration of cases; and measures to encourage the greater use of alternative dispute resolution. One key opportunity would be to introduce a form of early neutral evaluation into the tribunal service. Appropriate mechanisms will be put in place to enable a wider cross section of tribunal users and stakeholders to provide feedback into that process.

There are other policy issues that I have identified as being worthy of further consideration, many of which would require legislation. I will briefly outline a number of those in a moment. There will be a need for a more detailed appraisal of the proposals, and the development of potential options, before seeking Executive approval to go out to public consultation. In parallel with my ongoing discussions with departmental officials, the LRA is hosting a round-table forum of the key employee and employer bodies to identify proposals that are agreeable to all stakeholders. We have not had that type of structured engagement between key social partners for quite some time. I am encouraged by the commitment of the key stakeholders to work collaboratively to reach a consensus

on a range of measures that would bring substantive improvements to our current employment relations system. I will give serious consideration to any employment relations proposals that enjoy the support of employee and employer interests.

The first of the key areas that remain under active consideration is the requirement for potential tribunal claims to be referred or routed to the LRA in the first instance. The objective will be to create conditions in which people are encouraged to consider the merits of resolving their disputes without the need to go through a formal legal process. The qualification period for unfair dismissal is another policy issue that requires careful consideration. In Great Britain, the qualification period was recently extended from one year to two years on the basis that it would increase business confidence, encourage companies to recruit more staff and potentially reduce the number of tribunal claims. It is argued that any difference in the medium term between Northern Ireland and Great Britain in that area would undermine our competitive position and become a negative factor for investors when they are considering location options for investments. By contrast, others point out that Northern Ireland, Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland already have some of the most liberal labour laws in the world. They also point to a risk that workers in a more uncertain employment situation will be less likely to spend in the local economy. In addition, given our particularly strong equality protections, there is a danger that claims that would otherwise have been for unfair dismissal will simply be taken as alleged discrimination cases, which can be more complex and costly.

As a change with regard to unfair dismissals may have limited practical impact, some may say that the case for Northern Ireland marketing itself presentationally in similar terms to Great Britain is, therefore, much easier to make. By contrast, others may draw an opposite conclusion and claim that there is less need for reform. Ultimately, I believe that this is a sufficiently critical matter for the Northern Ireland economy to be considered further as part of a focused public consultation in which the views of stakeholders can be properly taken into account. That aspect of employment law must remain on our agenda, but there will be no predetermined outcome. Any consultation in this area would enable the advocates of change to set out its potential benefits, seek to assess the validity of all the various arguments and examine viable available options.

The potential for introducing a process of protected conversations will also be explored. That might allow for an employer to have a conversation with an employee about sensitive issues, such as performance and retirement, on the basis that those conversations would be not be admissible in an unfair dismissal tribunal hearing. Any analysis will examine not only the viability of such conversations but the form that they may take, including the legal and operational implications. Additionally, I will be considering the policy for compromise agreements, which are formal, legally binding agreements that follow the termination of an individual's employment. They usually provide for a severance payment by the employer, in return for which the employee undertakes not to pursue any claim to an industrial tribunal. Stakeholders confirmed the need to examine the processes and terminology of those agreements.

At this stage, I have also decided to leave the consultation periods for collective redundancy unchanged. Members will be all too aware of the recent redundancy announcements, which have such far-reaching implications for the affected employees, their companies and the wider Northern Ireland economy. My Department is committed to helping those employees to re-enter the labour market at the earliest opportunity. I sense that this is not the right time to bring proposals that could potentially disadvantage employees who find themselves victims of the current economic downturn. We may return to that issue later in this mandate.

I have already indicated that this employment law review is predicated on Better Regulation principles. It is a Programme for Government commitment to take action to reduce unnecessary regulatory burdens. Therefore, it is my intention to launch a Better Regulation pilot, which will examine the Working Time Regulations and the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations, with a view to reducing unnecessary bureaucracy. The pilot will inform a wider review of all subordinate legislation that my Department will take forward in partnership with business and employee representative bodies.

My Department's review of employment law represents the most significant consideration of our employment relations system since employment law was devolved back to Northern Ireland in 1999. It covers every aspect of the employment relationship and will require a partnership involving all the employment relations representative bodies.

There are three key outcomes that all the reforms are designed to achieve. The first is to achieve greater harmony and cohesion in the workplace, to make Northern Ireland a model for employment relations and, in doing so, to consolidate its position as good place in which to do business. The second is to shift the balance of how any complaints are addressed significantly in the direction of the various forms of alternative dispute resolution. The third is to make the process within tribunals simpler and more efficient for the cases that will still follow that route.

I am sure the Employment and Learning Committee will want to further influence the conduct and outcomes of the review. The Committee will obviously determine how it would like to be involved, but I am pleased that it has invited me to an early meeting to discuss the scope of the review.

It is important to recognise that there is a very broad spectrum of opinion on how we should develop employment relations in Northern Ireland. There are many policy options to consider. I want to assure the House that I am committed to evidence-based policymaking, to better regulation and to making the decisions that best serve employees and employers. I commend the statement to the House.

1.15 pm

Mr B McCrea (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I am drawn to the comment in the Minister's statement about Mr Justice Underhill producing draft rules designed to be "clearer, simpler and more concise". I commend those words to the Minister because his presentation was somewhat heavyweight. We need to find a better way to deal with such issues. I have

mentioned to the Minister previously that it is simply not helpful to present a document of this length and substance to Members, give them only a few minutes to scan it and expect them to ask questions on the matter. Other Members will, no doubt, mention that.

I have now made my point on behalf of the Committee for Employment and Learning and will mention a number of other issues. The Minister stated that the employment law framework has become very complex. To me, it is something of an understatement that the totally unsatisfactory experience of employers and employees in this process requires a radical change. However, after we have gone through research paper after research paper, it seems to be taking a very long time to get things resolved. Could we not take the lead in some of the issues and be more timely in our execution of the work? Northern Ireland is facing some really difficult unemployment challenges, and we could use our devolved powers in this area quickly, properly and with the full consultation of the Committee. If we were to do that, we would make a real difference. The challenge for the Minister is that we do not want to be dealing with the issue in three years' time. We need to deal with it within one year.

Dr Farry: I thank the Chair of the Committee for those comments. At times, you sense that you are in a no-win situation, particularly with the Chair. This is an important area of responsibility for the Department and, indeed, for Northern Ireland. This is the first time during this mandate that the House has had a significant opportunity to discuss the full range of our employment law system. I rather fear that if I were to bring a very short statement to the House, I would be accused of being superficial and giving an important subject light treatment. If I bring a detailed statement that sets out the broad range of all our actions, we are also criticised.

I am rather bemused by the Chair's comments about the procedures for the statement. The statement was made available entirely in line with normal protocols. Given that, quite appropriately, we have had today a very detailed Matter of the Day, Members have had ample time to consider the statement. As many Members are aware, at Westminster, statements are not made available to Members at all. The first time that they hear about a statement is when a Minister rises in his or her place. I am not sure whether the Chair's comments are, therefore, entirely appropriate.

The area that we are dealing with is, of course, complex. However, I am committed to driving the issue forward and to making any necessary changes, quite a number of which will require changes not only to primary but to secondary legislation. If the Chair has indeed made a commitment that the Committee will be seized of the matter and be proactive in considering any statutory rules or legislation that is brought to the House to ensure that we take the issue forward, I welcome that.

I welcome the Chair's comments about Northern Ireland striking out and being a leader, and I believe that there are opportunities for us. I will highlight a number of points. The single arbitration scheme is already in place, and Northern Ireland is the only region of the UK to have such an alternative. In that sense, we are setting a strong precedent. In other areas that I have set out today, particularly to do with protected conversations, Northern Ireland may have the potential to be a policy trailblazer,

given that my counterparts in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills seem to have backed away from that a little bit over the past months.

By the same token, our scope for innovation is limited in the sense that we have to recognise that we are part of a wider islands and European framework, and we have to take into account what is happening in other jurisdictions. We have to ensure, particularly on items that affect how businesses do business across boundaries, that we are not creating a situation where we are the outliers or unnecessary operational burdens for businesses.

Mr Ross: I will, perhaps, be kinder to the Minister. This is a very weighty issue, so I think that a weighty statement is entirely appropriate, particularly given the concern that there is among the business community that Northern Ireland may fall behind the rest of the United Kingdom.

In his statement, the Minister mentioned how small businesses would be given more confidence to hire staff and create jobs if they were to extend the qualifying period for unfair dismissal. May I put it to the Minister that one of the big pitches that is made regarding inward investment — a pitch that is made to investors in the US — is that Northern Ireland operates under the same regulatory system as the rest of the UK? Does the Minister agree that there would, perhaps, be a danger if we were to fall behind changes that were being made in GB and to have a different regulatory system from the rest of the United Kingdom, particularly with regard to multinational companies, from which we are trying to draw such backroom operations as HR, for instance? Furthermore, inward investors who are looking to choose between investing in Northern Ireland or somewhere in GB could look at us less favourably if we had a tougher regulatory system. Those are the reasons why we need to be pushing forward with reform.

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his comments, particularly his acknowledgement that this is an important matter, one that we have to give due consideration. I appreciate that he is seeking to have a debate on the matter in the Assembly some time in the near future. I fully understand the arguments that he is making, and they would be echoed by a large number of business organisations. It is one factor that has to be considered in relation to whether Northern Ireland follows suit with an extension of the qualifying period for unfair dismissal. The arguments that the Member has made are strong, and I hear them made. At present, there is a lack of evidence to formally back them up, but I think that it is important that we try to gather that evidence-base, so that we can ensure that we are following it through with evidence-based policy-making.

At the same time, we have to be aware that counterarguments have been made by other quarters, and there is the potential for unintended consequences in Northern Ireland. In particular, we have much stronger anti-discrimination measures. We also have a culture of more people taking cases based on alleged discrimination. We need to be wary of a situation in which potential claimants would simply find a way around an extension of unfair dismissal and take a greater number of discrimination cases, which, themselves, are more complex and costly and which could, inadvertently, create bigger issues for business. It is, therefore, important that we consider all the issues in the round.

I give the House a commitment that this is a sufficiently important issue to remain on the formal agenda. It will be part of proposals that I intend to take to the Executive for a more formal public consultation around any measures that require legislation. We can have a proper rounded debate on whether it is an appropriate measure for Northern Ireland.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá dhá cheist agam don Aire. I thank the Minister for his comprehensive statement. Will the Minister tell us about preliminary engagement that his Department may have had with the trade unions, notably ICTU, on the matter? Given that the employment law review is under way in the rest of the island of Ireland, has the issue been discussed at the North/South Ministerial Council? If so, will the Minister give some indication of emerging issues of common interest?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his comments and his acknowledgement that this is, indeed, a very comprehensive area. I have been very active in engaging with stakeholders. Our first step was to have a discussion paper, which was almost a form of Green Paper. It attracted 35 substantive responses. One of those was from the Northern Ireland Committee of ICTU. In that response, it was very clear that it was responding on behalf of the entire trade union movement in Northern Ireland. I had a meeting with it only last week. At that meeting, we discussed a large range of issues.

The Republic of Ireland is also significantly reforming its system of employment law, and I have discussed these matters with my counterpart there, Richard Bruton. The review is not formally part of the North/South Ministerial Council structures. Nevertheless, we will have ongoing bilateral discussions, and, indeed, my officials will engage with their counterparts in Mr Bruton's Department as well. Dublin is consolidating its processes, with the aim of having a single body equivalent of our Labour Relations Agency and its own labour court. So we can learn a lot of lessons from each other, and I am happy to take those forward.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the Minister's statement and his personal commitment and determination to get the right evidence-based approach. I sympathise with the Committee Chair, who I think was right, as we got the statement only a few minutes before 12.00 noon. It is quite a detailed and complex paper, and it is important that the Committee has sight of that. I presume that the statement was drafted last week and not just this morning. The Minister may shake his head, but anyway, is he content that the Labour Relations Agency has the resources to deal with the potential of all tribunal cases being referred to it or through it?

Dr Farry: I thank Mr Ramsey for his comments. I am almost tempted to raise my own point of order just to get the Principal Deputy Speaker to confirm that the statement complied with all the normal procedures and, indeed, did so with a generous amount of time to spare. For the record, the statement was issued to Members at 11.20 am, well in advance of the required time. Let me nail that we have complied fully with what is expected of us when dealing with such a weighty matter. Members of the Committee will have the chance to return to this issue when I visit it next Wednesday. We can also have many other discussions over the coming weeks. This is only the first bite of the cherry.

I am conscious of the point that the Member made about the resourcing of the Labour Relations Agency. We are shifting the balance of what happens in our employment law system towards early resolution and various forms of alternative dispute resolution. So we will have to look at the resourcing of the LRA to ensure that it has the capacity to meet the additional workload that we are trying to shift in its direction.

Mr Lyttle: I, too, welcome the statement and the notice that the Minister gave the House of his intentions to reform employment law.

Mr B McCrea: How good to see you in the Chamber.

Mr Lyttle: The Committee Chair often feels that he has to make a show on these types of issues, and he has done that this morning, so he has done his bit.

I welcome the fact that the Minister is committed to delivering a system that is good for business and for workers and that he has designated early dispute resolution as an important part of that system. Will he tell the House a bit more about how the new early neutral evaluation system that he mentioned introducing would help to improve employment relations?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his comments and for his positive welcome for the statement. It is important to acknowledge that early neutral evaluation could be opportune at two different points in the system, the first of which relates to the Labour Relations Agency and the second to the tribunal system, where it would be practised as part of the case management process. We are seeking to give people clear, early advice about the prospects for their claims. Often, people will take forward a claim without any real understanding of the relative prospects of its success or otherwise. That can lead to a lot of unrealistic expectations building up and a lot of time being wasted, and that applies to employers and to employees. A form of early neutral evaluation would allow people to receive a proper assessment of their claim. It does not deny them the opportunity to take their claim the full distance, if that is what they are determined to do. However, if someone is to receive guidance that they have a weak claim, a weak defence to a claim or that the time limit for taking a claim has expired, it is important to transmit that information at the earliest possible opportunity.

1.30 pm

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his statement. As he said, it is an important issue, and it is one that we fully agree with. Given its importance, I would have thought that it would have been prudent to have the statement somewhat earlier than we did, and I support the Chair's comments.

I will get to the question. The statement says:

"Devolution allows us to shape employment law".

Can you therefore tell us what input employers have had? How you will ensure that it is not enshrined in bureaucracy and does not become a burden to employers? That is what we are plagued with at the moment. It is a burden to employers, so how will you ensure that that does not happen? On the way forward, you mentioned that you had instructed a number of your staff to carry forward certain

projects. Can you give us any indication of when that work will be completed?

Dr Farry: I thank the Deputy Chair for his comments. I rather suspect that he and the Chair are now ganging up on me, but we will return to that in due course.

Employers have been very much engaged with the process. Most if not all of the employer representative bodies responded to the consultation. I have had meetings with each of the employer bodies to enable them to set out their views and to allow me to explain how I intend to take things forward. I appreciate that employment law at present is burdensome to employers and is very confusing for potential claimants. This is not an either/or situation in which we help employers at the expense of claimants. If we take forward the reforms, it can be a win-win for everyone concerned.

The real meat of the statement and the area in which we can potentially have the biggest impact on assisting employers is the reform of the tribunal rules themselves. A lot of employers find going to a tribunal a very daunting process. As well as the uncertainty about the outcome and the potential for a judgement to be made against them, there are risks to a business's reputation. It is also a strong drain on staff time if they have to be at a tribunal for hearings when they could be otherwise doing business. So, we want to have a much more efficient and effective way for tribunal cases to be heard. We want to try, through early neutral evaluation, to discourage people from taking cases that are weak any further. We also want to have a shift in the balance of where cases are addressed, moving them away from tribunals towards the various forms of alternative dispute resolution, which would be much quicker and more effective and would be done confidentially, so that people can move on quickly to doing business, maximising employment and making money for the rest of the economy.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle, agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas fada a thug sé dúinn inniu. Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister for his lengthy statement. Given some of his comments about the time frame, he must be optimistic about his future. It appears from his statement and the response to it that he is damned if he does and damned if he doesn't.

The Minister will be aware of the introduction of a minimum payment, known as the living wage, in some parts of Britain, some local authorities and some companies. This is actually Living Wage Week, and the new rate of minimum living wage is now £7.45 in Britain. Has the Minister given or will he give any consideration to the introduction of a similar scheme here?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his comments. I will just continue doing my job for as long as I am here. In politics, we all have a short life expectancy anyway, so we will see how it all goes.

I am aware of the debates that are taking place. I rather suspect that they are for another place, but they may merit at least an indicative discussion in the Assembly to test the waters and to see how Members feel about them. Of course, the setting of wages above the threshold should really be a matter, by and large, for businesses themselves in making those judgement calls. Equally, however, I fully support what we currently have: a national minimum wage

setting a floor for what the basic standards should be. Whether we go beyond that is an interesting debate.

Mr Anderson: I, too, thank the Minister for his statement, even given the concerns that have been expressed about the lateness of its arrival. We talked about the statement amounting to seven pages, but it is in quite fine print, so it could be extended to 14 pages. The Chair will be pleased to know that I was able to get to the first page, on which the Minister states that employment law is often pitched as the interests of business against the rights of workers. Does the Minister accept that it is vital that he and his officials work closely with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and her officials to ensure that there is a holistic approach to getting the balance right between the needs of businesses and the rights of employees?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his comments. Again, just for the record, the statement was not late: it was on time and fully in line with protocols. Given the way in which Members are behaving, I am tempted to add an extra four or five pages if I am ever back to the Assembly to make a statement so that I can put you through even more detail. I am all for showing exactly what we are doing as a Department and not sweeping things under the carpet so that we can have a full debate on all the issues and ramifications arising from them.

I have discussed the review with my counterpart the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and I am more than happy to continue those discussions over the coming weeks and months. What we are doing here as part of the review is identified in the wider economic strategy and reinforces a number of objectives in the Programme for Government. In many respects, this is a cross-cutting issue, and, ultimately, most if not all of what we do in Northern Ireland has to be geared towards the economy, creating job opportunities for people and creating the wealth that we can then share and spend on public services.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome his comments on wanting to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Northern Ireland is renowned for gold-plating the various directives that come from Europe, whether they are to do with agriculture or employment law, so I hope that in all his future work he continues to pursue efficiency and effectiveness.

This is a crucial issue. The Minister has asked his officials to commence work immediately on three projects, as well as providing further detail on work by the Labour Relations Agency. Can he provide a timeline for action, and can he tell us when he will come back to the Assembly on these points? It is good that we have goals, but we also need timeliness and results.

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for her question. On the issue of regulation, I will say that I am a committed European; I believe that the European Union is a wonderful thing. However, that does not mean that I am in favour of gold-plating every regulation that comes from the European Union.

In my statement, I indicated that I was committed to a Better Regulation pilot. We recognise that, at present, regulations can be very complex, so we will start with a pilot on the working time and conduct of employment agency regulations. The working time regulations have, I think, been amended 16 or 17 times over the past number

of years, so they are confusing, and there is evidence of a certain degree of gold-plating. The point of having reviews of regulations is to make that burden a lot more coherent and simpler for businesses. We will come back with the outcome of the reviews some time next year.

The Member rightly asked about timescales for the projects that I have identified. I apologise to Mr Anderson, who mentioned that point as well. There are three elements to this. There are things that I have asked the LRA to do, and those should be complete within a matter of months. On tribunal rules, I would like to think that we will conclude that process in the spring of 2013. It may be the latter part of the spring, but that is the general target. As regards the other aspects in which legislation is required, the intention is to bring a paper to the Executive. In the first instance, the Executive are the body that must agree to a public consultation. After they agree, a public consultation will then take three months. After that, the Department and indeed, in due course, the Executive will have to consider the outcome of any consultation with a view to taking forward any primary legislation. So, it will be well into 2013. Unfortunately, that is the way that we tend to operate in Northern Ireland.

Ms Lo: Many companies are already struggling due to the economic downturn without the burden of dealing with workplace disputes. How will the proposed reforms assist businesses?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for her question. Assistance to business should be in a number of areas. First, we are encouraging much greater use of alternative dispute resolution as the means by which these issues can be addressed. That should be a much simpler and efficient means, and it should happen early in the process. It is important that all potential claimants and respondents are attracted to the various forms of alternative dispute resolution.

The new consolidated set of rules for tribunals will have a major impact on how businesses and other users, including claimants, experience tribunals. It should make tribunals a lot more efficient, understandable and consistent in how they handle things. The use of early neutral evaluation, whether as part of the work with the LRA or as part of the tribunals, will hopefully indicate where cases are weak or out of time and that parties are taking them forward at their own risk.

The use of deposit hearings is another aspect that it is important to highlight. At present, there is the option for any party to a dispute to ask for a deposit hearing. That option is used very sparingly, but it can be a useful way of establishing the credibility of one or other party in a case.

Mr Cree: I also thank the Minister for his report. I was intrigued by many things that he said but particularly by his comments that the purpose of regulations and the periodic review was to make them simpler. In my experience, the reverse is the case.

The Minister refers to the qualifying period for unfair dismissal. In Britain, it has now moved from one year to two years. He has not really commented on that, but I notice — if I can decode it — that he refers to it in his instruction to officials to commence work on projects including the research project to establish the correlation between levels of employment legislation and competitiveness. Is this merely a benchmarking exercise,

or is a more innovative approach intended? Will the Minister share with the House what is envisaged?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. On the issue of regulations, the intention is to make the world simpler for business. That is why we are doing it. In my party's Assembly manifesto, we had a commitment to reduce the burden on businesses. Other parties have made similar commitments.

On the point about unfair dismissal, there was quite a lot in the statement, particularly towards the end, where I set out the arguments that have been made on whether we should change the qualifying period or keep it the same. The commitment that I make today is that this is an issue that we have to address in Northern Ireland in one way or another. I am currently minded to take it forward to the Executive as part of a paper of options to go out for public consultation. In the intervening period, I want to flesh out a number of the different arguments, to examine the evidence base and to see whether there are options available to us in Northern Ireland that mean that we do not quite have the same either/or situation as has applied in Great Britain. All of that is very much on the table.

At the same time, we have to recognise that this issue has been bouncing around for some time. As of June this year, Great Britain has moved to two years. In the Republic of Ireland, the period is one year, and there are no plans to change that position. Also, whether in Great Britain or Northern Ireland, the qualifying period has bounced around quite a bit, both up and down, over the past 20 or 30 years. At one time, it was as little as six months, and at other times in Northern Ireland it has been two years. It also tends to change quite frequently depending on the party that happens to be in power in Westminster, so there is a danger that, if we change it in Northern Ireland and there is a change of fortunes at Westminster, it could be changed back again. Leaving those issues aside, the period is very much on the agenda. We are not simply doing a bit of research around it; it is a viable policy option that is being given proper consideration and I intend to take it forward as part of a public consultation document with Executive approval.

1.45 pm

Executive Committee Business

Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to move the Further Consideration Stage of the Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill.

Moved. — [Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: As no amendments have been tabled, there is no opportunity to discuss the Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill today. The Further Consideration Stage of the Bill is, therefore, concluded.

Committee Business

Muscular Dystrophy and Related Neuromuscular Conditions

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes to wind. All other Members who wish 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 welcomes 'The McCollum Report: Access to specialist neuromuscular care in Northern Ireland'; is concerned about the lack of specialised neuromuscular services revealed in the report; believes that a lead for muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions should be appointed from within Health and Social Care; recognises that significant funds are being wasted on unplanned emergency admissions to hospital; notes that investing small amounts in the development of specialised neuromuscular services can lead to a reduction in these unplanned emergency admissions; further recognises the vital evidence provided by the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign's Northern Ireland Muscle Group during the all-party group on muscular dystrophy inquiry; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to act on the recommendations in the report.

Go raibh maith agat. This is probably the longest Committee motion to come before the Assembly, but there is a reason behind that. We tried, where possible, to condense it, and I apologise for its length. I welcome the opportunity to bring the motion to the Assembly on behalf of the Committee. This is an issue that many Members have a strong interest in, and the debate will give them the chance to convey their views directly to the Minister, who, I assume, is on his way. [Interruption.] I welcome the Minister to the debate.

I want to begin by acknowledging the work that has been done by the various charities to highlight the issue and bring it to the public's attention. Many of the charities have met MLAs, and they have provided us with much useful information on muscular dystrophy (MD). I formally thank them for taking the time and effort to do that.

The all-party group has done a lot of good work on the issue, and its commitment and ongoing work must be recognised. The all-party group carried out an inquiry from December 2011 to June 2012, and, in July 2012, it published the McCollum report, which explored access or, in many cases, the lack of access to specialist neuromuscular care. It looked at the gaps in provision and the impact that that had on people with the condition and their families. The report also identified examples of best practice and acknowledged the good work of health professionals. It sought to take a balanced view and focus on the positives as well as the negatives. The report contained 15 recommendations. I know that other Members, including some who are on the all-party group, will go into those in some detail, but it is important that I highlight a few that deserve particular mention.

The report recommends that a lead for muscular dystrophy is appointed from within HSC to take overall control. That person would be accountable for identifying and fixing the gaps in specialist care that require urgent service development. The campaign has advised that that set-up has been effective in Wales, with a recent draft document produced to recommend service improvements. The report also recommends that the Executive ensure that the care adviser post is secured long term in the HSC and that they take urgent steps to create more of those posts. Those steps will provide the best possible support and advice for people with the condition and related neuromuscular conditions and will reduce unplanned emergency admissions by investing small amounts to save large amounts in the long term. The campaign has advised that it is hoped that an appointment to the care adviser post, which has been vacant since November 2011, will be made in the next few weeks. That is welcome news for those involved in the campaign.

A further recommendation from the report is that the HSC and the Executive create a steering group for developing specialised neuromuscular services that incorporates the views of people affected by the conditions and includes health professionals, commissioners and the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign. Such steering groups have worked well in other places to identify gaps in services and patient needs.

I now turn to the work that the Health Committee has done on the issue. In March 2012, the Committee held an informal meeting with Action Duchenne, and representatives from the charity brought the issue of the lack of a care adviser since 2011 to members' attention. They explained that the care adviser was vital as someone who could act as a contact point for families and co-ordinate treatment. On the back of that meeting, the Health Committee wrote to the Health and Social Care Board and asked it to look urgently at that matter. As I said, we are glad to hear that the issue now seems to be resolved and that someone will be in post very soon.

Action Duchenne also advised the Committee of the disparity in services for people here as compared with those in England or Scotland. They talked about the lack of a centre of excellence and the fact that their children have to travel to Newcastle in England for specialist care. We heard that the life expectancy for Duchenne sufferers here is in the late teens, whereas in England it is in the mid-20s. That is worrying and demonstrates the need for the HSC Board to keep a focus on that condition and on the services available. Action Duchenne raised the possibility of an all-Ireland centre of excellence, and the Committee was interested in that proposal. It is similar to what is being looked at for children's heart surgery at the minute. We wrote to the Minister and asked him to raise the issue at the next North/South Ministerial Council meeting, and I will be interested in hearing from the Minister later on the latest update on that possibility.

I conclude by endorsing the recommendations made in the McCollum report and, on behalf of the Committee, I ask that the Minister takes the recommendations forward as soon as possible. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this important issue, which affects so many people across this country. Unfortunately, muscular dystrophy is a condition that affects around 2,000 people in Northern Ireland.

I will begin by commending the work of two North Down constituents, Gerry and Geraldine McCollum, for their brave efforts to date, following the very tragic death of their son Christopher, in working to improve services for those with this terrible condition. They are here today, and I welcome them and their colleagues and friends. They have both been a great credit to the memory of Christopher by helping to improve the life of those who suffer from the terrible disease of muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions. Having spoken with those directly affected by the condition, I was alarmed to hear that their son Christopher had to endure a wait of 18 months before getting a suitable engineered wheelchair. I was encouraged to hear from Gerry about the work that his charity does in helping to provide purpose-built wheelchairs for young sufferers of this disease. I understand that a family with a child of just eight has recently benefited from a wheelchair provided by their charity.

As with many health issues, it is crucial that we do all we can to improve services and ensure that patients' care is right at the forefront. The stories of families affected by muscular dystrophy highlight the very trying and difficult circumstances that they have had to face on a daily basis. There is no doubt that it can be very difficult for families, friends and carers as they try to do their best for those who suffer from this terrible, deteriorating muscular condition. It is vital that an adequate support structure is put in place to help and support not just those who suffer directly from the condition but those around the sufferers who have to carry and share the burden of this terrible condition.

There is clearly room for improvement in increasing support services for those affected by this condition. I know that the Minister has taken a keen interest in the matter to date, and I know that he shares our vision of improving services for muscular dystrophy and improving and implementing practical measures, such as ensuring adequate wheelchair provision for sufferers, which should be given a higher priority, both to help the sufferers in their daily life and to reduce the workload on our health service through admissions. It is vital that the right resources are in place, and there is a need for more health specialists, consultants, doctors, nurses and physiotherapists to be available at the point of need.

I welcome the work of the Department to date on the provision of wheelchairs. The average time from assessment to issue is now 32 weeks which, I understand, is about eight months. It is still much too long, as patients continue to deteriorate and suffer without the support of a specialist wheelchair. I welcome the proposal of the board for a second bio-engineer to get the provision of purpose-built wheelchairs moving much more quickly.

I commend the work of the all-party working group on the issue and of those fighting for sufferers on the front line. I trust that we will continue to see improvements in the support of those who suffer from this very serious and difficult condition. I support the proposal of the Committee.

Mr Swann: I am the vice-chairman of the all-party group on muscular dystrophy, and I pay tribute to the Health Committee, through its Chair, for the work it has done for this great cause in bringing the motion to the House. I also pay tribute to all the individuals — clinicians, sufferers, families, friends and supporters — who gave evidence to the all-party group's evidence sessions, which took place in the last session of the Assembly. That process

lasted up to a year, as the Committee Chair mentioned. Those evidence sessions were some of the most moving encounters I have had in my short period as an MLA.

The McCollum report refers to 60 types of muscular dystrophy. What really got me involved in the work of the all-party group on this cause is muscular dystrophy Duchenne, which mostly affects young boys. It sees average life expectancy reduced to 20 or 30 years in Northern Ireland. Those who suffer from it in Scandinavia can have a life expectancy that stretches into the 50s. It is through working with some of those families and hearing their evidence that I saw a need for what is recommended in the McCollum report.

I will share one experience, one of the most touching things that I saw on the all-party group. One of the clinicians was giving evidence on Duchenne, and he specified that the average life expectancy of sufferers was 20 to 30 years. A young sufferer was sitting at the table in his wheelchair at the time. That was the first time that anyone had taken the time to tell him, or perhaps his family had not found the right point in time to tell that young man that that was his life expectancy.

Not only did I see the realisation in that young man's face, I saw the pain and the anguish in his mother's heart as she realised just what her son had been told. Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, be under no illusion of the seriousness of the McCollum report and its recommendations and why it is brought forward today.

2.00 pm

When we talk of Duchenne and that life expectancy, those of us in the House who are parents know that no parent wants to, or should, outlive their child and that each day of that child's life should see a quality of life and support. It should not be a struggle waiting for a wheelchair or not having a named health clinician whom they can contact for support. Waiting 32 weeks for a wheelchair when your life expectancy is counting down day by day is far too long. I know that the Minister has worked on and is looking at that.

The McCollum report reiterates what Action Duchenne has heard from Northern Ireland members over the past few years. Families living with Duchenne speak of the perpetual fight for services, the lack of information on available services and a dearth of support from diagnosis. The specialised multidisciplinary care as set out in 'The Lancet' standard of care document is unavailable currently in Northern Ireland, and families often have to fly to Newcastle for similar actions for that care. However, when they return to Northern Ireland, they often cannot get the basic services that they have been recommended.

Key to managing Duchenne is the monitoring of the condition, the linking of services around the patient and the pathway of care to plan for the progressive stages of that crucial condition. That needs to be co-ordinated by a health professional. There are six care advisers in the Republic of Ireland, three in Wales, two in Scotland with the recruitment of a third under way, and 23 in England. There is none in Northern Ireland. The last postholder resigned in November 2011, and there have been a number of recruitment processes, which the Chair of the Health Committee referred to earlier. If you can, Minister, I would like you to clarify the statement that was broadcast on the radio this morning, when you said that the second

process had been unsuccessful again. This is crucial, and there are families who heard that this morning for the first time.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Will the Member give way?

Mr Swann: Certainly.

Mr Poots: The information I had this morning was that there were no applicants for either round. Subsequently, I received information that there have been two applicants. I am very glad to confirm that what I said previously is not the case and that the information that I had when I went on the radio this morning was incorrect.

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

Mr Swann: Thank you very much, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Minister, thank you very much for clarifying that point. I know that a lot of people who heard that statement this morning are in the Building today and will be reassured to hear that clarification. The urgency now is to get one of those two people appointed. At one of the evidence sessions, a commitment was made that there would be consultation with the families and clinicians to see exactly how that role would develop, and there was the possibility of making it a dual mandate role involving two people. I am glad that that has been clarified, but we need to sort out the functions and what will actually be delivered.

I have a number of examples from sufferers of Duchenne in my constituency. Margaret Casey's son Brendan, who is now 19, has waited for a wheelchair. He is in that transition period between juvenile and adult where there is a real problem with transition in our current services provision. There is also the McClean family, and young Ethan McClean has just entered primary school. There is the difficulty of explaining to staff in primary schools that those conditions will gradually worsen.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Swann: The challenges are out there for Duchenne sufferers of all ages. I ask the Minister to do all that is recommended in the report.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. I am a former member of the Health Committee, and I will be brief — well, I will certainly be briefer than our party's current health spokesperson would be if he were here.

I have been lobbied, as I am sure many Members here have been, by families in my constituency who are affected by muscular dystrophy. One feels overwhelmed hearing from helpless parents not only about how their beautiful son or daughter is destined to have a very short life but that not enough is being done to ensure that that life can be of as high a quality as possible. Parents have pointed towards superior, more suitable and effective treatments and services available in England — Newcastle has been mentioned in particular — that have been proven to increase the quantity and improve the quality of years that those with muscular dystrophy have.

Such opinions were also heard when Action Duchenne hosted an event in the Long Gallery a few months ago. I, like the Chair of the Committee, praise Action Duchenne and other charities involved in working to raise awareness of muscular dystrophy.

As we have heard, the disease is a genetic condition that gradually causes the muscles to weaken, leading to an increasing level of disability. It is a progressive condition, which often attacks one particular group of muscles before moving on to another. If, and when, it begins to affect the heart or the muscles used for breathing, muscular dystrophy becomes life threatening.

There are over 30 types of the disease, each with different symptoms, and, fortunately, not all types cause severe disability. Duchenne is one of the most common types and one of the most serious. Children suffering from this merciless disease may be in a wheelchair by the age of eight and have a very limited life expectancy.

While we are blessed here with excellent healthcare professionals, there are clear shortfalls in the co-ordination of neuromuscular service provision. The Department must consider additional specialist care adviser posts, with a commitment to recruiting and appointing the currently vacant adviser post, although we have heard assurances that that will be done. The unforeseen departure of the previous incumbent and the subsequent absence of essential support and advice for approximately 2,000 people with these conditions highlight the significant caseload and the need for stronger backup and better succession planning in the health service here.

Parents, patients and health professionals fear that investment in much-needed improvements will be prevented by budgetary constraints. We support the view of the College of Occupational Therapists (COT) that specialist skills are required to work with the more complex patients in this group and that adults and children in Northern Ireland should have access to advice, consultation and care services when specialist intervention is needed. The college also believes that a review is needed of specialist equipment and assistive technology to ensure prompt availability at time of need. Adequate funding and other issues such as responsibility for maintenance recycling need addressed too.

We welcome the McCollum report, as it shows that, in Northern Ireland, patients experience inconsistent standards of care from diagnosis onwards. Furthermore, there is a clear reduction in services as patients move from paediatric to adult services, and Mr Swann outlined the difficulties in that transitional phase. The report refers to the vital and urgent need for specialist multidisciplinary care. The fact that it identifies that healthcare professionals are able to devote only a limited amount of clinical time to neuromuscular services is very concerning. We in the SDLP recognise the very serious and rare complications associated with muscular dystrophy, and we, with the Committee, urge the Minister to support the recommendations of the report in order to provide specialist care to children and adults suffering from the effects of muscular dystrophy.

Mr McCarthy: As a member of the Health Committee, I am delighted that we have been able to bring this very important motion to the Assembly this afternoon.

As has been said, muscular dystrophy and neuromuscular conditions affect a large number of our population. It was a pleasure for me to be part of the all-party group on muscular dystrophy, and I congratulate our chairman, Conall McDevitt, who is not in the Chamber today, and our deputy chair, who has already spoken. Other members of

the all-party group played a significant part. I also welcome and am grateful to the people who came to give evidence to help MLAs to better understand this debilitating complaint. I pay tribute specifically to Mr and Mrs Gerry McCollum for their dedication and assistance despite their very sad loss and, indeed, for giving us permission to use their name on this very important report. They have given of themselves to assist others. I sincerely thank Gerry, Geraldine and, indeed, every member of the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign throughout Northern Ireland.

The motion is extremely important — indeed, vital — to sufferers of muscular dystrophy, their families and carers. When broken down, it has six key messages, although it was not read out to the Assembly. The McCollum report contains some 15 recommendations. I welcome the Minister's presence in the Chamber, and I sincerely hope that his response will include a time frame for the early implementation of the report's recommendations. I must say that I was somewhat disappointed to hear the Minister say on the airwaves this morning that he may not be able to authorise every one of the recommendations. That disturbs me. Perhaps, he can tell us in his response why that is and how many he will authorise.

I understand that over 2,000 people in Northern Ireland are affected by muscular dystrophy of one sort or another. It appears that services, including diagnosis, in Northern Ireland lag far behind what is available across the water. When the motion is passed by the Assembly, I hope that that gap will be closed as soon as possible.

During the inquiry, we heard from patients, some of whom recounted harrowing experiences and unbelievable suffering. Hopes had been dashed, appointments delayed and even basic repairs to equipment, such as wheelchairs and beds, had not been carried out. We can do better in Northern Ireland. In fact, we must do better. Given all of the evidence presented to our inquiry, it is essential that the recommendations are implemented, starting with the very important appointment of a case adviser to take control and be accountable for identifying and, more importantly, fixing the gaps in specialist multidisciplinary neuromuscular care. It is very disappointing that it has taken so long to fill that post.

The Muscular Dystrophy Campaign's report 'Invest to Save' contains the startling revelation that nearly £2.5 million is wasted each year because of unnecessary hospital admissions and treatments, most of which could be avoided if the key position of care adviser were filled. The evidence from Dr Amy Jayne McKnight on multidisciplinary support could not be more stark. Her dad was offered respiratory care only when he ended up in an intensive care unit. That was the first time that he had access to a respiratory consultant. These gaps need to be filled.

As Michaela Hollywood told us, there is a need for support during the transition from paediatric services to adult services. Michaela also told us that it was only after her dad had a heart attack that any help was forthcoming. Surely that is not good enough.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member must bring his remarks to a close.

Mr McCarthy: We also had a very moving contribution from a young man who benefited from the Newcastle centre. Assembly Members who conducted the inquiry heard about the needs of people with muscular dystrophy,

which include simple equipment, domiciliary care and respite care. As one contributor said, just a little practical help would ease stress levels very much. There we have it. We must implement the recommendations as soon as possible.

Ms P Bradley: As a member of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, I support the motion.

A family who receive a diagnosis that a member has a condition that is potentially life-limiting has the right to expect that the health service will do everything possible to ensure that he or she receives a timely diagnosis and the best possible care, treatment and therapy. They have the right to expect that they will receive that without having to argue or fight for it.

Sadly, from the information that the all-party group received, it appears that that is not what people who are diagnosed with muscular dystrophy experience.

2.15 pm

As has been said, muscular dystrophy is a condition that affects up to 2,000 people in Northern Ireland. It has approximately 60 different variations, with one of the most aggressive being Duchenne muscular dystrophy. The condition causes muscles to weaken and waste over time, affecting not only the limbs but the respiratory system and the heart, which can lead to shorter life expectancy. It has been highlighted that Northern Ireland falls seriously behind other UK regions in supporting families who have members who are diagnosed with the condition.

When the McCollum report was being compiled, we heard about how families are being let down by our system. We heard of delays in diagnosis, which impacts the ability of the professionals involved to plan and prepare care plans. Such delays also impact families, who are effectively left in limbo because, although they may wish to have more children, they are unsure about whether subsequent children will be affected by the condition. It also impacts the individual, who is left wondering what the future holds and who is, therefore, unable to plan for their future. We heard that once diagnosis is made, things do not always improve. We heard evidence from people who felt that they were left to manage the condition themselves, as well as from people who had suffered because of a lack of access to aid that could have helped with their quality of life but who had to go in front of a panel to explain why their family member should get a wheelchair ahead of another. We also heard how families are, time and again, let down by our provision. Emergency care for people who live with muscular dystrophy costs our National Health Service a massive £2.27 million a year. We heard that it may be possible to slash 40% off that by investing £320,000 in specialist care. With a more joined-up approach to the condition and better foresight and planning, we can make a real difference to the quality of life that families who live with the condition experience.

I support the motion so that the experiences of people with muscular dystrophy in our healthcare system can be improved.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. As a member of the Health Committee, I support the motion and fully endorse the McCollum report's recommendations. As someone who is new to the Health Committee, I formally acknowledge the

ongoing work of the Health Committee and the all-party group. Indeed, I acknowledge the role of charities, which, as the Chairperson said, provide much-needed information and expertise on the issue.

As has been stated, the report contains 15 recommendations. Central to the report seems to be the appointment of a lead for muscular dystrophy in Health and Social Care to take overall control, to identify and fix the gaps and to be accountable. There is clearly a variance in the availability and deliverability of services, with no specialist consultant or occupational therapist employed regionally. As the Minister stated, there is a clear demand for a care adviser post, which, I suggest, needs to be secured long term in the HSC.

We heard reference to the College of Occupational Therapists, which highlights — I think that this is important — that early intervention and projected planning of need by OTs are necessary, especially when looking at issues such as housing need. COT also believes that there is a need to ensure that the services to children and young people are seamless. The report recommends that trusts and local councils develop structural joint planning provision so that there is a seamless response and transition between Health and Social Care services.

Importantly, as the Member who spoke previously said, the campaign report proved that nearly £2.5 million a year is wasted in the North because of unnecessary treatment, most of which can seemingly be avoided. A care adviser would play a vital role in ensuring that such waste is avoided. I support the motion.

Ms Brown: I, too, speak to the motion as a member of the Health Committee. It is moving to read in the report, and to have heard, some of the stories provided by witnesses. However, those suffering from a form of muscular dystrophy seek not sympathy but action, through highlighting their experiences of care and direct experience of accessing services in the health service. Those who gave evidence to the all-party group are experts in the field, and we should allow them a fair hearing, something that the report grants them.

Muscular dystrophy comes in many forms, each affecting people in different ways. Muscular dystrophy generally affects children or young adults and commonly results in weakening or powerless muscles. Sufferers may find it difficult to walk, if they can walk at all, or to lift their heads or limbs. Many will ultimately end up requiring a wheelchair and full-time care. Sufferers require a great deal of medical assistance. The disease can impact on numerous organs, so various specialisms are relied on to treat and ease suffering.

The disease is, therefore, complex, and sufferers are wholly dependent on getting the right treatment at the right time to ease suffering. It is evident from the report that the system is not working as well as it should. That is the result of not only the complex nature of muscular dystrophy and how it affects people but the failings of the Health and Social Care Board as well as numerous trusts.

I had the privilege a short while ago to meet the mother of a 19-year-old living with Duchenne muscular dystrophy and hear at first hand how her son is not receiving the treatment and support that he deserves in order that he might live his life to its full potential. I have heard that other sufferers are living into their thirties solely because they

do receive the appropriate and necessary care. I ask the Minister to listen to those voices — I know that he will — and ensure that whatever can be done will be done so that those living with muscular dystrophy are afforded the services that are received elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

The report contains numerous critical and hard-hitting recommendations that require serious thought and consideration by the Minister and his Department, consideration that, I believe, they are more than capable of undertaking, resulting in positive outcomes for all concerned. My understanding is that when the Department, led by the Minister, published the report earlier this year, the Minister immediately took the time and effort to study it carefully, which I am confident is ongoing.

It is important that the Department take the time to consider each and every one of the recommendations and act on the evidence. One of the main recommendations is for the appointment of a specialist. One did exist until this time last year. We realise that the position was advertised twice this year to no avail. That is a vital point that the Department and the Health and Social Care Board need to address. They need to ensure that the position be filled by someone with experience and knowledge of what those who face this disease need.

I pay tribute to those in the health service, numerous charities and especially those families who care for children with muscular dystrophy for their efforts, time and dedication to ease the suffering and maximise their well-being. I trust that the Department will, through the Health and Social Care Board, act to help those suffering from this progressive disease and improve their expectations and experiences of care and services in Northern Ireland. I support the motion.

Mr Beggs: I, too, am pleased that the motion is here on behalf of the Health Committee, which I recently joined.

I thank all those who submitted evidence to the McCollum report and the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign for providing secretariat support during the inquiry that led to the report and its thorough and worthwhile evidence base, which is able to be provided widely to others. We must also thank Gerry and Geraldine McCollum for their efforts over the years and for highlighting the difficulties that their late son Christopher experienced. I share their wish that others may learn from his poor experience of the health service and hope that we will be able to provide a better level of care for others.

The chairman of the all-party group on muscular dystrophy, Conall McDevitt, and the vice-chair, Robin Swann, deserve praise for their leadership, which helped to gather the evidence, bring forward the report and, ultimately, bring the matter to the Assembly.

It is estimated that 2,000 people are affected by muscular dystrophy or neuromuscular conditions in Northern Ireland. The report clearly shows that the local health service is not meeting their needs at present. Even today, we have been advised that there is now a 32-week delay in getting the right equipment. For someone in need of such equipment, this is unacceptable. We need to have further improvement. I hope that the Minister will continue to work at this and provide resources to bring about improvements.

An important aspect is that there is significant isolation for those who cannot have mobility because they do not have

the right equipment. On top of that, other difficulties arise. I will come back to those in a minute. The evidence from the Health and Social Care Board indicates that about £160 per patient is invested in preventable care. When you compare that to the cost of having to treat some of the ailments that result, there is clear evidence that we need to change the balance. We need to invest in prevention so that we have the bespoke wheelchairs and the necessary support at a much earlier stage. Bed sores can result due to the lack of the right equipment. When you add up the cost of treating such very painful conditions, there is huge personal suffering and bottom-line cost to the health service of treating those conditions. Why can we not provide the equipment at an earlier stage and avoid that? Clearly, we need to change that. There must be speedy access to the assessments and the delivery of equipment to increase the mobility and independence of those in need.

The support must be better co-ordinated. Marina Lupari, in her evidence, relayed the experience of her son, Marc. She indicated that 28 healthcare professionals were involved in his care and that, collectively, they did not deliver. She said:

“The services do not join up and you can’t get basic things. Marc’s having things when it’s too late, all the time.”

What is the cost of those 28 professionals? They are not delivering the basic things. We need to more carefully co-ordinate what is needed to ensure that the basic things are always provided in a timely manner.

There is clear evidence that the level of care in Northern Ireland is very poor in comparison with the regional centre in Newcastle. We must learn from the positive work that is happening there to try to implement as much change and additional services here to meet the needs of those sufferers, many of whom have life-limiting conditions. The role of the care co-ordinator is essential, and I hope that that post will be filled. The Minister has indicated that a recruitment process is under way, and I am grateful that there are applicants. Hopefully, someone suitable can be found. What is happening in respect of workforce planning to ensure that we will not be back in the same position in one, two or three years’ time if someone decides to go in a different direction? We must have proper workforce planning to make sure that we do not face that again. Will the Minister also advise —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Beggs: — which of the recommendations in the report he does not find acceptable and which he does not endorse?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: As Question Time begins at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until that time. The debate will continue after Question Time, when the next Member to speak will be Mickey Brady.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

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

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 7 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

Childcare Strategy

1. **Mr Lyttle** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the childcare strategy and action plan. (AQO 2758/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will ask junior Minister McCann to answer that question. I welcome her to her first Question Time.

Ms J McCann (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Thank you. The current Programme for Government contains a commitment to publish and implement a childcare strategy to provide integrated and affordable childcare. The childcare strategy will be aligned with the primary focus of the Programme for Government, which is to grow the economy and tackle disadvantage.

A draft consultation document, which has been developed through engagement with relevant Departments and stakeholders, is under consideration in the Department. It sets out six key principles that we believe must be addressed if the childcare strategy is to make a lasting impact. Those are: informed parental choice, quality, accessibility, affordability, sustainability and an integrated approach. Based on those principles, we envisage a strategy that will involve three main strands: better information for parents and those looking for childcare; capacity building and improved provision in the childcare sector; and research into the needs of children and parents.

We recognise that early years interventions and good quality childcare services have important benefits for children in nurturing their social and emotional development. We envisage that the consultation document will also identify a number of areas that will require consideration in the future framework for improved childcare provision. Those include provision for children and parents who have a disability, children in poverty, school-age childcare and those who live in rural areas. That will ensure better outcomes for children in future years.

Work on the consultation document is at an advanced stage. Following Executive agreement, it will be published shortly.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the junior Minister for the update. Organisations such as Employers for Childcare have conducted detailed research and have identified that millions of pounds of childcare vouchers and tax credits, which would go towards helping families to access affordable childcare, are unclaimed each year. What is the Department doing to raise awareness among families of

the availability of the childcare vouchers and tax credits to help them to access affordable childcare?

Ms J McCann: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) has commissioned its own research on that issue. I understand what the Member is saying; I have held a number of meetings at which people expressed similar concerns.

We believe that the final research report will be delivered early next year. It will inform the development of the childcare strategy and will allow for more effective provision. As the Member will know, there are different types of provision. We will look at that. The research project also includes an extensive survey of parents with children under the age of 14. We will look at the type of childcare that is used, the current level of usage and the potential unmet demand for formal childcare provision.

Mrs Overend: Will the junior Minister give a commitment that the full £12 million will be spent on childcare within this Budget period? Will she outline whether she has given any consideration to the administration of child-minding provision through social enterprise?

Ms J McCann: I will answer the second part of your question first. I have met organisations in a number of areas, particularly community-based organisations, that provide that type of childcare through the social economy. We are very keen to see that developed and built on. It is very accessible for people, and it has the added benefit of creating employment opportunities for people in areas of disadvantage and need.

To answer the first part of your question, it is our intention that almost £4.5 million will be allocated for spending on childcare in 2012-13 and 2013-14. Of that, up to £2.5 million will be spent in 2012-13. Those are indicative allocations that have yet to be finalised. However, I am confident that the full £12 million will be spent over the period of the comprehensive spending review up to 31 March 2015.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for her responses so far. On her last point, given the delays that have already been experienced in the formation of the childcare strategy, will she give me some assurance that major delays such as experienced in the social investment fund will not be replicated in the action plan for childcare?

Ms J McCann: I am sorry. Could you repeat the question? I did not catch the last part of it.

Mr Rogers: We need money for childcare now, and I seek the Minister's assurance that the major delays experienced in the social investment fund will not be replicated in the action plan for childcare.

Ms J McCann: I am sorry; I did not hear you properly the first time.

As you know, there have been some delays with the social investment fund, but we are confident that that money will soon be going out to help people, particularly in areas of disadvantage and need.

There are a lot of social economy projects in the community sector that provide quality childcare, which we hope will be developed and continued. For the future, we will certainly be looking at an integrated approach to childcare.

Mr Agnew: What involvement has there been on the childcare strategy with other Ministers who have responsibility for the economy? On child poverty, we recognise that childcare and economic matters are interrelated, and we need an integrated approach to tackle the issue to ensure that people, and women in particular, have the opportunity to access employment.

Ms J McCann: As the Member quite rightly points out, childcare is a responsibility not only for OFMDFM but for other Departments. I was trying to explain the integrated side of the childcare strategy. We have had meetings, and my colleague who was previously in this post, Martina Anderson, and junior Minister Bell also had one-to-one meetings with different Ministers on child poverty and the childcare strategy. I reiterate: we want to co-ordinate the development of an integrated childcare strategy because we recognise the importance of ensuring that the strategy integrates within a wider policy field, including tackling disadvantage and poverty, helping to reduce child poverty, growing the economy and promoting employment and training opportunities.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that supplementary questions should be concise and to the point.

Child Abuse

2. **Mr Kinahan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action they intend to take to deal with victims of clerical abuse who are not covered by the inquiry into historical institutional abuse. (AQO 2759/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will ask junior Minister McCann to answer this question.

Ms J McCann: The issue of clerical abuse is no less important or emotive than institutional abuse, and we are mindful of the equally destructive impact that it has had on many individuals. As such, the Executive will have to give careful consideration as to how it should be dealt with following the inquiry into historical institutional abuse. This inquiry, however, was initiated in a 2009 Assembly debate about the historical institutional abuse of children. For the purposes of the inquiry, the definition of an institution formed an important aspect of the consultation with victims and other key stakeholders. Setting the parameters in this way does not in any way undermine the trauma that has undoubtedly been inflicted on many other individuals as a result of abuse in domestic or other settings. However, the categories to be covered by the inquiry were selected because of the very particular vulnerable nature of this type of residential care.

I am sure that the Member would agree that it was difficult for those children in institutions to find someone to turn to about the abuse that they were suffering. The staff in those institutions could have been the perpetrators of the abuse or at least could have been turning a blind eye. It is abundantly clear that children in institutions were especially vulnerable.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the junior Minister for her answer. The inquiry will, quite rightly, look at abuse in institutions. What services have been put in place for those who are discovered, through the inquiry, to be outside the institutions and who are in need of care now?

Ms J McCann: There is no doubt that the Member is quite right to say that. There will be people who will be outside the inquiry. It will be up to the Executive, in the longer term, to consider how to deal with clerical abuse that does not fall within the terms of reference.

I move now to the services that are there. I have met with victims and survivors. We have set up a temporary facility, and the WAVE organisation is looking at that. We need to have the services and support mechanisms in place for all who have the courage to come forward to say that they have been abused in this horrific way.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What is the legal and financial position of lawyers attending the acknowledgement forum and the statutory inquiry?

Ms J McCann: We have been very clear on this. We are going to clearly say that victims and survivors can bring a companion to the inquiry, if they choose to do so. I am sure that many of them would need a companion with them when they go to the inquiry. However, for clarity, the role of that companion, regardless of whether they are a friend or a lawyer, is to assist and support the victim and survivor in recounting their experiences. It is not to represent them in a legal capacity. There is no payment from OFMDFM or the inquiry for a legal representative to attend as a companion. Representatives of victims and survivors have continually stressed that they are not on trial, thus they do not want the inquiry to be over-lawyered. We have been made aware that some lawyers are advising in some cases and that they are filling in a form stating that they are acting as a companion. It is within their rights to do so, but they need to be clear that they will be acting as a friend or a companion, and OFMDFM cannot pay them to do that.

Mr Eastwood: I welcome the fast pace with which the inquiry and the acknowledgement forum have been set up. Will the Minister assure the House that the issue of redress will be dealt with as soon as it becomes clear what mechanism will be used for that, even if the inquiry has not fully reported? Will she assure us that redress will be dealt with as soon as it is possible to deal with it?

Ms J McCann: The report states that the inquiry's terms of reference will make recommendations and findings on four different matters, including the requirement or desirability for redress to be provided by the institution and/or the Executive to meet the particular needs of the victims. They go on to say that the nature or level of any potential financial redress or the provision of services is a matter that the Executive will discuss and agree following receipt of the inquiry and investigation report. At this stage, I would not like to pre-empt the work of the inquiry or any future decisions, but it is certainly in the terms of reference.

EU Presidency: All-island Economic and Social Issues

3. **Mr Byrne** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they are having any discussions with the Irish Government to promote and influence all-island economic and social issues within the context of the forthcoming Irish presidency of the EU. (AQO 2760/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: The First Minister and I have had useful discussions with the Irish Government on the Irish

presidency of the EU, the most recent being during our plenary meeting in Armagh, last Friday. We recognise that Ireland hosting the EU presidency provides us with a unique opportunity to access policymakers and to ensure that our views are heard in a way that would not otherwise be possible. The Irish Government have advised us of events that will take place in Dublin during the presidency and of their priorities for the presidency, which include the common agricultural policy (CAP).

Useful discussions are already taking place between Ministers at North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meetings and bilaterally on presidency-related issues within the context of the NSMC areas for co-operation, all of which will contribute positively to the social and economic issues that affect us all. A number of staff from our Departments have been seconded to the Irish Government to help in their preparations for the EU presidency. There, they will gain valuable experience in hosting and arranging a very significant event that will be of benefit to our system.

Mr Byrne: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. Will he outline whether the Northern Ireland Executive will have a negotiating strategy in relation to the CAP reform proposals? Does he agree that the Republic is on course for export earnings of €183 million this year in respect of manufactured goods and services? What can we do to avail ourselves of some of that?

2.45 pm

Mr M McGuinness: We are conscious of the opportunities that the Irish Government's EU presidency has for our Administration. As we go forward, we will consistently look at how we ensure that we take best benefit from that. For example, we are conscious that the Irish Government have, per capita, benefited much more than us from events over the past 10, 15 or 20 years. We are now trying to ensure that we can move forward in a way that sees us take a co-ordinated approach through all our Departments. The Barroso task force example brought great experience to many Departments in how we can draw down funds that are of huge importance for us. It is a clear example that we are beginning to recognise the huge benefits that exist by building good relationships. Having good relationships, particularly with the Irish Government, is hugely important if we are to capitalise on the advantageous position that they will be in during their EU presidency.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that they have one supplementary question.

Mr Campbell: In recent years, the deputy First Minister has gone down paths that, some 30 or 40 years ago, he probably thought he would not go down. Will he go down another today and indicate that, the next time he talks to the Taoiseach, he will tell him that the previous Taoiseach took the Republic down an economic path that we in this country have no intention of going down?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am not sure if that was a question, but the Minister may respond.

Mr M McGuinness: I will treat it as a question because I think that more than the deputy First Minister have gone down paths that they thought they would never go down, including the Member sitting opposite.

It is not our responsibility or job to admonish any previous Administration in the South or to take to task the present Taoiseach. Our job is to have a good, positive working relationship. Through North/South Ministerial Council meetings, we have developed a positive working relationship, and we want to ensure that we continue to do that. A lot of lessons have to be learnt from the mistakes of the past in many different ways. Clearly, the economic difficulties that afflict the South at the moment are examples of how, as we go forward, we must ensure that such mistakes are not repeated. We have our own set of challenges and difficulties to face here. The Executive are facing into those difficulties in a way that ensures that we can, as quickly as possible, move out of a very damaging double-dip recession. Our relationship with Europe will be important, as will our relationship with the Irish Government. It is obvious from my initial answer that the Irish Government are well disposed towards ensuring that we have more than a foothold in the dialogue and discussions that will ensue in due course. Among the biggest issues that they will face is the negotiations around the common agricultural policy, on which there is a good working relationship between Minister O'Neill and Minister Coveney. I think that our positions are very similar.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the deputy First Minister detail the secondment arrangements agreed to date with the Irish Government for their EU presidency?

Mr M McGuinness: Our Civil Service has seconded one staff officer to work on the Irish permanent representation to the EU assisting the Irish ambassador in the preparation and co-ordination of papers and agendas under the Committee of Permanent Representatives. The Department for Employment and Learning has agreed to provide a member of staff to assist in co-ordinating the EU input to the International Labour Organization event to be held during the Irish presidency. The Department of the Environment has seconded one person to the equivalent Department in Dublin to work on waste policy. We have also agreed that our Executive office in Brussels will make space available to the Irish permanent representative for meetings and events. Senior officials in the Civil Service also receive regular briefings from their Irish Government counterparts on the priorities associated with each EU presidency. The last such briefing was on the Cypriot presidency and was held on 5 September. I think that people can see that there is a very extensive relationship there and one that, if we build on it, can be very much to our mutual advantage.

Welfare Reform: Victims

4. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they have considered any implications of welfare reform affecting victims' entitlement from the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund and the new Victims and Survivors Service. (AQO 2761/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: Through the recently established Victims and Survivors Service, we aim to provide a high-quality service to victims and survivors based on individual assessed needs and the provision of high-quality services to meet those needs. We will continue to provide and improve that assistance for victims and survivors, taking into account the existing statutory provision, included that provided by the welfare system, both currently and in the

future. We have given a commitment to help people to move forward to a brighter future, and we will ensure that the Victims and Survivors Service provides the appropriate and successful means to do so. I understand that people are concerned about how welfare reform will affect them, but I can assure the public that we are constantly reviewing the impact of welfare reform on key services, and we will continue to monitor that to ensure that the best service possible is provided to the most vulnerable. The memorial fund will continue to provide direct financial assistance to victims and survivors until later in this financial year, when the function will transfer to the Victims and Survivors Service.

Mr McGimpsey: I thank the deputy First Minister for that comprehensive answer. Victims and survivors, in common with the rest of the members of society, are likely to lose out under the welfare reform process. Bearing that in mind, will he indicate to the House that he will bid under the budgetary bidding process for additional funds for the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund to support beneficiaries who are likely to lose out under welfare reform?

Mr M McGuinness: It is important to say that our understanding is that any payments made to individuals by the Victims and Survivors Service will be treated as gifts and will, therefore, not be taken into consideration with regard to benefits. The principal role of the Commission for Victims and Survivors is to promote the interests of victims and survivors. As part of that role, the commission advises the Department on matters affecting victims and survivors, and that provides another vehicle by which the impact of welfare reform on victims is closely monitored.

Earlier this year, the commission completed a comprehensive needs assessment and a report on meeting the financial needs of victims and survivors. Those two reports made recommendations for future provision, including the assessment of the financial needs of individuals and the impact of welfare reform on the eligibility of applicants. The comprehensive needs assessment looked in detail at welfare reform and reinforced the importance of the provision of good advice to the victims and survivors sector on welfare reform. The new funding programme will apply from 1 April 2013 and cover a two-year period. It will take into account the commission's advice and recommendations, including those relating specifically to welfare reform. The comprehensive needs assessment has been developed by the Victims and Survivors Commission. We continue to provide unprecedented levels of funding to individuals and groups in the sector, and, as you mentioned, the memorial fund provides practical help and support to victims and survivors for specific needs, including pain management, education and training. Of course, in the past two years —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Minister, your two minutes are up.

Mr M McGuinness: — it has provided £7.3 million, of which £6.2 million was for the improved needs-based assessment schemes that commenced in November 2010.

Mr Durkan: Has the deputy First Minister considered asking the Victims and Survivors Service to compile an analysis of specific welfare need due to the North's post-conflict status to provide statistical affirmation that we need significant changes to the Welfare Reform Bill here?

Mr M McGuinness: That is the responsibility of the victims' commissioner and the comprehensive needs assessment, which, as I indicated, has been carried out.

People are very focused on that and are conscious that, as the original question suggested, the victims and survivors sector is concerned that the welfare reforms, as they are called — many others believe that they are cuts — will be very damaging to them in their particular individual circumstances. Of course, the circumstances are different for all the victims and survivors; no two situations are the same. So, the answer is that we are focused on that and on the need to ensure that the Victims and Survivors Service takes into account all the points that you just made.

Crumlin Road Jail and Maze/Long Kesh: Regeneration

5. **Mr Douglas** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the potential economic opportunities arising from the regeneration of Crumlin Road jail and Maze/Long Kesh. (AQO 2762/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: The regeneration of Crumlin Road jail is at a pivotal stage. The restoration of the jail has greatly added to the overall regeneration potential of the site and of north Belfast in general. That has been evidenced by the commercial leasing of A wing to Belfast Distillery, which intends to make the wing a boutique distillery, visitors' centre, tasting room, restaurant and shop, potentially creating up to 60 jobs and attracting over 40,000 visitors in the first year, rising to 100,000 by year 3. We have also appointed Belfast Tours Ltd as the operator to run the visitor attraction and conference centre at the jail, which will create up to 40 jobs and attract an estimated 90,000 visitors a year.

The recently established Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation is taking forward the regeneration of the Maze/Long Kesh site. The development corporation's key aim will be to maximise the economic, historical and reconciliation potential of the site. We are pleased to report that that is already under way through the confirmed relocation of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society to the site in time for its 2013 agricultural show. The €20 million EU-funded peace-building and conflict resolution centre will be constructed by 2015. Early indications suggest that development of the 347-acre site could deliver an estimated £300 million investment, with approximately 5,000 jobs created on and through the site.

Mr Douglas: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. He outlined that there were great opportunities for jobs, but does he agree that we need to make sure that programmes are put in place that will allow disadvantaged groups to benefit from the regeneration? I am talking in particular about long-term unemployed people and young people from disadvantaged areas.

Mr M McGuinness: I absolutely agree 100% with the Member. We are all conscious, particularly in the context of what are exciting developments around Crumlin Road jail, that the people who will take up residence there with new businesses should fully understand the importance of social clauses and the fact that they will be working in an area of marginalisation and disadvantage. That will then affect the entire community in north Belfast. So, the answer is that we are very focused on the need to ensure that, when the job applications come in, people in the local community who are from a disadvantaged background can gain employment there. As you can tell from my answer, the potential at the site is tremendous. There will initially

be 100 jobs, but that could easily rise to over 200 jobs over the next number of years. That is something that people in north Belfast will find very encouraging.

3.00 pm

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 7 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

GPs: Out-of-hours Services

1. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there will be a reduction in funding for GP out-of-hours services as a result of his Department's proposed changes. (AQO 2770/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The changes outlined in the strategic framework for GP out-of-hours services will not result in funding being taken out of the GP out-of-hours budget. If anything, delivering an improved service will require a net investment in areas such as improved telephony infrastructure and a directory of services. The proposed changes are primarily concerned with simplifying access, integrating services and ensuring that a safe and effective GP out-of-hours service is available to everyone in Northern Ireland.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his answer. I am relieved to hear that resources will follow the anticipated increase in demand for the improved service. Does he anticipate any jobs being at risk if the proposals in the framework are brought forward?

Mr Poots: In government, people usually get a job for life. That is not necessarily something that I agree with, but it usually transpires to be the case. Often, if jobs happen to go, other positions are found for individuals. At this point, it is not anticipated that staff working in the out-of-hours service will lose their job. It is the board's expectation that staff will experience some change in the way in which the service works.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Minister, under Transforming Your Care, you intend to bring more primary care and health services into the community. Do you agree that any reduction in the out-of-hours service would not support that strategy?

Mr Poots: We require a quality out-of-hours service. In fact, we are looking at how we might improve the out-of-hours service, link it more closely with the emergency service and have a more joined-up system than is currently the case.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. What is the thinking behind the proposed 111 number?

Mr Poots: The NHS 111 service being piloted in England is being introduced to make it easier for the public to access healthcare services when they need healthcare quickly and the situation is not life-threatening. The aim is to deliver a 24/7 urgent care service that ensures that people receive the right care at the right time and in the right place.

The strategic framework sets out a strategic vision to simplify access to out-of-hours GP services, as opposed to having the seven telephone numbers that are currently in use, and to improve integration with other unscheduled care services, including the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service. TYC contains a recommendation on the introduction of a single number for urgent care. Under the auspices of the out-of-hours framework, one of the strands of work to be considered in relation to the integration of urgent care will include the scoping of a single telephone number, potentially similar to 111.

Mr Beggs: In England, over 95% of patients at type 1 A&Es are seen within four hours, yet here the corresponding figure is fewer than 80%. In fact, a large number of patients are treated after a wait of 12 hours or more. Does the Minister recognise that any changes to the GP out-of-hours service must improve the service so that patients do not choose to go to A&E, thus creating further lengthy waiting and treatment times?

Mr Poots: I agree. Many people who attend A&E should attend out-of-hours services. It would be to everyone's benefit, including patients, if better use were made of the out-of-hours service. That would reduce waiting times in and pressure on our emergency departments, so, perhaps, we have to be a little more sophisticated in encouraging people to use the out-of-hours service instead of emergency departments.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before moving to the next question, I will make a correction: question 4 — not question 7, as I said — has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

Health Service: Cleanliness

2. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to promote cleanliness in health service facilities. (AQO 2771/11-15)

Mr Poots: The aim of the new draft policy for the provision and management of cleaning services in the health and social care sector, which was out for consultation until 2 November 2012, is to promote better environmental cleanliness through clear standards; audit; specific training for staff involved in environmental cleanliness; capturing and sharing best practice; improving accountability; and making sure that environmental cleanliness is everyone's responsibility. There have been significant improvements since the establishment of the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority programme of announced and unannounced inspections of healthcare facilities. We must not be complacent. The inspections have highlighted that cleanliness can be improved further. The ongoing implementation of the new policy will be a positive step in continuing the improvement.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his answer. In light of that, what level of spending has been directed towards the process in recent years? Can we have a breakdown of that, if possible?

Mr Poots: We have had 'Cleanliness Matters: A Regional Strategy for Improving the Standard of Environmental Cleanliness in HSS Trusts 2005-2008'. Subsequently, we had 'Changing the Culture 2010' and the 'Regional Healthcare Hygiene and Cleanliness Audit Tool'. All those indicate that we need to spend significant amounts of money on cleanliness. Trusts' financial returns show

that, following expenditure on cleaning, internal material, equipment and contracts, a further £50.2 million is spent on salaries for cleaners. That is the level of money that we are spending.

There is a success story in respect of the number of cases of clostridium difficile and MRSA. In 2007-08, there were more than 1,000 cases of clostridium difficile; in 2011-12, that number fell to 327. In the case of MRSA, in 2007-08 we had 221 cases, which fell to just 96 cases in 2011-12. So, there has been significant improvement in cleanliness in our hospitals. There is still work to do, and we still need to engage to ensure that those improvements are carried through.

Mr Gardiner: Have there been any outbreaks of the norovirus this winter? How does the rate of occurrence of the virus in Northern Ireland compare with that in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr Poots: We are quite early in the winter, so I hope that there have not been any outbreaks. I will come back to the Member in writing on that.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I particularly welcome the reduction in hospital-acquired infections. That is good news. It reinforces the need for us to keep on top of this. Is the Minister aware of any reduction in cleaning services at weekends in any of our hospitals?

Mr Poots: All our hospitals have to meet minimum standards. That is essential, and we require the full support of the unions and everyone else to deliver those standards. Hospital cleanliness is essential. There is no point having consultants, nurses and specialists doing their job really well if a hospital is not clean. Often, an infection arising from lack of cleanliness can cause real problems. We really need to ensure that we meet those minimum standards seven days a week and not just during the week. I would be very concerned if standards were dropped at the weekend. I am not aware that that is the case, and I will seek to ensure that that does not become the case.

Brain Injuries

3. **Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department has taken to assist individuals with brain injury. (AQO 2772/11-15)

Mr Poots: On 5 July 2010, my Department published a two-year acquired brain injury action plan with the aim of providing clear time-bounded goals to drive forward service improvement in that area. On 15 November 2011, I launched the brain injury services standards and care pathway, developed as part of the implementation of the action plan, which will help to ensure equity of access to services across Northern Ireland. In addition, the regional acquired brain injury implementation group (RABIIG) has made significant progress in taking forward the actions in the action plan.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his response. What developments have taken place in Northern Ireland in the area of brain injury in children?

Mr Poots: Of course, all people in Northern Ireland with brain injury, including children and young people, have access to a range of inpatient and outpatient services, including access to the expertise available in the regional

acquired brain injury unit at Musgrave Park Hospital. In each trust area, there is also a community brain injury team that co-ordinates the treatment and care of people with brain injury. Those teams provide long-term care planning for those referred to them. Acute hospital care is available across all ranges. However, there are four inpatient rehabilitation units and five community brain injury teams across Northern Ireland for adults.

There are no regional or trust-wide community brain injury teams specifically for children. The brain injury services standards and care pathways, which I launched on 15 November 2011, included a specific acquired brain injury (ABI) pathway for children and young people that was designed to improve and develop services for all children up to the age of 18 — 19 if attending special school — with ABI in Northern Ireland. That pathway addresses mild-to-moderate and moderate-to-severe ABI. There are funding issues that remain to be resolved in the provision of appropriate children-specific ABI services, and my officials are discussing those with RABIIG and the Health and Social Care Board to agree a way forward. A further meeting is scheduled for December 2012.

Mr P Ramsey: Does the Minister have any plans to make further investment in neuromuscular services across Northern Ireland?

Mr Poots: Neuromuscular services is an area in which we anticipate significant growth. That is partly because of success in keeping alive people who have neuromuscular conditions. It is evident to us, even at this point, that further investment will be required to treat neuromuscular conditions as a consequence of the growing numbers that will come to us. There is also evidence that we will have to use more multidisciplinary teams and have more co-ordinated approaches because money alone will not resolve the issue.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Fire and Rescue Service: Bonus Payments

5. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will be setting up an independent review into bonus payments paid to members of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. (AQO 2774/11-15)

Mr Poots: As a result of whistle-blowing allegations, my Department's internal audit group carried out a detailed investigation into the bonuses awarded to senior uniformed officers in the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. That investigation's findings were published on 16 October and found that the bonuses exceeded the delegated limits and were not approved by my Department. Recommendations were made in the report to ensure that that does not happen again, and I have, therefore, no plans to carry out a further independent review of such bonus payments.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for his answer. What retrospective action, if any, can be taken against the individuals involved in the scandal? I accept his point that it will not happen again, but can any retribution be taken?

Mr Poots: I want to clarify at the outset that no individuals awarded themselves pay rises or bonuses. That was done by others, not the individuals who were beneficiaries. This situation has arisen before, namely with the Belfast Trust.

The advice that I have received up to this point is that you cannot go after it because it becomes a matter of contract after a certain period. However, I am receiving conflicting advice and am therefore taking further advice on the issue. It seems to me that there is an inherent unfairness in not carrying things out in an appropriate and proper fashion, as was the case when they did not get the Department's authority.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. There is a lot of concern after recent media stories about the Fire and Rescue Service, specifically the bonuses. What role, if any, has the Department played and what level of officials were involved with the Fire Service during the time the bonuses were paid?

Mr Poots: Job evaluations took place in August 2008, and the Fire and Rescue Service awarded its three non-uniformed directors increases in their pay scales. That was backdated to April 2007 and was done without referral to the Fire and Rescue Service board and without the required approval from the Department. When that was discovered, the pay rises were stopped and an internal audit investigation was carried out. That was considered to be a serious breach of NIFRS corporate governance arrangements, and actions and measures were instigated to provide assurances that such breaches in control would not be repeated. The Department agreed in May 2010 that NIFRS should record the payments in the loss register and in the losses note to the accounts, and we will look at the Department's legal advice as we deal with the matter.

The Department spends more time now with the NIFRS in regard to its monitoring of these issues.

3.15 pm

Mr Anderson: In relation to bonus payments, will the Minister seek to reclaim the bonuses paid to four uniformed officers in 2008?

Mr Poots: I will certainly take further legal advice on the matter. I will not pursue something where I do not have a leg to stand on legally. However, I think that, particularly in the public eye, if people are receiving bonuses that have not been through due and proper process, there is an expectation on us to ensure that we do what we can to get them back. Therefore, I will take further legal advice on the matter. It is primarily a matter for the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, and, indeed, the people who sit on its board. There is an expectation on the board that it should demonstrate more teeth than has been the case on a series of issues up to this point.

Mr McCarthy: The Fire and Rescue Service has served Northern Ireland extremely well at ground level over the past number of years. Does the Minister believe that his Department's actions, or, indeed, inactions, with regard to monitoring the Fire and Rescue Service at the top were adequate? Can he give us a guarantee that things like that will not happen again?

Mr Poots: It is quite risky to give guarantees as to what may happen in the future. Nonetheless, I can indicate that, for a considerable period, things went on in the Fire Service with which the Assembly and the Department are clearly unhappy, and with which I, as Minister, am unhappy. We are looking to take the Fire Service in a new direction. We have brought in someone from outside the organisation to head up the corporate side of it as chief

executive. We have carried out reports and investigations into a series of allegations and brought them to this House. Further matters were brought to me just last week. I was contacted last Monday by a third party, whom I met on Wednesday and from whom I received allegations. That afternoon, I instructed my accounting officer to establish a further inquiry, which will be outside of the Department and which has to have a degree of independence. That is being carried out. All those things are being done to bring a new culture into the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service; one that observes all the corporate governance rules that every government body is expected to observe.

Coeliac Disease: Prescriptions

6. **Mr Campbell** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will consider reviewing the limit of units of gluten-free foods available on prescription per month for people with coeliac disease. (AQO 2775/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is recognised that adherence to a gluten-free diet is essential for patients with gluten-sensitivity, such as those suffering from coeliac disease. The Health and Social Care Board's most recent guidance to prescribers, issued in November 2011, endorses the use of 'Gluten-free foods: a revised prescribing guide 2011'. That guidance was written by Coeliac UK, the Primary Care Society for Gastroenterology, the British Society of Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition and the British Dietetic Association. The guidance recommends the amount of staple gluten-free food that a patient should receive on prescription each month, based on the age, gender and levels of physical activity of the patient. However, it remains the responsibility of the prescriber to make appropriate decisions on the quantities of gluten-free food they are prescribing, based on their knowledge of the circumstances and clinical needs of the individual patient.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Minister for his response. In examining the cases that he has outlined, will he take account of the small number of individuals — one of whom has come to me in my constituency — who have a particularly high dependency on gluten-free products? They find that their requirement and dependency is in excess of the units stipulated. Will the Minister undertake to examine the very small number of people who are affected by that condition and review the number of units required?

Mr Poots: Certainly, the numbers are small. We provide support on the gluten-free diet that is offered, particularly with regard to staple foods. Once it moves beyond staple food, it becomes a matter for the prescriber. However, we are very happy to look at those things.

Mr McClarty: I thank the Minister for his response. Although I agree with him that a relatively small number of people suffer from coeliac disease, that number seems to be increasing. What steps is he taking to make people aware of the symptoms of coeliac disease?

Mr Poots: The Public Health Agency is best suited to deliver information on the matter. We are constantly updating information on a whole range of conditions and illnesses that the general public would not be easily aware of, so that more people can identify with the illness and recognise that they have problems and need to see their GP to get the appropriate advice to deal with their condition.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his interest in the matter. What research has been done by the Department on the prescriptions issue, which was raised by Mr Campbell? Often the prescriptions, especially for the essentials such as loaves, are not adequate. People then have to resort to buying the loaves, which are £3 or £4 each and are small. What research or outreach has been done by his Department to look into those matters and the adequacy of the prescriptions?

Mr Poots: The cost of non-staple gluten-free foods is determined as a result of commercial decisions made by private sector manufacturers and retailers and is influenced by a wide range of regional, national and international factors. Subject to Executive approval, I intend to issue a consultation in the near future on the potential of prescription charges. In doing that, I would like to take account of people with coeliac disease and look at the gluten-free situation that exists. Everybody has to buy food. We will never account for 100% of the cost of food for those who require gluten-free foods. Nonetheless, there is an acknowledgement, and that is already being carried out. What Members have raised cannot be done further. However, there is an acknowledgement that people who require gluten-free food have to pay considerably more than those who eat food containing gluten. Therefore, it is incumbent on us to ameliorate that as far as possible.

Termination of Pregnancy

7. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the contents of the publication 'Guidance on the Termination of Pregnancy: The Law and Clinical Practice in Northern Ireland' will be updated to include guidance on conscientious objection and counselling. (AQO 2776/11-15)

12. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he plans to publish guidelines for the medical termination of pregnancy. (AQO 2781/11-15)

Mr Poots: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 7 and 12 together.

As I have previously stated, I fully intend to publish guidance on termination of pregnancy. However, this matter has been subject to judicial review, and I must ensure that any draft published by my Department is robust enough to withstand any legal challenges that may emerge. As such, I am actively considering the full range of issues involved and seeking advice where appropriate. I will produce guidance only when I am content that it is fit for purpose. Any guidance produced will not change the law on abortion in Northern Ireland.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his response. I am concerned about the issue. The consultation on the revised guidance closed during October 2010, and departmental staff would have been working on it since then, I presume. The Minister has been in post for 17 months. Will he indicate when nurses and doctors can expect the guidance to be finalised so that there will be a clearer understanding of their rights and responsibilities?

Mr Poots: There is a clear understanding that abortion is illegal in Northern Ireland. There are defensible circumstances where people can engage in an abortion, and that relates to the life of the mother or the mental

well-being of the mother over a long-term and a permanent basis. That is pretty clear, and no matter what guidance is produced, it will not take away from the law that exists in Northern Ireland. The previous Minister brought forward guidelines and they were overturned, so I do not want to be in the same position as the previous Minister on that issue. I am interested to hear the Member raising that question because I am not exactly sure where her party stands on the issue. I do not know whether the Ulster Unionist Party is a pro-life party or a pro-abortion party, but I will make it very clear that we will bring forward the guidance when we are absolutely confident that we can move forward with it. In the meantime, people should be guided very clearly by the law as I have stated.

Mrs D Kelly: I look forward to that guidance coming forward. How can the Minister reassure the people who are pro-life that the Marie Stopes clinic will be adequately regulated in the interim period?

Mr Poots: Abortion is a matter of criminal law. The Department has been, and continues to be, in a process of seeking details, through the RQIA, of the full range of services and medical professionals providing services at the Marie Stopes clinic in order to determine whether the clinic will be regulated under the definition of the 2003 Order. The Department has sought legal advice based on the information received, and medical staff in the clinic are regulated through their own professional bodies. Abortion in Northern Ireland is a subject of criminal law. Therefore, anyone carrying out abortion needs to recognise that they are subject to criminal law, and if they are in doubt, they should be very careful because criminal law carries considerably greater punishment than civil law.

Mental Health Services: Belfast

8. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why many patients receiving mental health care and treatment have been reassigned to a different Belfast area team based on the location of their GP rather than their home address. (AQO 2777/11-15)

Mr Poots: Belfast HSC Trust regularly reviews its approach to the delivery of services and, in response to feedback from service users and general practice, has made changes to the deployment of community mental health teams to align them better with service users' GPs. For a small number of service users, that has resulted in a change to the mental health practitioners with whom they are working. The trust's approach in those instances has been to discuss any proposed change with the individual service user and to proceed to effect the change only where the service user is content.

Ms Lo: I thank the Minister for his response. I just wonder whether it makes sense, particularly for mental health patients, if there are changes. It is probably handier for them to have the local team, such as mental health nurses, to visit them, rather than creating a much longer distance for them to travel or for the medical staff to go and visit them at their own home.

Mr Poots: I am trying to work out what the question is, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Ms Lo: The question is this: does it make sense to move it this way, rather than sticking with the previous way, which was that people belonged to a particular local team

according to their address? What I am saying is that you are creating a longer distance if the GP is quite far away.

Mr Poots: Any proposals have been done on the basis of feedback from the service users and general practitioners. You make changes when you can identify that improvements can be made in services, and I believe that that was the basis for making the decision. We will work very closely with the Bamford recommendations on mental health. Bamford has been designated as the way forward in respect of mental health, and that is something that we are comfortable with implementing.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up. That concludes Question Time.

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was first elected here 30 years ago last Saturday.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Mr Wells: I have to say that something just happened in the Chamber that I have never seen in all my many years here. An honourable Member was allowed to stand up and have an exchange with a Minister during Question Time. Will you assure the House that that is not the norm and that it would not normally be acceptable for a Member to have a conversation, such as Ms Lo has just had, with a Minister?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I say to the honourable Member that it appeared to me that the Minister did not follow the question. I think that it was entirely appropriate to allow the Member to repeat it.

3.30 pm

Question for Urgent Oral Answer

Justice

Security: Prison Service

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice, following the brutal murder of Prison Officer David Black, what actions are being taken to address the security threat against members of the Prison Service and provide all necessary protections from terrorist attacks.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The safety and personal security of prison staff is a high priority. It is, of course, kept under constant review. Following the murder of prison officer David Black last week, Prison Service management responded immediately to remind staff of the need for vigilance and to reissue guidance on personal security. The Prison Service also triggered an urgent review of security. Today, the director general has issued further advice to staff on the assessed threat level and has reminded them of the range of personal security measures that is already available to them. My Department and Prison Service management continue to work closely with the appropriate authorities to consider further any implications for staff security.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): The Minister will know that this is a very serious matter. It is a matter of concern that was raised repeatedly prior to the tragic murder of David Black. Officers felt that their security concerns were not being treated seriously. Will the Minister assure me that, through his discussions with the Northern Ireland Office, the home protection scheme that it provides will be made available to officers who need it and that, where it is installed, it will be maintained? Officers have informed me that home protection scheme equipment is not maintained and that they have been told that it is their responsibility to maintain it. Does the Minister agree that that is a completely deplorable position to be in? It needs to be reviewed urgently. Will he take the lead to ensure that prison officers' security concerns will be addressed and protection provided to them?

Mr Ford: As the Chairperson of the Committee correctly highlights, the home protection scheme is managed by the Northern Ireland Office. I was certainly concerned to hear reports that prison officers had been told that equipment was not being maintained. It was certainly my understanding that as long as people remained within the ambit of the scheme, the Northern Ireland Office maintained the equipment that it provided.

I have already sought and secured a meeting with the Minister of State responsible for the scheme's administration. I will put in the strongest possible terms my belief that there needs to be a proper assessment of the needs of prison officers and, indeed, of others in the community, and where equipment is supplied, it must be maintained as long as individuals remain within the terms

of the scheme. I certainly trust that that will be responded to positively by the NIO when I meet the Minister.

Mr McCartney (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Buíochas leis an Aire don fhreagra sin. Will the Minister take this opportunity to outline the meetings that he has had with the PSNI to receive updates on the current assessment of the threat ?

Mr Ford: I suspect that Members, including Mr McCartney, would not wish me to give full details. I have had a number of discussions with the Chief Constable and Assistant Chief Constable Drew Harris since Thursday morning. I expect to meet the Chief Constable again tomorrow. I will ensure that the Department responds positively to anything that is required by the Police Service, and which the Department can supply, in the work that it must now carry out. I have also had discussions with the Justice Minister in Dublin, who assured me that the Garda Síochána will provide any necessary support that it can. As I said, there will be other meetings with, for example, the NIO Minister of State. Therefore, the matter is being treated extremely seriously.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for his answers. Does he accept that it is important that we are all careful with the terminology that we use about prison officers and ensure that there is no hint of a lack of confidence in long-serving prison officers, particularly as the director general of the Prison Service recently made comments to the Justice Committee that could be construed in that way?

Mr Ford: I am not sure exactly what remarks of the director general's Mr Elliott is referring to. I am certainly happy to place on record my confidence in the important work that prison officers are doing, be they long-serving staff or those who have recently joined the Prison Service, on behalf of everyone in this society.

Mr A Maginness: I express my condolences to the Black family on the murder of Mr Black. Given that we are now entering a new period of recruitment to the Prison Service, will the Minister assure the House that those new recruits will also benefit from any security measures that are given to long-term prison officers so that they can be reassured that their jobs, livelihoods and persons will be safe?

Mr Ford: I am happy to give Mr Maginness that assurance. The new custody officers are certainly given security advice as part of their initial training at the college in Millisle. I know that those in the first group who were on duty at Maghaberry last Thursday morning were spoken to directly by a senior member of staff there. However long their service, they are as entitled as any other member of the Prison Service to receive the full and necessary security provisions.

Mr Allister: In addition to ensuring that the matter that Mr Givan raised is addressed, namely, that home security, when provided, is maintained by the NIO, will the Minister take a hands-on interest in the implementation of the special purchase of evacuated dwellings (SPED) scheme, which has given rise to complaints about its adequacy and performance? Although that might fall within some other Ministers' remits, will he, as the Justice Minister, take that hands-on approach to make sure that it is working adequately?

Mr Ford: I assure Mr Allister and other Members that I have, indeed, already taken a hands-on approach to the SPED scheme. The issue has already risen in the context of a small number of police officers — I believe it is four in total — who are subject to negative equity in the application of the SPED scheme. Some time ago, I had a discussion with the Minister for Social Development and the Minister of Finance and Personnel, who also have responsibilities in that area, to see what could be done to work out an arrangement that meets the needs of that small group of police officers. I am not aware of any prison officers who are currently in negative equity. Of course, as we have seen in other areas, the SPED scheme applies to normal vesting for redevelopment on the basis of assessed market value. That is the way in which the scheme operates.

I have sought an update from the Department for Social Development on whether it is carrying out any further work on the SPED scheme, because that was under consideration some time ago. I will ensure that it is applied as best it can be for those who fall within the ambit of my Department. At the end of the day, in its normal operation, it applies on the basis of assessed market values, so we may have to look for additional measures for the small group that is affected by negative equity.

Committee Business

Muscular Dystrophy and Related Neuromuscular Conditions

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly welcomes 'The McCollum Report: Access to specialist neuromuscular care in Northern Ireland'; is concerned about the lack of specialised neuromuscular services revealed in the report; believes that a lead for muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions should be appointed from within Health and Social Care; recognises that significant funds are being wasted on unplanned emergency admissions to hospital; notes that investing small amounts in the development of specialised neuromuscular services can lead to a reduction in these unplanned emergency admissions; further recognises the vital evidence provided by the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign's Northern Ireland Muscle Group during the all-party group on muscular dystrophy inquiry; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to act on the recommendations in the report. — [Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety).]

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As a member of the Health Committee, I, too, support the motion, which is very timely.

First, I commend the McCollums and the other families who gave evidence to the inquiry and the published report. When listening to evidence from the families and the young people who suffer from the condition, one of the things that struck me was their sheer courage and determination and their ability to deal very well with the condition, which affects them on a daily basis.

Other Members spoke about the need for greater resources, but in evidence to the inquiry, it was also stated that there is a:

"need for greater education and training for health professionals".

Some of the evidence pointed to the fact:

"it's your local GP, it's the generic services that are there. And these people usually are not knowledgeable about muscle disorders ... this is a huge vulnerability generally with support services for rare disorders".

The inquiry also showed that patients here who are:

"affected by muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions experience inconsistent standards of care from diagnosis onwards. There is also an alarming reduction in services when moving from paediatric to adult services, such as the provision of physiotherapy and respiratory services, which are essential".

It was mentioned in some of the evidence:

"As the children progress into adult services, they move from their school service to community provision, which is sadly lacking and under extreme pressure."

In its evidence to the inquiry, the College of Occupational Therapists stated:

"Specialist skills are required to work with the more complex of this group. A specialist/consultant occupational therapist(s) for both children and adults should be available for advice, consultation for core services when specialist intervention is needed."

It also stated:

"A model based on the existing Complex Care Team should be available regionally"

and

"Communication across all levels with professionals/ services involved with clear model of care and pathways needs to be developed."

The report states:

"It is evident that specialist health professionals do an excellent job in providing the best possible service they can ... but they require increased support in terms of additional posts and clinical time within the specialist multidisciplinary team set-up."

Recommendation 13 of the report states:

"The ... Executive, in conjunction with HSC, improves the level of recognition and knowledge of muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions at GP level."

I certainly endorse that and, indeed, all 15 recommendations.

Coming down the road at us are the proposed changes to welfare reform and cuts. There is no doubt that young adults with a disability are among those vulnerable groups that will be most impacted on. I ask the House to ensure that that does not happen.

Mr Easton: I believe that we live in a compassionate society and that society feels that it is its duty to help those who cannot help themselves. I feel sadness at the experience of families who have members who suffer from muscular dystrophy. By implementing much of the McCollum report, we can go some way to helping to ensure that families are supported and that individuals get the appropriate aids, treatments and therapies that will improve the quality of life for all affected.

Muscular dystrophy affects approximately 2,000 people across Northern Ireland and has 60 types. In some cases, the condition can affect life expectancy as it affects the heart and lung muscles, while in other cases it affects the limbs but life expectancy is not impacted on. Regardless of the type of MD that a person is diagnosed with, the fact remains that the family and individual expect that they will get the appropriate care and support from our health system.

Sadly, Northern Ireland has lagged behind other regions in the UK. The report highlights areas that can be improved on to help reduce some of the stress and worry of those affected. If we invested £320,000 in the system and produced a more joined-up, cohesive approach, we could make not only significant differences to the experiences of people who use the service but could once again be sure that we can provide the same level of care as in other UK regions.

I want to see a society in which people are not informed over the telephone that their child has a life-limiting condition or left waiting for the appropriate aids to make their life easier.

Mr Swann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Easton: Yes.

Mr Swann: I know that the Member is the Minister's Assembly Private Secretary (APS). On diagnosis over the phone, I ask that that be something that the Minister look at quite seriously. I was informed earlier today of a diagnosis given over the phone only three months ago that has had a quite devastating effect on the family concerned.

3.45 pm

Mr Easton: I thank the Member for his intervention. The Minister is going to look into that issue.

Through the brave testimony of those who live with the condition every day, we have the unique ability to address what they identify is needed. One of the major failings identified is in the transition from paediatric care to adult services. Indeed, this is often the case for many conditions and it needs to be addressed as soon as possible. We need to take a holistic approach to how we support families who experience the condition every day. It is not just the person who is diagnosed with the condition who needs support but those who care for them.

The report highlights how vital respite care is, not just to the carers but to the individuals being cared for. The delay is in getting things such as appropriate head supports or wheelchairs for individuals, which effects the health of the individual and the mental health of the wider family. We need to be sure that people are given the appropriate information. To that end, the post of specialist care adviser needs to be filled as soon as possible, with the option of a second post being created to be examined. Hopefully, that will ensure that the situation in which the post is unoccupied for six months will not be repeated and that families will not be left in limbo.

I thank all families who made representations, and I thank the professionals for their help, advice and guidance to the all-party group. We have the ability to improve the current situation. By implementing much of the report's recommendations as soon as possible, we will achieve a better situation for all in Northern Ireland who are affected by MD.

Mr Gardiner: I support the motion. This is not about more resources for muscular dystrophy, although that, of course, would be welcomed. It is about the better and more effective use of the existing resources. The point has been made that £2.27 million is spent on emergency hospital treatment for people with muscular dystrophy and related conditions. National Health Service studies make the point that up to 40% of those hospital stays could be avoided if just £160 per patient, which is a total of £320,700, was invested in preventative care.

We must not regard muscular dystrophy as being just a disease for children. There needs to be a greater focus on what happens to children with muscular dystrophy when they become adults. The McCollum report specifically mentions the fact that healthcare is focused on children, with services dropping away in adulthood. That is often the time when patients' health is at its most critical.

There is excessive red tape around funding for genetic tests here in contrast to the rest of the United Kingdom. This leaves families often having to suffer months of agony while waiting for a diagnosis. Given that 2,000 people in Northern Ireland suffer from the condition, it needs to be pushed up the priority scale. It cannot be right that children in Northern Ireland wait months for vital appointments and that adults wait sometimes for several years. That is a poor reflection on our health service here. It is something that I am sure that the Minister will want to address.

Given the scale of the problem, it cannot be right that the whole of Northern Ireland has just one specialist care adviser and that the post has remained unfilled for six months. Funding has been found in England for 23, and Wales and Scotland have been able to find funding for three.

The points that I have made today are practical, and they all need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. I call on the Minister to do so. I support the motion.

Mr Agnew: I support the motion. I pay tribute to Gerry and Geraldine McCollum for their work in securing the debate today and the production of the McCollum report.

Muscular dystrophy has affected their lives for 23 years since their son's diagnosis with the illness. I know that, more than 10 years on from their son's death, the fact that we are debating the issue and giving it such prominence brings warmth to the family. It means a lot to them to know that their campaigning efforts, those of the other families affected by muscular dystrophy and others who have campaigned on the issue have been heard, and that we have brought the motion forward and given the issue the prominence it deserves. I commend the Health Committee for doing so.

I attended the launch of the McCollum report at the beginning of the summer. Like all who attended, I could not help but be moved by some of the stories of how the illness affects the lives of young people and their families. As a parent, I know how much distress even the most minor illnesses to our children can cause, and I can only imagine the difficulties that arise when such a serious illness afflicts a family.

The Minister has said that he cannot accept all the recommendations of the McCollum report. The report is by no means the last word on muscular dystrophy, but it is a very important contribution, and that is recognised in the motion. I hope that, in giving his response, the Minister will at least address each of the recommendations individually and give reasons why he feels he can or cannot accept them. To be fair, he said that he would do that on the radio today. It is important that it is communicated to those who put in so much work and gave evidence on the report to the all-party group that each recommendation has been given serious consideration. If there are reasons why some of the recommendations cannot — or the Minister feels should not — be implemented, those who contributed to the report should hear them.

I would like to pay tribute to the all-party group on muscular dystrophy. As all MLAs know, there are a number of all-party groups. Our time is stretched and there can be difficulties attending. As the sole representative of my party, I find it hard, and I try to attend as many as possible. It is important that all-party groups are not just seen as talking shops. The chair, deputy chair and members of the all-party group on muscular dystrophy have shown

leadership in that regard. They ensured that the all-party group did not just discuss the issues, but took action through the inquiry that led to the report before us today.

An issue that has been touched on by a number of Members is the cost of emergency hospital treatment. I welcome that the Minister said on the radio today that he recognises the cost savings of proactive investment in care services to limit or mitigate instances of emergency hospital treatment. I think that that approach needs to be taken as much as possible across the health service. It will allow us to redress the balance of preventative spending versus emergency treatment so that we can truly have a health service that promotes good physical and mental health and, as I said, that mitigates the need for emergency treatment. However, of course, we will always need a level of treatment, and we must ensure that those services are provided. We should seek to reduce that demand by investing early and ensuring that people receive services on a proactive basis.

I commend all involved in the report, and I welcome the contributions that I have heard today. I hope and believe that we will see some positive outcomes so that the hard work and campaigning pay off, and so that we can see some good coming out of the suffering of those with muscular dystrophy.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I welcome the opportunity to hear from MLAs on the motion and to respond to it. I also want to thank the all-party group on muscular dystrophy for its commitment to improving care for people with this very distressing condition. I am aware of the difficulties that people, young and old, who suffer from muscular dystrophy and other related neurological conditions have to face daily. I am also aware of the impact that living with these debilitating conditions can have on families, friends and carers. That is why I was pleased to attend and speak at the inaugural meeting of the all-party group in September 2011 and why I welcome the publication of the McCollum report in June this year. A considerable amount of work has gone into the production of the report, and it has presented us with much food for thought.

The wording of the motion contains some hard-hitting criticism of the services that are provided for sufferers of muscular dystrophy. Be in no doubt: such criticism has an impact. The wide range of people in the Health and Social Care family of organisations who provide those services rightly pride themselves in their ability to deliver care to a high standard in a tough economic climate. However, I must also recognise and respect the fact that such criticism may and does reflect the real-life experiences of people who suffer from neurological conditions and those of their families. Be in no doubt that we take the issues very seriously, and I have approached the debate as one who is prepared to listen and learn as well give some leadership.

Since the report was launched in June, departmental officials have shared it with the Health and Social Care Board, the Public Health Agency and the five health and social care trusts. The aim was to seek a considered assessment of the report and its recommendations from those who design and deliver the services. There has been much internal discussion and debate over the summer, during which time health professionals from the Health and Social Care Board, the five health and social

care trusts and the Public Health Agency service teams were afforded the opportunity to consider the report and its 15 recommendations in detail. The internal discussion culminated in the Health and Social Care Board running a workshop on 21 September 2012 to review the comments received from the many professionals working in the field and to finalise its assessment of the report.

Given the time available to me today, I do not plan to speak about each individual recommendation. As I indicated previously, I will provide a written response before long. However, I want to give a preliminary response. In my view, a number of recommendations can be taken forward and implemented as soon as is practicable. Recommendation 4, for example, suggests that the Health and Social Care Board and the Northern Ireland Executive create a steering group to develop specialist neuromuscular services, incorporating the views of people affected with neuromuscular conditions. Although we do not necessarily support the creation of such a steering group, a priority for the board is the establishment of robust engagement mechanisms with service users and carers, clinical staff, trust management, voluntary and community organisations and other statutory organisations. That is an acknowledgement of the fact that people with progressive neurological conditions require access to a range of services that can cross boundaries between health and social care, employment and benefit services, housing and education. Given the complexity of the conditions, the multidisciplinary approach is critical in those instances. In support, the Health and Social Care Board proposes to establish a neurological conditions advisory group, and a workshop was held recently to consider the role and remit of this group and its means of engagement with the wider network of stakeholders. I propose to allow the board to take the work forward and thus fulfil the role of the proposed steering group. I am sure that the group will provide a useful forum for the necessary exchange of views between service designers, providers and, very importantly, users.

Recommendation 6 suggests that the Health and Social Care Board and the trusts use specialist expertise in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to develop a hub-and-spoke model of service provision. Effectively, such a hub-and-spoke model for specialist neurological care already exists, with the Belfast Trust at the centre. The Health and Social Care Board has committed to continue to explore opportunities to develop those arrangements further for the benefit of service users. I suspect that recommendation 4 will help us with recommendation 6.

Recommendation 13 suggests that the Northern Ireland Executive and Health and Social Care improve the level of recognition and knowledge of muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions at GP level. The HSC Board is supportive of that recommendation and will consider sending information to GPs or arranging group event training. My Department will also raise the issue with the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency.

4.00 pm

There are some recommendations in which we see merit, but which require discussion with all concerned and need to be fleshed out. Recommendation 1, for example, suggests that a lead for neuromuscular services be established within the HSC in Northern Ireland. The HSC

Board and the Public Health Agency have recognised the need to put in place specific arrangements and to support the delivery of services for people with neurological conditions, including people with muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions, and their carers. They point to the existence of the neurological conditions subgroup of the long-term-conditions service team, which was established to provide resolved advice and expert opinion to the HSC Board and the PHA on health and social care services for people with neurological conditions, including neuromuscular conditions. However, that is clearly a key recommendation for the all-party group and Muscular Dystrophy Campaign, and, again, we take it very seriously.

Given the existence of the subgroup and the board's proposal to create a neurological conditions advisory network to improve conditions for service users, it would be helpful if the all-party group could detail for us specifically what added value such a lead could bring that cannot be achieved within the current and proposed arrangements. Put simply, the answer to that recommendation is not no, but, in these straitened times, we need to be convinced about the real added value of such a lead before we consider the deployment of more resources in that direction.

Recommendation 12 asks the Northern Ireland Executive to address inequalities in wheelchair service provision for people with muscular dystrophy. We heard from various Members the cases of the long waiting times that people requiring specialist wheelchairs have had to endure. It is acknowledged that there are issues regarding timely access to specialist wheelchairs, and that is now monitored on a monthly basis through the regional criteria for access to the service for all service users, including those with complex needs. However, in recognition of the specific pathway for specialist wheelchairs for clients, such as those with muscular dystrophy or other neuromuscular conditions, a separate monitoring process was put in place in April 2012. In 2010-11, the average time for assessment and issue was 32 weeks. I recognise that it will take much longer to provide those specialist wheelchairs than it will to provide the standard models, because, by their nature, they are customised and bespoke. However, I think there is room for improvement, and I am not happy that people are still having to wait for as long as 32 weeks. I welcome the fact that it has been reduced to that time, but I want to see it reduced further. The board wants to improve that position, and that will be helped by the training of a second bioengineer and recent changes in internal processes. My Department will continue to monitor the situation very closely to ensure that it continues to improve.

A few of the recommendations are not feasible for a variety of reasons. Recommendation 15, for example, suggests that health and social care trusts and Northern Ireland councils should develop structured joint planning provision to ensure a seamless transition and co-ordination between health and social care services. Although I am generally in favour of the Department and its agencies working in a joined-up manner in the provision of services, in principle, I imagine that that particular recommendation was written from the viewpoint of services in other parts of the UK where health and social care services are provided by separate bodies. That recommendation may not be as relevant in Northern Ireland, as we have an integrated health and social care system. However, the wider point

on the need to improve transitions, particularly from child to adult services, is not lost on us, so we are working with other Departments and agencies to make improvements in that area.

I also noted that recommendation 14 was about looking at long-term succession planning, so that recruitment for and appointment to key neuromuscular posts happens quickly. We have had preliminary discussions between the Department, the HSC Board and the PHA, and the trusts indicate that implementation of that recommendation is not feasible at this time. Every effort is made to ensure effective succession planning for doctors across a range of specialities, and, generally, where possible, medical posts, where the post holder is approaching retirement, are highlighted and identified to the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency in order for it to allocate a junior doctor to a specialist training programme. Similarly, where it is apparent that a specialist nurse or allied health professional is approaching retirement, steps can be taken to begin to train staff with generic skills. However, specialist medical training can take up to five years and retirement age is not fixed. It can prove challenging to co-ordinate the completion of training within the retirement period of a senior consultant in specialities where the number of consultants is small. So, the implementation of that recommendation may not be feasible, and we have to caveat that. The specialist position that became available last November did so due to illness and was completely unforeseen. Getting a specialist to replace him has proved very difficult. However, contrary to what I said on radio this morning, we are hopeful that that position will be filled this month, and I trust that that will make a significant difference in the care that is offered.

I emphasise that what I have said this afternoon is our preliminary position. The report was launched in June, just before the summer holidays. Many health and social care staff were on leave, so getting people together was a bit more challenging. My Department received the Health and Social Care Board's response to the report only last week. Therefore, there is still much for my Department to discuss with the HSC Board and the trusts about the detail of the recommendations. I propose to respond more fully, following that, in writing to the all-party group. I intend to do that before Christmas.

I conclude by taking this opportunity to again reaffirm my support for the work of the all-party group and to convey my wish to work together collaboratively and effectively to help to ensure that the needs of people with muscular dystrophy and other neuromuscular conditions, their families and their carers are taken care of. The Committee Chair asked whether we were talking to the Republic of Ireland about joining up services on an all-Ireland basis. Indeed, Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety officials have been in touch with colleagues in Dublin and are considering what is feasible. Those discussions are at an early point. When it comes to the more complex conditions, we will often have to share expertise, whether that is on an all-island basis or, indeed, an all-islands basis within the British Isles. What is important for those with such conditions is that we deliver the best possible care for the people who require it.

Mr Wells (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): First, I may not be my usual self today. I have just had the tragic

news of the loss of my agent of 15 years, Stanley Priestley, who died this morning. That has been a blow not to only me but the party and everyone who knew him. So, it has been a sad day, but, hopefully, I will get through this as best I can.

I attended as many meetings as I could of the muscular dystrophy group, and I was struck by many aspects of the work of that group, the first of which was the expert chairmanship of Conall McDevitt. It is unfortunate that Conall cannot be here because he made such a significant contribution as chair to that important group. I also noticed that its meetings were always packed out. I do not think that I have seen a better attended all-party group in my time at Stormont. I was also struck by the passion with which carers and those with muscular dystrophy spoke at the meetings. Any MLAs who attended certainly got a clear message that there was a level of dissatisfaction with provision in Northern Ireland at the moment.

I also have clear memories of praise for the work that is being done on muscular dystrophy in Newcastle upon Tyne. Some MD sufferers had been there and reported back the wonderful provision that there is in the north-east of England and their yearning for a similar facility in Northern Ireland or, perhaps, on an all-island basis, we do not know which. However, many of those who went to Newcastle came back singing the praises of that particular facility.

Of course, there was unanimous support for the stance taken by the McCollum family, who were so supportive of the work of the group. It is a very fitting testimony to the memory of Christopher that we now have this excellent report outlining what are perceived to be the needs of those with muscular dystrophy and allied conditions in Northern Ireland. Many Members who took part in the debate had also attended the meetings and so were quite well educated on the needs of the 2,000 people in Northern Ireland who have MD or allied conditions.

Gordon Dunne, like many others, commended the work of the McCollum family. He believes that it is crucial that services be improved, and he stressed the importance of putting in place a support structure for those affected and their carers.

Robin Swann made a particularly interesting contribution to the debate and raised some unusual points, which it was very useful for the Assembly to hear. First, he referred to the difference in outcomes of Duchenne muscular dystrophy sufferers in Scandinavia and those in Northern Ireland. He mentioned that the life expectancy of sufferers in Scandinavia is almost twice that in Northern Ireland. That raises some fundamental questions about why someone living on one side of Europe can expect to live for 20 to 24 years while someone in Sweden or Norway can expect to live for 50 years. It is important that the Department addresses that very obvious disparity. He also made the point that a 32-week wait for a wheelchair is too long. Many Members made exactly the same point. I must say, in relation not just to this condition but to other affiliated conditions, I find the provision of wheelchairs to be a problem that frequently appears in my constituency office inbox. There seems to be a general lack of satisfaction with the present provision. The problem may be one of resources, a lack of equipment or too few trained staff, but we should look at that.

Mr McCarthy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Does he recall that one client's contribution was simply to say that when the wheelchair that they required arrived at their house, it was too wide to get through the door? There is something to be said to the specialist mechanics who do that work to make sure that the measurements for the wheelchair, or whatever, are suitable for the home.

Mr Wells: Again, my experience in South Down is that that can occur. It seems wasteful to go to all the trouble of delivering the wheelchair to find that it is not fit for purpose, and it would be interesting to know how often that happens.

Mr Swann made the valid point that there are six care advisers in the Republic of Ireland and none in Northern Ireland. Clearly, the requirement for six in the Republic indicates that there must be a need in Northern Ireland. I suppose, pro rata, that would mean about two advisers here. To be fair, he welcomed the Minister's clarification that two people have applied for the care adviser post in Northern Ireland. I heard the Minister's interview this morning as I was shaving, and I was surprised to hear that there had been no applicants for those important posts. I am glad that he has now clarified that position, and there is hope that we will hear the good news of at least one appointment in the near future.

Mr Durkan made a rather amusing comment about the brevity of Mr McDevitt, had he been here. I hope that Mr McDevitt is not reading this on the internet in the jungle of Columbia. If he is, Mr Durkan will be in trouble. More seriously, Mr Durkan mentioned that muscular dystrophy is a progressive condition, and he was very supportive of the creation of the care adviser post. Better planning is needed to support the growing case load. He emphasised the urgent need for a specialist multidisciplinary approach.

Roy Beggs again emphasised the fact that 32 weeks is too long to wait for a wheelchair and said that that could lead to the isolation of people because they cannot get about. It is bad enough getting the diagnosis and the condition being progressive, but then to find that you have to wait for such a long period to get some form of mobility must be quite distressing. He stated that the £160 invested per patient in prevention is not enough and that equipment is needed earlier, which is a theme that ran throughout all the contributions. He was concerned about the lack of a joined-up approach to services by health professionals. He emphasised the importance of workforce planning so that the care adviser post does not become vacant again.

Pam Brown was very supportive of the motion. She said that the system does not work as well as it should and that the Department would do well to consider seriously all the McCollum report's recommendations.

Paula Bradley said that muscular dystrophy patients do not receive the treatment that they require and that Northern Ireland is falling behind other regions of the United Kingdom.

A recurrent theme of the Minister's time in office has been the importance of the idea that there should be no difference whether you live in Basingstoke or Belfast, Londonderry or Luton; everyone in the United Kingdom should have the same access to treatment. To be fair to the Minister, he has made quite enormous strides to try to achieve equality. Indeed, in some aspects of care, Northern Ireland is ahead of the rest of the United Kingdom. A recent example is the fact that the Southern Health and Social Care Trust was voted as having the best

telemedicine service in the entire country. Therefore, to some extent, people in other parts of the UK will complain that they are behind Northern Ireland, but, in this, we have clearly fallen behind. We need to catch up as quickly as possible.

4.15 pm

According to Ms Bradley, the cost of emergency care for MD sufferers in Northern Ireland is £2.27 million a year, which could be cut by 40% by bringing in specialist care. I am sure that, as far as the Department is concerned, that would be a valuable saving.

Maeve McLaughlin said that there was a need for a lead for MD in the HSC and for early intervention and occupational therapy. I will come back to that point, because Mickey Brady mentioned it.

Kieran McCarthy said that there were six key messages in the motion, which are also in the McCollum report's 15 recommendations. He called for the report's full implementation, and, again, he raised the issue of the gap in the provision of services between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom. He also felt that the £2.5 million that was being spent at the moment was being wasted due to unnecessary hospital admissions.

Alex Easton emphasised again the enormity of the condition, saying that 2,000 people were suffering from it. He said that there was a need to look at the practice of people being given a diagnosis over the phone. I would hope that, at the very least, we would not have any future situations in which someone was diagnosed with as serious a condition as MD over the phone. I am sure that that was a slip in the professional standards of the clinician concerned, and I would like to think that it would not happen again. It is far too serious to be done over the phone. Mr Easton also made an interesting point about the need to address the transition between paediatric and adult care. Of course, he came back to the lack of respite care provision, which is an issue that raises its head many times and is an area in which we are particularly weak in Northern Ireland. It comes through my office time and time again. There is a concern that, for many conditions, Northern Ireland is not up to the standards of the rest of the UK in respite and, in particular, in making it accessible to carers.

Mickey Brady emphasised the role of occupational therapists in the treatment of those with MD. He is absolutely right. Unfortunately, as we know, we have a shortage of qualified OTs to do that work.

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

Mr Wells: Well-trained OTs can do an awful lot to alleviate the condition.

I thank everyone who took part. I know that the Minister is taking on board seriously the points that were raised, and I am sure that we will support the motion in its entirety.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly welcomes 'The McCollum Report: Access to specialist neuromuscular care in Northern Ireland'; is concerned about the lack of

specialised neuromuscular services revealed in the report; believes that a lead for muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions should be appointed from within Health and Social Care; recognises that significant funds are being wasted on unplanned emergency admissions to hospital; notes that investing small amounts in the development of specialised neuromuscular services can lead to a reduction in these unplanned emergency admissions; further recognises the vital evidence provided by the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign's Northern Ireland Muscle Group during the all-party group on muscular dystrophy inquiry; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to act on the recommendations in the report.

Private Members' Business

Councillor Sammy Brush

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

Mr P Robinson: I beg to move

That this Assembly extends support, without qualification, to Samuel Brush, a DUP councillor who, while working as a postman, was shot and survived an assassination attempt by the convicted terrorist Gerry McGeough; stands by the victims of terrorism; and expresses revulsion at those who side with would-be murderers rather than an innocent public servant.

The events of this past week, in particular the murder of David Black, have been a timely reminder to us all of the terrorist threat that still exists. Although as a society we have moved a very long way from the dark days of the Troubles, we have had a chilling reminder that we cannot afford to be complacent about the threat and ideology of terrorism. Once again, the community has united in condemnation of those who carried out the brutal murder of a man who was on his way to do his job and serve his community. Today, the Assembly united. We galvanised in opposition to that terrorist act and in support of those who have been so tragically touched by terrorism.

The fact that atrocities of that nature are now so rare and the condemnation so universal is a mark of how far we have come as a society. We are moving to a new, shared and united community in Northern Ireland. However, in doing so, we must never sideline the interests of victims, disregard their quest for justice or be insensitive to their hurt and the ordeal that they have faced. Today, therefore, I take the unusual step of proposing a motion not as First Minister but as party leader in support of a colleague of mine who continues to suffer not just at the hands of those who sought to kill him and those in his home area who, to this day, continue to attack his home and threaten his family and him but now incredibly at the hands of some elected representatives who have sided with his would-be murderers rather than him. It is even more objectionable when we learn that that took place in his presence in his own council chamber. He had to listen to councillors arguing that the convicted terrorist Gerry McGeough, who had been tried for murder and sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment for attempted murder, 10 years for possession of weapons and seven years and four years for two counts of IRA membership, should be released from jail having served only a few months and without even serving the Belfast Agreement's reduced sentence of two years. I regard that as offensive and in stark contrast to the progress that has been made in recent years. That is why I want to give all in the House the opportunity to join us and stand together with a victim of terrorism.

There are many victims on all sides of the conflict, and each deserves their own time and attention. However,

this motion is about Sammy Brush. I have seen the amendment tabled by our colleagues in the Ulster Unionist Party. I support its sentiments entirely. On another day, I would endorse and welcome that amendment or a motion proposed on its own terms. However, I do not want us to lose focus today. I want this debate to be about just one victim: Sammy Brush. I call on the Ulster Unionists not to push their amendment to a vote but to bring it forward on another day. To move their amendment would be to dilute and broaden a specific issue and allow others to hide behind more wide-ranging and wide-sweeping generalisations.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Let me lay out just a few of the facts. On Saturday 13 June 1981, Sammy Brush was doing his rounds as a postman. Fortuitously, under his jacket and shirt, he was wearing light body armour. At around 1.00 pm, he arrived to deliver a letter at the home of Mrs Mary McGarvey, who, along with her sister, had been held at gunpoint from 6.00 am by two gunmen. He posted the letter and was turning to get back into his post van when a gunman appeared from the side of the house and, from a distance of 10 to 12 feet, fired two shots at him from a revolver. As the first shot hit, it drove the body armour into his chest. The second hit his right shoulder and then ricocheted into his body, passing through his lung and half an inch from his spine. He turned and ran up the laneway. A hail of gunfire followed him. He was shot twice more in his back, and four other bullets went through his Post Office jacket but missed his body.

Sammy attempted to draw his personal protection weapon with his right hand, but the shot to his shoulder prevented him from being able to pull his gun out of its holster. With his left hand, he managed to grasp his weapon and return fire. In spite of being badly injured and in spite of the stress and gravity of the moment, he succeeded in shooting one of his attackers. However, he knew that there was at least one other gunman pursuing him. Losing blood and in pain, Sammy knew that his life depended on being able to get into his van and drive clear of the ambush site. He successfully struggled back to his vehicle and managed to drive to Ballygawley police station, from where he was taken to the South Tyrone Hospital. Meanwhile, one of the gunmen, Gerry McGeough, was admitted to hospital in the Irish Republic with a gunshot injury. He later absconded from the hospital, and it was not until 2007 that he was arrested in connection with this attempted murder. The evidence against Gerry McGeough at the trial was overwhelming, and he was convicted of a number of offences, including the attempted murder of Sammy Brush.

As everyone in the House will know, I was opposed to the Belfast Agreement and in particular the arrangements relating to the early release of prisoners. I continue to regard it as an affront to the rule of law. The release after only two years of anyone found guilty of attempted murder offends every sense of right and wrong. However, that is not the issue before the Assembly today. It is the law that prisoners of that era only serve two years of their sentence, but now some of those who supported the Belfast Agreement argue for the law that it put in place to be set aside. Perpetrators, they say, are being victimised. The Sinn Féin leader of Dungannon council claimed that Gerry McGeough was being detained due to his political beliefs, seemingly ignorant of the fact that he is being detained because he was convicted of, among other

things, the attempted murder of Sammy Brush. I was particularly disappointed by the comments of the leader of the SDLP, who on the BBC said:

"Gerry McGeough has been victimised by the system. There is a degree of victimisation of prisoners, and we don't like it."

So, in Alasdair McDonnell's world, it is Gerry McGeough, who, because he is being detained for two Christmases, is being victimised and not Sammy Brush, who, if Gerry McGeough had got his way, would have missed the last 30 Christmases.

Today, we will each decide who the real victim is. Is it Gerry McGeough, a bloody and evil terrorist, who, with murder on his mind and in his heart, sought in a cowardly fashion to take the life of a public servant? Or is it Sammy Brush, who, while doing his job and serving a rural community, was shot twice in the back, once in the chest and again in the shoulder, spent weeks in hospital and still receives treatment and medication to this day? Might I add that, as a result of the outrageous and hurtful actions of some of his fellow Dungannon councillors, he has had to have his medication doubled?

The motion that I have moved asks each of us to choose between the victim and perpetrator. Sammy Brush is in the Gallery to see the verdict of the Members of the Assembly. For my part, I will stand with Sammy Brush. To me, he is not just a victim; he is a hero.

4.30 pm

Mr Elliott: I beg to move the following amendment:

After "qualification, to" insert

"all elected representatives and their families who have been targeted by paramilitaries throughout the Troubles, including".

First, I pass on my sympathy to the family of the murdered prison officer, David Black. His murder was a despicable act and has thrown this Province back years in its attempts to move forward. Along with that murder, the motion brings a lot of issues back to us. I commend the Members who tabled the motion and secured the debate in the Chamber. I hope that there is general agreement on it and that, as the First Minister said in his capacity as leader of the DUP, Members define the difference between the victim and the perpetrator and identify who the victim is and who the perpetrator is.

Mr Robinson outlined very clearly the attempted murder of Mr Sammy Brush and the issues that followed that. It is disgraceful that people want the person who was charged with that offence to be released from prison. Just today, we have heard about a protest in Belfast organised by Sinn Féin for the release of Mr Padraic Wilson. When will these people learn and accept the rule of law? I thought that we had moved on, ladies and gentlemen, and progressed in this society, rather than wanting to bring back the dark old days when we had the murder attempts that we are debating and discussing today, such as that on Mr Sammy Brush. I agree that Mr Brush is a hero, but he and his family are also victims. Please do not try to tell me that Mr McGeough and those who carried out that act and many similar acts throughout Northern Ireland are victims: to me, they are not.

Yes, the Ulster Unionist Party has put down an amendment, but Mr Brush is still the central aspect of the motion. We have not removed any aspect of that motion, but we wanted to widen the issue to those public representatives. Mr Brush was serving his community in two aspects: as a postman and as a member of the Ulster Defence Regiment. He was doing his best for the security of everyone in Northern Ireland and everyone who lived in his immediate area. Many more people were in similar circumstances. Indeed, some did not have any connection with the security forces but were still brutally murdered or faced attempted murder by the IRA. I want to point out one in particular, Mr Charles Armstrong of Armagh, who was the Ulster Unionist chairman of Armagh District Council as well as a part-time major in the UDR. It disturbs me greatly that, following that murder, the Sinn Féin president, Mr Gerry Adams, said that killing UDR members was:

"perfectly legitimate in a state of war."

Asked about his own willingness to kill police or soldiers, he said:

"If my role lay within the IRA and within an armed struggle I would have no compunction at all."

That, to me, ladies and gentlemen, says a lot for the community that we have lived in. It says a lot for those who are now public representatives and for those who still fail to condemn, criticise and say that all murder was wrong. You cannot cherry-pick. Murder is murder; it was either right or wrong. Attempted murder is either right or wrong, and, to me, the murder of Charles Armstrong and the attempted murder of Sammy Brush were wrong. The people on the opposite Benches should say that and should say that the people who committed those offences should not be released early from jail. They should not be campaigning now for their release.

We can recall many other instances, including the time when a former Speaker of the House, Sir Norman Stronge, and his son were brutally murdered by the IRA, which said that the Stronges had been chosen as the symbols of "hated unionism". Why should there be hated unionism? Why should hated unionism bring about the murder or attempted murder of well-respected people who were doing all that they could for this society and all that they could to help Northern Ireland and its citizens? I call today for the Members on the opposite Benches to drop any call for Gerry McGeough and Padraic Wilson to be released. Let the due process of law take its proper course. That is what we are here for, and that is what everyone should accept. You cannot cherry-pick; you cannot say that you want some people to be locked up and others not. I believe that we have an opportunity out of this to move on. There is a challenge to those on the Benches opposite to accept that, and we are putting down that challenge.

Let us not forget all those who were murdered, whether they were in public service or otherwise. Murder is murder, and those who were murdered and those who were targets of attempted murder are all victims and should be treated as such. They should get the proper respect that they deserve. Those who went out to commit that murder — the perpetrators — should not be treated as victims. I want to hear the people on the Benches opposite accept that. I want to hear them say that the attempted murder of Sammy Brush was wrong. I want to hear them say that all the murders and killings throughout the last number of

decades were wrong. We are coming up to the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Enniskillen bomb, and I want to hear the people on the Benches opposite say that that was wrong and those people should not have died. They should not have been targeted or killed, and no lame excuses should have been made by the IRA and their comrades to try to justify it, because that, too, is equally wrong.

So, ladies and gentlemen, we have the opportunity today not only to support Sammy Brush — I wholeheartedly support Sammy — but to support all the other victims of terrorism, all the victims who were killed and, I have to say, injured. Many who were injured in the Troubles believe that they are forgotten. They believe that they have been forgotten by a society that has moved on. Just as the murder last week of David Black was wrong, so were all the other murders and attempted murders in the Province.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I apologise to the First Minister. Due to my attendance at another meeting, the fairly sharp beginning to this debate caught me by surprise. I caught Mr Elliott's comments in their entirety.

Today and last week in a similar discussion, we heard at length about the additional hurt and stress caused to Mr Sammy Brush by the motion that was presented to the local council by my party colleagues. I took the trouble to speak to those individuals, just to ascertain what exactly was said and how they had presented the motion. They made it clear to me that their opening remarks were addressed to Mr Brush. They made it clear that they were addressing an issue, as they saw it, of injustice, and they in no way at all wished to cause him any additional stress or anxiety. That was the opening statement of the debate that ensued, and Mr Brush himself, I understand, made a fairly rigorous contribution to that debate.

As I said, my colleagues said that they wished to draw attention to a fairly flagrant and systematic abuse of due process. We hear that language used occasionally by people on the Benches opposite. In this case, we are talking about individuals who were granted bail by the courts but were further incarcerated on the basis of secret briefings. Is that what we mean by due process?

In the case of Gerry McGeough, while it is complex, it is much more straightforward. In terms of our recent history and, indeed, the history of the process that has brought us all to this place, it has not been disputed that Gerry McGeough is a "qualifying person" under the terms of the Weston Park agreement, which dealt with the very difficult issue of what became known as the on-the-runs. Every MLA and every party in the Assembly is bound by those incremental agreements dating from the Good Friday Agreement to the present, whether they supported them in those discussions or not. We are charged with delivering, respecting and reflecting the outcomes.

I speak in the full knowledge that, as an individual, Gerry McGeough is opposed to my party, and he stood as an independent republican candidate against us in the elections in 2007. However, it is also a matter of record that, long before he was arrested or rearrested, he made clear his support for the peace process. He made it clear that his war was over and that we were in a post-conflict scenario. So, his entitlement under the Weston Park agreement was quite flagrantly set aside, despite the fact that it was a formal agreement between the parties and

those negotiating parties. This morning, again, we made reference —

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. Will he advise the House when the legislation that he talked about at Weston Park actually became the statute for the on-the-runs?

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

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Thank you very much. The Member has obviously misheard me. I did not say "legislation"; I said "agreement". *[Interruption.]* OK, the record will be there. It was an agreement, unless you are going to deny that that was the case. I made reference to the fact that, whether parties or individual MLAs supported those agreements, we are bound by the outcomes.

Mr Elliott referred to the rule of law. However, if we listen to the proposition, it is clear that there is a completely one-sided approach to the issue. I ask Members this question in all sincerity: where is the evidence of, if you like, an unbiased or a balanced application of the rule of law? Where are the cases involving members of the British Army who were involved in murder, as we saw on Bloody Sunday, as we know, and the Ballymurphy case? Where is the evidence of those in the RUC or the UDR who colluded with unionist death squads? How many of them were in front of the court? Is that the situation that they described? Do we have the rule of law, or is the rule of law also set aside?

In the motion and the amendment, there is no acknowledgement of the hurt on every side of the House. There is no acknowledgement of the injustice, the pain and the trauma that was imposed on people right across our community by all those who were combatants in our conflict. We really have to address the fact that that conflict has effectively been over for approaching 20 years now. Yet, people are being charged over issues that are 30 years old and people are being ignored. I include here the statement made by the British Prime Minister in the House of Commons when he was dealing with the Bloody Sunday inquiry. He addressed the issue and said that it was indefensible, but he did not address the issue of those who carried out the killings on that day. Even yet, even today as we speak, that still has not been addressed. If people are interested in due process, if people are sincerely interested in the rule of law, then make sure that it applies equally, without favour, right across the board.

Mr A Maginness: The SDLP has never sided with would-be murderers or with murderers. The SDLP has always taken the position that it will apply the principles of justice to any case. In Mr McGeough's case, we believe that there are complex legal issues that should be addressed. Indeed, at this time, the legal process in relation to Mr McGeough's case has not been exhausted. My understanding is that there will be an appeal to the Supreme Court. Currently, our courts have dealt with those issues and have rejected the arguments that have been put forward. In essence, what Mr McGeough and his legal advisers are saying is that he was dealt with in an arbitrary and capricious manner in relation to the exercise of the royal prerogative of mercy.

Mr McGeough spent many years in prison abroad. However, under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement and under the terms of the legislation, that is not taken into consideration in relation to remission, as far as offences are concerned.

If you serve a sentence in Britain, in the Irish Republic or in Northern Ireland, all would be taken into consideration, and remission would be given. That is the essence of Mr McGeough's case.

4.45 pm

Lord Morrow: Will Mr Maginness give way?

Mr A Maginness: I will indeed, Lord Morrow.

Lord Morrow: I did not support the Belfast Agreement, but even it said that those who were convicted would have to spend time in prison, namely two years. I do not agree with that. Therefore, does Mr Maginness not accept that Mr McGeough should be where he is today — in prison?

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

Mr A Maginness: I am grateful, Mr Speaker. Within the context of the Good Friday Agreement there have been anomalies. *[Interruption.]* Just look at the jurisprudence. There have been anomalies, and they have been remedied by the exercise of the royal prerogative of mercy. There were four comparators, and a number of different cases within those comparators were cited in the courts in relation to the McGeough case. In each of those cases, the royal prerogative was exercised to the benefit of those who were convicted of offences to iron out anomalies. In essence, Mr McGeough was saying that there was an anomaly in his case and that, therefore, he comes within the terms and the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement and that he should be given the relief under the Good Friday Agreement. That relief was barred by the fact that his terms of imprisonment were not served either in the Republic or in the United Kingdom. That is the essence of the case.

Some of you have presented this case as simply black and white. It is not simply black and white. There are complex legal issues here, and it behoves anybody who is committed to justice to see through to the end and to try to determine what is right and proper in this case. We have every sympathy with Councillor Brush. *[Interruption.]* He suffered a horrific attack from which he still suffers. Indeed, SDLP councillor Patsy Daly said that he did not feel that the motion should have come before the council but that he had to support it. The fact is that, throughout its history, the SDLP has had to stand by the principles of justice. We opposed internment, we opposed torture, we opposed the abuse of trials, we opposed the bending of the law, but we did not falter in our opposition to political violence or terrorism. We were adamant that violence had no place in society. That, Mr Speaker, is the SDLP's position.

A Member: Will the Member give way?

Mr A Maginness: I am sorry; I cannot. I am running out of time.

It is not a black-and-white situation. This is a complex legal situation, and, in the circumstances, it is right and proper that our councillors support a position where Mr McGeough should have been supported and, indeed, Marian Price and Martin Corry, both of whom, in our view, have been interned without trial. I think that that is very wrong, and the SDLP is very right to support their release.

Mr Lunn: I rise to support the motion. I do not know Mr Brush. I gather that he is here today. I am very pleased to hear that. I see him now. I hope that I have the

opportunity to shake hands with him before we go home, because, as far as I am concerned, he has, for a start, displayed qualities at which some of us can only marvel. He displayed terrific commitment and bravery by being a postman while he was a serving member of the UDR, because a job like that exposes someone on a daily basis, around a regular run, to any kind of attack. That is exactly what happened to him. He also displayed considerable heroism in his reaction to that attack. We have heard graphically from Mr Robinson the details of what happened on the day.

Later in his life, he displayed considerable generosity of spirit. His reaction to what is, effectively, a two-year sentence for Mr McGeough was to his credit. He actually said, "Well, that is the agreement that we signed up to and we have to live with it." He displayed his social commitment further by becoming a councillor; a position that he still holds. I would contrast that with the attitude or, perhaps, attributes of Mr McGeough, who has made a career out of attempted murder, gunrunning, trying to purchase surface-to-air missiles, and extreme republicanism that, I gather, is even too much for Sinn Féin.

As regards the actions of Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council, Mitchel McLaughlin and Alban Maginness have done their best to excuse what happened there a few weeks ago. However, you cannot justify the unjustifiable. The motion was completely hurtful and insensitive. To propose a motion like that when the man involved was sitting in the Chamber, even if it is 30 years later, is an absolute disgrace. It cannot be defended.

I am particularly surprised at the SDLP. It is the party that shares most of our values in support for the Good Friday Agreement, respect for the rule of law, support for the courts and the judiciary, and opposition to violence for political ends. How can that party reconcile that record, for which I give it credit, with trying to support the case for Gerry McGeough? I have heard the legal and historical arguments. Frankly, it just does not wash. Mr McGeough is guilty of attempted murder. He is a lucky man — under the terms of the agreement, he will serve only two years instead of 10 or 20 years.

I noticed on the SDLP website that, on 21 May, Mr Ramsey, Mr Maginness and their party leader went to see the Secretary of State to present a petition on behalf of Gerry McGeough and to try to obtain the release of Marian Price. Why on earth they would want to equate those two situations is quite beyond me. In the case of Marian Price — Marian McGlinchey — I have some sympathy because the lady has been locked away for a year and a half now and we really do not know on what grounds. I am sorry, but to equate that with the case of someone who is, rightly, in jail for attempted murder makes no sense to me at all.

As far as the Ulster Unionist Party's amendment is concerned, frankly, my party feels the same as the DUP in that there is no need for it. It dilutes the original motion, which is targeted specifically to one set of circumstances. Therefore, we would prefer not to support it. Perhaps, as the motion does, it points us in the direction of needing to provide a means to deal with victims' needs, those whom Mr Elliott referred to as the forgotten victims, and the past. I hope that we can, at some point, return to that thorny issue once again. In the meantime, my party supports the motion.

Lord Morrow: One thing is coming across quite clearly in the debate this afternoon. Sadly, it is that there will be no leadership from the SDLP on this important issue. Indeed, I challenge that party and ask it where their leader is and why, when he was in the Chamber earlier, he could not be here for this important debate. It is scandalous when you listen to some of the stuff that is coming from the ranks of the SDLP. Indeed, as my colleague up the line said, this seems to be a battle of who can be the greenest of them all. Today, the SDLP should be giving leadership to its community and electorate by saying, "As far as we are concerned, we stand clearly on the side of the victim. There is no ambiguity about it whatsoever, that is where we stand." Unfortunately, however, that is not the message coming across here today, which is regrettable. I think that the SDLP would do well to take another look at itself to see exactly where it stands on issues such as this.

It is most regrettable and a sad day when a motion such as this has to be debated in the Assembly Chamber, because we all thought that we had moved on and that the lines had been drawn in the sand. We also thought that even those who oppose us politically could see that there is an issue here and that we must be on the side of the victim. There is no need to be dubious about it. I congratulate Trevor Lunn on his speech, because he was quite precise. There is no ambiguity today about where Trevor Lunn stands: he clearly stands four-square on the side of the victim, and he is to be congratulated on that. The SDLP and Sinn Féin have taken up the case of Marian Price and Gerry McGeough, and only they can explain to the electorate at large why they feel compelled to do that.

I have been on Dungannon council for longer than I care to remember. Indeed, I have been a member for almost 40 years. I know that I do not look that age but, there you go, that is the way things are. I have been in debates on that council during the worst excesses of the Troubles. I can recall vividly the hunger strike and the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Indeed, Dungannon and Dungannon council were central to what was then known as the murder triangle. That clearly illustrates where people had to live and the issues that they had to contend with. However, I cannot recall a more insulting, infuriating or hurtful motion ever coming before that council in all those years. It was repulsive and despicable to say the least. The sad aspect of it was this: the motion was brought by Sinn Féin, which must have known that it could pull the SDLP in behind it to support it. The SDLP should have been giving leadership that evening; instead, it fell in line with the Sinn Féin motion.

Mr I McCrea: I thank the Member for giving way. He referred to the SDLP in Dungannon falling in behind Sinn Féin on that motion. Does the Member then find it difficult, as I do, to understand why the SDLP councillors in Magherafelt found the motion to be nothing other than a political stunt and abstained from supporting it? Does the Member understand that position?

Mr Speaker: A minute has been added to the Member's time.

Lord Morrow: The point is well made by my colleague Ian McCrea. Perhaps Councillor Campbell — I think that is who it was — is giving more leadership to the SDLP electorate than the leadership itself. I suspect that if Mr Campbell put his name forward for the leadership at the party's next conference, he might just topple the existing leader, because at least he has some ingenuity. He could

see the deviousness of the stunt that was unfolding before him, and he was not prepared to fall in line. Full marks to him, because he was not prepared to fall in line.

Mr McGlone: Will the Member give way?

Lord Morrow: Right, come on. Let us hear what you have to say.

Mr McGlone: I thank the Member for giving way. First, I need to clarify this completely: our group on Magherafelt District Council put forward its own all-embracing amendment, which took in the rights of victims. However, that was rejected by Sinn Féin and, indeed, by your party and the Ulster Unionists. Secondly, that was done in close co-operation with our party leader. I need to put that firmly on the record.

Lord Morrow: I heard what the Member said but, as my colleagues remind me, the policy has obviously changed.

5.00 pm

I want the House to grasp and understand what was happening on that evening, and I know that my party leader explained it and explained it very well. Councillor Brush was sitting in the council chamber. Remember, Councillor Brush has fought for his life in a hospital ward as a result of Gerry McGeough's actions. Gerry McGeough is where he should be, and were it not for the Belfast Agreement, he would be there for a 20-year period. Today, however, we have the SDLP, along with Sinn Féin, campaigning for his release.

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

Lord Morrow: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Let me say this: can the Members here today fully understand how they would comprehend such a debate if they were sitting there and if they were the victims of IRA terrorism?

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag labhairt in éadan an rúin agus in éadan an leasaithe. Thank you very much, a Cheann Comhairle. I will be speaking against the motion and the amendment.

For the record, I want to read out the actual motion that was debated in Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council and, indeed, in many other councils across the North:

"This Council calls for the immediate release of Marion Price, Martin Corey and Gerry McGeough. Everyone is entitled to due process. Both Martin Corey and Marion Price have been denied this. Their continued detention without trial is an infringement of their human rights and clearly undermines the justice system."

[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr McCartney: Are they all finished, Mr Speaker?
[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McCartney: OK. That motion continued:

"Their imprisonment is unjust and is in defiance" —

Mrs Foster: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: I note the Minister will contribute later, so she will have plenty of time to speak.

"Their imprisonment is unjust and is in defiance of rulings by the courts in both cases. Both have been granted bail by the courts and yet remain in prison. The arrest and continuing detention of Gerry McGeough represents a flagrant breach by the British Government of its commitments in the Weston Park Agreement with respect to OTRs."

I will translate that as "on-the-runs". The motion finished:

"All three should be released immediately."

In my opinion, these are issues that need to be addressed. Therefore, as public representatives of Sinn Féin, we have no fear about doing that, and we do so without prejudice. Marian Price and Martin Corey are now held on the strength of the revocation of a life sentence licence. Since those were introduced in the late 1980s, which is the best part of 30-odd years, we have consistently argued that they are unjust, a breach of due process and do not allow the person to challenge the "evidence" that is presented against them. In our opinion, that is against the spirit of natural justice and, therefore, against the rule of law. That is why we stand in opposition to them and why we stand to expose and, if you like, highlight those types of injustices.

It is the same for Gerry McGeough. When Mitchel McLaughlin, who is our spokesperson on victims, was speaking here today, he outlined that he took the time to contact the councillors who took part in the debates to reassure himself, before he would say it here today, that this was dealt with in a sensitive manner. We accept that this is a complex matter. It affects Mr Brush individually — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McCartney: It obviously affects Mr Brush personally. However, this is an issue that needs to be raised, and you cannot do that in silence. You have to speak out, and if you think that something is wrong, you stand up and say it.

I notice that Mr Elliott is no longer here. He spoke about the rule of law and challenged Sinn Féin about standing up today and saying that, in our opinion, Padraic Wilson should be released from prison. The idea and concept that the rule of law is absolute and cannot be challenged is wrong. The rule of law can be abused, and we have seen it being abused. If people did not stand up, there would be many people in prison today, including the Birmingham six and the Guildford four. I ask my colleagues on the other side of the House how many of them have campaigned for the UDR four. In my opinion, they would have done so quite rightly, because in their opinion —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: Yes.

Mr Allister: Does the Member not recognise that the very essence of the rule of law is the due process that gave rise to the ultimate acquittals in the other cases that the Member referred to? In the McGeough case, however, due process led to due conviction and a due sentence — the very antithesis of what he is talking about. The Member is clinging to his own definition of the rule of law, which is utterly false. The rule of law means the same thing to all people. It is due process of law, to which the Member's party is supposedly committed.

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

Mr McCartney: I am not sure when the Member left the party opposite, but we are raising the issue because it was agreed at Weston Park. Mitchel McLaughlin said — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr McCartney: — that there were subsequent opportunities for people to oppose this. It was not opposed. That is why we are raising it today.

I go back to the concept of the rule of law. If we want to take it out of the politics of Ireland, we can. Many people made the point about what happened at Hillsborough. Families were dismissed and told that due process took place and that the rule of law had been upheld. What turned out to have happened? Due process was not followed. There were corrupt practices in police services right across the board. The notion that you cannot interfere with due process and cannot challenge the rule of law is a false premise. Perhaps we have lessons to learn from Hillsborough, particularly when we are charged with ensuring that whatever we do is part of due process, accountability and scrutiny. We cannot afford to say, "We never raised our voice in opposition to something that we felt was wrong because we might have been accused of not following the rule of law." That is bogus and false. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mrs Foster: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Member finished his contribution in Irish, and there was no translation.

Mr Speaker: Order. Members will know that the ruling is clear: whatever language that Members want to speak, they should then translate it, as far as possible, into English. If the Member wants to —

Mr McCartney: On a point of order: thank you.

Mr Irwin: I am appreciative to my colleagues for tabling the motion. It is an opportunity to put on public record our support for Councillor Brush, who is here today. That support is very appropriate, given the recent hurt that our esteemed friend and councillor colleague has had to endure. Councillor Brush represents what is good about the human spirit. He not only worked for the Royal Mail, delivering post and being an important and trusted member of the community, but served as a member of the Ulster Defence Regiment, serving our country through some of the darkest days of the Troubles. That, undoubtedly, carried great risk for Sammy Brush. The fact that he has come through an attempted murder and has gone on to enter service as a public representative shows that he is a genuine and hard-working individual who has the community's well-being at heart.

Councillor Brush has had to endure many attacks on his character and property since that day in June 1981. However, I am sure that he did not expect to have such a hurtful attack made against him in Dungannon council chamber. The effect of the attack on our colleague has been profound. He has gone on record to speak of the hurt that it has caused him. Indeed, it has impacted further on his health. That is a shocking state of affairs considering that this has emanated from within the democratic structures of the local council. It is no surprise that Sinn Féin would attempt to raise such a motion in the council. However, should such a hurtful motion even have had the courtesy of a hearing? I feel not. The fact that the SDLP supported the motion strikes a new low for the party. The

SDLP representatives here today owe a collective apology to Councillor Brush for the conduct of their councillor colleagues in support of the motion in Dungannon council.

Let us make no mistake about it: Gerry McGeough deserves to be in prison. Two horses cannot be ridden on the issue. However, not for the first time, nationalists attempt to do just that. Their warped sense of equality is exposed as just that: warped and fanciful. What is really unjust and despicable is the fact that Councillor Brush was in the very chamber when the motion was tabled, with not one Sinn Féin or SDLP councillor even acknowledging the fact. How hurtful and reprehensible. The motion today points to the glaring irregularity of elected councillors serving on a local council siding with would-be murderers rather than supporting an innocent, dutiful public servant. That is a shocking state of affairs. After the past few days, in which dissident terrorists have taken yet another innocent life, now is the time for the SDLP and Sinn Féin to say where they stand. The choice could not be more stark: either you denounce violence and all that goes with it and support the rule of law or you do not. I support the motion and stand fully behind Councillor Brush and his —

Mr Poots: Will the Member give way?

Mr Irwin: I will; yes.

Mr Poots: Does the Member realise that it is not just the SDLP and Sinn Féin who have given succour to the convicted murderer? Éamon Ó Cuív has been up to visit Mr McGeough in prison three times. I know that he has not bothered to come and see Sammy Brush and hear about the pain that he suffers with the bullets that he carried as a result of Mr McGeough's activity. I am sure that the Member will find it equally reprehensible that the dissident Fianna Fáiler is lining up with dissident republicans, the SDLP and Sinn Féin. It was a despicable act on his part as it was a despicable action by the parties opposite on a law-abiding citizen in support of a convicted murderer.

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

Mr Irwin: I thank the Member for his intervention, and I fully agree with it.

I support the motion and stand fully behind Sammy Brush. As a councillor serving in Armagh City and District Council, I pass on the thoughts of my DUP colleagues on that council.

Mr Hussey: As Councillor Brush, at the time of the incident, was a serving member of the Ulster Defence Regiment, I will begin by declaring an interest, in that my mother, father and sister all served with the Ulster Defence Regiment, and I, of course, had the honour to serve as a part-time member of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

The attempt on the life of any part-time member of the security forces was reprehensible. Part-time members of the security forces were vulnerable because of the fact that they normally had to follow a routine. This week, such a routine was identified and ruthlessly followed through by terrorists. Hundreds of part-time members of the security forces were murdered in their homes, their places of work or while travelling to their places of work. As we discuss this issue, it is ironic that the terror tactic that was used to murder David Black — targeting someone who was on their way to work — was well-honed by the Provisional IRA.

No one in the House supports the attack on Mr Black, and it has been condemned rightly by all parties in the House. Anyone who feels that they can attack, with impunity, any member of society, whether they are a member of the Prison Service, Her Majesty's forces, the PSNI or a civilian ought to realise by now that they do not have the support of any democrat. At this time, I also pass our deepest sympathy to the McKay family on their loss.

With that principle clearly established, I move to the specific case of Councillor Sammy Brush, who I welcome to the Chamber today. He is a former Ulster Unionist councillor and is now a DUP councillor in Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council. Councillor Brush had to sit through a council meeting at which his council colleagues from the SDLP and Sinn Féin supported a motion calling for the release of Gerry McGeough, who had attempted to murder him in 1981 while he worked with Royal Mail.

I want to pay tribute to the bravery of Councillor Brush, who, at the time, was a part-time member of the Ulster Defence Regiment. When he came under attack, he had the courage to defend himself. In the process, he managed to scare off the cowards who had come to murder him and he injured McGeough. McGeough went on the run as cowards do. He was eventually brought to justice and sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment, and rightly so.

McGeough has had the nerve to apply for the royal prerogative of mercy. What mercy did he or his partners in crime show to Councillor Brush? Absolutely none. If they had had their way, Councillor Brush would have been dead and would have been one of those whom we remember on Remembrance Day.

All political representatives should be able to represent their constituents without the shadow of the gunman in the background, and everyone in Northern Ireland should be able to go about their daily life without that shadow. No political party that claims to be democratic can support terrorism, and no political party can afford to support the release of someone who cold-bloodedly attempted to murder a fellow politician. How can you sit beside someone, look them in the eye and say, "I want the man who attempted to murder you released as an act of mercy"? Has McGeough paid his debt to society? Certainly not.

My unreserved support goes to Councillor Brush, his family and the families of those other politicians who have suffered at the hands of terrorists over the years. I include in that those who were brutally murdered, such as Edgar Graham; Roy Bradford MP; Norman Stronge, the former Speaker of the Northern Ireland Parliament, and his son James; the former councillor, Joe Gaston, who was attacked by terrorists in December 1977; and my colleague Councillor Harold Andrews, who, on 1 April 2012, had a bomb left in a lane way near his home.

"They haven't gone away, you know", was a famous comment from Gerry Adams, TD for Louth and former Member of the House. For so-called democrats to treat a fellow councillor in this fashion brings shame on them and their council.

I also want to refer to some of Mr McCartney's comments on the proposal that was put to the council. "Human rights" are the favourite words of certain Members. The most basic human right is the right to life. Councillor Brush had the right to life, but somebody by the name of McGeough

wanted to remove that right. He has the right now to go to jail and to pay for his crime.

The pen that I am holding today has "Victim Support" printed on it. That is the man there whom we have to support. We have to support politicians who have put their lives on the line. Human rights are not something that people can choose to use today to defend the likes of McGeough.

5.15 pm

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Hussey: McGeough is in prison, and he should rot in prison. I support the amendment.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the motion. First, I express my disgust at the murder of prison officer David Black who was gunned down on his way to work last Thursday morning. That cannot be justified by anyone in any way. It is simply callous, cold-blooded murder, and I send my personal and party condolences to Mr Black's family and friends. Make no mistake about it: those who perpetrated that terrible crime have acted against the wishes and will of everyone in the House, the people whom we represent and the people of this island.

Issues involving prisons and prison officers have a long and tense history. In the past, action against prisoners or prison staff served only to heighten tensions and act against all the efforts that we are making on reform of the prison system. I call on all in this region to have cool heads over the coming weeks as we in the House stand united against violence.

The SDLP was born out of civil rights for all, and we hold strong to those ideals today. I take grave exception to some points made by my colleagues across the Floor. We were born out of non-violence and opposition to violence in all its forms.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. As he waxes lyrical on the SDLP's record, I am interested in his response to an interview given by Martin McGuinness, now the deputy First Minister, about his previous activities — one presumes his previous activities — to 'Inside Politics', which was broadcast last Friday night. McGuinness said:

"We also had a situation in Derry at the time where IRA people who were on the run were actually sleeping in SDLP supporters' houses. I did so myself on quite a number of occasions."

How does Mr Ramsey, on behalf of the SDLP, react to that? *[Interruption.]*

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

Mr P Ramsey: I have been a member of the SDLP for over 30 years, and in the context of what Danny Kennedy has said, under no circumstances would people whom I know to have been in the SDLP in Derry have been associated with or helped to support violence. *[Interruption.]* We stand united with those against whom violence has been used. All victims can be confident today, as they always have been, that the SDLP does not distinguish between victims. All victims of the conflict must be treated with equality, dignity, respect and transparency. As the motion states,

I extend my and my party's unequivocal support to all victims, to those who have been made victims as a result of the conflict, whether at the hands of paramilitaries, state agents or the British Army. Our party, as architects of the Good Friday Agreement, has enshrined in the ethos of the political structures that all victims will not be forgotten. A comprehensive victims strategy must be brought forward to complement and direct those efforts. The lack of clarity from former paramilitaries, the British Government and its agents continues to cause hurt and suffering for those same families and victims who seek the truth about the past. Contrary to what some Members have said here, we are committed, as we always have been, to ensuring that those difficult steps are taken to ensure that they receive the truth that they so truly deserve.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. It is difficult, today above all days, to hear so much anger and bile pushed out. As my colleague rightly said, the SDLP stood against violence. Some of our own party members were murdered, and some continue to be attacked. Is it not the case, Mr Ramsey, that dealing with the past and setting forth a strategy to do so remains within the gift of OFMDFM — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs D Kelly: — and that some people in the House speak through both sides of their mouth? The SDLP was not involved in paramilitarism or, indeed, Ulster Resistance.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Member for her intervention. Dolores is very clear — as we on this side are always clear — about where we stood when it came to violence across Northern Ireland — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order

Mr P Ramsey: Although, for the record, Mr Speaker, it needs to be stated that Mr McGeough is and has always been a supporter of the Good Friday Agreement. His complex — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr P Ramsey: His complex legal cases —

Lord Morrow: That makes it OK?

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr P Ramsey: — and appeals are still under consideration. I do not wish to interfere with those, and I do not think that anybody else would either. That having been said, it is clear that Gerry McGeough is not being treated under the same release scheme afforded to prisoners in 1998-99. Then, it took a matter of months, sometimes weeks, to process hundreds of applications by republican and loyalist prisoners for early release following the Good Friday Agreement. For many, that was a bitter pill to swallow, but the releases contributed immensely to the peace process that we have now —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time has almost gone

Mr P Ramsey: We in the SDLP will be supporting the amendment and the substantive motion.

Mr G Robinson: It is with pleasure and sadness that I speak in this debate, brought by my DUP colleagues, to pay tribute not only to Councillor Sammy Brush but to all part-time members of the security forces who served our country during what is known as the Troubles. Sammy

Brush was one of the brave men and women who worked full time to support their families and who then, after finishing their day's work, bravely put on their uniforms to defend their communities as part-time members of the RUC or the UDR. That group of dedicated men and women faced a disproportionately high level of attack, which resulted, at times, in death and injury, as they were easy targets as they went about their daily lives.

Recently, a motion was passed by Dungannon council supporting the release from prison of the man who tried to murder Councillor Brush. That raises serious questions about those Dungannon councillors who supported the motion to have McGeough released. Councillor Brush is one of the unsung heroes of the dark 30 to 40 years of terrorism that Northern Ireland came through. Yet, some want to glorify the man who would happily have murdered Councillor Sammy Brush. Lest any Member be in any doubt: the only person who deserves support is Councillor Brush. Gerry McGeough, who hid behind bushes to try to kill Sammy Brush, deserves to be where he is today — behind bars, hopefully for a very long time. The Assembly must stand behind the victims of terrorism. I, without hesitation, express revulsion at those who would support such heinous acts of attempted or actual murder.

Today is a test for the parties on the Benches opposite. They will have to demonstrate to the world their commitment to a peaceful future for a Northern Ireland where victim takes priority over criminal. I, therefore, urge all Members to support the motion and to send a further signal, particularly in light of last week's tragic events, that there is unanimity of purpose in supporting victims of terrorism and to show that the revulsion expressed last week and this week is sincere. In conclusion, I pass my best wishes to my DUP colleague Sammy Brush and his family.

Mr Bell: Sammy Brush has shown leadership to everyone in the community, not only in his public service in the Ulster Defence Regiment but as a postman. Where would we be if we were talking today about a nurse, doctor, primary school teacher or any other public servant who was out there doing their job and was set up for a premeditated assassination? Today, the House has to make a choice. Is it on the side of the person who went in and held two sisters at gunpoint in their own home at 6.00 am while another terrorist assassin set themselves up to murder an innocent postman who was showing the highest level of bravery, courage and integrity?

It is an honour for anybody to have Sammy Brush as a colleague. He was an innocent man; a public servant doing a job for the whole community. Do we stand on the side of the victim or the side of the terrorist? It appears that, for some, there is no recognition that Sammy Brush had human rights, too. He had the right to life. He had the right to go about his day-to-day job without fear, and he had the right to live free from terrorist assassination. That right was deliberately, cruelly and with premeditation attacked by a terrorist, who then faced the full due process of the law and was convicted. It is time for the SDLP to move away from a morally incontinent position. Are you on the side of the terrorist who tried to kill an innocent public servant or are you on the side of the innocent public servant, a gentleman of the finest Christian integrity, who took in his body the bullets of terrorists? Which side do you stand on? Choose you this day which side you are going to serve, because there are no ifs or buts on that question.

I listened to some SDLP Members today referring to the McCartney murder and the shameful behaviour of Sinn Féin in relation to Padraic Wilson. They said that we should stand full-square behind the McCartney family and others, fearless in their determination to hold terrorists to account for their actions. The exact same thing applies to the innocent Sammy Brush, and the best and strongest message to terrorism today would be if the SDLP were to step up to the plate and say that it values justice and will stand full-square behind Sammy Brush and his family, fearless in their determination to hold terrorists accountable for their actions. The SDLP did not just say that. It went on to say today that Sinn Féin's position is, on one hand, to call on people to provide information to the police but, on the other hand, not to do so when it relates to a Sinn Féin member. That is how shallow Sinn Féin's position is, and no one should buy into it.

I ask the SDLP today why it is buying into the Sinn Féin position, because there is no difference between the murder of Robert McCartney and the attempted murder of Sammy Brush. Do not be Sinn Féin-lite today in defence of an innocent man who was cruelly the subject of terrorism. The House has rightly asked for the real SDLP to stand up. Is it the SDLP on Magherafelt council, which, it would appear, had enough integrity to turn down the Sinn Féin tail attempting to wag the SDLP dog, or is it the SDLP on Dungannon council, where two of its members did not turn up to do their public duty that night? I am led to believe that the one member who did turn up said that he was going to vote that way but he did not want to do any harm. He already did harm, because there is independent medical verification from Mr Brush to show that he was re-victimised by what the SDLP did in connection to that. There was no difference between that attempted murder, murders that are being carried out today and those that happened 30 years ago. Stand today on the side of justice and do not allow the Sinn Féin tail to wag the SDLP dog.

Mr Poots: Will the Member give way?

Mr Bell: Yes, I will give way.

Mr Poots: Does the Member agree with me that Mr Brush has suffered considerable intimidation over the past 30 years, on top of the attempted murder? That intimidation, by those who skulk about in the darkness, has been compounded by what happened in Dungannon district council. Would anyone from the SDLP have the honour to stand up and say that it is wrong?

5.30 pm

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

Mr Bell: Where were the words of comfort today from Sinn Féin about the pain in the shoulder and lung of an innocent postman who was serving the entire community? We never heard that today, and we should have heard it from Sinn Féin.

Again, I challenge the SDLP.

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

Mr Bell: Whereas once, it would appear, it allowed Sinn Féin to have safe houses, it should not today allow terrorists to have safe Benches.

Mrs D Kelly: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it right that a quote from a Member of this House on a television programme should be given as factual information here? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us temper our language. I call Mr Allister. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Allister: I could not have put it better myself, Mr Speaker. *[Laughter.]* One of the things that always strikes me when I talk to victims of terrorism, so many of whom have been denied justice, is that they harbour a hope that, one day, some semblance of justice might be delivered to them and that, one day, they might see someone made amenable for the crime in which they became a victim.

Yet, when that happened in the case of Sammy Brush, and after a very protracted time, someone by due process of law was brought to justice — a very inadequate justice because of the sentence capable of being imposed, but a semblance of justice nonetheless — we then had this orchestrated campaign, led of course by the organisation to which the perpetrator belonged with the political affinity that he had at the time that he attempted to murder Mr Brush.

Of course he was a Provisional IRA member, but he was helped along, sadly, by the SDLP, a party that should know better, in Dungannon district council. The common thread between what both of them seem to be saying is that there is some spurious distinction between an offence for which there is conviction before 1998 and an offence, though committed before then, for which there is conviction after 1998. They seem to root that in something that they think they achieved some years ago in relation to on-the-runs.

I want to make it very clear: there is no distinction in law, nor can there be in practice, between the commission of murder before 1998 or after 1998 or conviction before 1998 or after 1998. They are still heinous crimes that require the visitation of sentence and retribution.

The notion that you can somehow pretend adherence to the rule of law but yet advocate that no one be made amenable to the rule of law for something that happened before 1998 is utterly preposterous. That is the proposition that has been emanating from Sinn Féin, and even, it would seem, the SDLP, who have been trying to say that there is something here that dilutes and tarnishes the rule of law in the case of the McGeough conviction.

Let us be very clear: Mr McGeough was convicted by due process of law. He has an appeal process and all of that at his disposal, and he stands today convicted, as others have been convicted, with no basis to distinguish him. Either you accept the outcome of due process or you do not. Sadly, it seems, there are some who wish to finesse it and refuse to accept it. In that, they are utterly, utterly wrong, and, particularly in the case of the SDLP, do their own cause utmost damage.

Sammy Brush has been rightly described in this Chamber as a very brave man; he is a gentleman whom many of us have the honour of knowing. What a contrast with the evil individual who sought to snuff out his life. Yet, sadly, it comes as no surprise tonight that Sinn Féin lines up in support of McGeough. The very day that he was arrested, Ms Gildernew was in the media protesting the arrest. From that moment, they have championed his cause. In championing that cause, they champion the cause of the attempted murder for which he was duly convicted. Not

today and not ever have we heard a single syllable of condemnation of the attempt to murder Sammy Brush. There has not been one indication or recognition that it was wrong and criminal. Sadly, in the eyes of Sinn Féin Members, it was none of those things. In their perverse view of the rule of law, it was the right thing to do. Yet this is a party that is supposedly signed up to the support of the rule of law.

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

Mr Allister: Today shows us just what that support is worth.

I have to say this to the proposers of the motion: remember that these are your partners in government; this is what they really think and really do.

Mr Nesbitt: What happened to Sammy Brush was wrong. What is happening to Sammy Brush remains wrong. It is black and white. Therefore, we support the motion and congratulate the Democratic Unionist Party for bringing it forward.

I ask the DUP to note that, in our amendment, we did not delete a word of the motion. We did not change or amend a word as it applied to Sammy Brush. Every DUP Member will recognise that when a debate like this is seen and heard by the public, there will be those who were impacted on in other events of the Troubles — other victims and survivors — who will listen and think, "What about me?" We merely wish to acknowledge them. I hope that Mr Brush will accept our motivation in recognising all the other innocent victims, albeit tangentially, in our amendment.

The issue is whether we, as a House, have bought into the moral ambivalence to the extent that there is no right or wrong any more, that there is no black and white, and that there is no clear, unambiguous truth. The clear, unambiguous truth is that Sammy Brush is lucky to be alive. The issue is whether republicans accept the rule of law or accept the rule of law only when it suits them.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I thank the Member for giving way. You refer again to the rule of law. Will you clarify whether your party's amendment refers to Councillor Bernard O'Hagan, who was murdered by loyalist paramilitaries led — this is established fact — by British Security Service personnel, and Councillor John Davey, who was murdered in similar circumstances? Does your amendment address that issue? It does not seem to on the face of it.

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

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for his intervention. He must make his own mind up about the truths. The Members opposite are very clear to decide what they consider to be the truth and what they consider not to be the truth. Our amendment stands and is easily read, Mr McLaughlin.

Mr Peter Robinson made very clear the horrendous details of the attack on Mr Brush, the injuries that he received, the daily regime of abuse and hatred that he now endures, how offensive it is that elected representatives have added to his pain, and how his medication has doubled as a result.

Mr Elliott welcomed the debate and offered his support for Mr Brush. He also offered sympathy to the Black family, who will bury their loved one tomorrow morning. He challenged Sinn Féin to say that all murders by

terrorists were wrong, including the Enniskillen Poppy Day massacre.

Mr Elliott was followed by Mr McLaughlin, who opened with an apology but only for being late in the Chamber. He tried to reassure the House that his council colleagues meant no offence to Mr Brush. He complained about a one-sided application of the rule of law and said that the:

“conflict has effectively been over for approaching 20 years”.

Mr McLaughlin, it has not been for the victims. It has not been for Mr Brush.

Mr Maginness said that the SDLP never sided with terrorists, although he was later to hear an intervention from my colleague. He said that it was a complex legal matter and that the issues were not black and white. I must say that I disagree.

Mr Lunn said that he did not know Mr Brush but that he hoped to shake his hand later. I hope that Mr Brush hopes to shake the hand of most Members of the House. Mr Lunn directed us to the SDLP website and its coverage of a visit by the then Secretary of State. I direct Members to a republican website that carries the headline, “End British Torture in Maghaberry”. Let us end the murder of prison officers en route to Maghaberry.

Lord Morrow expressed regret at the stance of the SDLP, the absence of its leader and its lack of leadership.

Raymond McCartney talked about the council motion, spoke in support of it and, again, mentioned the rule of law.

William Irwin attacked the council motion and repeated the stark choice between supporting the rule of law and not doing so.

Ross Hussey declared an interest as someone who had many family members in the UDR and paid tribute to Mr Brush.

Pat Ramsey said that we must stand united in favour of all victims and called for a comprehensive strategy for victims.

George Robinson said that Mr Brush was an unsung hero and contrasted him with those who want to make Gerry McGeough a hero in their community.

Jonathan Bell praised the courage, integrity and bravery of Mr Brush and attacked the hypocrisy of Sinn Féin's position on the murder of Robert McCartney.

Jim Allister said that there is no distinction between commissioning murder before 1998 and after it. He said that you have to accept the due process. That is a fitting point to finish on: you either support due process or you do not.

It seems strange to me that Sinn Féin is a party that signed up to devolution, yet it does not seem to realise that you cannot cherry-pick justice. If Sinn Féin wishes to convince the population of its bona fides when it comes to the judicial system, it needs to engender public confidence in its position. It has singularly failed to do that.

Mrs Foster: I am delighted that Councillor Brush is with us.

Lord Morrow and I well remember the 2007 election, in which one Gerry McGeough decided to stand in the constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone. I remember that, when we heard the news, we could not believe it,

because we knew, having spoken to Sammy in the past, that it was the same Gerard McGeough who had tried to murder him many years before in 1981. So when Mr McGeough was taken into custody after the election count, we were pleased that it appeared that justice for Sammy Brush would finally be carried through. It took some four years — until February 2011 — for justice to be passed. Mr McGeough was sent to prison for all too short a time. This party is very clear that we believe that Gerry McGeough should be in prison for at least 20 years, if not more. However, the Belfast Agreement came about and was signed, and, therefore, Gerry McGeough will serve two short years, despite the fact that he has given a life sentence to Sammy Brush in the form of the injuries that he has had to endure.

I agree with the South East Fermanagh Foundation when it says that the motion before Dungannon council re-traumatised my friend and colleague Sammy Brush. We know that he sees the motion as abuse, and I see it as that as well. It is, as Lord Morrow said, the most painful and disgraceful motion that he has ever seen before Dungannon council. However, we should not be surprised about that given some of the comments that we have heard today.

It seems to me that there are two arguments put forward by those opposite in relation to Gerry McGeough. The first is that, in Weston Park, a deal was carried through and, therefore, the on-the-runs should get an early release. There is another lady in the Public Gallery today who I am very proud to call a friend. She is called Aileen Quinton, and she lost her mother in the 1987 poppy day bomb in Enniskillen. She is here because she and I campaigned vigorously against the on-the-runs legislation, which, I have to tell the House, is not on the statute book. Therefore, the nonsense spoken across the way about Weston Park is just that — it is nonsense.

5.45 pm

I refer Members to the Court of Appeal's judgement on the matter. Paragraph 24 of that judgement states:

“Mr Scoffield also sought to rely upon the terms of the Weston Park Agreement in support of the application. We can deal with this very briefly. It is correct that in that Agreement the UK Government expressed a willingness to consider dealing with others in similar situations to the applicant in a manner that might have led to his being more favourably regarded, but the materials before us show that the Government withdrew the necessary legislation when it became clear that there was insufficient support in Parliament for its proposals, and we do not consider that this adds anything to the applicant's case as that willingness was not translated into reality.”

So, that is the first point dealt with.

The royal prerogative has also been brought before the court and has been roundly rejected by the Court of Appeal. I hear what Mr Alban Maginness has to say about this being an ongoing matter and a very complex issue. It is not a complex issue. This is the most straightforward case that I think that I have ever seen. It is whether you stand —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Foster: I will give way.

Mr A Maginness: It certainly is complex. Both at first instance and in the Court of Appeal, it took several days to thrash out the issues. As the learned lady will know, there are four comparators in this case: the Anthony Sloan and others case; the Seamus Campbell and others case; the Leonard Hardy case; and the James McArdle case. All those involved the royal prerogative of mercy, and the point that I make to you is —

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us have a short intervention. We are winding on the motion.

Mr A Maginness: — that it is, therefore, extremely complex and not a matter that can easily be dismissed.

Mrs Foster: All those cases were taken into consideration by the Court of Appeal, and all those issues were dealt with and rejected by the learned Court of Appeal. The Member says that this is an ongoing matter, and the SDLP feels that it must stand with the side of justice. However, I say to him: give some leadership to your community and tell it where you stand today on Councillor Sammy Brush, as opposed to standing with those who perpetrate murder and attempted murder.

A number of us were with Sammy when the initial judgement came through. It outlines the aggravating features in the offence that was perpetrated on Councillor Brush. The aggravating features were that it was a terrorist offence; the attempt to kill was politically motivated; and the victim was providing a public service. Many in this House talked today about the public service that Sammy was giving when he was under attack. The other aggravating features were that Sammy was vulnerable by virtue of being alone in an isolated and remote location; that the offence was planned; the use of two firearms; arming with firearms in advance of committing the offence; the effect on the victim; McGeough's enduring commitment over a number of years to terrorism and the leading role that he played as a terrorist; and that he absconded or, in other words, went on the run. Those are not my words about aggravating factors but the words of the learned judge in the trial case.

It saddens me a great deal when I hear people trying to excuse and push forward meaningless arguments in this House. We have talked a little about the Enniskillen bomb today, and I am happy to hear the good news that the Historical Enquiries Team has passed a file on the Enniskillen bomb to the police to continue their investigations. I pose this question: if we are able to bring about justice for the Enniskillen bomb victims, what will the SDLP do in respect of that person, if he is brought before the court? Will it go out of its way to try to get him the royal prerogative of justice, as it has done in this case, or will it say that the matter should be left to the courts and to due process?

We have heard a lot today about the rule of law and due process, but the only due process is the courts of this land. I am happy to quote from the courts. I am happy to say what they have to say about the Weston Park agreement and the on-the-runs legislation.

By the way, on the on-the-runs legislation, one of the people who was most vociferous at the time in fighting against the on-the-runs legislation was one Mark Durkan. He fought against it, yet here we have his party arguing for

the royal prerogative to be exercised and, effectively, given to on-the-runs by the back door. I have to say, and I have said it before, that there is a moral blind spot in the SDLP. It is hugely disappointing that the leader of that party is not here. I listened with incredulity to him give an interview to the BBC in which he waxed lyrical about the pain and the victimhood of Gerry McGeough. Not one word, Mr Speaker, did he say about Sammy Brush and what he had gone through over the years. I note as well that it took Alban Maginness four and a half minutes to say that he wanted to stand with Sammy Brush, after telling us all the other things that he wanted to talk about.

Therefore, I stand with my party. We are very proud to call Sammy Brush a member of the Democratic Unionist Party. We are very proud to have him as one of our members. We look forward to working with him in the future.

I have to say, if the SDLP has any sense of what is right and what is wrong, it will vote for the motion.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 66; Noes 27.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr I McCreagh, Mr McGimpsey, Mr McGlone, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr P Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Elliott and Mr Nesbitt

NOES

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Molloy, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McCartney and Mr Mitchel McLaughlin

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 66; Noes 27.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas,

Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr McGlone, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr P Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Clarke and Mr G Robinson

NOES

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Molloy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McCartney and Mr Mitchel McLaughlin

Main Question, as amended, accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly extends support, without qualification, to all elected representatives and their families who have been targeted by paramilitaries throughout the Troubles, including Samuel Brush, a DUP councillor who, while working as a postman, was shot and survived an assassination attempt by the convicted terrorist Gerry McGeough; stands by the victims of terrorism; and expresses revulsion at those who side with would-be murderers rather than an innocent public servant.

Mr Speaker: Before we adjourn, I inform Whips that there is a meeting of the Business Committee in room 106 in 10 minutes.

Adjourned at 6.21 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 6 November 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Suspension of Standing Order 20(1)

Mr Swann: I beg to move

That Standing Order 20(1) be suspended for 6 November 2012.

Mr Speaker: Before I move to the Question, I remind Members that the motion requires cross-community support.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That Standing Order 20(1) be suspended for 6 November 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.

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Plenary

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): Mr Speaker, in compliance with Section 52C(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, we wish to make the following statement on the fifteenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in plenary format, which was held in Armagh on Friday 2 November 2012. The Executive Ministers who attended the meeting have approved this report, and we make it on their behalf.

Our delegation was led by the First Minister, Peter Robinson, and me. In addition, the following Executive Ministers were in attendance: Minister Attwood; Minister Farry; Minister Foster; Minister O'Dowd; Minister O'Neill; Minister Poots; Minister Wilson; junior Minister McCann; and junior Minister Bell.

The Irish Government delegation was led by the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD. The following Irish Government Ministers were also in attendance: the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Eamon Gilmore; Minister Noonan; Minister Quinn; Minister Bruton; Minister Burton; Minister Deenihan; Minister Reilly; Minister Varadkar; and Minister of State McEntee.

Ministers extended their sympathies to the family of David Black, who was brutally murdered on his way to work last Thursday, and condemned those who carried out this atrocity. Ministers reaffirmed their determination that actions such as this will not be allowed to drag us back to the past.

The Council discussed the economic challenges being faced in each jurisdiction and the work being undertaken to address the global economic crisis. Ministers specifically discussed challenges in the banking sector, the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA), corporation tax and the benefits of working together to build trade links with economies such as China's. Ministers also discussed the importance of tourism to both economies and recognised the importance of maximising the benefits of major initiatives such as the World Police and Fire Games, the City of Culture celebrations and "The Gathering" 2013. Farm safety was also discussed, and Ministers expressed their sympathies to everyone who has lost loved ones in farm-related accidents.

There was a discussion on the St Andrews Agreement review, and it was agreed that senior officials would meet and bring forward proposals before the end of the year. Ministers reiterated their commitment to the north-west

region and noted that further discussions would take place on the north-west gateway initiative.

Ministers also discussed Ireland's presidency of the EU during the first half of 2013. They noted the priorities for the presidency term and that a full programme of events is planned. The Council noted that a central theme of the Irish presidency will be to improve the European Union's global competitiveness, promote economic growth and create jobs. Those priorities will be reflected across all of Ireland's presidency programme. Also discussed was how the outcome of negotiations on the future financing of the EU through the multi-annual financial framework (MFF) will be critical for Europe's future economic development and competitiveness in vital areas, such as the reform of the common agricultural and fisheries policies.

The importance of engagement in the NSMC to maximise mutual benefit from the Irish EU presidency was recognised. It was noted that arrangements have been put in place to enable Irish Ministers to brief their Executive counterparts on presidency-related issues at NSMC meetings and that consideration is being given to joint participation by our Ministers at presidency-related events.

The Council noted the progress report that the NSMC joint secretaries prepared on the work of the North/South bodies. It also noted that 24 NSMC meetings had taken place so far this year. The Council also welcomed key developments, including that construction of the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin is to commence in 2013, with the unit being operational in 2016. The child protection steering group has developed a future work programme that is to be taken forward through five specific work streams. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) has been agreed on protecting the island of Ireland from exotic animal disease incursion, underlining the commitment to key principles in the all-island animal health and welfare strategy.

The Council welcomed that a joint inspection of the Middletown Centre for Autism by the Education Departments concluded:

"The Centre is meeting very effectively the needs of the young people, their peers, parents and professionals and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained improvement."

At their meeting on 17 October, Education Ministers agreed to continue to support the efforts of both Administrations to ensure that the agreed expansion of the Middletown Centre for Autism is delivered as soon as possible.

Work has now commenced on the repatriation of illegally dumped waste at a further two sites in County Tyrone — at Seskinore and in Eskra, Clogher. Joint enforcement action to deal with illegal operators remains a priority for both Environment Ministers, and the Departments continue to target resources to that. A timetable of key milestones has been agreed to enable the necessary legislation to be put in place by the end of 2014 for the mutual recognition of penalty points across the island.

InterTradeIreland created or sustained 115 jobs in the first half of this year against a full-year target of 150, and in the period June 2011 to July 2012, it facilitated the drawdown of €20 million from the seventh framework programme — FP7 — for 19 cross-border projects. InterTradeIreland is also running two new programmes — Challenge and

Elevate — that are designed specifically to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to develop their innovative and exporting capabilities. Both programmes have generated considerable interest and strong initial returns.

Development on post-2013 territorial co-operation EU programmes has commenced, with several public consultations having been held already. The Food Safety Promotion Board's Stop the Spread obesity awareness campaign won the gold award in the healthcare sector at the 2012 and Post integrated direct marketing awards. The Council welcomed the Loughs Agency's significant contribution to the Clipper Round the World event and its preparations for the sea and trout angling events of the 2013 World Fire and Police Games.

The Ulster-Scots Agency is developing plans to promote and support Ulster-Scots haitlan areas with its aim to preserve, protect and present Ulster-Scots heritage through geographical designations. Foras na Gaeilge provided a revised implementation plan for the review of core funding at the NSMC language meeting in July 2012. Final proposals will be brought to the next NSMC language meeting in December 2012.

The restoration of the Ulster canal from Clones to Upper Lough Erne is progressing through the planning application process in both jurisdictions. An inter-agency group has been set up to examine all possible options to advance the project. Tourism Ireland is rolling out major promotional campaigns for "The Gathering" Ireland 2013 and the City of Culture 2013.

The NSMC noted the current position on a North/South consultative forum and agreed to review that issue at a future NSMC plenary sitting. Ministers welcomed the establishment of the North/South Inter-Parliamentary Association and noted that it held its inaugural meeting in Dublin on 12 October 2012. Ministers noted that members of the Assembly and the Oireachtas had discussed the Ulster canal and child protection and agreed to meet again in April 2013. The Council approved a schedule of NSMC meetings proposed by the joint secretariat, including an NSMC plenary meeting in July 2013.

Mr Moutray: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. How does he see Northern Ireland benefiting as a result of the Irish Republic having the EU presidency?

Mr M McGuinness: From our meeting in Armagh on Friday, it is clear that the Irish Government are very anxious to have us as much involved in all of that as possible. They provided us with a useful update on their plans for the forthcoming EU presidency. As everybody knows, Ireland is hosting the EU presidency at a time when it is likely that decisions will be taken that will have a major impact on all of us. It is likely that decisions will be taken on future EU funding programmes and on the very important common agricultural policy. That gives us a unique opportunity to ensure that our opinions are communicated to those who will be making decisions, in a way that would not otherwise happen.

Informal council meetings will be held on various topics during the presidency, and we understand that some of our Ministers and senior officials will have the opportunity to attend those meetings, which will provide access to key decision-makers across the EU. We have also agreed that our Executive office in Brussels will make space available to the Irish permanent representative for meetings and

events. We welcome the arrangement whereby senior officials in the Civil Service receive regular briefings from their Irish government counterparts on the priorities associated with each EU presidency. We are also aware that some of our Ministers and senior officials are going to be invited to events, and that is to be welcomed. There is a very inclusive approach being taken, and given that all of that is to our mutual benefit, it is a very sensible arrangement.

Mr Nesbitt (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I thank the Minister for the update, and particularly mark the fact that Ministers at the North/South plenary offered their sympathy to the family of David Black on this particularly difficult day for that family. With your indulgence, Mr Speaker, I note that the deputy First Minister omitted the "UK" from the "UK City of Culture" when he was reading out his report. Perhaps he would like to put that right in a moment.

My question is with regard to InterTradelreland. The Minister is celebrating the fact that, halfway through the year, it is more than halfway to its target of 150 jobs created or sustained. Given that the budget of InterTradelreland is £9,822,000 per annum, making it £65,480 for each job created or sustained, does the deputy First Minister consider that to be good value for money?

10.45 am

Mr M McGuinness: InterTradelreland is good value for money. It has clearly been one of the great success stories of the North/South institutions. In the initial stages, when we did not have a world economic crisis, it was quite clear that there had been a very substantial increase in trade between North and South. Obviously, this very cruel world recession has impacted somewhat on North/South trade but, from its foundations, InterTradelreland has always shown itself to be a body that could deliver in a way that would be of mutual benefit to everyone in the business community, North and South.

As we go forward, we can learn from the experiences that we have been through. When InterTradelreland and the other bodies were established, we did not have a world economic crisis, but now that we have one, people will have to cut their cloth to meet their needs, considering the very severe challenges that we all face in the time ahead.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. Will he update us on the north-west gateway initiative?

Mr M McGuinness: We had a discussion about the north-west gateway initiative. Many people, particularly representatives from the north-west, understand that it is a very important piece of work. Maintaining the initiative's momentum is hugely important and, in order to do that, we agreed that officials should hold a meeting, which should take place early next year.

The north-west science park was not discussed at the meeting, but I am very pleased that the programme approvals for it have now been sought and obtained, and a letter of offer has been issued to the lead partner. It will be a welcome addition to the region that will help to strengthen our innovation infrastructure. Given current economic conditions, however, those benefits may not be realised immediately.

We have also had developments in the supply of new buses. The issue of trains and the rail link from Coleraine to Derry is very important. Although the A5 road project has been interrupted as a result of a judicial review, the money for that has been ring-fenced by our Administration, so there is no threat to that. There was some discussion of that matter at the meeting, and we were all conscious that, until the judicial review, it had been all systems go. Hopefully, that review can be concluded very shortly, and it is quite clear that the Department for Regional Development (DRD) is very focused on the need to proceed with that work. I understand that there is some concern about the delay, but DRD is going to robustly defend that action and has instructed senior counsel to take it forward as quickly as possible. As with all these matters, there is a risk of a delay.

Mike Nesbitt challenged me to use the term "UK" when describing the City of Culture project. That is the title that was awarded to the city, and different people in the city have different ways of expressing that, just as they have different ways of expressing the name of the city. The important thing is not to use it as a political point-scoring exercise, but to recognise that Derry, or as some citizens of the city choose to call it, Londonderry, has been awarded a unique opportunity to take forward a project that can effectively make that city the cultural capital of the north-west, with a great legacy. Hopefully, and more importantly than anything else, it will increase the employment prospects of young people in the city. World-class events will be coming to the city and it will move forward, as it did for the bid, in a very united way.

I caution everyone in society to recognise that the whole issue of the City of Culture should not be made a political point-scoring exercise. There is a danger that some people can lapse into that, but the people who are charged with the responsibility of taking the City of Culture project forward in the city are very conscious of the need to ensure that it is a totally inclusive event and that everyone in the city feels comfortable and part of something that is going to be truly historic.

Mr Eastwood: The deputy First Minister has expressed very clearly his understanding of how important the City of Culture — the UK City of Culture or whatever people want to call it — is for the city of Derry. The legacy that that will have for our people will be very important for us all. Can he assure the House that NITB will make a similar marketing effort to that made on the 2012 Our Time Our Place campaign?

Mr M McGuinness: Yes. Everybody in our Government, Assembly and Executive understands the importance of the City of Culture and that there is a duty and a responsibility on all agencies to ensure that it is marketed in a way that will complement the great work that is taking place in the city as we move forward. I have confidence that people appreciate the opportunity that is there and appreciate that, for many in the north-west, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to ensure that the city moves forward in a way that brings not just economic progress but a very real opportunity for the city to emerge as a very important cultural and economic hub in the future.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement and for the confirmation of how Ministers, North and South on the island of Ireland, are working together to build a shared and better future for people throughout

our community. That stands in stark contrast to the futile and cowardly actions of the murderers of David Black. I note and welcome the united condemnation from Ministers throughout Ireland. Indeed, the President of Ireland has represented the sympathies of the entire people, which go to the Black family, especially today.

In relation to the practical efforts on the ground, is it possible for the deputy First Minister to update the House on work to identify an all-island solution to children's heart surgery provision in Northern Ireland?

Mr M McGuinness: Everybody in the House knows that our Health Minister, Edwin Poots, is very focused on that issue. We know from the pressure that comes from families who are directly affected by the dangers to their children's lives that it is a critically important area of work. There was some discussion about that at the meeting. Minister Reilly and Minister Poots are very focused on the need to get a resolution to that issue as quickly as possible. I am absolutely satisfied that that is being taken forward with all haste.

In relation to the attitude at the meeting regarding the murder of David Black, it is very important to point out again that, in Armagh, we had present the political representatives of the people of Ireland, North and South. All the major political parties on this island have condemned the murder of David Black. It is very important to make the point that the people who murdered David Black do not speak for the people of Ireland. We, as the elected representatives — whether it is myself, Peter Robinson, Enda Kenny, Eamon Gilmore, Micheál Martin or the representatives and leaders of the other political parties in the Assembly — speak for the people of Ireland. We demand that these people — these idiots who wish to plunge us back to the past and who are committed to violence to overturn the democratically expressed wishes of the people, North and South, that we move forward in peace and in a way that sees increased sharing and co-operation between us — stop their activities and recognise the importance of weighing in behind the expressed will for peace and the views of the people of Ireland.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for his statement. Can he give us any more detail on the discussions at the North/South Ministerial Council on the North/South inter-parliamentary forum?

Mr M McGuinness: The North/South inter-parliamentary forum has sprung to life. All credit is due to our Speaker, William Hay, and to the Ceann Comhairle, Seán Barrett, for the work that they engaged in to ensure that it moved forward. The first meeting of the parliamentary forum was held on 12 October. It discussed things such as the Ulster canal and child protection. More importantly, we all recognise that, without endangering anybody's political allegiances or aspirations, it makes sense to have politicians throughout this island sitting down and discussing issues of real relevance. We can come up with ideas and suggestions that ensure that we are comprehensively dealing with issues that resonate throughout the island in a way that does not undermine anybody's allegiances. That is very important. The strengthening of such links is a good thing.

It is hugely important that we continue to give support to our Speaker and the Ceann Comhairle, express to them our deepest thanks and appreciation for their work

in bringing this to fruition and wish both of them every success in the future. I am sure that all the political parties that are represented on this body will see its importance.

In many ways, it also sends a very important message to those who are committed to ongoing violence. Here we have political representatives from all the major political parties on this island prepared to sit down together in a spirit of dignity and respect to discuss real issues that can make a difference to people, North and South.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas ar maidin. I thank the Minister for his statement and his answers so far. He has mentioned a number of key strategic areas of work for the north-west. I welcome his mentioning the gateway initiative, the science park, the City of Culture and the radiotherapy unit.

Given Derry City FC's success on Sunday, was there any discussion of the game at the North/South ministerial meeting and what impact it would have, particularly the possible return of European football to Derry?

Mr M McGuinness: Funnily enough, it was mentioned at the meeting. It was mentioned in the context of the Taoiseach giving us a report that Paddy Power had extended his workforce and that he was there for the announcement. Given that the meeting took place prior to the final, I asked him whether he had asked what the odds were on Derry City winning the FAI Cup. There was a bit of a snigger from the other side of the table as if there was no hope. However, I pay tribute to Philip O'Doherty, chairman of Derry City, Declan Devine, the manager, Kevin Deery, the captain and all of the team. It was a great North/South occasion, with 16,000 fans there. There was a great spirit, and the FAI was absolutely fantastic.

Prior to going to Dublin for the game, I, along with the First Minister, was at another very important all-island event in Casement Park for the very important Michaela Foundation. Great credit must go to the GAA and to Mickey Harte, John McAreavey and their families. It is obvious that they are much loved among every section of our community. What happened was a terrible tragedy. We have to recognise that sporting organisations, North and South, make an incredible contribution. We should also recognise the incredible contribution of the Northern footballers who got a fantastic draw against Portugal.

I am one of those people who believes that when young people go onto the pitch to play their sport, engage in training and inspire their communities, it is a very good thing. It does not matter who they represent, and we should resist the temptation to be critical of decisions that young people make about who they play for.

Mr Rogers: Thanks to the deputy First Minister. The Narrow Water bridge is a very important strategic project for the south Down area. Was that discussed? We have the funding from Europe, but the project needs a firm commitment from the Irish Government and the Assembly.

Mr M McGuinness: We did have a brief discussion on the Narrow Water bridge project. I am very pleased that planning permission has been granted for the bridge on both sides of the border and that the project has been successful in its bid for funding, having been awarded €17.4 million. So, the Finance Departments, North and

South, are in the lead on what is an ambitious project that will involve the construction of a 600 metre single-lane bridge.

I understand that, if everything progresses as planned, the bridge could be completed by 2015.

11.00 am

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas a thug sé dúinn inniu. Will the Minister provide an update on the restoration of the Ulster canal from Clones to Upper Lough Erne?

Mr M McGuinness: As I said, there was a presentation on the issue at the North/South interparliamentary forum, and the planning processes are up and running. I understand that, on the Cavan side of the border, it has been successfully concluded. There is still some work to do on this side. Everyone realises, from a tourism point of view, that this is filled with all sorts of potential for us, particularly in the context not only of whatever construction jobs will be created by the project but of the prospects for utilising our waterways in a way that can bring employment to local communities.

Mr G Robinson: What plans are in place to control spending on North/South bodies?

Mr M McGuinness: We are all very conscious of living in a time of great economic hardship, and the responsibility and duty fall to the Minister of Finance in our Executive and the Minister for Finance in the South, Michael Noonan. Both have been charged by the North/South Ministerial Council to look at how we can utilise the funds available to us in a way that gives us the best value possible.

We are all conscious that enormous savings can be achieved through North/South co-operation and by working together. For example, Minister Quinn in the South and Minister O'Dowd in the North are looking at education in border areas, which impacts on people on both sides of the border and right across the community. We have had very progressive statements from Edwin Poots, our Minister of Health on how the new South West Acute Hospital in Fermanagh can be utilised for the treatment of people living not only in Fermanagh and the surrounding area in the North but in Cavan and Monaghan. All these opportunities are out there to ensure that we are as cost-effective as possible. Both Finance Ministers and, indeed, the entire ministerial team at the North/South Ministerial Council are very focused on ensuring that we utilise what are, at present, fairly meagre funds in the best way.

Mr Newton: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. He mentioned the drawdown of €20 million under the framework programme 7 (FP7) by InterTradelreland. Does he agree that there is a need to increase the level of drawdown under this programme for innovative-type programmes? Specifically, how might he encourage InterTradelreland to do so?

Mr M McGuinness: It is very important. The First Minister and I met Máire Geoghegan-Quinn in Brussels and emphasised the importance of ensuring that we draw down as much as we can. Máire Geoghegan-Quinn attended a conference here in, I think, the Titanic building, although I am subject to correction. In the early part of next year, there will be an opportunity for further meetings of that nature. Therefore, it is crucial that InterTradelreland

and, indeed, all our SMEs in the North understand the importance of engaging with Europe. We have put a big emphasis on that in the Executive. All our Departments are very focused on the need to ensure that they do as much as they can to increase the drawdown, at the same time as getting the message out to SMEs that they can increase their drawdown by increasing their contact and co-operation with the European Union.

Mr Spratt: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. Deputy First Minister, you mentioned the A5 project. The Committee has been informed that £10.7 million a month is going back into the centre, and you mentioned that it was going to be ring-fenced by the Executive. Does that mean that, after the judicial process has ended, the moneys that have gone back will be reinstated to the A5 project?

Mr M McGuinness: We are all hoping that the judicial review can be dealt with as quickly as possible, and, as I said, our Minister for Regional Development, Danny Kennedy, will defend our position robustly. I hope that on the other side of that, if we are successful — there is every expectation that we can be — we will move forward with the project. The First Minister, the Finance Minister and I have already had discussions, and we are absolutely satisfied that the funding for our contribution to the construction of the new roads from New Buildings to Strabane and from Omagh to Ballygawley will be there. The Finance Minister will keep a close eye on the project to ensure that it goes ahead and that there will be no threat whatsoever to the funding that has been allocated to it.

Schools: Putting Pupils First

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Le do chead, a Cheann Comhairle, ba mhaith liom ráiteas a dhéanamh ar na chéad chéimeanna eile don oideachas.

With your permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the next steps for education. Last autumn, I came to the Assembly with a challenging and necessary programme of actions under the heading of "Putting Pupils First: Shaping Our Future". I want to update Members on the progress made since then and to set out information on a further programme of work. That programme continues to put pupils first and is focused on improving the outcomes of our young people and, in doing so, on creating opportunity.

In "Shaping Our Future", I set out the challenges associated with a schools estate that was not well planned in the past and needed reshaping, reinvestment and realignment with local communities' educational needs. Since then, viability audits have been carried out to assess the educational, enrolment and financial position of every primary and post-primary school. The area planning exercise that I promised is under way. The consultation phase for post-primary plans concluded recently, and I expect to have the finalised plans on my desk shortly. The cross-border survey of education is also now under way, and it will examine how education is provided along the border corridor and whether there is scope to engage in joint planning of the respective schools estates in this area.

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

Although my departmental allocation is limited, major capital investment has been planned and announced after a transparent process of prioritisation. Money is being spent to deliver modern, fit-for-purpose schools that will be sustainable long into the future. At the same time, I have significantly increased and ring-fenced the investment in maintenance to £40 million this year to date. Importantly and perhaps for the first time, an increasingly mature and healthy debate is happening in communities across the North about the future planning of our schools estate.

Over the past year, we have delivered progress in other areas. We have reached agreement at the Executive on the next steps for special education. We have amended preschool admissions arrangements to remove the July/August birthday anomaly. I will shortly announce revised proposals for the early years strategy. Sir Bob Salisbury is leading the review of the common funding scheme, and I look forward to receiving his report in the near future. We have, of course, also started the legislative journey towards the establishment of a new Education and Skills Authority that will have our young people and their needs at its core. We have also responded to the growing appetite for sharing in our education system, and I look forward to the recommendations from the shared education working group that Professor Paul Connolly is leading.

The Executive have rightly been considering their response to the challenging economic context that persists. The Programme for Government makes clear the priority that all Ministers attach to the economy. That priority recognises the immediate challenge of supporting economic recovery and the longer-term challenge of growing an economy that provides opportunities for all. It should be

an economy that generates wealth equitably and ethically, can compete and win business and can create jobs and provide opportunity. We know, too, that an economy can succeed in the face of global competition only if its education system is performing well and its young people achieve to their full potential. We cannot, therefore, divorce what our children learn and how well they do at school from our economic future. For that reason, I have remained determined to ensure that our young people have access to a modern, relevant curriculum and to high-quality careers advice. That is why I commenced, as I said I would, the legislation that gives effect to the entitlement framework. Schools are now planning with certainty to ensure the delivery of a range of courses that will respond to the interests of pupils and the needs of our economy. Parents and young people can be assured that there will be a broader curriculum available from September 2013. They should not hesitate to ask how their school is planning to meet the requirements of the entitlement framework.

Linked to the entitlement framework, of course, is the awarding of qualifications. As Members know, I have announced a review of our qualifications to ensure that they continue to be credible, portable and tailored to our needs. I am also determined to retain a clear and unapologetic focus on raising educational standards, a focus that is at the heart of my Department's corporate plan for 2012-15, which will also be published this week.

On 17 October, the chief inspector of the Department's Education and Training Inspectorate launched her biennial report on the state of our education system. Through its independent reporting of the strengths and areas for improvement in our schools and youth provision, the inspectorate makes a key contribution to raising standards. It acts as a catalyst for improvement. In the past year, 81% of schools with follow-up inspections had improved by at least one performance level. The report paints an improving picture in our primary schools, showing that the revised curriculum has bedded in well and is making a difference, that Key Stage 2 outcomes for pupils in literacy and numeracy continue to improve and that the overall quality of provision was good or better in four fifths of primary schools inspected.

I acknowledge the dedication of our primary schools and the improvement that has been delivered, but too many children are not well served. One in five of our pupils is not at the expected level of literacy and numeracy by the time they leave primary school. The report highlights that leadership and management in just over 20% of the primary schools inspected need to be improved. We need to tackle these problems, not tolerate them.

Our post-primary schools face even more complex challenges. The Assembly knows my views on academic selection well. It knows that persisting with a two-tier model of provision or, rather, overprovision at post-primary level creates the greatest challenges for the schools that serve our poorest communities and the children who stand to benefit most from a great education and face the greatest barriers to fulfilling their potential. That reality is not the fault of our schools, yet it is our non-selective post-primary schools that are often left to deal with the consequences. Unless we tackle the structural deficiencies in post-primary provision, we will not make the progress that we need to make. In the meantime, I will

take action to address the issues that the chief inspector's report highlights, issues that include the indefensible gap in attainment at GCSE between our least and most affluent pupils and underachievement among boys and girls and among Protestant working-class children and their Catholic working-class neighbours.

The chief inspector tells us that inspections and follow-up inspections of post-primary schools resulted in overall effectiveness being evaluated as good or better in 59% of schools. It is right that we pay tribute to the staff and governors in those schools, but the other side of that statistic gives me and must give the Assembly real cause for concern. It tells us that provision was not good enough in 41% of the post-primary schools inspected. The report also tells us that curriculum provision could be better in 33% of post-primary schools and that leadership and management need to improve in 39% of the schools inspected. It finds that in 20% of post-primary schools inspected — one in five — the leadership of the principal was less than satisfactory.

When the report looks at the English and maths departments in post-primary schools, we see that the leadership is good or better in over 70% of English departments but in just over 50% of maths departments. We know how central good maths teaching is, yet in almost half of the post-primary maths departments inspected, leadership and management needs to improve.

There must be a clear and sustained response to this report. It highlights the need to move beyond academic selection. While we work to achieve that in the short term, the report makes clear the need for other action that I, as Minister, propose to take.

11.15 am

It is very clear from the chief inspector's report and from wider local and international evidence that effective leadership and high-quality teaching are central to delivering improvement. The flexibility to teach in a way that best meets the needs of pupils holds no fear for them, nor does being held accountable for the outcomes their pupils achieve. We have many great teachers in our schools, but we need to do more. We need to do more to acknowledge great teachers and to develop more of them, and, yes, we need to do more to challenge and support those who are not as effective as they should be. For that reason, I have already announced action to enhance the professional standing of teachers here. I propose to bring before the Assembly legislation to strengthen the role of the General Teaching Council as the professional body in supporting teachers and in upholding the highest professional standards. We will also support the continuing professional development of teachers through a new strategy for teacher education that will focus on attracting the right people into teaching and then on how to support them as they prepare to become teachers and as they go through their professional career. I also intend that ESA will have a professional support service of the highest quality. It will be responsive to the needs of teachers, modern in its outlook and dedicated in its commitment to helping teachers help pupils. In the interim, I have tasked my officials with taking action to ensure that the current structures deliver effectively for teachers.

I turn now to leadership. We know that great teachers can flourish only when they are supported in schools by great

leaders. Therefore, we need to take a fresh look at how we develop and support our school leaders — our principals and vice-principals — and others in leadership positions in schools.

In response to the chief inspector's finding that our leadership programmes are fragmented and in need of updating, I will ensure the development and delivery of coherent, modern, fit-for-purpose leadership programmes that reflect the challenges of education in the 21st century. I want those programmes to focus on developing leaders who lead effectively not only within their school but beyond the school gates, leaders who work in alliance with their peers to meet the educational needs of all young people in their area.

I am also convinced that we need to reinvigorate the negotiating machinery that deals with principals' and teachers' pay and conditions of service. It is simply too complex and too slow in responding to the changing needs of pupils and of teachers. For example, should we not have the flexibility to reward principals on the basis not of the number of pupils in their school but of the size of the challenges they face and their success in overcoming those challenges? I suggest that leadership challenges in taking over an underperforming school with low aspirations and falling numbers may be far greater than those involved in leading a school with stable enrolment and a strong track record of delivering education.

I also want to see more mobility in the profession. We have teachers and principals who have not experienced teaching outside their own school. They have worked their entire career in one place. I ask this question: can such a system really provide the professional challenges that teachers and principals want and need? We need to do more to make sure that the recruitment process for principals values breadth of experience, including employment outside the school. I want to see a situation where promotion to principal is frequently not the last career move for a teacher but the first career move for an education leader.

We also need to learn from other countries. We already benchmark our 15-year-olds in reading, maths and science through the programme for international student assessment (PISA) survey. Next month, following our participation in two major international surveys — the trends in international mathematics and science study (TIMSS), which looks at maths and science, and the progress in international reading literacy study (PIRLS), which looks at reading — we will be able to establish for the first time how our primary system compares with those in other countries. That will allow us to see how we shape up against the best in the world.

I also want to announce to the Assembly that, as part of our work to learn from the best, the North will participate in a major review by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) of how assessment and evaluation systems deliver improvements for pupils. Our involvement will help others learn from our experience. Importantly, it will also help us to learn from others. It will involve an in-depth country review of our education system carried out by independent experts from other OECD countries. This is an exciting development that will provide valuable information to help us improve further our education system. It seems right, after all, that, if we expect our schools to be inspected and evaluated and to respond with action to build on strengths and

address areas for improvement, we should expect to subject our system as a whole to similar scrutiny with the same objective: learning and improving. I look forward to welcoming the OECD expert team in the new year and hope that they will have an opportunity to talk not just to teachers, pupils, principals and governors but to some of our politicians and policy advisers.

I have talked about schools. I have talked about teaching and leadership. In focusing on leadership, I want to do more to support governors, who give valuable leadership to our schools in a voluntary capacity. My Department will therefore ensure the creation of a dedicated governor support service. That service will not only provide training, advice and support but will develop greater opportunities for governors to network, share experience and become a stronger, collective voice in our education system. Last autumn, I asked the inspectorate to broaden and strengthen the existing evaluation of the effectiveness of boards of governors. That is now being trialled with a view to the greater sharing of good practice.

Mar fhocal scoir, agus an ráiteas seo á chríochnú agam, ba mhaith liom fócasú ar na daoine a ba chóir dóibh bheith ag croílár ar gcórais oideachais: ár ndaoine óga agus a dtuismithoirí.

Finally, as I finish my statement, I want to focus on the people who should be at the very heart of our education system: our young people and their parents. I want to make clear to the Assembly and to the people we serve my commitment to raising standards and closing the achievement gap. The Programme for Government rightly sets ambitious targets for us. I want to work with everyone who has an interest in education to see those targets achieved. By improving outcomes for our young people, we improve opportunities for them, too.

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): When coming to the House, I always look through what the Minister is going to say. I note that he used the words “exciting development”. I have to say that there will be few teachers, in any school, sitting on the edge of their seat today as a result of the content of the Minister’s speech. However, we welcome the fact that he has come back to the House and tried to expand on the statement that he made last year. I am concerned that teachers listening today will be of the opinion that they are being asked to pick up the tab for the failures of the Department rather than address the issues currently in our education system. I am disappointed that, at a time when the Minister is well aware of many issues, particularly around the computer-based assessments NILA and NINA, no leadership is being given by his Department on those issues.

I want to ask the Minister a question that specifically relates to the entitlement framework, which he made reference to today and in his previous statement. Will the Minister consider the suspension of the withdrawal of funding for the entitlement framework until the common funding formula has been set before him and he sees what alternatives are being proposed by Sir Bob Salisbury? I ask that for the simple reason that there is a disconnect between his policy on the delivery of the entitlement framework and the financial structures in place to ensure that that policy is met. Will the Minister give serious consideration to that issue to ensure that we have in

our schools a connection that is relevant to policy and practice? At this time, that is lacking.

Mr O’Dowd: I thank the Member for his question. He states that before he comes into the Chamber he always, quite rightly, evaluates what the Minister is going to say. He states that he doubts that teachers will listen to the announcement with excitement. It always amazes me how the Member manages to evaluate what the outside world thinks after I have just sat down.

I have no doubt that there will be different views on what I have said today in the teaching profession, among parents and among boards of governors. However, let me make it clear: I am not pointing the finger solely at teachers. We have a collective responsibility to improve the educational outcomes of our young people. Within that collective responsibility, there is a role for teachers. I said in my statement that the vast majority of our teachers are excellent; they are great educators. However, we have to accept that there are teachers out there who require retraining or are no longer effective. I do not believe that we have the mechanisms in place to deal with that quickly and efficiently enough to make an impact, but I want discussions on how we deal with that to continue apace with the trade unions.

I also set out a challenge for me, as Minister. I have called in OECD to inspect our education system — the education system that I, as Minister, am in charge of. The buck stops with me. OECD is coming to inspect my role as Minister and the policies that I have delivered. I do not think that I can be any more open and transparent than that, when I am bringing in a group of experts to tell me whether I am doing a good job or not. So, I am taking on my responsibility.

There is a challenge for the Education Committee in this, and it will continue to conduct its work. There is also a challenge for this Assembly and this society in relation to raising educational attainment for our young people, because, although we are improving, we need to do better.

The Member made a number of other comments. As regards the computer-based assessment, at the close of play on the Friday before the Halloween recess, around 100 schools were facing difficulties. The computer experts now tell me that they have identified a problem in the system and have identified a way to resolve that problem. They are running further tests before they put that into the system. However, we do not have wide-scale problems with the computer-based assessments; we do not have a shambles; we do not have a crisis. We have a difficulty and a problem. It would be interesting for the Member to know that the same percentage of schools has completed the computer-based assessment at this point as had completed InCAS last year at this point. Schools are carrying out the computer-based assessment, and schools with problems are engaging with C2k and CCEA. In a number of instances, we can resolve the problem in the school. There may be a computer glitch there, which they have a remedy for, and they are deciding on the best way to insert that remedy into the system.

With regard to the entitlement framework, I am not going to suspend the withdrawal of financing around that at this time. I have brought in Bob Salisbury, who is a well-respected individual, and his team, and they are looking at how we fund our schools. Mr Salisbury’s report should be

with me in January or early spring of next year. I will take on board his recommendations and study them carefully, and I will make a decision on the way forward for funding at that time.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Will the Minister expand on the purpose of the OECD report?

Mr O'Dowd: I have decided, for a number of reasons, to bring in the OECD. One of the reasons is to internationalise the debate around education in this society. For many years, we lived off the propaganda that we had a world-class education system. It is difficult for an Education Minister to stand up and say this, but we do not have a world-class education system. We have world-class educationalists working in an education system, and we have world-class institutions working in the education system, but the overall system is not world-class. We need it to be world-class. Continually, we compare ourselves against England and Wales and against the South, but we need to compare ourselves against the best in the world to ensure that our young people have every opportunity to compete in a global economic market.

The OECD is an international body whose research reports are highly regarded. The outcomes of the research will provide us with an independent assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of our education system, pointing up areas for improvement as well as areas that are performing well. The review will look at the various components of assessment and evaluation frameworks, with the objective of improving student outcomes. Twenty-five other countries are participating in one form or another in this important review, and 13 countries, along with us, are having country reviews. That includes countries as far afield as New Zealand and, in respect of the Flemish countries, Belgium. The total cost of carrying out the review will be between £78,000 and £86,000, depending on the sterling exchange rate at that time.

The Department of Education is currently finalising a country background report that will provide the review team with information on the education systems here, including the current assessment arrangements. A preliminary visit by the review team will take place on 21 and 22 November, with the purpose of identifying the key issues. The external review team, which includes two independent experts, will visit in early 2013 and hold discussions with a broad and relevant group of people. A draft report will be provided four months following the review. Once finalised, the report will be published on the OECD website and will provide, from an international perspective, an independent analysis of major issues facing the education assessment framework here.

11.30 am

So, we have the best in the world coming in to evaluate us and measure our systems. They will report, and that report will be open and transparent. That presents a challenge to me as Minister; to my Department; and to the Assembly. However, I welcome that challenge because I firmly believe that, as a society, we have to get out of our cocoon and start talking about education in an international framework, rather than in a narrow framework, as we do currently.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his statement, which talks about everything and nothing. It is appallingly self-congratulatory on how well he is doing things badly.

Its key point is leadership. The Minister is absolutely right on leadership. However, Napoleon said that an army marches on its stomach. We have to look after the welfare of the soldiers, who, in this case, are teachers, parents and pupils. What is the Minister putting in place to make sure that he listens to parents, teachers and pupils, and not just to unions, so that he knows where he is taking them and they know where they are going? At the moment, he is not looking after the stomachs of his teachers and pupils.

Mr O'Dowd: Well, at least the Member has not accused me of having a secret plot to create a united Ireland through this statement. It may be a disappointment on my behalf, rather than congratulating me. The Member will also be aware that Napoleon floundered during the Russian winter and lost the majority of his army in his dreadful retreat from there. Napoleon is an interesting historical character. I am not sure whether he had any input in the development of a modern education system. However, he was prone to defeat. I would like to learn from Napoleon on a number of factors. Yes, you should listen to people on the ground. You should also learn from international lessons and best practice. Everybody knows that you should never go to Russia in winter, and I have no intention of bringing our education system into any kind of Russian winter.

My statement was not self-congratulatory. As Minister, I have stood here and said that the Department that I am in charge of has serious challenges ahead. We have to reassure ourselves that we have the right policies in place to deliver. I am bringing in a group of international experts to examine my role as Minister. I am not aware that any other Minister in the Executive is doing that.

There is also a challenge for the education workforce. There is a challenge for the teaching workforce, and the principals. The inspection report and the schools inspectorate tell us that leadership is a key issue and that delivery of teaching on the ground is a key issue in a number of schools. I acknowledge that the vast majority of teachers are excellent. However, we must also accept that a number of teachers either require retraining or should be allowed to leave the service for the betterment of education. So, there is a challenge for the Minister and the workforce.

Do I listen to teachers? Yes. I meet trade unions, teaching associations, individual schools and groups of teachers regularly. I listen to them. Do I always agree with them? No, I do not. However, I listen to them. As Minister, I have a responsibility to lead. I take that leadership responsibility very seriously. I am saying to the education sector and the workforce, "There are challenges for you and for me". If we both deliver on those challenges, we will improve outcomes for young people.

Mr Rogers: The Minister mentioned a computer glitch. Having sat down with school principals and children in front of those NINA screens, believe me, I know that it is much more than a computer glitch. However, I welcome the Minister's comments on leadership — leadership of schools and in classrooms. What support will be given to existing principals to develop their leadership skills in

order to develop a more effective self-evaluation process in schools?

Mr O'Dowd: On his first point, if the Member has been in a primary school that is facing difficulties, that should be reported to C2K, which will interrogate the system in the school and externally. I am not saying that there is no problem. There is a problem in a small number of schools now. It can be and is being resolved. So, we should not over-egg the pudding on that issue. We are not facing a computer meltdown. There are some instances when schools cannot do the assessment. I am also of the strong view that there are a small minority of schools that will not do the assessment. There is a difference between cannot and will not. That needs to be resolved as well.

With regard to continuous professional development for all teachers and leaders, there is currently a number of training programmes in place. As we head towards the establishment of ESA and the wind-down of the education boards, I am concerned that that support is not as effective and efficient as it can be, because of the wind-down. ESA will be in charge of a newly developed support service, but I have asked my officials to interrogate what is in place and to produce a report and recommendations for me on what we need to do in the interim. I do not want a gap in provision between the boards and the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS), and ESA. Provision has to be continuous. That work will be ongoing, and I intend to take a partial interest in the matter.

The inspectorate referred to the programmes for developing new leaders and said that those were perhaps not as joined up across the system. That has come back to me from a number of channels, so I want to take a look at how we identify new leaders, how we support them to get into leadership positions and, once they are in leadership positions, how we keep them there.

As Mr Rogers will be aware, being a school principal is a rewarding but very challenging post. It is an important post in our society, and that has to be recognised. When people are doing well, we have to congratulate them, support them and put the measures in place. When people are under pressure, a network of support has to be put in place. However, we also have to be able to challenge principals when they are failing. If retraining does not work and the support mechanisms are not enough, we have to ask this question: should that principal remain in post? We have not been able to answer that question effectively and efficiently.

Mr Lunn: I welcome the Minister's very wide-ranging statement, which, without wanting to agree totally with Mr Kinahan, is just the latest in a long line of wide-ranging statements. Like me, perhaps the Minister would like to see more outcomes and fewer initiatives. He referred to the start of the legislative journey towards ESA. Does he agree that it is vital that ESA be established as quickly as possible, as it is connected to all the various suggestions in his statement? If you have not got a proper organisation at the top of the tree, how on earth will everything filter down?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for his question. Sometimes it is a case of being damned if you do and damned if you don't. Ministers are criticised for not bringing initiatives to the Assembly, for not being proactive in developing their respective Departments, for not putting policies in place,

and so on, but when they do, they are criticised for having too many initiatives.

The statement is a background analysis of the autumn statement. It also provides background information on the inspectorate's report, and I believe that it was only right and proper that I repeated parts of that to put into context what I plan to do. The major initiative is that we are bringing in the OECD. The other initiatives deal with leadership, the negotiating machinery and the programmes of work that need to be rolled out.

I agree with the Member in this context: even I as Minister find it frustrating at times, because it is difficult to get policies and initiatives working on the ground. That is not a criticism of my civil servants. I am very lucky, because I have a very good team of civil servants around me in the Department of Education. However, the system can at times be very cumbersome and slow to deliver, and I think that the Executive and the Assembly need to look at that as well.

Mr Lunn: ESA?

Mr O'Dowd: Apologies, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Lunn: That was my question.

Mr O'Dowd: It was the second part of your question. I agree with you wholeheartedly that we need to get ESA in place as quickly as possible. I have done my bit by bringing the ESA legislation to the Chamber. The Bill is now with the Education Committee, and I have to respect the role of the Committee and the Assembly in developing it. I encourage them to work through it as quickly as possible. However, it is out of my hands at this stage.

Miss M McIlveen: I listened to the statement with interest, especially the Minister's reference to closing the achievement gap. With that in mind, has he given any particular consideration to the 2,644 looked-after children in Northern Ireland and to the possibility of introducing a pupil premium plus for looked-after children, an action that has been recommended by the all-party group for looked-after children at Westminster?

Mr O'Dowd: When you are dealing with young people, statistics do not accurately reflect the fact that you are dealing with real people's lives. Looked-after children continue to be reflected in that, as do the challenges that they face as young people in education. Through SEN and other initiatives, we introduced proposals to assist them across the broader range of pressures that they face. However, I am more than happy to study the recommendations from Westminster, and if there are proposals that would be workable in our education system, I am more than happy to explore them and, if I have the resources, bring them forward.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas sin ar maidin. Will the Minister outline what he means by modernising the negotiation machinery?

Mr O'Dowd: The issue is one that, in fairness to all trade unions and the management side, has been raised continuously with me. It can be quite cumbersome and slow to get agreements through the current negotiating machinery. Under the current system, we have several different employer bodies, whereas we will be dealing with a single employer through ESA, so now is an opportune

time to look at our negotiating machinery, and it is only right that we do that.

The current procedures for dealing with teachers, including principals and vice-principals, whose work is assessed as unsatisfactory have been in place since 1997. I know that they are considered by the management and teachers' side of the teachers' negotiation committee to be no longer fit for purpose. I understand that they are difficult to manage and take too long to reach a conclusion. The joint working party of the General Teaching Council has, therefore, established a working group to review the current procedures and create a new procedure for supporting effective leadership in schools.

All sides recognise that the process is slow and cumbersome. We need to improve the mechanisms and reach decisions. We need those bodies to come to decisions, because I continually meet boards of governors who are frustrated by their inability to deal with ineffective teachers under the current system. If I am putting in place support mechanisms for teachers and a mechanism to scrutinise my Department and myself, it is only right and proper that we reach a conclusion on how we deal with unsatisfactory teachers and the unsatisfactory leadership of principals or vice-principals.

Mr Craig: I have noted with interest that if you want a statement from the Minister, all you have to do is table a motion and, sure enough, the week prior to it being debated, you have a statement. So I look forward to many more statements from the Minister.

You say in your statement:

"the Inspectorate makes a key contribution to raising standards. It acts as a catalyst for improvement."

If that is the case, Minister, why is there no clear, criteria-based targeting by the inspectorate? Why are there not regular inspections in schools? Why is it that we have to leave our schools until they are in crisis before the inspectorate goes in and deals with some of the hard issues?

Mr O'Dowd: As far as the timing of my statement is concerned, I have known for several months that the inspectorate was publishing a report. I was aware of the publication date and had planned to make a statement to the House in response to it.

I look forward to the debate next week on the motion that the DUP has sponsored. It will be a worthwhile debate that will keep the focus of society and the Assembly on the issues that we need to focus on. So I welcome that debate and any others that the Member wishes to bring forward.

The inspectorate does not wait until a school is in crisis or difficulties before it goes in. District inspectors regularly visit schools and report to the inspectorate on their progress. It is only right and proper that if the inspectorate is informed by a district inspector or receives any information that a school may be facing challenges, it produces a focused report on that school. It is not a case of the inspectorate turning up only once every seven or five years, or whatever it may be. A number of processes are in place, and the district inspector is key to those. Reports from boards of governors, parents or elected representatives may also trigger an inspection report.

I am happy that the inspectorate is doing a good job and that the Every School a Good School policy is beginning

to deliver changes. As I said in my statement, 81% of re-inspected schools and institutions were shown to be improving. So, inspection also has a challenge and support function; it does not simply point out flaws. An inspection report also has to ensure that support is put in place for those schools. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and 81% of improving schools have been inspected.

11.45 am

Mrs Dobson: Minister, I note that, discreetly tucked away at the back of your statement, is the reference to the creation of a dedicated governor support service. Have you consulted with governors and fully engaged with schools on that? Will you assure the House that such a service will not be a Sinn Féin-led entity that can manipulate rather than aid?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes. The first item on the agenda will be signing the members of the boards of governors up to join Sinn Féin. That is the secret ploy that we are involved in. It follows our secret ploy for ESA, which is the White Paper for uniting Ireland. You have caught me out. I do not know what to do next.

The UUP is going to have to get serious about education —

Mrs Dobson: We are.

Mr O'Dowd: No, you are not serious. With respect, you come out with nonsense. No harm to Mr Kinahan and Mrs Dobson, but you are individuals who are more capable and who have a greater insight into education than your coming to the House with the nonsense that you come out with on the direction of travel in education would suggest. How can anyone suggest that a good proposal that will put in place more training, more linkage between schools and sharing good practice, which boards of governors have been crying out for, is actually some sort of Sinn Féin initiative to brainwash them into some sort of other agenda? This is about improving educational outcomes for young people. If you do not agree with my policies, come forward with different policies; do not come forward with sound bites. That is not of any benefit to you, and it is of no benefit to education.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas a thug sé dúinn ar maidin. I thank the Minister for his statement this morning. I welcome the creation of a dedicated service for governors. For too long, governors in their voluntary capacity have been left to stand alone. I wonder how the Minister envisages the stronger collective voice being heard from governors in our education system.

Mr O'Dowd: The Member's question is focused on what my proposal is about. We have around 10,000 members of boards of governors, and they all do that work on a voluntary capacity. I give credit to them, because it can be quite time-consuming. At times, it can be a quite difficult task, especially whenever you are dealing with budgets and staffing issues. That can be a very difficult function for anyone to carry out. I think that they deserve our support.

However, they also deserve practical support. I have set aside half a million pounds per annum to bring forward a governor support body. It will be delivered under ESA, although I would like to see it in shape before ESA comes into final play. The chief executive designate of ESA, Gavin Boyd, has been tasked with bringing forward proposals

on that, which will involve discussions with boards of governors. Indeed, at the start of this year, senior officials from my Department travelled to all arts and parts of the North to give presentations to the boards of governors on departmental policies and direction and then to have informed discussions with them about their role and their views on education. Both sides found that very informative. Following those and further discussions, we will bring forward a training and support package for those 10,000 governors. That is financed, and I believe that boards of governors across all sectors will welcome it a great deal.

Mr G Robinson: Why is it necessary to bring in the OECD when the Minister has his own inspectorate? Will he clarify whether the OECD team will be inspecting his Department?

Mr O'Dowd: Yes, the OECD will inspect my Department. That will be its primary function. It will look at the systems and policies that are in play for the delivery of education. My Department and I will be under inspection. I think that it is only right and proper that if we inspect schools, we should bring someone in to inspect my Department's role.

Why the OECD? It is a very highly respected international educational body across a number of subjects. Its reports on economic development, and so on, are highly regarded. Those people are well tested and respected to do so.

We also need to internationalise our education debate. The DUP, Sinn Féin, the UUP, the Alliance Party, the SDLP and other Independents all have their own views on education. Our views can sometimes be very insular, and we can be competitive and combative with one another — rightly so; that is the nature of politics. An outside view might help all of us and allow us to refresh our thinking on international evidence-based information and to move forward in a more co-operative and agreed format than we do at present. I welcome the fact that political debate and differences of opinion are part of our system, but I think that we would benefit from an international perspective on our education system.

Mr McAleer: The Minister's statement referred to the entitlement framework. Will he tell us why parents and pupils should have an interest in their schools' ability to deliver on the entitlement framework?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for his question. The entitlement framework requires schools to offer a wide range of courses, options at Key Stage 4 and post-16. At least one third of those courses must be general, and one third must be applied. Schools will also be required to provide pupils with access to a set number of general and applied subjects. The Department published a list of general courses and applied courses that schools use for the purposes of the entitlement framework. The definitions that were previously in use were developed some time ago and were quite complex. In last year's autumn statement, I gave a commitment that the definitions would be reviewed. They were revised by a group of principals, the Education and Training Inspectorate and CCEA representatives and were published last December.

Parents and pupils should be interested in this issue because the post-primary courses that students study will decide their pathways for the rest of their lives. The entitlement framework allows for a greater balance of applied, vocational and academic subjects, which will result in more rounded students with more rounded futures, whether

they go to university, enter apprenticeships, or whatever it may be. The framework gives a broader understanding of society, education, career choices, and so on. There is now a legislative duty on schools to provide such a range of courses, so it is only right and proper that parents and pupils start to talk to their prospective schools about future courses that they can deliver.

Executive Committee Business

Superannuation Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to move the Further Consideration Stage of the Superannuation Bill.

Moved. — [Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel).]

Mr Deputy Speaker: As no amendments have been tabled, there is no opportunity to discuss the Superannuation Bill at this stage. Further Consideration Stage of the Bill is, therefore, concluded.

Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill: Final Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister of Finance and Personnel — when he is ready.

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

Mr Deputy Speaker: Does the Minister wish to address this issue?

Mr Wilson: I am sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker. Could I maybe —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Yes, take a few seconds. Members may take their ease. It is not a problem.

Mr Wilson: I apologise. I was not listening to what you were asking me to do, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I beg to move

That the Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill [NIA 15/11-15] do now pass.

I take this opportunity to thank Members for their support for the Bill's passage through the Assembly. I also thank the Committee for Finance and Personnel for dealing with the matter at such speed. It was important to move the matter on quickly, so I appreciate the Committee's work.

As I have said in earlier debates on the Bill, I, along with many other Members, would have preferred it if it had been possible for the Bill to have gone through by normal means. Unfortunately, however, because our objective was to have the Bill enacted by 1 January 2013, normal passage was not possible and we had to go for accelerated passage.

I believe that the Bill is a vital piece of legislation, which, in delivering on the Executive's commitment to eliminate air passenger duties on direct long-haul flights departing from airports in Northern Ireland, will improve and protect international air access. That is important from the point of view of promoting economic growth in Northern Ireland. Indeed, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has made it quite clear how that link helps to promote investment opportunities, especially from North America.

I know that Members continue to have concerns about air passenger duty generally, and its impact on short-haul flights. I also know that many Members desire a reduction in air passenger duty across the board. I have made it quite clear that we did not seek the devolution of all air passenger duty powers. That would have been expensive — it would have cost about £90 million had we devolved it and taken the rate down to zero. I know that some Members argued that it did not all have to come down to zero. Nevertheless, the assessment that the Executive made was, first, that they wanted to get the issue resolved speedily — we would still have been talking about the devolution of air passenger duty had we gone for full devolution, and we probably would have lost the flight to Newark by now. Secondly, we had to ask what was the best way of using those resources.

I can also advise Members that the Department, alongside the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and the Department for Regional Development (DRD), is undertaking work to consider further options that will improve connectivity, including on air passenger duty and non-related actions that might be taken. As I

am sure the Chairman of the Committee will point out, that is in response to one of the recommendations in the Committee's report on the issue.

In summary, the elimination of air passenger duty on direct long-haul flights is the main measure being taken forward through the Bill today. I look forward to Members' support to ensure that the Bill clears its Final Stage so that it can gain Royal Assent in time to introduce the measure for 1 January.

I was with representatives of Belfast International Airport yesterday, and they could not have emphasised more strongly the importance of this measure. I know that they are seeking, with great diligence, to look at how we can build on this legislation to increase connectivity with other parts of the world and to look for other direct long-haul flights. That will not only help the economy through investment and tourism but it will help to make one of our important strategic transport locations even more viable for the future. I commend the Bill to the House.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Final Stage of the Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill, and recognise that its passage will lead to the timely outworking of setting a zero rate of duty for direct long-haul flights ahead of the target date of January 2013.

The Minister originally briefed the Committee on 3 October 2012. He responded to the Committee's report on air passenger duty and advised that he intended to seek accelerated passage for the Bill.

12.00 noon

Before the Bill was introduced to the Assembly, the Committee engaged in an extensive evidence-gathering process on the proposals in the Westminster Finance Bill, which would transfer setting the rates of APD for direct long-haul flights to the Assembly. It became apparent during the Committee's consultations that there was a clear need to alleviate the burden of APD on direct long-haul flights from the North, especially in light of the more competitive position enjoyed by Dublin Airport. The Committee discussed how infrastructure was bringing Dublin closer to Belfast, and it considered that that should be taken into account in any future decisions on APD and our transport infrastructure.

The Committee received written submissions from a range of stakeholders and took oral evidence from Belfast City Airport, the international airport, Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau, the Hotels Federation, the Consumer Council and the Federation of Small Businesses. In its report, the Committee recognised APD as a:

"regressive tax which is particularly disadvantageous to businesses, consumers and the wider economy"

The North's peripheral location and dependency on air travel has undoubtedly been compounded by the South's airports enjoying a competitive advantage due to the low rate of the APD-equivalent air travel tax of €3 for all flights. The Committee also noted that a number of European Governments, including those of Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands, had reduced, withdrawn or not implemented aviation duty because of the adverse impacts that it had had on their aviation industries. The

Committee's report made a number of evidence-based recommendations to the Department, the majority of which were accepted.

The Bill's primary purpose is to alleviate the burden of APD rates by setting a zero rate of APD on direct long-haul flights from the North. Members will be mindful of the significance of aviation to the local economy, not only because of the reliance on air travel but in increasing tourist numbers and attracting business investment to the region. Although direct long-haul flights represent only around 1.5% of flights from the North, the policy intentions behind the Bill include the aim of retaining the North's economically important long-haul flights and, hopefully, developing new strategic flight connections. I certainly put a number of questions to the Enterprise Minister as well because I believe that she has a key role to play in conjunction with the Finance Minister in trying to open up new avenues to places such as Canada and looking at flights that perhaps previously existed. That obviously flags up the potential that is there to open up new routes to the benefit of the economy and the tourism sector.

Under previous rates of APD, airlines were forced to absorb the costs of the duty in order to retain services locally. The negative impact of the duty is demonstrated by the United Airlines example. The airline had to absorb around £3.2 million of costs to keep the Belfast to Newark route viable, a position that was clearly unsustainable. The risk of losing such long-haul routes if the Bill was not enacted by 1 January placed an urgency on the consideration and passage of the Bill. Therefore, the Committee agreed to support the Minister in seeking approval for the Bill to proceed by accelerated passage. Given the importance of retaining the Newark flight route, the immediate potential to attract more business and trade to the North and the detailed scrutiny already undertaken, the Committee agreed to support the Minister's request for accelerated passage in order to have the Bill in place by 1 January.

It was clear to the Committee that stakeholders regarded the provisions of the Bill as a step in the right direction. However, there were repeated calls for consideration to be given to extending the scope of the transferred powers to include short-haul band A flights, which represent 98.5% of flights from the North. In its report, the Committee concluded that the Executive, in the first instance, should continue to press the case with others for the abolishment of APD across the board. In his recent evidence to the Committee, however, the Minister confirmed that there was no prospect of the British Government softening their position of being wedded to using air passenger duty as a revenue-raising measure. Indeed, in its final report, the Committee also concluded:

"given both Treasury's insistence on devolution rather than exemption of APD and the determination of the .. Coalition Government to retain APD ... as a revenue-raising measure, any future reduction ... on Band A flights ... is likely to be achieved only through the further devolution of powers to also cover Band A rates".

Although supportive of the continued campaign to abolish APD across the board, the Committee called on the Minister to propose that the Executive commission independent expert research into the business case for

reducing or abolishing APD on band A flights departing from the North, including rigorous economic modelling and the forecasting of options, that would inform Executive consideration of whether or how wider devolved powers over air passenger duty should be exercised. In his response to the Committee report, the Minister advised that that research should consider the full range of options to improve the North's connectivity, including APD and non-APD-related actions that might be taken, and he confirmed that his officials were in discussion with counterparts in DETI and DRD to consider how that can best be commissioned. The Committee welcomes that planned work and looks forward to considering the associated terms of reference at the earliest opportunity. That and other work arising from the Bill is essential in order to maximise the economic opportunities that arise from devolution. The Committee will look forward to the combined efforts of DFP, DETI and DRD to establish new, direct, long-haul routes to key business and tourism hubs. The Committee will continue to engage with the Department in monitoring the outcome of that work, and, personally, I will be particularly interested in the outcome of the research into the business case for transferring band A flights. I believe that, given the economic circumstances in which we find ourselves, there is an onus on Ministers and the wider Executive to examine objectively all existing and potential strategic economic levers that can or could be utilised to help rebalance the regional economy.

To conclude, I should put on record the Committee's gratitude to all those who provided written and oral briefings during its scrutiny of air passenger duty. That was vital in allowing the Committee to establish a sound evidence base for its report and subsequent recommendations. I also thank the Minister and his Department for the constructive way in which they engaged with the Committee on the matter. Finally, I would also like to acknowledge the past and present members of the Committee for their time given in the detailed consideration of the policy proposals that lie behind the provisions in the Bill. I think that is nearly comprehensive enough.

From a party perspective, I think that we should take the recent news into account. I do not think that we should go through business today without mentioning the situation at Patton in my constituency of North Antrim. One of the issues that we considered and one of the examples that was flagged up during the Committee's consideration was the construction sector and how construction companies are positioning themselves to avail themselves of major projects on the island of Britain. I am aware of local workers who are involved in projects in places such as Wales. When you have a situation like that, with workers flying back and forward week in, week out, it costs thousands of pounds in air passenger duty for band A for those companies.

It important to highlight that what remains to be discussed and debated is the further 98.5% of air passenger duty. We need to take into consideration the impact that that has on the real economy. Given the hit that construction and the construction community have taken and could take in the context of Ballymena and the domino effect that that will have on subcontractors in places like counties Derry and Antrim, air passenger duty is not only an issue of keeping flights open or tourism but a big issue for construction as well. I look forward to the work that will be undertaken

by the Minister and his Department. I look forward to working constructively with him, because this is an area that has huge potential for our local economy. I welcome the progress that has been made by the Executive in securing the transfer of the powers to date, but we need a fuller debate on the full transfer of air passenger duty. The economic benefits are staring us in the face. Yes, there is a cost involved, and perhaps this will involve another rigorous negotiation with the British Government and the Treasury statisticians, who are more than willing to put one over on us. That is the challenge ahead for the Executive and for the Minister of Finance and Personnel. I look forward to taking that work forward on a constructive basis.

Mr Girvan: The Committee Chairperson has used this opportunity to link to the Patton issue. Very well done.

I welcome this debate, and, in doing so, I will take a slightly different stance. I appreciate the work that the Committee has done in its evidence sessions. To take APD on fully would involve a significant cost to the Northern Ireland Executive, and, as such, the route that the Minister and the Executive have taken — to put pressure on the Exchequer in London to look at APD in the region in its entirety — is the correct one. The UK suffers because of its stance on this matter. I welcome the opportunity to take this on board, and, with only a modest hit to the block grant, we should secure the current situation. Although only long-haul flights will take advantage of these measures, it gives us an opportunity to encourage other airlines to come on board and see Northern Ireland as an opportunity to link to Europe as one of the major markets.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. In welcoming what the Bill opens up, I am sure that the Member, who has no constituency interest whatsoever in the matter, is a very firm supporter of the international airport. Does he welcome the opportunity that the Bill will open up for Belfast City Airport to introduce flights to Europe and other long-haul flights? I am sure that he will join me in welcoming that level of true competition.

Mr Girvan: As far as Northern Ireland is concerned, I appreciate Peter's tongue-in-cheek way of saying that. We have to look at securing what we have and make sure that we have a viable international airport. Belfast City Airport — George Best Airport, as it is called — is a city airport. There is an issue over the length of the runway there and its capability of dealing with certain long-haul flights. What is deemed to be a long-haul flight may be different for certain people, and reference has been made to a range and a band. Aldergrove has the capability of using that. I am not necessarily agreeing with Peter on that point, but we have to make sure that Aldergrove — Belfast International Airport, not Aldergrove — takes advantage of the opportunity to encourage additional long-haul flights. If any airlines can take advantage of that at the harbour airport, we should let them go ahead as well.

Northern Ireland has brought this forward as one of the tools to help us rebalance our economy and ensure that we do not miss opportunities. However, it is not just about tourism opportunities but about business and inward investment. We must allow work to go on through the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to encourage additional flights. That work has been going on.

I welcome some of the things that I have been hearing about, indicating that there are other providers who have

an interest in coming here, which would potentially reduce our dependence on taxpayers to fund certain things. I appreciate that this proposal was brought in to deal with an environmental tax. As far as I can see, it is not delivering on that basis. It has been brought in just to attract additional revenue. Carbon offsetting or whatever they want to call it does not necessarily seem to have been the main objective. The objective seems to have been to rake additional money into the coffers.

12.15 pm

Now that we have this opportunity, we should see ourselves as a direct link into the United Kingdom and for those who want to tour. We are competing, which makes us different from most other regions. Dublin has a very reduced rate of APD. In fact, they have abolished it in several areas and are looking to do away with it in totality. As a result, we have to compete on that basis. A lot of other UK-based airports do not have the same competition. You can be in Dublin 40 minutes or an hour after crossing the border. We need to look at ensuring that people from Northern Ireland can take advantage of travelling from Northern Ireland and returning to Northern Ireland.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for giving way. In embracing the issue, we are embracing long-haul flights. The Chairman of the Committee raised the issue of the wider context of APD. Indeed, he made the argument effectively for the abolition, pretty much, of APD. There is a wider debate to be had on that. On this side of the House we believe that it is an issue that is still to be proven, and we proceed on an evidence basis. Earlier, you welcomed the fact that the Chairman managed to shoehorn Patton into the debate. Will you also welcome the fact that the party opposite has obviously had a conversion to Thatcherite low taxation? Irrespective of the merits of the debate, the clear Damascene conversion that has happened across the way is to be welcomed.

Mr Girvan: I am glad to hear that. I did not appreciate that Sinn Féin had turned into part of the Tory party. Thank you very much for that. I welcome that, if it is the case.

I very much welcome the opportunity to bring this forward. We hope and pray that many flights will take advantage of it. I thank the Finance Minister and the Executive for the work that they have put into it and the Committee for the evidence that has been brought forward, and I congratulate them on that. We have had a good balance in the way that it has been presented.

Mr Cree: I support the Bill at its Final Stage. The Committee has spent a lot of time taking evidence and has dealt with the subject most thoroughly. APD started off as an environmental tax, but it is clearly now a fundraising tax for the Government. The European Union emissions trading scheme was introduced in the United Kingdom in January. It is designed as an environmental tax. It relates to fuel inefficiency in aircraft, the miles flown and the load carried. It is a more practical method of taxing aviation pollution costs. Therefore, APD is exposed for what it is: simply a government fundraising exercise. APD should be scrapped or at least offset against the European trading emissions scheme. That is something that the Minister might take up in another place.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Éirím le fáilte a chur roimh an chéim deiridh den Bhillle seo. I welcome the Final Stage of the Bill. As we know, it devolves to the Assembly the power to set the rate of APD to be applied to passengers on direct long-haul flights that take off from destinations in Northern Ireland, known as band B, C and D flights.

The measure was spurred by the fact that the existing flight from Belfast to Newark was in danger. That flight is essential, in so far as it brings in huge revenue from business and tourism. Other powers over APD, specifically for band A flights, will not be devolved through the Bill. As we know, under the Azores judgement, the cost of measures such as this has to be borne by the Executive. In this case, the cost to the block grant is, we are told, around £5 million. That is a price worth paying, considering that the flight in question benefited this region to the extent of around £100 million over seven years. Indeed, the airports have told us that, were we to gain the services of three new carriers with similar passenger levels, there would be the potential to create between £300 million and £400 million in extra revenue over a similar period. Therefore, this is a good deal for us and one that we should welcome. As the airports suggest, there is a market for further flights of this type, and that is a market that we should exploit and exploit to the full. I have been in touch with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment about that potential, and she assures me that she and her Department are doing their utmost to gain the maximum benefit from the Bill. That is also to be welcomed.

The Chair of the Committee mentioned the other element of the debate, which deals with band A flights. Band A flights make up 98.5% of flights from here, compared with 17% in the UK. That shows clearly that we are dependent on air travel. We have not gained the exemption that the Scottish highlands and islands have gained from the band A duty, because apparently we do not qualify under the revised European rules. That is a pity, but it is a fact that we must face. We should explore the possibility of powers being transferred to vary the band A duty as well. When we look at Dublin, we see that the domestic rate for APD is around €3 compared with £13 here. That does not make us very competitive.

Some Members will mention the cost of the transferral of powers over band A duty, which is estimated to be £50 million to £60 million per annum. That may or may not be true. I agree with the Committee's recommendations in its report that a proper cost-benefit analysis should be carried out on the transfer of powers over duty for band A flights and a business case made. At the end of the day, if the powers were transferred, they would give us the ability to vary APD. That does not mean that the cost would need to be at the maximum level. The Executive would have the power to set the rate.

The Chairman mentioned most of the major points that were raised during the Committee's evidence sessions and by members of the Committee, and I am largely in agreement with the points that he made. On behalf of the SDLP, I welcome the Bill and the effects that it will have. I urge the Minister to explore the possibility of extending the powers to cover band A flights. A LeasCheann Comhairle, gabhaim buíochas leat.

Mr Dickson: I welcome the opportunity to speak at Final Stage and echo my colleague Judith Cochrane's previous

statements on the legislation. It represents a significant step forward as we seek to create a more competitive Northern Ireland. In this and previous debates on the legislation, the difficulties that we face in Northern Ireland due to our unique geographical position, with stiff competition from the Republic of Ireland, have been outlined. With an already low rate of APD in the Republic of Ireland, this legislative change will start to at least bring us closer to a level playing field with our southern neighbours on long-haul flights and will further enhance our capacity to attract new business.

This progress, however, is not the end of the story. As we look to strengthen our position in future global markets, we must seek to use this momentum to build on our successes. It is essential that we continue to push for the further devolution of regional air regulation if we are to meet our long-term goals, and, in this regard, I urge the Executive and the Minister to lobby and fight for greater Treasury co-operation in redressing inconsistencies. The track record of our air travel sector in contributing to the economy and employment market is clear for all to see, and, on this basis, there is a rationale for further extending the facility to set our own APD rates to include travel closer to home. The fact remains that current short-haul rates continue to have a detrimental impact on regional flights within the UK and, undeniably, place a premium on our connectivity with the rest of the United Kingdom.

One issue has not yet been raised by Members in today's debate. It is the further disadvantaging of local travellers by the double payment of APD on other short-haul destinations when you have to transit through one of the London hub airports. Flights to many parts of Europe are simply not delivered from any of the three Northern Ireland airports, so we suffer a double whammy from having to pay the lower rate of APD twice.

I ask the Minister to continue to deal with those issues as we welcome and support the introduction of the Bill. As previously stated by other Members and as will no doubt be said after me, the devolution of long-haul APD rates is an opportune step forward on the road to addressing disparity for Northern Ireland air travellers. The Alliance Party supports the Bill.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister to wind up the debate on the motion.

Mr Wilson: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was listening this time, so I actually got your instructions. I thank all Members for taking part in the debate and for their unanimous support.

I left these remarks to the end, because I did not want to make them in my opening speech. I was hoping that, at some time during the debate, the Member of the Green Party might have drifted in to take part. Let us not forget that air passenger duty and a lot of the other tax impositions that have befallen the poor population of the United Kingdom were at the behest of people such as those who populate and support the Green Party. They have said that they will change behaviour by imposing financial hardship on the people of the United Kingdom. I would love to have heard his view on the issue. Perhaps the unanimous opinion that we have had around the House would not have been as evident. He has dodged out of this because, I suspect, he knows that this and many of the other green taxes are not all that popular with the people,

even some of the people who support him. The rhetoric sometimes disguises the real impact that some of the Green Party's policies would have on our daily lives and how they would hit the pockets of people across the United Kingdom.

I will deal with some of the issues that have been raised. I thank the Chairman and all the other Committee members who have spoken for the work that they have done. A number of issues raised are worth dealing with.

12.30 pm

The Chairman made a very important point about what we should do to build on this for the future. Once the Bill gets Royal Assent, we will have a zero rate of tax on long-haul flights. However, the Chairman's point was that there is significant work to be done in capitalising on that to bring in other long-haul flights. There is a bit of a chicken-and-egg situation here. The Chairman quite rightly raised the issue of the role of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, especially the Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland, in getting those direct flights. The evidence is that airlines will be interested in bringing planes to Northern Ireland not only on the basis that they will have a cost advantage of £135 on the tax, or whatever it happens to be, but on whether there is a market. Generating that market will probably require a lot of work that is focused in the areas from where we think we can best get the direct long-haul flights.

On the other hand, of course, Tourism Ireland and the Tourist Board will argue this point: why should we spend money promoting Northern Ireland in a certain place if flights are not already available to transport the people who you are seeking to market? I will have to have a conversation with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment about how we make sure that, now that we have the advantage, we build up a market and can approach airlines.

The Chairman quite rightly identified that the Canadian market is one that must be targeted initially. At one stage not so long ago, 50,000 people a year travelled from Northern Ireland to Canada and back on direct flights. So, there is already a market there that I think that we can capitalise on. If we can prove that there is a market and can spend some money promoting it, it will be easier to get some of the airlines interested in flying that particular route. There are a number of other areas that I think would be natural targets for us, both for investment and tourist potential. Again, the same amount of work needs to be done on those. However, it means that some finance has to be risked in trying to promote Northern Ireland in those places, even though we initially do not have the direct flights.

The Chairman and other Members also raised the issue of extending air passenger duty to include band A flights. The Chairman also made the point that a lot of construction industries might benefit from that. Anybody who goes on a flight first thing on a Monday morning or comes back late on a Friday afternoon will see just how packed those flights are, especially with people who have gone over to England or Scotland to work and who then fly back. His argument is that if we were to reduce air passenger duty on those flights, it would help to reduce the costs of the firms that are seeking to get work in England, Scotland or Wales and would, therefore, make them more competitive. Mr Bradley made a similar point.

That is a reasonable point to make. I suppose that the difficulty is ensuring that you are targeting the reduction for those kinds of people because, of course, lots of people will travel on flights from Northern Ireland for purposes that are not work related. You would be subsidising those flights at the cost of the public purse here in Northern Ireland. Given that it is difficult to differentiate between different kinds of passenger, you cannot always be sure that the money will be well targeted. The same applies when you consider other flights that people are using to maybe go away for weekend breaks further afield, etc. In that situation, you are actually taking money out of the Northern Ireland economy. How do you differentiate between those who are going for business purposes, which is bringing work back to Northern Ireland or is bringing money into the Northern Ireland economy, and those who are simply going away for pleasure and are taking money out of the Northern Ireland economy?

Mr Bradley suggested that one of the ways in which the cost could be reduced was to have air passenger duty for band A devolved to Northern Ireland but not reduce it by the full amount. However, given the fact that it is sitting at around £13, even if you were to halve it, you must ask yourself whether, marginally, it would make much of an impact on the cost of a flight and whether it would generate all that much extra business. I suspect that £6 is not going to deter people from flying into or out of Northern Ireland. Although it would be one way of reducing the cost, I am not so sure that it would have the impact that the Member is hoping it would have; that is, making that travel much more competitive.

Mr Cree raised an important issue. I need to check my facts on this one, but given the European emissions trading scheme and the fact that people will have to buy credits to burn fossil fuels, he is asking whether this is double taxation? I am not too sure whether it applies, or is intended to apply, to the aviation industry. If so, then he is right that there would be double taxation.

The whole point of having air passenger duty was that it was a tax that sought to deter people from travelling on airplanes and, therefore, it cut down the amount of fuel burned by flights from the United Kingdom and, as a result, it reduced carbon emissions. If the airlines are already required to buy credits for doing that anyway, all we are doing by imposing this tax is making our own aviation industry less competitive than that in other parts of the world where such a tax is not imposed.

We already know that this was the whole purpose behind the Irish Government reducing the tax to €3: they saw it as a way of making their flights more competitive than those from Northern Ireland, or, I suspect, those from other parts of the United Kingdom. People could fly into Dublin and then take long-haul flights and escape a sizeable amount of tax; and if they were flying business class, they could save well over £100. There is an element involved, although I am not too sure of my facts and, therefore, do not want to say that there is double counting as the trading scheme may not apply to the aviation industry.

Mr Dixon made an important point on which we need to have further discussion. There is a growing body of opinion across the United Kingdom saying that we are disadvantaging our aviation industry by having air passenger duty full stop. I hear that at Westminster as well. At the start of the debate, I was teasing about the

Green Party. Although air passenger duty started off as an environmental tax, the Chancellor has made it quite clear now that it is a lucrative way of raising revenue. Airline travel is increasing and is designed to increase very rapidly over the next number of years, which is one of the reasons why they are having to look at extending airports, etc. So, this is a good way for the Treasury to make money. However, there is growing opinion that this is disadvantaging the aviation industry as a whole. One of the points that we need to make in the debate is that if air passenger duty disadvantages the aviation industry as a whole — and the Member made a very important point here — it doubly disadvantages the people who travel from Northern Ireland to hub airports in GB and then fly on. They are paying air passenger duty to get to the hub airport and then they are paying it again for the flight from the hub airport to wherever they happen to be going. That is because we do not have direct long-haul flights to more than one destination.

Of course, if that is true for people in Northern Ireland, it is probably true in regions across the United Kingdom, whether it is the north of England or Scotland, because a lot of people fly from the north of England down to Heathrow, etc. They would, therefore, face the double payment. That is a general point that needs to be made.

We have said that DETI, DRD and ourselves will look at other options, and we have given that commitment to the Committee, but, for the immediate future, the emphasis will be on direct long-haul flights from Northern Ireland. I know that has been welcomed by the international airport and Continental Airlines, and I hope that we will be able to build on that to have a greater number of direct flights to other parts of the world.

I have made this point in previous discussions with the Committee. Some time ago, I attended an event in the House of Commons at which they were talking about the airline industry. I spoke to the chief executive, I think it was, of Newcastle airport. He told me that since they had started direct flights to, I think, Dubai — I cannot really remember, but I think it was Dubai, or somewhere in the Middle East anyway — the amount of business that that region had commissioned with the area where the direct flight was going had increased tenfold. I suppose that epitomises the importance of this measure. If we can find ways of increasing the number of direct flights from here to other parts of the world, there could be huge business consequences and, therefore, job consequences for people in Northern Ireland. Of course, that fits in very well with the objective that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has of growing exports in markets that are not declining, but in parts of the world where markets are expanding.

I thank Members for their support. I thank Sinn Féin, which now supports the DUP policy of low taxation, as has been pointed out by my colleague. We can tick air passenger duty off the list; we can tick corporation tax off the list; we can tick the regional rate off the list. I am glad to see that we have had a leavening influence on Sinn Féin on this. Perhaps it is moving from deep red to slight pink. Who knows? Maybe they will become true blues before the end of this Assembly period.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I think the Minister's concluding remarks were well off the subject.

Before we proceed to the Question, I remind Members that under the provisions of section 30A(13) of the Finance Act 1994, the Bill must pass with cross-community support.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill [NIA 15/11-15] do now pass.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As there are ayes from all sides of the House, and there are no dissenting voices, I am satisfied that cross-community support has been demonstrated.

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 4.00 pm, as agreed by the Business Committee at its meeting yesterday. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time.

The sitting was suspended at 12.44 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

4.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Speaker: Questions 3 and 9 have been withdrawn and require a written answer.

DARD: Headquarters

1. **Mr Hussey** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she consulted all relevant Executive Ministers before deciding on Ballykelly as a suitable location for her Department's headquarters. (AQO 2782/11-15)

5. **Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she will publish the business case for the relocation of her Department's headquarters. (AQO 2786/11-15)

7. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she will support the development of a rail halt at Ballykelly to help staff who will be commuting to there when her Department's headquarters are relocated. (AQO 2788/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. With your permission, I will answer questions 1, 5 and 7 together.

Advancing the relocation of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development headquarters to a rural location is one of the Executive's Programme for Government commitments. The decision on the specific location of the DARD headquarters is a matter for me, as Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. That decision came at the end of a structured process that involved an assessment of 23 potential locations against a defined set of criteria, plus the fact that there is an Executive-owned site comprising a range of buildings, some of which have the potential to be used for office accommodation. Since I made that decision, I have directed my officials to prepare a business case that considers the options that would deliver the headquarters on the Ballykelly site. The necessary work required to complete that business case is now well under way, and, once all the necessary approval stages have been completed, I would be happy to consider publishing it.

I recognise that the location could cause problems for some existing staff. Therefore, I have outlined my commitment to use the time that we have available to ensure that the transition from a Belfast-based headquarters to the rural setting of Ballykelly is made as easy as possible for all staff involved.

I am aware that the railway line to Derry crosses the lower end of the site, and I have already written to my colleague the Minister for Regional Development inviting him to give serious consideration to a rail halt in the vicinity.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for her answer. Given that Executive consultation was non-existent, would she agree that she showed a complete disregard for the pressure on local infrastructure in the area? Would it not have been better to have those conversations before you announced your decision?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member might be surprised to know that I do not agree. On 3 September, I brought my decision to the Executive. I announced to my colleagues the objective criteria that were applied. I informed them of my move and that I had decided on the Ballykelly site. As far as I am concerned, I did what I needed to do to inform my Executive colleagues of the way forward.

Mr Dickson: Minister, do you accept and agree that you will cause substantial disruption to families and children, particularly for those who currently work in the Department here in Belfast, and that families will have to consider the relocation of schools and homes? How will the Minister factor that in to her business case?

Mrs O'Neill: I have always said that I recognised that the location could cause some potential difficulties for some existing staff. I have given assurances that I do not want to see any existing staff being forced to move. I think we have enough time, over the next number of years, to facilitate everybody's needs. I am very committed to making sure that we work with the trade unions to make sure that staff interests are taken on board all along the process and have done that, to date, to get us to the position we are in now. I will take time to develop and implement the changes. We need to look at more flexible working patterns so that we can facilitate people's home and work balance. I do not expect that existing members of staff will be forced to move, but I accept that, sometimes, that is not possible in all situations. However, I am committed to ensuring that we have two years ahead of us in which to plan properly for staff and filter into all decisions their needs as well.

Mr G Robinson: Is the Department making any financial contribution to a rail halt at Ballykelly?

Mrs O'Neill: The idea of a railway halt is a good one. From the outset, I can easily recognise the benefits that that would bring to the site, not just for DARD HQ staff but through the wider tourism potential that a stop there would provide. It is something that I would welcome and, as I said, something that I have written to Minister Danny Kennedy about. I want to explore the conversation even further with him with regard to the potential costs and how we can work together. I believe that a railway halt would provide benefits to the wider north-west area, not just DARD headquarters.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Can the Minister expand on the benefits of relocation?

Mrs O'Neill: The benefits are second to none, particularly in redressing the imbalance in public sector jobs. Some time ago, the Bain report looked at the independent review of the policy we had in the Executive for the location of public sector jobs. The proposed location of Ballykelly, which has now been announced, will naturally stimulate the local economy through increased local spending. The provision of the high-quality, well-paid public sector jobs at all levels right across the Civil Service that are being brought to the site addresses the imbalance that

has existed for far too long. The relocation will also help to share the wealth right across the economy and will contribute to better and more appropriate balanced economic growth right across the North, as opposed to just concentrating on one area.

Mr Frew: In similar circumstances, we have an ex-military camp in St Patrick's Barracks, Ballymena, and Ballymena has been identified as a regional hub through the Bain report. How can the Minister choose Ballykelly over St Patrick's Barracks, which is the midst of a regional hub?

Mrs O'Neill: Many Members of the House would stand up and fight their corner for their constituency and rightly so; that would be proper. There was a programme board in place. It worked through all of the process and looked at all the objective criteria, which included deprivation, the availability of jobs, the availability of public sector jobs and unemployment levels. When all those factors were applied, Limavady was at the top of the list, along with Strabane, so the north-west was at the top of the list. In that position, you then consider what is available to you. The fact that the Ballykelly site is Executive-owned was, in itself, a plus, as is the fact that there are buildings on the site that could potentially be used. I would not expect the Member to do anything less than to stand up for his constituency. That is natural.

Mr Dallat: Will the Minister agree that Ballykelly is right bang in the middle of a high unemployment area that has lost thousands of jobs in the past five years? Despite the disappointment of some of my colleagues around the Chamber, will the Minister assure me that, as far as possible, 800 jobs will go to Ballykelly?

Mrs O'Neill: As I have said to the House before, there are 800 jobs in DARD headquarters, so the intention is to move the whole of the headquarters to one site. You will be aware that I have made announcements in respect of Forest Service relocation, so there will be a number of jobs going into the Fermanagh area. I take on board the Member's welcome for the Ballykelly site and assure him that it is my intention to move the majority of those 800 jobs into Ballykelly.

Potato Farmers: Compensation

2. **Mr Anderson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what consideration she has given to introducing a compensation programme for potato farmers who are facing crop losses due to the prolonged period of wet weather. (AQO 2783/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am very aware of and sympathise with the difficulties being experienced by farmers throughout the North due to the bad weather. Unfortunately, there are currently no financial support measures available for farmers' losses due to the poor weather. Any potential for compensation funding is further severely constrained by business case requirements and compliance with restrictive EU state aid rules.

It is too early to reliably quantify losses where crops have been affected by the weather. However, where farmers have been affected, I encourage them to contact their local CAFRE adviser for assistance. My officials are monitoring the situation and have provided and will continue to provide practical information and advice to help mitigate the risks associated with severe weather. Also, CAFRE,

AFBI and the Ulster Farmers' Union will jointly run the Potatoes 2012 event at Greenmount on 28 November. That is an opportunity for growers to meet and speak with CAFRE development advisers and members of the wider industry.

In addition, I recently announced that I would reduce the amount of modulation money taken from farmers' single farm payment in 2013, making an additional €19 million, which is roughly £15 million at current exchange rates, available to farmers in their 2013 payments.

The Department has also commissioned research into additional measures that farmers can take to mitigate risk associated with extreme weather events. The findings of that research will be disseminated to farmers through CAFRE when it becomes available.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for her response. In light of the lack of compensation payment, can the Minister tell us how much financial support has been given to date through the current rural development programme in order to help and assist vegetable producers and processors?

Mrs O'Neill: I can give the Member the overall figure of £500 million for the rural development programme, but I am happy to get the Member a breakdown of the money that goes directly into the sector. It is a very important sector, and I totally take on board the fact that the weather is creating a catastrophic disadvantage to them this year. I encourage them to ask for advice and to work with our CAFRE advisers. I will continue to do all that I can to help them to mitigate the risks that are associated with bad weather. Issues that we need to explore much further include insurance for people in the sector. In the time ahead, I intend to have meetings with insurance providers to discuss that further. It would also be useful to have conversations with the Ulster Farmers' Union in that respect.

Mrs Dobson: Will the Minister outline which concrete steps she has taken to introduce a scheme to support potato farmers who have experienced crop losses? As she is aware, the issue was raised in the House last November by my party colleague John McCallister. Then, she offered sympathy and cited financial pressures as the reason for not supporting those farmers.

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will be aware of the current economic climate. We are in difficult financial times. The fact that the Executive face significant financial constraints, in turn, has a knock-on effect on Departments.

I will assist farmers and potato growers in every way that I can. I have outlined the type of things that we are involved in, such as the workshops, in particular, which I think people find very useful. We are also working to improve productivity and get the most out of what someone grows with the least input costs. So, we will continue to do all the work that we can. We will continue to work with the Ulster Farmers' Union and all those people because it is important to me that we maintain that sector and help it to grow. Unfortunately, at this time, financial compensation is not something for which I have the budget to be able to consider.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Can the Minister assure me that DARD is doing all it can to assist all sections of the farming community affected by bad weather?

Mrs O'Neill: It is fair to say, as I said, that the full extent of the difficulties that are being faced by the sector this year are due to issues that the House has debated on many occasions, particularly, quite recently, the fact that farm gate prices are falling and input costs are rising and the weather. So, we have to work with the industry right across the board no matter what sector we are involved with. A lot of the work that I am doing in that regard is around training events, the workshops that I talked about and access to development advisers. The provision of management tools is also important in assisting farmers to calculate the volume of fodder that they have in store, their stock demands and all those issues. We provide advice on harvest and poor harvest management of potato crops. We are also involved in a lot of work on benchmarking. Those are all practical ways in which the Department can assist all sectors throughout the farming industry.

Mr Rogers: In addition to the potato farmers, grain and fruit farmers have had an equally terrible year. Has the Minister any plans to address the problems faced by sectors of the farming industry that depend very much on feed all year round, such as the pig men and poultry men?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, absolutely. We are looking at each sector and all of its needs. As part of the wider Agri-Food Strategy Board work, we have broken that down sector by sector. We are looking at the challenges and barriers to growth for each sector and how we can work together. The grain sector is having particular problems, as it is not always feasible or attractive for a farmer to even want to start growing crops. We will continue to work with all sectors right across the board on their potential for growth in the future and the barriers that exist.

Mr Speaker: Question No 3 has been withdrawn.

Flood Alleviation: Belfast

4. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her Department's plans for flood alleviation work in Belfast. (AQO 2785/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In the aftermath of the June flooding, Rivers Agency undertook considerable work to clear debris and blockages in watercourses right across Belfast. That was in addition to the agency's ongoing inspection and maintenance programme to ensure that the main watercourse network, for which it is responsible, is functioning as effectively as possible. The agency also investigated watercourse-related flooding to determine what could be done to reduce the risk of further flooding. Where minor works were identified, many of these have been progressed. The agency is also seeking approval from the Drainage Council to take on responsibility for a number of watercourses where there are clear benefits for this work to be undertaken by government.

For my part, I am delighted to confirm that I have secured an additional £6 million for flood alleviation work to help to protect 1,700 properties in east Belfast. That will enable Rivers Agency to commit to the integration of flood alleviation work as part of the Connswater Community Greenway project and is in addition to the £5 million-worth of stand-alone work that Rivers Agency is taking forward to reduce the risk of flooding.

4.15 pm

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for her answer. There is, however, still a problem, particularly in south and east Belfast. The Minister referred to east Belfast, and I am grateful for that, but what remedies is she pursuing in south Belfast?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will be aware of the ongoing discussions with the Rivers Agency about south Belfast. Some time over the next two weeks, I intend to visit sites in south Belfast to take a look at the issues for myself. A number of residents have asked me to do that, and I am happy to do so. It is about protecting people and about the Rivers Agency providing the best response in protection and flood alleviation for the future. You will be aware that we are working on schemes. I will give you an idea of the amount of spend in the greater Belfast area: about £1 million of maintenance work will be carried out over this financial year, about £200,000 of which is for upgrading facilities or constructing new ones, grilles and clearing things like that. I am happy to write to the Member with more detail on the south Belfast flood alleviation plans in particular.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. What co-ordination takes place between flooding responders to improve the flood response?

Mrs O'Neill: Co-operation and co-ordination between flooding responders is provided through a two-tier structure that includes representatives of the Rivers Agency, Roads Service, NI Water, NI Fire and Rescue Service and the local government emergency management group. The Rivers Agency chief executive chairs the flood strategy steering group, and the Rivers Agency also chairs the flood liaison group at an operational level.

The remit of the groups is to co-operate and co-ordinate with one another before, during and after any flooding event to ensure a more co-ordinated response to the public in the event of flooding. The recent co-option of the Fire and Rescue Service and the emergency planning co-ordinators who represent groups of councils is, I believe, added value. Continued improvement is expected through developing an understanding of the co-operation between the various parties.

Mr Cree: Will the Minister confirm that her Department's financial contribution through the Rivers Agency to the Belfast flood alleviation scheme is enough to allow it to perform its duties satisfactorily on an annual basis? Will she reassure us that the flood alleviation scheme is, indeed, a priority for her?

Mrs O'Neill: It was evident from my initial answer that it is a priority, given the fact that I went to DFP, made a bid and secured the £6 million necessary to carry forward the integrated element of the project. Aside from that, another £5 million will be spent over the next number of years on the stand-alone measures that need to be taken. Obviously, it is a massive scheme, but those things will help with the process until we get the whole flood alleviation scheme and the integrated flood alleviation scheme implemented. So I have prioritised the issue. Rivers Agency believes that it needs to be prioritised, which is why we bid for the additional money.

Mr Speaker: Question 5 has already been answered.

Forest Service: Relocation

6. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress has been made in relocating the Forest Service to Fermanagh. (AQO 2787/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: This is an important project for Forest Service. My general policy is to relocate more DARD jobs to rural areas. In the case of Forest Service, there is an added rationale for seeking to relocate its headquarters to Fermanagh, because 15% of the land area is already forest. Furthermore, we want to reach our overall target of 12% in the North, and it is a reasonable expectation that the density of forest in Fermanagh could increase to over 20% of the land area by planting in the wettest soils, which are so difficult for agriculture and so common in that county.

My view is that the senior managers and their support staff will be better informed about the issues that concern forest users, the timber industry and the Assembly if their headquarters were close to the place where most of the forests are. The chief executive of the Forest Service is assembling a team of staff to take forward that work. He has held meetings with NIPSA to address staff concerns and discuss planning of the move, which I expect to take place within the next 12 to 18 months.

A property search is being carried out for suitable premises. Some preliminary work has been done to develop a business case, which will need to include an assessment of the equality impact. I will discuss the options with the chief executive when that work is more advanced.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra a thug sí dúinn. I thank the Minister for her comprehensive answer and for the positive news coming out of this development.

On a separate matter, given that Fermanagh has a significant number of ash trees, will the Minister update the House on the situation with the ash dieback disease? How is she attempting to control that?

Mrs O'Neill: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as ucht a cheiste. As the Member knows, ash is a very common tree in Fermanagh, and I believe that, if the headquarters were located there, the Forest Service's effectiveness in monitoring threats and dealing with any outbreaks would improve. However, you have rightly highlighted the issue of ash dieback — chalara disease — and it is important that I update Members on where we are with that.

I am pleased to report that, following a meeting with Minister Shane McEntee last Friday, we agreed the need for additional safeguards on imports of ash wood and bark. After consulting stakeholders, we found that there were regular imports of ash logs for manufacturing purposes, mainly for hurls and firewood. That is a potential pathway for disease, and it is an unacceptable risk. Today, I authorised the making of a statutory rule, the Plant Health (Wood and Bark) (Amendment) Order, as emergency legislation. That means that, from today, ash wood can be imported only under certain technical conditions as set out in the order. I believe that that is a proportionate response to the risk of introducing disease in wood, which is greatest in the case of ash logs that have bark attached. From today, they can be imported only if they are accompanied by an official statement that the wood originates in an area known to be free of Chalara fraxinea. However, the risk

reduces substantially if the wood receives some simple treatment. The order provides for a range of suitable treatments that will, I believe, allow manufacturers to continue to produce hurls. I am aware that the equivalent legislation has been brought in today in the Twenty-six Counties. We have very much taken a fortress Ireland approach to this issue, and it has served us well to date.

Mr Speaker: I am very conscious of the original question, and the supplementary went slightly outside that. It possibly answered Mr Sheehan's question, which is question 10, so maybe he will have some thoughts on what supplementary he might ask the Minister.

Mr Kinahan: I enjoyed listening to all that about the ash trees, as we all need to know about the issue, although maybe not at that time.

It is good to hear that a business case is being put together. However, are we looking in that business case at the extra cost that will be involved with people having to travel to Fermanagh to areas such as Tardree and others to manage the woodlands elsewhere? Alternatively, will we have local offices that may add an extra cost so that those staff can manage areas that are further away from Fermanagh?

Mrs O'Neill: There are 61 posts in the Forest Service headquarters, which are currently based in Belfast. Some of those posts are closely connected with the work that the staff do in forests, particularly those that are maybe in County Antrim, County Down or County Armagh, and they will not move to Fermanagh. However, because some are occupied by specialist staff and require specialist skills, staff are not readily available from elsewhere, so it may take time to locate them. We have 12 to 18 months ahead of us to plan properly and make sure that staff are taken with us along the way. Over time, I expect that most if not all of those jobs will eventually relocate to Fermanagh, if we are reasonably flexible about the timing and working arrangements. The Forest Service is staffed mainly with specialist staff, many of whom have family commitments in the greater Belfast area, and it is important that we take all those things into account as we develop the plans to move forward. However, I hope to be there in 12 to 18 months, and the intention is that all staff will move there at some stage after that.

Mr McCarthy: I appreciate the Minister's response to the questions on relocation. Now that she has raided all the east of the Province of all the good jobs, is there anything left at all for Strangford, or will we have to travel to Ballykelly, Fermanagh and God knows where?

Mrs O'Neill: It certainly makes a change for people to have to travel to the west to get a job. I have no interest in stripping anywhere of jobs, but we need to have a fair distribution of public sector jobs, and that is what this move is about. It leads the way, as a Department is taking its jobs to the west of the Bann. It gives us a fair distribution for economic growth, for the jobs that are available and for the opportunities for people who work in the Civil Service.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle, agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas agus as a freagraí. Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, and I thank the Minister for her statement and answers. Does she have any plans to expand the Forest Service in the Newry and Armagh constituency?

Mrs O'Neill: That is a very parochial question, but I am happy to write to the Member about it. As you know, we have a fantastic natural resource in the area, and we are always looking for further opportunities to develop it, particularly in social and recreational use, through the Forest Service. Michelle Gildernew brought forward that policy in the previous mandate. I am happy to write to the Member about any plans for expansion in the Newry and Mourne area.

Mr Speaker: Mr Lyttle is not in his place for question 8.

Ash Dieback

10. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had with the Irish Government in relation to the tree disease ash dieback. (AQO 2791/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Tá brón orm, Pat. I may have answered this question when I was answering Phil Flanagan's question.

As I said, we brought in emergency legislation on 26 October, and today I will bring forward further legislation. I know that you have been contacted by some people, particularly hurl manufacturers, who are concerned about the future. I assure you that I have met all stakeholders and have assured them that I am trying to find a balance between protecting our forests and our most native species, which is the ash, and being mindful of the fact that these are manufacturers who operate businesses. I think that we have found a way forward that works for everybody and makes sure that we take on board everybody's concerns. As I said, we have applied the fortress Ireland approach. It has served us well to date. I will continue to work with Minister Shane McEntee and Minister Simon Coveney in any further moves that we may need to take in the future.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Sheehan. I appreciate that the Member's thunder may have been stolen on this one.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for her answer, and I welcome her previous answer to my colleague Mr Flanagan. She alluded to the fact that a number of people on this island, particularly hurl makers, have a livelihood that depends on the importing of ash wood. I welcome her announcement today. What steps are the Southern Government taking to eradicate the outbreak of ash dieback in County Leitrim?

Mrs O'Neill: It is regrettable, to say the least, that ash dieback has been discovered in a young ash plantation in Leitrim. I understand that it was discovered in imported plants. Surveys for planting and established ash woodland continue to be carried out as the South have introduced the emergency legislation.

As I said, the South have taken other measures: I think they have destroyed 30,000-plus ash plants to eradicate the disease. The priority is eradication. Our fortress Ireland approach then kicks in for imports that may come in from England or the rest of Europe. We will continue to operate the fortress Ireland approach and have close co-ordination at official and ministerial level across both Departments.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for her answer. When foot-and-mouth disease came on the scene, the carcasses of

the beasts were burnt. I appreciate that certain people on this side of the House might say that the right approach would be to burn the ash and therefore probably deal with the hurley stick business in a different way. That is one angle, and it is said somewhat tongue-in-cheek. Is the eradication being carried out on-site? I have been told that moving the spores of damaged trees spreads it round the country. That is what could happen, so they will have to be burnt on-site.

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will be aware that we have had no outbreaks in the North at this stage. Hopefully, we will not have to deal with it. I believe that the South burned them on-site, but I can confirm that with the Member.

What is most important is the balance between protecting our native species and protecting our important industries, such as hurl making. The hurl makers were very concerned about the implications that this would have for them, but I am confident that we have found a way forward that will allow them to continue to make hurls way into the future. Maybe the Member should go to a game, and maybe he would enjoy it. It is very much about a balanced way forward to protect the species and the industries that depend on it.

Mr Speaker: Question 11 has been withdrawn.

Salmon Stocks: Foyle

12. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she is taking to preserve salmon stocks in the Foyle system. (AQO 2793/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Loughs Agency is very progressive as regards the conservation and protection of salmon in the Foyle system. There are three aspects to that work: the making of regulations; enforcement of those regulations, and freshwater habitat management. All are underpinned by best scientific advice. That approach reflects fully the resolutions and guidance from the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization.

4.30 pm

The agency has established from scientific research the optimum number of adult salmon needed for each river each year to maximise productivity. It has established targets in regulations that must be met if fishing is to be allowed. Currently, no commercial fishing is allowed, and angling is by catch and release only on the Foyle and Finn rivers. That is rigorously enforced, and poachers are prosecuted.

In parallel to regulating salmon fishing, and detecting and deterring illegal fishing, the agency seeks to boost the productivity of rivers by protecting the juvenile salmon habitat from impacts such as drainage, livestock incursion and pollution, and by restoring and enhancing their habitats by introducing spawning gravels and nursery stones, and by fencing the banks. That approach maximises the number of smolts produced.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the Minister have any plans to buy out the remaining netting entitlements on the Foyle?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have any such plans at present. Currently, there is no legal netting of salmon on the Foyle system, and that will not be reviewed until 2016 at

the earliest. I am mindful of the tradition of commercial fishing in the area and the future demands of high-quality protein such as fish. I am also mindful of the need for rural jobs. I look forward to a situation in which the abundance improves and there is an exploitation opportunity to sustain a food and recreational fishery.

Mr Speaker: Order. That ends questions to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. The Minister for Regional Development is stuck in traffic somewhere, so I ask the House to take its ease for a few minutes until he arrives — *[Laughter]* — at which time we will move to Department for Regional Development questions.

Regional Development

Mr Speaker: I want to say to the whole House that we will still have 30 minutes for this Question Time; we will not lose any time whatsoever. Questions 3 and 6 have been withdrawn.

Twaddell Avenue, Belfast

Mr Humphrey: I welcome the Minister to the Chamber. I wonder whether the Minister has been stuck in a traffic jam in Twaddell Avenue.

1. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will review the current road layout of Twaddell Avenue, Belfast. (AQO 2797/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Mr Speaker, I am grateful to the House and to you for your indulgence. Members will know that I have been travelling back with others from the very sad circumstances in Cookstown, the funeral of Mr David Black. It was a very solemn and dignified occasion. I apologise to the House for my slight delay.

In answer to the question: the Member will recall my answer to his previous Assembly question concerning the road layout at Twaddell Avenue, which is designated as part of the A55, a busy and important traffic route to the north side of the city that runs through a residential area. In 2001, Roads Service implemented a traffic calming scheme on Twaddell Avenue that provided a central hatched area, incorporating right turn pockets and the provision of pedestrian refuge islands; and footway build-outs, placed strategically along the length of the road to assist pedestrian movements and to help to reduce the speed of vehicles.

Although Roads Service is aware, and it is regrettable, that there have been incidents where vehicles travelling along Twaddell Avenue have caused minor damage to door mirrors of parked vehicles, there is still no scope within the existing carriageway to provide a wider parking area and retain the benefits of the existing road layout. To widen Twaddell Avenue would involve the relocation of kerb lines and a reduction in the size of the existing footways. It would also entail the removal of a number of mature street trees and the relocation of underground services, drainage pipes and gullies.

Mr Speaker, I am not as fit as I used to be or thought I was. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his answer, and I agree absolutely that he has answered this question

before. However, since then, there have been other incidents and a very serious accident on Twaddell Avenue. At peak times in the mornings and evenings, heavy duty vehicles such as lorries, buses, and so on, use that very busy thoroughfare in a built up area in a settled community. Will the Minister, his diary permitting, visit Twaddell Avenue to have a look at it at some mutually convenient time in the future? This situation is just continuing and there is no resolution.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. On the basis of generosity of spirit, I will endeavour to fulfil his request as early as possible.

Parking: Penalty Charge Notices

2. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister for Regional Development how the number of penalty charge notices issued in the three months since the charge increased compares with the same three-month period last year. (AQO 2798/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware that the increase from £60 to £90 in the cost of a penalty charge notice (PCN) took effect on 4 July 2012. Roads Service has advised that in the intervening period to 31 October 2012, 37,277 PCNs were issued. That represents a decrease of just over one tenth when compared with the 42,052 that were issued in the same four-month period in 2011. My Department is monitoring the impact of the fee increase on illegal parking, as well as the various types of contraventions. It is anticipated that this monitoring exercise will run for approximately 12 months, to allow for a comprehensive assessment to be completed. My Department will then carry out a statistical analysis of the results found in Northern Ireland compared to those in England and Wales, where differential penalties are in place, and in Scotland, where differential penalties are not in use.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his reply. Will he detail how that positive indication for the first six months of this year compares with the preceding year?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary. There may be various factors. I hope that the decrease indicates an increased level of compliance, but, as I say, there is a range of factors to be considered. It is not always possible to identify those immediately, and that is why the 12-month assessment will be important in analysing all the data available.

Mr Spratt: Given that 28% of clearway tickets are issued on the Lisburn Road in Belfast, 86% of them between 4.30 pm and 6.30 pm, does the Minister consider that the company carrying out the contract at present is doing so in a fair and equitable way across the entire city of Belfast?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. He will know, as will most Members, that the contract for that work was recently re-tendered and has been allocated. I am satisfied that the successful tender does fulfil all the necessary requirements, including increased savings to the Department on the quite substantial cost of these services.

I know that the Member has raised, on a constituency basis, the issue of a particular section of clearway. I am still assessing that particular situation and will be happy to liaise with him as we give further consideration to the questions he has raised.

4.45 pm

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Minister will know from my earlier questions that penalty notices are a huge issue in Enniskillen. Has there been a decrease in penalty notices in the town since the charges increased?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I do not have numbers for Enniskillen in particular. I am happy to write to the Member and give him some detailed information, but my sense is that the overall reduction will, I hope, be reflective in all parts. However, we will certainly confirm the information that he seeks.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Minister, for your answers so far. Minister, you have helpfully told us that you are prepared to undertake a statistical analysis to assist you in deciding whether to introduce a two-tier penalty system. Will you tell the Assembly what factors you intend to take into account in that analysis?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for the supplementary question. Obviously, there are various factors. There is the implementation of a system that would give variations. It may well be that some of the units that are currently used would have to be adapted for that. I am happy to continue to look at measures that might improve the overall service that we seek to provide. We do not seek to punish people. Let me make it clear again that, for the company involved, there are no increased benefits for additional tickets being issued. It is not done on that basis, and the individuals who serve the tickets gain no personal benefit either. What we are trying to do is improve the flow of traffic and the management of parking. One hopes that, with greater compliance and acceptance of the rules and the code of parking, people should park properly and legally and, therefore, avoid penalty charge notices.

Mr Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

A5 Dual Carriageway: Derry to Strabane

4. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister for Regional Development when work will commence on the A5 section between the Derry City Council area and Strabane. (AQO 2800/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Work on the A5 western transport corridor between New Buildings and Ballymagorry and between Omagh and Ballygawley was due to start in October but has been delayed due to a legal challenge. In order to mitigate the impact of delays associated with the legal challenge, the contractors have been instructed to carry out preliminary works, which include ground investigation, ecology works and service diversions. That work is ongoing. However, it is not possible to say when the main construction contract works will commence, as that will be dependent on the timing and outcome of the legal challenge.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his answer. Further to that, how much money is being lost to his Department as a result of that delay?

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware, as has been previously indicated, that the clock is now running on those delays. Any delay will certainly result in increased costs in a number of areas. Assuming that there is no change in the total construction period, there will be direct, quantified inflationary increases arising from month-on-month delays

to the start of construction. The project team will attempt to mitigate the impact of any delay. However, the initial assessment of the impact of a delay to the starting date is in the order of £700,000 to £750,000 a month. Of course, the postponement of the scheduled start date will result in the Department having to declare back to the Northern Ireland block approximately £10 million for every month of delay.

Ferry Services

5. **Mr Hazzard** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the subvention of ferry services at Strangford, Rathlin Island and Magilligan. (AQO 2801/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department operates the Strangford lough ferry and secures the provision of the Rathlin ferry service under article 99 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993. The Lough Foyle ferry service, which operates between Magilligan and Greencastle, does not fall within the ambit of that legislation and does not receive financial assistance from my Department.

The Strangford lough ferry service is directly provided by Roads Service. The ferry is operated by Roads Service staff, with specialist marine work undertaken through an external contractor. Overall running costs vary from year to year, depending on the amount of maintenance work required by the vessels at annual refits. Almost all the maintenance work carried out is deemed essential in order to retain Maritime and Coastguard Agency certification. Roads Service has advised that, for 2011-12, the total subsidy equated to around £1 million, excluding notional costs.

The Department provides a subsidy to the Ballycastle to Rathlin Island ferry service. The amount of annual subsidy paid is in the order of £600,000, which equates to just under £8 per trip. I remain fully committed to the continued provision of ferry services to Rathlin, and I am working with the residents to improve island life, including developing an action plan agreed across a range of government entities.

Mr Hazzard: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Has the Minister considered a subvention for the Magilligan to Greencastle ferry, considering that it has carried more than three million passengers in recent years, or, indeed, the possibility of a bridge at Strangford, considering the millions of pounds that go into the ferry service there each year?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. The Department has not carried out a feasibility study on the building of a bridge across Strangford lough. It is envisaged that the cost of such a scheme would be extremely high. The likely cost of an aesthetically acceptable bridge, spanning the narrowest part of Strangford lough, would be in excess of £300 million. If the Member wants to put forward such a proposal, well and good, but this estimate is based on the cost of recently constructed suspension bridges. Given that the subsidy to the ferry service amounts to around £1 million a year, a bridge would not be considered an economically viable solution at this time.

There is no legislative basis for the Department to provide financial support for the type of service that runs from Magilligan to Greencastle. Therefore, at this stage, there are no plans to change that position.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for the part of his answer that related to the Rathlin ferry. Obviously, it is important that that ferry continues to operate in a way that benefits, first and foremost, the people who live on the island, and, secondly, those who wish to visit. Will he tell the House what information he has about an ongoing dispute between Rathlin Ferries Ltd and a pension company?

Mr Speaker: The Member must finish his question.

Mr Storey: Has he had any discussions with Rathlin Ferries Ltd about that issue, given that it was in the ombudsman's report back in August 2012?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. He will realise that this is a somewhat delicate matter and that I am not at liberty to go into substantial detail. I understand that discussions are ongoing between my Department and the operators, and I hope that we can get the matter resolved.

Mr Dallat: The Minister said that there are no plans to change the legislation that would allow funding for the Magilligan ferry service, which is the same line as was taken by his predecessor, Mr Murphy. However, surely the Minister would agree with me that, in this day and age of the new Europe that we live in, he should at least engage in discussions with his counterpart in Dublin with a view to having joint funding for that service, which is so important for filling empty beds on the Causeway Coast and other parts of Northern Ireland.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I am, of course, always willing to explore funding opportunities to see how we can improve services. I will simply say that the current legislative basis for the Department is not in place. The harbours legislation does not allow the grant-aiding of shipping, which is a reserved matter. The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 allows subsidy to be paid to the road ferry services in Northern Ireland, namely Strangford to Portaferry and Rathlin to Ballycastle, but it cannot be used to support services that go outside Northern Ireland. That is the current legal position. However, we can potentially explore whether there are opportunities, possibly through Europe or with the Irish Republic.

Mr Kinahan: What discussions has the Minister had with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development about her Department taking responsibility for Rathlin?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I am very pleased and proud to be the Executive representative with responsibility for Rathlin. I have enjoyed the three visits that I have paid to Rathlin as Minister. I think that I have developed a very good working relationship with the islanders and the islanders' forum. Other Departments may well feel that they have a more direct input, and I am happy to listen to those representations. I have not had any serious discussion with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. However, I have to say that I will not let Rathlin go easily.

Roads: Gritting

7. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister for Regional Development how much money has been set aside for the 2012-13 road-gritting programme for the South Antrim constituency. (AQO 2803/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his question. Roads Service does not hold information on its winter service programme on a constituency basis. Roads that are included in the Roads Service gritting schedule in the South Antrim constituency are treated from its Antrim depot in the northern division and from its Newtownabbey and Carrickfergus and Lisburn and Castlereagh depots in the eastern division. That said, I will say that each division retains client responsibility for all salting routes that are within its geographical boundary when, for example, providing reports to the roads incident desk or handling complaints and queries about the provision of winter service operations.

Application of the current policy ensures that just over one quarter of the total road network, which carries around eight tenths of traffic, is salted. This year, Roads Service has allocated £5.9 million to the winter service across its four divisions. Bids for additional funds for that service can be made by all divisions through the in-year bidding process. If costs over and above £5.9 million are incurred and in-year bids are unsuccessful, reductions in other maintenance activities will be required, for example, in road patching, bridge maintenance or other traffic maintenance activities. I must emphasise to the Member that, depending on the severity of the winter conditions, those allocations may change.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his answer. I appreciate that it might be difficult to extrapolate that information right down to constituency level. However, representations have been made to many of us about the provision of grit boxes. There seems to be an inconsistency in the way that the policy is applied across the Province, as it seems to be more stringent in some areas than in others. It can be difficult to get grit boxes in locations where public representatives deem them necessary.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I understand his point about his constituents. For information purposes, I will say that there are 11 gritting routes in the Antrim section and 114 in Northern Ireland overall. Those are reviewed regularly to ensure compliance with Roads Service winter service policy. In general, Roads Service salts main through routes carrying more than 250 vehicles a day, although, in exceptional circumstances, other roads carrying fewer vehicles will also be salted.

5.00 pm

The application of the policy ensures that just over a quarter of the total road network, which carries about four fifths of the traffic, is salted. However, I stress that it is applied consistently on a Province-wide basis. I will endeavour to find out the number of grit piles to give the Member some comfort, because I sense that he is not completely convinced by the answer he has received. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Beggs: Will the Minister advise us of how much salt is in storage and is available to Roads Service in the northern divisional area, which serves south Antrim and east Antrim? How does that amount of salt compare with the amount that is normally stored?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. He will be please to hear that the Antrim section salt barn at the Rathmore depot has been replenished and is full to capacity with 5,700 tons of

salt. The northern division has 36,289 tons of salt in stock, including 10,953 tons in the strategic reserve. The average winter in the division requires about 22,000 tons of salt, but the severe winter of 2009-2010 required approximately 36,000 tons, so stocks should be sufficient for the incoming winter. The eastern division has 14,382 tons of salt in stock plus a resilience stock of 3,500 tons.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for his responses so far. Are there arrangements between his Department and our local councils to ensure that the footpaths in our town centres are gritted during severe weather?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question, and he raises a very important point. I am very pleased that, since taking responsibility for this Department, we have been able to engage with local government and our colleagues in the various councils. Some 23 of the 26 councils are signed up to a memorandum of understanding with us. However, it is fair to say that it is simply not possible or economically viable to salt every road and footpath. So, a degree of prioritisation has been established between Roads Service and the other agencies and local government. That has the prospect to ease some of the problems that can emerge in any harsh winter conditions.

Mr Speaker: Question 8 has been withdrawn.

Fair Employment Tribunal: Dr Alan Lennon

9. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin** asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has sought further legal advice from the Departmental Solicitor's Office in light of the alleged ineligibility of the panel member on Dr Alan Lennon's tribunal hearing. *(AQO 2805/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: I have taken legal advice on this live tribunal case as a matter of course. As the tribunal hearing has not concluded, I consider the matter to be sub judice. So, I will not comment further on any advice I have received or on the proceedings before the tribunal.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Mr McLaughlin to ask his supplementary question, I remind Members that the sub judice rule in Standing Orders applies to tribunal hearings. The tribunal is very much active in the case of Dr Alan Lennon. I ask the Member and the whole House to be cautious. I will allow him to ask a supplementary question.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I observed that the Minister was very much out of breath when he arrived, but I thought that he would have recovered by now. I thank him for his brief answer.

Despite the ongoing proceedings, the Minister managed to decide that he would not appeal. Without interfering whatsoever with the issue that the Speaker has quite correctly drawn to our attention, will the Minister explain to the House how it is possible to demonstrate that that pre-emptive decision is based on the best and most up-to-date information and represents value for money in any way?

Mr Kennedy: I refer the Member to the reply that I gave earlier.

A32 Irvinestown to Enniskillen

10. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on his Department's plans to upgrade the A32 from Irvinestown to Enniskillen. *(AQO 2806/11-15)*

Mr Kennedy: First, I should advise the Member that the focus of the strategic road improvement programme in the current Budget period to 2015 is on the delivery of the A8, A5 and A2 dual carriageway schemes. Roads Service has identified a number of improvement schemes along the A32 Omagh to Enniskillen route that have been prioritised in affordability, buildability and value for money. The scheme at Drumskinny is now complete, and the scheme at Shannaragh, which has an overall scheme cost of £7.3 million, is ongoing and scheduled for completion in March 2013. Together, these schemes will improve the quality of the route, enhance road safety and reduce travel times. Design work is also well advanced on two further schemes along the route at Cornamuck and Esker Bog. With regard to the section of the A32 between Irvinestown and Enniskillen, a scheme at Kilgortnaleague — I think that my officials put these names in deliberately — *[Laughter.]* — has been identified as a priority. However, progression will be subject to satisfactory completion of the statutory processes and the availability of funding in future budgetary settlements.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The good people of each one of those townlands will be delighted at the Minister's attempts to pronounce them. The Minister mentioned the work that is going on in the three strategic dual carriageways. How the people of Fermanagh would love a dual carriageway. Are we any closer to reaching the stage where the proposed bypass at Enniskillen gets down to being a preferred route, moving on from being a preferred corridor?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question and, hopefully, I was able to pronounce those accurately without the use of any signage. The proposal for an Enniskillen bypass is something that I, as Minister, want to carry forward. Let me give that clear commitment. Obviously, we are in financially straitened times, and it is dependent on the budgetary settlements in the coming years. I have sought to carry forward as quickly as possible the Enniskillen bypass project and schemes such as the A26, Millennium Way, the Magherafelt bypass and a host of others in which Members will be interested for constituency reasons. I want to make those projects as shovel ready as we possibly can. I am conscious of the benefit that they could have for the construction industry, particularly the road construction industry. In recent days, unfortunately, we have been hearing of increased problems in the construction industry. All Members will be concerned about that, so if there are road-building projects that we can bring forward, I, as Minister, want to do that.

Comber Greenway

11. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration has been given to an extension of the greenway or the provision of cycle lanes to connect with the Belfast and County Down Railway bed running between Comber and Newtownards.
(AQO 2807/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The greenway is a seven-mile traffic-free section of the national cycle network developed by Sustrans, in partnership with Roads Service, along the route of the former Belfast to Comber railway line. The path was completed in November 2008 and provides a tranquil green corridor all the way from Comber to the

heart of east Belfast. It continues to prove extremely popular with both cyclists and walkers. I understand that although stretches of disused rail trackbed remain between Comber and Newtownards, portions of this route, which may have allowed an extension of the greenway scheme through Comber and on to Newtownards, have been built upon, leaving very few off-road sections available for use as a cycle route.

I am aware that discussions are continuing between my Department's officials and other parties, including local MLAs, councillors, Sustrans and Down Rural Area Partnership staff, to look at options to extend the Greenway scheme into Comber town centre. It has been acknowledged by this group that funding would need to be sourced from a variety of partner organisations to realise such a scheme. Unfortunately, under current funding levels, this proposal would likely attract a low priority for Roads Service when assessed and compared with other potential transportation schemes competing for the limited funding available. Therefore, Roads Service is unable to consider an extension of the greenway cycle path from Comber to Newtownards.

Mr Speaker: That ends Question Time. I ask the House to take its ease for a few moments as we move to the next item of business.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy] in the Chair)

Private Members' Business

Voting Age

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 to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are selected to speak will have five minutes.

Ms Fearon: I beg to move

That this Assembly believes that the voting age should be reduced to 16 for all elections and referendums; and calls on the Westminster Government to introduce legislation to accommodate this change.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. We have an opportunity today to send a message of inclusion to young people who are disenfranchised from the political system. Decisions are made every day that impact heavily on young people and many of those decisions will have a long-term impact on their future, yet they have no say in who represents them. I fully support the motion. I encourage others in the Chamber to get behind the 16- and 17-year-olds who are denied the right to vote. Representatives across the board need to wake up and recognise the widening gap between them and their younger electorate.

Much more must be done to engage with this sector of society, and it is absolutely vital that young people have the basic democratic right to vote. Personally, I have been extremely politically active and politically aware since my early teens, but I was only entitled to vote three years ago. I want to ensure that young people are given a greater say. The argument that older people know what is best for young people and would vote accordingly was used to deny women the vote in the 1900s, and it is as wrong now as it was then.

At the minute, there are many issues coming through the Assembly that relate specifically to young people; for example, the future of the education maintenance allowance (EMA). That is an issue that affects only those under the age of 18, yet they are denied the opportunity to elect policymakers. The voting age should be lowered to 16 so that young people can have a direct influence on who is elected to make those decisions. Young people are repeatedly stereotyped in the media and other outlets. It is said that young people are not interested in politics and are not mature enough to vote. There has been much talk recently about voter apathy and a lack of interest in society about politics, particularly among young people. This is simply not true. Young people are now more politicised than ever. The world is a much smaller place than it was when many of the people in this Chamber were 16. Global connections can be made at the touch of a button.

Sinn Féin believes that a dynamic could be created by lowering the voting age. It could open up new ideas, challenge old, bad practice and banish the myth that young people are not interested. I have heard this question asked before: can we trust 16- and 17-year-olds to vote? That question is irrelevant and, quite frankly, patronising. It

implies that younger people do not have the capabilities to make an informed decision. We have to accept that young people are intelligent, rational and articulate individuals. At 16, you can consider your career prospects and your educational future; enter into full-time work; become liable to pay tax and national insurance; give consent to medical treatment; consent to sexual relationships; and get married. At 17, young people are trusted to acquire a driving licence and to drive on public roads, but we cannot trust them to vote. This argument has no merit. That is one of the biggest responsibilities that anyone, at any age, can have. At the very point that society expects young people to assume many of these responsibilities, it is only right that they also get the right to vote. Not only are 16- and 17-year-olds able by law to make complex decisions and take on a wide range of responsibilities, but they are showing in practice that they want to make a positive difference. Locking young people out relies only on outdated views about their capacity.

As things stand, there are almost 50,000 16- and 17-year-olds in the North who are being denied the vote. It is the responsibility of all of us to get young people interested in the democratic process. We cannot, on the one hand, say that we are interested in young people's issues and, on the other, refuse them access to the ballot box until they are 18. In countries where the voting age has been lowered, younger voters have shown a higher turnout than older demographics. It is time that all elections and referendums on the island of Ireland are made equally open to young people. It is vital that we include young people in the political process as early as we can so that we can lay the foundations for future political engagement.

The motion should be a motion of confidence in the younger generation, and I urge everyone here to support it. I say this to those who do not: it only shows a fear of becoming irrelevant and a worry about how a young and increasingly liberal population will choose to use its vote. I cannot help but notice that a huge reason for political detachment is the very make-up of the Chamber. There is a very real perception in the community that the Chamber is male and middle-aged and too much so. It is time for change. I urge everyone to support the motion.

5.15 pm

Mr Ross: "It is time for change" is a particularly appropriate term to use today when the people of America are choosing what kind of change they want — the kind of change from four years ago or a new change. It is important to have today's debate. It is an issue that the Member, obviously, as the youngest Member of the House, has been lobbied pretty heavily on. I used to be one of the younger Members of the House. I was never particularly supportive of the concept of 16-year-olds voting. I have still not come round to that point of view, and I have not been convinced by the arguments that have been put forward so far that we should move towards that position.

Most people in the House would agree that voting is a huge responsibility. It is also a privilege that we all have in a democratic society. We want to make sure that our voters are —

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ross: Already; yes, of course.

Mr D Bradley: Does the Member agree that it is a little more than a touch ironic that one of the parties proposing the motion does not take its seats in Westminster. Were the issue to come before Westminster, it would not be in a position to vote for it. Would the proposer of the motion not be better spending her time trying to encourage those who could have a vote to take that vote and exercise it?

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

Mr Ross: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. On this and a number of other issues that can effect change at Westminster, I think that it would be important that all those elected to Westminster should take their seats. I do not think that that will come as any surprise to the Member.

The people who are involved in the votes-at-16 movement are clearly well educated and well motivated and take an interest in the political process. I do not think that there is any doubt about that. Indeed, many of us will have received correspondence from the organisations supporting it. However, I do not think that that can be said of the vast majority of 16-year-olds across the country. Indeed, I do not think that every 16-year-old will be watching proceedings today with a huge degree of interest.

The fact is that, right across the world, 18 is the age at which voting tends to happen. I think that there are 142 countries where voters must be 18. We have a handful of countries where people can vote below that age: North Korea is one where the age is 17; in Brazil and Nicaragua, it is 16; and in Iran, it is 15. I suggest, though, that the elections in North Korea and Iran do not make an awful lot of difference. However, the fact that, across the world, 18 is the age that is generally accepted, shows that it is the age at which most societies believe that a young person becomes an independent-thinking adult.

Ms Ruane: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ross: I will, if it is very brief.

Ms Ruane: Thank you. Go raibh maith agat. I understand that the Member's party is opposed to voting at 16. Will he explain whether his party is united in that? We are given to understand that one of his MPs supports voting at 16. Is that a united position?

Mr Ross: I think that Members are able to hold their own individual views on this. I do not think that that would be unique. The Assembly party here is united in the view that it does not believe in voting at 16. I do not think that it can be much clearer than that.

The proposer listed a number of things that people can do —

Mr Dickson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ross: I am not going to give way, because I am running out of time.

The proposer listed a number of things that you can do at 16, but that on its own is not an argument to reduce the voting age. I could list a number of things that you cannot do at 16. You cannot drive; you cannot drink alcohol; you cannot smoke tobacco; and you cannot rent out films such as 'RoboCop' or 'Trainspotting'. You cannot even play computer games such as 'Resident Evil'. The reason why society has said that you cannot do that is because of protection. Indeed, it is somewhat ironic that some of the individuals in the House who will argue to give 16-year-

olds more responsibility by allowing them to vote are the very people who also argued for and supported raising the smoking age to 18 and want to have further restrictions on young drivers and drinkers for their own safety. There is somewhat of an irony there.

Perhaps the clearest example is jury duty. You cannot do jury duty until you are 18. I do not think that many Members in the House would advocate having 16-year-olds serving on juries.

One of the other arguments that has been advanced is that young people are affected by decisions taken at Parliament Buildings or at Westminster. That is absolutely correct. However, there are younger children who are also impacted by decisions taken by politicians. Such issues as childcare policy and post-primary transfer policy relate to young people, regardless of whether they are four, five, six, 14, 15 or 16. Therefore, it is not a good enough argument to say that decisions taken here impact on 16-year-olds, so they should be able to vote. I think that any party worth its measure should be listening to the views of young people, regardless of whether they can vote.

The other argument that was advanced by the Member was that —

Mr Eastwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ross: I cannot; I only have 50 seconds left, and the Speaker will not give me any more extra time.

The final argument that was advanced was that this measure will increase young people's participation in the political process. Although the Member said that that is the case where voting age is reduced to 16, there is no evidence of that. If we look at the Isle of Man, where the voting age was reduced to 16 in February 2006, we can see that only half of those eligible to vote actually registered to vote, and fewer than that turned out to vote at elections. So there is no evidence at all to suggest that this will increase any participation or connection between young people and the political parties.

That said, I think that it is important that political parties do all they can to ensure that they engage with young people. I do not think that it is necessary to change the law and allow younger people to vote, but it is important that politicians and political parties try to engage with young people, —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Please draw your remarks to a close.

Mr Ross: — listen to the concerns, listen to the issues that are important to them and reflect on them, because you have to be a political representative for all the people in your constituency, not only those who can vote.

Mr Beggs: The Member who has just spoken indicated that harm would befall a young person, and, for that reason, they were not allowed to smoke or drink, but he did not explain what harm would befall them if they voted. I did not hear any explanation there. Surely, every democrat must be concerned —

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for giving way. The point that I was making is that there are Members in the House who are arguing that young people are not responsible enough to take decisions about practices that will harm their own health. It is something that I have heard the Member's colleagues argue for before. It is about that sort

of level of individual responsibility. Some Members say that young people do not have enough individual responsibility to smoke or to drink, but they think that they have that individual responsibility to vote. That is the contradiction that I was highlighting.

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

Mr Beggs: Every democrat should be concerned about declining voter turnouts. Without a healthy level of participation in elections, any body will have difficulty in claiming legitimacy. I first stood for election in 1998, when there was a 70% turnout in Northern Ireland. In just 13 years since that, there has been a 14% decline in the Assembly electorate. One in five of those who were voting have stopped voting. That must be of concern to everyone, and we must change that decline. I am particularly concerned by the most recent European election, where there was only a 43% turnout.

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: I have already given way.

In the east of the Province, there were six constituencies in which fewer than four in 10 electors chose to cast their vote. I am talking about East Belfast, East Antrim, South Antrim, Lagan Valley, North Down and Strangford. Several of them had a turnout of less than 35%. That must be of concern.

I thank the Assembly research staff for their information packs, which I found very useful. In particular, they contain information regarding a recent House of Commons information booklet. There are some useful facts in it. In 2001, a MORI poll estimated that 39% of 18- to 24-year-olds voted, compared with 70% of those aged 65. We have an increasing population, and we are finding that the younger population are not voting. That is not good. We need to change that decline.

In 2003, the Electoral Commission stated that there were clear signs of public disengagement with voting, particularly among the youngest section of the electorate, in which fewer than four out of 10 18- to 24-year-olds were estimated to have voted in the most recent general election. Interestingly, it went on to say that an estimated 11% voted in the English local government elections. What will become of us in the future if we do not try to take action to change that decline?

Mr Hussey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Beggs: Certainly.

Mr Hussey: I am sure that you listened intently to Mr Ross's comments regarding the support that the DUP is not going to give to the motion. Would you be surprised to know that, in 2005, the then MP Peter Robinson signed an early day motion in favour of 16-year-olds voting?

Mr Beggs: I am aware that a number of its other MPs signed motions. Perhaps it makes a difference when it does not have an input in the ultimate decision. Ultimately, this decision has to be made at Westminster. We need to send a clear signal to Westminster. Now that there has been agreement to give this power to Scotland, I would argue that it would be hard not to give it to Northern Ireland.

Another important aspect is that citizenship training is now happening in our schools. Our young people are

being taught about our elected bodies, the importance of voting and how it works. However, what happens at present is that they are given the information and, come the age of 16, many leave school and face a minimum of two years before they have an opportunity to exercise their vote. They forget what they learned at school before they have had a chance to exercise it. How much better would it be if, having gone through citizenship training at school, young people were presented with the chance to exercise their vote at the next election and so participate? The habits learned in our younger years tend to follow through to our latter years. It is vital that we encourage more people to get out and vote. That is also the view of the Power Commission, which was established by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust. It was very concerned with why people were disengaged from politics and how that could be rectified. Recommendation 16 in its 'Power to the People' report, published in February 2006, was that the voting age "should be reduced to sixteen". This is not rocket science.

I may come at the issue from a different angle and perspective from other unionists who oppose it and are somehow fearful of empowering young people. In Carrickfergus, through the youth education social inclusion programme (YESIP), peer research went on among young people, who were supported by the YMCA. My experience was that I was one of a group of adults who provided some background information, guidance and advice. Ultimately, however, the young people made the decisions. I found them to be a very mature group of young people who appreciated the difficult decisions that often have to be made. They were aware of how you have to gather the facts and argue your case. That group was successful in getting some funding and set up a YESIP information point café for young people. Regrettably, that funding has now come to an end. It is vital that we empower our young people and encourage them —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Beggs: — to exercise their vote. The Assembly must give a clear message: let us empower young people to vote.

Mr Eastwood: First, it is very good that the motion has come to the House. I am somewhat surprised at the DUP's position given, as Mr Hussey outlined, its leader's position. He is a Member of the House and a member of your Assembly team, Mr Ross. Even though you said that your Assembly team was united, your leader, Mr Robinson, signed an early day motion supporting this very proposal. I hope that you will go and talk to him after this, or maybe before the debate is over. Maybe you will have to change your mind.

The motion is a very good one. There are obviously some well-rehearsed arguments for why young people between the ages of 16 and 18 should be allowed to vote. They can get married and go off to fight in wars in Afghanistan, Iraq or anywhere in the world, but they do not get an opportunity to vote for the Government who might send them to Afghanistan, where they might end up losing their life in defence of their country.

The value of widening the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds is much more than just a rights issue. It is about the political process engaging with young people, which I think we are very bad at. Evidence from other countries shows

that if you get young people voting from age 16, they form the habit and tend to vote for the rest of their life.

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mr Eastwood: I will give way if you are prepared to explain your leader's position.

Mr Ross: The Member will give way for what I am going to ask him.

The reality is that those between the ages of 18 and 24 can vote, but they have the lowest turnout in election after election. I do not follow the argument made by Mr Beggs and you, which is that reducing the voting age to 16 will somehow increase participation among the youngest voters in society. Should we not concentrate first on ensuring that we get a higher turnout of voters between the ages of 18 and 24 before we even considering widening the vote to 16-year-olds? Other Members argue that we would get their engagement, but there is no evidence to suggest that we would.

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

Mr Eastwood: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

You have not answered my question, Mr Ross, but I will attempt to answer yours. It is clear that if young people begin to vote at an earlier age and are encouraged to do so while learning about citizenship and politics at school, they will tend to vote for longer, get into the habit and understand its importance.

5.30 pm

Mr Hussey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Eastwood: Yes, I will.

Mr Hussey: Do you find it strange that a party that has the word "democratic" at the beginning of its name — the Democratic Unionist Party — is not prepared to widen democracy?

Mr Eastwood: I find a lot of things strange about the Democratic Unionist Party.

I think that the point is very well made. If young people are able to go and fight wars that some Members might support, they should be entitled to vote for the Government who will send them there. I am fed up hearing politicians say that young people are apathetic and not interested in politics. I often speak to young people, as, I am sure, do many Members, and I find that they are far from apathetic. They are very interested in many issues, but, in a lot of cases, one thing that they are not interested in is how this political process and these political bodies engage with them and attempt to encourage them to become involved in politics. That is a failure on our part. Every one of us has a responsibility to ensure that young people engage with this type of politics.

Young people think very carefully and very clearly and are passionate about many issues that affect them and others not only in this country but around the world. We have failed young people if they are not voting from the ages of 18 to 24. We have not excited them, and we have not engaged with them. Every one of us has an opportunity to do that going forward. What better opportunity to do that than to begin the process at age 16 and allow

those people, whose lives are affected very seriously by politicians not only in this House but in other places, to have an opinion and have their voice heard? I do not think that there should be any problem with that. This is an opportune time to begin a relationship with democracy for 16- and 17-year-olds. Nobody in the House should be afraid of that.

I try to engage as much as I can with young people, but, if they are not even entitled to use their vote, when we ask them to do many other things, what kind of confidence are we showing in them today? There are not many DUP Members here, but I plead with those who are to use their franchise today and to vote to support the extension of the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds. Hopefully, between now and the time of the vote, you can call Peter and ask him whether he has changed his mind; I do not know whether he has.

Mr Dickson: Having the vote is one of the most important rights in a democracy. Therefore, the age at which people can vote is a significant democratic and political issue. The Alliance Party believes that the voting age should be reduced to 16 for all elections. After all, Members will have heard on numerous occasions the slogan "No taxation without representation". The clearest argument that we can see for such a change is not the arguments that have been made in the House today but the basic and very simple principle that, if you pay taxation, you have a right to representation and a say in that representation. That clearly comes at the age of 16 when, if you are in employment, you have to pay income tax.

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dickson: Yes.

Mr Ross: Is the Member arguing that 16-year-olds who stay in education and do not pay taxes should be able to vote?

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

Mr Dickson: No, that clearly is not the argument that I am making. Many pensioners and others do not pay tax. However, when people have reached a certain point, the principle is applied in the round, which means that 16-year-olds who pay tax have a right to representation and to a say in that representation. If you are old enough to work full time and pay taxes, it is fair to have a say in how that money is spent and to have the opportunity to hold to account those who make policy decisions about the spending of that money.

I ask Members how they would feel if they were 16, working full time and paying taxes, with a real interest in politics and a desire to have a say in how tax on their hard-earned income and wages is spent but were unable to do so. I am glad to see that at least some Members of the party that is espousing opposition today, including another of its MPs, are here. Maybe this is cynical — I do not know, Mr Deputy Speaker — but some sign early day motions and others take publicity opportunities to ensure that they are seen to support voting at 16.

Mr Swann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Dickson: I will.

Mr Swann: I am just conscious that it will not be recorded in Hansard that you actually held up a photograph of Ian Paisley Jnr. *[Laughter.]* The Northern Ireland Youth

Forum tweeted on 19 October 2012 that Ian Paisley Jnr is happy to go on the record as being in favour of voting at 16, although his party is agnostic about it. I am not sure whether that is the Assembly party, the entire party or just the members who are not really sure at this moment in time.

Mr Dickson: Those who champion democracy cannot and should not stand over such a situation. Whether 16- and 17-year-olds are denied the vote is not widely regarded to be as serious an issue as, for example, the historical denial of votes to women and other groups in society. Maybe, the DUP would have agreed with those who denied the vote to women by describing them as being feeble-minded. Maybe, the DUP believes that 16-year-olds are feeble-minded. That is what people said about women, who were denied the opportunity to vote.

If the arguments against lowering the voting age are found to be weak or unconvincing, the exclusion of a particular section of the public from voting has to be taken very seriously. The maturity of 16- and 17-year-olds is an issue for many who are opposed to any change. Of course, questions of maturity are important. Ideally, we want citizens to be properly engaged, but, as my colleague from East Antrim Mr Beggs said, citizenship is part of the curriculum with knowledge of the political system and an understanding of the nature and significance of the issues that are the subject of public and political debate. If we take such logic to its natural conclusion, then we must ask whether citizens who are 18, 40, 50 or 62 years old are equally mature to make decisions. Can we honestly say that all citizens currently entitled to vote have the same understanding? We cannot, and so that argument must not be used to justify denying 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote.

Another argument put forward against the change is that extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds will not lead to a significant increase in the number of people who vote. That may be the situation, but, although others have said that it is, this is not an issue of increasing the number of people who vote. That is not why I support 16- and 17-year-olds being able to vote. I do so because it is the right democratic thing to do. If it encourages more people to vote, that is a good outcome, but it is not the principal reason for supporting the vote for 16- and 17-year-olds. None of us knows for certain whether such an extension would lead to a significant increase in the number of people who vote. We need to consider and implement measures that deal with political disengagement. If extending the vote encourages people to engage with politics at a younger age, everyone in the Chamber should agree with me that that is a good thing. If it did not have such an effect, that would be disappointing. However, it is certainly not a reason to deny politically active 16-year-olds their democratic rights.

Many of us have received letters from the Northern Ireland Youth Forum and other youth groups. We cannot deny that there are young people who are passionate about politics. Today, I received six or seven postcards in the mail, and I can expect to receive more following the debate this evening. We have an opportunity to demonstrate to those young people that we respect their views as valid and we regard them as citizens who are equal to the rest of us. I urge Members in the House to support the motion. Let us send a message to our colleagues at Westminster, who have the decision-making powers. Yet again, I challenge

Sinn Féin, and this comment has been made: why do you not go and use your vote and stand up for what you are preaching in this House today?

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I would like to begin by thanking my party colleague Megan Fearon and the Green Party's Steven Agnew for tabling the motion. It has been highly anticipated by large sections of society for a few years now. It is great that we finally have the opportunity to address one feature of the demographic deficit that exists in our political system.

One of the early mantras of progressive political discourse at the outset of the American revolution was "No taxation without representation". Perhaps, it is fitting, on the day that US citizens go to the polls, that progressive political discourse is echoing that same historical disdain for demographic deficits. Our mantra is similar: no taxation without participation. Participation is at the very heart of the motion. I have little doubt that today's debate and the ongoing work being done by various youth forums and Comhairle na nÓg throughout Ireland will be the catalyst for a more progressive and participatory democracy in years to come. That is vital.

For decades, political establishments throughout much of the world have been manoeuvring political power away from participatory models of democratic accountability, as large-scale apathy and disillusionment with the political system has come to characterise much of what democracy stands for today. In some recent instances, such as in Egypt, the demand for participatory democracy was so intense that the political elite did not even have the time for adequate reform before it was too late. Indeed, Tahrir Square demonstrated to political establishments throughout the world that deficits in the democratic system will always be filled at a later date, not always as intended. We need to recognise the shortcomings of our political system and address the grievances of the disenfranchised. Today's motion is certainly not opportunistic or in any way demagogic, so it is disappointing that we have once again had the same burst of —

Mr Dickson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hazzard: Go ahead.

Mr Dickson: The Member referred to the disenfranchised. Surely all the people who voted for your Members of Parliament are disenfranchised because of your failure to represent them in that House to vote on this and other important issues.

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

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his intervention. I remind him that that is one of the main reasons why large numbers of people vote for us. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Hazzard: Today's motion is certainly not opportunistic or in any way demagogic, so it is disappointing that we have once again had the same burst of reactionary paroxysm from the usual pulpits across the way.

We have only to look at some of the daily activities of most 16- and 17-year-olds to highlight the absurdity of the current electoral situation. Our 16- and 17-year-olds are expected to make decisions on their future career path, and they show huge maturity by learning to drive,

balancing hobbies and sporting commitments with their education and setting up bank accounts to support their part-time employment and, indeed, fund their travels throughout much of the world. Our young adults at 16 and 17 are just as rational, intuitive and articulate as their 18- and 19-year-old siblings, yet they must remain silent on polling day. They watch elected representatives make decisions every day on matters that affect their future, be it EMA, corporation tax, education reforms, welfare cuts or even the decision by various Governments to go to war. Are we really saying that a 16- or 17-year-old is mentally able to lift a beret and a gun but not a pencil and a ballot? It is not just about capability. Young people rely on public services such as transport, schools and hospitals, and yet they have no influence over the policies that affect their functioning.

I am not saying that reducing the voting age to 16 will be the great panacea for political apathy in an emerging generation, but I have no doubt that it can be a powerful catalyst in commencing a process of renewed participation. The progressive argument is starting to prevail throughout large parts of the world. Recently, we have seen Argentina and Scotland join political systems in Latin America and Europe in widening electoral suffrage to include 16- and 17-year-olds. There is finally an acceptance that it will be our young people who will lead real and valuable change in years to come. The decades of cronyism and golden circle politics must be banished to the past, for it is the young — even the unborn — who will eventually pay for this democratic deficit. There are tens of thousands of young adults across the North who want to participate in our political system. It is vital that we open the door to that progressive development.

I again refer to our friends across the sea. Abraham Lincoln once aspired to:

“government of the people, by the people, for the people”.

Indeed, his Gettysburg address has become the definition of wide, true democratic participation. Yet, some in the House would prefer government of some of the people, by a few of the people, for their people. Our young adults in Ireland would put some of the political dinosaurs in this House to shame. I look forward to the day when young vibrant members of our society play their part in building a progressive and prosperous future for us all. I support the motion.

5.45 pm

Mr Weir: Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I first want to apologise to the House because, at the end of my speech, I will have to return directly to the Assembly Commission meeting that I have just come from. I mean no discourtesy to the House.

In many ways, this is a difficult issue. If the test for the voting age is, as the previous Member who spoke said, the impact of government policy on individuals, there is an equal argument for giving the vote to those aged 12, 11, eight or whatever, because government policies on education or any issue affect everyone in society, irrespective of age. It is clearly the case that people develop at different rates, so there is a strong argument for saying that, although someone may be mature enough at 14, others may not be until they are 19 or 20.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: I do not really have the time.

When faced with a difficult issue, we have to reach an objective, rational position. The easy way out, which a number in the Chamber seem to have gone down, is, when faced with a campaign, simply to agree to it. However, we have to take the courageous decision to say that we look at the facts and come to a reasonable conclusion. Can I say —

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: OK, I will give way briefly.

Mr Beggs: Can the Member not accept that a reasonable conclusion is that, after completing citizenship training, young people are allowed to exercise the vote and, thereafter, may continue to vote? Is that not a reasonable, logical approach?

Mr Weir: If citizenship training took place at 12, would the Member allow someone aged 12 to vote?

Mr Beggs: I said, “After they have completed their citizenship training”, which for most people finishes at 16.

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

Mr Weir: With respect, the point I made is that, if that citizenship training took place at 12, would the franchise be at the age of 12? That is the position that the Member is adopting from a logical point of view.

Mr Dickson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: No, I gave way once already, and I have only a few minutes.

A number of points were raised, and the Member opposite talked about people driving at the age of 16. Of course, you cannot have a full licence at the age of 16. Maybe the Member was not necessarily aware of that. Spurious arguments have been used —

Mr Dickson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: No, I will not.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Weir: With respect, I have a limited amount of time. I gave way once, and I will not give way a second time.

In some of the spurious arguments used, mention was made of the army. I suspect that the idea of a beret and a gun may be a lot more prevalent on the opposite side of the House in terms of knowledge of possession of those. Mention was made of the army, of marriage and of leaving home. All those are restricted for a 16-year-old by parental consent. There is not complete freedom. For example, in terms of serving on a jury and facing charges, the dividing line in an adult court is 18. The vast amount of key decisions are made at 18. The switch between secondary and tertiary education is also at 18.

This is not a decision that we have come to in just the United Kingdom. Internationally, voting at 16 is restricted to four countries and three other jurisdictions — Guernsey, the Isle of Man and Jersey. The indications are, for example, on the Isle of Man, in terms of the impact on the voting situation, that out of 1,800 people eligible to go on the electoral register at the age of 16 and 17 only 600 did. So, the idea that this will in some way massively increase

the democratic buy-in is ill judged. Of the four countries that have voting at 16, one is Cuba, where you can effectively choose between communist and communist. That is not really a proper democratic choice.

Mr Eastwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: No, I have already indicated that my time is short.

Compared with the four countries where that is allowed, 206 countries across the world, including every country in the European Union except Austria, have the voting age at 18. Indeed, there are more countries that have a minimum voting age above 18.

There are a wide range of democratic challenges for all of us: a sense of disenfranchisement from politics and a sense of disillusionment across the board. That is in not just Northern Ireland but across western Europe and the world as a whole.

Mr Hazzard quoted Abraham Lincoln. In the presidential election in America today, 150 years after the Gettysburg address, the age of voting will also be 18. There is international consensus. There is important work that all politicians have to do with engagement with the electorate, but we will not have that sense of re-engagement if we simply pander to gimmicks, which is what this motion does. This is a gimmick proposal. It is an attempt simply to be seen that we are very much in with the youth. This party may well, on this motion, stand alone, although there may be others who will vote with us. The reality is that the DUP is opposed to changes to that — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr Weir: There are, occasionally, differences of opinion on this issue but, frankly, rather than pandering today, we need to take the mature decision, along with virtually the rest of the entire world of 206 nations, which is to say that 18 is the right age for enfranchisement.

Mrs Dobson: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. My colleague Roy Beggs has outlined my party's support for the rationale behind the motion, and I echo that support.

Since I was elected, I have sought to engage with young people at every available opportunity. They are the future of Northern Ireland. It is fundamental that we listen to their views and do our best to bring them into the political process where possible. The Ulster Unionist Party has been working hard to get young people involved in politics. We held a very successful event at Stormont for our new young members a number of weeks ago. We also consulted heavily with young people in the run-up to the most recent Assembly election by writing to every school. We received hundreds of responses, with a significant number advocating a reduction in the voting age. I meet young people locally on an ongoing basis. As a member of the Education Committee, I understand the importance and relevance of that work. I am sure that many others in the House do also.

Mr Hussey: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Dobson: Yes.

Mr Hussey: You will be aware of local democracy week and of the participation of many politicians from all parties. The view of most young people is that they are

not represented by this House. Do you agree, and do you agree that reducing the age to 16 would certainly encourage the involvement of young people in politics?

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

Mrs Dobson: Thank you. I totally agree with that comment. I have taken part in the democracy events. They are an excellent way of engaging with young people. Thank you for that.

It is clear that we have a problem with getting people of all ages interested in politics on a broad scale. The turnout in some constituencies in the most recent Assembly election was an indication of that. In my constituency of Upper Bann, just over half the electorate — 55.3% — voted. Other constituencies had similar or worse turnouts, with 48.5% in Strangford and 45.9% in North Down being other poor examples. In 1998, the turnout in Upper Bann was over 70%. The decrease is evident, and that trend is largely mirrored across Northern Ireland over the intervening years. It is down to us to ensure that that decline in engagement with politics is reversed. One way in which that could be done is through a reduction in the voting age. If we empower young people to vote at the age of 16, it may become something that stays with them and encourages them to vote continually as they get older. I will move on to the issue of representation.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Dobson: Yes.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member agree that it is unfortunate that the young people of Northern Ireland are largely represented by the two largest parties? The DUP has indicated that it is opposed to widening the franchise to young people, while Sinn Féin does not exercise its vote at Westminster, which will ultimately take the decision.

Mr Flanagan: Have you any votes in Westminster? *[Laughter.]*

Mr Beggs: We aspire.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mrs Dobson: I thank my colleague for the intervention. I agree with him: I find it ironic. Too often, when we ask —

Mr Hazzard: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Dobson: No, I have already given way twice.

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Dobson: No.

Too often, when we ask young people who represents them, the answer is "No one". That may be because of the disconnect that they feel from politicians and political institutions, owing to the fact that they have no say in who is elected to represent them in their area. I have no hesitation in saying that I am elected to represent all the people of Upper Bann, regardless of factors such as religious belief, political opinion or age. It is down to me to present myself as an elected representative for all my constituents. Voting for the motion sends out the right message to our young people.

In supporting the motion, I have, of course, considered Sinn Féin's agenda in tabling it. Its actions are clearly motivated

by political gain. Northern Ireland's demographics are changing, and Sinn Féin believes that the votes of 16-year-olds could benefit it. However, I am confident in the values of my party and the merits of the Union. In any election or referendum, they can be explained to young people and older people alike. The bigger issue is that we do the right thing for young people across the country. Giving them the ability to vote should also put the onus on political parties to get involved more with young people. We must also look at the issue morally. As we heard earlier, young people are considered responsible enough for a number of activities, such as joining the army, working at 16 and driving at 17. Young people, therefore, should have a choice at election time.

I want to refer to unemployment statistics, which show that a record number of young people are unemployed. The labour force survey results from October show that one in five young people — 21.1% — is currently unemployed. With so many young people navigating their way through the difficulties of the current economic downturn, it is more important than ever that they have a say at a political level.

I reiterate my support for the motion. I have not heard a convincing argument why we should not trust 16- and 17-year-olds enough to vote. My party and I will continue to press for positive change, which will help young people. The motion is a step towards that type of change.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to speak in this rather lively debate. We brought the issue to the Assembly during the last term, and it is good to see that there is nearly cross-party support across the Chamber for a reduction in the voting age. Sixteen-year-olds can, conceivably, marry and make a decision to spend the rest of their life with one person; they can engage in sexual relations; and they can have children. However, according to the DUP and others, they cannot decide the best party to vote for and what can be put in a blue bin. There is an imbalance that needs to be addressed. Young people are mature, and parties across the Chamber recognise that, including the First Minister and the MPs for North Antrim and Lagan Valley. Sixteen- and 17-year-olds can demonstrate adequate maturity to vote. Some 16-year-olds whom I know are more mature than some of the 60-year-olds across the Chamber. That is a fact.

The Member for East Antrim referred to turnouts being down and our need to address the issue of less citizen participation in voting and the electoral process. That is true. Alastair Ross referred to the fact that, on the Isle of Man, fewer than half of those between the ages of 16 and 18 who are allowed to vote do not take the opportunity to do so. In recent years, the same has applied across the board in our local elections. We need to address youth disengagement and help young people to become involved in the democratic process at an early stage. The minimum voting age may be 18, but, because of the way in which elections are spaced out, some young people who leave school at the age of 16 having attended citizenship classes and been awarded qualifications may not get an opportunity to vote until they are 21, which is half a decade later. That is a huge gap. If the voting age were reduced to 16, a person might not get an opportunity to vote until they were 17 or 18, but we would ensure that more and more young people were involved in the democratic process.

Citizenship is taught in schools, and young people can join trade unions and be a director of a company but cannot vote on matters to do with the Assembly or local councils. I see that the opposer of the motion finally has some support on the opposite Benches. The DUP is significantly split on the issue. As Mr Hussey said, in 2005, the First Minister signed an early day motion in which it stated that the time was right to lower the voting age to 16. I agree with the First Minister: the time is right to lower the voting age to 16.

6.00 pm

Mr Allister: I am opposed to this proposition, not just because I am a grumpy old man. *[Laughter.]* And not just because I am opposed to most things. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Swann: Is it because you are supporting the DUP?

Mr Allister: And not because I am supporting the DUP. *[Laughter.]* I am opposed to it because I think that it is a very trite and foolish proposition.

In any society, you have to draw lines and make decisions about what is the appropriate age of majority and the age for voting. I think that 18 represents an age of sufficient maturity to be the right age. In my logic, it follows that 16 represents an age of inadequate maturity to be afforded what equates to the age of majority and the right to vote.

At times, this debate — for the short time that I have been in the Chamber for it — sounded more like that of a school debating society, which, I think, is the last place that I heard the subject debated. The quality and nature of the debate is perhaps reflective of the fact that this is a subject that we are spending time on, yet, as an Assembly, can do absolutely nothing about. You invite, and therefore get, all the politics of gimmickry, of the fad and of appealing to what is seen to be a populist notion within a certain youthful constituency, in the safe and certain knowledge —

Mr McCartney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: In a moment.

In the safe and certain knowledge that, no matter how much you appeal to that particular issue and no matter how many brownie points you collect from that particular constituency, it is not going to happen, because the House cannot control it. However, you can gain those brownie points and look good to that constituency, and I suspect that that is the motivation of a lot of Members who have spoken in support of the motion. I will give way now.

Mr McCartney: Would the Member agree that there are many issues that have been spoken about and debated in the House that we have no power over? However, that should not limit us in our range of debate.

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

Mr Allister: The House excels itself, par excellence, in debating matters about which it has, thankfully, no control. Indeed, if we did not debate such issues, I do not think that there is any prospect of us being here until 6.00 pm on very many days. The truth of the matter is that there is a great paucity of the real nitty-gritty legislation that we can control and do something about. For the appearance of this place, some people probably need motions such

as this so that they can pad out the time and pander to the constituency that a particular motion happens to appeal to.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Allister: Yes.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member accept that given that the Government have agreed to widen the franchise in Scotland, the first point of achieving that direction in Northern Ireland should be the Assembly giving a clear message to Westminster? Only at that point will the Westminster Government listen.

Mr Allister: As a unionist, I must say that I do not think that a nationalist referendum is a good precedent on which to build in respect of the voting age or anything else. It is quite clear that the granting of the reduction in the voting age to 16 on the referendum in Scotland was part of a political deal that was demanded by Mr Salmond and met by the Prime Minister as quid pro quo for something else. I think that it is a wrong precedent and a foolish measure and that Westminster may regret it, because it will build pressure towards granting the vote at 16 in the place that can decide those issues.

I do think, in all seriousness, that since this is, fundamentally, an issue of the maturity of those who are voting, it is a step too far. It is not that there are not some very mature 16- and 17-year-olds. Of course there are. Indeed, they could put some people who are a lot older to shame. However, across the board, you could not say that your average 16-year-old is imbued with the maturity that you would expect from someone exercising something as significant as the right to vote. I think that society is entitled to say that this is an adult exercise and that electing our Government is very serious. Elections to somewhere like this place may not be so serious, but there is certainly something very serious about electing our Government in Westminster. In consequence, some degree of seriousness and maturity must be attached to doing that, and this proposition would undermine that. So, I oppose the motion.

Mr Agnew: I think that this is the right time and place to have this debate. As has been pointed out by others, the franchise to vote in the Scottish referendum on independence will be extended to 16- and 17-year-olds. The Irish Constitutional Convention is looking at the potential for lowering the voting age. The Welsh Assembly has called for votes at 16. Indeed, a private Member's Bill that looks at lowering the voting age to 16 had its First Reading in the House of Lords on 22 October. So, I disagree with Mr Allister when he says that we cannot do anything about it here. We can send a clear message across the Irish Sea and across the Irish border that the Northern Ireland Assembly believes in and wants votes at 16.

I agree with Mr Dickson's comment that there should be no taxation without representation. At 16, you receive your national insurance card and with it the right to work and the responsibility to pay taxes if you do. You are directly taxed by the state, yet you have no say on that state's policies. That needs to be addressed. When we allocate budgets from our block grant, we should remember that many 16- and 17-year-olds have contributed to that pot, and they should have a say in how it is spent. We need to see greater inclusion of young people's issues in election

manifestos, and reducing the voting age will help us move in that direction.

I often hear it claimed that young people are apathetic, and Colum Eastwood made the strongest case that that is not so. Young people are matched only by those at the other end of the age spectrum in being the most passionate and holding the strongest opinions of any age group. It is probably in middle age, when you have a career, a family and so many other things to occupy your time, that you do not have time to consider the various issues that affect not just you but others. Young people have that time, and they care passionately about issues, as can be demonstrated by campaigns that they are involved in. Look at the number of student and young people's protests over the years. It is worth pointing out that our young people of today are probably the best informed that we have ever had. With unprecedented access to information, our young people are better informed than they have ever been. We see that from the number of e-petitions and e-campaigns that they engage in. Young people already engage in participative democracy.

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: I will give way.

Mr Ross: Given the point that the Member has just made, can he explain why it remains the case that those aged between 18 and 24 do not vote in election after election? We continually hear it argued that reducing the voting age to 16 will increase participation. Why is there not that level of participation among 18-year-olds if they are so well-informed at this moment?

Mr Agnew: I will come to that shortly, and I will address the Member's point. However, I believe that we should extend the opportunity to 16- and 17-year-olds — who are actively engaged in political campaigns — to vote for the political parties that they wish to represent their views.

Mr Hussey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: Sure.

Mr Hussey: Do you agree with me — a not-so-grumpy middle-aged man and a bachelor to boot — that 16- to 18-year-olds generally feel that we do not represent them because, in their opinion, we do not listen to them?

Mr Agnew: Absolutely. I believe that when politicians engage in young people's issues and with young people in a way that is attractive to them, they will come out and vote. I hope to put that to the test. I hope and believe that, in North Down, because of the level of my engagement with young people, we will see an increase. Indeed, I have had a lot of feedback from church youth groups and the YMCA that young people are talking about politics in North Down in a way that they did not before, because I have addressed their issues. Indeed, I was banned from a supermarket, believe it or not, for standing up for young people who held a peaceful protest — a freeze mob. They stood still for two minutes and were lambasted for that dastardly behaviour. I stood up for them, defended them and was banned from a supermarket. The amount of support that I have had for standing up for young people doing that has been incredible.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: This is the last time.

Mr Allister: Does the logic of the Member's position on giving the franchise at 16 cause him to conclude that the age of eligibility to stand for Parliament must also be reduced to 16?

Mr Agnew: We can look at that.

Mr Allister: Is it a good thing?

Mr Agnew: The Assembly has an increasingly young membership. The average age is not young enough, but I welcome the fact that more and more young people are entering politics in Northern Ireland, and I hope that the trend continues.

I believe that, collectively, as politicians, we fail to engage young people in the political process. We have work to do on that front, and that point has been made. We have failed to get young people to register to vote and, indeed, out to vote. However, there is considerable evidence — I challenge Mr Ross on this point — that by reducing the voting age, we can increase the proportion and the number of young people voting. If you look at research by Mark Franklin, you will see that he believes that the stable context in which young people of 16 live makes it much easier to engage them in the franchise of voting. At 18, you are possibly heading off to university and moving house. In fact, you may move house every year. For that reason, you fall off the voting register, or are registered at the wrong address or at your parents' house, so you do not receive your voting card. However, the evidence suggests that through citizenship classes — the point was well made by Roy Beggs and others — age 16 is when young people think about engaging in politics. That is a good time to say that, now that you have been told why it is important to vote, we will give you the opportunity to vote.

There is other evidence. The kids voting programme conducted by Steven Chaffee — I hope that I pronounced his name correctly — at Stanford University found that increasing political discussion in education when young people are engaged increases voter turnout. So there is evidence that if we lower the voting age, we can increase the number of young people voting. The question is not whether 16- to 18-year-olds would be the biggest voting group or how they would compare with other age groups, but whether doing so would make it more likely that 16- to 18-year-olds, and, indeed, 18- to 25-year-olds, would vote. That must be the key question. If it would make young people's engagement in the political process more likely, which I believe that it would, it has to be a good thing.

I come back to the point about the transient nature of student life. On turning 18, you may move out of the family home to go to university, to work or to start a family. The evidence of that can be seen in south Belfast, which has the lowest level of voter registration because, I think, of the transience of student life. Most people living there are aged 18 to 21. If we get them voting at 16, they are more likely to continue exercising that franchise when they go to university. The other benefit of getting young people registered to vote at the age of 16 or 17 is that most of them will be at school, particularly those aged 16. So when the Electoral Office runs campaigns to get young people to register to vote, school is the place to do it. If young people were enfranchised to vote at the age of 16, they would be more likely to register.

6.15 pm

It has been pointed out that there is an absolute incongruity in the positions of various DUP members on different issues. The DUP believes that, at age 10, a young person is perfectly able to make the decision to commit a crime and to be held fully responsible for it. In fact, the Chairperson of the Committee for Justice believes that a child of eight is capable of being held fully responsible for his or her actions. However, the DUP does not believe that at 16, six years later, a young person should have the right to vote. I find that incredible and completely incongruous.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member must bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Agnew: It is an inconsistent position. We have heard that the First Minister has already supported voting at 16, as have Jeffrey Donaldson and, as has been pointed out, Ian Paisley Jnr.

I will finish with one final comment. *[Interruption.]* As Roy Beggs pointed out, what is learned in your younger years becomes a habit in later life. I think that that is a lesson that we should take on board today.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 51; Noes 29.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hussey, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McClarty, Ms McCorley, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ni Chuilin, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Agnew and Ms Fearon

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly believes that the voting age should be reduced to 16 for all elections and referendums; and calls on the Westminster Government to introduce legislation to accommodate this change.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Planning Applications: Foyle

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic for the debate will have 15 minutes, the Minister will have 10 minutes to respond, and all other Members who wish to speak will have approximately seven minutes, if required.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to have this Adjournment debate on a very important issue in the Foyle constituency. There are nine major Derry planning applications in the system. One of them is for the H2 zone on the Buncrana Road, and it has been in the planning system for almost 10 years. Others have been in the system for many years.

Derry's retail strategy, as presented and announced in July 2010 — over two years ago — made five recommendations, including the need for strengthened planning focus, city centre expansion, marketing co-ordination and improved integration.

At that stage, the report looked at 38 planning applications since 2001. There was 7,811 square feet of vacant floor space in the Waterside area of the city and 36,682 square feet vacant in the city centre. I suggest that those figures have altered greatly, even since then.

6.30 pm

I highlight those figures because we have huge delays in decisions around out-of-town applications, and we have no statutory planning guidance to protect our current city centre, which is struggling daily. The Derry Area Plan was adopted in May 2000. Work had commenced on that in January 1993. The research was dated from 1993 to 1996, so the retail monitoring information that was used is nearly 20 years old. Therefore, we now have a very out-of-date plan, which is still used as a material consideration, and often primary consideration, for the city. Our city has delivered huge efforts in the development of the One City, One Plan, One Voice regeneration plan and has many opportunities facing into 2013 with the City of Culture and Fleadh Cheoil. Key to all those initiatives is the legacy for our people. Derry, therefore, needs a supportive statutory framework to deliver on our regeneration plan, retail strategy, riverside master plan and Foyle valley gateway master plan.

We have examples of where statutory planning guidance was used in other places, and I will cite just one. These powers of statutory planning guidance were brought into effect in the planning for Victoria Square. Therefore, if it can happen in Belfast, why not Derry?

The Roger Tym report said that there was a:

"Lack of a strong and effective City Centre policy presumption and supporting information to inform decision making".

As I said, our legacy will be our jobs, and we have committed to 12,900 jobs over the next 10 years. Therefore, we need to ensure that planning processes will support this economic regeneration, not the current processes, which are hindering it. We also need interim measures, such as the supplementary planning guidance, to be implemented immediately.

Progress on the retail strategy has failed to tackle the key policy framework that is required, and I will cite just three examples of this failure. Review of the city centre boundary as it currently is was stressed as urgent. This is now, after two years, only ongoing. A city centre design guide, which was to be city centre-wide, is only considering conservation areas. The Queen's Quay area was identified as a key entry point into the city, and, while there have been a number of environmental improvements, which are very welcome, this has little to do with the redevelopment and investment that that area requires. That area requires a planning framework for this to be progressed.

Two years since the retail strategy, we have another retail report from the Environment Minister. We are told by the Minister that there are competing voices and demands, and we have met most if not all of those sectors and developers. Of course there are competing interests. That is the nature of development. Out-of-town shopping will support wider geographical areas of need, but we must also reflect that particular types of retail can impinge on our current city centre. The point is that planning policy should be interventionist in the market, and not prohibitive. We are told through the report:

"a comprehensive approach to retailing will allow the Department to make robust and balanced decisions".

Minister, Derry already knows this and has had the analysis completed since July 2010. When, then, will the robust and balanced decisions be made?

Derry has 37,655 square metres of convenience floor space and 84,750 square metres of comparison/non-food/high street. Again, we knew this in 2010. The comparison sector is the type of goods that our current city centre can attract, but the local planning office has consistently refused to accept that, without planning policy, this will remain a report on a desk. Interestingly, the Minister's report in August highlighted that 54% of respondents in a survey do their top-up shopping in local shops and petrol stations, which is a strong indication of the need for protection and a supportive framework for our local businesses. Some 23% of shoppers surveyed in Strabane were from Derry, and all shopped in Asda. Some 44% of respondents from Donegal visit the city regularly to undertake their main food shop. Derry is recognised as the primary location for comparison retailing in the north-west, with 88% of all respondents stating that that form of shopping is carried out in the city.

The report goes on to state:

"The level of retail vacancy in and around the Strand Road is of great concern to the department and a situation that will continue to be monitored."

I ask what progress has been made on that observation. Vacancy is lower than the North of Ireland average of 18.5%; Derry's retail vacancy is at 15.25%.

I spoke just a number of hours ago to a local developer, who highlighted that he had organisations ready to come in and take office space, in business and in leisure, with a potential focus on the town centre. In his view, current planning policies are not encouraging investor confidence. That particular developer indicated that because of the lack of planning, he cannot provide a building solution to interested individuals, and if planning policies and decisions were in place, he could — on that application alone — provide up to 1,200 jobs by Christmas.

When, therefore, will we get the statutory framework that ensures a balanced approach to out-of-town employment opportunities but also protects our city centre? The major opportunities that our city faces over the next few years require a supportive, current and robust planning framework. We must support economic regeneration, and the Minister of the Environment has the power to make that happen. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Hussey: I begin by congratulating Ms McLaughlin for bringing this matter to the Assembly's attention. My colleagues in Foyle also have concerns about developments in Londonderry city and the wider Foyle constituency. Those concerns are shared by my colleagues in East Londonderry and in my constituency of West Tyrone.

We have come from that area that is west of the Bann, and we do not want to be seen as country cousins who are left to their own devices. The motion refers specifically to the Foyle constituency, and it is to that specific area that I will address the rest of my comments.

I have the honour of representing my party for Foyle, and at every opportunity that I can, I visit the constituency. I do so at least once a month.

The city of Londonderry will be the City of Culture of the United Kingdom in 2013, and it is clear that the eyes of the kingdom and beyond will turn towards Londonderry. The massive steps forward that have been taken in that city, such as the rejuvenation of Ebrington, are indicators of what can be achieved when there is a will to work together.

We support the measures being taken in the run-up to the UK City of Culture year. That is why the Minister is to be commended for initiatives such as his recent earmarking of £500,000 to address derelict buildings and such problems in and around the city centre. That is why it is crucial that he get the planning backlog cleared to allow his Department to take a much more strategic approach to the city and enable the planners and local stakeholders to start looking forward.

There has been a clear absence of strategic planning, and that undoubtedly has led to the current economic difficulties that the region is facing. There is no doubt that the north-west, and the Foyle constituency specifically, has suffered from decades of sustained underinvestment. It is also a fact that the city was at times under siege during the Troubles. I feel that it is right at this stage to condemn those who continue to attack Londonderry in the guise of dissident republicanism. The city has moved with the times, and it is time that those individuals walked away and supported the dream that we all have for Londonderry, which is for it to be a vibrant 21st-century city, with its rich 17th-century history intermingling with the present.

In February 2012, Alex Attwood stated that it was his intention to deal with a range of major planning applications. In Londonderry alone, there are nine major retail applications. We welcome the progress that has begun; for example, the redevelopment of Lisnagelvin to allow for extended modern retail facilities. However, it is equally important that the Minister does not lose sight of existing businesses and the need to ensure that all are playing on a level field. Clearly, there is huge untapped potential in some of those major planning applications.

Earlier this year, Nelson McCausland announced that the Illex Urban Regeneration Company had lodged an outline planning application for the redevelopment of the 14-acre Fort George site. It is anticipated that it will be a mixed-use development, with residential, industrial, educational, office, leisure, retail and restaurant facilities. Given that the Executive have been in possession of Fort George since 2004, it is important that that planning application be processed without delay.

Councils will shortly be granted significant new planning powers, and the Assembly has an obligation to make sure that the transfer of such significant responsibilities is done properly and is accompanied with the requisite resources. We want planning to be generally user-friendly; whether in Londonderry or Omagh, we want to see all of Northern Ireland flourish. I am sure that we have all read the reports that the United Kingdom is expected to move out of recession, albeit slowly, ahead of the other European states. We need to see that we are prepared for growth. I want to see the west grow, and any cutting of red tape will support growth by cutting out unnecessary delays.

Mr Eastwood: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I welcome the chance to speak about the opportunities that Derry has. Unfortunately, there are not many people here to hear it.

Mr Hussey: What you have in here is good.

Mr Eastwood: I am glad that you are here, Ross.

Ms McLaughlin talked about the One Plan, the future of Derry in 2013 and all the tremendous opportunities that we have. I think that that is true: we have tremendous opportunities. It is incumbent on all Ministers to ensure that we maximise those opportunities. With regard to the Programme for Government, it is unfortunate that the One Plan was merely mentioned. It said that we wanted to develop the One Plan, but no reference was made to developing the major part of the One Plan — the one real game-changer in the One Plan — the Magee campus and the development of 10,000 student places. At the last election, Ms McLaughlin's party promised that that would be secured. Unfortunately, it has not been secured. I encourage every Member to ensure that every element that was promised in the One Plan is delivered, not just developed.

I understand Ms McLaughlin's frustration. I have probably sat in more meetings on these issues than most people, and I have probably taken more phone calls at all hours of the day and night about these issues. I have been lobbied by developers, residents and city-centre traders on all sides of the argument. The fact is that there is no simple answer to each and every one of the proposed developments. What is true, though, is that there is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to shape the retail future

of our city. I would not want any Minister to take those decisions lightly.

When Minister Attwood came into power on 5 May 2011, there were 60 live article-31 applications, 28 of which have been dealt with already. That is a far better record than any previous Environment Minister who has operated in these fields. I want to make sure that we get it right. I want to make sure that the commitment to the survival of not only the city-centre businesses but all the convenience stores that Ms McLaughlin talked about is paramount and at the centre of every decision that we make. Knowing the Minister, and sitting in on many of his meetings, I know that that is at the forefront of his mind. It has to be said that the Minister has committed enormous effort towards the development of the city that we are all so proud of. He has committed £1.2 million for heritage buildings, and, just last week, he committed £500,000 to fix some of the issues that we have around dereliction in the run-up to the City of Culture year. All of us want to see that happening, and I believe that every Minister should do their job in that regard. Even the Minister of the Environment, whom you would not expect to have any real role in the City of Culture, has put his money where his mouth is. He has also made sure that the hotel applications have been fast-tracked, and we now have approvals for hotels. Whether they are built in time is up to the developer. We have also seen Department of the Environment (DOE) jobs being decentralised to Derry. I think that that is another good development.

6.45 pm

The fact is that we have seen a real effort by the Department and the Minister to ensure that we get these decisions out the door. However, I, for one, do not want to see these decisions go out the door in the wrong way, and I do not want us to have to go through years and years of judicial review and court appearances. I want to make sure that public money is used wisely and correctly and that we get the retail solution that every person in Derry city needs to get right, because there are no other instances in any other city in the North in which eight or nine major applications can have an impact on each of the others. It is very important that we allow the Minister to make the decisions and to get them right. I have full confidence that he will do that, and I have full confidence that that will happen very quickly.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I congratulate my party colleague Maeve McLaughlin on securing this Adjournment debate on a very important strategic issue for Derry. I welcome the fact that the Minister is here. I agree with Mr Eastwood; we all know that the Minister has spent a lot of time dealing with this issue. I can see why you have selected Mr Eastwood as your Assembly Private Secretary; he certainly gave you a glowing reference for any future job that you may wish to undertake.

I preface my remarks by acknowledging the recent announcement of half a million pounds in relation to the City of Culture and the £1.2 million for heritage works. They are very welcome. They are recognition of the importance of the City of Culture and the importance that the Executive and the Minister have placed on it. I also acknowledge the presence of Ross Hussey. You have

done a good service to the Ulster Unionists by participating in today's debate.

Maeve McLaughlin has outlined the situation. It is, obviously, something that the Minister has inherited. If there is an overall critique, it is that, over the years, there has been an inability to make decisions around crucial planning applications in the city. I know that the Minister is committed to the thrust of the debate. He has made a number of public statements, and I have listened to him on Radio Foyle and here in the House. We are all pressing for the earliest possible decision. Perhaps the Minister will take the opportunity today to present a timeline for that. He is smiling; I hope that that is a recognition of something.

I agree with what Maeve McLaughlin has said, and I know Colum Eastwood has said it: it is not that we want a decision made in haste that is not the best or proper decision. Underlying the frustration of many people over many years has been the fact that when it comes to crucial points in the decision-making process, too often there has been a bit of a retreat into analysing the last study or the last set of proposals. Now is the opportunity for us to give the Minister the time and space. I think we have afforded him the time and space for the decisions to be made. We must not allow previous decisions or the previous inability to make decisions to stand in his road as we take this forward. As I said, I hope the Minister will give some sort of timeline today. I am sure we will all want to know what the decisions are going to be, but a timeline would certainly be very much appreciated.

I have certainly listened very intently to the Minister when he is speaking on the issue. I know that, in the past, he has made criticisms, if that is the right word, that there are, perhaps, too many voices coming out of the city and that sometimes there can be conflicting views. Again, Colum Eastwood has outlined that. I am not saying that I have had as many meetings as Colum has, but we have all been lobbied and given presentations by the various applicants. It is understandable that there are competing views. If there are those competing views, it may come across as though they are in total opposition. However, I think that they are all united by the fact that they want the right and proper decision made for the city.

It was interesting that Ross Hussey, in his contribution, mentioned underinvestment. We see, in a sense, underachievement, because of that lack of investment. This is an opportunity. I know that there are nine applications pending. Most of us have been given presentations by each of the applicants. You see the strengths; you see the weaknesses; you see the complexities. We do understand that there are big decisions for you to make. I will make a broad appeal: we would like to see, at the heart of this, you do what is in the best interests of the people of Derry city; we would like to see, at the heart of this, job creation; we would like to ensure that we maximise the opportunity for the creation of jobs in the city. Some of the applicants have made public statements and presentations to you, Minister. Some of them are dependent on their applications being successful so that that will create the space for them to grow their own businesses elsewhere and open up other job creation possibilities. We hope that that all feeds into whatever decisions you have to make.

Colum Eastwood mentioned the One Plan. A big part of that was to say that retail does have a crucial role to play

in job creation opportunities in the future. I agree with him that the One Plan was, over a number of years, about the city coming together. It was maybe two or three years in the processing and final decision-making processes. Whatever criticism may have been made in the past that sometimes Derry did not speak with a single voice, which is understandable given the complexity of issues, the One Plan was our best guess of what we felt was in the best interests of the city. Retail is at the heart of that. As we take this forward, we are mindful of some of the broader strategic considerations, which Maeve McLaughlin outlined. We hope that, in the future, when you make your decision, you will be guided by what is best for Derry. You are obviously tied to planning policy and other legal requirements, but at the core must be what is best for Derry.

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): Before commentating, I acknowledge that, as the night closes in, two families — and many others, indeed — face a very long night: the Black family, for whom there was a very strong turnout from this Chamber this afternoon; and the family of Katherine Kelley, who tragically died following a very serious road accident over the weekend. Our thoughts and wishes go to those families, and to the other young people who remain in hospital following the accident in Portadown.

I welcome the debate. I am one of those Ministers who thinks that the more I am held to account, be it on the Floor in the Assembly, publicly or otherwise, the better it is for me. It is better for DOE, it is better for planning, and it is certainly better for democracy.

I will deal as best I can, in the time allowed, with the issues raised. Let me first make this point. Maeve McLaughlin said that current processes hinder planning development in Derry/Londonderry. I understand why she makes that point. However, in many, many instances, the evidence does not back up that point. Look at the decisions made for the city of Derry over the past 18 months or thereabouts. You will see four or five hotel decisions. That is not hindering planning and development in Derry; that is enabling development in Derry. You will see a whole catalogue of restoration planning approvals, making and shaping the city in advance of the year of culture. Extra money came from the Department for Social Development, arising from the comprehensive spending review bid when I was Minister, to ensure that the city looks its best for 2013. Planning approvals for sites such as the Vital Venue and the lighting strategy all require planning approval. That has all been processed in double quick time by DOE over the past 18 months. In my view, that tells part of the tale of planning in Derry. Part of that tale is not that processes hinder planning development, but, in many instances, as the 2013 projects, the hotel decisions and the venue decisions demonstrate, there is a good narrative around planning in Derry. The best example of that is the Peace Bridge. Due to the constraints of EU funding timelines, a decision was made very quickly and very well by the planning authorities, to the point that the Peace Bridge has won national awards and has been entered in international competitions, not just in respect of the design but in respect of the planning. That is part of the story about Derry.

Secondly, I agree with one of the essential points made by Ms McLaughlin, which is that places develop best when there is plan-led development. That was the essential core of her

argument. When you have statutory planning guidance and statutory plans, you have plan-led development. That is a better model of planning going forward. Some 80% of the land mass of the Republic of Ireland has plans. There have been problems with the plans, confirmed by the tribunals in respect of zoning issues and corruption. Nonetheless, 80% of the land mass has plans. In 2000, they recognised in their planning legislation and have rolled out, especially since 2005, that plan-led development is the best model going forward. You will have no argument with me about that. If you look at the Clare county plan, you will see that one of its big themes is, “Come and invest your renewables money on the coast of Clare because it has the best quality wind, wave and tide in the world”, confirming that, in my view, renewables are Ireland’s biggest economic opportunity. That demonstrates what plan-led development can mean for Clare and for all parts of the North of Ireland.

We do not have a full suite of plans, and we need to update that, but we were unable to update it because developers in the North, unhappy with planning decisions, went all the way to the European Court to try to derail particular planning applications in the North. Fortunately, that matter was settled earlier this year, and in the run down to the transfer of planning functions to local councils in 2015, we should work and accelerate how we are going to move forward plans, including for the city of Derry.

Ross Hussey was right. We have to get the devolution of the planning functions right, because the responsibility that will fall to local councils for the vast majority of planning decisions, for community planning and for local development plans is enormous. You only have to look at Scotland to see how some councils get it right and some councils get it wrong, how some councils continue to be a collection of planning lobbyists — legitimate though that is — and other councils live up to the threshold of being the planning authority driving forward plan-led development.

That is only one aspect of what I am trying to do in the Department, namely to have the most radical reshaping of planning in a generation. That is what the planning Bill that I hope to bring to the Chamber before Christmas will do. That is why we have a new senior management team. That is why, when we went out for consultation last week on permitted development rights for farm dwellings, we proposed 500 square metres, which is more than in any other part of these islands, to enable farming to prosper, not least because of the opportunities for agrifood going forward. That is why I want to have a single planning policy, rather than having a full suite of 10 or 20 planning policies, collapsing down the purpose of planning going forward, with an overview from the Executive saying that the purpose of planning is to drive economic development in a sustainable way. That is why we need a policy that accommodates the huge onshore and offshore opportunities for renewables.

7.00 pm

My colleague Mr Eastwood said that close to 50% of the number of article 31 planning applications that I inherited 18 months ago have now, one way or the other, been resolved. Now, the number in the system is only a few over 30. Of those, seven refer to Derry, and two non-article-31 retail planning applications also refer to Derry. What is the advice that I got from Derry? I do not expect — not least because of the development community that

exists up there — that they will all agree that this family of retail applications should or should not be approved. Some of the advice from Derry is to approve everything; some is to approve nothing; and some is to approve some applications. It is very difficult to interpret what is coming back from Derry. I must say this to Ms McLaughlin: it is particularly difficult that one reason why, arguably, there has not been plan-led development in Derry is because everybody — or, at least, some people — said, “Suspend it until we come up with this comprehensive One Plan”. In my view, there is evidence of mission creep by Ilex, but that is for another day. I have not hidden my view on that — I have not hidden that from the board of Ilex.

Putting that aside, where are we with these planning applications? First, I will take a precautionary approach. I believe that the argument put forward by town centre retailers generally, including those in Derry city centre, means that a precautionary approach is appropriate. Secondly, as Mr McCartney said, I need to be very careful that I apply current law and planning policy in making those decisions, mindful that my ambition is to have a new planning policy statement 5 that reconfigures retail planning to favour in-town over out-of-town retail. Thirdly, as Mr Eastwood said, I have to get this right. Why? It will shape retail in Derry for a generation, and, if I do not get it right, one or more, and probably many more than one, retail developer will have me in court. Fourthly, when we have gathered all the evidence, had all those meetings and completed the retail study, which was necessary because, as Mr McCartney said, it revealed the slippage of business to Strabane and the opportunities for people from the north-west and Donegal to shop in Derry, the character of the first phase of those planning decisions will be known before the end of the month.

Adjourned at 7.03 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 12 November 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Why is it that, last week the Executive once more made an announcement, which was billed as a key economic announcement, not to the House but to the media? Is there nothing further that you can do to curb the obvious contempt that the Executive have for the House?

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for his point of order. I assure him that I continually raise this issue with the Executive. Just last week, I put in a letter to the First Minister and deputy First Minister as well on this issue. As I continually say to the whole House, this really is an issue for Ministers and for the Executive. I always encourage Ministers to come to the House with statements that are of importance, but, at the end of the day, it is really up to them to decide which statements are important and which are not. I have some sympathy with the Member's point of order, but these issues lie solely with the Executive and individual Ministers. Let us move on.

Standing Order 10(3A): Extension of Sitting

Mr Speaker: I have been given notice by members of the Business Committee of a motion to extend today's sitting up to 8.00 pm. Under Standing Order 10(3A), the Question on the motion will be put without debate.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 12 November 2012 be extended to no later than 8.00pm. — [Mr P Ramsey.]

Ministerial Statement

Public Expenditure Adjustments: 2012-13 October Monitoring and 2013-14 and 2014-15 Budget Realignment

Mr Speaker: The Minister of Finance and Personnel wishes to make a statement to the House.

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I do, indeed, Mr Speaker. I am always happy to make statements to the House and to have them queried by Members. I do not have any intention of ever running away from the scrutiny of Members when it comes to making important announcements. I look forward to the scrutiny of the many Members who are in the House. I hope that the 'Belfast Telegraph' takes a photograph at some stage but not of the Sinn Féin Members.

My statement will cover three important issues. First, I intend to update the Assembly on the allocation that was made as part of the invest-to-save scheme that the Executive agreed in September. Secondly, I will inform Members of the 2012-13 October monitoring round outcome. Finally, I will outline the Executive's decisions on the 2013-14 and 2014-15 Budget realignment exercise.

Members will recall that, as part of June monitoring, the Executive agreed to allocate £30 million of resource funding to an invest-to-save scheme. The Executive subsequently agreed in September a number of allocations from the invest-to-save fund, totalling £23.6 million. The invest-to-save bids and agreed allocations are included in the tables that accompany the statement.

The most significant invest-to-save allocation was for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to take forward the Transforming Your Care (TYC) reform programme. That will not only transform the way in which health services are delivered to the benefit of our citizens but will realise significant savings. The recurrent savings from 2014-15 onwards are estimated at nearly £26 million a year, which represents a very good return on the investment.

There was some £6.4 million of resource funding left unallocated, owing to the fact that the remaining bids did not meet the scheme's strict requirements. That funding was then made available for reallocation in the October monitoring round.

The October monitoring round is critical, since it allows the Executive to take an initial view on the resources that may be carried forward into the next financial year under

the end-year flexibility arrangements agreed with Her Majesty's Treasury. It is also early enough in the financial year to reallocate a significant amount of resources and for Departments to be able to incur that expenditure. Indeed, the Executive again found themselves in the position of having a large amount of resources available for allocation. I will say more about that later.

The presentation of the October monitoring position again focuses on the non-ring-fenced resource and capital investment figures, since that is the funding that the Executive can use to deliver public services. However, the ring-fenced position, which relates to non-cash costs such as depreciation, is also included as a table separate from the statement. The Executive also continue to monitor departmental administrative cost expenditure, and the latest position is attached for Members' information.

Let me start by setting out the amount of resources that the Executive had available to allocate in this round. The Executive carried forward an overcommitment of £6.5 million resource expenditure and £12.7 million capital investment from the June monitoring round. As I mentioned, £6.4 million of resource funding was also made available from the invest-to-save initiative.

The Executive held £13 million of resource expenditure for the social investment fund and the childcare strategy. It is unlikely that more than £2 million of that funding will be spent in this financial year, so £11 million of resource funding was made available for allocation in this round. There was also £10 million of capital funding that was made available and has been held at the centre for the social investment fund.

In addition, funding was made available through savings in the EU Budget and reinvestment and reform initiative (RRI) interest, and those savings amounted to £4 million. There was also a pressure totalling £3.5 million impacting on the centre position resulting from a failure to progress the review of education maintenance allowance (EMA) and to fund salary pressures for the Assembly Ombudsman, the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG), the Lands Tribunal and judicial salaries. I am particularly disappointed that the EMA review has failed to progress. I probably do not need to name the Minister concerned, but, for clarification and so that the Assembly is in no doubt, the Education Minister has not progressed that review, despite the fact that it was endorsed by the Executive.

Taking all those issues into account resulted in a starting position of £11.3 million resource funding available and a small pressure on the capital side of £2.1 million. The Departments declared reduced requirements in this monitoring round of £24.2 million resource and £12.9 million capital investment. That, again, was a relatively high level of resource surrenders. The full details are included in the tables attached to the statement.

The public expenditure control framework provides each Department with considerable scope to address emerging pressures in their existing allocations on a unilateral basis. However, any proposals to move resources across spending areas in excess of the de minimis threshold of £1 million are subject to Executive approval. Departments may also reclassify between ring-fenced and non-ring-fenced resource expenditure. Those movements are also shown in the tables. There may also be departmental allocations that, for technical reasons, were incorrectly

classified. Departments may also seek to reclassify some of their budget as part of a proactive management action. All such reclassifications require the Executive's approval. All the proactive movements and reclassifications that were agreed by the Executive have been included in the tables that accompany this statement.

All the issues highlighted so far, including the starting position, the departmental reduced requirements, the internal reallocations and the reclassifications, impacted on the resources available to the Executive in this monitoring round. The net impact of all those issues was that there was £43.6 million of resource funding and £7.5 million of capital investment available to the Executive. The Executive took the view that it would be prudent to carry forward an overcommitment into the January monitoring round in anticipation of further reduced requirements at that stage. That was particularly important in this financial year since it has transpired that there have been significant delays in the delivery of the A5 and A8 road schemes. The delay is, of course, most acute in relation to the A5 since the work on the A8 has now commenced. The delay incurred so far has resulted in an easement in the Department for Regional Development of £31 million in this financial year. The Executive agreed that that would be managed in the DRD by allowing the Department to reallocate internally to other areas on the condition that the funding will be returned to the A5 and A8 road schemes in 2013-14 and 2014-15 as required. The funding will now be used to accelerate road structural maintenance and Northern Ireland Water capital projects.

The delay on the A5 has been caused by legal action being taken against the DRD. The issue remains unresolved. For each month that passes, DRD will have an easement of £10 million, which means that up to an additional £50 million could be returned to the centre in this financial year. As a contingency, Ministers agreed to consider whether further capital expenditure may be incurred in this financial year to make use of those resources if they become available. In addition, I have been in discussion with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on seeking some additional budget flexibility to manage that large capital project.

The Departments submitted bids worth £63.6 million resource and £50.9 million capital expenditure. Those bids are also detailed in the tables accompanying the statement.

12.15 pm

In addition to the departmental bids, Members will be aware of the jobs and economy initiative announced by the First Minister and deputy First Minister last week. Funding of £10 million, split equally between resource and capital, has been set aside for the 2012-13 financial year to take forward the jobs and economy initiative bids. The Executive agreed allocations totalling £33.2 million resource expenditure and £32.8 million capital investment. Since much more resource funding was available than capital, the Executive agreed to switch £20 million from resource to capital to facilitate those allocations. The allocations made are shown in the tables attached to the printed version of this statement, and I will highlight only a few of the main ones.

The Department for Regional Development received a total of £25.9 million, with most of that funding going towards

the additional maintenance of our roads and street lighting infrastructure.

The Executive decided to allocate a total of £14.3 million to the Department of Health. Most of that funding will contribute to reducing waiting times in our health sector. That will directly benefit people currently on hospital waiting lists, which remain a high priority for the Executive. A total of £8.3 million was allocated to the Department of Education towards the maintenance of the education estate and, specifically, to address the consequences of extensive fire damage to Arvalee School.

The Executive also agreed to allocate an additional £8 million towards the housing co-ownership scheme. That will not only help to fund an additional 180 new property owners but will boost housing demand at a time when the local housing market is struggling to recover.

The Executive allocated a significant amount of resources in this monitoring round. The allocations provide a significant boost to our construction sector and local housing market. This will help to stimulate the local economy at a very difficult time. Indeed, not only did the Executive specifically set aside £10 million towards the jobs and economy initiative but some £41.5 million of the October monitoring round allocations contributed directly to that initiative. The decisions taken mean that the Executive exits this monitoring round with an overcommitment in resource expenditure of £14.6 million and £10.3 million in capital investment. I believe that this is a reasonable position at this stage of the financial year. Of course, I will continue to monitor the position in respect of the A5 road scheme, since that represents a significant financial risk in this financial year.

I now turn to the realignment of the 2013-14 and 2014-15 Budget position. Before I go into the details of the realignment of budgets for the remaining years of the Executive's Budget 2011-15, I would like to make a brief comment on the review of financial processes. Over recent days, I have given many interviews, and a constant theme has been the difficulty in understanding the financial consequences of public expenditure decisions taken by the Executive. My review of financial processes was designed to address that lack of transparency. I promised the Assembly that it would be a priority for the Department. A paper has been with the Executive for the past number of months, but I have not been able to progress it. I find that deeply concerning, and I am sure that many Members will share that concern. Of course, one of the constant themes during the Budget debate was what many of the figures meant. The whole point of the financial processes paper was to give that greater transparency. As I said, I do not mind scrutiny of the Budget or awkward questions on it, but, if the figures are hidden or wrapped up in a way that does not easily lead to that kind of questioning, the Assembly ought to be concerned. I am concerned that, because of the inability to get it through the Executive — that is due mainly to Sinn Féin — we still do not have the transparency that the Assembly would have wished.

Ms Ruane: Will the Minister take an intervention?

Mr Wilson: Not during a statement. The Member should learn the rules of the Assembly. There is no option to make interventions during a statement. I am sure that she will have plenty of opportunity when the time comes, and I look forward to the question that she will put to me on this issue.

I turn to the detail of the Budget realignment. Members will no doubt be aware that many things impact on Budgets throughout the four-year period. I felt that it was prudent to present an opportunity to Executive colleagues to address some of the emerging issues that have arisen in respect of the 2013-14 and 2014-15 financial years. One of the key drivers for the Budget realignment was the departmental spending performances of 2011-12. My officials carried out an analysis of departmental underspend and examined the capital spending profiles of the forward two years. They concluded that there was scope for some Departments to surrender funding in the period 2013-15.

It is important for Members to recognise that, overall, the spending performance in 2011-12 was good. Although greater than expected, the reduced requirements surrendered by Departments were successfully utilised, meaning that year-end underspends fell within the scope of the Budget exchange scheme and no resources were lost to Northern Ireland. Details of the level of reductions are provided in the tables that accompany the statement.

I turn now to the allocations made in respect of the forward years. The Executive have taken this opportunity to confirm the transfer of £15 million and £75 million to the Department of Education in respect of the commitments made in January 2012 to increase funding to that Department. That directly relates to the budgets for individual schools, where the reductions were to have been 5% this year, 1% next year and 5% the year after that. That was causing great difficulty for individual schools, and we have funded to reduce the impact on schools significantly, and that was welcomed earlier by the schools.

Members will be aware of the upcoming UK City of Culture celebrations in 2013 in Londonderry. To help fund these important cultural and tourism events, the Executive agreed to allocate £6.1 million to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in 2013-14.

It has been agreed with Her Majesty's Treasury that aspects of air passenger duty (APD) will be devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive. That will enable us to take better account of local economic conditions and compete fairly with the lower rates of aviation duty that apply in the Republic of Ireland. However, in the devolution of the tax powers, due regard must be given to EU law. Under EU rules, the Executive will now have to be financially responsible for the revenues and administration costs of APD in Northern Ireland. To achieve this, there has been an annual adjustment to the block grant, and mechanisms will be put in place for the payment of the development and administration costs, which are likely to be around £5 million per annum. I have set aside funding for that purpose.

With the introduction of welfare reform, there remains the possibility that Her Majesty's Treasury will cut our housing benefit rates rebate by 10%. To ensure that there is enough time to assess the potential impact and provide an alternative scheme, I have set aside £13 million and £15 million in each of the two remaining Budget years to address the potential shortfall in the existing rates support scheme.

In March, the Executive endorsed the Minister for Employment and Learning's proposals to introduce an assistance package to alleviate some of the worst effects of growing youth unemployment. His Department was allocated £5.8 million in June, and I am now allocating the forward years'

funding identified at the time: £15.6 million in 2013-14 and £19.6 million in 2014-15. These amounts are in addition to and, therefore, complement the important £200 million economy and jobs initiative package.

In March 2012, the Executive agreed that departmental baselines should be adjusted to reflect the allocation of capital receipts identified by the asset management unit. A significant proportion of those receipts were to have been realised by DRD and related primarily to the sale of four revenue-generating assets. The sale of those assets will lead to a loss of resource funding to DRD of some £1.5 million per annum. The Executive considered that that funding pressure should be addressed and therefore agreed to allocate £1.5 million resource DEL to DRD in 2014-15.

Finally, let me turn to the future years allocations in relation to the economy and jobs initiative. Members will be aware that that package included some of the October monitoring allocations, co-ownership funding and acceleration of projects that will provide a much-needed short-term boost to our construction sector. In addition, the Executive set aside £70 million over the next two years to fund the economy and jobs initiative. When all those things are factored in, there is approximately £200 million being targeted on specific measures designed to boost our economy. Should the funding of those projects exceed the initial envelope, we will look at ways to allocate additional money to those important initiatives.

I assure the House that the changes to budgets agreed by the Executive are designed to boost our economy and provide the necessary skills to educate and equip our workforce, strengthen our businesses and support investment. Announcements today will also provide significant investment in our health and education sectors. The additional funding allocations under the invest-to-save scheme and the October monitoring allocations will help drive essential health sector reform and reduce hospital waiting times. That is good news for everyone in Northern Ireland and shows that the Executive are seeking to deliver key long-term strategic reforms, even in difficult economic times. Our schools will also benefit greatly, both from the allocations in this financial year and those agreed for the next two years. That secures adequate funding for our schools sector to ensure that we continue to drive excellence in the education system. Finally, the allocations in the October monitoring round, along with the jobs and economy initiative, will provide an additional short-term boost to our economy and our construction sector. I therefore commend the statement to the House.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement, as well as the work that the Executive have been doing to address our economic difficulties, in particular, the assistance that they are providing to the construction sector, as the Minister outlined, through allocations for roads and education maintenance. Something that outlines the urgency of that is the situation at Patton. Indeed, a number of subcontractors have come to the Assembly today to speak to MLAs.

Minister, you referred to reduced requirements of £24.2 million in resource and £12.9 million in capital, and you described that as being relatively high. Do you believe that all Departments have declared their reduced requirements

at this stage, and how confident are you that a larger level of reduced requirements will not present itself in the January monitoring round?

Mr Wilson: The Chairman makes an important point about reduced requirements. We have stressed to all Departments that, if there is likely to be an underspend, they should not leave it until the last moment to declare it. We do not have the flexibility that we had in previous years, albeit that we have negotiated some flexibility. We do not have the open-ended flexibility that we had in previous years to carry money forward. All I can say is that I am satisfied with the way that Departments have behaved to date. Some declared quite significant reduced requirements in June, so they were looking ahead. Obviously, the reduced requirements that were declared in October were fairly high for this time of year. There is constant contact between my Department's officials and officials in other Departments to look ahead to see what spending is likely to be. I believe that Ministers have realised the importance of declaring reduced requirements at an early stage so that they can at least be used to fit in with the Programme for Government. That is the important thing, and I know that the Committee has emphasised it. The earlier we get them, the more we can slot them into aspects of the Programme for Government, rather than having a last-minute scramble to simply spend resources in the last two months of the year.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for the statement. There is some good news on the reallocation of some of the money. What has happened to the Minister's review of the financial process? That is an issue of concern for the Finance Committee and many other key stakeholders.

We want to hear about greater transparency in debates such as this. Certain people have been asking why this did not happen sooner.

12.30 pm

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

Mr Girvan: I appreciate that. Thank you.

Mr Wilson: Of course, it has not happened at all, other than in the form of the paper that the Department presented to the Executive but which has not yet been agreed by the Executive.

Let me spell it out. There is nothing that is demanding of Ministers in this. The review of financial processes would simply require Departments to outline their spending in more detail. There would be more budget lines so that Members could scrutinise them and determine what the money is being spent on — or what the Minister said the money is being spent on — and confirm what it is being spent on.

If there are more lines in the budget, it will mean that when a Minister decides to move money from one line to another, he or she will have to show that there is transparency so that Members know that what they voted for is being done. That is all that it is about.

I am not giving the Assembly any new news today, but the difficulty has been with the Minister of Education, who, ironically, will give that information to the Treasury in London before he will give it to the Assembly. Perhaps we require an explanation for that.

I am frustrated that we have not been able to do this. The people who scrutinise our budgets want to have the information. The Assembly should not be afraid to give that information, but it is not being done, and I hope that it will be.

I can barge all I want, and the more I barge the more intransigent people will be, but when people want transparency, we are prepared to give it to them. If there is a roadblock to that, it is my duty as a Minister to say where the roadblock lies. It does not lie with my Department. Indeed, the Committee for Finance and Personnel has been very helpful because it has agreed the kind of information that is required, but that has not come to fruition in departmental presentations.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his statement and for giving us some time to read it, which was helpful. I share the views that have been expressed about the review of financial processes being frustrated. It reflects very poorly on government that we cannot move something as important as that forward.

When it comes to transparency, however, the investment package that was announced last week comprised an amount of Barnett consequentials. Will the Minister spell out the detail of those consequential credits to us during the year?

Mr Wilson: The Barnett consequentials represented money that was allocated for this year, next year and the following year, and they amounted to about £179 million. That came from a range of sources.

On UTV the other evening, I heard John Simpson say that we do not want jam tomorrow; we want jam today because the problems exist now, and we should spend it all now. Those Barnett consequentials, of course, are made available to the Assembly on the basis that there will be certain years to which they apply. So, the money that applies in 2013-14 and 2014-15 cannot be brought forward to be spent in this year.

We get a consequence from Westminster if, for example, additional money is being spent on transport in England and Wales. We get a certain percentage of that; I think that it is 2.3%. The money has to be spent in the year for which it has been allocated in other parts of the United Kingdom.

The new money amounts to £179.1 million, but it is spread over three years. That is why we had to spread that spending over three years and could not do it all in one year. To argue for doing it all now — jam tomorrow is no good; we want jam today — is not possible given the way in which the money was allocated to us.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a ráitis. Tá ceist bheag agam air faoi thábla C.

I thank the Minister for his statement. My question concerns table C of the statement, which outlines reduced requirements. From that, I see that the Department for Social Development (DSD) is returning £8 million from the social housing rebuild programme, with nearly five months of the year still left. Does the returning of that money represent the cancellation of the 100-house phase 1 of the Girdwood newbuild that was planned by previous Ministers?

Mr Wilson: No, it does not. The reduced requirement is a result of housing associations not being able, for one

reason or another, to spend the money in this year. I welcome the fact that the Minister for Social Development has trawled through the information that was available to him and scrutinised what spending is likely to happen. People will, of course, hold on to money as long as they can, and, in the past, this would probably have been left until the February monitoring round, when it was too late.

The Minister for Social Development, as a result of work that he has done with housing associations, identified that they could not spend that money for whatever reason. I do not know what the reasons are or whether we are getting all of the full reasons. I know that there has been resistance from some housing associations. As their grants have gone down, they simply decided that, rather than putting in more of their own money, they would not build houses. If that is the case, the housing associations have to be pushed on it. In some cases, it might be as a result of not having planning permissions through or tender documents out. If that is the case, I would have thought that there was probably still enough time left in the year. For whatever reason, the Minister has given the money back.

The Member should note that the money will not be lost to housing. We have allocated the money to a sector that we believe can spend it, namely affordable co-ownership housing. Whether a house is built as a social house or a co-ownership house, the building will still take place. The private sector will welcome that further injection. The difference is that money spent on co-ownership housing draws in additional finance. The banks provide at least 50% of the mortgage, so you double the money. The Co-ownership Housing Association can draw down loans on the basis of money that we give them. So the £8 million that will go to co-ownership in this year can expand to nearly £20 million.

Mrs Cochrane: I, too, welcome the statement, specifically the news that money will be set aside to address the potential shortfall in housing benefit rates and the allocation to the economy and jobs initiative. Given the danger of further spending cuts from the UK Government, is the Finance Minister confident that all the spending proposals and the current overcommitment will be sustainable over the lifespan of the current Budget?

Mr Wilson: We have to work on the basis of the money allocated to us. One thing that I would not like us to do is to hold back on spending through trying to anticipate, for example, whether the financial statement that the Chancellor will make at Westminster in December is likely to include further changes and downward Barnett consequentials, which I think is what the Member is referring to. The schemes funded here have been scrutinised. Do not forget that some of them were rejected for the very reason that the Member gave: we were not sure that some could be delivered on time or that they were sufficiently robust.

We still have flexibility over the next two years of the Budget. If the reduced requirements and the monitoring rounds produce the same amount of resources as they did in the past, we will have some flexibility to play with. We carry over resources, and we have the ability to carry over £52 million and £11 million of capital and current spending from one year to the next, which gives us a degree of flexibility. We did that this year, and we intend to do it next year. If we get the additional flexibility for capital moneys that I have sought from the Chief Secretary to the

Treasury, that will give us some scope there as well. I am convinced that we have sufficient flexibility through the monitoring rounds, the money that we carry forward as a prudent exercise and the additional flexibility that we seek from the Treasury.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his statement. I refer him to the penultimate page of his statement, which mentions the £200 million for the economy and jobs initiative. One concern that has been raised is that that is simply recycled money that is in the system already. Will the Minister clarify the extent to which that is additional new money and to what extent it is a reallocation of money from existing budgets?

Mr Wilson: It is not all reallocated money, and I have already given a figure to the Assembly for the significant Barnett consequential that were made during this financial year and the impact that they will have in this and the next two years. However, even if the £200 million were all the result of reallocations, I cannot see where there is an issue.

Members can look at the table for administration costs, etc. If the money had been a result of greater efficiency in delivering services in Northern Ireland and cutting administration costs, which some of it is, that would have been a good thing. It would mean slimmer and more efficient government and the ability to put money into front line resources. Had it been the result of Ministers simply saying, "Look, the big priority at the moment is to do what we can to alleviate the distress caused by the recession, so are there lower priority programmes in my Department that can wait so that we can address the immediate issues that affect our constituents?", that would also have been a good thing. Some of the money is due to some of those things. Had the £200 million simply been the result of Ministers doing things now that they were going to do in two years' time because they will have a great impact now, that would have been good.

Those three elements account for some of the money. However, a large proportion of it is due to additional funding that enables us to do things that we had not planned in the Budget and that Ministers had identified as new things that they wanted to do or extensions of things that they are doing at present that are working and are addressing problems.

Whenever we make an announcement that reflects a genuine effort by the Executive to try to improve the situation, I find it intolerable that the first thing that some of the commentators in Northern Ireland do is pick over it to see what bad news they can find, rather than presenting it as positive work by the Assembly. There are times when we get things wrong, and we deserve to get beaten for it. However, whenever we get it right, the least that we deserve is a bit of credit.

Ms Ruane: The Minister said that whenever people get things right, they deserve a bit of credit. On that note, does he agree that John O'Dowd and, indeed, previous Education Ministers fought very hard for funding for the building of schools and the schools estate. I know that old habits die hard, but I wonder whether the Minister wakes up in the morning thinking, "How am I going to get at Sinn Féin today?" That is what it seems like from this side of the House. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: I am coming to my question. Does the Minister agree that the money that John O'Dowd secured for maintenance is very important for the schools estate?

Mr Wilson: I am surprised at the Member's response, because if she thinks that I wake up in the morning wondering how I can get at Sinn Féin, she must think I lead a very sad life. That is not what I do. Indeed, if one looks at the statement, one would see that I have a funny way of getting at Sinn Féin — it has about £130 million worth of getting at Sinn Féin and the Education Minister. There is £90 million directly for the schools budget, £10 million for capital investment next year for schools maintenance and money for schools maintenance this year. I am trying to quickly add it all up, but it all amounts to well over £120 million. So, I do not think that the Member can honestly say that I look for ways of getting at Sinn Féin.

I have my difficulties with some Sinn Féin Ministers, as I do with lots of other Ministers, including some of those from my own party, but I emphasise that judgements will not be made on the basis of whether I do or do not get on with a Minister. Judgements will be made on the basis of whether we have money and whether there is a problem. If a Minister presents a problem and makes a case justifying the need for extra money, I do not care what party they come from.

12.45 pm

Mr McQuillan: I also welcome the Minister's statement. I welcome the additional £8 million for the housing co-ownership scheme, which will give the construction sector a boost. We cannot do that on our own. Minister, have you had any conversations with the banks so that they can buy into that project?

Mr Wilson: We have. Indeed, the Minister for Social Development and I did so before we decided to put the money in.

The Member makes a very important point that there is no point in us putting money into the Co-ownership Housing Association when at least half the value of the house has to be financed through a mortgage. In some cases, if people go for a lower percentage, they will require an even greater mortgage. Therefore, before we put the money into the Co-ownership Housing Association, we had meetings with the banks. We told them that we were going to do this and that we were going to give a long-term commitment so that it was not just a one-off and worth their while setting up schemes to make mortgages available to people. We also made the point that, under co-ownership, all the risk of a new house is carried by the Co-ownership Housing Association, because it takes the first hit if the equity value goes down. Therefore, there is no reason for banks to ask people who apply for mortgages under co-ownership for a deposit. We now have a commitment from the banks that not only will they match all the finance that we put in but will give 100% mortgages to successful applicants. That, of course, is a big boost, and it means that we lever in at least as much money as, and possibly more than, we are putting into the scheme from the banks alone.

Mr Beggs: I welcome the Minister's statement, in which he has allocated a further £14.3 million towards health to address the necessary pseudomonas investment and to try to reduce the growing waiting lists.

Will the Minister accept that confusion can be created when reannouncements occur, such as the invest-to-save allocation for Transforming Your Care, which was agreed by the Executive in September? However, the 11 pages of tables do not include a simple table to illustrate where the all the money is coming from, and we have had to ask questions about Barnett consequentials.

Mr Wilson: The tables do explain where the money is coming from. I also explained that in my statement, so it is explained in figures and explained in writing. Some of it is money that we have from the invest-to-save fund. Some of it comes from Departments' reduced requirements. Some of it is from Barnett consequentials. Some of it is from spending that we are bringing forward from future years because we want to do the capital schemes now. Northern Ireland Water capital schemes are an example of that.

Therefore, the tables do show where the money is coming from, and I refer the Member to the appropriate tables. The money that has come from reduced requirements is outlined in table C. Reallocations are outlined in table D. Reclassifications are outlined in table E. Where the money is going to as a result of the bids submitted is shown in table F, and the allocations that were made are shown in table G. Even the administration costs that have been saved are shown in table H. All the tables outline the information that the Member has asked for. I hope that there is as much transparency there as we can possibly give.

I thought that Members would have welcomed the invest-to-save money. For £23.6 million, we will make savings in the health budget on a year-on-year basis of £27 million. That is a good return and one of the reasons that the Health Minister was allocated the money. Of course, that £27 million saving every year means that there is more money to go into front line services. The money that is going into elective care will, according to the information that I have been given, deal with waiting lists of up to 3,000 patients in orthopaedics, 2,600 in general surgery, 1,000 inpatient and day cases, 2,700 ophthalmology cases and 300 inpatient cases. The numbers are in the thousands. I accept that that detail is not in the paper. However, it is the kind of detail that I would expect the Health Minister to give to his Committee. The money has been allocated: what will be done with it? This is the information that he has given to me. Thousands of people will be taken off the waiting lists as a result of the £14 million allocation in the statement today.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for his statement. Has any analysis been undertaken of the percentage change from the original budget allocation for each Department? What sort of lessons are being gleaned?

Mr Wilson: I said in the statement that some Departments are going to lose some money as a result of this, and that others would gain. The Departments that will have their budgets reduced are listed in the statement: the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), the DRD and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). Those were the three main Departments that were going to have money reallocated. The winners in this were going to be the Department of Education and, if I remember rightly, the Department of Health. We have allocated money to those Departments, and it has been done on the basis of what reduced requirements there were and what we see for the future. As I said to the House already, it does not preclude giving priority in future monitoring rounds to the Departments that

may have had reallocations in this exercise, should we find that the situation changes and they need further money.

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): The Minister should be aware that there is nothing new about republicans giving information to the British Government. They did it for 40 years, given the number of spooks and spies that were inside their organisations.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member must ask a question.

Mr Storey: I welcome the Minister's statement. On behalf of the Education Committee, I welcome the £8.3 million that has been allocated to the Department for the maintenance of the education estate, and to address the consequences of the serious fire at Arvalee Special School in Omagh.

I also welcome the fact that the Committee will now see the transfer of the £15 million and the £75 million to the Department, albeit with the caveat that the Minister has given about the issue of transparency. Will he outline for us the issue with regard to the review of the EMA and what the consequences of the failure to progress that issue will be to the overall budget position, given the fact that it was agreed by the Executive?

Mr Wilson: On the first two issues that the Member has raised, the bid for capital works in schools is a bid for capital works in schools and, therefore, the money will have to be spent for that purpose.

The £90 million allocation is to deal with the reductions that would have been made to school budgets and which schools have now been told will not have to be made. Schools have already budgeted for this, because that assurance was given to the Minister. We could not do it at the time the assurance was given because we had to give some certainty to schools' boards of governors, headmasters and headmistresses who were worried about the future and what cuts they would have to make. Would they have to make staff redundant? We gave them an early assurance that that would not have to happen. However, it was a funding pressure that we knew we would have to address. We have now addressed it as we promised we would.

I cannot now remember the other point that the Member made.

Mr Storey: It was about the EMA.

Mr Wilson: As I said already, I am disappointed that we have not had the progress on the EMA that we had anticipated.

The Executive took a decision in January that they would not increase student fees by more than the rate of inflation. That left a pressure that had to be funded. All other Departments have already had their budgets reduced in order to fund that pressure, but, because of the pressures it faced at that particular time, the Department of Education indicated that it could not possibly face it. So, the Executive agreed that, since there was a large amount of the EMA that was targeted at people who did not need it, and that there was a lot of dead weight in it, there would be a review of the EMA. Whatever savings there would be from that, on a pro rata basis, would be made available to pay the Department of Education's contribution towards holding student fees at no more than the rate of inflation.

There has been significant feet-dragging on that. The consultation is now finished, and a decision has to be made by December. The Executive's position still remains, which is that if that decision is not made and the savings are not realised, Education will have to find the savings from its own budget. Therefore, it is up to the Minister to behave responsibly. If he does not want schools to suffer, he has to make the necessary decisions to target EMA provision much more efficiently, in order to make the savings that then enable his Department to have financed its contribution towards the decision on student fees.

Mr Campbell: In his statement, the Minister outlined the saving on the A5 of £10 million a month, culminating, probably, in a total of £50 million. Can he give the House and the wider community an assurance that there is no risk of the money being lost and returned to the Treasury?

Mr Wilson: Once the Regional Development Minister raised the issue, we immediately contacted the Treasury, and my officials had conversations with Treasury officials.

There is a particular difficulty in carrying money forward, because the Treasury does not want that kind of loose arrangement where regional Administrations simply decide that they are not going to spend the money this year and that they will carry it forward and build up a big pot of money that, presumably, would be used in election year to give out goodies to the electorate. That is the thinking of the cynics in the Treasury. Of course, we would never, ever think of doing that, Mr Speaker. Anyhow, the cynics in the Treasury thought that that was a possibility, so they gave us no ability to carry money over, which was an absolute nonsense. It did not even allow you to efficiently manage resources, because you could not always be sure that something would not happen towards the end of the year that you could not spend all the money. The Treasury wants to avoid going back to that free-for-all.

We believe that we have designed a proposal that is so unique to this project and to Northern Ireland that neither Wales nor Scotland could say that they wanted the same. I talked over the details of it when I met the First Secretary to the Treasury on Thursday, and I am fairly hopeful that we will get a positive response from Treasury, but only on this one particular issue of flexibility.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Minister for his statement. In the welcome package towards boosting our economy and supporting jobs, which measures does he believe will have the most long-lasting effect from the package?

Mr Wilson: The ones that will have the most long-lasting effect are some of the employment ones. The thing that enables us to sell Northern Ireland is the quality of our workforce. Although we talk about the quality of our workforce, we have to accept that there are skills shortages and that there are areas where we have been successful in attracting inward investment and promoting local investment. However, as we do that, we need more people to be employed in those sectors.

Therefore, the money that has been allocated towards extending apprenticeship schemes and making it easier and cheaper for employers to take on apprentices; the money available for graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects and PhDs in those areas that we have targeted as growth areas in the economy that will have a long-lasting effect; and some of the money that we have designed to spend on

infrastructure will help build up the infrastructure base that makes it easier for industry to locate, transport goods, communicate, etc. For me, those are the ones which will have the greatest long-term effect.

However, we must also recognise that there are short-term problems, such as the young people who do not have a job and those over 50 who have been put out of work and find it hard to get back into work. That is why those short-term measures of 26 weeks are important to, at least, get people into the job market. The Member will know, from his own constituency, that the support for small business in the centre of town and the raising of the £15,000 NAV threshold will bring an extra 3,500 businesses into the 20% reduction in rates. That will be an important reduction in overheads for many of those businesses, and it just might help them to weather the current recession.

1.00 pm

Mr B McCrea: Following on the point about youth unemployment and skills, I refer the Minister to the penultimate page of his statement. Earlier in his statement, the Minister berated a commentator for looking for jam today rather than following the profile. Can he explain to me why youth unemployment was allocated £5.8 million in June but the Barnett consequential from the youth contract for 2012 was £10.2 million? There is a difference there. Following on from that, the paragraph dealing with the economy and jobs initiative states that the Executive have set aside £70 million over the next two years, in addition to co-ownership, acceleration and various other things. What will that £70 million be spent on? I looked at the tables, and I could not see how it related to employment and learning.

Mr Wilson: First of all, the money that is allocated this year is money on top of what the Department for Employment and Learning is already using to address youth unemployment. I do not want to mislead the House, but I think that the Department for Employment and Learning's total additional bid for dealing with youth unemployment was about £36 million, so it has got additional money over the three years. That is on top of the schemes that are already in place, which were being financed as a result of money we had available to us.

I move now to the £70 million. I do not want to read out a long list of how the money will be spent, but it is divided between resource and capital. Let me give some examples of the things that we are talking about. In respect of supporting people, we have the First Start initiative, the Step Ahead programme for the 50+, the undergraduate STEM places, the increased funding for FE and 150 additional PhD places. Those are not in the statement. If the Member is looking for them, he will find that they are not there. I do not want him to think that I am misleading him and wonder what I am reading from. To support businesses, there is a moratorium on car parking charges and the increase in the NAV in the rates element. In supporting investment, there is £10 million for the additional maintenance of schools next year and the updating of tourist facilities, caravan sites and forest parks. There is a range of things. I do not know for certain, but I am sure that that information is available in the written statement that was produced by the Executive after the Executive meeting. I think it came out on Friday.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his statement. As a member of the Health Committee, I especially welcome

the additional £14.3 million for health. Can the Minister advise what the additional funding for the Ulster Hospital will mean for the long-term development of the Ulster Hospital site?

Mr Wilson: The additional funding is for the Tor Bank site. As the Member will know, the school there has been knocked down. Additional car parking is needed for the hospital, and anyone who drives up the road towards Newtownards will see how much that is needed, because cars are parked along the East Link Road towards the Ice Bowl etc at Dundonald. So it is to include greater car parking facilities in the hospital grounds, so that people are not forced to park on the road when they visit relatives and to allow staff to find places in the hospital grounds. As the hospital is expanding, it, of course, requires more car parking. The Tor Bank site is next door, and the £4 million is for that.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the statement by the Minister. I encourage him to complete the review of financial processing. It is important for the Executive going forward. Can the Minister give an assurance that the Executive are still committed to building the two roads, as outlined? Will the Minister further agree that the funding for the A5 and A8 was project-specific, as outlined by the Treasury, and that that, hopefully, can still be maintained?

Mr Wilson: I hope that I have given the assurance. Let us look at the two things that I said about the A5 and A8. First of all, £31 million that could not be spent this year has been allocated to capital projects so that there can be work for the construction industry in Northern Ireland Water projects and road maintenance. That money was given on the strict understanding that, since it was money that would have been spent by the Water Service and Roads Service next year, it will be transferred to the scheme next year and the year after as it is required. We have gone to considerable lengths, as I have outlined to the Assembly already, to negotiate with the Treasury a carry-over of £50 million so that that is not lost. That will be available to spend in the last year of the scheme, when, of course, the shortfall would have occurred because of the delay at the start of the scheme. In the ingenuity we have tried to show in persuading the Treasury and getting it over the line and in the commitment we have given that any money brought forward from the A5 project to spend on other projects this year must be returned to the scheme next year, there can be no greater indication of our commitment to complete the project.

Mr Craig: I welcome the Minister's statement, especially what he said around the additional £15 million and £75 million for education. However, does the Minister agree that that is a bit like the headmaster rewarding the pupil for playing truant? Does he agree that, if the Department got its act together and gave the Minister proper information, any increase, especially in the maintenance budget for schools, would not only have a beneficial effect on school property but boost small to medium-sized businesses, which, at the minute, are struggling in our economy?

Mr Wilson: There has been no attempt to reward a Minister who has not been playing ball in producing financial information or scrutinising the financial operations in their Department. At the end of the day, I have to make a judgment and the Executive have to make a judgment on what the needs of the education sector are. I will have the most robust debates with the Minister in private and

in public, and I will, I am sure, annoy him in public by some of the things I say. However, let me make it clear that we will not make decisions on the basis of how I as Finance Minister get on with other Ministers. We will make decisions on the basis of what the needs presented are. Needs were presented. I know, because I spoke to principals in my constituency, that schools would have found it almost impossible to make an 11% reduction in their budget over the period of the Budget. For that reason, additional money was found. There is a big backlog of maintenance in the schools sector of over £300 million. We do not want buildings to deteriorate to the point where they cannot be used for the purpose for which they are required or, indeed, to incur even more maintenance because they get so bad and damaged as a result of that. On that basis, additional money was made available. However, that is not rewarding any wayward Minister, by any means. It is a sensible allocation of resources to a problem that has been identified and needs to be addressed.

Mr Allister: Was the Minister's thunder stolen last week because the First Minister and deputy First Minister wanted the glory of the announcement before they went off to China? Or was the announcement made because the Executive could not trust some of their own members not to leak the details between last Wednesday and today?

On the issue of the rightful criticism that the Minister made of Sinn Féin's blocking of the review of financial processes and, I suspect, the roll-out of further announcements on the Budget for 2013-14 and 2014-15 and the EMA, am I reading the statement correctly when I discover, from table C and elsewhere, that not a single Sinn Féin Department surrendered any money or admitted to having any reduced requirements, yet all of them got handsome increases in their allocations? Is that correct?

Mr Wilson: If one looks at the reduced requirements, one will see that OFMDFM has shown a number of reduced requirements. There was also a reduction, in table D, and movements of money within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The Departments that have made reduced requirements are spread across a number of parties — for example, the Alliance Party. The SDLP, as has been pointed out, and Ulster Unionist Departments have not shown reduced requirements, but, nevertheless, we make a judgement not on the Minister but on whether Departments have underspends. If they have not spent money at the end of a year, it will show as an underspend, which is when real criticism will come in. However, my officials and accounting officers in other Departments are constantly going backwards and forwards between each other. We are satisfied that the reduced requirements shown in the statement reflect genuine reduced requirements.

The Member made a point about my thunder or glory being stolen by the statement being made on Thursday evening rather than today. I do not think that it is a question of glory for any individual Minister. The Executive made a collective decision. Despite what UTV reported, the announcement was not delayed because Ministers could not agree and were squabbling about how the money would be spent. In September, we decided that we had to do something, and, by October, we had a comprehensive package, which was made public. How and why it was made public at the time that it was is not a matter of great concern. The important thing is that we now have a programme that will help thousands of people to get work. It will help many

small businesses and construction firms. That is how the package should be judged, not on how it was announced or who got the opportunity or glory of announcing it.

Mr Speaker: That concludes questions on the statement.

Mr McCarthy: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I heard the Minister's response to Gordon Dunne's question about the Ulster Hospital site. The Minister quite rightly said that it would be used for car parking. Is the Minister aware that there is also provision —

Mr Speaker: Order. Questions on the ministerial statement have ended. That is not a point of order. Let us move on.

Executive Committee Business

Local Government (Indemnities for Members and Officers) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I beg to move

That the draft Local Government (Indemnities for Members and Officers) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

The order is made under article 33 of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 2005. Article 33(3) of the order provides that a draft of the order must be laid before and approved by a resolution of the Assembly. The purpose of the draft order is to permit councils to provide indemnities to any of their members or officers. The Department consulted on the draft order from December 2009 to March 2010. The Department received 18 responses, none of which opposed the proposals. Clearly, some time has elapsed between the end of the consultation and the order coming before the Chamber. I will address that matter in my later comments.

Given the developing and innovative ways in which district councils have sought to carry out their functions, they have in the past raised concerns regarding the extent to which they can indemnify their members and officers against personal liability. All of us in the Chamber, including you, Mr Speaker, who are or were councillors, especially going back some time, will know how significantly the work of councils has adjusted over the decades, to the point where council members who sat on bodies outside the council may have had issues of liability. We are trying to address that matter now and in anticipation of the review of public administration, when councillors' responsibilities, including being involved in external third-party organisations and companies, may become more significant. The main concern that was raised was about instances in which councils have appointed members and officers as members of other bodies such as partnerships, regeneration initiatives and companies that councils have established or participated in, which has given life to the quality of this regulation.

1.15 pm

Legislation that has established bodies requiring council representation, such as the policing and community safety partnerships, has often given councils explicit powers to provide indemnities. The draft order will supplement those powers in cases in which no such provision exists in relation to a council function.

Councils should seek clarity from partner organisations at an early stage on where responsibility for indemnity lies in order to avoid duplication and convey that information to their members and officers. That is very good advice. Given the range of partnership arrangements between councils, councillors and third-party organisations, people should interrogate third-party organisations and themselves to determine where liability indemnity begins and ends.

The order also proposes to prohibit councils from using the powers within it to meet the costs of members and officers

taking legal action for slander or libel either directly or through insurance. That said, there may be provision in the order to allow members to defend themselves when party to an action of slander or libel but not to initiate slander or libel actions. That may be a regret to some Members, I do not know. The Department does not believe that individuals should be funded at public expense to bring proceedings against third parties, as to do so could stifle legitimate public debate — never mind open the door. Councils will, however, be able, as I said, to provide indemnities to individuals against the cost of defending themselves in such actions when the actions relate to their official functions.

I want to make it clear that this does not give councillors a licence to do what they want in third-party organisations of which they might be a member. If, for example, a member acted fraudulently, recklessly or, indeed, criminally, he or she could not rely on indemnity in those circumstances. Therefore, indemnity is subject to certain hurdles and tests. It is not an open door for councillors to behave as they might wish without repercussions. The order will extend indemnity provisions to people who were councillors and have now stepped down for actions that may have arisen when they were in that role. Provisions will also extend to non-council members or staff who sit on committees where the indemnity provisions may kick in.

The proposed order mirrors the legislation available to local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales. The enabling power for the order was introduced in the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 2005, but the order is only being made now. As I said, it might be helpful if I set out the reasons for that. Although I will outline those reasons, it is accepted in the Department — certainly by me — that it should have been brought to the Chamber before now, some 30 months after the consultation ended. Although I will explain the process between then and now, certainty should have been created before now to allow the matter to be brought before the House.

The story from March 2010 until now is as follows. First, the Department was taking forward other legislation on which the indemnity provisions could have a bearing, namely the power for councils to establish or participate in companies for the purposes of carrying out their functions, for which legislation was made in January 2007; the issue of whether councils and waste groups have the necessary vires to enable them to enter long-term service contracts with the private sector; and to address concerns that contractors and financiers might have about such contracts, for which legislation was made in 2012. That is a very important matter given what may happen in the waste procurement process and the scale of the contracts, both in duration and cost. It is important that the issue of indemnity and the waste procurement groups was interrogated. However, that in itself should not have given rise to the scale of the delay that we experience today. In the Department, at a certain stage, it was considered prudent to wait until those issues had been resolved and to take account of ongoing developments in other jurisdictions before making the regulation. Secondly, the need to seek legal advice on issues raised as part of the consultation contributed to the delay. As we know, lawyers are not always the most prompt in giving their advice. Thirdly, there were competing legislative priorities of which Members will be aware, not least the drafting of a wide body of legislation, some of which will come before the

Assembly in the near future, in respect, not least, of local government reform. I ask the Assembly to approve the draft order.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): The Committee considered initial proposals for the regulations almost three years ago at its meeting on 3 December 2009. Members welcomed the proposals and were content for the Department to proceed with the policy.

As we heard, the rule will make provision for circumstances in which a council may indemnify some or all of its members or officers. It enables the council to provide indemnity by securing an insurance policy for members or officers and sets out the cases in which indemnities may be provided. It also allows indemnity to cover officials carrying out a function on behalf of the local authority.

Members noted that the need for the legislation was identified many years ago. It has become even more important as we move towards larger councils with greater powers. We need to ensure that councils have the ability to use these powers in innovative ways to deliver high-quality and cost-effective services. The protection that the rule provides will help councils to do that.

Powers have existed in Northern Ireland since 1972 to enable councils to indemnify their officers and members. However, councils have long been concerned about the extent to which those powers could be applied to officers and members whenever they were acting or taking decisions as members of other bodies to which the council had appointed them. The Committee was, therefore, pleased to hear that, in bringing forward the regulations, the Department would overcome those doubts by ensuring that councils will be able, at their discretion, to provide indemnity that is wide-ranging and applicable to all members and officers wherever they conduct their responsibilities. However, the Committee welcomes the fact that some restrictions will be in place. For example, indemnity will not be available to cover a case in which an individual has acted fraudulently or recklessly, as the Minister indicated, nor will it extend to any liability arising from an action or failure to act that constitutes a criminal offence. It is reasonable to expect that members and officers can rely on indemnities that have been funded directly by their council only where they have acted honestly and in good faith.

The Examiner of Statutory Rules considered the draft statutory rule in his fourth report to the Assembly for session 2012-13, which was published on 24 October 2012. He had no issues to bring to the Committee's attention.

The Committee considered the draft rule at its meeting on 18 October 2012. Although the Committee was concerned at the significant time that it had taken the Department to bring the rule forward, members welcomed it and were content for me to recommend to the Assembly that the rule be affirmed.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom cúpla focal a rá. I want to say a few words on this.

Obviously, this has been in the pipeline for a number of years, as it is three years since it first came to the Committee. The order will give more clarity and surety to local councils and officers. It will bring a wee bit of

confidence to councils, especially in the run-in to the new council structures and formations. So, with that, I support the order.

Mr Attwood: First, as always — well, nearly always — I thank the Committee for its contribution to these matters and, indeed, to the order. As the Chair and Mr Boylan indicated, there has been some delay, but, to be fair, this has not been an acute matter over the past period. I acknowledge that the order should have been brought forward earlier, but, as far as I am aware, subject to what the councils may say, it has not been one of the most pressing issues. I agree with Mr Boylan that this will create confidence and certainty and avoid doubt.

The Committee Chair made a curious and relevant point when she said that the order was important now because, in future, councils might find innovative ways in which to work with others to develop local council areas. Over the next three years and beyond, that issue will become more and more relevant. Are there opportunities, ways and means and models for councils to draw down extra funds, without placing any undue burden on the life of councils or any particular cost on ratepayers, to initiate and drive development in their communities?

I also acknowledge the Committee Chair's point, which is another good point, that, where councillors or members of staff engage honestly, reasonably and in good faith in a proper council function with, let us say, a third-party organisation but, in doing so, act beyond their particular powers, that sort of action beyond their competence is, nonetheless, captured by the order. Therefore, it protects councillors, former councillors and staff in taking forward the work of a council with other organisations, but — I give this warning — if they are fraudulent, reckless or guilty of criminal behaviour, they will not have indemnity.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft Local Government (Indemnities for Members and Officers) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

Committee Business

Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

Mr D Bradley (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 15 February 2013 in relation to the Committee Stage of the Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill [NIA Bill 12/11-15].

Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Éirím leis an rún a mholadh. Cuireadh críoch leis an Dara Céim den Bhille Stát Seirbhíse (Comhairleoirí Speisialta) ar an 25 Meán Fómhair, agus fágadh faoin Choiste Airgeadais agus Pearsanra é le haghaidh na Céime Coiste.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy] in the Chair)

The Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill completed its Second Stage on 25 September and was referred to the Committee for Finance and Personnel for its Committee Stage. In broad terms, the Bill provides that no person shall hold the post of special adviser if he or she has what is termed a “serious criminal conviction”, which is defined as one carrying a custodial sentence of five years or more. It requires the Department of Finance and Personnel to publish a code of appointment for special advisers, a code of conduct for special advisers and an annual report about the number and cost of special advisers. It also removes the Speaker from the list of office holders who are entitled to appoint a special adviser to the Civil Service.

1.30 pm

Having been notified at its meeting on 5 September that should the Bill pass its Second Stage it would stand referred to the Committee unless the Assembly otherwise ordered, the Committee invited the Bill's sponsor, Mr Allister, QC, MLA, to give evidence on the provisions of the Bill at the Committee's meeting on 19 September. Evidence was also invited from the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) in view of the functions to be conferred on that Department. Additionally, the Attorney General was invited to address early concerns regarding legislative competence, in particular, potential non-compliance with human rights requirements. Those were useful sessions, which helped in informing Members in advance of the Second Stage debate.

Following the Bill's referral to the Committee, a public call for evidence was issued. In response, the Committee received more than 860 responses from individuals and organisations. The Committee has identified a range of organisations and witnesses from which it plans to take oral evidence. Although some have to be confirmed, it is expected that the evidence sessions will continue until the Christmas recess. As is the normal protocol with an Executive Bill, the Committee is also likely to invite the Bill's sponsor to respond to any issues raised in the evidence. I expect that Mr Allister will shortly receive communication in that regard. In addition, the Committee may seek legal advice on aspects of the Bill.

Members will be aware from the Second Stage debate that differing views were expressed on the Bill and concerns

and issues highlighted. The Committee wishes to take the time to undertake robust scrutiny of the Bill and, therefore, agreed at its meeting on 24 October to seek an extension of the Committee Stage until 15 February 2013. That will allow time for all the oral evidence to be taken; for the Committee to consider in detail the issues arising from the evidence; for all necessary advice to be received, for the clause-by-clause scrutiny to be completed; and for the Committee report to be agreed.

I have no doubt that the Committee will report to the Assembly in advance of 15 February, if practicable. Therefore, I ask the House to support the motion to extend the Committee Stage of the Civil Service (Special Advisers) 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 15 February 2013 in relation to the Committee Stage of the Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill [NIA Bill 12/11-15].

Private Members' Business

Boxing

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The next item of business on the Order Paper is the motion regarding funding for boxing. As two amendments have been selected, up to one hour and 45 minutes will be allowed for the debate. The proposer of the motion has 10 minutes to propose and a further 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and a further five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Miss M McIlveen: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the recent announcement by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure in relation to funding for boxing; acknowledges the boxing strategy being developed by Belfast City Council in conjunction with Sport NI and the club development plan being produced by the Ulster provincial boxing council; recognises that there is a need to develop boxing in working-class Protestant areas; and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to ensure that the funding is allocated equitably across communities to fill identifiable gaps in provision for the sport, in keeping with her Department's section 75 responsibilities.

I have come under a certain amount of criticism for tabling the motion. I have been accused of seeking to positively discriminate in favour of Protestants and of effectively being sectarian. That is simply not the case. The purpose of the motion is to seek to ensure that the opportunities and benefits that boxing affords can be enjoyed across Northern Ireland.

The problems faced by Sandy Row boxing club are well-documented, have been discussed at the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee and will continue to be scrutinised in the Assembly and the press. The issue of sectarianism and racism is not confined to Sandy Row or to boxing and needs to be removed from our society. In boxing, it needs to be addressed as a priority as it is a barrier to participation. The motion is primarily focused on funding and developing participation in the sport.

Despite negativity in recent months, Northern Ireland amateur boxing has much to be confident about. We returned two medallists from the Olympic Games, and we can look forward to sending a strong team to the forthcoming Commonwealth Games. I want to see us building on the successes that we have had and perhaps regain some of the past glories — the achievements of Wayne McCullough and Carl Frampton spring to mind. We can look at the success of the Irish Republic's Katie Taylor as an inspiration to young women in Northern Ireland. Following the successes of Paddy Barnes and Michael Conlan, the Minister re-announced the provision of £3.27 million for local boxing, which is to be administered through Sport NI and the Irish Amateur Boxing Association (IABA).

Boxing in Ulster relies heavily on volunteers giving freely of their time. It goes without saying that a debt of thanks is owed to them for that. The Ulster Boxing Council (UBC) governs local boxing and is responsible for some 110 clubs, 86 of which are in Northern Ireland. The council is part of the IABA, which represents boxing on an all-island basis.

Following a report by Sport NI, UBC prepared an implementation plan for 2011-16 and a policy and procedure document to implement proper governance arrangements. The plan surveyed existing facilities, assessed the need for the development of coaches and officials, and set out key strategic objectives for Ulster boxing. Those were the development of coaches and officials, the development of governance practices to ensure that participation is open to all, and the support of a high performance programme.

The policies and procedures deal with various areas, including governance and accountability, risk management, child protection, and what the UBC describes as equity. In the equity section, UBC states that it is determined to ensure that all services and policies are fair and without discrimination. It also seeks to ensure that all who participate in the sport of amateur boxing reflect the diversity of background and culture in the province of Ulster. The equity policy fleshes out the steps to be taken to ensure that those who participate in the sport do not suffer discrimination, harassment or unfair treatment. That policy is backed up by IABA's disciplinary and grievance procedures. That, of course, is to be welcomed, but why has it taken so long?

Belfast City Council also approved the development of a boxing strategy, which was informed by the work that was being undertaken by UBC. A baseline assessment was undertaken, which, in addition to establishing the numbers involved in boxing and the key issues facing clubs, demonstrated the benefits and value of such clubs. Those include: reducing antisocial behaviour by providing activities, particularly in deprived areas of the city; contributing to improved health; and increasing participation in physical activities. It also identified a gap in Access NI vetting of coaches and volunteers. The strategy is now subject to public consultation.

As a result, Sport NI and Belfast City Council are working together to establish a baseline standard for facilities and equipment. That should be in place for all boxing clubs at various levels. An action plan is being drawn up to outline what can be taken forward to meet the shortfalls in infrastructure and equipment in the Belfast area. That will then inform discussions with other Northern Ireland councils about boxing provision in their areas. Sport NI's boxing investment programme consultation is now open. Although the link-up with Belfast City Council is useful, boxing exists beyond Belfast. There is life beyond Belfast. I seek the assurance that Belfast will not soak up all of the investment. I want to see gaps in provision addressed right across Northern Ireland.

A general theme that runs through all of this is addressing inclusivity in the sport. Given the prominence of that, it is natural to infer that it is recognised as a problem. The Minister has acknowledged the need to promote inclusivity so that no one, regardless of community background, is discouraged from participating. I cannot stress enough the importance of UBC adopting the new equality standard for sport.

Boxing is more than a sport. It can act as a vehicle for the promotion of good relations, particularly in working-class areas. A difficulty in fully achieving that is the paucity of clubs in perceived Protestant areas. Historically, boxing clubs in Roman Catholic areas have been established along parish lines and have been a focal point for those communities. In many instances, the Catholic Church has

granted land to the clubs, and this has proved to be a huge advantage for them. In west Belfast, for example, there are 11 clubs within a three-mile radius. Clubs in Protestant areas did not and do not enjoy such generosity. Those involved in boxing acknowledge that clubs in Protestant areas are poor at accessing funding opportunities and the lack of facilities exacerbates that. We are left with a position in which there are significantly fewer clubs in Protestant areas, and, therefore, fewer Protestants participating in the sport. However, it is felt that, if the facilities were there, there would be a demand.

One of the interesting aspects of some clubs is the diversity of what is on offer. Although they are boxing clubs, they offer much more, such as engaging with young people from socially excluded communities and seeking to lower youth crime and address antisocial behaviour. They also seek to address underachievement in education, which is particularly prevalent among working-class Protestant boys.

One of the problems that could be foreseen with the funding is that, given the dominance of one community in the sport, it will entrench the situation. There needs to be promotion and encouragement of the sport in Protestant areas, particularly in working-class areas. I am not advocating an approach of build it and they will come. However, the strategy underpinning the investment needs to seek to develop boxing in those areas.

The perception that boxing belongs to only one community to the exclusion of the others needs to be addressed. In recent times, there has been a focus on addressing discrimination and harassment in the sport. The development of an equity policy by UBC is a huge step forward, but it needs to be enforced: words on a page are not enough. Perhaps future funding for individual clubs could be subject to anti-sectarian and anti-racism measures.

Disappointingly, increasing Protestant participation is not a key objective of the investment strategy. This investment offers the opportunity for that to be done. As one of the key objectives is to contribute to the social regeneration of deprived communities and to make improvements in the health and mental well-being of local communities, I would like some assurance that Protestant communities will not be by-passed in favour of the many established clubs in predominantly Roman Catholic areas.

I am pleased that another key objective is to encourage the involvement of women. I referred earlier to Katie Taylor, and the manner in which she won Olympic gold and the high regard in which she is held in the sport make her a fantastic role model for young women. I hope that, in providing investment in that area, her example will act as a catalyst for the development of women's boxing.

From a personal perspective, I would like a mapping exercise to be carried out. Questions need to be asked about whether there are too many clubs in a particular area and whether it is appropriate for all those clubs to receive funding while there are areas of need that are not being addressed. If there are too many clubs in an area, should a closer working relationship or merger be encouraged to maximise the benefits of funding? Is it time to look at a centre of excellence for boxing? We need to look to see where there are gaps in provision and fill those.

A substantial amount of money is being invested in boxing, and it has been identified by the Minister as one

of her priorities. There is a perception that the money will just go into north and west Belfast. The Minister needs to demonstrate that she acts for all of Northern Ireland. There are issues around sectarianism within the sport whether we care to admit it or not. Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club's report exemplifies that. The Minister needs to demonstrate that the processes are there to ensure that sectarianism has been taken out of the sport and that everyone who participates in it is free from intimidation and harassment. This is a test for the Minister. I do not want to see her fall short.

Mr Allister: I beg to move amendment No 1:

Leave out all after "notes" and insert

"with concern the findings of Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club's (SRABC) recent report; further notes the recent announcement by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure in relation to funding for boxing; acknowledges the boxing strategy being developed by Belfast City Council in conjunction with Sport NI and the club development plan being produced by the Ulster provincial boxing council, but regrets the council's failure to address the issue of sectarianism highlighted in the report by SRABC; recognises that there is a need to develop boxing in working-class Protestant areas; calls for a Northern Ireland amateur boxing association to be established in order to afford boxers from Northern Ireland the opportunity to compete for the UK at international level; and further calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to ensure that the funding is allocated equitably across communities to fill identifiable gaps in provision for the sport, in keeping with her Department's section 75 responsibilities."

In moving amendment No 1, I make it clear that it does not detract at all from the content of the motion. In fact, it takes nothing from the motion but adds three items that I think are vital considerations for the debate. The first of those is recognition of the report from the Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club, which did a service to the sport in general by being prepared to have the courage to speak up about an issue which, in many cases, had been swept under the carpet for too long. Therefore, amendment No 1, first, notes:

"with concern the findings of Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club's ... recent report".

Secondly, it regrets that the boxing authorities have failed to address the issue highlighted in that report.

1.45 pm

Thirdly, and very importantly, in looking forward to the future and the governance of boxing, it makes the elementary point that we need to have governance arrangements that are not one-sided and that afford to all unionists and nationalist boxing participants the opportunity to box under the colours of the country that they choose to box under. That is an important consideration, not just for boxing but for other sports.

My acquaintance with Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club goes back to when, as a Member of the European Parliament, I was invited to come and discuss some of the club's needs. I will never forget going into that club and having to negotiate my way round the buckets that were catching water from the ceiling. That need was self-evident

and, happily, we were able to get some improvements moving. The second thing that struck me was the sheer dedication of the volunteers who run the club, and they are volunteers — people who needlessly give up night after night of their personal lives to try to equip, train and give an outlet to young people who would otherwise have a much worse, misspent youth. We all owe a debt of gratitude to people such as that.

It was clear then and has become clearer since that that was a club operating under a shadow of sectarian abuse. Its members participated in competitions in venues that were anything but neutral and in extremely hostile circumstances under which young people were repeatedly subjected to sectarian abuse. It has to be said that the Sandy Row club has tolerated that for many years. It has sought, through the processes within boxing, to draw that fact to the attention of the authorities. Only when all of that failed did it go public with its concerns. As I said, I think that we owe the club's members a debt of gratitude for their courage and strength in doing that. It is a matter of regret that, to this day, the Irish Amateur Boxing Association — despite its saying at the time of the report's publication in August that it would undertake a thorough investigation — has yet to speak to the Sandy Row management about the report's contents. It matters far less, but, to this very day, the association has not even replied to a letter that I sent it in August to raise the issues. So, in that regard, there is feet-dragging, which is very regrettable.

I come to what I think is the important long-term issue, which is that of how boxing should be organised. We all observed and took pleasure from the Olympics in the summer. We saw the great affinity between people in every sport and the national pride that they took as their flag was run up the pole to mark the presentation of their medal. Yet, in boxing, as in other sports in Northern Ireland, if you are a participant who wishes to box for the United Kingdom because you regard it as the country of your birth and the country of your allegiance, you cannot do so because recognition is given only to the Irish Amateur Boxing Association. Therefore, you have to box on behalf of Ireland. That is wrong; it is a denial of people's fundamental rights. The House is highly populated by Belfast Agreement enthusiasts. Let me remind those enthusiasts that the Belfast Agreement stated that "the people of Northern Ireland" have the right:

"to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose".

It inexorably follows that that applies equally to the young Protestant boxer from Sandy Row who identifies himself as British, wants to fight and box for the British nation, wants to appear at the Olympics with the Union flag — not the Irish tricolour — going up the pole if he wins a medal, and asks why he is not allowed that basic human right that the Belfast Agreement is supposed to embrace.

That is why my amendment grapples with that issue and states that Northern Ireland needs a Northern Ireland federation of boxing to be established. I am not saying that it can be the only governance organisation, but it has to be there as a conduit and opportunity for young unionists who want to channel their talents into boxing for the United Kingdom. It has to be there to enable that to happen so that they can affiliate in that direction. It does not mean that the alternative arrangements cannot still be

in place. There may be room for both, but there certainly is not room to exclude one section of the community and its political and constitutional affinity. That is what has been happening in boxing and, indeed, in other sports. That is something in the name of equality. Many Members hold themselves out as champions of equality, so here is an opportunity to demonstrate their credentials on equality. Here is an opportunity to demonstrate that, when they espouse the principle that is supposedly in the Belfast Agreement of that equal right of expression, they are prepared to live up to it and to say to young boxers, young swimmers and others that of course they have the right to compete for their country, of course they have the right to take pride in their own flag, and of course they have the right to do what everyone else takes for granted. In the long term, that issue needs to be addressed.

We were told that sectarianism was a problem in soccer. That problem was addressed, in part by overseeing the governance arrangements and by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) interfering in the governance arrangements. What is good enough for soccer —

Mr Humphrey: Football.

Mr Allister: What is good enough for football is good enough for boxing. Let us see the same proactive action so that young people who take pride in their boxing skills can indeed participate, free from the burden and the cloud of sectarian abuse that, as the Sandy Row report demonstrates, so many have been subjected to for so long. If those young people have the ability and achieve competition results, they can attain the ultimate and compete for and on behalf of their own nation, and instead of having to wrap themselves in an Irish tricolour when they do so, have the opportunity, as everyone else does, to take pride in their own flag. Is that too much to ask? I think not. The vote on the amendment will tell us whether that is too much to ask of the House.

Mrs McKeivitt: I beg to move amendment No 2:

Leave out all after “develop boxing” and insert

“; and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to ensure that the funding is allocated on the basis of need to fill identifiable gaps in provision for the sport, in keeping with her Department’s section 75 responsibilities and to ensure that all clubs uphold the highest standards of good relations and the equality standards in sport.”

The SDLP amendment makes the motion much more inclusive and calls for every section of our society involved in boxing and in need of support to be considered and supported. The amendment also puts an onus on all clubs and organising bodies to uphold the highest standards of good relations and equality in boxing.

At this stage, it would be remiss of me not to mention the achievements of our amateur boxers at the Olympics in London earlier this year. They did us proud. In particular, local bronze medal winners Paddy Barnes and Michael Conlan kept us on the edge of our seats, and we know that they are capable of bringing home gold at the next Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. Silver medallist John Joe Nevin, a member of the Travelling community, said that he wants the legacy of the games to be a closer relationship between Travellers and the settled community. I think that he has achieved that already. Gold medal winner Katie

Taylor, a born-again Christian, is an inspirational individual who has excelled in her chosen sports, especially boxing. Her performance in the Olympics has motivated many young people, mostly young girls, to think about their well-being and to take up sport, particularly boxing.

Our Olympic medal winners already reflect the diverse backgrounds of boxing participants and champions. I am convinced that sticking with the original wording of the motion would be regrettable as it introduces an element of discrimination that is neither required nor desired.

Our amendment makes the fund available to everyone and may well set the standard for future motions. Can you imagine future debates in which all the proposals for support or funding are targeted at a particular section of our community?

I have, however, some concerns about the timeline of delivery for the boxing fund and about the capacity of clubs to make a successful bid. Since the fund was outlined to the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure in June and re-announced by Minister Ní Chuilín during the Olympics in August, movement has been slow. Sport NI’s consultation on the boxing investment programme was released only on Friday last and runs until February next year.

Bearing in mind that the first year of the three-year plan ends in March, I do not think that it gives clubs that have expressed an interest a great deal of time to apply for equipment under the first tranche. I am also concerned that Belfast clubs have a massive head start on other clubs because Belfast City Council was able to start developing its strategy back in February.

There are clubs in premises that are not fit for use. My colleague Dominic Bradley and I visited boxing clubs in Newry and Mourne that stuffed newspapers in the ceiling to keep the snow out while they were training. It did not stop them delivering their champions, however, which was a credit to the coaches and the dedication of the boxers.

I plead with those charged with developing the strategy and delivering the fund to move with haste to ensure that it is delivered fairly and across all sections of our community, but most importantly to simplify the process and make it accessible to every club, even those with limited form-filling capability.

I ask Members to support our amendment to ensure fairness for everyone in boxing, regardless of their creed or class. How heads-up was Barry McGuigan a number of years ago when he was boxing? We often spoke of the support that he received from Protestant and Catholic communities throughout his boxing career. McGuigan, born and reared to the Roman Catholic faith, never chose sides. Refusing to wear the green, white and gold, he became known as a non-sectarian sporting ambassador for Ireland. During the darkest days of the Troubles, Catholics and Protestants would say, “Leave the fighting to McGuigan”, for which I admire him, because he does that to this day.

The Assembly must promote good community relations through sport. We must move away from the them-and-us attitude. We must stop seeing our sportsmen and women as wearing green, white and gold or red, white and blue; we must see them as athletes and champions.

If the Assembly gets the delivery of this welcome funding for boxing right, many clubs across the region will be

able to reach the proper standard that we have today for coaching and which has given us champions. I ask the House to support our amendment.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Príomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag labhairt i bhfabhar an dara leasú agus in aghaidh an chéad leasaithe, agus tá cúpla focal le rá agam faoin mholadh fosta. I support amendment No 2, oppose amendment No 1 and have a few words to say about the motion.

When I first saw the motion, I was concerned about the line to which Mrs McKeivitt referred, which mentions the development of boxing in working-class Protestant areas. I know that that would cause a lot of concern among some boxing clubs as well.

The second part of the motion, however, caused me equal concern. It asks the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to ensure that funding is “allocated equitably across communities”. Allocating funding equitably is not the same as allocating funding on the basis of equality. Funding should be allocated not because a club is Protestant or Catholic, unionist or nationalist, but regardless of it. It should also be allocated according to whether a club is urban or rural.

I will declare an interest because my son is a member of a local boxing club with which I have worked very closely down the years. It is a small, rural club, which, some 40-odd years ago, was founded by a few very far-sighted men who spotted an opportunity to acquire an old drill hut that belonged to the old Ulster Special Constabulary and put it to better use.

That sufficed for 20-odd years, even with its leaking roof, ropy floors and everything else. Despite the fact that it did not have the facilities, it produced some of the best champions that we have ever seen. Indeed, that small club holds nearly every title under the sun: county titles, Ulster titles, all-Ireland titles, British titles, Commonwealth titles, European titles and intercontinental titles. Indeed, had Eamonn O’Kane not gone professional last year, we probably would have had an Olympic title, and, had there not been a dodgy decision against Paul McCloskey in Manchester last year, we would have had a world title. That club has achieved all that without funding.

2.00 pm

When the Minister announced the £3.27 million of funding, it was welcomed with open arms in boxing circles. It added to the Irish Amateur Boxing Association’s contribution of £1.5 million. As the motion recognises, central to all this is the contribution of Sport NI, the club development plans and the boxing strategies of both the Ulster Boxing Council and Belfast City Council. However, also relevant is the fact that a club development officer has been put in place. We have seen the benefits that that has brought to sports such as GAA, soccer, rugby and cricket.

I would like to refer to Mr Allister’s amendment, which touches on a few points, including sectarianism. The Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure received a presentation from Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club. We are due to have presentations from other clubs, so there has not really been a right of reply yet on that point. The other side of Mr Allister’s argument is that we should form a Northern Ireland boxing federation. I do not know whether he has done the sums, but we are on an island of

7.5 million people as opposed to the neighbouring island, which has 75 million. Like many other sports, boxing has always been organised on an all-Ireland basis.

I had the pleasure of being invited to Ravenhill to watch Ulster demolish Edinburgh Friday a week ago. One of the senior officials said to us that rugby was organised on an all-Ulster — nine counties — and an all-Ireland basis and that that would not be changing any time soon. I think that that is positive, because people can throw their weight behind Ulster and Ireland, which I was very happy to do. It was pointed out to us on the night that, increasingly, those who support Ulster Rugby come from a GAA background.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Member for giving way. He is right about how rugby is governed. There is no difficulty with the Ulster branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union. The difficulty is with the Irish Rugby Football Union based in Dublin. Whenever an Ireland game is played in this part of the United Kingdom, the Irish Rugby Football Union refuses to allow ‘God Save the Queen’, our national anthem, to be played or to allow the Union flag to be flown. It brings politics into sport.

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

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I take the Member’s point. However, I do not think that there was any problem when Ireland played South Africa on Saturday. Indeed, we saw every one of the South African players singing the new South African national anthem. Whenever you go to Dublin, you will see people of all political persuasions and of none supporting Ireland.

As regards governance and competition, it is advisable and probably preferable for boxing, like many other sports, to be organised on an all-Ireland basis. I hope that that will continue for many years to come. Back in May, I entertained Carl Frampton, Paul McCloskey and Eamonn O’Kane out on the steps here.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Ó hOisín: They are positive role models in boxing, and I think that they are the examples that everybody else should follow.

Mr McGimpsey: I support the motion. I also support both amendments. I do not see a contradiction between them, and I will speak to both of them.

It is important that we reflect the importance of sport. Just as we use cultural activities and artistic endeavour, we use sport to promote community development and inclusion, as well as individual and collective equality in our community. One of the things about sport — boxing is no exception — is that it promotes a healthy lifestyle and physical and mental good health. One of the things that I talked about in a previous life as Minister of Health was the important role of sport in supporting the health service and supporting individuals to ensure that they made the right lifestyle choices. Sport can deal with issues such as obesity, which can lead to diabetes, cardiovascular problems, heart attacks, strokes, suicide and self-harm. All those areas get positive support from sport and from boxing itself. That is the value of boxing.

Ten years ago, when I was Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, we held the World Amateur Boxing Championships

in the Odyssey Arena. That was very successful, promoted Northern Ireland worldwide and did a huge amount for the sport at the time. There was huge support from across the boxing community, led by Wayne McCullough, one of the many world champions to have come through the ranks in Northern Ireland.

At that time, the plan was to roll out a strategy. Unfortunately, with the imposition of direct rule, that strategy appears to have fallen by the wayside, and here we are again 10 years later. However, better late than never. We are moving forward with a strategy, and there is money there. That is all to the good, when you look at the facilities in many of the boxing clubs up and down the country. Many work on a shoestring, do not have proper male and female changing facilities and have very poor facilities all round. Jim Allister talked about buckets catching rainwater in Sandy Row. I can confirm that that is the case, but it also happens in other clubs.

Boxing has a poor infrastructure, and the money is to be welcomed. However, we also have to look at Sandy Row Boxing Club. Members will be aware that I represent the area, and I have a close personal knowledge of Sandy Row and the challenges that the people there have faced over the past 10 years. Those challenges have come in the form of repeated instances of discrimination and sectarianism against the club and its members. There is clearly a strong requirement on the Minister, the Department, Sport Northern Ireland and the boxing authorities to address the issue.

We have heard evidence at the Committee and, as the Chair said, we will hear more evidence. It seems to me that, looking at the issue and the efforts that Sandy Row Boxing Club has made to bring it forward, those responsible have been very slow in finding a remedy. We have the all-Ireland boxing organisation, which appears to be — in fact, it is — a cold house for Protestants boxing out of Sandy Row, and they are not alone. There is a responsibility to address that, and, if that organisation is not prepared to do so, there are other remedies as far as the fraternity is concerned. For example, Sandy Row Boxing Club has been disaffiliated on the grounds that it does not have proper Access Northern Ireland clearance. In fact, it has that clearance and can prove it. Therefore, there are issues there that need to be addressed.

I have absolutely no problem in supporting Mr Allister's amendment. As he said, people in Northern Ireland have the right to box for whomever they wish. If they wish to box for a Northern Ireland association, that is their right. If they wish for that Northern Ireland association to be affiliated with the UK, as is the case in many other sports, that is their right. Just as it is the right of young footballers from a nationalist background to opt to play for the Irish Republic, that right applies to boxers.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr McGimpsey: Boxers from Northern Ireland have that right, and, unless we see some action from the Minister, it seems inevitable that that step will be taken.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of improved funding for boxing across the community in Northern Ireland and in support of the call for good relations and equality to be the values that govern the sport to ensure that it is open to all people across this region. It is for that reason that I believe that the SDLP

amendment best reflects that position. Although I am concerned about the decision to isolate one particular background of people for mention and, indeed, to emphasise a failure to address the issue of sectarianism, given the offers to meet people to try to work this issue through, I am also concerned about aspects of the other proposals today. I will reflect on how the debate proceeds.

Like many other sportsmen and sportswomen from Northern Ireland, our boxers have punched well above their weight, and one can only imagine what they will be able to achieve when they have adequate facilities, support and co-ordination. Venues such as the Ulster Hall, King's Hall and Odyssey Arena have become synonymous with boxing, and sports journalists across the world speak in reverential tones about the atmosphere and the support generated by boxing fans in this region. I hope that the debate, from now on, recognises that boxing, like many other sports, has been a force to bring people together, despite deep division in our community, while affirming that there can be no place for sectarianism of any kind in our community or sports.

Boxers such as Barry McGuigan, Wayne McCullough, Neil Sinclair and Paddy Barnes, to name a few, have lit up the sport and raised amateur and professional titles. These boxers all won medals representing Northern Ireland at the Commonwealth Games, and McCullough and Barnes have won medals representing Ireland at the Olympics. Indeed, McGuigan won the British title as a professional. On those terms, boxing, like other sports, overlaps and confounds the division imposed on this society by many.

The exploits of our Olympians in London this summer were exceptional. I agree with my colleagues who have referenced that. Katie Taylor and Nicola Adams inspired many women to take up the sport, either competitively or as part of a wider fitness regime. Alongside the likes of Carl Frampton and Paul McCloskey, these boxers will, hopefully, continue the rich legacy of boxing in Northern Ireland. So, the Minister's recent announcement of funding is indeed most welcome, and this investment must be used in a fair and imaginative way to include the entire community in the development of this sport. For example, I would welcome investment in my constituency of East Belfast, where there is real need for community facilities and help for boxing clubs, such as Castlereagh Amateur Boxing Club under the leadership of Terry McCorran, based in inner east Belfast. Such clubs reach out to people of all backgrounds, from age six and up, to provide committed coaching and instil values of inclusion, discipline, healthy lifestyle and respect. I know that Michael Copeland MLA has worked hard to support the club and has hosted a match in Parliament Buildings. The club's achievements are all the more impressive, given the battle for resources that it has faced and the voluntary effort that has been required for its development. That is a battle that is not unique to this club, and I thank the Minister for the consideration that she is giving to visiting the club.

I wholeheartedly support the calls for the Sports Minister, Sport NI and local government to work together to ensure that the infrastructure is in place to support boxing clubs to the benefit of all who seek to participate in the sport. I look forward to seeing that support delivered to give all our recreational and more dedicated boxers the best opportunities possible to develop their talent and enjoy

the sport in a safe and shared manner, regardless of their background.

Mr Humphrey: I support our motion and the two amendments to it. I declare an interest as a member of Belfast City Council.

Northern Ireland, particularly Belfast, has a great tradition of boxing, and, indeed, the city of Belfast has produced nine Olympic medal winners, including two at the recent London Olympics of 2012. I welcome the announcement by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure of more funding for boxing.

As with all sports, boxing should provide a pivotal role across my city and across our country in the life of communities, particularly, as the Chair of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure said, in working-class areas. Today, thousands and, over the years, hundreds of thousands of young people — male and, increasingly, female — have been involved in boxing. Boxing is a sport that provides young people with discipline, confidence, self-management, respect and strategic and technical thinking.

2.15 pm

The Assembly must recognise the important role of boxing clubs in working-class communities. I mentioned Belfast City Council, and other contributors also mentioned Belfast City Council's boxing strategy. It is important that the Assembly and the Department, through Sport NI, works closely and in a collegiate way with Belfast City Council and other councils that bring forward strategies for sport, so that we work in unison to ensure that we have a joined-up approach, removing any possibility of wastage and providing value for money.

In February, Belfast City Council established a steering group to oversee the development of the strategy, and that includes representatives from the council, the Ulster Boxing Council, Sport NI and the Irish Amateur Boxing Association. I commend Belfast City Council for that. Other councils — this is the point that Mrs McKeivitt made earlier — need to step up to the mark.

I work with two boxing clubs in my constituency. Albert Foundry Boxing Club produced Wayne McCullough, who won a gold medal when competing for Ireland. If there is a boxing club in Northern Ireland that has worse conditions, I do not know where it is. Conditions there are appalling; it does not even have running water. Cairn Lodge Boxing Club is based on the lower Shankill but actually does not have a home. Recently, it moved to a disused primary school, having been for some time in a community centre and having to take the ring up and down three or four times a week. That club was given an opportunity to potentially have a new home, and it still hopes to do so. The Minister knows that, and I have written to her about it in order to raise the issue with her. The issue there was around Sport NI, and I will return to that later in my speech. The club has an interface at either end of Agnes Street. It has 80 young people on its books and a waiting list of 60. It simply cannot meet the demand; facilities do not allow it. Particularly in the summer, it is involved very much in diversionary activity. That club was promised money from the Department and the council, and there was an indication of funding from Sport NI. That money has been taken away. The same thing happened to a sporting facility

that was located in the Marrowbone in the Oldpark area of north Belfast. Maybe the Minister will address this in her reply to the debate, but I think that Sport NI needs to be very clear when it is working with groups and clubs, many of them run by volunteers, as other Members have said, where the capacity is not there, that money is delivered on the ground. It should work much more closely with councils in doing so.

Clearly, moneys have been lost and potentially can and will be lost. The funding of elite boxers is obviously key and important. I agree with the point that Mr Allister made. There was a lot of hyperbole earlier in the year when Mr McIlroy decided that he might golf for GB in the next Olympics. We have had the whole situation with James McClean and whether he should play for Northern Ireland or the Republic. If sportsmen are funded by this state, money goes in at youth and junior international level, and the sportsmen progress to full representative vests. Those sportsmen should choose which country they want to box for and not have it forced on them by sporting bodies. Therefore, I think that politics should be taken out of sport.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Humphrey: The individual should be left in the position of choosing.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh na gníomhartha dearfacha atá déanta ag an Aire maidir le tacaíocht agus cur chun tosaigh don dornálaíocht ó tháinig sa Roinn.

I welcome the Minister and her very positive actions in supporting and promoting the sport of boxing since coming into office. It is encouraging, too, that Belfast City Council, in conjunction with Sport NI, is developing a boxing strategy at this time and that the Ulster provincial boxing council is producing a development plan. There could be no better time to promote and sell the sport of boxing. We are basking in the wake of an amazingly successful result for Irish boxing at the 2012 Olympics this summer. We eagerly watched as local boxers Paddy Barnes, Michael Conlan and John Joe Nevin stepped into the ring to face their opponents. They made us all so proud when each earned medals for Ireland at this year's Olympics. To top that all off, Katie Taylor from Bray took a gold medal in the women's competition.

Agus ag teacht amach as an bhua sin, tá cuid mhaith dornálaithe nua uailmhianacha óga ó gach páirt den tír seo — ach go háirithe ó cheantracha a bhfuil easpa agus bochtanas iontu — ar féidir leo aisling a bheith acu: go dtiocfadh leo, b'fhéidir, bheith ina ndornálaithe den scoth fosta.

Out of that success, there came many young, aspiring, new boxers in all parts of the country, particularly in areas of poverty and deprivation, who can now dare to dream that they, too, could become champion boxers. There is no better time than the present to build on that success by making the best use of the current strategy on boxing, which will ensure that the identifiable gaps in provision are filled, in keeping with section 75 responsibilities.

I want to see all boxing clubs grow and flourish, so that any young girl or boy from whatever community can become involved in the sport and take advantage of the improved facilities that we can now look forward to. There should be no bar to participation in sport, boxing or otherwise.

However, it just happens that boxing is one of the sports that is more accessible than most, perhaps because it does not cost as much to participate in, compared with other sports. Maybe that is why it is more appealing in working-class areas. We all need to encourage that participation and ensure that all clubs are affiliated to the appropriate sporting bodies and compliant with all the necessary childcare protection regulations.

Is cúis díomá é gur cuireadh ina leith thar na blianta go raibh tarluithe seicteacha ann ag roinnt cluichí dornálaíochta.

It is a matter of disappointment, however, that there have been allegations of incidents of sectarianism at some boxing matches over the years. The Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club has complained about the verbal abuse that its members were subjected to in February 2010, and it was quite right to do so, for such behaviour is unacceptable. It is unfortunate that the police investigation has not resulted in identifying the offenders.

Several Members raised the sectarian issue today, and, indeed, the Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club told the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure that it had endured 10 years of sectarian abuse. I am puzzled about why the issue has not been raised with previous Culture Ministers but is being raised now that we have a Sinn Féin Culture Minister. Sectarianism has no place in sport, and every effort must be made to ensure that anyone engaging in such behaviour is appropriately dealt with under the law. All the relevant bodies, such as the Ulster provincial boxing council, the Irish Amateur Boxing Association and Sport NI have a duty to do all in their power to make the sport a neutral environment where the only fighting that happens takes place in the boxing ring.

A Member of the House has called for the establishment of a separate boxing association for the North of Ireland, but I feel that that would be a mistake. The biggest sport that is organised in that way is soccer, and, as we all know, that sport is notorious for the sectarianism which has — *[Interruption.]* — dogged it over the decades.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Ms McCorley: The good news is that Sport NI has been attempting to address the issue over many years in order to make soccer a more friendly sport.

Mar sin de, cad chuige ar mhaith linn gabháil síos an bóthar sin ó thaobh dornálaíocht de?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Ms McCorley: Why would we want to go down that route with boxing? Surely, that can only result in the complete sectarianisation of the sport, a retrograde step no matter what way you look at it. Ireland is small country, and it is best served by having just one overall boxing association — *[Interruption.]* — just like the vast majority of other sports in this island. In conclusion —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Time, time. We move on to the next Member.

I remind all Members that, if you notice, I will let any Member finish. It is not because they are from my own political party or any other party. I will let other Members speak. Just remember, when others are running out of time, that the same thing applies.

Mr Humphrey: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I have made this point in the House before, and I will make it again as I am pleased and proud to do so. The House should recognise that Northern Ireland football supporters are recognised by Europe as the best supporters in Europe, and they are not sectarian in any way. That is an outrageous statement.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Sammy Brush. Sorry, Sammy Douglas. *[Laughter.]* My apologies, but I am sure that he will not mind.

Mr Douglas: I have been called Sammy Wilson before, so I will not be offended by that.

I support the motion and welcome the opportunity to speak in today's debate. First, I thank the Minister for being in attendance. I look forward to hearing her response to today's proceedings, and I hope she comes out fighting.

Like many others, I grew up in a working-class community where boxing, including street boxing or street fighting, was a very important part of growing up. It was an area that had very few facilities for young people. There was a boxing club at the end of my street, and, as a child, I wanted to be the next young Cassius Clay or Henry Cooper. I am giving my age away. Unfortunately, my nose got in the way too often to allow me to fulfil my ambitions.

I am very supportive of the Minister's announcement about her Department's boxing strategy and the much-needed cash injection into the sport. That will be welcomed by all, including the boxing clubs in my constituency, which were mentioned by Mr Lyttle. Castlereagh boxing club, Eastside Boxing Club and one of the most recently established clubs, a club in the Tullycarnet estate, will certainly welcome that.

For far too long, boxing has been seen and treated as a second-class sport. That neglect has had a detrimental effect on the sport, particularly in the working-class communities where the demand for boxing is greatest. The Assembly has an important role to play in challenging the very real stigma that is associated with the sport, and today's debate provides the perfect opportunity to do that.

Mr McCartney: Will the Member give way?

Mr Douglas: Yes.

Mr McCartney: I welcome the fact that the Member has accepted that boxing has been treated as a second-class sport. Perhaps credit should be given to this Minister now that it is going to be made a first-class sport.

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

Mr Douglas: I thank the Member for his intervention. I certainly agree with that, and I look forward to the Minister's response.

As has been highlighted by other Members, boxing is a true success story for Northern Ireland. We should celebrate the extraordinary achievements of the two Belfast boxers, Paddy Barnes and Michael Conlon, who won bronze medals in the Olympic Games, and the amazing feat of the Northern Ireland team becoming the most successful boxing team at the Delhi Commonwealth Games. Let us not forget Barry McGuigan, "The Pocket Rocket" — Wayne McCullough — and our own Carl Frampton, a future world champion, I am sure. Last but

not least is Katie Taylor. She is a true ambassador for boxing, a great role model for young women and a great role model as someone who has a strong faith. However, our potential within the sport has not yet been fulfilled. The lack of resources and investment is certainly proving to be a major hurdle in the full and proper development of the sport.

Some of the statistics raise genuine concerns. Some 50% of Belfast clubs believe that their current facilities hold back the development of our young people and clubs. Only 10% of the clubs surveyed believe that their toilet and wash facilities are above average, and the majority of clubs in Belfast — in fact two thirds — operate with a budget of less than £1,000. Once again, we must give praise to Belfast City Council, and I know my colleague William Humphrey mentioned that as well. It took the initiative to develop a strategy with the Minister and other agencies. It is very welcome. That programme will complement all the work being done in tandem by DCAL and Sport Northern Ireland to target the clubs that are most in need.

A few years ago, I compèred boxing matches for the Sandy Row boxing club. One memory etched in my mind is that of a young child of about two playing in the boxing ring during the interval with his great-grandfather, who was in his 80s. That night, I thought that boxing covers the whole ambit of age groups and community relations.

We must ensure that adequate support is given to our boxing clubs. Research by the IABA shows that boxing plays an important role in the life of our hardest-hit communities. I suggest to the Minister that we need to take a proactive approach to ensure that the clubs that need most support get that support. I am a former member of the Belfast European Partnership Board.

When allocating money, we found that quite a number of Protestant areas in Belfast did not have the capacity to put those applications and proposals together. Interestingly enough, research showed that some Catholic areas in Belfast also did not have that capacity. We formulated a plan to ensure that those areas, organisations and groups that were not receiving the support and did not have the capacity, and were so busy with community development in their own areas, had support. It was a bit like the social investment fund. Technical assistance is currently available for those areas to come up with their plans. I certainly encourage the Minister to look at that. It is not only about Belfast but about the whole of Northern Ireland, urban and rural. If anything is to come from today —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Douglas: — let it be that we take a proactive approach to addressing those issues.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Social Development

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 15 has been withdrawn.

Child Maintenance

1. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister for Social Development what steps he is taking to support parents who separate and who require help and information to enable them to work together to resolve issues such as maintenance arrangements. (AQO 2811/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): My Department is undertaking a programme of major reform for child maintenance. Compelling research and evidence demonstrate that children who receive support from both parents throughout their childhood tend to enjoy better outcomes in life. Therefore, through the reform programme, I intend to develop a modernised child maintenance service that will provide high-quality information and support at the earliest possible time during a relationship breakdown.

Already, parents in Northern Ireland can be supported in making their own maintenance arrangements through the child maintenance choices service. In January 2011, my Department launched that free, confidential helpline service to help parents to decide the child maintenance arrangement that best suits their needs. That advice and information service has proved to be very effective, with almost 13,000 calls received from April 2011 to the end of September.

I also recognise that family breakdown creates a range of issues that parents need help to overcome. That highlights the importance of an integrated approach across government and voluntary and community services to support families. To that end, my officials have been working with the voluntary and community sector and other Departments to explore the different levels of support required and how support services for separated and separating parents can be better co-ordinated. A key aspect of working with that sector is to develop new services and maintain and strengthen existing signposting services. Officials have been working at community level to trial interventions to assess the different levels of support required in local communities in order to find out what works and does not work at a local level in supporting separated families. The findings from that work have highlighted potential opportunities for enhancing existing arrangements to support the most vulnerable through local community organisations and trusted networks.

Finally, the Executive are determined to work effectively across local government —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Time is up.

Mr McCausland: — and the delivering social change framework aims to deliver a sustained reduction in poverty.

Ms Boyle: I thank the Minister for his detailed response. Will he assure us that, in facilitating those arrangements,

no charge will be levied to the caring parent? Go raibh maith agat.

Mr McCausland: The issue of charges attracts considerable attention. In Great Britain, charges for the use of the new statutory child maintenance scheme will be introduced. However, in Northern Ireland, maintenance is a devolved matter. Charges are still under consideration.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Minister, why, at this point, is there a need for reform of the child maintenance system?

Mr McCausland: The current child maintenance system places too much emphasis on the state determining financial support and not enough on supporting separated and separating families to reach their own arrangements. The system takes responsibility away from parents and can lead to hostility. The child maintenance reform programme puts collaboration between parents in the interests of their children first and places greater emphasis on supporting parents to make their own arrangements. Research shows that children who receive support from both parents throughout their childhood tend to enjoy better outcomes in later life. Therefore, I want to support families and ensure the best outcomes for children. That is why I want better co-ordinated support services for separated and separating families in Northern Ireland.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. What support does the Minister's Department provide to families in which the parent without care resides in another jurisdiction?

Mr McCausland: The Member makes a point about one parent living outside Northern Ireland. That issue has arisen on a number of occasions, and I have had correspondence from various MLAs about that. In the arrangements between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, for example, it is important that we have the best possible systems in place to make sure that information and then payment are forthcoming. The Member will understand that there can be difficulties with that, but we take it very seriously and continue to work on it.

Home Heating Oil: Pay-as-you-go Scheme

2. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the outcome of the evaluation of the home heating oil pay-as-you-go pilot scheme. (AQO 2812/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Officials from my Department have been working with Kingspan Renewables and Carillion Energy Services to test a pay-as-you-go oil scheme. This exciting new technology has the potential to offer householders the opportunity to pay for oil as they use it, similar to the way in which people pay for their electricity or gas. I have taken a personal interest in this issue. When I came into the Department, I identified it as a priority, along with other aspects of addressing fuel poverty. I have pushed forward the development of this product, as I believe that it will greatly benefit people in fuel poverty. It also provides a good example of government working with local companies to drive the local economy.

The technology was piloted for three months and evaluated by Carillion Energy Services and the Housing Executive. Both evaluations were extremely positive. The majority of householders who took part in the pilot scheme

said that they would recommend the technology to other householders.

I am very keen for the technology to be rolled out, and my officials have been having ongoing discussions with Kingspan Renewables and Carillion Energy Services on the development of the product, which could be rolled out in future energy efficiency schemes. I have asked officials to progress this important initiative as quickly as possible. I am disappointed that it is taking so long to get this up and running, but there are important issues to be resolved in ensuring that we address issues with the cost of the product itself and the running costs associated with it.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for his update and credit him for the pilot of the scheme. It is good to see the private sector working in partnership with the Department to deliver assistance with home heating budgeting, and many people in my constituency have welcomed it. However, given that we are now in the depths of winter, can the Minister give a firm timescale for when the scheme will be mainstreamed?

Mr McCausland: I welcome the fact that the Member gave credit for the scheme. In the past few days, Members giving credit to my Department for an achievement seems to be breaking out as a habit in the Assembly, and I welcome that.

As I said, I am disappointed that it has taken so long. I cannot give a timescale at present. It would be wrong to do that because of the two important issues of the cost of the product and its running costs. We need to get this right because it is such an important issue for people in light of the cost of fuel and the fuel poverty that can arise as a result of that. We are pressing on with the utmost urgency. I am disappointed that we have not quite got there yet, but I continue to make it a priority. I am sure that the Member will join me in hoping that we get there as quickly as possible.

Mr Copeland: Will the Minister detail whether his pilot addressed some or all of the concerns about ownership and liability in the event of theft of oil from tanks?

Mr McCausland: The pilot scheme looked at that issue. The details of what would make it a good, successful scheme are still being worked through. The technology works, but it is a matter of getting the other pieces of the jigsaw in place, particularly those that I have already identified.

Mrs Hale: Will the Minister provide the House with an update on the boiler replacement scheme?

Mr McCausland: That is another important initiative for tackling fuel poverty. In June 2012, I launched the new boiler replacement scheme. It followed on from the pilot scheme, which ended in March of this year.

The new scheme offers a grant of up to £1,000 towards the cost of replacing old, inefficient boilers if the family has an income of less than £40,000. Twelve million pounds have been allocated to the scheme over the next three years, with £4 million available for grants before the end of March 2013. Householders with an income of up to £20,000 could be eligible for a maximum grant of £1,000. Householders who earn between £20,000 and £40,000 could be eligible for a maximum grant of up to £500. The level of grant will depend on whether householders replace oil with oil or gas and whether controls are also installed. Householders

can choose an installer of their choice, as long as they are appropriately qualified.

The scheme has been very popular. Some 19,500 enquiries have been received already in less than two months. I have instructed the Housing Executive to allocate additional resources to deal with the huge number of inquiries that are coming in. To date, 10,500 application forms have been issued, and, of those, 4,500 have been returned. Compared with the anticipated 5,500 cases that we thought we would receive each year, those numbers are very large.

DSD: Staff Reductions

3. **Ms McCorley** asked the Minister for Social Development whether, in the remainder of this mandate, there will be a reduction in staff in the Social Security Agency, the Housing Executive or his Department. (AQO 2813/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I do not expect reductions in staff numbers in the remainder of this mandate. However, as part of the changes arising from the devolution of justice, a number of staff will transfer from the Department for Social Development to the Department of Justice.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle, agus gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. Can the Minister assure the House that Social Security Agency staff will have the necessary resources to enable them to cope with the advent of welfare reform?

Mr McCausland: The implementation of welfare reform will certainly bring changes. The Member referred to the “resources” that staff need to cope, but I am not entirely clear what she means by that. With regard to having the skills and training to maybe move to a different model or, in some cases, to relocate to a different area in the sector, I assure her that everything will be done to ensure that people have the necessary training and that the changeover is swift and efficient.

If she is asking whether the implementation will result in staff reductions, I can tell her that, during this mandate, there will be no reduction in staff due to the welfare reform agenda. It will ensure that services are delivered as efficiently as possible. Although ultimate numbers are not yet determined, the expectation in the medium term is that, compared with the number that is needed for the current system, fewer staff will be required to administer the new welfare reform system. Changes will be implemented in a carefully planned way, and new arrangements will be introduced gradually through a phased approach. The administration of existing benefits will continue for some time, during which staff will be needed to operate both the current and the new system. Any reductions in staffing will be beyond the current mandate.

Mr Beggs: In working with a tight budget, difficult choices have to be made. One has to ask whether we should invest in staff or in capital for new homes or programmes. Can the Minister advise the House how the quality of service will be monitored as the number of clients and staff members change in the new systems that come forward?

Mr McCausland: The Member will be aware that systems are in place on an ongoing basis to monitor the service that is being delivered. In my answer to the previous question, I pointed out that work will be taken forward on a

phased basis and that adequate provision will be made to ensure that the changeover is smooth and maintains the high standard that the public are entitled to expect.

Mrs McKevitt: Is it now the Minister’s opinion that the business case that referred to the loss of 1,630 jobs for staff in Northern Ireland under universal credit is wrong?

Mr McCausland: The Member is clearly confused. What I said, first of all, concerned what would happen if we did not move forward with universal credit. I noticed that, at the weekend, some members of her party, who are still at the Neanderthal stage, were obviously still intent on saying, “Vote this down. Do nothing about it. Block it.” That was the message that came from her party colleagues at the weekend: “Block it.” That is — I choose my words carefully — an example of financial illiteracy. It is an utter impossibility, as we have spelt out very clearly the implications of doing that.

2.45 pm

That is why it is good that we have proceeded on the path that we have taken. I believe that we are getting it absolutely right as regards welfare reform. If we had gone down the road that was being advocated by some people across the way — indeed, it was still being advocated at the weekend — we would be in a position in which we would have lost potentially 1,600 jobs from Northern Ireland. If the Members over there in the SDLP actually listened more than they interrupted, they might learn something. The potential loss of jobs is a real threat if we go down the road that the Member’s party is advocating.

As regards the other matter, the figures are correct. When you move from a range of benefits to a single benefit, obviously, in the longer term, there will come a point at which fewer people are needed. That is the fact. Again, the Member seems to prefer to talk to the person beside her rather than listen. That probably explains why there is the inability to understand the two facts.

There are two separate figures and two separate issues. They happen to be the same number, but they are two separate issues.

Neighbourhood Renewal: Inner East Belfast

4. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the potential regeneration projects his Department is considering in the inner east Belfast neighbourhood renewal area. (AQO 2814/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department is currently committed to a number of significant regeneration projects in the inner east Belfast neighbourhood renewal area. It is providing £5.4 million towards the Skainos development on the Newtownards Road, over £2 million towards the Templemore Avenue School redevelopment and £3.2 million as part of the funding package for Connswater Community Greenway. My officials are also engaged locally with a range of stakeholders in taking forward a number of potential projects, including new community centres for the Ballymacarrett and Walkway communities, as well as the Titanic People tourism-related project. All those projects will help to address local priorities identified in the inner east Belfast neighbourhood renewal action plan.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive reply. Will the Minister comment on the status of the potential for a new community centre — that is, the Ballymacarrett Friendship Centre — on the lower Newtownards Road?

Mr McCausland: An economic appraisal is being updated to assess the need for a new community centre to be built there. There will be the potential for funding of £200,000 to be sought from my Department through neighbourhood renewal towards that newbuild.

I am sure that the Member will be pleased if I list some other projects that we are taking forward in east Belfast. My Department recently concluded a number of major environmental improvement schemes on the Newtownards Road, Castlereagh Street, Albertbridge Road, Short Strand and Woodstock Road, at a level of investment in excess of £3 million. Further similar schemes are being considered for Ravenhill gateway, Templemore/ Albertbridge, Woodstock Link, Bridgend, Lower Newtownards Road, Short Strand and Mountpottinger, which will require a commitment in the coming years in excess of £7 million. The Executive's commitment under Delivering Social Change includes the creation of social enterprise incubation hubs, and the Newtownards Road is well placed to be such a hub for east Belfast. I am sure that the Member will be pleased by that news.

Mr Lyttle: I am sorry to interrupt that DUP exchange.

What work is the Minister doing in his Department to ensure that areas of need outwith the neighbourhood renewal areas — for example, Knocknagoney — will also benefit from investment?

Mr McCausland: As a Department, we invest in many different areas across Northern Ireland. Some of our investment is at a regional level, and, therefore, benefits are accrued to communities right across the Province. However, our focus is very much on areas of the maximum disadvantage — the neighbourhood renewal areas. For areas that fall outside that, we have our areas at risk programme. It is two years' support to give some communities that fall just outside the neighbourhood renewal threshold that little bit of extra help to lift them up.

I am happy to speak to the Member about any other areas and whether there are other opportunities, should he wish to contact me about that.

Welfare Reform

5. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister for Social Development, following his statement on 22 October 2012, to outline any other areas of flexibility on welfare reform that he is exploring with Lord Freud. (AQO 2815/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I appreciate the Member's interest in the area; however, I do not believe that this is the place to go through the finer details of my negotiations with Lord Freud. As the Member is aware, the Welfare Reform Bill is currently going through its Committee Stage in the Assembly. I have been listening with interest to the views of MLAs, the groups that have responded to the Social Development Committee's call for evidence, and stakeholders who have been attending events held by my Department to hear views on welfare reform. I remain committed to hearing ideas on how we can mitigate the negative aspects of welfare reform without breaching parity.

In my statement to the Assembly on 22 October, I mentioned that Lord Freud has a genuine interest in the specific challenges we face here in Northern Ireland. He has accepted my invitation to visit us in November to discuss how best we can address the impact of the housing benefit changes. He is aware of some of the issues particular to Northern Ireland and is particularly interested in our discussions on how the housing sector can contribute to finding solutions.

The Executive subcommittee on welfare reform also continues to meet and discuss issues of concern and potential areas of flexibilities. I have reflected those discussions in my detailed negotiations with the team of Ministers in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). I and officials from my Department continue to be involved in all aspects of the welfare reform programme with counterparts in DWP.

I am working towards achieving a welfare system for Northern Ireland that addresses our issues, based on the principles of protecting the vulnerable, helping people into employment, developing a system that is fair, and encouraging personal and social responsibility.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his full response. Given the influence that might be exerted during the visit referred to, is the Minister concerned that, because of a range of delays, the Committee considering this matter aims to conclude its work on, I believe, the very first day of Lord Freud's visit? Is that a missed opportunity?

Mr McCausland: No, I do not think that it is a matter of real concern. I am content that he is making his visit to engage with people and listen to their views.

However, it has to be borne in mind that this is a devolved matter. So, the conversations that, obviously, must take place are between the Committee and stakeholders but primarily between the Committee and me as Minister. We should not get hung up on this idea of running off to Westminster, or seeking to short-circuit things in some way, or thinking that there is an easy answer by talking directly to Lord Freud. The key thing is that this is a devolved matter. It is a matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly within the constraints that we are all very much aware of. I will, therefore, want to give serious consideration to whatever comes forward from the Committee.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister rightly referred to the fact that the Committee is considering the legislation as we speak. I was, therefore, quite astounded when I heard him speaking to the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations on Friday morning. I understand — and I stand to be corrected on this one and, hopefully, I will be — that the Minister made a statement on Friday morning that, as I read it, he will consider no change to what has been described as the bedroom tax or, more appropriately, the owner-occupancy rules.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question.

Mr Maskey: Was it not, at the very least, premature for such a statement to be made, given that the Minister is still to meet David Freud, and in the context of the Committee's consideration?

Mr McCausland: The comment to which, I think, the Member refers is one that arose in the course of an interview, not in the actual address to the conference,

which covered a whole range of issues relating to housing, such as the housing strategy, the Housing Executive, and so on.

I am very conscious of the issue, because it will impact on more than 30,000 social tenants in Northern Ireland. It is how we do something about that to make sure we get the best outcome. There is no surprise there. Landlords here have always known to expect the same changes at the same time as those in the rest of the UK. Delaying this change will directly cost the Northern Ireland Executive up to £9 million.

I believe that we can address the issues and meet the need without delaying the introduction. We can mitigate the effect in a range of ways, by making sure that we get the right allocations, that tenants understand the change and that, in future, there is more smaller-sized accommodation, which has been a shortcoming in the past. We need the right support measures. I certainly have said already, and did say in answer to the question — although I do not know whether it was broadcast or not because they sometimes broadcast the bit that they want — how we would mitigate the issue. I also intend to increase the funding available for discretionary housing payments and change the legislation to allow such payments to be made to all social housing tenants.

I will be happy to discuss with the Committee a range of measures that we will bring forward that make sure we can address this and mitigate the difficulty without the burden of a further £9 million on the Executive.

Mr P Ramsey: Further to his responses, will the Minister agree that there is continuing worry, stress and distress for so many in Northern Ireland and for so many within the all-party groups that we represent here? Will the Minister outline for the House his assessment of the impact on vulnerable adults and children across Northern Ireland if he does not secure any more flexibility in his discussions with Mr Freud?

Mr McCausland: Unlike the Member, I am not a defeatist. We go into these discussions and go forward in a way in which we anticipate and identify what we need, and then we go out and negotiate it. I believe there are flexibilities still to be got, so I do not see that as the end of the road. What we have got is part of the way. We have had considerable success already, and the Member's party has recognised that on occasion. The other point is to make sure that we do that again and get further flexibilities.

Child Maintenance: Computer Access

6. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister for Social Development what arrangements will be put in place for parents who wish to make an online application for child maintenance support who do not have access to a computer or have limited computer and literacy skills. (AQO 2816/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Although there is a facility for parents to make online applications for child maintenance, the main focus of support is through the Child Maintenance Choices freephone information line. Where a parent does not have access to a computer or has difficulty completing an application, they may contact our helpline staff. Callers to this free service are provided with impartial information and guidance on all aspects of child maintenance to help

them to put in place an effective maintenance arrangement best suited to their circumstances.

Where parents decide to make an application for child maintenance to the statutory child maintenance service, staff will support them to make their application over the telephone or, if the parent prefers, they may make a written application by completing the appropriate application form.

Mr McAleer: Is any provision being made for one-to-one consultations with staff? I am thinking particularly of rural areas where families do not have access to broadband provision.

Mr McCausland: The point I made there was that people can, as at present, make their application by telephone. The fact is that in Northern Ireland today, as in most other western countries, the telephone coverage is extensive. People are walking around with one mobile phone or a couple of mobile phones as well as a telephone in the house. There is easy access there to a telephone. In addition to online applications, parents have the option to apply by telephone to the statutory child maintenance service provided by the child maintenance and enforcement division. If they do not have a telephone, postal applications are also accepted.

Ms Brown: What arrangements will be put in place for online applications for people in Northern Ireland claiming benefits following welfare reform?

Mr McCausland: One initiative I have instructed officials to put in place is a pilot programme that will support those who do not have access to a computer or have limited literacy skills. The development of that programme is at a very early stage. However, it is envisaged that it will run in local communities using IT facilities in community centres or libraries and will be delivered by qualified instructors.

During the transition to online applications, Northern Ireland customers will retain the ability to make a claim via the telephone. I am keen that that remains an option for our customers and is yet another key operational flexibility that I have secured for the people of Northern Ireland. That is another example for Members in the SDLP and elsewhere who are keen on maximum flexibilities.

We have achieved a lot of flexibilities already. We have been very successful; my approach has proved to be right. That is another flexibility that we have secured for the people of Northern Ireland.

3.00 pm

Justice

Thompson House, Belfast

1. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Justice whether he will review the decision to locate sex offenders in the refurbished Thompson House, Belfast. (AQO 2826/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I fully support the position of the relevant agencies: it is in the best interests of the public for Thompson House to continue to operate as approved premises for offenders supervised by the Probation Board, on the basis of what is best for individual risk-management purposes. Effective public protection is the key factor. The Presbyterian Board of

Social Witness has operated the facility for some 30 years and contributed much to the provision of effective public protection from the risk posed by a variety of offenders, including sex offenders. I have listened to the community representatives and their concerns, as have the agencies. However, experience has shown that Thompson House is a vital facility. Having considered and taken account of the statutory and operational responsibilities of the relevant agencies in ensuring the highest standards of public protection for all, I support the continuing use of the facility to accommodate sex offenders.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his response. Is he aware of widespread concern in the community in relation to his decision to house ex-sex offenders in Thompson House, given the fact that well over 2,000 schoolchildren use the Antrim Road at that point to go to and from school throughout the day? Does the Minister accept that he should reflect on that and review the decision with a view to at least creating a moratorium on the reintroduction of ex-sex offenders so that the community could at least have an opportunity to see how the situation might develop in the near future?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Maginness for that point. He refers to my decision, but it is not my decision. Thompson House has accommodated offenders for 30 years, many of whom have been sex offenders. During that time, there has been no incident involving any child in the immediate area of Thompson House by a resident of Thompson House. The practical reality is that the best public protection that can be provided is by accommodating offenders who require supervision, including sex offenders, in appropriate accommodation with the level of supervision that exists in Thompson House, supporting the work that is being done by probation and others with their clients externally. That is the best way of protecting the people of north Belfast and every other area; not somehow suggesting that we can solve the problem by moving them to a different area. The reality is that the record of all the hostels that accommodate offenders is an exceptionally good one in terms of the supervision and the public protection that they provide.

Mr Humphrey: I declare an interest as a member of the Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Board of Social Witness at Corkey House. Has the Minister had any meetings with the Presbyterian Church or the Board of Social Witness around this issue?

Mr Ford: I do not think that I have to declare an interest as a former member of the Board of Social Witness. I have had meetings with Mr Lindsay Conway and others from the Board of Social Witness. I have had meetings with those who are involved with public protection arrangements generally. I have attended a meeting with some representatives of the local community and elected representatives from North Belfast. At every one of them, the same issues have been discussed. It is fundamentally about how, in difficult circumstances, we provide the best possible protection for the people of Northern Ireland. Nothing can be perfect, but the arrangements in Thompson House are as good as we are going to get, given that they cannot be 100% perfect.

Mr Copeland: Will the Minister detail whether there have been any further incidents or threats to those premises since the pipe bomb was discovered in October 2011?

Mr Ford: I am not aware of any specific threats of the scale of the pipe bomb that happened, but, undoubtedly, there has been a certain amount of low-level reference. There has been a certain amount of graffiti around the premises, but I cannot give Mr Copeland any more specific detail, other than to say that I do not believe that there have been incidents of the level of the pipe bomb since then.

Maghaberry Prison

2. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the contribution that the staff and facilities at HMP Maghaberry make to the delivery of prison services. (AQO 2827/11-15)

Mr Ford: I visited Maghaberry prison on 1 November following the brutal murder of prison officer David Black. I want to pay tribute to the professionalism and dedication of the staff at Maghaberry, who continue to do a difficult job in a challenging environment despite their shock, anger and sadness at the senseless murder of a valued colleague. I have made it clear several times that we should not underestimate the vital role that prison officers play in society in working with offenders to address offending behaviour, to rehabilitate and to reduce the risk of reoffending. In so doing, they enhance public safety across Northern Ireland. That is a role that we are continuing to develop and build on through the prison reform programme.

Members will be aware that the Criminal Justice Inspection conducted an announced inspection of Maghaberry prison in March 2012. Although the final report has not yet been published, initial feedback has been encouraging in that it recognised Maghaberry as an improving establishment. I welcome the inspectorate's findings, which are indicative of the effort that has been made across the Prison Service and by Maghaberry staff and management to address the areas of concern that had been previously identified. However, I accept that much more needs to be done across a range of issues to address overcrowding; to safeguard equality of outcomes for prisoners; to develop the learning and skills curriculum, capacity and attendance; and to further improve the regime and facilities at Maghaberry. I am confident that, in the context of a reforming service, staff and management will continue to work with professionalism and dedication to address those outstanding areas of concern.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his answer. I appreciate that, in answering it, a lot of the emphasis was on what the prisoners get out of the establishment. Unfortunately, staff are not duly considered, even down to the food they get at lunchtime. If they want hot food, they cannot get it inside the facility and have to go out, putting themselves at risk and everything else. Prisoners can get hot meals, but, in the current staff facilities, staff who work in the prison cannot.

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Girvan for that point. The specific issue of the provision of canteen facilities in prisons is being re-examined. We all appreciate the context in which that is being done.

Mr Elliott: Will the Minister detail whether there have been any reviews of security for prison officers within and outside the prison complexes in recent weeks?

Mr Ford: I can assure Mr Elliott that there has been a significant review of security measures for individual prison officers in the context of their home security, the issue of personal protection weapons, which Members will remember has been raised, and their security going into and out of establishments. I do not think that the House would expect me to go into the detail of that, but I believe that very significant work has been done. I have had meetings with the Chief Constable and others, and, later this week, I will meet the Minister of State in the Northern Ireland Office who has responsibility for the home protection scheme. A number of issues are being actively addressed.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind Members of the need for supplementary questions to be relevant to the original question.

Mr Dickson: I thank prison officers for their commitment to their work in Northern Ireland, and I note that the Minister has told the House that the prison is an improving establishment.

Minister, new prison officers have recently been recruited and are now taking up their roles in the prisons. What will your Department be doing to support them in their ongoing training?

Mr Ford: I suspect that there are two parts to that question. The first is security for individual members of staff, which we have just been talking about. In their training, new members of staff are given security advice, and they are able to obtain the equipment that is obtainable by all staff on the same basis. They are also given very significant training to ensure that they are fit, in general terms, for the role they are being asked to perform. I think that three of the first eight classes of 20 prison officers have passed out from the college in Millisle, but they will each have three further 8-week periods in each of the three establishments to train them for the work they will do. Work to upskill existing staff is ongoing.

Of course, the new staff will be expected to show that they are capable of carrying out the work of custody officer to a certain level within their first year in post. They will then be given the opportunity for further training and development opportunities to move into other roles in the Prison Service. I believe that, unlike what may have happened in the past, we have a process now that enables all Prison Service staff to gain additional skills so that they can be better equipped for the job ahead of them.

Knife Crime: Craigavon

3. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Justice what plans he has to introduce a knife amnesty in the Craigavon area, given the increase in knife crime in recent years. (AQO 2828/11-15)

Mr Ford: PSNI statistics on violent and sexual offences involving knives and sharp instruments indicate a decline in such offences from 2007 across Northern Ireland, with a marginal increase of 2% during 2011-12 compared with the previous year. However, there have been increases in such incidents in some districts. I understand that there have been fluctuations in the number of offences in Craigavon during the past five years and that figures for the Craigavon area for 2011-12 indicate an increase of 11 offences compared with 2010-11.

As knives are in everyday use and readily available in every household, it is important to raise awareness that they are dangerous and to encourage responsible usage to prevent these unwanted and unacceptable attacks from taking place. At a local level, policing and community safety partnerships (PCSPs) have a responsibility to work with the community to identify and address issues of local concern, and I am pleased that the proposed action plan from Craigavon PCSP has an action focused on knife crime. I also understand that the PSNI delivers awareness sessions on knife crime to post-primary schools and young people as part of the youth conference arrangements in the Youth Justice Agency.

Given the current statistics, I do not think that a knife crime amnesty across Northern Ireland would be appropriate at this time. I assure the Member, however, that the possibility of a further knife crime amnesty will remain under consideration and that I remain ready to consider any additional measures that would be effective in reducing knife crime.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for his response. The previous two knife amnesties led to 1,488 knives being handed in Province-wide, 69 of them in Craigavon. Does the Minister not accept that this low-cost initiative, although not a panacea, is a useful measure among others to help to tackle this serious problem in our society?

Mr Ford: I appreciate the point that Mr Moutray is trying to make about how things are operating and how they worked from that previous amnesty. As he correctly highlighted, nearly 1,500 knives were handed in during the two amnesties of 2006. However, the total cost of those was £300,000 in Northern Ireland. So, although he describes amnesties as "low-cost", I am not sure that that is a particularly effective use of money in straitened times. I am open to any specific arrangements that would be seen to make a real difference. The reality is that we did not see that amnesty paying any dividends as opposed to a general trend in the use of knives in crimes.

Mrs Dobson: Will the Minister expand on the problem in the Craigavon area, and can he identify any relationship or cause for the upward trend?

Mr Ford: The simple answer is no. It is not possible, at this stage, to give answers to Mrs Dobson's questions. I said in my initial answer that numbers, which are low, fluctuate a bit from year to year, and it is difficult to see a trend in those fluctuations. What is clear is that there is a general downward trend across Northern Ireland as a whole.

Mr McDevitt: It seems a bit strange that the Minister does not consider it value for money to spend £300,000 on taking knives off our streets. Therefore, does he have plans to legislate to control further the sale and availability of knives in this region?

Mr Ford: The issue of knife sales has, of course, been dealt with in legislation that increased the minimum age at which someone could buy a knife from 16 to 18. The knife crime that we talk about frequently involves the inappropriate use of knives that are perfectly acceptable in a domestic context, so we have to be realistic about how possible it is to control their purchase. The issue is to ensure the control of knives in a wider sense.

Prisons: Full-body Scanners

4. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department has submitted an application to the relevant authorities to use the X-ray transmission scanner as part of the full-body scanning pilot scheme. (AQO 2829/11-15)

Mr Ford: As I have made clear previously, the use of transmission X-ray equipment has not yet been approved for use in UK prisons. Consequently, authorisation must be obtained under the Justification of Practices Involving Ionising Radiation Regulations 2004. A draft justification application is now under consideration by Prison Service management and should be ready for submission later this month, subject to further clarification on legislative issues, including the non-medical use of that equipment.

3.15 pm

The justifying authority is required to consult the relevant Northern Ireland agencies, including the Health and Safety Executive, the Food Standards Agency and the Health Protection Agency, as well as the other UK jurisdictions. The Department of Justice will act as the justifying authority, as required under the regulations.

Mr P Ramsey: I am disappointed to hear that the Department has not made a formal application for authority to use these scanners. Given that the Department is now preparing an application for approval, can the Minister give the House an indication of the authorities' time frame for the application's assessment? What is his assessment of the body scanners?

Mr Ford: Unfortunately, I cannot give any assessment to Mr Ramsey at present. As I have made clear to the House before, when it comes to the transmission of X-ray matter and, indeed, millimetre wave scanners, the Northern Ireland Prison Service is at the forefront of policy in these islands in seeking alternatives to full-body searching. It is not possible, given that we are leading the way, to give an assessment of the time that will be required.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister not have a responsibility to drive forward the time frame for this process, rather than leaving it up to those submitting the application?

Mr Ford: Yes, I do have a responsibility, and that is what I am carrying through.

Mr Swann: Is the Minister aware of any objections to the use of full-body scanning in the current pilot schemes at Magilligan or Hydebank?

Mr Ford: Some prisoners have raised issues with the searching. That is what the pilot schemes are about — ensuring that we get things like the tabulation of the machinery correct and that prisoners do not have to spend extra time if they have to go through that search. However, I believe that we are seeing positive results from the two millimetre wave scanners. Of course, that is different from the technical issue of the transmission X-rays, which the question was about.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

Criminal Justice: Guilty Pleas

6. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the proposals on early guilty pleas within the proposed "Faster, Fairer Justice Bill". (AQO 2831/11-15)

Mr Ford: Late guilty pleas not only delay justice but have a negative effect on victims and witnesses. There are real benefits to encouraging persons guilty of an offence to admit their guilt at an early stage. Entering an early guilty plea avoids the need for a trial and saves victims and witnesses from having to give evidence. Between January and May, my Department consulted on options to encourage earlier guilty pleas, and it presented its proposals to the Justice Committee before the summer recess. The provisions that I intend to include in the Bill represent the outcome of that process.

The Bill will propose placing a duty on a defence representative to make clients guilty of an offence aware of the benefits of admitting their guilt at an earlier stage. It will also enhance the current statutory arrangements by requiring a court, when sentencing, to specify the level of credit that would have applied had a guilty plea been entered. The Bill will propose a change to the law to allow the direct transfer of a defendant from a Magistrates' Court to the Crown Court for sentencing when the defendant has indicated an intention to plead guilty. These provisions will support the broader inter-agency work being co-ordinated by my Department through the speeding up justice programme.

Mr Kinahan: I wonder whether the Minister is concerned that these proposals could pressurise non-guilty individuals into accepting a guilty plea to ensure a lenient sentence.

Mr Ford: I am aware of those concerns being raised, but I cannot see why anyone who is not guilty, and who can put a case to the court that they are not guilty, would see any benefit in pleading guilty.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister outline the timeline on which he seeks to introduce the Bill to the House and give an assurance that access to justice will not be restricted by cost savings?

Mr Ford: I obtained Executive approval for drafting the Bill early last month. I am optimistic that it will be possible to introduce the Bill in the early part of next year, but we all know that drafting can take a little longer than hoped. I give Mr Boylan the assurance that he seeks that I will do my best to ensure that we do not create any difficulties in ensuring proper access to justice, but we all know the difficult financial circumstances in which we live. I am certainly satisfied that what has been done so far on, for example, criminal legal aid costs, has ensured that we have made the necessary savings, not by taking people out of the scope of legal aid but by reducing the amounts paid to individual solicitors and barristers.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr Basil McCrea is not in his place. I call Mr Adrian McQuillan.

Magilligan Prison

8. **Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister of Justice for his Department's assessment of the importance of Magilligan prison to the economy in the East Londonderry constituency. (AQO 2833/11-15)

Mr Ford: At the outset, as I have done in a series of recent engagements with elected representatives and other stakeholders, I stress that no final decision has been taken on the future of Magilligan prison.

I recognise that, in coming to a decision on the future of Magilligan, we cannot ignore the impact that its closure would have on the local economy. At this stage, the economic impact of either having a prison there or moving it elsewhere has not been quantified. That is why I have made it clear that any decision to proceed with decommissioning Magilligan would be the subject of a full economic appraisal.

However, Magilligan prison's future cannot be based on one issue alone. Ultimately, my decision must be determined by what is best for the community in Northern Ireland where rehabilitating offenders, reducing offending and protecting the public are concerned. That is why I must take into account issues such as family links, and rehabilitation and employment opportunities for offenders. With that in mind, my officials are continuing to engage with stakeholders on how some prisoners' needs might best be served by locating a prison in the north-west and, if that is the case, whether there is scope to build on and improve rehabilitation opportunities for prisoners there.

If I am convinced that locating a prison in the north-west is indeed best for Northern Ireland where rehabilitating offenders, reducing offending and protecting the public are concerned, that will be reflected in my final decision on the future of Magilligan prison.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his detailed answer. Does he agree that no decision on Magilligan prison should be made without considering the effect that it will have on the local economy?

Mr Ford: I certainly agree with Mr McQuillan on that general point. Indeed, I made that point clear at the public meeting in Limavady a few weeks ago and, more recently, when I met a number of council representatives from Ballymoney, Coleraine and Limavady, including the Member's colleague Mr George Robinson, who is sitting beside him.

It is clearly an issue that has to be taken into consideration, but it is not the only issue. Although I can understand the view that local representatives are taking of the importance of the prison as an employer and for the economy of Limavady and the north-west in general, that is not the only issue on which I can determine something that is my responsibility.

As we look at the issue, and given that no decision has been taken, I want to see whether there are options that would change what was originally recommended in the estate strategy and in where I have asked Prison Service staff to re-examine the potential options. I am certainly heartened by some of the positive commitments to engagement that I received from public representatives and businesspeople in that most recent meeting that I had with them.

The issue is still very much under consultation, and, were a decision to close Magilligan to be made, there would be a full economic appraisal of it.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister says that no economic appraisal has yet been carried out of the closure of Magilligan prison. Does he have any idea how much it will cost to keep the prison open between now and 2018?

Mr Ford: With due respect, Mr Ó hOisín seems to presume that there is going to be a decision to close the prison. As I made clear today and on numerous other occasions, the issue is out for consultation. Part of that consultation involves looking at what possible use there might be of Magilligan prison, as well as at the prison review team's original recommendations, which included looking at centralising on a site that is nearer to where a larger proportion of the population of Northern Ireland live. Clearly, the issue has to be that we ensure that we meet the needs of prisoners from all over Northern Ireland and that we get the best possible rehabilitation functions for them.

I have no detailed figures today on the cost of maintaining the prison until 2018 even if it were to be decommissioned at that point. A figure of a few million pounds has been highlighted for work that would be necessary to deal with changes to some facilities and improvements to some security measures at the prison. That work will be required if the prison were kept open for either only a few years or a longer period.

Mr Allister: Does the Minister understand that the economic disadvantage would not just be to East Londonderry but to north Antrim, where many prison officers who work in Magilligan live? Will the fact that several million pounds is currently being spent on the provision of a new sewerage facility to accommodate a new and large prison be taken into account in the economic appraisal of the wise expenditure of public money and any suggestion that the prison should not stay where it is?

Mr Ford: I am happy to say that my departmental responsibilities do not include those of Northern Ireland Water. I happily cede those to my colleague the Minister for Regional Development.

There are issues that affect a number of factors relating to the economy. I have no doubt that other examples could equally have been produced relating to other aspects of the physical infrastructure in the Limavady and Magilligan area. However, if we are talking about an investment of a very substantial sum to provide prison facilities for the benefit of Northern Ireland, frankly, we have to look a bit wider than the cost of sewerage works at Magilligan. That is part of it and will feed into any economic appraisal, but it is a long way short of being the only key issue to be addressed.

That is why I made it clear when I talked to the representatives of the three councils a few weeks ago that we also need to look at a range of issues, including the potential for stakeholder involvement and the potential to build on the existing good but limited rehabilitation facilities that are available for those in, for example, the Foyleview unit to go out from Magilligan daily for work experience. That is the kind of work that needs to be done in the Prison Service. That is the kind of work that I am focused on.

Although the infrastructure will also be borne in mind, for me, the fundamental issue is ensuring that we have a Prison Service that is fit for purpose and that does its best to rehabilitate all those who are in need of the kinds of services that are provided by the Prison Service to protect the public as a whole.

PSNI: Agency, Consultancy and Associate Staff

9. **Mr Brady** asked the Minister of Justice when his Department first entered into discussions with the PSNI on the development of an outline business case for the tendering of a new contract for temporary agency, consultancy or associate staff. (AQO 2834/11-15)

Mr Ford: The PSNI is responsible for developing business cases, whereas my Department's role is to approve those that fall outside the Police Service's delegated financial limits.

The Police Service first shared a draft of the business case with my Department in late July. In the knowledge that there was a live Northern Ireland Audit Office investigation into the Police Service's use of agency staff, my officials advised the PSNI that it would be inappropriate to review the business case until after the report had been published and the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) hearing had taken place. The PSNI has not submitted an updated draft since the PAC hearing. It is important that any recommendations made by the PAC be considered and, if appropriate, included in any new contract.

Mr Brady: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he assure us that any new contracts will ensure full compliance with equality requirements?

Mr Ford: Mr Brady asks specifically what I can do to ensure compliance of particular contracts. My role in the Department is to do with the formal approval of a business case. It is the responsibility of the Police Service to ensure that it adheres to equality requirements or any other aspect of the law in drawing up those contracts. Those particular points need to be considered by the Police Service and any body with which it engages in a contract to provide temporary agency, consultancy or associate staff. Those are issues for those who hold the contract and the employers rather than for the Department per se.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. What lessons are to be learned from the Audit Office report?

Mr Ford: Mr Bradley makes a very reasonable point. The problem is that, at a stage when the PAC is still to hold a further hearing — the PAC has had one hearing, but I understand that it is inviting back representatives from the Police Service, although not to the second departmental hearing — it is difficult for me to say what lessons are to be learned. What is important is that we give the PAC the opportunity to do its work and to consider the issue in full detail. When its report is published, it will be up to all those concerned with such issues, and potentially people in other areas of the public sector, to learn the lessons of the final report when they see it and have had time to study it.

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

3.30 pm

Private Members' Business

Boxing

Debate resumed on amendments to motion:

That this Assembly notes the recent announcement by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure in relation to funding for boxing; acknowledges the boxing strategy being developed by Belfast City Council in conjunction with Sport NI and the club development plan being produced by the Ulster provincial boxing council; recognises that there is a need to develop boxing in working-class Protestant areas; and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to ensure that the funding is allocated equitably across communities to fill identifiable gaps in provision for the sport, in keeping with her Department's section 75 responsibilities. — [Miss M McIlveen.]

Which amendments were:

No 1: Leave out all after "notes" and insert

"with concern the findings of Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club's (SRABC) recent report; further notes the recent announcement by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure in relation to funding for boxing; acknowledges the boxing strategy being developed by Belfast City Council in conjunction with Sport NI and the club development plan being produced by the Ulster provincial boxing council, but regrets the council's failure to address the issue of sectarianism highlighted in the report by SRABC; recognises that there is a need to develop boxing in working-class Protestant areas; calls for a Northern Ireland amateur boxing association to be established in order to afford boxers from Northern Ireland the opportunity to compete for the UK at international level; and further calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to ensure that the funding is allocated equitably across communities to fill identifiable gaps in provision for the sport, in keeping with her Department's section 75 responsibilities." — [Mr Allister.]

No 2: Leave out all after "develop boxing" and insert

"; and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to ensure that the funding is allocated on the basis of need to fill identifiable gaps in provision for the sport, in keeping with her Department's section 75 responsibilities and to ensure that all clubs uphold the highest standards of good relations and the equality standards in sport." — [Mrs McKeivitt.]

Mr Swann: Like Michael McGimpsey, I support both amendments. When we talk about boxing, it is important to have an urban and rural strategy. A lot of emphasis is being put on Belfast clubs at the moment, but, as Sammy Douglas said, we have to look outside the greater Belfast area when it comes to supporting boxing clubs. The CAL Committee has visits planned to the All Saints Boxing Club and the Braid Amateur Boxing Club in Ballymena later this month, which I look forward to. I have visited Braid

and seen the work that it is doing, not only to develop professional boxers but to work with young people in the area to improve their health and confidence. It is also working on crime prevention in the area, because, when young people focus on the physical activities involved in boxing, they are distracted from other things.

I commend Belfast City Council for the work that it has done to bring forward its boxing strategy. I have contacted the other local councils in North Antrim to ask them to consider doing the same. A number of Members have mentioned how supportive the Minister has been to boxing, and I commend her for that. She has been so supportive that she announced £3·27 million of funding twice. She announced it first on 26 June to the CAL Committee, and she reannounced it during the Olympics to get some headlines and a wee bit of PR for herself.

Mr McCartney: When there was an Ulster Unionist Minister, did he make announcements of any money for boxing?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Swann: I would also point out to the Member that it was UK National Lottery money that she was announcing, so I congratulate her on recognising that.

The £3·27 million will be handled by Sport NI. There has been ongoing concern — all Members raised it today — about where and how the money will be distributed. I congratulate the Minister and Sport NI on the timing of their release of the details of the consultation period on the funding for boxing. It was announced while the debate was going on earlier. The consultation will close on 8 February, so I would like the Minister to guarantee the timeline for how the money will be spent.

I found the objectives very interesting. Seventy clubs will receive funding for new equipment, 50 clubs will receive funding for premises repairs and up to six clubs will receive funding for major capital works. This is very commendable. Who can apply? An expression of interest form was sent to all clubs that had been affiliated or are presently affiliated to the Irish Amateur Boxing Association from 2009 to 2013. So, the concerns raised by Sandy Row boxing club and other clubs seem to have been addressed when we see who the expression of interest forms were sent to.

The unfortunate aspect is the eligibility criteria. The Minister may want to check things with her officials, but I have a copy of the announcement here for her as well. Who is eligible to apply? For tranche 1, the boxing equipment award will be subject to a single application from the Irish Association of Boxing Clubs and will not be open to individual clubs. So, it does not matter if you were affiliated from 2009 to 2013, unless you are a current member, you will be denied access to tranche 1 funding.

For tranches 2 and 3, which involve money for development, information is being gathered from boxing clubs on facility requirements. The information is being gathered, but the eligibility criteria are all laid down. Funding will only be available if you are affiliated to the International Boxing Association (AIBA) or are recognised by the governing body, which, for any club in Ireland, North or South, is the IABA. So, if you are not affiliated to any of those clubs, you will be denied access to the UK lottery money. This needs to be addressed so that there is equality of access to the money among all the clubs in the boxing fraternity.

Amendment No 1 calls for the establishment of a Northern Ireland boxing fraternity, which is commendable. We have to recognise the bravery of Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club for speaking out. It has stood up, despite the fear of losing any sort of funding from the £3·27 million, to ask for the sectarianism that they have seen to be addressed. I refer to something that Ms McCorley said. She asked why Sandy Row had not raised the issue in the past 10 years and whether it had waited until a Sinn Féin Minister was in post. That was not the case. If she had listened to the evidence that was given to us in the CAL Committee, she would have heard the club say that it had been continually working with the Ulster Boxing Council and the Irish Amateur Boxing Association throughout that time, trying to get redress to all their concerns. There is real concern that the sectarianism that is currently evident in boxing is similar to that which was evident in football 10 or 15 years ago. The IFA has made great steps in its work in rooting that out, not only on the terraces but on the pitch. Ms McCorley's comments were not accurate about the work that has been done there.

Ms McKeivitt said boxing was not about red, white and blue or green, white and gold. One of the recommendations that Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club made was exactly as specific as that. It asked for clubs to be allowed to use the red and blue neutral colours that are recognised internationally —

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

Mr Swann: — and not the green, white and gold that some clubs are bringing into the boxing arena.

Mr McMullan: We all know what happened on the night of 11 February, and that is basically what is behind this today. It is clear — indeed, it has never been denied by anyone — that what happened on that night was wrong. Indeed, steps were taken on that night to eliminate those who were behind this crime. The people involved were ejected from the premises, and even the PSNI came afterwards and told them that everything that could have been done was done on the night, and they were totally satisfied.

We could talk about all of that, but what is the problem here? The problem is and has been for a while that Sandy Row is not affiliated. We have discussed this at the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee, and Mr Swann has picked different items out of the Committee, but this is the nub of the problem and the elephant in the room. Why is it not affiliated? We must try to get it affiliated. In the same meeting, one of the mentors from Sandy Row boxing club said that, now that steps have been taken to do away with this problem, such as the House of Sport being used for weigh-ins for matches, it is better now. It is one of the points in the eight-point plan that the club put forward. He mentioned that he did not have a problem with young people wearing green, white and gold and that that is their choice. He said:

“Proactive steps are being taken, and they should be commended.”

We should take a lot out of what that official said. There is a window of opportunity to get Sandy Row boxing club affiliated and back into the family of boxing. We could talk all day about the negative side of things. The only people who suffer are the very people who are pivotal to

the motion: children from working-class Protestant areas. Those are the people who are suffering.

It is not a question of whether we want to set up another boxing association to be affiliated somewhere else. Nobody here today — including Mr Allister, who has championed this — has told the House where the funding is coming from for that. Who will fund the youngsters to go to England if they want to go over there? You can do that at the minute if you want to. That is the problem. Mr Allister said that he was a MEP when he first came across this problem. What has he done since that? This has been going on for 10 years. This is not last week, last year or two years ago; this is 10 years ago. If this were happening in my area, I would be beating the door of every Department to see why nothing was being done. Those people are being let down by some of the Members who have been talking today. They should look at themselves when they talk about this.

In March, the Minister made it very clear, in answer to a question from the Chair of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee regarding implementation of the IABA strategic plan in Ulster, that boxing would be open and inclusive for all who take part. The Minister was clear that the process would be based on inclusion and would provide opportunities for the development of boxing clubs from all sections of the community that are affiliated to the governing body. Again, the word “affiliation” comes in. Right around the House, you all know that that is the problem. It is not the Minister. This Minister has done more to put boxing on the world stage than any Minister from this Department has ever done. If you come up with the argument that that is wrong, I would like to hear it, for you have tried today and failed miserably. We have talked about other sports, like rugby, Gaelic football and the IFA, which have all made massive strides to get rid of sectarianism. They are still battling with sectarianism within their own sports, but they are trying and are working together. Mr Humphrey talked about the national anthem being played at Croke Park. He forgets the reason why rugby was played at Croke Park. It was because —

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mr McMullan: No. I will not. Sit down. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr McMullan: Do you forget what the captain of the England team did when he was presented to the president of Ireland? We have raised ourselves above that. We must take this forward.

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

Mr McMullan: All I can say is please do not get hung up on this sectarian thing. The only people who are suffering are the children of these areas. As an Assembly, we must rise above all that and show that we can show leadership.

Mr Hilditch: I support the motion, which has been tabled by my party colleagues. It has been good to listen to the arguments on the amendments.

As a member of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee, I acknowledge the work that has been and is being carried out by the stakeholders in the sport, which is referred to in the motion and the amendments. Indeed, the work of the Committee is very much a work in progress, particularly

as we continue to pursue the issues raised in the evidence sessions with the stakeholders, including the worrying allegations in the report from Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club. The motion seems to unite contributors, however, in trying to ensure that the funding promised by the Minister for the sport is allocated equitably across the community and fills the glaring void in provision for the game. Therefore, like others, I welcome the £3 million investment in amateur boxing but wish to see that money distributed evenly and fairly throughout all our communities across Northern Ireland and, in particular, to see it bring in from the cold the Protestant and unionist communities, where boxing is currently very underrepresented and where the lack of sports clubs and investment is also evidenced.

The sporting community, as a whole, has suffered from decades of underfunding. So, while we look forward to the commencement of the capital needs assessment of all clubs, there is concern at the outworkings of any funding programme, which has been alluded to in the last few minutes. That could further exacerbate the situation. Areas of underinvestment may again miss out because it has been difficult historically to establish and sustain a club in those areas, thus reducing eligibility to apply for the capital needs funding. I ask the Minister to comment on that in her address.

To give an example of the differential in facility provision, I look no further than my constituency of East Antrim. There is a good example of a well-run, firmly established club at Monkstown, at the greater Belfast end of the constituency. It plays an integral part in the development of the sport, and I commend it for doing so. However, the story changes somewhat as we move further through the constituency. In the main town, Carrickfergus, there is a perfect example of the lack of investment and the gap in provision for the sport. For many years, the Carrick club boxed out of an old World War II Nissen hut located in the grounds of the local Orange hall. Mr Deputy Speaker, you can only imagine — I think you may even have seen it — what the conditions were like. The boxers had to be totally dedicated to the sport even to set foot inside what can only loosely be described as a building. The current academy uses the very dilapidated basement of a row of hot food bars. Again, it is in very poor shape, and it is no encouragement to the development of the sport. A piece of land has been earmarked and at least provisionally secured for a purpose-built building, but capital funding is not within reach at this stage. That is a typical example of what the motion is attempting to highlight and address. There are many more Paddy Barneses and Michael Conlons out there, but, under the current provisions of the sport, they may never get the chance if they come from a working-class Protestant area.

I was involved in sports administration for many years, and I have raised concerns around governance and structure in the sport. I pay tribute to the many volunteers in the sporting community who put so much into sport in Northern Ireland, and boxing is no different. However, it annoys me at times when some of today's social do-gooders and johnny-come-latelys advocate sport as a way of bringing communities together. I pay tribute to those who have worked tirelessly over the last 40 years, when sport was the only conduit for bringing communities together, and did so through some of the darkest days in Northern Ireland's history. They are all unsung heroes. However, sometimes, if governance is ignored and not

given priority or if the structures are not right, the scourge of sectarianism can rear its ugly head, and sport is no different from any other arm of our communities. Many sports — football is one example — have made great strides in stamping out sectarianism and racism. However, as the Minister knows only too well from the situation that arose in her constituency on Saturday at the Solitude stadium, when a small section of Cliftonville supporters behaved despicably, we cannot take our eye off the ball at any time. We must deal with those unsavoury issues where and when they arise. Boxing is no different.

A greater debate needs to be had on the structure of boxing and the way forward. A lot more detail needs to be looked at, and the Department should take that seriously. In supporting the motion, I appeal to the Minister to ensure that the Ulster Boxing Council, the county boards and the Irish Amateur Boxing Association deal with the matters that affect our communities.

3.45 pm

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank everyone who has spoken so far. I am quite pleased with the tone of the debate. Regardless of where people are coming from and their rationale for tabling the motion or the amendments, it is perfectly clear to me that everyone values the role that boxing has played and continues to play.

I listened to the debate carefully, and I want to make a couple of things clear. First, there is the issue of life beyond Belfast. The Chair of the Committee, Michelle McIlveen, introduced that issue, and Robin Swann and others picked up on it. I have responsibility for the entire North, so funding for boxing is for the entire North. Belfast City Council, to its credit, has recognised that boxing as a sport has been hugely underfunded for decades. I will not go into the reasons for that, but it has been hugely underfunded. I feel that, from experience, it is primarily because it is a working-class sport and that people who train in awful conditions to produce champions do not, to their credit, complain too much and by and large get on with it. Belfast City Council, to its credit, has not only brought forward a boxing strategy but has produced a very good template that other councils can lift and use if they so wish. In fact, Andrew Hassard and Rose Crozier, through NILGA, will be making that available, because there is no point in other local councils having to go through work that is already done. If it needs to be tweaked to suit a local area, then do that. We all have a responsibility to make sure that boxing gets as much funding as possible from local government, from the lottery, from central government and from any other source. That is my responsibility as well; I am not ducking out of it.

With regard to the two announcements, I announced the funding in June, and the BBC did the rest. What am I supposed to say: "Don't do that for me. Don't give me any more good PR"? Wise up. Anyway, the good PR was for boxing. Absolutely no one in the House has anything negative to say about the role and the legacy of those clubs. However, in all sports and in all walks of life, we need to challenge, confront, condemn and resolve sectarianism wherever it raises its head and move on. I am not ignoring the fact that there were incidents and that there are still allegations around what happened. I

am not ignoring that at all. In fact, I am on the record as condemning it, and I will do it again. I do not think that children involved in any sport — in this case, boxing — should be subject to that sort of abuse. It is ugly, horrible and wrong. Let me be clear about that. Let me also be clear about the fact that we all need to work together to get this resolved. I am not simply paying lip service to that.

When Jim Allister moved his amendment, he talked about the condition of stadiums. Despite the fact that I have asked to go out to Sandy Row, I have absolutely no doubt about what he said. I have absolutely no doubt that the conditions that he referred to exist, because they have existed in most if not all of the clubs that I have so far visited. As I said, boxing seems to get on with it, to its credit, but the situation is not acceptable. For me, as the Minister responsible for sport and for delivering facilities, it is not acceptable that that happens. I do not think that any MLA would take responsibility for letting on or for glossing over boxing's dire need.

Let me confront the point that Jim Allister makes. I want Sandy Row to reaffiliate with the Irish Amateur Boxing Association. What is more, the boxing family wants Sandy Row to do that, because it is good for the sport. If Sandy Row wants to go off and create its own affiliation, it is entirely up to it. Robin Swann mentioned the criteria and said that they excluded Sandy Row. They do not. Sandy Row has been affiliated to the Irish Amateur Boxing Association, so it is entitled to put in an expression of interest, which it has. If you have been affiliated to the Irish Amateur Boxing Association within the past three years, you are entitled to put in for the money, so Sandy Row is not excluded. Sandy Row is not the only non-affiliated club; there are five others. For whatever reason, they decided not to bother. I do not know about the rest. If they have been affiliated within the past three years, they may want to apply, but I am not sure.

Mr Swann: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I will, surely.

Mr Swann: I would like clarification on that point. I have the document here, and the paragraph that deals with eligibility for tranche 1 states:

"The boxing equipment award will be the subject of a single application from the IABA."

Are you telling me that the IABA will make applications for non-affiliated clubs?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The criteria state that any group affiliated to the IABA within the past three years is eligible for that funding. That is a fact, and it is in the consultation document that was launched on Friday, Robin, unless the Department told me that it was launched on Friday but really launched it only today. I do not know, because I have been in here. My understanding is that it was launched on Friday.

I welcome Karen McKeivitt's amendment on behalf of the SDLP. I welcome the sentiments, because there is a bit of concern. When I saw the amendment, I thought, "What is this about?". To be honest, I wanted to see what way the debate was going. I do not want it to sound as though there is a contradiction, but, if there is a demonstrated need that money needs to go into areas that are, by and large, Protestant working-class areas, that is where it will go.

That applies across every one of my arm's-length bodies. That will apply wherever there is a subjective need or a resource need, regardless of how the religious breakdown of the area concerned is described. That is called equality; it is not equity. There is equity when Derry, for instance, gets a boxing club and then Cairn Lodge gets one. I will come on to Cairn Lodge later, William.

Cathal Ó hOisín, Michael McGimpsey and others, such as Chris Lyttle and William Humphrey, mentioned clubs that they had visited. I will go out to Castlereagh and Abbey boxing clubs this week. I have been to Dungiven, and I understand that I will go back to another boxing club before Christmas.

Everyone recognises what boxing has done. Everyone recognises that, despite the conditions, boxing is producing champions, should they be Olympians, world champions or Commonwealth champions. These champions give great leadership and are brilliant role models in their communities. For the most part, they are working-class kids. Most are young working-class boys, but not exclusively. One of the biggest gaps, as was pointed out, is that there are not as many young girls.

An example of another gap can be seen at Cairn Lodge, the Holy Family Boxing Club and many others, and I have no doubt that I will see it again. Kids are left outside clubs because the facilities are not there. When I was at the Cairn Lodge club recently, 80 kids were there, with at least 60 on its waiting list, and it has not even got a boxing ring. It has bags hanging in a hall that is used by the entire community on Agnes Street. Instead of additional evenings, the number has been cut, which is a tale that can be applied to many clubs. We need to make sure that we put in the resources.

Michael McGimpsey and others mentioned the power of sport — in this case, boxing — and the fact that it promotes mental and physical well-being. Some Members, including David, who has just spoken, mentioned crime prevention and the sense of discipline, the sense of belonging and the sense of being on a team.

It is important to recognise that, wherever sectarianism presents itself, wherever it presents itself, regardless of the sport, we all have a duty to confront it. All of us have a duty to make sure that sectarianism is confronted, particularly when it affects children. Each and every one of us has a duty of care to children, and we need to make sure that we adhere to that.

Mr Maskey: I thank the Minister for giving way and for referring again to sectarianism. Does she agree that the people who make generalised, sweeping statements about “sectarianism in boxing” do an awful disservice to the many people across the communities who have been involved in boxing, in some cases for decades, mostly on a voluntary basis? Does she agree that that does a gross disservice to people such as Tommy Armour and the Warnock brothers — I am going back four or five decades — from the Shankill Road area, who made a massive contribution to boxing not only in the city but beyond? Would she say that the notion of sectarianism across boxing does a great disservice to that community?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his intervention. That is the whole point behind me bringing that issue up. That allegation has hurt the whole boxing community deeply; it really has. One club has labelled the entire

boxing community as being either overt or secret bigots or as people who are capable of sectarianism or just waiting for the opportunity to be sectarian. As the Chair said at the start of the debate, an assumption is made about clubs. Decades ago, the Church may have been involved in helping boxing, and lots of the clubs in Belfast hold on to the parish name. However, the Church got rid of the clubs a long time ago because it needed to develop clubs or community centres. So, the clubs have held on to the parish title but have had to develop their own premises. That is the case across the rural and urban split. I have been to clubs in rural areas that have held on to the parish name but have had to find their own facilities. Assumptions are made because a club may be called after a certain parish. I have met kids from both communities in those clubs, which is pleasing. So, an assumption is made that, because kids come from a St Oliver Plunkett club, a Holy Family club or whatever, by and large, they come from a Catholic community. For kids in another club, the assumption is made that they come from another community. That is not the case. The changeover that has happened in boxing over the decades means that, for other sports, it has led by example. I make that very clear.

Let me also be clear that, as far as I am concerned, the £3.27 million is just the start. It is a start that needs to be welcomed, but Sammy Douglas raised a crucial point. I have given priority to boxing, but I will use the same rule of thumb for sport, the arts, museums, libraries and everywhere else. You need to get out to the communities that are hardest to reach, and you need to make sure that funding goes to objective need. Unless we do that, we will be creating and administering decades of imbalance, underachievement and underinvestment. That is not happening on my watch.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I accept what the Minister says, but the experience in Cairn Lodge, which I mentioned, is that, although your Department indicated that money was to come to the club through Sport NI, it has not been delivered and, I understand, will not be delivered.

Ms Ní Chuilín: That was Sport NI's community capital programme. I have said during other debates but particularly at Question Time that I will find the resources. I will find the resources under monitoring bids. I will make sure that clubs such as those have at least an opportunity. I am not guaranteeing them or anybody else anything else, because I cannot and will not do that. The people who have been left to wither on the vine because they have not got the capability to put in an application should not be penalised either by Sport NI, Belfast City Council or by anybody else, for that matter. Those days should be put behind us. We need to make sure that, when those bids come in, they are not seen as something that a parish or community or constituency approach is taken to. It should be done on the basis of need. That is where this will happen. It is a start, and it is a good start.

I welcome the debate. It is good that boxing and all its achievements have been brought to the Floor. I appreciate the tone of the debate, despite some of the nonsense that some Members said before. I look forward to making sure that every support is given to the boxing community. Let me be clear: should you box and train in Sandy Row, Cairn Lodge or anywhere else, I am in the boxer's corner. I have got their back, and I will come out fighting.

I will fight for the money for the bid. I will challenge any nonsense, should it be cheap PR stunts or actual, real abuse. Regardless of how it is described, I will challenge it. I will challenge any sporting body that does not step up to the plate, and I will challenge people, when they make allegations, to put up or shut up.

4.00 pm

This has been a good debate. I am delighted that there is so much support for boxing, and my wish is that everybody will take a bigger interest in boxing than they have done in the past. I thank the Members who tabled the motion and those who tabled amendments for the opportunity to speak on this important issue.

Mr D Bradley: Coming to the end of this bout, I feel a bit punch-drunk, but I hope that I will be able to stay on my feet until the end.

I come from a boxing family. My brother fought for the St John Bosco club in Newry and later ran the Clonduff club in Hilltown, so I have some background in it, although I have to admit that I was never a participant myself. In any case, the motion before us today and the associated amendments, although they diverge in their sentiment, have a common element, which is that boxing is a sport that is worthy of support by the Government. It is a sport that demands peak fitness, skill, discipline and courage, all gained by hard, dedicated and prolonged training. It has many positive attributes as a sport, among them the promotion of physical health and mental well-being.

Boxing is also a sport that now attracts boys and girls, many of whom may be hard to reach through other sport, and it quite often places them on a positive trajectory of behaviour, which helps them to avoid other activities that may not be as beneficial to them. Up until now, there has been a fairly modest investment of around £80,000 on average per annum over the past five years. That will be increased to £3.27 million over the years 2012 to 2015.

I believe that Sport NI is taking the right approach by carrying out an exercise to establish the needs of boxing clubs right across the North. The funding should be distributed on the basis of boxing need, whether that be in Catholic or Protestant area, rather than simply the location of clubs. The information that will be gleaned from that study will be used by Sport NI, in conjunction with the boxing governing body, the IABA, to consider how funds can be best used to maximise the benefits for the sport as a whole. Although we should not prejudge the exercise before it is complete, I agree with Miss McIlveen that not all of the funding should be soaked up exclusively in Belfast. I welcome the Minister's assurance today that that will be the case.

The SDLP supports the Sport NI approach and fully expects that the funding will be allocated equitably across communities to fill the gaps in provision, in keeping with the Department's section 75 responsibility, as the motion and the two amendments express.

If there are needs in one area or another, this particular piece of work should reveal those needs. I expect that the results of this work will be made available to the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee at the earliest possible opportunity. It would be helpful if the Minister could give us an undertaking that that will be the case.

The report from the Sandy Row club on incidents of sectarianism at various boxing venues was, as Members said, very disturbing. I am sure that all those who are interested in the promotion of the sport will be eager to ensure that boxing is free of that type of behaviour. The Sandy Row eight-point plan is being implemented by the Irish Amateur Boxing Association and the Ulster Boxing Council, and is being overseen by Sport NI. I welcome that. Along with implementing the eight-point plan, the UBC should adopt the equality standard for sport. The SDLP believes that the various strategies in the club development plan should be well co-ordinated and funded, and should be situated clearly in that standard, which embraces the spirit of all equality legislation and is committed to eradicating any unfair discrimination.

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

Mr D Bradley: Mr Allister's amendment calls for a Northern Ireland amateur boxing association to be established. He has, quite often, told us that we should not call for things in the House over which the House has no control. This is one such thing. There is little evidence from boxing clubs that there is a demand for such an association.

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

Mr D Bradley: If there is that demand, it is up to those on the ground to bring it about.

Mr Allister: It is interesting that despite some people's lamenting the fact that the Sandy Row boxing club made allegations, which were publicised, no one in the debate has refuted any of those allegations. That is the abiding imprint of the debate; the reality that, sadly, in the sport, this club and others have been subjected to sectarian harassment. The question is whether we are exercised to do something about it.

In response to Mr Swann in particular, the Minister said that Sandy Row boxing club was not prohibited from availing itself of the current round of funding because, at some point since 2009, it had been affiliated. I think that the Minister has to make up her mind. I have in my hand a written reply from her to a question dated 28 September 2012 which asks precisely for an assurance that Sandy Row boxing club would be eligible for funding. The answer states that:

"in line with all Sport NI club based programmes, direct funding is only currently being considered for boxing clubs that are governing body affiliated."

Therefore, if Sandy Row boxing club, as of today, is not affiliated, I interpret that answer to mean that the club is shut out of funding. The Minister is trying to suggest something else today. That is an advance. However, I really think that she has to decide which way she is facing on this issue.

There has been some avoidance —

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Member for giving way. I just want to make him and the House aware of an issue related to affiliation. The Member will be aware that a Belfast City Council boxing strategy will be implemented soon. Significant amounts of money have been set aside for that. I assure the Member, the House and Sandy Row boxing

club that no such affiliation is required for council money to be sought and obtained by that boxing club.

Mr Allister: I am grateful for that, as, I am sure, Sandy Row boxing club will be.

I will turn to the issue about which some people have been reluctant to talk; one that really goes to the core of equality and which many people like to talk about in the most generic fashion. It is the issue of why young people who are affiliated to boxing and see their attachment to the British nation are prohibited from competing under the colours of their nation, and why it is that those who say that they are great enthusiasts for the Belfast Agreement are reluctant, when it comes to boxing, to implement the portion of it, which I quoted earlier, about the right to identify oneself and to be accepted as Irish or British or both as one may choose. Why is it that there is that blind spot with Sinn Féin Members in particular as to the right of the young Protestant participant in boxing to be able to be affiliated to an organisation which would enable him or her to fight for the United Kingdom?

Mr McElduff: Did that situation pertain during the stewardship of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure by Michael McGimpsey, Edwin Poots, Gregory Campbell and Nelson McCausland?

Mr Allister: That situation may well have prevailed before I came to the House, but it is certainly a position in the House that I am determined to highlight, and that is what I am doing today.

It is very simple: either it is right or it is wrong that boxers in Northern Ireland who have no affinity to the Irish Republic should nonetheless have to wrap themselves in the Irish tricolour in order to be able to box in the Olympics. That cannot be right. They have to have the right to box for the United Kingdom. It is that fundamental right — that fundamental principle — that I say that the House should be voting for in voting for the amendment that I propose. I trust that it will do that. It is a seminal touchstone for all the words of many who talk about even-handedness and equality — all the buzzwords that they love to trot out. Well, today is the day to decide, regardless of whether you are from the Alliance Party, which sat on the fence on this issue; the SDLP, which seemed to be against it; or Sinn Féin, which predictably is against it. Today is the day when you declare yourself on this amendment — am I for perpetuating the inequity that young people from Northern Ireland cannot, in this sport, fight, appear and compete for the country to which they are proud to belong? That cannot be right. As I said, by your votes, we shall know you in the House today.

Mr Weir: At the conclusion of the debate, I thank all those who have taken part. There has been a bit of verbal sparring across the Chamber, but it has been kept, I think, in a good tone by all involved.

The mover of the motion said at the outset that it was not a sectarian motion. Indeed, the intention of the motion was to ensure benefits for all and inclusivity. It is certainly the case that it is not a sectarian motion, but there has been acknowledgement from all sides of the House that sectarianism is an issue that needs to be addressed. Sadly —

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. I am on my feet to clarify a point that I made during my contribution earlier — Mr McMullan would not give way —

in response to the suggestion from Mr Ó hOisín in relation to Ulster rugby games.

My point was that when the Ulster rugby football union hosts a game in Belfast that is an IRFU game — regardless of whether it is an international, junior international or whatever — the Union flag is not flown and the national anthem is not played at Ravenhill. Mr McMullan made the point that when the Irish team plays at the new Aviva stadium, 'God Save the Queen' be played there as well. I would welcome that. I am sure that you would have more difficulty with it, though.

Mr Weir: I thank the Member for his intervention. Obviously, Mr Ó hOisín got his Ravenhills, Croke Parks and Aviva stadiums mixed up a bit. The Hansard report will indicate what the Member said.

There is a need to address sectarianism. For example, it is disappointing, as has been pointed out to me, that, as late as last night, Wayne McCullough received abuse on a social media site simply for wearing a poppy. He was described as a traitor to his country because he did so.

It is also the case, as pointed out by the mover of the motion and others, that, when we are dealing with sectarianism, racial abuse or any other form of discrimination, it is not a majority position within boxing. Indeed, it is a much wider issue — a societal issue. However, where sectarianism raises its head — I am glad that there has been condemnation of it from all sides of the House today — we need to address it. One of the Members opposite talked about the issue of affiliation. Clubs and individuals, when affiliating, need to have a degree of confidence that their concerns are being properly addressed.

I want to deal briefly with the two amendments. As the party that proposed the motion, the DUP does not have a problem with either amendment.

I turn first to Mr Allister's amendment. He makes a central point that people from a sporting background should be able to choose their affiliation. My preference, which I suspect would be his as well, would be that any sportsperson from Northern Ireland would compete for a British team. I think that even Mr Allister would acknowledge that neither he nor I can impose that on people. However, we do have to see a situation in which anyone is at least given the freedom of opportunity to compete for different teams. That is particularly pertinent where we have a sport that involves individuals. We saw, for example, in the Olympics, a number of sportspeople from Northern Ireland competing for either the Irish Republic team —

Mr D Bradley: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: Briefly.

4.15 pm

Mr D Bradley: On the point about a separate Northern Ireland boxing association, does the Member agree that that is a matter for the clubs involved in the sport on the ground to decide, and not one for the House or even the Minister? If there were a desire for that, surely it would have been brought about by now.

Mr Weir: With respect, that clearly is not something that we can impose from above. However, as we have seen

with cycling, which is a sport that I am very familiar with, there was an attempt to form a body and, indeed, one was eventually formed that is affiliated with the British bodies. That body faced years of discrimination and of obstacles being put in its path. The basic principle is that people should be able to choose which country they want to represent. For example, a number of footballers have chosen to play for the Republic of Ireland. As a Northern Ireland fan, I am not particularly keen on that, but I have to accept it. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.

Take a look at what happens in athletics. Down the years, a number of people from Northern Ireland have competed in the Olympics for either the Irish Republic or team GB. That opportunity is there. However, even where that is permitted, we need to make sure that obstacles are not put in someone's path. Look, for instance, at hockey.

[Interruption.]

Mr Weir: I have to move on. I am sure the Member was about to make a very sage point, which I am sure I would agree with, but I have to move on.

So, there is a basic principle in what Mr Allister said that I think we would support. Similarly, we are comfortable with the SDLP amendment. Our motion specifically mentions the need to target Protestant working-class areas in particular. It is our belief that that is where the strongest need is, but we are happy to accept that, if it is an issue of objective need, that will be highlighted by that. So, we are comfortable with its suggestion.

It is true that, during the debate, a number of Members covered a lot of common ground. There was a long list of inspirational boxers, which, if read out, could fill the next five minutes, from Muhammad Ali to Katie Taylor, Nicola Adams to Carl Frampton, Wayne McCullough to Barry McGuigan and a host of others. They have been and, indeed, continue to be an inspiration.

A number of Members, including the proposer of the motion, Robin Swann and Michael McGimpsey, highlighted the positive benefits of boxing, from a physical and medical point of view, in providing good physical and mental health. Indeed, it also has wider societal benefits, as it provides a productive route, particularly for young people, and I think that it has played a very positive role in dealing with antisocial behaviour and underachievement.

Jim Allister and the proposer of the motion mentioned the debt of gratitude to volunteers, and, again, a number of Members acknowledged that.

One constant theme was the range of examples provided, from the rural hall that was taken over in Mr Ó hOisín's area to the examples in east Belfast, Sandy Row and a range of other places. That is why all of us, I think, welcome the Minister's remarks and the commitment to the level of funding. Historically, boxing has been underfunded, which has meant that a number of facilities need help. There has to be a commitment to all of Northern Ireland, and again, I welcome the Minister's remarks in that regard. She referred to Abbey boxing club, which I know plays a very positive role in Bangor, and I commend it. Indeed, a range of boxing clubs have played a positive role across Northern Ireland.

In conclusion, what is at the heart of the motion is identifying need and ensuring that that need is met. A number of Members spoke about the gaps throughout

Northern Ireland that need to be addressed. It is important that a signal is sent out to all boxing clubs across Northern Ireland that their funding requirements will not be ignored and, indeed, that we will go beyond simply saying, "We will ensure that everybody has an opportunity". I think that there is an important onus on the Department, the Sports Council and, indeed, all within the sector to ensure that, from a funding point of view, that is proactively pursued.

We want to see people coming forward, and we want a clear message to be sent out that no boxing club will feel excluded. Indeed, as the Minister herself said, we need to ensure that this does not create a situation where clubs that are behind others in respect of capacity are penalised.

In addressing the problems of the historic underfunding of boxing, it is important that we do not entrench division or create further inequality. Therefore, a commitment needs to be made across the board.

It is important that we do not have only a few well-run and successful boxing clubs. It is about the entire sector, and that commitment must go across the sectarian divide and throughout Northern Ireland. If we can embrace that, we can make a positive contribution to a noble sport, and I hope that the House can unite around it.

The DUP will support Mr Allister's amendment. We are happy with the SDLP amendment, but we also urge Members to support the motion.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I advise Members that, if the amendment is made, I will not put the Question on amendment No 2 as the wording of the original motion will have been changed to such an extent that it would not be in order for the House to vote on amendment No 2 as well.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 47; Noes 42.

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Allister and Mr McNarry

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Eastwood and Mr Ó hOisín

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 48; Noes 42.

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Eastwood and Mr Ó hOisín

Main Question, as amended, accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern the findings of Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club's (SRABC) recent report; further notes the recent announcement by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure in relation to funding for boxing; acknowledges the boxing strategy being developed by Belfast City Council in conjunction with Sport NI and the club development plan being produced by the Ulster provincial boxing council, but regrets the council's failure to address the issue of sectarianism highlighted in the report by SRABC; recognises that there is a need to develop boxing in working-class Protestant areas; calls for a Northern Ireland amateur boxing association to be established in order to afford boxers from Northern Ireland the opportunity to compete for the UK at international level; and further calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to ensure that the funding is allocated equitably across communities to fill identifiable gaps in provision for the sport, in keeping with her Department's section 75 responsibilities.

4.45 pm

Construction Industry

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

Mr Byrne: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the current plight of the construction industry; and calls on the Executive to prioritise the proposed maintenance and capital spending plans of each Department, to stimulate the local economy and support jobs within the construction industry.

This motion is extremely timely, as the construction industry, which is already one of the hardest-hit in this recession, had a further blow with last week's announcement of the job losses at Pattons.

The construction industry is in crisis, the primary cause of which is a lack of work. Not many contracts are being issued. There are virtually no private sector projects at the moment except for some retail schemes. The sector has fallen most dramatically from £2.4 billion in new works in 2005 to about £1.6 billion in 2011 and is still dropping.

Very few capital works schemes are coming forward in the public sector. There are very few newbuild schools; there are currently 15 schools projects in the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) system but they cannot be advanced until the Department of Education's business case is concluded. When that has been done it will have to be further examined by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP).

Very little social housing is being built, although I note that, today, the Minister of Finance and Personnel announced an £8 million diversion into the co-ownership schemes. Very few new hospital builds or extensions are currently taking place. Indeed, we have very few public roads schemes except for some maintenance schemes that are currently in the pipeline.

In 2007, the construction industry was worth £3 billion. This year, the net worth is about £1 billion, which represents a £2 billion drop in five years. The consequence is that there are 25,000 fewer jobs in construction today than there were five years ago. The reality is that a massive contraction is taking place in the construction industry. One of the biggest outworkings of that is that we have what is called below-cost or sub-economic tendering. Many big contractors are going out of business. Indeed, a lot of them have already gone out of business.

Pattons is the most recent example, and it is causing massive concern in the industry. It is a 100-year-old company from Ballymena with over 300 workers directly employed. In addition many subcontractors, about whom we do not hear much in the media, are being badly hit. Many of them were present today at a meeting in this Building, which was attended by 85 people who represented between 30 and 40 subcontracting companies.

Many hundreds of workers in the subcontracting sector are going to be directly affected. In my constituency of West Tyrone, McCann Brothers (Ire) Ltd of Seskinore ran into difficulty some weeks ago and was put into receivership. That has had an impact on two major schemes. Ordinary workers did not get paid for four weeks. That is not good for the industry and it is very severe for the workers involved.

The GAA centre at Garvaghy has been badly hit because a £3 million contract with McCann Brothers has been put on ice. A Loretto school at Kilkenny has also been stopped because the McCanns went into liquidation. Many main and secondary contractors, as well as builders and providers, on these schemes are left suffering badly. In the case of the new South West Acute Hospital, many small subcontractors were never paid. The main contractor and one or two of the larger subcontractors were paid, but many of the smaller ones were not paid.

How can anyone carry on in business if they are not paid for the work that they do? Protection of subcontractors must be addressed by this Assembly. Too often, subcontractors are the forgotten victim when a firm enters administration. They fall far down the list when it comes to the settling of debts, and they regularly lose out.

There is a way to address this. For some time, industry representatives have promoted public project bank accounts, whereby specific accounts are opened for public works projects. All moneys are paid into the account and then passed on to the relevant contractors and subcontractors rather than to the lead contractor. One of subcontractors' greatest gripes is that they feel that they are far down the chain and are last in line to get paid. Public project bank accounts would help remove the serious risk that the subcontractors here today have had to face when the bigger company gets into difficulty before outstanding financial matters have been resolved.

Many construction companies were badly hit as a result of the property development collapse. Unfortunately, some construction companies diverted into property development and have suffered debt burden consequences. The banking pressures are adding to the problem of managing cash flow. Banks are being ruthless. Talk to anybody in the industry, and they will tell you that they are getting harrowing phone calls and letters daily. The public are asking: can this Executive put some pressure on the banks? They want to know that, particularly given that Ulster Bank is part of a public sector-owned bank and that First Trust is really a publicly owned bank backed by the Irish Government.

There is a combination of factors and problems leading to a crisis in business confidence in the industry. Many professional businesses related to construction are also affected. These include architects, quantity surveyors, civil engineers and consulting engineering firms. They are all hanging on by their fingernails. They are all employing staff for whom they do not really have work. They are hoping and waiting for an upturn. Many building supply firms are suffering badly as well. Many of them are suffering multiple hits as more and more construction companies go out of business. I could name building supply companies here that have had multiple hits in the last two years.

The fall of one construction company has a domino effect. It is like a pack of cards. So many are affected, and many cannot continue like this.

Mr McKay: I thank the Member for giving way. He makes an excellent point about the pack of cards. Today's meeting was great to realise the effect that the Patton group going to administration will have on our local economy. It was tallied up that the companies that were represented in the Assembly today are owed a combined £15 million. They have a grand total of 2,000 employees, which would make them one of our largest companies if they were all together. Does the Member agree that we need to act urgently in respect of those 2,000-plus employees?

Mr Byrne: I fully agree with the Member. This crisis has to be addressed seriously. There has to be a change in company law to try to recognise that bona fide subcontractors have real concerns and a plight that needs to be addressed.

Procurement and tendering bureaucracy in the construction sector is also very frustrating. I appeal to the Minister that that issue ought to be addressed. The Patton group had a turnover of £140 million in the last year. Unfortunately, it posted a £7 million loss in the same period.

According to the 'Belfast Telegraph' dated 6 November, the Patton group decision was brought on by "extremely challenging trading conditions". That is what is facing every construction company. John Armstrong, managing director of the Construction Employers Federation (CEF), said on 17 October, in response to further a reduction in activity in the area:

"Looking ahead CEF has serious concerns that activity levels will fall further as the cuts to investment in public buildings and infrastructure continue to bite. Every £1 million reduction in construction output results in the loss of over 28 jobs and takes £3 million out of the wider economy."

This is one industry in which the multiplier effects can bring great benefits if money is being put into the sector. However, equally, if money is being taken out of the sector, the downward spiral is catastrophic.

On 22 October, he also wrote:

"the Executive has recently published the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011-2021. The ten year plan was not actually published until a year and a half in to the ten year period. Disappointingly, even with such a substantial delay, the strategy falls down on a number of counts. As a forward looking document it suffers from a fundamental failing – it puts more focus on the past and the present than on the future."

It is crucial that the plight of the industry is heard in the House. We just had a debate on boxing, but this is the one issue that is causing big problems. There has been a massive number of job losses, bankruptcy and pain experienced by workers and managers of construction companies. We need to address that.

Mrs Overend: I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after "Department," and insert

"to encourage and facilitate more investment in public-private infrastructure projects during this Assembly mandate, and to lobby Her Majesty's Treasury for a reduced rate of VAT for the repair, maintenance and improvement of existing dwellings to stimulate the local

economy and support jobs within the construction industry.”

First, I commend the SDLP for tabling the motion, which could not be more timely, given the terrible news last week that the Patton Group was in financial difficulties and the subsequent news that it has been placed in administration.

The Patton Group is a nationally and internationally renowned, family run business that is celebrating its centenary year. I am sure I speak for everyone in the House when I express great sadness at the events of the past week. There have been reports that up to two thirds of the workforce at the Patton Group could be lost, which is devastating for those people and their families. That is the latest blow to a declining industry, and the sector has been left reeling from it.

As others have said, just this afternoon, I, along with many other MLAs, met a huge delegation of the subcontractors affected. The Patton effect could hit more than 2,000 employees of subcontractors and small and medium-sized businesses, which could be owed around £15 million. That is a shocking statistic that was revealed at this afternoon's meeting.

There is also a wider effect on the economy to consider, given that the news comes on the back of nearly 800 job losses at FG Wilson and the knock-on effect that that has had on its supply chain. The Enterprise Minister is still refusing to clarify the details of that for commercial reasons.

Today's debate may not be able to help those construction workers we met this afternoon as it is short-term assistance that they require. So, I challenge the Executive and the Ministers to explore areas in which help can be given urgently.

I want to speak specifically about the decline that has been evident in the construction industry since 2007. In doing so, the most recent Northern Ireland Construction Bulletin, which was published less than a month ago, is perhaps the best place to start. That bulletin made for worrying reading, as it clearly outlines that the total volume of construction output in Northern Ireland in the second quarter of 2012 decreased by 8.2% compared with first quarter. That comes after three consecutive quarters of growth in construction output and shows that no recovery is under way. It is also the sharpest quarterly decline since the recession took hold.

The value of construction output in real prices in quarter 2 of 2012 was the lowest quarterly value recorded in the past five years. There was a 10.3% quarter-on-quarter volume decrease in housing output. There was a 25.1% decrease in infrastructure output in the second quarter of 2012 compared with the first quarter. The category entitled, "Other Work", which includes work associated with factories, schools, hospitals and agriculture, decreased by 1.7% over the quarter, according to figures from DFP.

5.00 pm

According to figures from DFP, we have suffered 17 quarters of decline in employee jobs in construction up to the second quarter of 2012. That means that the number of construction jobs has fallen from a high of nearly 47,000 in 2007 to just over 30,000 now. To put all that in some kind of headline figure, construction output is now 40% below its pre-recession peak. It is also true that, relatively speaking, the GB construction sector has experienced a

less severe downturn than that in Northern Ireland. Those statistics are important indicators of where we are, and they illustrate the scale of the challenge that the Executive face in creating an environment for sustainable growth in the construction industry.

The Ulster Unionist amendment comes in two parts. The first is our desire to see the Executive facilitate and encourage more investment in public-private partnerships in infrastructure projects. Two large public-private partnership examples are set out in the investment strategy, and they concern drinking water quality and waste water treatment. The Omega waste water PPP project is delivering improved treatment standards for 20% of the total waste water that NI Water receives, and the Alpha water PPP project is delivering new treatment facilities for over 50% of drinking water.

The investment strategy also has a commitment to:

“actively engage with institutional investors in order to attract inward investment into public-private infrastructure.”

The strategy also deals extensively with alternative funding options and sets out many of the advantages of working with the private sector. Therefore, I think that we in the House are all broadly on the same page in thinking that there is validity in looking at collaboration between the public and private sectors. Some may be more enthusiastic than others, but we should all be committed to looking at the options.

The Ulster Unionist Party's main issue is the time frame in which alternative financing options will be introduced. IN appendix 2 of the investment strategy demonstrates it can be seen that there is no commitment to use alternative financing until between 2015 and 2021, when £390 million for the Department for Regional Development, £200 million for the Department of Education and £500 million for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety will be sought. The question that we pose today is whether any of that potential finance can be tapped into now to support growth and recovery and to create jobs during this Assembly mandate, which is when it is potentially most needed. I understand that there may be an argument that we need to wait until the next CSR Budget before committing to alternative financing, but unemployment is rising fast now, and, as things stand, our recovery is already behind that of the rest of the United Kingdom. That area also has been flagged up by the CBI following events at Patton's, and it needs to be considered. We are simply calling on the Executive to give the various financing options due consideration. For example, we have private finance initiative contracts in the health service in relation to various health and social care trusts. Although that model is not suitable for all capital projects, we should consider whether it can be developed further.

Lastly on this aspect of our amendment, I want to briefly mention the UK guarantee scheme that George Osborne announced. That scheme is for nationally significant projects that are shovel-ready but are struggling to access private finance because of adverse credit conditions. The Treasury would step in behind these projects, and, at the time of the announcement was in July, the aim was to provide public guarantees of up to £50 billion of private investment in infrastructure and exports, with the intention of accelerating major infrastructure investment. Are we

in Northern Ireland considering our own eligibility for the scheme? We should be, and I will be interested to hear a response on that point.

The second part of the Ulster Unionist Party amendment concerns a reduction in VAT for the repair, maintenance and improvement of existing dwellings and is, therefore, a matter that needs to be negotiated with the Treasury. This is a policy that my party has advocated since as far back as 2010, and my colleagues will further investigate it in the debate. We debated a motion in the House on 10 September that called for a reduction in VAT for the hospitality sector. Although the hospitality sector is crucial, especially for tourism, one reason that my party voted against that motion is that we believe that, if we reduce VAT for certain sectors, we must prioritise the construction industry. As Members know, European rules dictate that we can have only a certain number of areas that are subject to VAT reduction. Every member state in the EU must apply VAT at a standard rate, which can be anything between 15% and 25%. All countries can also have up to two reduced rates of between 5% and 15%. There is certainly an argument for the construction industry to have one of those reduced rates. An increased market for the repair, maintenance and improvement of existing dwellings could provide a real boost to the construction sector, and the evidence base is there, as the Isle of Man has operated this with success for over a decade.

I urge the House to support the reasonable and pragmatic amendment from the Ulster Unionist Party. It calls for due consideration to be given to alternative finance initiatives, as well as to a reduced VAT rate. Our construction sector is failing and needs help. I believe that the measures in our amendment would bring improvements.

Mr Girvan: We all recognise the problem that the construction industry faces in our Province, and I am glad to see that both the motion and the amendment have come up to speed with what the DUP was trying to do earlier in this session.

I want to move in on part of the point. A lot of focus is going on the public spend, and, granted, that is the part on which we can have some influence. The Executive are spending £1.3 billion on capital projects this year. My point is that there might be additional moneys drawn in from local government for capital projects. Those areas need to be looked at seriously. Some £32 million was announced, and it was announced today that some of that money will be spent on schools and road projects. It is all very well to spend, but we must ensure that contractors and those who tender, when they get the job, give a fair crack of the whip to those who are subbing from them. That was the story that came out today. The subcontractors are sometimes the bank to the main contractor. It is evident that some main contractors are using the subbies' money to keep themselves afloat. A number of initiatives have been put in place. The prompt payment scheme was brought forward, and, in that, we went over and above what was proposed in other areas of the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, that is not filtering down the line to the subbies. That is why we are in such a predicament today.

An announcement was made about 300-odd jobs that will potentially be lost at Patton. That does not take into account the thousands of jobs that could be affected through the subcontractors associated with Patton. That is an area that we should take seriously. We should put

forward contract law that protects the subcontractors and ensures that, when payments are made, they get a fair crack of the whip and receive that payment.

I appreciate that there are a number of things to take into account, one of which is the downturn in the residential housing market. The price of residential property is probably 7% lower than it was in the first quarter of 2005 and approximately 50% lower than it was in 2007. We are dealing with that, and it will have a knock-on effect. The only mechanism that we have is to ensure that, when public contracts are awarded, we target them at the areas where they will be most effective.

Last week, it was announced that the Executive had decided that £200 million would be spent. That is a jobs initiative, and some of that money will target areas where the contract industry can take advantage of it. Northern Ireland contractors have taken advantage in the past: 96% or 97% of all contracts awarded here are awarded to Northern Ireland-based companies. We want to ensure that that money circulates and stays in Northern Ireland. I appreciate that some people will say that we also have to tender for contracts outside Northern Ireland and that some Northern Ireland contractors have been very successful in getting work outside Northern Ireland and have brought back some skills to the industry here.

We have a job of work to do. I heard the plight and the testimonies of people today who told us that they could lose their home as the result of another firm going bankrupt. There is nothing wrong with them, but the drawing down of the funding has had a major impact.

Other initiatives have been announced. The co-ownership scheme will bring in funds. I know that people have mentioned £8 million. I had a figure of £10 million. Two major funders — Barclays Bank and the Bank of Ireland — are each putting in £25 million, giving us a total of £50 million to go towards newbuild —

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

Mr Girvan: I am sorry, I did not realise that time had gone so quickly. I really think that we need to focus on what the Executive can do for our construction industry and target contracts accordingly.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the supporters of the motion for bringing the matter forward. It is timely, given the situation with Patton's and the domino or ripple effect that that will have on the entire local economy. Patton's, of course, is located in my constituency of North Antrim. Last week, I spoke to a number of subcontractors, and we were to arrange a meeting today. There was only supposed to be a handful of them, but it soon spiralled way beyond that. As Members saw today, more than 80 subcontractors packed into a room on the third floor, and some of the human stories that we heard were really depressing. We are talking about SMEs and microbusinesses. Some, perhaps, have only two or three employees but are owed £200,000 or £300,000, and they cannot see a way out of the situation. It is deeply depressing, especially as we are in the run-up to Christmas.

Departments need to explore what they can do. To be fair to the Finance Minister, it was only a number of days ago that we were discussing what we could do about

this, and legislation has been brought forward. However, subcontractors get a bad deal in such situations, and we need to explore further what we can do to protect them when larger contractors go to the wall. Today, quite rightly, many subcontractors were angry about that. I do not think that it is an acceptable situation. There may be certain European regulations and so on that we could make our way through, so we need to explore that and make it a priority. We cannot allow what happened to those subcontractors and what could happen to those 2,000-plus employees to happen again. Quite simply, it is grossly unfair, as the subcontractors carry the can. In some instances, the main contractors may fold and start again. However, in many cases, a lot of the smaller enterprises will go to the wall, which will affect their personal finances and is quite worrying.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr McKay: Yes.

Mr Storey: Does the Member agree that not only do we need to highlight the problems today, we also need to try to identify solutions? Does he also agree that one of the difficulties has been that Departments, in particular the Department of Education, changed the rules? I declare an interest as a member of the board of governors of Ballymoney High School. When a PPP project was put in place six years ago, the Department of Education changed the rules and decided to go down a conventional procurement route. Today, neither Rainey Endowed School in Magherafelt nor Ballymoney High School have got their newbuild, and that, clearly, was because of the way in which that Department decided to abandon a contract and go for something different.

5.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McKay: I thank the Member for his intervention. It is a problem across all Departments, and I think that we can do a lot on the public-private side of this with regard to Departments and the local councils, which we heard about today as well. Obviously, we need to ensure that there are protections in place on the solely private side of things. Of course, the Executive recognised in their £200 million announcement that construction boosts the economy and provides that immediate job in the arm to the economy at times like this. We need to continue to focus on that.

The Member for South Antrim referred to the fact that the housing market has, quite clearly, slowed down immensely. The construction sector has already taken a huge hit. A lot of employees have moved out of the sector, reskilled and gone on to other things, and some have emigrated to Australia or the United States. We have to protect what we have and ensure that those employees have a role to play with regard to export as well. Employees of one of the subcontractors referred to today are in Wales, Scotland, England or Europe. They are doing their work and bringing that money home every week to spend in our local economy. All of that needs to be taken into consideration.

We need to look at what we can do immediately for the Patton subcontractors. How do we deal with the cash flow problems? The banks certainly are not helping. I know that Invest NI has loan mechanisms in place, but we need to explore as a matter of urgency what we can do in that case. Perhaps the Minister will comment on his own ideas.

We need fresh ideas on this situation, as a number of employees could be out of a job within a matter of days or weeks. Moving forward, from the Department of Finance's point of view —

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

Mr McKay: We need to ensure that protections are put in place to protect subcontractors.

Mr Lunn: I support the motion and the amendment.

A lot of people have mentioned Patton. Patton is the biggest warning sign yet of how far gone the construction industry is. Other companies have gone for different reasons. They have been affected by the downturn in the value of land, the contracts coming out of places like this and the attitude of the banks. The fact that NAMA is coming over the horizon in a bigger way will influence the whole situation as well. Let us face it: some of those companies were reliant purely on house building, which has suffered a savage downturn. Patton is a well-run company, with various divisions. From what I hear about Patton, there may be some hope for some of its activities. I do not think that it has come a cropper purely in terms of house building, but we will have to wait and see. I fear for the subcontractors; they are in an awful situation. I think somebody mentioned that Patton has a turnover of £140 million, and Mr Byrne mentioned that the total value of the construction sector was £1 billion. To me, that means that Patton is worth 14% of the construction industry in this country. That is so serious. Who will be next? I hear other names mentioned. I certainly would not want to say them in public, but everybody is in trouble. It is not beyond belief that we could end up without a viable construction industry here in the next couple of years. Whatever we can do, in a big way or in a small way, is absolutely vital.

I will talk briefly about the education sector. I believe that the Minister has gone as far as he can go in terms of newbuild school contracts for the time being, certainly for this year. In the past few days, an extra £10 million was granted for school maintenance. That is good news. I think that brings the total available up to about £40 million. That is £40 million against a turnover for the industry of £1 billion. It is pretty small beer, but, if it keeps some companies going, fair enough. It worries me that all of that is connected with what is going on in the education sector — the viability audits, the area-based planning. I do not want us to spend money on the maintenance of schools that will be closed. Hopefully, we can correlate those two things so that we do not do that.

As for the planning system, what can you say about John Lewis? There was a potential major contract for the private sector that would not have cost the public sector a penny, and, after eight, nine or maybe even 10 years now, nothing has gone ahead. I know that it is under judicial review, but it has not been under judicial review for 10 years. What on earth happened to it in the first eight years of its genesis? As an ex-member of Lisburn council, I really despair. There is work waiting to go. Whether Westfield or the authorities would actually go ahead with it if they got permission right now is open to question, because it is not a great time, but it is an opportunity lost.

The amendment calling for a reduced rate of VAT for the maintenance and improvement of existing dwellings is a very good idea and something that has been under

consideration across the water. It seems odd to me that there is no VAT on a newbuild domestic property and only 5% if it involves a renewable contract but a house extension attracts VAT at 20%. It is the same work, the same contractors and the same materials. That just does not seem sensible. To be honest, I do not fully understand VAT; I worked in a business that did not attract VAT. My accountant used to say that I should get down on my knees every day and give thanks. The gaming industry does not attract any VAT. If you want to buy a helicopter, you do not pay VAT.

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): How many have you got?

Mr Lunn: Well, some of our biggest property developers were running helicopters when times were good. The point is that there is 0% VAT. Where is the logic in allowing somebody to buy a helicopter without a VAT charge —

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

Mr Lunn: — but to charge them 20% VAT if they want to extend their house? We support the motion and the amendment and hope for a better time for the industry.

Mr Frew: This is a very important debate. I express my sympathy to the Patton Group, employees of which are from and work in North Antrim, my constituency. The Patton Group has employed, throughout the many years of its existence, many thousands of workers. We are at the point now where it has a workforce of 300. Those left are desperately clinging on to their job, and many have lost their job. I have worked alongside many of those people. Being from the electrical industry myself, I have worked with many electrical contractors over the years, alongside Patton and many of the main contractors in Northern Ireland. I certainly recognise what they are going through. I certainly feel their pain. I went through the process that many of them are now in due to a company going into administration. I have lived through that, along with my work colleagues, and have worked alongside the people who are now in that situation. I have grave concerns not only for the workforce of 300 at Patton but for the 3,000-plus workforce throughout the subcontractor, supply and wholesale chains, due to the fallout of what has happened to Patton. If Patton is, if you like, a nuclear bomb in the construction industry, we still await the fallout of what will happen to the subcontractors.

I welcome the £200 million economy and jobs initiative, which complements the economic strategy, investment strategy and Programme for Government that this Government, this Executive, have in place. That is very important and very good. It shows that the Government are listening and can react when they need to. It shows that strategies are in place that are flexible enough to evolve as required when there is greater or targeted need. Indeed, this motion is in a similar spirit, and its detail is in the same vein as the actions of the Executive only last week.

The Government and the Departments have done incredible work on prompt payment. We have only to look at the table to see that our Departments are hitting 90%, 97%, 95% and 94% of prompt payments being paid within 30 days. We may throw millions of pounds at investment and at the construction industry, but, unless that prompt payment falls down from the main contractors across the spectrum of the construction industry to the

subcontractors, the mechanics, the electricians, the plumbers and the fire alarm specialists, the construction industry will be in trouble. We need prompt payments across the board. The Government have done that. They have acted and have come up with prompt payments, but what the Government need to do better is to scrutinise how those prompt payments are measured and pushed down to everybody involved.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

The majority of the jobs that we hope to create out of last week's initiative will go to subcontracting companies and specialists. It is a natural progression in the construction industry at the moment, where most of our main contractors employ many people but subcontract most of the work. A specialist in the electrical and mechanical constructors will create those jobs and have those skills. I am fearful for those people today, and we have to make sure that the situation improves. It is not about prompt payments only. The sub-economic tendering process has caused the construction industry to enter a race to the bottom. That needs to be checked out. We need the COPEs in our Departments to scrutinise, audit, stock check — whatever you want to call it — the work and the contracts that have been done in the past five years to see the practices that are in place —

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

Mr Frew: — and to try to engage with the main contractors to improve that and to get rid of sub-economic tendering. I could say so much more, but my time is up.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the proposer of the motion and welcome the opportunity to participate in this critical debate for our economy. It is important to reflect on the statistics and, as previous contributors have said, to consider the fact that construction accounts for approximately £1.3 billion of the total spend from the Executive, with 96% of contracts going to local companies. It is also important to reflect on the fact that the total value of that construction in the second quarter of this year was the lowest quarterly value in the past five years. The construction industry is engaging, and it has identified 16 Programme for Government commitments that it can assist the Executive in delivering. As some Members have said, we recognise — at least, we should recognise — the importance of investing in the sector, and we see its financial impact. Every pound invested in construction produces £2.84 in wider economic activity. We should not lose sight of that important aspect of our economy. However, we have to reflect on the fact that 25,000 jobs have been lost in construction and local industry output has dropped dramatically since 2007-08.

I want to make particular reference to last week's announcement and welcome the £200 million jobs initiative. The package that was outlined will deliver new measures to improve schools and roads and accelerate nearly £60 million of capital projects. We are told that more than £40 million of that will be available to deliver a range of projects to support the construction sector.

There is a list that includes improving the schools estate, further roads, structural maintenance and street lighting. There is £8 million for the housing co-ownership and maintenance budget. There is also an extra £5.7 million for the tourism development scheme, which we are told

may support over 450 jobs in construction. However, to support the construction sector and the local economy, we must ensure that the proper procedures, processes and tools are in place. Although the inclusion of social clauses is important, a social clause cannot simply be defined as a 26-week Steps to Work programme. Therefore, the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) guidance must be maximised.

5.30 pm

Like other Members, I had the opportunity to meet subcontractors today. Part of our discussion was about ensuring collectively that the early pay programme, which has been mentioned in the debate, is extended to include subcontractors.

Mr Frew: I am very grateful to the Member for giving way. Does she agree that the onus has to be taken off subcontractors when they are in a position in which they have to complain about the lateness of payment to either the client or the Government? Does she agree with me that there has to be some way to get a resolution whereby the onus is taken off the subcontractor and the Government or the client can scrutinise how payments are meted out?

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

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I thank the Member for that, and I agree. My previous comment was that this is about getting the tools, processes, policies and procedures in place to do just that: to simply protect the sector, not only at the top level but, clearly, at the subcontractor level. In reference to the Member's question, today, one contractor described quite brutally how he had received a phone call on a Friday about work that was due to start on the following Monday. In effect, the company was going into administration. We heard very human and tragic stories today. It is important to reflect on the fact that, from my recollection, almost 80 companies have been affected. We are talking about a huge impact from job losses. Although the figure has been mentioned, I think that I need to repeat it: over 2,000 jobs have been lost in the sector.

Today, subcontractors' demands were clear: they need a rescue package. I suggest that the House and the Executive look collectively at how the announcements this week and in the past few days can support that. Subcontractors also request that the Assembly and Departments look at how to tackle clients to support them. We need to support subcontractors on the early pay scheme. It is important that we also reflect on changes to procurement. It is critical that the construction sector has a process whereby contractors are asked for more than five years' experience. Some previous guidance restricted those who could even apply, as, in the current economic climate, they had to show three years' experience. I welcome the changes that are tagged to that system. We must also ensure, however, that, if that simplified procurement process demands the lowest cost and prices, ethical, quality legal processes are in place.

Mr Speaker: The Member must draw her remarks to a close.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I thank the Member who tabled the motion.

Mr D McIlveen: I, too, would like to join my friend and colleague Mr Frew in extending my sympathies to the

Patton family and all the firm's workers for the difficulties in which they find themselves at present. Not only has the news this week been a huge blow to the Ballymena area but the ramifications of such announcements have a profound ripple effect. Many construction companies will say, "If that can happen to Patton, surely it can happen to other companies as well."

A number of points have already been raised about subcontractors. I, too, was privileged to attend the meeting today. The points have been well made. We in the Assembly must get to a position in which we are clear about the boundaries to what we can or cannot do. Previously, I made this same point on private sector issues, and I will make it again. I come from a private sector background and still own a business. I think that the one thing that private sector people find exceptionally frustrating is talk, and there is sometimes a lot of talk. Unless it is backed up with action, we can, unfortunately, get ourselves into a position where talk can become cheap.

A lot of people out there, both inside and outside the political realm, have put forward motions or made suggestions on things that are not deliverable. We really have to be very careful that we do not add insult to injury by giving false hope to those in the private sector. So, I think that we have to deal very specifically with the things that we can deliver.

The Finance Committee has recently been discussing prompt payment, particularly where government contracts are concerned. There are issues to do with how quickly some Departments have been making payments. It is really important for contractors that they are paid quickly and efficiently. As has been mentioned, it is important for the subcontractors that the money trickles through and that everybody gets a fair bite of the cherry.

We have to look at what has been done already. As has been mentioned, an announcement was made last week about co-ownership housing. I come from a property business background, so I have a certain degree of understanding of what needs to be done there. We have to accept that it is a property market. Any market is driven by the principle that demand has to outweigh supply. At the moment, unfortunately, we are in a position where we have the opposite: we have an oversupply of property and a limited amount of demand. To increase that demand, we have to come from a number of angles. First, the banks have to be lending, and I think that the pressure on banks has to continue. The Minister, along with Arlene Foster, has been doing that, and I certainly want to see that continue. So, it is important that as much pressure is put on the banks as possible.

I want to tie in with what Mr Lunn said about the dysfunctional planning system that we have at the minute. I agree with him wholeheartedly. There is money for our private sector contractors waiting to be had.

Mr Storey: I thank the Member for giving way. He referred to talk. The Planning Service would talk the economy to death. It has done so in some cases in our constituency. For example, the Runkerry decision was 10 years in the planning system. That is a shame and a disgrace. I doubt that any private sector company would want to come and use Northern Ireland as a base, given our Planning Service's atrocious record.

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

Mr D McIlveen: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the Member for his intervention. I agree wholeheartedly. We have a disgraceful situation in North Antrim. We had the Minister of the Environment teeing off at the new Runkerry development one day and in court practically the next because of a judicial review that was taken by people using charitable donations in an attempt to keep the development from going ahead, after its being in the planning system for 10 years in the first place. That is morally and ethically wrong, and it has to be dealt with. I appeal to the Minister of the Environment to get a hold on the issue.

John Lewis was the other example. We have electrical contractors, construction engineers and architects on the starting blocks ready to go. Hundreds of thousands — millions — of pounds of investment that potentially would have come through the private sector has been completely missed, certainly in the short to medium term, as a result of the planning system. Those are things that we have control of. We do not have control over the market, but we have control over what happens in this place and how the Departments work. Therefore, I agree with the motion.

We will accept both the motion and the amendment. However, I urge the Minister to continue to work with his colleagues in the Executive to make sure that a cross-departmental approach is taken to this matter.

Mr Nesbitt: Like other Members, I express my sympathy and concern for Patton, the supply chain and the subcontractors and for the construction industry generally. It seems to be facing something of a perfect storm, with the public sector unable to spend enough, the banks clearly not lending enough and the householder perhaps not secure enough in their financial situation to be investing. It is, therefore, important to offer some form of hope or optimism and some positive ideas about a better future.

On that basis, I will address the part of our amendment that refers to a concessionary VAT rate for the repair, maintenance and improvement of existing dwellings. I acknowledge that my colleague for Strangford Mr Hamilton suggested a similar move for the hospitality industry. I think that that is at least as appropriate for the construction industry. I base that not just on my thoughts but on the evidence base of what has happened on the Isle of Man for some 12 years.

In January 2000, the Isle of Man Government, the Tynwald, secured from the European Union a concessionary 5% VAT rate, which has since become permanent, such was the success of the experiment 12 years ago. Should we be able to secure a concessionary 5% VAT rate, we would be able to achieve many things: retaining jobs and skills, possibly even generating new jobs; offering people an affordable way to improve their current dwelling; regenerating our existing housing stock; and even helping government to achieve its target of reducing carbon emissions and thus tackling global warming. I know that the Minister has been looking for the downside to the proposal, and I have identified that right away for him. It would also reduce the viability of the black/shadow economy.

Again, I say all that because that is the experience of the Isle of Man Government. They commissioned an evaluation on 31 December 2006, and this was its primary conclusion:

“The overwhelming impression from all sectors of the Island community is that the experiment has been a huge success. Those offering this view include, the public, the trade, politicians and Government Departments and bodies. There is also hearsay evidence from the trade that those operating in the shadow economy are complaining about the measure.”

That was supplemented by two sectoral surveys that identified an increase in business, a decline in the shadow economy and an increase in the number of employees in the sector. The research also identified that work was undertaken that would not otherwise have been done, that people were less inclined to request cash deals and that they were much happier to look on small construction operations as being competitive with some of the larger businesses. Indeed, it also found that the quality of those coming forward looking for training in the construction industry improved significantly. More than that, it led to a hike in tax take. In 2006, the island's then Department of Trade and Industry reported that the 5% VAT rate led to a rise, despite the 12.5% differential when compared with the tax rate of 17.5%, as it was before.

I will quote just one more report from the Isle of Man Treasury. It said:

“With regard to the numbers of traders in the relevant construction industry codes, this has steadily increased from 453 at the start of the experiment ... to 691 in January 2006”.

That is a 52% increase in a couple of years. The number of traders who made use of the reduced rates steadily increased from 265 at the end of 2000 to 487 at the end of 2006.

Let me emphasise that this 5% concessionary rate would be for labour-intensive projects, not for your local DIY store. It is hard to quantify the potential, in discrete terms, were we to do it in this country. However, Experian, the business intelligence people, has identified that, UK-wide, the potential is absolutely enormous. Lowering the VAT rate could result in a loss to the Treasury of between £102 million and £508 million —

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

Mr Nesbitt: — but that would be more than balanced by a stimulus effect of £1.4 billion for the economy.

Mr Speaker: I call Barry McElduff. We are almost out of time, but if the Member can say what he needs to say in three minutes, I am happy enough to take his contribution.

5.45 pm

Mr McElduff: Thanks very much, a Cheann Comhairle. Again, I just want to commend the motion; very timely, and all of that. I agree absolutely with the call for the Executive and individual Departments to bring forward, where possible, capital and maintenance programmes. I do appreciate the attendance of Minister Wilson at the debate and his frequent engagement with the all-party group on construction.

I invite the Minister to reflect that investment in the construction industry is not a burden but should, rather, be regarded as a stimulus for the wider economy. It is a way of investing and not cutting our way out of recession. Those points are regularly made at the all-party group on construction.

There was great focus today on job retention as much as job creation, and rightly so. It is everyone's business. We could, for example, ask the Minister for Employment and Learning about retraining and improving the employability and skills of construction workers who are already unemployed.

Those are some general points but, to be specific, today's debate has taken on the character of a campaign to ensure that there is greater protection for subcontractors and suppliers when a main contractor goes into administration. Specifically, I ask the Minister to address whether it is factual that in the rest of the island of Ireland there are better protection mechanisms in place for subcontractors and suppliers. We heard evidence of that. I also invite the Minister to detail what will take effect later this week in relation to the construction contracts legislation that was recently introduced. That is an attempt to make things better.

I commend my party colleague's initiative today. Daithí McKay, the Member for North Antrim, convened that meeting. Lots of Members participated in the exercise and at one point Paul Girvan, Danny Kinahan and myself were totting up the figures as they were coming in. It was rather overwhelming: the names of the companies, the number of jobs losses and the amount owed. There was a totting-up exercise that, I think, reached 2,000 job losses, perhaps, on the horizon.

I suppose the one good thing that came out of today, and I thought about this when the 80-plus subcontractors were here, is that at least there is somewhere for them to come in terms of this regional Assembly. At least, they were accessing the Assembly and people who may be able to help them in some way.

My final point in my limited three minutes is to ask whether the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to the judicial review delaying action on the A5, is aware of any engagement with the construction sector about that current difficulty.

Mr Wilson: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I am glad that you cut the Member down to three minutes. I noticed that when he was cut down to three minutes, what was the first thing he sacrificed? His Irish language introduction. I am glad to see that Sinn Féin is now getting its Irish language into perspective. Do it again, Mr Speaker.

This has been a useful and timely debate. Today, the priority for the Assembly seems to be what we do for the construction industry. We really do need to have some joined-up thinking in this because a couple of weeks ago the priority was welfare reform and what we do for the less well off in society. At that stage, we were prepared to sacrifice nearly £220 million and 1,300 jobs in the Civil Service sector that services welfare payments in other parts of the United Kingdom. Before that, there was a different priority.

The point is that none of these things comes without a cost, and this Assembly has to make up its mind. What are the real priorities? If there are priorities, then there are other things that we cannot do. I do not want to go into a long list of things that are sitting in the pipeline but let me just mention one that the SDLP and Sinn Féin are tweaking each other's tails on: the whole issue of pension reform, which, in two years' time, if we do not make the right decisions now, will cost this Assembly £260 million.

That was a priority when they were lobbied about pension reform. There was a different priority when they were lobbied about welfare reform. There is another priority today when they are lobbied about the construction industry.

Mr Byrne: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: Yes.

Mr Byrne: I appreciate that the Minister has addressed some issues, but when is he going to address the issue of the subcontractors' plight? When is he going to address the issue of the workers and the subcontractors of Patton? When is he going to issue the procurement process that he is in charge of?

Mr Wilson: It is a most important point that everything cannot be a priority for the Assembly. I wanted to put today's debate in context and then move on talk about the issues. I think that there were probably five issues that came forward today.

The first was that we could do more. Of course, there were some exaggerated claims; Mr Byrne started his speech by saying that there are very few capital works in the scheme. I remind the Assembly of what the Executive are doing — not were doing, but are doing. We have a capital spend this year of over £1 billion. Over the four years of the Budget, we have a capital spend of £5 billion. Five years ago, 40% of spend in the construction industry was accounted for by the public sector. Today, as a result of the spending by the Executive, 64% is provided by the public sector.

The crisis is not a result of things that the Executive are not doing; it is, essentially, a problem that rests with the private sector and the collapse of spending therein. The public sector has filled the gap. Furthermore —

Mr Byrne: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: No, I will not give way. The Member had plenty of time to make his points.

Furthermore, not only have we, in our core Budget, put down substantial spending; in every monitoring round, we have given substantial amounts of money when they have been redirected by underspends in Departments.

The first port of call has been about what we can do to increase capital spending in Northern Ireland. Last year, in 2011-12, an additional £26 million, on top of the money that was being spent, went into capital spending. That meant that, in the first year of the Budget — 2011-12 — over £100 million went into roads maintenance spending.

I listen to the industry. It said look, that is fine, but a lot of it comes at the end of the year; it is a peak; it does not carry the industry through the year. This year, when money became available in the first round of monitoring in June, we immediately put additional money into the capital spending for DRD roads. This year, to date, we have put £49.8 million additional money into capital spending in maintenance alone. Of course, as Members have rightly pointed out, that benefits small businesses. In Northern Ireland, 96% of centres of procurement expertise (COPE) construction spend goes to locally owned firms. Although we cannot skew procurement, we have worked with the industry to try to direct procurement so that it encapsulates small firms in Northern Ireland. That is what we are doing.

If Members wish to have more money put into construction works, the first thing that we have to do is ask where that construction will sit in the Programme for Government. Secondly, what parts of our current spending do we sacrifice to do that? Thirdly, if we are going to do that, how can we ensure that it is going to have overall benefit for the Northern Ireland economy, when, of course, there are all the other competing interests?

Very often — I think it was repeated today — people give the multiplier that every £1 spent on the construction industry generates £2.64 of spending. That is right. A small proportion of that, about 40%, goes on wages. If we are talking about employment — I will just throw this out as an example — and if we take that out of spend on the number of people who are employed in the public sector, every £1 that is spent on employment in the public sector goes on wages. Immediately, you have to ask where the priorities lie.

The second thing that was said today was that we could do things differently and that there are other ways of getting money into the economy and the construction industry. Most of those, of course, involve private finance. I have had long discussions with the construction industry about private finance. In fact, when I first took over as Finance Minister, I sat down with the then head of the CEF, John Armstrong. He talked about innovative finance and new ways of bringing in money and everything else and about bringing forward proposals.

Three years later, the proposals have still not come forward. I do not necessarily fault people for that, but one of the things we have to say about it is that, in the current environment, it is difficult for the construction industry to draw down money from private financiers for construction projects. The financiers have been bitten by the construction industry and are reluctant to lend. If they do lend, they do so at very costly rates of interest, and, of course, if that is the case, we have to look at the costs of the projects and whether they give value for money.

Some Members mentioned the infrastructure guarantee fund, and I have had discussions with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury about that. The Government have now introduced that fund. Under that fund, there are very strict criteria that, unfortunately, make it difficult for us in Northern Ireland to benefit. I had a long discussion with the Chief Secretary about this. The conditions are that projects have to be of national significance and shovel-ready, and they have to have already been turned down by the banks. I suppose that we have very few projects that could be called of national significance.

One of the breakthroughs that I made with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury when I spoke to him last week was that he accepted that it probably is difficult to meet those criteria in regions like Northern Ireland. He indicated that the door of the Treasury would be open to perhaps look at projects that may not necessarily meet that criteria but that are, nevertheless, important to the region. We will pursue that with him. I want to explore every possible avenue.

Another avenue that we are looking at is the whole idea of revenue finance initiatives. I think that it was Mrs Overend who talked about the possibility of £1.4 billion worth of schemes, although not until the next Budget period, and she queried why that could not happen until the next Budget period. The reason, of course, is that, for every £100 million of that, we would have to take £10 million out

of current revenue spending every year. In turn, that would mean a substantial rejigging of our immediate Budget.

We do not know what the resource budget is likely to be after the current spending period. All the indications that we have been given are that it will be hit fairly severely, with a 4% reduction in the year after the current comprehensive spending review (CSR) period ends, and a 2.7% reduction in the year after that. Until we know what revenue funding will be available to the Executive, it is difficult to make those commitments.

Nevertheless, we are prepared, we are exploring and we are already looking at trying to have projects ready. It will be a decision for the Executive, but do not forget that that decision will be against the background of substantial cuts in revenue spending in the next Budget period, financing, if we can get it, the devolution of corporation tax, and a range of other things that we are already making commitments to.

So, it is not an easy option, but it is one for which preparations are already being made, and she acknowledged that it is being looked at in the investment strategy.

6.00 pm

Mr Flanagan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: I want to make one last point. The Department for Regional Development could look at private finance, because toll roads and suchlike are a ready source of quick revenue that would lead to infrastructure development. It will be interesting to see whether the Ulster Unionist Minister, in response to his party's amendment, is prepared to consider some of those things. Do not forget that costs are attached to all private finance initiatives. The initiative may be to mutualise the Housing Executive's stock, but where does the money to support the capital spend there come from? It comes from rents, and we then have the conflict of whether to put up rents to get extra capital to build more houses or keep rents the same and deny ourselves the ability to raise the money.

It is the same with water. We could get more money to improve the water infrastructure, but is the Assembly prepared to consider imposing water charges to raise the required capital expenditure? Those are the difficult decisions that we must make. Let us not run away from them and the things that we have to do.

A Member wanted me to give way, although I cannot remember who it was.

Mr Flanagan: Thanks, Minister. I know that you are almost out of time, so I will be brief. The Minister laboured extensively on the benefits of PPPs and PFIs, matters that have been missing from the debate. Surely he agrees that instead of signing up to a huge number of PPPs and PFIs, the Executive would be much better securing borrowing powers and enabling agencies such as the Housing Executive to borrow money that they could decide how to spend to secure the best possible value for taxpayers and ratepayers.

Mr Wilson: The Member may not be aware that when we borrow, we first have to service the cost of that borrowing and, secondly, pay back the borrowing. Where do we raise the revenue for that? I have been explaining some of those ways and some of the decisions that we may have to make

if we want to raise the revenue to service that borrowing and pay it back in the longer run.

Let me come to one last but important point: subcontractors. We can do things in the public sector for subcontractors. The fair payment proposals that I brought to the Assembly, and which led to the Construction Contracts (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, come into effect on Wednesday.

Mr Speaker: The Minister's time is almost gone.

Mr Wilson: Let me make it quite clear that that will require penalties to be imposed on main contractors who do not honour the requirements in public sector contracts, to the point that we will exclude them from tendering for public sector contracts. That is the only way to try to get fair payments. The industry should put its own house in order, but we will seek to ensure that there is at least an incentive for it to do that, so that subcontractors are not left in the position that the Member and others described.

Mr B McCrea: At the heart of our amendment is the need to do something now. The crisis facing the construction industry has been with us for some time. People have done their best, but they now have to stare reality in the face.

In concluding, the Minister, who does not normally take kindly to my supporting his points, raised the question of borrowing money. It may have escaped people's notice, but we in the United Kingdom spend more money on servicing our debt interest than we do on our entire education budget. Our deficit is still going up. We will still have to find ways to find money. The Minister asked the question: where are we going to find the money to do more? Will we take it from somewhere else or find innovative ways to deal with things?

There are also issues for which we must take responsibility. I was at another meeting, so I did not hear Mr Lunn's contribution on planning. However, because I have heard him previously, I am quite sure that he talked about John Lewis and judicial reviews. Is there no way that we, as a legislative body, can find a way to reduce the time that it takes for a judicial review. It seems that we are at the mercy of these processes. We are all told that we cannot do it, even if it is a case of putting funds into a different body that is no longer a public body so that we can move things on. It just seems outrageous that we cannot build what people want, whether that is the John Lewis store, the A5 or a plethora of other projects. That is not to say that people do not have the right to stand up for their interests, but we should surely be able to go through that process in a timely manner so that we can get a resolution to these issues.

People criticise the banks. You have to realise that, if we place more regulation on the banks, and people call for that because of their profligate lending, their capital ratios will dictate that they have less money to lend. So you have to work out what it is that you want: more lending or more regulation? Somewhere along the line, we have to find a balance that encourages people to put money into our economy.

Our amendment particularly calls for more public-private financing. Normally, the minute you mention that, everybody says, "No, under no circumstances can we do that. Never will we do it." The issue is that you cannot raise money any other way. You will have to take a position on whether to do without roads and schools or find some way

of financing other initiatives. The Minister did not talk about public-private financing — perhaps it was not brought up — but maybe he will at some stage.

I am interested in what happens in the Scottish Futures Trust, which looks at supposedly innovative ways of financing projects. It trumpets on its website that it is able to build an additional 12 schools. It mentions a scheme called tax incremental financing (TIF), which borrows against future tax incomes. All of that is against a backdrop of it saying that there will be a reduction in the amount of money available. We have not seen the worst of it yet. We will see more and more reductions in our public sector finance. Perhaps there is a way of looking at non-profit distributing, a national housing trust or maybe we have to look at toll roads. Maybe we have to put that on the agenda. Perhaps we even have to consider whether we are raising the right amount of tax in areas where we can raise tax.

Those of you who call all the time for tax-varying powers have them in your gift — they are called water rates. You could say to people that we want to borrow to invest. That is an argument that you will have to have with the general public. The real issue is this: when I heard the Minister's statement earlier — I know that he was doing his best — he made the point that the A5 will cost us £10 million for every month that it is delayed. I wonder whether we are able to put that money into really profitable, useful projects. I heard Mervyn Storey say that he knows of projects that are shovel-ready, but we do not appear to be able to get that money on the ground when we need it.

I will conclude by saying that —

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

Mr B McCrea: — in education, instead of paying the £75 million in revenue, maybe we should be spending it on capital projects. The real issue is that we need to come forward with a constructive, proper way to get the construction sector out of the mess that it is in now.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Thank you to all Members who contributed to the debate.

Before I move on to the substance of those comments, many Members will know that the industry now requires stability. Stability is required within the industry, and it must also be reflected outward, because the rumour mill currently at work will lead to only one thing — the paralysis of activity. That is uppermost. We have heard a wide-ranging debate on a multiplicity of things: some were focused, some maybe not so focused. The key message that must come from the Assembly, and, indeed, the Executive, to the sector and, in particular, to the construction industry is that it needs stability.

I will make some concluding remarks later. As we ranged through the debate, Mr Byrne referred to the difficulties that small contractors face through being far down the list of creditors. He also mentioned social housing newbuilds.

Just today, I received an e-mail from someone who was involved in a social housing newbuild project and, as a consequence of being so far down that list, was not paid. That issue must be watched very carefully. So the use of public funds and the consequences of that must be very carefully scrutinised, albeit in that case by an arm's-length body. However, there was an injection of significant funds to that project.

Mr Byrne also mentioned the banks. We have the funding for lending scheme, and although I appreciate that it is not specifically directed at the construction industry, the exertion of pressure on and encouragement of the likes of Ulster Bank, which operates the scheme, and expansion in key areas, will have a consequence for the construction sector.

Mrs Overend talked about the significant decline in the industry and alternative sources of funding. She also mentioned a reduction in the VAT rate, to which her party leader referred as well.

At the SDLP's annual conference at the weekend the shadow Secretary of State, Mr Vernon Coaker, talked specifically about those matters as being key priorities for any incoming Labour Government. In many instances, the sooner those are implemented, the better to give a shot in the arm to our construction industry.

Mr Girvan talked about the lowering of property rates and the difficulty that, while at one level that should be an opportunity, given the access to finance and the inability to raise finance from the banks, acquisition is a major issue.

Mr McKay mentioned the meeting that took place with the subcontractors earlier today, and I thank him for facilitating it. There, we heard about the coalface of the matter. Despite the fact that there were many in that room, at least a thousand more could have been there who have been affected by the ripple effect of the Patton situation.

Mr Lunn also talked about VAT reduction for maintenance on house extensions. Mr Frew talked about the subbies and his own experience in that regard.

He also mentioned the improvements in the payment processing performance of Northern Ireland Civil Service Departments. Some of those have definitely improved. I see that the Department of Finance and Personnel's performance rate of paying invoices within 30 working days stands at 98%, which is an excellent figure. Some of the other Departments' payment performance rates are not as high. The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has a 92% rate; the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's rate is 95%; the Department of the Environment's (DOE) rate is 96%; and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister's (OFMDFM) rate is 95%. That begs the question as to why they are not as close to 100% within 30 working days as they should be.

Maeve McLaughlin talked about the people who are employed in the construction industry and reflected the issues around payments that were raised at today's meeting with the subcontractors.

Likewise, David McIlveen mentioned the prompt payment of contractors and subcontractors and the fairness and efficiency that is required in the delivery of that. He also talked about housing co-ownership and about lending from the banks, a theme that emerged again and again.

In an intervention, Mr Storey referred to delays in the planning system in relation to Runkerry in North Antrim. I would point out that for four of those eight years his party colleague was the Minister. I am glad that it was my colleague who took the decision.

Mr Nesbitt talked about security of funding and raised the issue of VAT. He mentioned the Isle of Man, which has a concessionary 5% VAT rate. That would be very attractive.

Barry McElduff spoke about the meeting that took place earlier today. Minister Wilson discussed a wide range of issues, including welfare reform, sources of fundraising, capital spending and the centres of procurement expertise.

That brings me to the key themes of our motion. Earlier, I talked about the stability and the confidence that is required in the wider economy, but also in the building and construction sector. The Minister of Finance and Personnel, correctly, spoke about the reliance of the building and construction industry on the public sector, which provides about 60% of its income.

However, we require public expenditure to be deployed effectively and efficiently. Newbuild programmes, be they for the Department of Education or any other Department, must not be held up by red tape. Where projects are good to go and ready for movement, we should not have internal red tape. I have experienced some of it at the Department of Education, where that has been the case.

6.15 pm

That brings us to the idea that prevention is better than cure. The Minister and his officials have been helpful with this. We heard about the financial mess and the human misery that people are going through as a consequence of one firm going into administration, and to ensure that we avoid that, we need the likes of project bank accounts and targets to be set for those accounts. We also need public sector moneys for the supply chain to be paid into those accounts so that they can be ring-fenced by a trust. The UK Government aim to have project bank accounts for £4 billion of government works by the end of 2014. We need those in place as soon as possible.

Likewise, all public sector procurers must give serious consideration to the capitalisation of lead contractors as a pre-qualification requirement. That takes us back to COPES. We cannot have a situation in which a firm goes into administration one month, and, a month or six weeks later, it is reformed as a new firm and is competing and tendering for public moneys with no financial history to show its stability and, on the face of it, no experience to show its ability to deliver projects that are paid for out of the public purse. That is a major issue.

The Minister referred to how some companies will be penalised. I would like to know that we will not have people, who could be penalised, going bust over there, taking down a whole pile of subcontractors and suppliers over there, and then reforming as another company over here and being treated as a new entity straightaway.

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr McGlone: I will give way to the Minister.

Mr Wilson: The Member brought a very poignant case of someone in such a situation to me recently, and I undertook to look at it. Indeed, proposals on the issue will be going to the procurement board very soon. I appreciate that he first drew it to my attention. The industry will have to learn that there will be penalties if they try to play that game.

Mr McGlone: Thanks very much for that, Minister. I appreciate you giving your time to this issue, as you said previously that you would follow through on it.

All that adds to the confidence that is so necessary when one contractor looks to another and a supplier looks to a contractor and thinks: does that person have the capacity to pay me? That is what we saw in the Long Gallery today. Where that happens is not a place where we want to be as an economy.

The final element is the need for innovative and creative thinking for schemes to create new jobs. We need knowledge and information on a joined-up, cross-departmental basis, including in local government, to help firms to develop and expand with resources and information about funding. Just today, I chaired a conference upstairs in the Long Gallery, where a key speaker said that, in accessing resources and funding, we are “not at the races”. I am talking about EU funding and other sources of funding that can help businesses to develop their research and development and innovation.

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

Mr McGlone: With those key elements in place, we will be able to see expansion and wealth creation in the local economy and the jobs in our construction sector that are so needed.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the current plight of the construction industry; and calls on the Executive to prioritise the proposed maintenance and capital spending plans of each Department, to encourage and facilitate more investment in public-private infrastructure projects during this Assembly mandate and to lobby Her Majesty's Treasury for a reduced rate of VAT for the repair, maintenance and improvement of existing dwellings to stimulate the local economy and support jobs within the construction industry.

Diabetes Strategy

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

Mr P Ramsey: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the increase in the number of people diagnosed with type 1 and type 2 diabetes; further notes the specific increase in type 1 diabetes amongst children; acknowledges the cost to the health service of managing diabetes; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to introduce urgently a properly resourced diabetes strategy.

Mr Speaker, I thank you, the Business Office staff and the Business Committee for facilitating this debate. I was running around like crazy last Tuesday trying to get this motion on the Order Paper. I thank Members from all parties for their co-operation.

It is important that we are discussing this issue, given that it is World Diabetes Day on Wednesday. Most Parliaments, particularly those on these islands, will be either having a debate on diabetes or hosting an event. On Wednesday, there will be an event hosted by the all-party group on diabetes, which will involve a number of parents and children from across Northern Ireland. Some of the children will be giving testimony on the difficulties that they have experienced because of diabetes.

I declare an interest as an insulin-dependent diabetic and chair of the all-party group on diabetes. I acknowledge the sterling work of Diabetes UK, which has supported our group and helped to inform Members, not just those on the all-party group but the whole House, about the impact of diabetes through its programmes over the past number of years.

I refer to the report 'Diabetes in Northern Ireland: The human, social and economic challenge', which was published by C3 Collaborating for Health, Novo Nordisk and Diabetes UK last year. There has been a 33% rise in the number of people diagnosed with diabetes here in the past five years — the highest rate of any region in Britain — from just under 57,000 in 2007 to just under 76,000 this year. That is a most worrying statistic, which is compounded further when we delve into the numbers provided by Diabetes UK.

Take, for example, our constituency of Foyle, Mr Speaker. Over the past five years, over 1,100 more people have been diagnosed with diabetes. That is higher than the regional average. The number of people in this region with diabetes has rocketed by 41% between 2005 and 2011. That is bound to put massive pressures on the health system, on public expenditure and on families. I welcome the Minister to the debate.

The motion refers to a specific increase in type 1 diabetes among our young people. Other Members may give testimony about their own family and the difficulties that they have experienced. There are over 1,000 under-16s who have type 1 diabetes. That may sound like an

insignificant figure, but the impact of long-term care, cost and possible complications, as well as the legacy of that figure, cannot be ignored by the House. Approximately 85% of diabetes cases in Northern Ireland are type 2. A massive 80% of those could have been prevented by lifestyle changes.

The focus of any resourced diabetes strategy must balance treatment and clear preventative measures. In the decade between 2000 and 2010, the number of diabetes-related deaths rose by an awful 128%. That is a frightening number, and I want to put it in context. If 50 Members had died from diabetes in the previous decade, every Member in the following decade when the massive increase took place would, statistically, be dead.

The cost to the economy must be emphasised. Diabetes is costing the Executive £1 million a day, every single day of the year. That, coupled with lost working time and early deaths is hard to quantify or qualify in both social and economic terms.

I fully support the report that I mentioned earlier, particularly the aspects of it that deal with young people. The report states:

"Ideally, good diabetes care in the future should... acknowledge that children and young people with diabetes have particular difficulties in relation to self-management in schools. Transition from paediatric to adult diabetes services is a critical time, when many young people with diabetes allow their care to lapse".

We know many of those young people, and I have spoken to consultants in Altnagelvin who refer that issue to me. As we know, and, as the report says, that has potentially disastrous results. Some of it has to do with diet control. They stop taking their insulin, for example. The report continues:

"It is vital for young people with diabetes to keep good control, with the support of the paediatric and adult multidisciplinary teams, as they have the greatest number of years ahead of them."

We all know that.

As part of the report's goals, we, as elected representatives, are urged to use the opportunity of 2012 to review, strengthen and maintain the commitments already in the CREST/Diabetes UK guidelines, meeting the special needs of children with diabetes to improve self-management support skills in families and schools. Will the Minister comment specifically on that subject and give us an idea about what collaboration has taken place with the Minister of Education on access to schools and schoolchildren as regards awareness?

I want to make one point to the Minister about a properly resourced diabetes strategy. We are here today to ensure that we are looking at that. I will give him one example. Recently, I was told by a constituent who has a family history of diabetes that, every six months, he used to call into the local pharmacy to get his blood and glucose tested. He has recently gone back to the same pharmacy to find out that it is no longer able to carry out those checks because the funding has stopped. Earlier, I made a point about the importance of preventative measures, and people do call in off the streets to pharmacists to get

a blood test. Maybe the Minister may use this occasion to respond to that.

In balancing preventative measures and treatment, we must ensure that local services are accessible to people who may want to get checked, get advice and access services. GPs and diabetic nurses have an ever-increasing workload, and it is our job to complement their work to ensure that they have the resources and guidance they need to ensure that, as a public health issue, diabetes receives proper due care and attention.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member has mentioned many figures on diabetes. Does he agree that the report states that up to 10,000 people in Northern Ireland could be living with diabetes who do not know it?

Mr P Ramsey: Yes, and that is the point of ensuring that, in future, pharmacies that take on the aspects of accessibility for people coming in off the street continues. The most important aspect of diabetes is to ensure that we are carrying out education and awareness programmes in the community, not in hospitals or in GP practices. I know that time is limited in the debate, and I urge all Members to support the motion.

Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. At the outset, I apologise that I might have to leave before the debate ends. It is important to commend the Members who signed the all-party motion. Given that we have a number of all-party groups, it is important that we see an outcome of some of the work that takes place in them. It is a collaboration. Pat, you mentioned collaboration between charities, the community and voluntary sector and MLAs. We want a genuine partnership approach, and debates such as this are quite useful.

It is important to recognise that the Minister is also here during the debate.

6.30 pm

As Chair of the Committee, I think it is important that I update you on what we have done. I know that some members of the Committee are also members of the all-party group, but it is important to put on record what we have done. Recently, we considered the issue of the support provided to children with diabetes who require medication at school. In your opening remarks, Pat, you mentioned that. In particular, we looked at the role of diabetic support nurses. We wrote to the Minister in September to ask about the current provision of diabetic support nurses and for an update on the Department's position on the administration of medication in schools. In and around that time, there were media stories around pupils starting the new school term. The Minister replied, stating that training for teachers and school staff is provided by a diabetic support nurse, alongside the parent and the pupil. It can only be done during school term, to accommodate the teaching staff, and five sessions are required. Obviously, there is a need for good communication among all those involved, so that we do not end up with a situation where a child is unable to start a new school term or indeed a new school because the teacher has not been trained in how to administer the medication. We also need to be careful about the transition

between primary and secondary school. It is hard enough, as a young person, going from primary school into secondary school without probably missing some time at the secondary school because there has been a failure to put that into practice. The Minister also stated that the health authorities were working with the education and library boards to look at the whole area of training. Such co-operation is to be welcomed.

I will not speak on behalf of the Minister; he is here to do that for himself. However, I think it important that I highlight the work that the Committee has done, because the issue was raised with us through some of the Committee members who sit on the all-party group. Also, people feel that they can write to us to get information or answers to questions.

There are currently 16.8 whole-time-equivalent paediatric diabetic support nurses across the five trusts. Funding has been approved for a further two posts. That is to be welcomed, because the Belfast and South Eastern trusts currently appear to be understaffed in that regard.

The proposer of the motion highlighted the statistics around diabetes, whether type 1 and type 2, and the work that needs to be done not only in dealing with the two types of diabetes but in prevention. It is a growing health issue for our society. We need to look at a strategy for dealing with the condition, and, as I say, we need to look at prevention. But this is also about people taking ownership and helping people to change behaviours and risk factors that may mean that they develop diabetes in later life. We could talk all day about fizzy drinks and things like that; however, there is an onus on the individual, manufacturers and advertisers and all of that stuff to ensure that people are aware of the health benefits or risks for later life. The Health Committee is currently focusing on health inequalities and health promotion, and this is another area where we need to do more work on prevention, public awareness and early intervention.

I do not sit on the all-party group, but, once again, I commend it for the work that it has done. I thought it important that, as Chair of the Committee, I should highlight some of the stuff that we have done. I support the motion.

Mr Buchanan: I count it a privilege to speak on this important health-related topic, one that I know unites all parties in the Chamber.

Diabetes is an extremely complex disease that can affect people in different ways. If it is not properly managed and treated, it will certainly lead to serious complications such as heart disease, stroke, blindness, amputation of limbs and kidney failure. Diabetes has long been a common problem in Northern Ireland, and most of us in the House will know of someone, including family members and friends, who is affected by it. The number of adults with diabetes aged 17 and over who are registered with their GP now stands at 75,837. That represents an increase of 33% since 2007 and an increase of almost 19,000 sufferers. The number of children and young people under 17 who have the disease is around 1,000, which is far too high. Although I accept that diabetes is a growing worldwide problem, an increase of 33% in Northern Ireland does not compare favourably with a rise of 25% in England, 20% in Wales and 18% in Scotland. Describing the trend in Northern Ireland as very worrying, Mr Iain

Foster, the national director of Diabetes UK Northern Ireland said:

“Diabetes is a rising challenge within our health service and it is vital that an effective strategy is put in place to ensure we do not see a similar increase in the next five years.”

He also stated that 10% of our health service budget was spent on diabetes, and he rightly stresses that that is not sustainable.

My colleague the Health Minister faces many legitimate and compelling demands on his limited resources, and today's motion is not a demand for him to simply throw more money at the problem — far from it. We need to approach the issue strategically. We must look at ways of maximising our resources and tackling diabetes without spending unduly large sums of money. If we get the strategy right, there is no doubt that it will make a lot of difference to people who suffer from diabetes and we will make much progress.

As the motion highlights, there are two distinct types of diabetes, both of which are on the increase. From conversations with GPs, I feel that, overall, our strategy for tackling type 1 is better than our strategy for tackling type 2. In type 1, the person's body destroys the insulin-producing beta cells in the pancreas. Type 1 usually appears in young people and, therefore, is commonly known as juvenile diabetes or childhood diabetes. Unlike type 2, type 1 is not preventable and cannot be linked in any way with a person's lifestyle. Whether a person is heavy or thin or fit or unfit makes absolutely no difference to their risk of developing type 1 diabetes. Therefore, early intervention is so important, as it can prevent further and more serious problems at a later stage, particularly in relation to eyesight and the feet. It can also reduce the likelihood of greater costs to the system at a later stage if a person's condition is controlled and not allowed to deteriorate. Although current arrangements seem to deliver a fairly well co-ordinated response in type 1 cases, there is always much room for improvement.

Type 2 diabetes is much more complex, both in its causes and its treatment. GPs tell us that it can be more difficult for them to refer patients with type 2 to the specialists that they need to see. Type 2 diabetes is often linked to a range of lifestyle factors. Mr Iain Foster said that modern life, our food industry and a lack of physical activity are contributing to the rise in diabetes. That is a key statement because it underlines the need for a much broader strategy than one that is purely the responsibility of the Health Minister and his officials. We must ensure that sufferers are encouraged to maintain a healthy weight by taking regular physical activity and having a balanced diet that is rich in fruit and vegetables but low in fat, sugar and salt.

Education and awareness are key. I commend the sterling work of organisations such as Diabetes UK Northern Ireland, which holds roadshows and other events to increase awareness and to offer help and advice. Coming from west Tyrone, I know that the diabetes education and support programme —

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

Mr Buchanan: — called CHOICE, has provided a successful service for children and young people who

have diabetes in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Beggs: I, too, declare an interest: some of my family members have type 2 diabetes. I welcome the motion as it will increase awareness of the disease. I hope that it will make people more aware of some of the preventative actions they can take to reduce the risk of acquiring type 2 diabetes. I accept that, on some occasions, type 1 cannot be changed by diet etc, but, for others, it is possible to change. In addition, it is clear that there is a need for early intervention and improved management of the condition to minimise the wide range of associated complications that can arise.

As was said earlier, a 41% increase in the number of diabetics over the past six years is quite stark. Of even more concern is the fact that a further 30% rise is expected by 2020. Mr Foster of Diabetes UK Northern Ireland identifies the main contributing factors as obesity, population growth and ageing. I believe that a diabetes epidemic is an appropriate description of what we face today. Mr Foster also highlights the fact that 80% of people with type 2 diabetes are overweight or obese and 80% of the cases of the disease could be delayed or prevented if we ate a healthy diet and exercised regularly. Linda Nazarko of the British Journal on Healthcare Assistants indicated that not drinking to excess and not smoking, as well as eating a healthy diet that is high in fibre with not too much sugar, will help to prevent diabetes.

According to Diabetes UK, the National Health Service spends a staggering 10% of its budget on diabetes care. The statistics are stark. We are advised that one in five UK hospital admissions for coronary heart disease, renal disease and foot ulcers is related to diabetes. Adults with diabetes are two to four times more likely to die from heart disease or a stroke. Diabetes is also the single biggest cause of blindness, and 30% of diabetics develop kidney disease. The statistics also tell us that one in 14 of people with diabetes has a foot ulcer, one in 10 of which results in amputation. One limb is lost to the disease each week in Northern Ireland. That must be a wake-up call for all of us to adopt a better lifestyle and diet and to exercise more.

Although type 1 diabetes is not preventable for some, the majority of childhood diabetes can be prevented through the proper management of lifestyle. A big responsibility falls on parents to give guidance in that regard and to set an example. We must also ensure that the education of young people who develop type 1 diabetes is not limited by restrictions on the administration of their medication.

I welcome the call to the Minister in the motion to produce a properly resourced diabetes strategy, an integral part of which must be early years development for all. Good habits for life are most easily learned early in life, and I encourage the Minister to walk alongside other Departments to ensure that adequate education and prevention of the condition occurs. I declare an interest as a member of Horizon Sure Start.

As well as the high cost of diabetes to personal health, the cost to the economy is huge. It is estimated that it costs £1 million a day to treat diabetes in Northern Ireland alone, but there is also the loss of earnings and income that results in individual families, as people may not be able to be as productive as they would otherwise be.

Progress has been made with a diabetes framework in Northern Ireland, but it is not enough, and more must be done. People are two and a half times more likely to become diabetic at any age if they come from an area of multiple deprivation, as other Members stated. So a targeted approach is also necessary in order to work with communities in deprived areas so that the health of individuals can be better protected and the knowledge, education and dangers can be highlighted to them. The strategy must be one of prevention, especially for children, and that must be effectively communicated in such areas. Good access to local GP-led health and care centres and local diabetes clinics has to be a target, because sometimes the inability to access such good advice easily restricts the level of care.

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

Mr Beggs: We must also ensure that there are appropriate referral pathways to consultants when assistance is necessary.

6.45 pm

Mr Dickson: As the vice-chair of the all-party group on diabetes, I support the motion. I declare an interest, as my wife is a type 2 diabetic. Therefore, from a family perspective, I know what it is like to live with the issue.

Mr Ramsey quoted quite a number of statistics, as have others. I do not want to repeat many of those statistics, but I express my concern at the numbers being diagnosed in Northern Ireland, particularly children. As we face budgetary constraints and as the Minister has to tackle the budget, the cost of dealing with diabetes and its complications puts a huge strain on our health service. I think, Minister, that that has to be acknowledged today.

The most important effects are on the everyday life of individuals and their families as they adjust to managing the condition. It is our duty as Members of the Assembly to do all that we can to mitigate the difficulties faced by those affected, and so I turn to a proposed strategy. In the management of diabetes, we must ensure that patients have ready access to treatment that is as locally based as possible. Currently, diabetic care is managed quite well in the community, but a great deal more could be done. However, as the Chair of the all-party group said, cuts are now being felt in service delivery. People with diabetes still incur significant costs in travelling to medical appointments and missing work. Therefore, we should provide as much support as we can in that regard.

We must ensure that there is support not just for the individual but for the whole family affected by diabetes. The family unit can act as an effective tool in the management of diabetes by creating an environment in which healthy eating and regular exercise are endorsed and promoted by the whole family. Such support is vital for those trying to manage their condition and has the added effect of an entire family learning good dietary habits. We need to press for more resources and better education for healthcare professionals who have to cope with the increased number of children with diabetes. We need to press also for greater provision for the children affected.

Another important point is that the vast majority of cases of diabetes in Northern Ireland are type 2, most of which, as Mr Ramsey and others said, could be prevented by lifestyle changes. The NHS states that a 5% reduction in

body weight, combined with more regular exercise, can reduce the risk of getting type 2 diabetes by more than 50%. I will take that lesson on board as well. The UK as a whole is now the most overweight country in Europe. The number of obese adults is forecast to rise by 73% over the next 20 years, potentially resulting in more than one million extra cases of type 2 diabetes, with the consequent heart disease and cancers. In Northern Ireland, 59% of adults are overweight or obese, and, disturbingly, 8% of children aged two to 15 were assessed as being obese. We face enormous challenges, including the challenge to put in place more effective preventative measures, which cannot be tackled by just one Department.

That brings me to the main point that I would like to make. Although the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety should take the lead, any diabetes strategy must be cross-departmental in nature. Undoubtedly, there will have to be links with other initiatives in the Department, such as the 10-year framework for tackling obesity, which was launched earlier this year. There must also be co-operation across Departments to achieve the best results. A diabetes strategy would have to work with DCAL and its representatives to get more people involved in physical activity through the existing sport and physical recreation strategies. It would have to work with DRD as it promotes active travel. Indeed, much of the focus of the proposed active travel strategy is on the health benefits of more walking and cycling, which are directly related to tackling obesity as a major cause of diabetes. The strategy will have to work with the Department of Education to ensure that children grow up with an awareness of diabetes and the benefits of healthy eating and regular exercise. Diabetes is a cross-cutting issue. As we look forward, let us think cross-departmentally for the benefit of all who are affected.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate on an important issue for a growing number of people across Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, diabetes continues to be a major problem affecting many lives in our communities. A recent survey showed a 33% increase in the past few years in the number of people in my constituency living with type 1 or type 2 diabetes, which is certainly of some concern. The fact that there are now almost 20,000 more sufferers than in 2007 shows that there is room for improvement in tackling the rising problem. It is now estimated that more than one in 20 people in the UK has diabetes.

I know that the Minister is aware of the challenges that we face because of diabetes. He is looking at ways of improving lifestyle choices and at healthier living, focusing particularly on healthier foods, encouraging a more balanced diet and the importance of regular exercise. Prevention is better than cure. Therefore, it is imperative that work continue to place a greater emphasis on healthier lifestyles for young and old. As with other important issues in health, increasing public awareness through education will not only help to tackle diabetes but have a positive knock-on effect on obesity levels, heart disease and some forms of cancer.

Measures such as A Fitter Future For All are to be welcomed as a practical, targeted way of helping to improve the health of our population. There is a role for all levels of service in helping to tackle the growing problem of diabetes. Central to that must be through our GP surgeries

and other community-based outlets. The Transforming Your Care programme will help to address that important issue.

Screening programmes have proved successful in highlighting risk and making people aware of the real dangers that they could find themselves in. The right structures must be put in place to facilitate early detection and intervention, which is crucial to minimising the impact of diabetes on lives. Given the seriousness of the issue, it is vital that we do not get complacent as we try to solve the problem.

Another important issue that often arises and did so recently in my constituency is having school staff properly trained and equipped to support young people with diabetic needs. Josh Todd, a young lad from north Down, has been involved in an ongoing case with the authorities to ensure that teachers and assistants are properly trained to enable him to get the education that he deserves. The start to Josh's education at a Bangor primary school was delayed because the staff had not received the necessary training from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to enable them to check the pupil's blood sugar levels and administer insulin if necessary. The education boards and local health trusts must work closely together to avoid pupils having to delay their school admission. There are clear discrepancies in the length of time it takes education boards across the country to carry out the statutory assessment of special educational needs. The South Eastern Education and Library Board has an average of 10 weeks, while the Western Education and Library Board has an average of six.

I commend Diabetes UK on its ongoing work to tackle diabetes. I trust that this debate will help to increase awareness of diabetes and to improve the lives of the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Easton: I declare an interest as my father is a diabetic, so there is a family history there.

Diabetes has the potential to cost our society not just in money terms but in its general health and well-being. Without a healthy society, the ability of Northern Ireland to produce a well-balanced and well-resourced workforce is severely hindered. In 2011, the overall spend by the health service right across the UK for the care of diabetes and the complications that arise as a result of having the condition was well over £9 billion, with 79% of that figure used to treat the complications. In Northern Ireland, the cost of treating diabetes is estimated to be in the region of £1 million per day or 10% of our entire health budget. Those costs look set to increase, as predictions suggest that, by 2020, more than 94,000 people are expected to have type 1 or type 2 diabetes. Currently, we spend 10% of our health budget treating the 3.9% of the population who have diabetes.

The sad fact for many people who develop the disease is that it can be avoided by changing their lifestyle. In 2010, 80% of people with type 2 diabetes were classified as overweight or obese. It is well known that carrying excess weight is a major risk factor in developing diabetes. Statistics suggest that two thirds of adults in Northern Ireland are overweight; however, only 40% recognise that they need to lose weight. The Minister and his Department have already brought out campaigns designed to raise awareness of obesity in our society. That is one area where personal accountability must be the number one defence.

We already know that diabetes has the potential to impact on life expectancy by between 10 and 20 years, depending on the type of diabetes that someone has. We know that members of certain socio-economic groups are more at risk of developing the disease and are less likely to have good management of it and will, therefore, need treatment for complications. We know where the information needs to be targeted to gain maximum results. Too often, it is difficult to reach the demographic groups that suffer most from such diseases. The development of a strategy for diabetes could help to ensure that they can be reached in new and innovative ways.

At present, almost 1,000 children in Northern Ireland live with diabetes. The sad statistic is that one quarter of them are likely to endure life-threatening complications. There have been stories of children's education being delayed due to schools not being able to manage their condition. There are also stories of children not being able to go on residential trips due to their suffering from diabetes or having to feel different because they have a medical condition that, for many of them, is not their fault and from which they do not have the ability to make themselves better. Therefore, the condition in childhood can have the impact of restricting educational achievement and life potential.

Diabetes costs Northern Ireland dearly. We must work harder to minimise the impact that the disease has the potential to have in our community. A combined joined-up strategy will help to raise awareness of the risk factors and ensure quality care for not just health but psychological reasons so that those with the disease can be helped to manage it more effectively and so that complications can be reduced and awareness raised in the community of what can be done to support those who have it.

Mr McDevitt: I, too, declare an interest: I am the proud father of Clara McDevitt, who is eight years old now. She was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes just before Christmas 2010. Her story is not untypical. She was misdiagnosed by a general practitioner. She ended up as an emergency admission to the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children in what is known as severe DKA. Her blood had become very acidic as the result of the shutdown of a certain part of her pancreas and its failure to produce insulin.

I would like to take my time to speak up for the some 1,000 children in the region who are under 16 years of age and have type 1 diabetes. They are a small number, but they are very special kids. The tragedy of type 1 diabetes is that you cannot really afford too many misdiagnoses. More often than not, a severe misdiagnosis that is not discovered will be fatal. The other thing to understand about type 1 that I really want to re-emphasise is that it is utterly unavoidable. It is an autoimmune condition. You are just unlucky to get it, and there is nothing that you could do or could ever have done to stop yourself becoming a type 1 diabetic. They are still trying to get to the bottom of what actually causes it. If I could make my first plea tonight, it would be that we would continue to play an active role at regional level in research into the causes and ultimate treatment and cure of type 1 diabetes. Indeed, I welcome the announcement by Queen's University last week of £32 million towards the new research centre.

We remain the only region in these islands not to have a service framework for either type 1 or type 2 diabetes. Although I acknowledge that, since 2003, there have been

improvements, the condition is currently managed under the umbrella of a framework that is designed around a different type of condition. It is generally designed around cardiovascular health and well-being. Since 2009, when that framework was introduced, concerns have been raised continually about its appropriateness for dealing with the specific requirements of those with type 1 diabetes.

The Minister will, of course, be aware of an Audit Office report in 2009 that addressed several issues around the management of diabetes. I note the commitment that he made last year to increase resources for type 2 diabetes and to put extra and renewed focus on type 1 in this region. That is important. However, the reality on the ground is that we have fewer diabetologists and diabetic support nurses per capita in this region than anywhere else. As a result, the management, in particular, of children with type 1 diabetes is considerably more difficult here than it is in other parts of these islands. As colleagues such as Mr Dunne, Mr Ramsey, Mr Dickson and Mr Buchanan pointed out, that is reflected in problems with schools and the administration of medication in schools, as well as in other aspects.

7.00 pm

Colleagues have mentioned the very fine report prepared by Diabetes UK, titled 'Diabetes in Northern Ireland: The human, social and economic challenge'. It was prepared with the support of C3 and Novo Nordisk. I thank the Minister for having joined a few of us in the Long Gallery just before the summer break to launch the report. It is a serious piece of work, and one that helps us to think our way through the necessary steps that we must take in the years ahead to improve the management of the condition. It identifies six goals, but I will bring just three of them to the House's attention.

The first is to do with education: the need to increase the capacity of young people with type 1 diabetes to be able to manage their condition. The second is to do with insulin pumps. There is a crying-out need for more insulin pumps, particularly among young people. I am very fortunate that Clara got an insulin pump only last month, and we can already see improvement in her management. There are not more pumps with more children today because of a lack of diabetes support nurses and resources to give them training. I appeal to the Minister, on behalf of all those who are the proud parents of children with type 1 diabetes, to do what he can to ensure that extra resources are there to support the provision of insulin pumps.

The only thing that diabetes stops you doing is going a bit mad on the sugars. In every other aspect, it is not, and should not be in 2012, an impediment to the lifestyle of someone with type 1 or type 2.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time has gone.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I thank Members for their contributions to today's debate, and I welcome the opportunity to respond to points. I may not get to them all, given the time that we have. I also want to outline my Department's approach to managing diabetes, and other long-term conditions more generally.

I am aware that diabetes is a condition that affects many people in Northern Ireland, including some Members. Members will be aware of my commitment to improve

services for people with diabetes and to prevent type 2 diabetes. Let me be absolutely blunt: the vast majority of people who have type 2 diabetes should not have type 2 diabetes; they bring it on themselves. They eat too much, they drink too much and they do not take enough exercise. It is quite simple. Self-medication should apply here, and that is to eat less, drink less and take more exercise. If people do that, they will avoid diabetes wholesale. Therefore, let us be frank on that issue. People need to change their lifestyle, and we need to challenge people on their lifestyle.

We have made a number of commitments, as I stated at the launch of diabetes week in June this year, to work on this. I have met clinicians, patients and their representatives to understand at first hand how diabetes affects individuals and their families.

Figures show that the total number of adults aged 17 and over with diabetes registered with GPs in Northern Ireland was nearly 76,000 in 2011-12. That is approximately 4% of our population. Estimates by the Institute of Public Health in Ireland in its 2010 report 'Making Chronic Conditions Count' suggest that, by 2015, over 82,000 people in Northern Ireland will be living with diabetes. The majority of those with the condition will develop it later in life and will have type 2 diabetes. However, there is emerging evidence to suggest that the number of new cases of type 1 diabetes, which primarily affects children, is also increasing. That is a life-changing diagnosis and a significant challenge for many children, adolescents and young people, and, of course, for their families.

Given the increasing prevalence, it is not surprising that GPs, hospital doctors, nurses and other health and social care professionals tell me that they are under ever-increasing pressure, as more and more patients are presenting with an increasing range of complex needs.

As Health Minister, it is not just my job to outline the challenges; I have to offer solutions. I have offered one already but, hopefully, will offer others as well. The ageing population means that we have to tackle head-on the effects of an increasing prevalence of long-term conditions; otherwise, our health system will be put under an intolerable and, indeed, unsustainable pressure. It was with that in mind that I put in place a number of new approaches to finding solutions and a more innovative approach to managing long-term conditions, in particular diabetes.

The new model for health and social care outlined in the 'Transforming Your Care' report and further elaborated in the consultation document 'Transforming Your Care: Vision to Action' presents new opportunities for how we plan and deliver services to people with long-term conditions. Crucially, it puts the individual at the heart of decision-making.

'Transforming Your Care' identifies long-term conditions as a key area for health and social care and presents a series of proposals, including improved partnership working to enable greater self-care and prevention, and personalised care pathways to help people understand and manage long-term conditions at home. It also proposes maximising the opportunities provided by telehealth and benefits to be gained from a more integrated approach to treatment and care.

A key vehicle for a more co-ordinated and person-centred approach is the establishment of the 17 integrated care

partnerships. Integrated care partnerships would bring together health and social care providers in collaborative partnerships to work together to improve how services are delivered on the ground. It is anticipated that much of the initial focus of the integrated care partnerships would be on the frail and elderly and on specific long-term conditions, namely diabetes, stroke services and respiratory conditions.

Many of the principles that underpin that new model of care are also reflected in 'Living with Long Term Conditions', my Department's policy framework for adults with long-term conditions, which I launched in April this year. The framework provides a strategic direction for the reform and modernisation of services into the future for people with long-term conditions.

The framework sets out how outcomes for people with long-term conditions can be improved through more partnership working, supported self-management, support for carers, and access to patient information and education, so that people with long-term conditions have the knowledge and skills they need to manage their conditions more effectively. That can include optimising medicines management, with the support of community pharmacists; the use of new technology to facilitate telemonitoring; or making lifestyle changes to maintain or enhance health and well-being.

The importance of patient information and education in supporting self-management is underscored by the inclusion in the Programme for Government 2011-15 of a commitment to enrol people with long-term conditions, and who want to be enrolled, in a dedicated chronic condition management programme. A delivery plan has been developed to drive the achievement of that commitment, and officials from my Department are working with colleagues in the Public Health Agency to establish information on patient education programmes across each of the health and social care trusts. That information will inform the future commissioning of patient education programmes.

In 2003, a blueprint for diabetes care was developed with the joint CREST/Diabetes UK task force report. The joint task force framework for diabetes care sets standards for the prevention, early detection, care and treatment of diabetes.

Since the publication of the CREST/Diabetes UK framework, there has been significant investment in diabetes services. For example, £3 million has been provided to recruit more than 70 additional staff from a range of disciplines to provide services for people with diabetes; £0.8 million was invested in the development of a comprehensive screening programme for diabetic retinopathy for all people with diabetes over the age of 12; £0.8 million was invested to tackle obesity, and £0.85 million has been directed towards promoting physical activity, and food and nutritional initiatives.

In 2011-12, £4 million was provided to GP practices, through the equality and outcomes framework, to ensure the provision of good-quality care for people with diabetes. Non-recurrent funding of £255,000 was made available in 2010-11 to start insulin pump therapy for 60 children and young people. Additional funding was secured in 2011-12 for a Co-operation and Working Together cross-border diabetes project for an additional 80 pumps for children.

Further to that, £2.5 million was allocated last year to purchase 1,100 insulin pumps. It is expected that those will be phased in and will significantly reduce the time that patients have to wait for the therapy, as well as replacing pumps that have reached the end of their lifespan. In addition, and in recognition of the fact that diabetes is a major risk factor in other areas, £9 million has been invested in cardiovascular services, £14 million in stroke services and £8 million to expand renal capacity.

I want to ensure that the cases of type 2 diabetes are, as far as possible, prevented. That is why I have committed considerable resources to public health programmes, as I already outlined. There is an obligation on all of us, however, to adopt lifestyles that will help to ensure, as far as possible, our own health and well-being. My Department's obesity prevention strategy and framework, which I launched in March, encourages people to take responsibility for their own health and eat a healthy, well-balanced, nutritious diet as well as engaging in more physical activity.

As part of a wider approach to health promotion and prevention, my Department is consulting on a new 10-year public health strategic 'Fit and Well – Changing Lives' framework, which emphasises the importance of a multisectoral approach to tackling inequalities in health. It also reinforces the importance of preventative measures in reducing the number of people developing long-term conditions by supporting individuals to take responsibility for their own health.

I referred to some of the complications associated with diabetes: sight loss and renal and circulatory problems, which can, in some instances, lead to amputation. In fact, there were 237 amputations last year. I have seen the devastating effects that such complications have on individual lives. We need to ensure, through education and earlier interventions, that we can help people with diabetes to maintain or enhance their health and well-being and minimise the adverse effects of the condition. That requires a systemised approach to patient review, vigorous evidence-based intervention and informed patient self-management.

The 2003 CREST/Diabetes UK joint framework is now almost a decade old, and times have moved on. We have an ageing population, and there are now more people living with diabetes and other long-term conditions. So, we need to ensure that we look ahead and determine how best to maximise the resources that we have.

With that in mind, in January this year I asked the Chief Medical Officer to initiate a review of diabetes care. The purpose of the review is to focus on where we are in relation to the original CREST/Diabetes UK framework to identify the gaps in service provision. I have also specifically requested that the review should identify emergent issues in diabetes care and that it include the assessment of diabetes care for children in relation to the aspirations of the original CREST/Diabetes UK framework.

I am pleased to report that that work is well under way, and the review team has brought together clinicians and health professionals from a range of disciplines, as well as representatives from Diabetes UK. I expect that the review group will report its findings to me early next year —

Mr Speaker: The Minister's time has gone.

Mr Poots: — and that will provide a strategic direction for diabetes care. Time has beaten us, Mr Speaker, and I will write to the Members in response to questions that they posed.

Mr Molloy: I thank the Minister for making a winding-up speech. I thank Pat Ramsey for securing the debate tonight, after a bit of flexibility and pressurising to get a space for it. It is an important debate, and we have had the debate here before. The all-party group was then set up, and that was an important dimension in trying to move the thing along and bring various MLAs together.

I declare an interest in that I am one of those people, Minister, who probably should have avoided it, but I do have type B diabetes. A difficulty for so many people is that you do not know that before you get it, and when you get it, it is too late. That is one of the difficulties around all of this.

I would like to see some of the issues that we have talked about today dealt with on a broader scale. For instance, 76,000 people are suffering from diabetes, and, as Kieran said, possibly another 10,000 who may be suffering but do not know it. That is important: the number of people who are walking about with diabetes and who have not been diagnosed.

We all eat food in various forms, and the processors and manufacturers have a responsibility also to ensure that there is the least sugar content in all the breads that are available. With coeliacs, for instance, particular loaves have to be gluten-free yet we do not have any recommendations around the whole issue of bread and other foods with high sugar content. High salt content also has a big effect on diabetes and heart illnesses. It is important for those manufacturers and processors to recognise that there is a major market of diabetes sufferers who cannot get the proper foods because of the amount of sugar and salt in them. I would like them to look at that and see the market that is there.

Many Members spoke about the £1 million daily cost to the Executive. That is a massive amount of money that is actually going into trying to deal with diabetes. It is important that we try to find, if not solutions, because at this time, unfortunately, we do not have them, at least ways of managing the condition.

Good management and control are very important, as Pat said. The whole issue is about trying to develop a strategy so that it is not just left to the individual who has diabetes. It is about how you manage that. It is about trying to get a joined-up approach across the various Departments to ensure that all Departments look at how it can be managed, how they can have an influence on it, how they can provide services that might help to deal with it and how they can manage the process on a wider range. That will mean, to some extent, legislation in various ways in relation to the contents of food and how food affects us.

7.15 pm

Sue Ramsey said that good communication and education are very important. She also spoke of the importance of training for school staff to support young people who have diabetes to ensure that they are able to continue their schooling. The funding for nurses in the diabetes sector is very important so that people know about it. It is also important to have a wider remit of people who recognise

the symptoms of diabetes at a very early stage instead of waiting until, unfortunately, it is too late.

Tom Buchanan was alarmed at the increase in the level of diabetes. I think that the increase right across the various constituencies is running at about 33%. That is quite an alarming figure. The fact that 10% of our health budget goes on the treatment of it is also alarming.

Roy Beggs identified that some of his family members were in the same situation. This is relevant right across all our constituencies: so many families are affected by diabetes. It may be one or two members of a family at this time. I do not think that there is a family in any area that is untouched by diabetes and its effects. It is very important to note not only the amount of money that is being spent every day but how it is being spent. One in five hospital admissions is in relation to heart conditions and various illnesses that are associated with diabetes. We could deal with different illnesses if we could get to a stage where diabetes can be dealt with in the community.

Stewart Dickson spoke about the costs of dealing with diabetes. He said that it was a major drain on the health service and that we need to move more into community support. That is where there is a lack of activity. Although some GPs have a very good service, others do not. You find that, in more rural areas, there are gaps in the service. You find that people are frustrated because they do not get direct applications. They are being deferred for long periods; the gap between examinations can be very great. That endangers people in the future.

Gordon Dunne said that one in 20 people in the UK suffers from diabetes. A healthy lifestyle is one way of dealing with that, but, again, the big problem with all of that is that it is usually too late by the time that we realise that. Everyone is saying that there needs to be some means of identifying that and dealing with it at an earlier stage. Gordon highlighted the case of the young fella who was being treated and could not take up his school place. We need to have a standard right across the board areas in education and health to ensure that every child gets the same treatment and application and that the response time for referrals is more unified, because there seems to be variations.

Alex Easton repeated the costs to the health service. He said that two thirds of people are overweight, and he spoke about the effects that that has. Alex also talked about diabetes reducing people's lifespan. Some people might not realise that, without the proper treatment, it can reduce life expectancy by 20 years in some cases — and even sometimes with the proper treatment, because it develops as we go along.

Conall McDevitt raised the issue of his daughter being misdiagnosed, and he spoke about getting into that dangerous situation. It is so often the case that there are misdiagnoses. Sometimes, people are not diagnosed at all; they are walking about with the illness and do not realise. We need to try to find a means of identifying that at an earlier stage. That is particularly the case with young children, who are probably in and out of health centres more often getting injections and various things. Maybe there are other ways of identifying diabetes at an early stage. That is very important.

There is also the issue of there being no service framework. There is no focus on diabetes and on how it is linked to the

broader general health of people. That is very important. We need support in schools to ensure that young people can attend.

We also have the issue of insulin pumps, to which the Minister responded. We need to emphasise that again. So many young people, particularly children, find that it is better to use insulin pumps than injections or other mechanisms. Insulin pumps should be a priority. More and more people with type 2 diabetes have to take insulin in their later years. It is not just those with type 1 diabetes who require insulin.

The Minister said that people with type 2 diabetes should not have the condition. That is a very simple solution. Unfortunately, however, when people have it, they cannot get rid of it. So, I go back to the point that we need early education and awareness. There are so many illnesses that we could say are a person's own fault, and there are illnesses that are the result of smoking, drinking and other things. What the Minister said is not a solution. It may be a way of criticising the condition and warning people about it, but we need to warn people at a younger age to make sure that they do not get it.

As I said, I have type 2 diabetes, and I probably had it for between 12 and 18 months before I knew it. That was despite having most of the symptoms that have been highlighted, such as fatigue, lack of energy, thirst and bad feet. I went to a GP a number of times and pointed those things out, but it took some time before the GP decided to examine me for diabetes.

There is also confusion in the health service and in the provision in some clinics. Very often, for example, people are on a number of different medications. They may take aspirin as a preventative treatment for heart conditions, but some doctors say that aspirin has side effects and that perhaps people should not be on it. People look to doctors and GPs for guidance, and if there is confusion among doctors, a patient will not know what to do. It is important that we get the procedure —

Mr Speaker: Your time is almost gone.

Mr Molloy: As we go forward, we need a diabetes strategy. Thank you very much, everyone.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the increase in the number of people diagnosed with type 1 and type 2 diabetes; further notes the specific increase in type 1 diabetes amongst children; acknowledges the cost to the health service of managing diabetes; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to introduce urgently a properly resourced diabetes strategy.

Adjourned at 7.23 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 13 November 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Public Petition: Athletics

Mr Speaker: Mr Steven Agnew has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. The Member will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject.

Mr Agnew: I submit a petition on behalf of over 350 sportspersons, both athletes and coaches. The petition calls for the development of a strategic plan for athletics as a priority sport and for the strategy to include the development of a dedicated indoor athletics training facility.

Athletics is the blue riband sport of the Olympics. It is also an inclusive sport that receives support from all sections of our society. However, those behind the petition believe that insufficient support is being provided by central and local government. No strategic plan exists to develop and promote the sport, and the facilities available in Northern Ireland are either shared or of an inadequate standard to meet the needs of the next generation of athletes. The petition recognises the positive outcomes that are possible when government invests in and lends its support to sports.

Northern Ireland has an ideal opportunity to capitalise on this year's Olympic legacy to inspire a generation. Sport makes a valuable contribution to our society through not only the enjoyment of participants and viewers but the lifelong health benefits that it offers our young people. Sportspersons from across Northern Ireland believe that a strategy coupled with a dedicated indoor, all-year facility would encourage more people to get involved in athletics and help Northern Ireland to nurture elite athletes, maximising their potential to win medals at Commonwealth, European and Olympic games.

The petitioners would like the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to explore the possibility of a dedicated indoor athletics training facility at the current site of the Mary Peters Track. The petition is timely, given today's debate on the legacy of the Paralympics and yesterday's announcement that, in the near future, the Executive may find that they have unspent capital. Let us not let the legacy of the Olympics and the Paralympics pass us by, but let us rather lend our support to this worthwhile sport. On behalf of all of those whom I represent today, I call on the Minister to give the issue due consideration.

Mr Agnew moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: I will forward a copy to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and to the Chair of the Committee.

Ministerial Statement

North/South Ministerial Council: Environment

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): With your permission, Mr Speaker, in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the sixteenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in environment sectoral format, which was held in Armagh on Wednesday 31 October 2012. The statement has been agreed with junior Minister Bell.

Jonathan Bell MLA, junior Minister to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and I represented the Northern Ireland Executive at the meeting. The Irish Government were represented by Mr Phil Hogan TD, Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, who chaired the meeting.

Ministers discussed the environment sector priorities for Ireland's presidency of the European Union in 2013 and looked forward to the informal meeting of the council of EU Environment Ministers in Dublin on 22 and 23 April 2013. Quite a bit of time was spent on that issue. I think that, in the rundown through and after Ireland's presidency of the EU, you will see a gear change when it comes to the environmental interest and funding for the environment out of EU structures. The Irish Government have 1,600 meetings in the six-month period of the presidency. They hope to get various funding decisions over the line in terms of funding issues 2014-2020, including the common agricultural policy. Around all of that, the environmental interest is becoming much more significant in terms of its profile, its importance and potential funding streams.

Ministers noted the publication by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government of a new waste management policy, 'A Resource Opportunity: Waste Management Policy in Ireland'. As Members know, we are currently revising the waste management strategy here in Northern Ireland, and hope to have that published by April next year. The Council welcomed the presentation by rx3 and WRAP — the equivalent bodies in Dublin and Belfast that deal with these matters — on the all-island bulky waste reuse best practice management feasibility study, which is due for publication this month. That feasibility study should open doors for business to better use bulky waste and reuse it for other purposes, rather than it going to landfill or being incinerated.

Ministers noted that a final report on an all-island tyre survey, led by Department of the Environment, is also expected to be completed by the end of the month. There is a series of interventions around the issue of

tyres, not just the final report on the survey. Ministers noted that consultants appointed by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government to conduct a review of the producer responsibility initiative (PRI) model in Ireland will examine the structural and environmental outcomes of the current system for dealing with used tyres and examine areas for enhanced co-operation with DOE.

Ministers welcomed the new chairperson of the North/South market steering group, David Surplus, and noted that a further meeting of the group will be arranged to consider strategic priorities identified in the work programme. The new chairperson will be invited to provide Ministers with an update on progress at a future NSMC environment meeting. I particularly welcome David Surplus's appointment to that post. He is one of the leading lights on this island when it comes to renewables, and the mind that he will bring to the steering group, in terms of the reuse of plastics and bulky wastes and other interventions, will further embed the green and clean credentials of the island of Ireland and, I hope, create increasing market and job opportunities around that type of business going forward.

The Council noted that two sites in Clogher, County Tyrone — Seskinore and Eskragh — have been agreed for the 2012-13 repatriation programme. Work has been completed at Seskinore site. I think there was 3,700 tons of waste. That has now been repatriated, in this case to a site in Monaghan. Preliminary works have commenced at Eskragh. Those works are of more significance because around 30,000 tons of waste, I think, have to be repatriated. That work will take 10 to 12 weeks, but it is ongoing.

Dublin City Council has established a framework agreement for the disposal of repatriated waste and has commenced the preparation of tender documents in advance of a public procurement process for the haulage of excavated waste to authorised disposal facilities from 2013 onwards. That is important work because, if it were not done, there could be an issue about the ongoing repatriation of waste. However, the fact that the council has established a framework agreement and is now moving towards tendering will ensure that, from 2013 on, the repatriation framework strategy will continue.

The Council noted that joint enforcement action to deal with illegal operators is a priority for both Environment Ministers, and Departments continue to target resources at the issue. There was a meeting in May in that regard, at which the agencies, North and South, further scoped out what intelligence was telling us and what joint enforcement might look like. Obviously, I will be a bit coy about commenting in any detail on those matters.

Ministers noted that officials have researched and considered further opportunities for mutually beneficial joint working to facilitate effective and efficient policy approaches in the context of EU directives on air quality, industrial emissions and noise. Air quality and noise provide most opportunities for mutually beneficial joint working. Ministers agreed that officials should commission further research to examine the issue of airborne pollution from residential smoky coal combustion and provide an update to Ministers at the next NSMC, to be held in 2013. The calorific value and cost of smokeless fuel suggest that a ban on smoky fuel on the island of Ireland would not have a financial impact on consumers but would have a potential impact on air quality, especially in some urban

locations where there are air quality issues. The Council welcomed further engagement by officials to discuss the potential for mutually beneficial approaches when considering the third-round noise maps due in 2017.

As I indicated, the Council noted that nothing of immediate cross-border interest was identified in the industrial emissions directive, but obviously that will be kept under review.

Ministers noted that discussions were under way in the North/South working group on water quality (NSWGWQ) on co-ordinating the timetable for preparations of the second-cycle river basin management plans under the EU water framework directive. Obviously, given that our rivers, watercourses and lakes, in some instances, are shared cross-border assets, it is important that those co-ordinations are ongoing. The Council welcomed the workshop involving representatives of both jurisdictions on 17 October 2012 under the auspices of the International Centre for Local and Regional Development to explore practical measures that could be pursued as part of the joint implementation of the river basin management plans.

Ministers welcomed the continued co-ordination in relation to the blue flag and green coast schemes and, in particular, the role played by both jurisdictions to standardise and expand the running of the green coast scheme. Tourism Ireland, as Members know, markets the island beyond this island to Britain, Europe and the international market. Having a common approach to beach quality and having the greatest scope of blue flag and green coast schemes is part of the marketing of the island by Tourism Ireland. In that regard, this work to protect beaches and develop coastal communities is important.

Ministers noted that the NSWGWQ will receive regular updates, as appropriate, on EU policy developments in the area of water quality that may arise during Ireland's presidency of the European Union in the first six months of 2013.

Ministers noted the successful launch and publication of the Environmental Protection Agency's state of the environment report, 'Ireland's Environment 2012', on 25 June. The Council noted the successful international symposium on domestic waste water treatment systems organised by the EPA and Trinity College Dublin, which involved presentations from leading researchers and included regulators from the EPA and the NIEA.

Ministers noted that, following preliminary research into the environmental impacts of hydraulic fracturing — fracking — in May, a more comprehensive research study is planned before the end of 2012. The intention is that that research study will be commenced by the end of 2012. However, given the different science and views around fracking, the research will clearly take some time. The DOE is represented on the steering group, which met on 5 July.

The Council agreed to hold the next environment sectoral meeting in Dublin in April 2013.

10.45 am

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): I thank the Minister for his statement. It seems that a lot of issues have been discussed by the two jurisdictions. I am heartened to hear that a higher profile will be given to environmental issues and about

the potential for us to have access to more funding for environmental protection in the coming months.

There are so many questions that I would like to ask the Minister, but I know that I am limited to one. We published our inquiry into used tyre disposal in April. So far, we have not seen the Department take a lot of actions to meet the recommendations in our report. I am pleased that the Minister has discussed the issue with his counterpart in the Republic. Will he expand on what has been discussed and give a time frame for action?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member. She rightly identified that, arguably, the NSMC environment sector covers issues that other sectors do not. That only leads me to the point, Minister — sorry, Mr Speaker; maybe one day — that the North/South review, which was agreed at St Andrews and commenced five years ago, is stuck; arguably, it is badly stuck. In June, the deputy First Minister came to the House following an NSMC meeting and said that “decisions” — that is the word that he used and that was used by both Governments in the communiqué — in respect of that review would be taken in November. When it came to November, no decisions were taken except that officials were asked to go out and bring forward proposals — whatever that might mean — before Christmas. Here we are, three or four years into a recession and five years into the review, and there has been no outcome whatsoever. A lot of issues on the island of Ireland could be scoped out and worked up and a way forward agreed; yet, five years later, the North/South review is badly stuck. I have a view about why it is badly stuck. I am saying to the parties in the Chamber and to the Irish Government that it is time to move it on and get it unstuck to maximise opportunities for the people of this island so that we position ourselves in the global market and get work for the increasing numbers of people who are out of work.

I do not agree that nothing has been done on the issue of tyres since the interim report. What has been done, or what was already being done and has now been moved forward? Let me give you six examples. First, as I said, the all-Ireland tyre survey will be published this month. That will be the first time that we have had an audit of where the issue lies on the island of Ireland. It is sometimes difficult to have good practice without good evidence.

Secondly, in June, a code for a duty of care in respect of those who manage tyres was issued. There was an obligation on businesses to respond to that code, and those that did not respond are now being individually chased up by the Department to ensure that the requirements under the duty of care are fulfilled. If they are not, action could arise. Thirdly, there are now nine pilot studies with councils in the North to deal with the issue of fly-tipping, including the fly-tipping of tyres, which is known to so many of us. The relevant people in the Department have set up a dedicated enforcement section to deal with the tyres issue, as well as the more significant enforcement section, known as the environmental crime unit. You have only to look at the papers of the past two or three months to see that a very significant commercial organisation in the North of Ireland that was involved in the management of tyres was brought before the criminal courts because of various breaches. In court, admissions were made, pleas were entered, and, under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA), £120,000 was taken from that business. At the same time, we continue to liaise with councils on the issue

of part-worn tyres. Yes, there is a lot more to do, but I have given you six examples of good work to date.

Mr Hamilton: The Minister knows that I am interested in the cross-border movement of waste. I have asked him about it before in response to NSMC statements. Some time back, he told me that around a dozen to 15 cases had been identified in Northern Ireland. Will he clarify whether the sites included in the statement were part of that initial dozen to 15 and whether there is any evidence of new sites at which there has been illegal dumping or of the illegal cross-border movement of waste into Northern Ireland?

Mr Attwood: First, I will correct myself: I said that I thought that the site in Eskragh was 30,000 tons; it is 17,000 tons. The two sites — Seskinore and Eskragh — were part of the family of original sites. They are not new; they are the latest two. Under the framework agreement with the Irish Government, the ambition is that two sites every year will be cleared, provided that, when you dig into the ground, you find what you thought that you would find. It is subject also to the weather and ground conditions allowing for the material to be removed and not discovering other environmental risks arising from leachate that might lead to further work being needed to manage the waste properly. The pattern is that two sites a year will be cleared.

At the end of the day, there are people who know what happened here. Now that everybody is saying “Report all crime to the police” — well, nearly everybody is saying, “Report nearly all crime to the police” — let those who were responsible for such environmental damage on the island and in those communities be reported to the police. We make that plea because, in Ballymartin, which is one of the most significant sites from which waste is repatriated, although a lot of information about where it may have come from was extracted from the waste, to date, the authorities, North and South, have not been able to get a prosecution over the line. The more co-operation we have to identify the criminal gangs who did what they did in Ballymartin, Seskinore, Eskragh or in the other 10 sites that have yet to be repatriated, the better off we will be.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire. I welcome the Minister’s statement.

Minister, my question follows on from that of the Chair. What intervention will you make to ensure that we are able to track tyres? Over Halloween, a number of tyres were burnt on a bonfire, and it is unacceptable that that still goes on. Also, will you indicate whether you propose to introduce anything to help those who want to recycle heavier-gauge plastics? I have brought this up in the Committee on a number of occasions. There are certain types of plastic that we do not recycle at the minute, and I would like to see something brought forward to encourage the recycling of heavier-gauge plastics.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. I will answer the second part of his question first. A report is coming out this month in respect of bulky waste on the island of Ireland — major items of furniture and white goods, for example. Given the profile that is now gathering around the reuse of existing materials, that report will advertise not only that there is a lot of opportunity to reuse that we are not taking but that there are market opportunities, given the added value. Some of the figures in the report will be astounding. The value added from the

reuse of white goods and bulky furniture is huge. Because you get the product at no cost or a very low cost from civic amenity centres, for example, if you then reuse it, on the far side of your own costs, there can be a significant markup simply because you are getting the product at such a low price.

Touching on Mr Boylan's question, the same is true in respect of the previous report — the Horizon report on plastics. Mr Boylan is right: the headline figure that jumps out in that regard — I keep saying this — is that 30% of plastics on the island of Ireland are recycled, and, of that 30%, only 30% is recycled on the island of Ireland. So, we have a situation where 70% of our plastics are not recycled, and 70% of that which is recycled is recycled outside the country. The purpose of the group that David Surplus chairs, the all-Ireland market development strategy steering group, is to exploit the opportunities to have more reused and recycled for green and environmental reasons and because of the pressure of EU requirements, in order to create job opportunities. There are huge job opportunities. If you were to close your eyes and think back 20 years about the growth of recycling, you would find it unimaginable. Over the next 20 years, the growth of reuse can similarly be unimaginable, given the scale of the reuse on the one hand and the job opportunities on the other.

In respect of the issue indicated to the Chair of the Committee about tyres, action is being taken. There are mechanisms to monitor what happens with tyres. There is a process around the disposal of tyres, and waste documentation has to be completed. If the Member is asking whether we will put a tracking device on every tyre, that is beyond the scope of what we do at the moment. That is an initiative that will have to be co-ordinated with the buy-in of the tyre-making business and the car- and lorry-manufacturing businesses and all those sectors. In the meantime, we will do everything short of that. In order to have the best auditing of where our tyres go, the proposal is ultimately one that will have to be given serious consideration.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for the statement. Towards the end of the statement, he talks about hydraulic fracturing or, as we all know it, fracking. He said that an initial impact assessment had been carried out in May 2012 and that more comprehensive research was to follow. He also said that an initial meeting of the research steering group was held on 5 July. Will the Minister give us any more detail on that? If he has not the detail with him, perhaps he will give us a written report at some stage.

Mr Attwood: In the near future and before Christmas, I will make an oral statement to the House. It is time to take stock of where we are with fracking from the Department of the Environment's point of view. Part of that statement will outline where the research is in respect of fracking. The United States Environmental Protection Agency has two strands of work ongoing. We must be mindful that in America, in his last state of the union address, President Obama clearly gave a green light to the roll-out of fracking, which, he said, could produce 50% of America's energy needs over the next number of decades.

11.00 am

To date, there is obviously the research that Dublin did. However, that was a desktop study in which Dublin

commissioned the University of Aberdeen, I think, to undertake research. However, to be fair, that was light-touch research. That is why it was agreed that there would be a second phase of much more probing research, commissioned by the Irish Government, with the involvement of my Department and officials involved in the steering group. That will be announced and launched in the next few weeks.

At the same time, the European Union is undertaking work on fracking, given the divergence of opinion in Europe and among members of the EU, not least between Poland, which is gung-ho for fracking, and France, which, as far as I recall, still has a fracking ban in place. Therefore, there is clearly a need to interrogate the science and the evidence to determine that we know the full consequences of fracking's impact and whether we can draw a conclusion on whether it is or is not safe. It seems to me that everybody is looking at the science of fracking, but that does not discount the need ultimately to make a judgement on it. The DOE's role is to assess the planning and environmental impacts, as well as to take into account whether fracking is or is not safe. I will say a lot more on that in a statement to the House before Christmas.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for his statement. I have no doubt that, when he mentions a gear change, it is an upward gear change on environmental issues.

How will the work in the environmental sector be taken forward at a European level when Ireland takes over the EU presidency at the beginning of next year?

Mr Attwood: As I indicated in my opening remarks, Ireland will have a very busy time. I am worried that, as we approach Christmas, whether the officials who have been appointed to take forward the North/South review will have much time to do the work that I think needs to be done, which, in some places, does not appear to have been done over the past number of years.

In the rundown to Christmas, officials will be very busy, because they will have 1,500 to 1,600 meetings in that time frame. They have ambitions to get funding agreements for 2014-2020 over the line, and those would include CAP reform and potentially some decisions around Horizon 2020, which is a successor programme to FP7, the £80 billion programme for R&D and innovation. However, the interesting point about both those programmes is that 30% of CAP in indicative terms at present will go to countryside management — that negotiation has concluded — reflecting, as I indicated, the gear change on environmental issues around the management of the countryside. It might not end up that way, because the Council and Ministers will have to discuss the final shape.

As I said about Horizon 2020, there are also significant funding streams for environmental and green issues. One of my staff has been seconded to the Irish Government's structures for the lifetime of the EU presidency and the rundown to that to give us some further inside track.

The reputation of Irish presidencies of the union is that work gets done. The Irish Government have huge ambitions concerning the work that can be done. The more that we observe and are involved in that work — not at this stage as part of a different system of government, but perhaps in the future — the better that we will be, because, together with Barroso opening the doors, I think that the

European presidency in Ireland will open the doors and give us access to understanding the opportunity out of Europe.

That is why I welcome the fact that the Northern Ireland Minister of the Environment and other Ministers will attend informal European Council meetings. Why? The Dublin Government are recognising that this is part of the island of Ireland, and, although we do not have a seat at the table of council meetings, since, at the moment, we are represented by the London Government, they are putting a seat at the table for the northern Ministers at informal meetings, in order to recognise that there is a special relationship, to borrow a phrase, and that there are opportunities for us being in those rooms.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his statement. He mentioned the issue of the blue flag and green coast co-operation. Obviously, this has been an area, in terms of improvement in our beach quality, where we have had some success. While I welcome the reference to the improved beach quality being used, for example, as a marketing tool for tourism, will the Minister expand on the references to co-operation and the practical benefits of improving the beach quality?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member. The four areas around beach quality that are reflected in the blue flag and green coast schemes are water quality, environmental management, environmental education and safety. Those are the four standards against which both those awards are considered. They are international awards, not just awards in the two parts of Ireland. The environment sector, which addresses issues of water quality and environmental management, is, by its very nature, addressing issues that impact upon the quality of beaches, and, therefore, has consequences with regard to the award of blue and green flags.

Take the issue of water quality. Besides the river basin management strategy, there is a lot of contact between the two Departments. There are a lot of conversations, including at ministerial level, about water quality, not least around the more demanding requirements of the water quality directives that are coming in 2016. So the character of the environment sector touching upon water quality, environmental management and other issues works itself through in a whole lot of expressions, including the quality of beaches.

It is self-evident, I suggest, that the more beaches we have with the status of blue and green awards, the better it is for tourism and the marketing of Ireland globally. Last year, 11 blue flags were awarded in the North, and seven were awarded in the previous year; there were 11 green, and 10 the previous year. This year, it is not going to be so good. Given the severity of the weather, there will be one or two places which, in my view, on the far side of the appropriate marking process, will end up not getting the awards. However, the direction of travel is very good, and, on the far side of that, if it is sustained, it can only be good for tourism. It can only be good for the tourism of the island.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the statement by the Minister. I particularly welcome the appointment of David Surplus and the repatriation works that have started at Seskinore and Eskragh. Will the Minister outline what the general thrust of the waste management review is likely to be here in the North and if any consideration has been given

to the waste-to-energy option that might form part of a comprehensive recycling programme?

Mr Attwood: I will touch upon the last question. People are aware of the ongoing procurement, for example, by local councils for their waste infrastructure over the next 25 to 30 years. People are aware that the SWaMP contract has been collapsed, for various reasons, and that I have been saying very clearly that there is a need for certainty in respect of the affordability, deliverability and finances around Arc21 and North West Regional Waste Management Group — the two schemes that are still live. I hope that all of those matters will be concluded quickly, because I think there is a need for certainty. However, on the far side of all that, if one or other of those schemes, or a similar scheme, were to emerge, it would be very much about creating energy from waste, and we should be collapsing, as far as possible, the threshold of our waste that ends up not being reused, recycled or turned into energy, so that we reach our ambitions more and more.

What are those ambitions? In the recast waste management strategy, which is all about efficiency and not about management — there is a difference — we hope that, by 2020, 50% of household waste and 70% of construction and demolition waste will be recycled. More controversially, there is a 60% statutory recycling target for local authority-collected municipal waste. Having a statutory target makes things more rigorous. Having a 60% target is more rigorous than what we were looking for in the previous non-statutory target for that category. In that way, we are demonstrating where we are going with recycling, as a Government and a country. On the far side of that, we will have more reason to portray this part of the island as green and clean, which is all part of our offering towards tourism growth, the character of our island and the quality of our lives. As people know, there are growing employment opportunities around all that. We hope that the recast strategy will be in place by April 2013.

Lord Morrow: I welcome the Minister's statement and thank him for bringing it to the House. I welcome his very fulsome answers to the questions that have been asked. I draw his attention back to the two sites, at Seskinore and Eskragh, where illegal dumping has been going on. I welcome the fact that work is ongoing there. Will the Minister tell us what, if any, liaison is going on with the local councils where that is happening, in this case, for instance, Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council? Is the council liaised with in relation to that exercise? Furthermore, will the Minister assure the House that the practice of illegal dumping has discontinued and is not happening elsewhere in Northern Ireland as we speak?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. It is anticipated that work at the Eskragh site will take eight to 10 weeks. Work commenced on 25 October, so I hope that, in the rundown to Christmas, the 17,000 tons of waste will be repatriated.

The question was whether there is co-ordination with the council. I do not have an answer to that. There are sometimes moments when you do not have the answer. The framework agreement is between the Department and the Dublin Government. The actual management of the repatriation of waste is done by contractors, further to the work of the NIEA and Dublin City Council. That is the structure of it; intergovernmental, to begin with, and then managed on an operational basis between the NIEA

and Dublin council. I will come back to the Member on that, but, given that waste is being moved, there may be some requirements to bring that to the attention of the appropriate authorities and local council in the area. It may simply be that that should be brought to their attention, or there may be some monitoring role, if even that. I will come back to the Member in that regard.

I would love to give an absolute assurance to the House that no illegal dumping of waste is going on in the North, either movement of waste from the South to the North or movement of illegally dumped waste within the North. I would like to give that reassurance, but I am not able to. The character of the criminal gangs involved — there might be others involved, beyond criminal gangs — tells me to answer that question in a precautionary way. The criminal gangs are forever trying to find ways and means of subverting proper process when it comes to the issue and disposal of waste. Therefore, I cannot give that absolute guarantee. Similarly, people who are licensed could be acting in a way that is in breach of that licence. I cannot give that reassurance. Indeed, I will go further and say that my intuition, if not my judgement, tells me that there will be illegality, either through licensed operators or criminal gangs. I will not say more than that for now.

To address the issue of illegality fully, a flow of information is needed from the community, on the one hand, and proper enforcement is needed through the various agencies, on the other hand. There are a range of agencies at council, policing and DOE level that have a responsibility in that regard. That is why my Department is looking at how we can grow that model, now that 11 posts have been allocated to the environmental crime unit (ECU).

In my view, when it comes to waste and various activities, the growing threat of illegality requires heavier departmental enforcement, which will come through the Department, via the ECU, having more environmental policemen and women. I cannot give Lord Morrow and the rest of the House an absolute assurance about what is or is not happening. I would be foolish to do so because I may have a bit more knowledge that I am prepared to indicate at the moment. However, in respect of the departmental response, the ECU needs to become a much bigger force of enforcement than it is at present.

11.15 am

Private Members' Business

Schools: Chief Inspector's Report

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

Mr Craig: I beg to move

That this Assembly acknowledges the recent report by the chief inspector of schools into the leadership and management of schools in Northern Ireland; notes, with concern, the underperformance of some managers and teachers; and calls on the Minister of Education to give greater leadership and to introduce more stringent measures to increase confidence in the system of schools management.

It is quite alarming to see such a report from the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). It highlights a number of serious issues in the education system. The chief inspector, Noelle Buick, details that the leadership and management quality in many schools falls below standard. The report clearly states that 22% of primary schools and 39% of post-primary schools have issues with management quality. It is an interesting statement that almost one in five schools in the primary sector and two in five schools in the secondary sector have an issue with how schools are run.

The report does not criticise the overall achievement of those attending the schools or the teaching quality, but it does criticise how those schools are governed. That is concerning because the report does not highlight one sector only but addresses schools across the board. It states that there is an issue about how schools are managed in all sectors, but it does not state how a lack of leadership quality has been identified. It sets out some of the difficulties that now face management in secondary and primary schools, such as problems that are due to the economic downturn. All schools face that issue and have great difficulties in meeting all the programmes that are put on them with the same resources or, in some cases, diminishing resources. Therefore, huge challenges are built in, which at least the report clearly identifies.

I want to point out that I am reporting directly from what Noelle Buick says about those schools. Personally, although I see some issues, I never would have dreamt that they were as large as described in the report. It is not up to me to say whether the report is right, wrong or indifferent; that is what the inspectors found. I have a lot of sympathy for teachers. I have always openly admitted to any teacher that it is a job that I could not do. I would not have the patience to teach in a classroom. I have huge admiration for all teachers, some of whom not only teach but have to manage and run their schools.

I feel that there is a lack of understanding among the general public about how schools are actually managed. That is why I want to take a few moments to outline some of the ways in which that happens.

Normally, schools have middle management, which is made up of the heads of departments, year heads, etc, who run their particular department or look after the children in a particular year. The general public may think that those are full-time positions. The simple truth is that they are not. The positions are held by full-time teachers who have part-time management roles in their schools. That puts a completely different slant on the difficulties that those individuals face in the education system. They do work that goes far beyond their original role as teachers. Although they get training, help and assistance, at the end of the day, they are being asked to do two jobs, something which is frowned upon in the Chamber.

Beyond middle management is senior management, which includes heads of the junior and senior school, finance managers, curriculum co-ordinators, timetable managers, vice-principals and principals. Again, we are back to the same issue in the management of schools. All of those positions, bar those of principal in most schools, are carried out on a part-time basis. Most — in fact, all — are teaching positions, so those staff have to teach. They also have to look after all the serious managerial issues that occur in schools. That may give the general public an idea of the difficulties and pressures that face those in “management” in the primary and post-primary sectors. In fact, even in many primary schools whose numbers have decreased to a certain level, principals are also part-time teachers because the schools' budgets do not allow for them to be full-time principals.

The other level of management in a school is the board of governors. Yet again, a group of individuals go into schools and give of their time on a part-time, voluntary basis. There is no recompense. Governors go in and give of their time freely to serve in schools.

What does all of that lead to? It leads to massive pressure on individuals to do two jobs. Then, we get reports that state that there are problems with the management of many schools. Is it any wonder? I do not want the public to think that, for some reason, full-time managers in schools cannot do their jobs. The simple truth is that, in many cases, they are being asked to do far too much, and we need to read the ETI report in that context.

That brings us to some very serious issues in education, and I believe that the Minister himself needs to look at those.

First of all, teachers have to take courses and train up before they are ever allowed to even apply for a lot of positions, especially those in senior management. If that is the case, one really has to ask this question: if there are failings in the system, how did those people get the qualifications to take on senior management positions in schools? Why is it that we are sitting with one in five in primary schools, which, according to the report, is not good, and two in five in our secondary sector, which, again according to report, is not good? If that is the case, are there serious failings with the way in which we train and qualify teachers to take on senior management positions in schools? I hope that the Minister will have another look at that, because according to the report, it is a big issue.

Is there a problem with the way in which senior management in schools is selected? I have to say, from my experience of all this, that it is a very long, drawn-out process. You go through a number of interviews with potential principals and then the boards, as they are today,

take over the process. I have seen things in that system that are very alarming. Is there a need to overhaul the process of selection and how we process and select senior management in schools?

To my mind, it not good enough to see reports that condemn the management in our schools. What I want to see is what the inspectorate and others will do to help out hard-pressed managers — VPs, principals, heads of departments, etc — who are under huge pressure to deliver education to our children —

Mr Speaker: Time is almost gone.

Mr Craig: — and to run our schools. The inspectorate has to stop coming down on those individuals with a hard hammer and, instead, help and assist them to become better.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Craig: I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I support the motion and thank the Members opposite for bringing the issue to the House today.

High-quality, good leadership and management are key in any organisation and, indeed, in our schools in helping to raise standards and in providing good-quality education for our children. The ETI report identifies areas of good performance and the many challenges for our education system. It realises the challenges facing the delivery of education in our schools today. As the Member opposite alluded to, the quality of leadership and management was not good enough in 22% of primary schools and 39% of post-primary schools. It is clear that there are problems, and more needs to be done to address the quality of management.

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

Schools and organisations that have problems have an adverse impact on pupils' learning, and that can leave those pupils with a poor outlook on their learning experience. The flip side to that is good, effective leadership, which can make a difference to the quality of pupils' learning experience. Schools must have a strong vision and place a strong emphasis on promoting learning and teaching attainment. Effective management of a school, where staff, the board of governors, parents, pupils and the wider community they serve work together, will promote best practice and demonstrate high levels of awareness. To help develop good leadership skills, they will encourage and empower staff.

What we need in our schools is effective, motivated management that is not afraid to challenge and, where necessary, take the appropriate steps. If a school leader has the commitment, drive and energy to deliver the ethos of the school, that will have a positive effect on others.

11.30 am

As recently as last Friday, I visited two schools in my area. I was delighted to be in the presence of such good leaders and principals. Both principals demonstrated to me that they give a strong personal commitment to key priorities such as improving learning and what they do to inspire and motivate staff, parents and the wider community.

Recognising the contribution of others and involving them in school activities is key. For example, one principal told me of a parent who they identified as being very good at art and who was brought into the school to work alongside the children. That demonstrates good leadership in schools, where they involve parents and the wider community.

Leadership is about setting out and inspiring others with a long-term strategic vision. The report highlights many good examples of improvements in the sector, and that has to be welcomed. Where many schools have overcome economic and social disadvantage — Mr Craig spoke about schools experiencing problems in that area — they have a clear focus on achieving value for their resources and raising standards to achieve good outcomes for all learners. Those organisations enable learners to develop their skills so that they can progress to a later stage of learning. However, the report clearly identifies the resource difficulties that schools experience.

The report highlights areas that could be given further consideration: the plans to review the notice period given to schools; the emphasis on a two-way process in Scotland and here; the more challenging approach in England; and the use of unannounced inspections as in other jurisdictions, such as Ireland, which aim to determine the effectiveness of education during a normal school day.

I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say on the findings of the paper. I concur with the Member across the House —

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

Ms Boyle: There are many good schools, and teachers find themselves in difficulties at this time.

Mr Kinahan: As ever, I very much welcome being able to speak on the subject and welcome the motion. I speak as a Member and not as the Vice-Chair of the Committee.

The inspectorate is phenomenally important to everything that happens in schooling. Before I get into that, I must say that, normally, I am mild, meek and discerning and do not go for a fight — the Minister may not necessarily agree; it is good to see him here — but, when I see something that needs changing or needs work, I will make sure there is a fight to make sure that we get for Northern Ireland what is needed. At the moment, most of our problems are from the point of view that we have one dogma, one line being forced on all of us. We get the impression that the Minister is not really listening and will go on regardless.

I will get back to the debate. Last week, I visited a school and saw exactly how inspection should work. It was a school with a new head, and, while he was taking over the reins and getting things to work, the inspectorate did not bother him. It let him have the time and place to get everything correct and in the right order. When it did come in, it discussed all the matters with the parents and teachers rather than finding holes and trying to pick the school apart. It was all done from a very constructive standpoint. That is how the inspectorate should work, and it should not be a body that terrifies everyone in schools.

On some more general points, it is vital that the inspectorate is seen as totally independent. That means being independent from the Department and the Minister. I propose that we should get the inspectorate to report to OFMDFM or some other body, so that it is separate from the dogma that is being pushed on us by the Education

Minister. We should also review how the inspectorate does things. You have already heard me say that it does some things extremely well. However, many see it as a blunt instrument or bludgeon used on their school. We need to view it as a school assessment body that works hand in hand with schools. This week, we all received a list of district assessors who will work with the schools. That is a step in the right direction. We need to have a nice assessment system but with a dynamic, stringent and strong control at the end and only at the end. We do not want to see it published all over the web until it is absolutely necessary.

Today, in the answer to a question from my colleague Mr Gardiner, we learn that 38 of the 59 people who are inspecting schools have no classroom experience. We need to make sure that more teachers are involved, and we need to look at having some system that includes teachers throughout so that everybody has faith in it. We know from the report that Northern Ireland is doing very well when it comes to A* to C grades; we are on 75.6% against the UK's 68.4%. However, we also know that we do appallingly at the other end. Only 32% of school leavers on free school meals achieve five GCSEs. That is on where the inspectorate needs to concentrate, but we need to move away from judging purely on GCSEs. As we have hinted today, we need to judge on leadership and management.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Member for giving way. Is he confident that good leadership is coming from the Department?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. Sometimes I am confident that we are getting good leadership. However, look at the principles of leadership, of which I will choose five: know your staff and look after their well-being; keep your followers informed; ensure that each task is understood, supervised and achieved; build a team; and know yourself and seek self-improvement. Those are just five of the 11 principles of leadership. The Department achieves the other six, but it does not set the example on those five. I am concerned that we are judging leadership more on the paper exercise of whether we do well against one another in league tables rather than by assessing properly the teachers and giving them the time, the place and, as we heard, the resources so that they can lead.

In some people, leadership is born; in many others, it has to be trained. That is the example that the Department should set. That means consulting, listening and bringing everyone together. That is what I ask the Minister to do from today. Today's debate is important. There is so much more that we would all like to say. We need to see more resources going to the schools so that they can do the leadership and the management. We need an independent inspectorate, and we need it to be a bit more softly-softly, with a whip at the end. We support the motion.

Mr Rogers: I thank the DUP for tabling the motion. I support it.

It is worth noting that the chief inspector's report states:

"We have a sound education system that serves many of its learners effectively."

It disappoints me that there is little acknowledgement of those who give us that sound education system and continue to deliver at the chalkface: our school staff. I mean not just our teachers but all the staff who help to create a stimulating learning environment for our children, despite, in some cases, experiencing poor classroom conditions and having to cope with half-baked ideas such as computer-based assessments and levels of progression, never mind increased bureaucracy. We all recognise the challenges facing us in difficult economic times, but a little acknowledgement, especially from the inspectorate, would go a long way.

Minister, you said last week that school leaders played a vital role in raising standards. You are right. Whether it is the classroom leader, the department leader or the school leader, leadership starts and ends in the classroom. That is where school leaders are born. You have to have the ability to ignite the minds of your audience, whether it be the four-year-old, the 14-year-old or the 44-year-old member of staff. We all remember teachers who made a significant impact on our life and possibly inspired us into various careers.

I am disappointed that the SDLP's amendment did not make the debate today. It was simply an additional line, basically saying:

"and support to further embed the use of effective monitoring and self-evaluation strategies to effect improvement".

If effective monitoring and evaluation strategies are embedded in classroom practice, the conversation about what constitutes good practice begins to effect improvement. Then, this conversation begins to occur naturally at a departmental level, and the development of a culture of learning for all extends from the classroom to the Department and throughout schools. We need monitoring and self-evaluating strategies embedded at senior leadership level. Certainly, the statistics of 30% in preschool settings, 22% in primary and 39% in post-primary settings where it is deemed not good enough would be significantly reduced.

I give credit to John Anderson from the ETI, who, in the report, stated that the report acknowledged that there was a "fragmented approach to leadership development". However, that is not necessarily the fault of schools. As one who, in the past, was responsible for trying to translate the DE guidance 'Together Towards Improvement' into practice, I know that it is no mean feat to embed that advice in an effective manner in the day-to-day running of a school.

Schools cannot do this work on their own. With the winding down of the boards and the promise of ESA, one of the first casualties was the boards' CASS service. How can one post-primary maths officer service the needs of all the schools in a board area? Is that a contributing factor to poor performance in maths departments? The report states that, in those departments:

"some heads of...departments take insufficient responsibility for leading improvement and sharing best practice in teaching, learning and assessment."

At a senior leadership level, the Professional Qualification for Headship (PQH) is a starting point. However, it needs to be supplemented with a master's-type study. Minister,

I urge caution when you acknowledge the wide range of skills required for school leadership, from pedagogy to financial management and from human resources to business-style leadership. You should not underestimate pedagogy. Our school leaders are leading a wide range of individual and unique talents. It is not an assembly line. Principals in Finland — I am not advocating this, mind you — are required by law to have been a teacher and must continue to be engaged in classroom teaching for at least two or three hours a week. This lends them credibility among their teachers, enables them to remain connected to their children and ensures that the pedagogical leadership is not merely rhetoric but a day-to-day reality.

If we want a first-class education system, we must invest in first-rate leadership development not only for new teachers but for all our staff. Some good experiments are taking place on a cross-border basis and can be seen in some of the work from the RTU and the Centre for Cross Border Studies. Good leadership and a strong system of self-evaluation in our schools make people feel better. If people feel better, they will perform better. If they perform better, leadership will become better, and, as a direct consequence, pupils' achievements will improve.

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

Mr Rogers: Minister, begin the conversation on what constitutes good practice; get monitoring and evaluation right in our schools; give the right support; ensure that, within ESA, we have a properly funded school —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Your time is up.

Mr Rogers: — development unit with pedagogy at the centre, and we will get the right result.

11.45 am

Mr Lunn: I welcome the motion today because it, at least, gives us an opportunity to discuss these things. When I first read the motion, I thought that it was unduly critical of teachers, governors and principals. However, in his opening remarks, Mr Craig clarified that that is certainly not the intention, so we are happy enough to support the motion.

Jonathan also referred to the onerous duties placed on teachers in terms of extra activities rather than just teaching. I completely agree with him. However, a lot of those problems are, indirectly, of our making. There is a lack of progress at a political level, and layer upon layer of reports, duties and initiatives come from the Department. Just this morning, I heard from a primary school headmaster who has been told by letter that he has to complete the assessment tests by Christmas because the computer glitch has apparently been sorted out. He has 400 pupils and is expected to complete those nonsense tests by Christmas. That is another one.

I will not go into a lot of statistics, but the ETI report is not entirely negative. There are quite a few positives in it as well, although I would not want to downplay in any way the obvious items that require attention. It states that the proportion of students achieving at least five GCSEs at grades A* to C, which is not a measure that I like to dwell on, went up from 64% to 73% in the reporting period. Leadership and management in post-primary English departments evaluated as good or better has gone up by 10%. In addition, the quality of strategic leadership

by governors was evaluated as good or better in 80% of primary schools. So, it is not all negative by any means, although that is not to say that I am happy with the situation or that things do not need to improve: clearly, they do. The Minister, in his Putting Pupils First statement last week, acknowledged quite a few areas where there was room for improvement and various initiatives are in place. Sir Robert Salisbury will, hopefully, report shortly on the common funding formula.

What I really want to talk about is the Minister's initiative to bring in the OECD to do a report on our entire system. That is a very worthwhile initiative that is to be welcomed. He has not given us the terms of reference for that yet, and we would like to know exactly what the OECD will be asked to do. However, he indicated that it would examine the whole structure of the system and that leadership and management would certainly come into it. He indicated that his Department would be examined like everybody else. In particular, I hope that the OECD will examine the situation with the inspectorate and the argument over whether it should be independent or happily attached to the Department. The current inspector and the previous one have both indicated that they are not unduly unhappy with the present arrangement. Some of us beg to differ, but that is for another day. I certainly look forward to hearing what an organisation as august as the OECD will have to say about our education system.

I wonder what we will do when we receive the report. If the OECD comes down heavily on the side of academic selection, says that it values our system and thinks that it works very well, will the Minister accept that? If it comes down the other way and says that academic selection is a monstrous anachronism that should have been done away with 40 years ago, will the supporters of academic selection accept that? I doubt it. The OECD may say that our separate school systems that educate Catholic and Protestant children separately until they are 18 are marvellous, and pigs might fly. I wonder what we will do with the heavyweight recommendations of an OECD report when they come through. I see that my time is nearly up, so I will have to leave that one hanging in the air.

For the meantime, I am glad to see a truly independent body having a look at our system, and I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say later in the debate.

Mrs Hale: Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this serious issue. I welcome the debate so far. I welcome the number — apologies; I shall get my speech in order.

I welcome the number of success stories highlighted in the report by the chief inspector of schools, but, like many, I was shocked but sadly not surprised that some children still fail to fulfil their potential. Outcomes need to improve for learners of English and maths across all sectors, especially those who come from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. Only 32% of school leavers entitled to free school meals achieve grades A to C in five subjects. How can we turn that round? How do we ensure that those who need the greatest support can fulfil their real potential? One of the answers is to support and inspire both the current and the next generation of educational leaders and managers, whilst ensuring that current inspectorate processes and mandate reflect the needs of learners and those responsible for management in the education system.

Like my party colleagues who tabled today's motion, I strongly believe that more needs to be done to improve leadership and management across all sectors, in particular post-primary, where the quality was not good enough in approximately 39% of schools inspected. That does not come without many challenges. All leaders face significant challenges in managing budgets and ensuring viability. While trying to look after the interests of their organisations, they must ensure that money being spent gives added value to our learners. They must be equipped to make sound, professional decisions, while ensuring that they have the foresight and ability to provide accountability and to support change.

Although the chief inspector's report highlights the issue of inadequate leadership and management, I find it difficult to accept that it takes almost three years to deal with an underachieving senior manager. If a senior manager is unable to make the grade, procedures must support that person to improve but not to the extent that it puts learners, staff and their organisation at risk. If you want to improve the level and capabilities of leadership and senior management, you must start by ensuring that those who are inadequate for the job are moved on. That is met by creating a system in which leaders and staff are supported in their role and are appropriate for the role into which they move.

A recent report by PricewaterhouseCoopers showed that a number of anomalies were contributing to lower levels of management and leadership skills in the schooling system. Some 57% of principals in Northern Ireland had not received formal leadership training prior to appointment. Key reasons for not accessing that type of training while in post included availability, awareness of training and lack of time to undertake professional development. Some 63% of teachers who had recently taken up a new leadership or management position felt that they had a lack of confidence in carrying out their role and had been parachuted into the job. The report also highlighted the need to encourage younger professionals and females to come forward into leadership and management positions. There was also the need to cut bureaucracy and administration and the worries about financial management and accountability, while striking a balance in personal life. This issue was especially prevalent for principals who manage small schools and have to strike a balance between teaching and management time. The report underpinned that, if we want to improve leadership and senior management skills in the education sector, we must be sure to challenge the stigma associated with leadership and management jobs, while ensuring that we break down the barriers preventing rounded professionals from coming into those roles.

As I stated at the beginning of my speech, we must take a holistic approach to the issue to ensure that we raise leadership and management skills and standards. In doing so, it would be wrong not to consider our inspection process. How can we be critical of teachers, leaders and senior managers if we do not ensure that the current inspection process is fit for purpose and question the position and status of the inspectorate as part of the Education Department?

In 2010, the ETI moved to a new risk-based approach to determine how often a school should be inspected. I must say that I found it difficult to determine when the ETI finds

a school or its pupils are at risk, and I strongly believe that the current approach stifles real leadership and management by prioritising compliance over innovation. It also brings me on to ask whether the Education and Training Inspectorate should be independent. Like other Members in the Chamber today, I believe that an independent inspectorate would have a stronger hand in holding government and the education services to account. I also believe that, if we want to prioritise the improvement of leadership and middle management, having a fully independent organisation to monitor that will encourage the Department of Education and the Minister —

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

Mrs Hale: — to tackle this growing concern.

I ask that the Minister of Education also consider the need to have the ETI as an independent organisation to be critical of government on the one hand, while making sure that it can ensure best practice for the needs of learners and leaders, free from departmental politics —

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

Mrs Hale: — and not being used as a private army.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. The need for strong, innovative leadership in our education system has been clear for some time, and I am pleased that the DUP recognises that we need to implement various education reforms so that we can build the world-class system that it has talked about for so long.

Outstanding leadership has invariably emerged as a key characteristic of outstanding schools. There can no longer be any doubt that those seeking quality education must ensure its presence and that the development of potential leaders must be given high priority. It is said that, if you scratch the surface of an excellent school, you are likely to find an excellent leader; peer into a failing school, and you will find weak leadership. To learn well, students need access to high-quality instruction and a well-crafted curriculum. After that, they benefit most from the positive effects of strong school leadership. Case studies of exceptional schools, particularly those that succeed beyond expectations, provide detailed portraits of leadership. Large-scale quantitative studies of schooling conclude that the effects of leadership on student learning are small but educationally significant. In these studies, as in case studies, leadership effects appear to be mostly indirect; that is, leaders influence student learning by helping to promote visions and goals and by ensuring that resources and processes are in place to enable teachers to teach well.

Efforts to improve educational leadership should build on the foundation of the well-documented and well-accepted knowledge about leadership that already exists. We know that school leadership is most successful when it is focused on teaching and learning and that it is necessary but not sufficient for school improvement. We understand that leadership can take different forms in different contexts. We understand some of the mechanisms through which educational leadership has its effects. We should promote strong, creative leadership that ultimately increases educational success for all. Research suggests that, in the past, principals have been able to succeed, at least partially, by simply carrying out directives from

central administrators. Such management by principals is no longer enough to meet today's educational challenges. Instead, principals must assume a greater leadership role. Good leadership envisages goals, sets standards and communicates in such a way that all those directly or indirectly associated know where their school is going and what it means to the community.

We all have a responsibility to show leadership when it comes to enhancing the educational outcomes of our young people. Sinn Féin puts the spotlight on standards with its zero tolerance for the stagnant belief that, in previous years, we somehow had a world-class education system. Various parties extolled that education system as world-class, yet thousands fell through the net. Slowly but surely, we have broken down the toxic culture of toleration. The discourse has changed, and today's motion symbolises such change in the mindset of most education commentators. Sinn Féin set about the task of putting the child at the centre of our system. No longer could we justify putting the needs of institutions ahead of those of our young people.

Mr Craig: I thank the Member for giving way. I listened with interest to what he had to say about the so-called failing system that we have. If it is such a failing system, I need to remind the Member that his party has been in control of this failing system for the past five to 10 years. To be honest, I sat through the previous Assembly mandate and listened to the wrong debate taking place in the Chamber time and time again. While others fixated on the 11-plus, no Minister ever tackled the real issue: the one third of our education system that fails our children. I am glad that the Minister has reversed that —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. That intervention was rather long.

Mr Craig: Thank you.

Mr Hazzard: I will go on to my point that, during a recent six-hour debate on ESA and the need for reform in our schools, only one Member on the Benches opposite referred to Protestant working-class boys. Those on that side of the House need to reflect on that. Indeed, political unionism needs to ask serious questions of itself when it comes to showing leadership on educational reform. In recent months, that has been particularly true of the Ulster Unionist Party. I had a fair idea that there was something odd about UUP political analysts from the first debate that I attended in the House. In April, Mr Kinahan was speaking to a motion calling for the establishment of a cross-departmental working group to explore ways in which Lough Neagh could be utilised in the best interests of the public when he said:

"I am concerned that hidden behind the motion is ... stealth towards a united Ireland ... driven by Marxist and communist philosophies." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 74, p35, col2].

Unfortunately for our young people, the UUP's McCarthyite double vision and contribution to education debate has been just as decrepit, as Mr Kinahan and his colleague Mrs Dobson have been unable to show political leadership on various education issues. Instead, they have busied themselves with attempts to spread fear and confusion. Despite calls during the summer from his party leader for

legislation on ESA to be introduced, Mr Kinahan stood in the Chamber and described ESA legislation as:

*“filled to the brim with hidden intentions”. —
[Official Report, Bound Volume 78, p190, col2].*

He also said that it was “chicanery” and a one-way stop to a united Ireland. Just last week, Mrs Dobson spoke of her fears of hidden Sinn Féin agendas and that a support service for boards of governors would be a Sinn Féin-manipulated entity. The UUP needs to get real and demonstrate that it is fit to show leadership and to work to improve educational outcomes for all our young people.

Similarly, when it comes to the SDLP's educational analysis, we once again see the strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. The SDLP needs to stop riding two horses: it is either for or against academic selection, and it either wants to address education underachievement or it does not. It can show leadership or continue to flounder —
[*Interruption.*]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Hazzard: During an Adjournment debate on post-primary provision in my South Down constituency, the SDLP's education spokesperson asked the House whether all the things could be done in one school.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is almost up.

Mr Hazzard: Yes, they can, in all-ability schools to meet the needs of all of our children.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Time is up. I remind Members to try to stay on the subject, otherwise you might get no marks.

12.00 noon

Mrs Dobson: How do you follow that? I thank the Member who previously spoke for making all of my colleague's points again.

No one in the Assembly will have failed to notice the banner headlines in October that pronounced failure and poor leadership in our schools. We must first recognise the schools that have shown improvements and whose inspection reports showed strong leadership and vision. Nevertheless, it is to the underperformance that the motion refers.

The inspection reports were, indeed, critical of school leadership and raised many more serious concerns, but I am certain that, in many cases, principals would be prepared to concede that their inspection reports would improve were it not for the continual conveyor belt of conflicting policies and regulations coming to them from the Department. Budgetary concerns, with schools continually asked to raise standards in a climate of falling budgets, are totally and wholly unsustainable. Those concerns, coupled with, among many others, the need to respond to potentially far-reaching area planning proposals, can only lead to the deflection of the leadership roles within the schools.

Our principals and teachers are highly dedicated to their roles and will always strive to do their absolute best for their school. If, however, in the minority of cases, they fail to do so, that must be clearly illustrated in their inspection report, and swift action needs to be taken by the Department to help bring the school into line for the sake of the pupils and, indeed, the staff. However, when

the Department is directly responsible, who will bring it into line? Principals being hampered by the Department when attempting to fulfil their aim can be directly linked to the inspection reports being debated here today. If we were to turn the tables and ask principals to rate the leadership and performance of the Department, we would hear a damning verdict. We would hear of the continual and unrelenting pressures being placed on the principals and boards of governors — pressures that, many believe, have gone past breaking point and are only set to increase in the coming months.

It has been made clear many times in the Chamber that there is an urgent need to address the issue of underachievement among working-class Protestant boys, yet the chief inspector's report points out some disturbing statistics. Only 32% of school leavers entitled to free school meals achieve GCSE grades A* to C in five subjects, including English and maths. That is one of the reasons why the Ulster Unionist Party proposed a pupil bonus scheme, as announced by my party colleague Danny Kinahan at our party conference, through which schools would get additional money principally on the basis of the number of pupils who qualify for free school meals.

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Dobson: Yes, I will give way.

Mr Storey: I know that the Member has a question tabled for the Minister about the Dickson plan. Will she outline how, from her perspective, working-class Protestant boys in the Craigavon area will be protected and provided for under the Dickson plan, given the current uncertainty that some schools within the Dickson plan are mooting in the local papers in her area?

Mrs Dobson: I thank you. That is a concern, but, as you know, I am continually fighting for all of the pupils of Upper Bann.

I will go back to my speech. Perhaps the Minister will explain what direct assistance his Department gives to schools, especially in areas where pupils struggle to attain basic English and maths skills.

It is right and proper that schools undergo a rigorous inspection process, and, where deficiencies are found, they should be thoroughly and swiftly resolved. However, the inspection process must take into account the full picture of the pressure under which school leaders find themselves. The Department cannot, on one hand, call for higher standards and, on the other, provide principals and teachers with a much harsher climate in which to deliver that change. If the Department expects inspection reports to improve in that climate, it must stand up and recognise its accountability when that fails to be the case.

Perhaps the Minister could take a look at the Department for Employment and Learning's track record. Since the consolidation of the six regional further education colleges, we have heard that 80% of provision has been evaluated as being good or better. The quality of teaching has been deemed good or better in 81% of cases. Perhaps the Department of Education could learn lessons from the FE sector, which is, in general, performing well.

In conclusion, I echo the sentiments of many in the education profession when I say that it is the Department of Education that is failing our schools and, ultimately, our young people, not the other way around. It is failing

in its budgets and its policies and in providing the vision necessary to look towards a 21st century education system for the children of Northern Ireland.

The Department of Education has a responsibility to ensure the maintenance of public confidence in school management. To do that, the public will need to have the confidence that the Department is ready, willing and able to do its part, not sitting idly by and leaving principals and staff to do all the heavy lifting. Only then shall we stop reading banner headlines about poor leadership and failing schools.

Mr D Bradley: Tá áthas orm páirt a ghlacadh sa díospóireacht thábhachtach seo faoi thuairisc an chigire. I am pleased to participate in the debate on the chief inspector's report and thank the Members opposite for tabling the motion.

There is no doubt that we have much to be proud of in our education system. However, we are not in a position, nor should we ever be, to rest on our laurels. The headlines coming out of the report, especially those to do with the quality of school leadership, are extremely alarming: 22% of primary schools and 39% of post-primary schools are characterised as being not good enough.

That is especially important when we consider that leadership and management are pivotal elements in ensuring that each and every child in our education system gets the maximum benefit from their time at school. School principals and management need to promote a culture of continuous self-improvement among themselves at managerial level as well as among their staff in the classrooms.

I welcome the significant improvement of 10 percentage points that has been made in the leadership of primary schools, but there is still quite a bit of room for improvement there. I hope that, in the two years before the next report is due, that gap will narrow even more.

The chief inspector notes that continuous self-evaluation is key to sustained improvement and that it needs to be robust and rigorous at all levels of management. She says that the embedding of a culture of self-evaluation should become an inherent part of a school's work. Mr Rogers mentioned that earlier.

The report states that the combination of self-evaluation with good use of data is seen as a key element in bringing about improvement across primary schools, post-primary schools and even FE colleges. Successful schools are those that have embedded and combined critical self-evaluation and the relevant use of data.

Therefore, there is plenty of good practice in schools, but the question is whether it is being disseminated. Poor performance requires early intervention, before a situation gets to an extent that it cannot be recovered. It is not about statistics, although there are plenty of statistics in the report. It is about children and their life chances. In a situation in which 39% of post-primary leadership is not good enough, we have to look at our programmes for preparing teachers for leadership.

The Minister of Education made a statement to the Assembly last week in which he generalised quite a bit about what he intended to do to improve the situation, but we did not get much detail nor did we get a timescale. We need more detail and more urgency. Our children deserve the best, and they deserve it now.

There are structural issues that contribute to the difficulties. Among those are the selective system and the nature of the schools estate. In many cases, selection is draining non-selective schools of their best talent, with the result that some schools are left with an extremely challenging cohort but without the necessary role models to have a strong influence on raising achievement.

In the interim, the Minister should consider measures to deal with the leadership deficit. He should review headship qualifications and other managerial qualifications; ensure that leaders and managements have the time to lead and manage; intensify the dissemination of good practice, of which there are plenty of examples; and use successful school leaders as mentors to a greater extent than is the case presently. Such support and assistance is worthwhile and is proven to work.

The idea that a principal is immediately ready for any challenge when he or she is appointed needs to be questioned. Continuous professional development is necessary for the classroom teacher, and it is also necessary for the principal.

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

Mr D Bradley: As regards Mr Hazzard's points about the SDLP, he should remember —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Sorry; time is up.

Mr D Bradley: — that Ms Ruane claimed to have ended the 11-plus. Yet, we still have tests.

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

Mr D Bradley: In fact, we have more tests now than we ever had before.

Mr McNarry: When I read school inspection reports and the sensational headline that the quality of leadership and management is not good enough in many schools — 22% of primary schools and 39% of post-primary schools — I ask this simple question: who inspects the inspectorate? If the inspectorate is to be used as the tool to deliver the Minister's school rationalisation policy, we should know how well-qualified the inspectorate is for that task. How much recent classroom experience has the inspectorate? I ask that question because 21 of 59 inspectors have been appointed in the past five years, which indicates that 38 inspectors cannot have had either classroom or school management experience in the past five years. So, almost two thirds of the inspectorate have experience that is five years out of date. That is an issue that needs to be addressed.

I, like everyone in the House, am for better schools; schools that are rooted in, and relate to, their communities; schools where excellence is the norm; and schools that are housed in new, state-of-the-art buildings. The decisions that shape the future of our schools must be evidence based. We must know how valid the comments of those providing the evidence really are. An expert witness in court must demonstrate his or her fitness to comment by showing how relevant and recent their qualifications and experience are. Inspectors are like expert witnesses. Much will be based on their conclusions. Their recommendations will affect the lives of large numbers of teachers, principals and pupils. Let us parade their credentials publicly for all to

see and evaluate, so that we can have the confidence that we need to make widespread and far-reaching change.

The motion quite rightly calls on the Minister to:

"give greater leadership and ... increase confidence in the system of schools management."

Effectively, it could say that the Minister needs to increase confidence in his Department and call on schools management to follow that confidence. We are dealing with underperformance all round. The motion calls into question the qualities of some teachers. That quality is left up in the air, which — like it or not — creates doubts in parents' minds about opportunities potentially being neglected and, therefore, impacting on their children. This is not a good situation to be in.

Pointing the finger is all very well, but who is it being pointed at? Are underperforming teachers new to the job or have they been in place long term? Either way, how has the problem arisen? How have poor teachers been appointed and how have poor teachers remained in position? Parents would like answers to those questions because this clearly indicates that the system is unable, so far, to clear its own fault lines. Just like the poor reporters and the poor managers being exposed in the BBC, parents have the right to know that poor teachers and poor school managers are not only being exposed but, as a result of this report, are being moved out and cleared out of the system and that that is being done as a matter of confidence. After all, we are talking about standards. If the standards are not met, they are failing the pupils. That is a matter that we cannot stand over. I welcome the report, and I support the motion.

12.15 pm

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá mé tiomanta d'fheabhsú sna caighdeáin oideachais fud fad na hearnála oideachais. I am committed to an improvement in educational standards across the whole education sector. In all my Department's responsibilities and functions, my efforts and my Department's efforts are there to drive up standards.

Today, we are debating the most recent chief inspector's report, and it is useful to set out what exactly the chief inspector said in that report. The report is an analysis of the schools that were inspected. It does not extrapolate the figures across our entire schools estate in any way, and Members should bear that in mind. The chief inspector states that our education system provides good value but with too much variation and reports that 42% of the primary schools inspected are very good or outstanding and that a high proportion of teaching and learning is good or better in primary and special schools. The report states that the proportion of school leavers achieving five GCSEs or equivalent has risen to 73% and that 80% of achievements in standards in the preschools inspected were good or better. Over 80% of primary school leavers achieved the expected level in both English and maths; 82% and 83% respectively. Through the school improvement policy, more robust action is being taken to follow up on inspection reports and ensure that schools receive the support that they require to address areas of improvement and achieve the best possible outcomes. The report states that 81% of schools that were inspected have

improved by at least one performance level in follow-up inspections and that, in 82% of primary schools and just over 76% of post-primary schools, lessons observed were evaluated as good or better.

There are also negatives. The chief inspector states that our education system provides good value but with too much variation. There is a need to improve the outcomes in literacy and numeracy at Key Stage 2 and GCSE English and mathematics, particularly for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Improvement in the quality of leadership and management is required across the phases. In around 39% of post-primary schools inspected and 22% of primary schools inspected, the standard was evaluated as not good enough. Leadership development is fragmented and does not respond quickly or effectively enough to the changing needs of our education system, a point that I touched on in my most recent statement to the Assembly in response to the education report. This area does need improvement. My Department acknowledges that, and we will be improving upon it.

There is a need to improve the effectiveness of the boards of governors. In 20% of primary schools and 30% of post-primary schools —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The Minister will resume his seat. I ask Members to please refrain from conversation when the Minister is making his speech.

Mr O'Dowd: — transitional arrangements for children and young people between organisations at key stages need a stronger focus to ensure no regression. Post-primary schools are not as successful at exiting formal intervention as their primary school counterparts, and use of ICT needs improving in 50% of post-primary schools.

That sets out a picture of where areas have improved and where we require challenges to improve those. I listened intently to Members speak during the debate, and there have been some informed contributions that require further analysis and study. Some contributions have no basis whatsoever. I ask Members to reflect on and, indeed, study the motion that they are being asked to vote on because some of them appear to be voting on a different motion. The final section of the motion reads:

"and calls on the Minister of Education to give greater leadership"

— I have no difficulty with that challenge —

"and to introduce more stringent measures to increase confidence in the system of schools management."

It is not to introduce more stringent measures to increase the confidence of school managers but to increase confidence:

"in the system of schools management."

The dictionary definition of stringent is: "strict, precise and exacting". I take from that that the motion calls on me to introduce more robust policies to give the public and the Assembly more confidence in schools management. Perhaps I read the motion wrongly. Some Members seemed to be asking me, as Minister, to introduce more stringent measures to increase confidence in something else. Members should read the motion.

Members across the Chamber stood up and criticised me — quite rightly; I am open to criticism and challenge. Members are quite right to do so; that is their role. They criticised policies and budgets, which is fair enough. However, the vast majority of our schools and people in leadership positions are doing well or improving. They work under the same circumstances as everyone else. So why do we still have questions about the leadership in some schools, and why do we still have poor teaching? That cannot be blamed entirely on the Minister of Education of the day or the Department of Education. I have a responsibility that I take very seriously. Every policy proposal that I bring forward is targeted at improving educational outcomes for young people. However, Members will have to accept that, every now and again, the fault lies with an individual in a classroom, in a principal's office or around a board of governors' table. Those individuals have to be held to account.

Mrs Dobson asked who holds the Minister to account. It is her job to hold me to account. She, along with 106 MLAs, the Education Committee, the media and, ultimately, the electorate holds me to account. I am rightly held to account. So why should we not have an inspection system that holds our schools to account? We entrust our young people to our education system and schools. We allow those institutions to help to shape those young people for the future. Thankfully, the vast majority of our teachers and school leaders provide them with that chance in life.

Perhaps it is an electoral ploy, and Members do not want to criticise teachers because teachers have a vote. However, are Members — on the Ulster Unionist Party Benches, in particular — seriously suggesting that there is no such thing as a bad teacher or a bad leader? Of course there is. I will tell you who is most critical of poor leadership and teaching: fellow leaders and fellow teachers. When I am out and about in schools, talking to professionals on the ground, it is constantly raised with me that we need a more robust system to deal with failing teachers and leaders.

Brenda Hale's speech, in fairness to her, requires further study and analysis. It raised a number of interesting points as to how we can tackle those matters. She referred to a PricewaterhouseCoopers report that requires further analysis. We need to know why younger people, in particular, are not coming forward for leadership positions. What are the barriers in their way? Why can we not get the best and the brightest to come forward for school leadership positions? If there are barriers in their way, let us remove them. You are not giving any benefit to the Minister or the Department, but by denying that there is a small minority of poor teachers and leaders, you are letting down the young people under their charge and denying those young people's rights to a good and proper education system. That is a challenge for us all.

As regards policies on the way forward and how we deal with these matters, every policy that I bring forward is about raising educational attainment. As the inspector's report states, we are improving and getting better. However, we are not getting there quickly enough. We are not achieving the outcomes that young people deserve quickly enough, and I have no difficulty in continuing to examine different ways to go forward. As was said, I have introduced OECD. It will come into our education system, and its terms of reference will be made known to the Education Committee. I have no doubt that it will

engage with the Education Committee and with individual Members. OECD is coming in to examine our education system in its totality, and it will present challenges to us all. The question was asked: what if OECD comes in and refers to academic selection as the best thing ever or refers to the number of policies that different parties have? That is the challenge for us all and the big question that we will all have to face.

As I set out in my previous statement, I want to bring in OECD to examine our education system because I believe that we are far too insular, that we need to internationalise our education debate and that we need to learn from the best. Let the OECD come in, do its job and report. Then, let us, as an Assembly and as a society, analyse its responses.

The leadership programmes in place are good but could be better. We have had difficulty in identifying potential leaders early, bringing them through the system and ensuring that they have enough confidence in themselves and the system to move forward and apply for leadership positions. Mr Bradley challenged me on the fact that my speech was light on detail. I want to analyse potential programmes further before I give details. However, we acknowledge that the leadership programmes need to be improved. The proof of the pudding is in the inspector's report.

I also put out a challenge on our negotiating machinery. Again, this comes from a challenge placed on me by teachers and school leaders and, again, Mrs Hale referred to that in her speech. It can take up to three years before a final conclusion on the future of poor performing teachers and leaders is reached. That is far too long, and the machinery involved is too cumbersome. We do not assist the teacher or leader under focus by having that long, drawn-out system, and we certainly do not help the cohort of young people under the responsibility of that teacher or leader during that time. However, negotiations between the trade unions and employers will be required to improve that. My message is quite simple: those negotiations need to come to a conclusion sooner rather than later for the benefit of teachers, school leaders and pupils as we move into the future.

Members, there is no easy solution to any of these matters. Mr Craig, who opened the debate, referred to the fact that a lot of responsibilities fall on boards of governors who are voluntary and part-time. I have acknowledged the important role that they play in education many, many times in the Chamber. However, that is where the current legislation states that the responsibility lies. Time and time again in the Chamber, Members from across the different Benches insisted that we allow the autonomy of boards of governors to remain, and I have never challenged that — it should remain. However, we have to ensure that boards of governors are empowered or given the training or support to make the difficult decisions that they have to make on human resource issues in those schools. Decisions on personnel are never easy. Regardless of the size of the business you may be involved in, dealing with personnel matters is the most difficult issue. However, we have to ensure that boards of governors have the ability to do that. I have set in motion training and support for our boards of governors, backed up with financial support, and they will have to make such decisions. The new ESA body will be in place to ensure that they are backed up in such matters.

In conclusion, I acknowledge that our school system has to deal with one of the most difficult budgets in modern

education history. I have never said that the education budget was the right budget to deliver our education system. However, when I look at the performances across our schools estate; when I see schools, including those in socially deprived areas, achieving excellent results and producing well-rounded and well-informed young school leavers who value themselves and others around them; and when I see those who give leadership in the principal's office and in the classroom, I know that we simply cannot turn round and say that the budget is bad, therefore the results will be bad. The two do not necessarily equate. The previous inspection report from two years ago was carried out at a time when education was relatively well financed, and there were similar findings then. It is, therefore, not simply budgetary.

12.30 pm

We are talking about the need to improve leadership. I accept my role in that as Minister, but we are also talking about leadership in the principal's office and around the table of the board of governors, and from our Members and our community. It may be uncomfortable for Members to hear this, but we have to accept that, occasionally, we have bad teachers and bad leaders. We have to put mechanisms in place to deal with that matter more effectively and efficiently than we do currently.

Mr Storey: At the outset, I thank all Members who took part in the debate. I thank them for the support that they are going to give to the motion and for the contributions that have been made. I will not bore you by repeating them, but, in the course of my comments, I may refer to them. I also thank the Minister for being in attendance and for the contribution that he has made to the debate.

We welcome the opportunity to have in the House a debate that notes the inspectorate's report. The inspectorate's report is always very important in giving us an overview and assessment of our education system. There is much to celebrate within our system, despite the confusing and conflicting messages that come from the Sinn Féin spokesperson on education. I will come back to his comments later.

There is much to celebrate in our education system. There is something that we need to do, but I think that the House is the classic example of how you do not do it. We have an inherent inability to talk something up, but we always seem to be capable of talking it down. Every party in the House does it, and members of my party are not exempt. If we find that the opposition says something, we will always make sure that we find something critical to say about it. That seems to be the nature of the beast that we have created here. I think we need to stay relatively within the realm of facts and of what is the case. We welcome the fact that the statistics from the report highlight that over 75% of the institutions inspected, in all sectors, are in the good or the better category. That is to be welcomed. If political parties were being assessed by the inspectorate, I doubt whether some in the House would ever come anywhere near the 75% mark. However, the electorate has made its choice on that one.

I come now to children from disadvantaged areas and the community that continues to underperform against the current benchmark of five GCSEs. It has to be said that, despite a decade of control by the Minister's party, a period in which we have had much of the rhetoric and

repeats of the same mantras, we still have a situation in which only 32% of children leave school with five GCSEs. The initiatives that seem to deliver are often discredited or starved of funds.

That brings me to an issue around initiatives. Schools are tired of initiatives. We had a circular from the Department — I think it was from 1993 — that called for less bureaucracy in our system. There has been more bureaucracy in our system since that circular was sent out to our schools than we have had in the history of our education system. We have to recognise that we desperately need to free our teachers to allow them to do what they were employed to do, and that is to teach in the classroom. Last week, I spent some time in schools. I will be honest and say that it is depressing to see the number of forms, reports, assessments and various documents that teachers have to fill in. By the way, they also have to teach in the classroom.

The inspectorate report referred to ICT in our schools. That is a very concerning issue. Considering the significant investment that we have made in ICT, to have 50% of schools in the "less than good" category for their use of ICT is very worrying. Between 2000 and 2011, £470 million was spent, and I am not even going to include the figure for Northern Ireland literacy assessments (NILAs) and Northern Ireland numeracy assessments (NINAs), because we know the ongoing crisis around those. However, the teachers are not to blame for that. Let us be very clear: the teachers are not to blame. It was a badly thought-out process. A bad set of arrangements was put in place to bring in the contracts, and we moved from one contract to two contracts. I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but let me say that, three years down the road, we will be in the same place, because the contracts will probably be mismanaged by the Department. Perhaps we will have four contracts by that time, and the system —

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Member give way?

Mr Storey: Yes, I will give way.

Mr O'Dowd: In three years' time, the Member may be the Minister of Education. Is he predicting that he is going to mismanage the contracts?

Mr Storey: I am just hedging my bets.

We need initiatives that can clearly deliver. Does anybody really have any confidence? Whether or not we in the House have any confidence, do teachers have confidence? Let us ask the people who are delivering in the system. That is the issue. That is why the motion talks about confidence. We have to have confidence in those who are leaders, but our leaders have to have confidence that there is a system in which they can participate.

A significant number of schools appear to demonstrate failing in leadership and management, yet there has been huge investment in leadership training and almost 2,000 staff are now accredited with the school leadership qualification, as was referred to by Mr Rogers. However, we still have coming to the Education Committee this week a paper on the school workforce review. When was that initiative announced? In 2008. What does the Department have to tell us on that very important initiative? It is anticipated that the review will be completed by 31 March — wait for it, and hold on to your seat — 2013. From 2008 to 2013. Please, let us have some reality in

the way in which initiatives are brought to our schools and commented on by the inspectorate.

What about the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS)? The report highlights the need for CASS to be more flexible in its support for newly qualified teachers and calls for more training and support for teachers, at a time, as some Members said, when CASS has been decimated through the introduction of a vacancy control policy. From 2006 until now, I have repeatedly highlighted that in the House. Some people will probably say that I am a cynic on the issue, but why was vacancy control introduced? It was an attempt to force us all into accepting an ESA. That is not the best way in which to do policy. A few weeks ago, the Minister admitted in the House that that will probably be looked at when ESA is brought into existence. I have said in the House, as he knows, that the first thing that ESA will have to do is employ more staff. Why? Because we have cut and cut and cut away, and the support mechanisms for our schools and teachers are not there in the way in which they should be. We need to look seriously at CASS. *[Interruption.]* Does the Member want to intervene? Go ahead.

Mr Lunn: I am glad to hear the Chairman mention ESA. Does that mean that his party has now withdrawn its opposition to ESA and will give it a fair wind?

Mr Storey: Perhaps I am in a different House from the Member, but I do think that the legislation has had its Second Stage and is coming to the Committee for consideration. I am quite open to scrutiny of ESA, as we scrutinise the Bill over the next number of weeks.

On improving the efficiency and effectiveness of boards of governors, the report highlights the fact that 20% of primary schools and 34% of post-primary schools have issues with boards of governors. If that is the case, why is it that an element of governors out there, particularly those in the voluntary grammar sector, is very concerned about the way in which governors are being treated by the Bill that the Member referred to? Yet, the way in which they have organised their board of governors is an example as to the way in which they deliver for their particular schools. Irrespective of what you think of assessment, irrespective of what you think of the transfer debate, there are a number of schools in the maintained sector and in the non-denominational sector that have been very good at putting together boards of governors who are very capable of giving exceptionally good leadership to their schools. That should not be put in the bin and ignored; it should be recognised.

The Programme for Government sets 49% for the target of five GCSEs for disadvantaged groups by 2014-15. At present, we only have 32%.

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

Mr Storey: The report highlights the good outcomes of, for example, Achieving Belfast and Achieving Londonderry, yet the Minister has told this House that he has no plans to introduce similar programmes elsewhere.

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

Mr Storey: Let us use good practice, and let us use initiatives that work. I support the motion and thank Members for their contributions.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly acknowledges the recent report by the chief inspector of schools into the leadership and management of schools in Northern Ireland; notes, with concern, the underperformance of some managers and teachers; and calls on the Minister of Education to give greater leadership and to introduce more stringent measures to increase confidence in the system of schools management.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately after the lunchtime suspension. I, therefore, propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time.

The sitting was suspended at 12.41 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Questions 5 and 14 have been withdrawn. Question 5 requires a written answer.

European City of Sport 2013

1. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the funding her Department has allocated for Lisburn as the 2013 European City of Sport. (AQO 2841/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I thank the Member for his question. I would like to acknowledge the recent success of Lisburn in being designated European City of Sport for 2013. Since the designation, Sport NI, which is responsible for the development of sport, including the distribution of funding, has been engaged with Lisburn City Council to discuss opportunities for partnership working during the 2013 European City of Sport year. A working group, which includes Sport NI, has now been established to further develop plans and initial ideas, which, I understand, are still at an early stage of development. Until that process is completed, it will not be possible for me to comment on what funding or other form of support might be considered for Lisburn as the 2013 European City of Sport. However, I have to say that it is a good news story for Lisburn and, indeed, the entire North.

Mr Craig: I thank the Minister for that full answer. I note that she agrees with me that it is a huge achievement for Lisburn to be European City of Sport. It is something to be acknowledged. We owe a lot of that to the sporting groups in Lisburn; the likes of Salto Gymnastics Club and the National Badminton Centre, which brought Olympic teams to the city. The Department is taking part in that working group. A number of key events will take place in 2013.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member must come to his question.

Mr Craig: Will the Minister look in her Department's budget to ensure that funding is given to Lisburn that will bring it up to a similar level to that of the City of Culture events that are taking place in Londonderry?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I would just like to remind the Member that over £30 million has been put into Derry City of Culture by the entire Executive. I do not know whether he is requesting the same amount of funding for Lisburn; maybe he is asking for that — £29.75 million would be welcome says the Member.

It is important that the badminton and gymnastics groups have been acknowledged, particularly for the work that they did for the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics. They are now world venues for events to occur. It is important to support sport and, indeed, what it produces. I am encouraged and delighted that Lisburn has received

that status. I will be encouraged by the reports that I will receive. I will look wherever I can to try and give as much support as possible, but it will certainly not be in the region of £30-plus million. I do not think that that is realistic at all.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. Has the Minister received any request from Lisburn City Council for funding for the 2013 European City of Sport?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as ucht a ceiste. I thank the Member for her question. I have not received any request, apart from the one that Jonathan made a matter of seconds ago, when he invited me to put in millions of pounds. I have not received a request formally, although I imagine that it will certainly be on my desk fairly soon.

It is important. Lisburn, like many other cities, towns and villages, has neighbourhood renewal areas and areas at risk within its boundaries. It is important, particularly when we are talking about new initiatives, that we provide additionality and add value and facilities to cities, towns and villages that, in the past, have experienced a lack of investment. I congratulate Lisburn on its success and look forward to hearing what its future plans are and what impact it may have for my budget.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for her comments and her answers so far. It is important that we all congratulate Lisburn and share in its success, because it is a tremendous achievement. Although I appreciate that it is in the early stages and there are various partnerships and other things being worked out, I would ask the Minister whether a programme cannot evolve in the Department to feed into those partnerships. Such an achievement is a major challenge in itself. Lisburn may require a bit of extra help. I would certainly welcome, as would a lot of people, a proactive approach by the Department.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I agree with the Member. The budgets were set some years ago, and it is hard to predict, from one comprehensive spending review period to another, what new opportunities will emerge. All Departments need to be flexible not only to assist such bids, which benefit the entire vicinity, but to ensure that opportunities are always there, particularly those for match funding. Groups and sports clubs are often told that they need match funding, but when they go to one Department, more often than not, they are passed to another one. We need flexibility to ensure partnership working, because that comes with the budget, and an outcome for people, because we are all here to deliver outcomes.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mitchel McLaughlin is not in his place for question 2.

Football

3. **Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding and support is available for young footballers who wish to progress to professional football in Great Britain. (AQO 2843/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for supporting young footballers in the North who wish to progress to professional football in Britain rests, in the first instance, with individual football clubs and, indeed, with the governing body for the sport, the IFA. Sport NI provides

assistance to sports organisations, including the IFA and football clubs, in developing young players. That includes support for the IFA's centres of excellence, the development of coaches in partnership with the Sports Institute and the talent network aimed at identifying and developing talented players more effectively.

Mr McClarty: I thank the Minister for her response. Will she encourage and develop professional football in Northern Ireland by encouraging the cream of our young crop to play football here for longer before the bigger clubs in England snap them up, which is of no benefit at all to Northern Ireland?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have sympathy with the Member's point. I will use an example in my constituency. Cliftonville recently lost Rory Donnelly, but Swansea gained his skills and expertise. Needless to say, that loss has not been too painful for Cliftonville, particularly given the recent result.

When we invest in young players, we hope that they stay, but we should not keep people here for the sake of it. It is up to Sport NI, the Department and the clubs to try to make it attractive for young players to stay, but if those players wish to move elsewhere and have great career opportunities, we should not only wish them well but support their development.

Mr Humphrey: Does the Minister agree that the House and the whole country should be proud of the recent successes of the Northern Ireland women's under-17 and under-19 teams in qualifying for the elite sections in Europe? Will she join me in wishing our national team all the very best as we take on Azerbaijan at Windsor Park tomorrow night?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member will appreciate that his definition and my definition of a national team are completely different. I wish the team all the best, despite the fact that five are not fit to play, which will surely have an impact. Either way, I wish them all the best.

I agree that it is important, particularly when talking about young women in sport, that the House and those further afield give every support. That support is a resource and is part of the overall development of encouraging, nurturing and assisting the talent of sportspeople here.

Mr Kinahan: Has the Minister or her Department had any discussions with the IFA about setting up a centre or centres of excellence around clubs such as, in my case, Crumlin or Ballyclare? There are lots of great teams that such centres could be built around.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I had preliminary discussions with the IFA some time ago. The IFA has centres of excellence. If the Member is talking about subregional development, that is for the next CSR bid in 2015, and more serious discussions will soon commence. We were focused on the three stadia and on moving those on before looking at the next tranche. This is the first time that I have heard Crumlin mentioned for its skills and expertise, but I have to take what the Member says. I have absolutely no doubt that, as the IFA rolls out that programme, it will only be good for the sport of soccer. The provision of facilities that are fit for purpose can only be good for the constituencies that host them.

Mr Rogers: Is any funding available specifically for talented young female footballers, considering the increased popularity of the sport?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. Yes, there is funding for female footballers. Funding over the past three years was just over £81,000. I expect that to increase as the programme rolls out and more female footballers are identified as being in need of assistance and support as part of that package. It is crucial that the imbalance, particularly in gender and in talented sportspeople, is addressed by my Department and the governing bodies.

City of Culture 2013: Programme of Events

4. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the recently published programme of events for the Derry/Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 is sufficiently inclusive and has a wide enough scope to deliver for the entire north-west region. (AQO 2844/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The City of Culture bid included a commitment to deliver benefits to the north-west. Although most events will take place in Derry city, the 2013 programme provides opportunities to achieve positive change for all.

The 2013 programme provides opportunities for people across the North to attend international events on their doorstep. It also provides opportunities for accommodation providers to benefit from increased visitor numbers and spend. The north-west will be showcased during 2013, and neighbouring areas and communities should maximise the opportunity by hosting complementary events. Arts organisations and businesses in the north-west have a great opportunity to build capacity in 2013. The Culture Company has engaged with, for example, Strabane, Limavady and Donegal and helped to plan projects in Bready and Strabane and Donegal's On Home Ground project.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Príomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for her answers to date. Two of the three previous questions were about the European City of Sport and professional footballers. So I wonder whether the Minister will join me in congratulating Derry City on winning the FAI cup. The team is an example of good, professional footballers, and their win ensures that there will be European football in Derry next year. That will, I am sure, ensure that the Minister's wish for the City of Culture to be a truly north-west event will —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the Minister has taken a question from that.

Mr McCartney: There is a question. Will that add to the Minister's sense that the City of Culture will be truly a north-west occasion given that the person who scored the winning goal was from Strabane?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question and congratulate Derry City on five in a row. It is great that the winning goal was scored by somebody from Strabane. That makes it truly north-west.

Lord Morrow: [Interruption.]

Ms Ní Chuilín: Well, I do not know. I would not comment on that, Lord Morrow, because I am on my feet and will be heard. You are speaking from a sedentary position, so I will not repeat what you said.

I believe that Derry and the towns and villages surrounding it should be able to maximise the benefits from 2013. It is

incumbent on the Executive, who, as I said, put over £30 million into this bid to ensure that the city and surrounding areas benefit from the legacy that the 2013 City of Culture will deliver.

Mr Campbell: The question, of course, relates to inclusivity in Londonderry as the UK City of Culture next year. Will the Minister give an assurance that all the discussions and meetings that have taken place to try to ensure that that is the case will be built on, that no one will be allowed to try to hijack events and that people will be able to celebrate a cultural showcase, not just in 2013 and not just for Londonderry but for all of Northern Ireland for the future?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Yes, absolutely. I agree with the Member, which is a rare thing in itself, that it is important that everybody can participate and feels that they can participate in an inclusive way. It should not be an afterthought but in a way that their community, culture and, indeed, city is identified in the City of Culture programme. I am sure that the Member is aware that a number of events will be showcased around Derry City of Culture. It is important that the legacy of 2013 and afterwards is felt by every citizen, regardless of how they choose to describe themselves.

2.15 pm

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's stated support for the City of Culture and the support that she has shown for the 2013 celebrations. I also welcome her congratulations to Derry City FC. She spoke of the need to maximise the potential of 2013 for the city and the north-west region. Does she believe that that potential could be further capitalised on if the Brandywell stadium were improved in order to host bigger crowds for European ties?

Ms Ní Chuilín: A bid has not been put in by the Brandywell, or by Derry City Council for the Brandywell, as part of 2013, although I am well aware of the situation. For the record, Derry City Council and the Brandywell will be talking to the IFA and others about the proposed bid for subregional development for 2015 and beyond. I also put on record that the vandalism that happened in the Brandywell was disgraceful.

Despite the success of Derry City — I am sure that you agree with Raymond; there is no need to repeat it — the Brandywell's facilities are not fit for purpose. The city of Derry needs to help the Brandywell to improve its facilities. It is unfortunate that a small minority of people felt that the Brandywell was an easy target. We need to do a bit of heavy lifting to help it out. I cannot guarantee anything for the Brandywell or anybody else for 2013, but I certainly know what the Brandywell is. For some strange reason, every time I am in Derry city, I happen to walk past it at least twice, so I know where it is and what it sits beside.

Mr Swann: I think that we all look forward to Londonderry's year as the UK City of Culture. Can the Minister give any detail of any work that she has done with the Minister of Justice or the security services to ensure that the festivities and everything that happens there pass off peacefully and that there is no security threat at that time?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have not met the Minister of Justice or the PSNI. It is not my role. The Culture Company has been working with the PSNI, as has the rest of the community

on an ongoing basis. That is the way that it is; it is not up to me to go the Minister of Justice, who would pass it on to the PSNI anyway. He does not have responsibility for operational matters; he is on the record as saying that. If there is a need to meet the PSNI or any other statutory body to make sure that the City of Culture is a success, I will do it.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

Boxing

6. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the success of the scheme which she and Sport NI launched that allows boxing clubs to apply for financial help. (AQO 2846/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The strategy to provide financial help to boxing clubs is still under development. As the Member will know, the consultation was released on Friday. Consequently, it will not be possible to offer a full assessment of the scheme's success until that strategy has closed. However, it is clear that my announcement of the boxing strategy initiative has helped to raise awareness of the importance of boxing in many communities and the urgent need for strategic facilities and equipment.

As a result of the announcement, a number of organisations, including Belfast City Council and the Youth Justice Agency, have approached my Department about the possibility of providing additional support. That is very welcome. I hope that more organisations will become involved in the process. To that end, I have asked Sport NI and Belfast City Council to jointly consider how identified shortfalls in infrastructure in boxing clubs in the greater Belfast area can be addressed and to agree a costed implementation plan that can be used as a template for discussing further opportunities with other councils.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagra. I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she indicate why the governing body affiliation is a requirement for all sports clubs when they apply for funding?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Affiliation is a requirement, because a governing body ensures that there is proper governance in place. Part of that governance is around financial accountability and, most importantly, child protection. It looks at how a club regulates itself, and it makes sure that the club is up to date and that it implements statutory duties and provision. In this case, it is a requirement. A boxing club has to be affiliated to an internationally recognised governing body.

Miss M McIlveen: In an interview on 'Good Morning Ulster' today, the Minister stated that Nelson McCausland did nothing when he was Minister about the concerns that were raised by Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club. However, in a letter to the Committee, the Minister was able to detail the work that Minister McCausland had in fact undertaken. Will the Minister retract her statement this afternoon?

Ms Ní Chuilín: If I have accused Nelson McCausland in the wrong, I will certainly retract the statement. I have a transcript of the interview, and the Member is free to have a copy of it. In the interview, Noel Thompson accused the Department of institutionalising sectarianism in boxing,

including Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club, over the past decade. My question to him was to ask what other Ministers, including Nelson McCausland, had done. I assume that the Member has a copy of the transcript, but if I am wrong, I will put it on the record now and apologise in public to Minister McCausland. I will also apologise in writing and copy it to the Committee.

When allegations are made, I think that it is incumbent on us all to show evidence. People need to do that. They also need to make sure that they can stand over allegations when they make them.

I think that what the Member is saying is that her colleague Minister McCausland did do something. However, Minister Campbell, Minister Poots and Minister McGimpsey were also in post during the period. For some reason — allegedly — they did absolutely nothing in the 10 years after the allegation was made.

Mr McGimpsey: As far as my term as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure is concerned, I say to the Minister that she needs to look at the records. However, I want to ask her about the money under the boxing strategy and her speech in the House yesterday. In that, she indicated that Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club would be eligible for part of the £3.27 million of funding because it had been affiliated to the Irish Amateur Boxing Association (IABA) within the past three years. She appears to have said something different this afternoon here and earlier on 'Good Morning Ulster'. Will she please explain to me and the House exactly what she means?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Any club that has been affiliated to the IABA within the past three years can put in an expression of interest. However, a club must be affiliated to receive any funding. That is what I said yesterday, this morning and this afternoon.

On your performance as sports Minister, you will be aware that Ministers cannot look at previous Ministers' papers. Again, if I am wrong, I will apologise, but the Member's name was not on the list of people who stood up for Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club and tried to do something about the situation, either as an elected representative or as the Minister for sport.

Sports Facilities

7. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps her Department is taking to encourage sporting clubs and societies to share their facilities. (AQO 2847/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Under my Department's strategy for sport, Sport Matters, I am taking steps to encourage the provision of shared services and spaces for sport and have encouraged all stakeholders to identify opportunities for greater sharing of sports facilities. For example, as part of the delivery of Sport Matters, Sport NI, in conjunction with the Department of Education, is developing a document aimed at promoting an opening-up and sharing of school sports facilities with the rest of the community, including sports clubs and societies.

Under its places pillar, Sport Matters further identifies the need to provide multisports facilities and services generally that can be made available on a shared basis by clubs. Sport NI is supporting a number of those developments through its Sports Matters community capital programme. The Department has set aside over

£10 million in the current CSR period to support the delivery of the community capital programme.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for her answer. Has she given any consideration to introducing a requirement for sharing in the distribution of any funding?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member will appreciate that when clubs — in this case sports clubs — apply for funding, they will be asked how they share their facilities with others in the community. Quite often, if not on every occasion, they give a list of people with whom they have worked and shared their facilities. It is a requirement to share facilities. Indeed, it is a statutory duty under section 75 to share facilities.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for her responses so far. Will she give a commitment to working with the Education Minister to open school facilities for community use, especially after school hours?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am working with the Minister of Education to make sure that school facilities are opened up. Indeed, the document that I referred to in answer to Chris Lyttle is about producing guidelines. Those guidelines will be available to the Sport Matters monitoring group, which meets on 21 November. After that, they will go out for publication.

We have all seen many facilities that are closed after hours when the community could be using them. No one is happy with that, but we need to make sure that we bring forward guidelines that are clearly understood and lay out exactly how those facilities can be used.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Príomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht na bhfreagraí sin. I thank the Minister for her answers thus far. Will she clarify her view on the primacy rule? How might that rule enhance the sharing of facilities to meet the needs of soccer?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am on the record as saying that the removal of the primacy rule would enhance greater sharing. Chris Lyttle is nodding, and with his IFA background he will be aware that there is a need for greater sharing of facilities. There is a difficulty in terms of land available in urban areas, but the fund is available to try to meet the needs of every club. The primacy rule has been used to exclude certain football clubs.

Windsor Park Football Stadium

8. **Mr Spratt** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will ensure that access to Windsor Park will be made available from the Boucher Road to contractors working on the redevelopment of the stadium. (AQO 2848/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department is proactively involved in discussions with the IFA, Belfast City Council and the Department of the Environment to remove any barriers or obstacles that might prevent Belfast City Council from granting that construction access.

Access from the Boucher Road would address community concerns about the volume of construction traffic in the Village area. In addition, the robust community consultation exercise currently being undertaken by the IFA and its planning consultants will further develop proposals to

alleviate the community's concerns about the management of traffic from the redevelopment of Windsor Park.

I am confident that Belfast City Council will have granted access from the Boucher Road to the stadium well in advance of the proposed construction start date of August 2013.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she agree that the site offers excellent potential to combine Midgely Park, the Olympia leisure centre, the playing fields and Windsor Park to make one large sports area in that part of the city?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I absolutely agree with the Member. It is silly that proposals are developed separately. For years, we complained about footpaths. You get a surface laid, the footpath is dug up and another surface comes along. We need to have a creative approach to redevelopment and the planning of all the developments. That pays off.

Twice in one week, I have paid credit to Belfast City Council, but credit where it is due. When you are in discussions, particularly with councils, about other developments in the community, they should all be in sequence and in concert. That is the way it should be done. The people in the Village have been waiting for regeneration for decades. They deserve the maximum facilities but the minimum disruption and obstruction in the development of those facilities.

Mr Eastwood: I ask the Minister to clarify what she meant when she said in an earlier answer that the Brandywell would not be eligible for funding until at least 2015. The people of Derry, and the Derry City supporters especially, will not find that acceptable or good enough.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: You have gone back to a question that has already been dealt with. Maybe the Minister will reply in writing. It is not particularly relevant to the contractors working on Windsor Park.

Football, Gaelic Games and Rugby: Funding

9. **Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding football, Gaelic Athletic Association and rugby have received from her Department in the last ten years. (AQO 2849/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I would not have minded answering the Member's question, because he is on the record for being misleading in his responses. I will write to him, and I will share that with the rest of the House in case he gets it wrong again.

Sport NI is responsible for the distribution of funding to sport in the North of Ireland. Over the past 10 financial years, up to 31 March 2012, Sport NI has paid out almost £51 million of Exchequer funding to football, GAA and rugby in total. I am happy to furnish the Member with a breakdown of that funding.

2.30 pm

Education

Schools: Dickson Plan

1. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Education to outline how the Dickson plan will be affected if the Education Bill is passed. (AQO 2856/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. The Dickson plan will not be directly affected by the provisions in the Education Bill. The Bill will make the Education and Skills Authority responsible for the area planning of the education estate and the delivery of the curriculum.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for his answer. I ask for his assurance that he agrees with the view of the Southern Education and Library Board official who briefed the Education Committee last week and said:

"There is no threat to the Dickson plan in the board's proposals."

Will the Minister give a commitment that his Department will not change or interfere with those proposals?

Mr O'Dowd: I am not aware of what the SELB official told the Education Committee last week. I have not seen the transcript. If he was referring to proposals around ESA and the Dickson plan, he is absolutely right: ESA does not affect the Dickson plan in any way. However, does the Member believe that the Dickson plan serves all her constituents in Upper Bann? Has she visited and talked to pupils in the junior and senior high schools that are affected by the Dickson plan and their families and principals? Is her concern only about pupils in Lurgan College and Portadown College? I request that the Member speak to all those interested in education in the controlled sector and seeks the views of the Catholic maintained sector, which, of its own volition, is moving away from the Dickson plan and has had that position for several years. Why is it moving away from the Dickson plan? It is because the Dickson plan does not meet all the educational needs of all the young people in the Craigavon area. If the Member is defending the Dickson plan for the sake of defending the Dickson plan, I suggest respectfully that she is not defending the educational outcomes of all her constituents.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I am afraid that I cannot let you answer that.

Mr Anderson: Does the Minister agree that any change to the present Dickson plan could jeopardise the attainment of academic excellence that exists? What is the justification for changing a tried and tested system that has the support of the community?

Mr O'Dowd: It does not have the support of the community. It certainly does not have the overall support of the community. As I said, the Catholic sector is moving away from the Dickson plan. It is doing so because, whatever rationale was behind the Dickson plan when it was introduced several decades ago, it no longer has any relevance to modern-day education. Judging whether it would have a detrimental effect on educational or academic outcomes would depend on the changes made to the Dickson plan. It is within the ability of those in the Craigavon area, as the Catholic sector has done within the maintained sector, to come forward with a proposal that would ensure that the educational outcomes of all young people in the controlled sector are looked after. My concern is that, when unionist representatives stand up in the Chamber and talk about the Dickson plan, instead of talking about all young people, what they are really talking about is two schools in the Dickson plan.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Can the Minister confirm that the new arrangements under ESA will have no impact on the day-to-day autonomy of schools?

Mr O'Dowd: They will not have a day-to-day impact on the employment practices of schools, which I assume is what the Member is referring to. ESA will be the employing authority for all staff in all grant-aided schools. Boards of governors, not ESA, will manage schools and will take employment decisions if they wish. A single employer will bring the benefits of better workforce planning and development and easier sharing, but I emphasise that there will be no loss of autonomy for schools under the ESA proposal.

Preschool Admissions: Universal Credit

2. **Mr Durkan** asked the Minister of Education how the implementation of universal credit will impact on the criteria for admission to preschool places. (AQO 2857/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: All preschool settings are required to apply admissions criteria if oversubscribed with applications. The admissions criterion specified in regulations is intended to ensure that preschool education is targeted at children who will benefit most from a year of preschool experience. Under existing arrangements, priority must be given to children in their final preschool year who are from socially disadvantaged circumstances, currently defined as being children with a parent who is in receipt of income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance.

In the review of preschool admissions arrangements published in January 2012, I announced that my Department will examine the definition of socially disadvantaged circumstances. Officials will also consider the impact of the proposed changes to welfare reform, including the introduction of universal credit, in determining a revised definition of disadvantage.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. Exactly how does the Minister see this new yardstick for measuring social disadvantage? In his opinion, will changes to the benefit system result in fewer children being eligible for free school meals?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not want fewer children being eligible for free school meals, and my Department is working in the Executive subcommittee that was set up to examine the possible implications of the Welfare Reform Bill, which has not yet been agreed by the House. So, we are examining those proposals. I am on the record as saying that I want to protect families currently on free school meals and to ensure that they remain eligible under any future welfare reform. However, the Member will be aware that his party's previous education spokesperson actually spoke against having social clauses in preschool admissions. I am not sure whether the SDLP has changed its position to one of now supporting —

Mr McDevitt: That is nonsense and totally untrue —

Mr O'Dowd: I seem to have upset him.

Mr McDevitt: — totally untrue. Outrageously untrue.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister has the Floor. There should be no interruptions from a sedentary position.

Mr McDevitt: He is fantasising from it.

Mr O'Dowd: Hansard will show that on numerous occasions the previous SDLP education spokesperson —

Mr McDevitt: No he did not.

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Member let me finish? I do not know why he is afraid of what I am going to say; I am only repeating what he has told me. In numerous debates in the Chamber, the previous SDLP spokesperson criticised the social clauses in preschool settings. So, if the SDLP position has changed and it now supports social clauses, I welcome that.

Schools: Literacy and Numeracy Assessments

3. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Education what steps are being taken to ensure that the Northern Ireland numeracy assessment and the Northern Ireland literacy assessment are suitable for use by people with hearing difficulties. (AQO 2858/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am clear that raising standards of literacy and numeracy for all our young people must be the key driver behind education policy and reform. That is why the specification for new computer-based assessment included the requirement to take account of equality of access for all pupils, including pupils with hearing impairments. Trialling of the new assessments took place between January and May 2012. It included a number of special schools and units for pupils with special educational needs. Feedback from those trials, the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) help desk and the evaluation of the previous provider, the interactive computerised assessment system (InCAS), was shared with the suppliers of NILA and NINA to inform their development of the assessments.

CCEA has scheduled a number of awareness-raising sessions about NILA and NINA during November 2012 for teachers of pupils with hearing impairments. Invitations to those events have been issued to the peripatetic services of each of the five education and library boards. CCEA has also invited the heads of those services for hearing impairment for each board, as well as other stakeholders representing this sector, to discuss the use of the assessments with pupils. CCEA has also provided a transcript to accompany the animated pupil demonstrations, which are designed to support pupils with hearing impairment as they prepare to use NILA and NINA. This is available on the curriculum website. This autumn term, CCEA will continue to gather feedback from all schools regarding the implementation of the new computer-based assessments. Within this evaluation, CCEA will seek to ensure further the manageability of the assessments for all pupils with special educational needs, including those with hearing impairments.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his response. Solutions are sometimes to be found in the classroom as well. Will the Minister assure the House that the same solutions will be available to those with visual impairments?

Mr O'Dowd: The Member is absolutely right: solutions are often found in the classroom and among teachers and classroom assistants who work with pupils and use the assessments. That is why CCEA will bring in teachers to

talk to and learn from in implementing NINA and NILA for pupils, whether visually or hearing impaired. The Member will also be aware from my previous comments to the House that the Education and Training Inspectorate will also look at NINA and NILA early in the autumn to see how it beds down in the first year.

We are all aware of the computer glitches and the problems that some schools have had. I am glad to announce to the House that around 80% of our primary schools have now completed the assessments, which is equivalent to the number of schools that had completed InCAS at this time last year. However, I remain to be satisfied that all that could have been done in preparation for the introduction of the assessments was done, and I await the evaluation of the Education and Training Inspectorate.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for confirming what he sent to principals in a letter yesterday, which is that the Education and Training Inspectorate is being used to determine and survey NINA and NILA issues. Does the Minister agree with me and with a teacher who asked this question: if the Department is interested in standardising, why not use the standardised scores that schools currently use, such as the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), progress in maths (PiM), progress in English (PiE) and the cognitive abilities test (CAT)? Why not customise and standardise them for the Northern Ireland population and relate them to the Northern Ireland curriculum? Would that be too simple for the Department? It would certainly be a lot less expensive.

Mr O'Dowd: Under legislation, computer-based assessments are currently in place. We have gone through a difficult period with the introduction of the current system. However, in some of the feedback that I have been getting, there is a difference between "will not do" and "cannot do". I will support any school that has a difficulty with "cannot do". However, I cannot support the "will not do" approach. We have taken a number of initiatives to examine, at first hand, the difficulties faced by schools. Some were to do with the implementation of the system on the ground, and that was interpreted by the media as an attack on teachers. That was not the case at all. It was never portrayed by my officials or my Department as being the case. A new system in play in schools will, of course, take time to bed in. I think that we have improved our communication with schools and teachers on that matter.

CCEA and the providers have been on the ground in a number of schools looking at exactly what happens when the system freezes or other issues occur. The computer programmers tell me that there may be a glitch in the system, but it is hard to identify at this stage, and they are looking through a number of solutions to it. However, they are confident that they have now got the system to a place where pupils can sit down in front of the computers and complete the assessments, as over 80% have already done. I have informed schools that they should return to the computer-based assessments. If the small number that have not done so have any difficulties, they should immediately contact CCEA or C2k, and support will be provided.

None of the other assessments that are in play is statutory. It is up to the schools — *[Interruption.]* I am not dismissing it; let me finish my point. None of the other systems is

statutory, and it is up to the schools whether to use them. I announced that, over the next period, I wanted to —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Time, Minister.

Mr O'Dowd: Sorry?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Time.

Mr O'Dowd: Sorry. I will return to that.

Mr Kinahan: On the same subject, will the Minister look at setting up some comprehensive way of listening to the teachers and parents who have received replies to find out whether the system works? The previous system did work and worked well. Maybe we should look at changing the legislation.

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for his question, which, conveniently, follows on from Mr Storey's.

I devoted the energies of the Department to resolving the current problem. We will have the review, and I also think that we need to look at computer-based assessments and how they fit in with other programmes being used by schools. Let us put the best system in place. If we need to change or review the legislation that is in place, let us do that, but I do not want to dismiss the principle of computer-based assessment. It is important that it remains in schools. However, as we move forward, I am open to persuasion and to discussions with parents, teachers, schools etc on how it is done, what its objectives are and so on.

We also have to learn a lesson on a broader procurement issue. InCAS assessments had been in place for a number of years when the contract had to go out to open tender because that is what procurement tells us to do. The previous providers did not win the contract, and new contractors were brought on board. Schools had to learn the contractors' system, and they had to learn the schools' system. I do not want to be in that position again in three years. I want to review what we can do on the continuation of contracts or to facilitate a more settled transfer between contracts than we experienced in recent months.

2.45 pm

Schools: Careers Guidance

4. **Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Education how his Department has tried to improve the careers guidance given to pupils. (AQO 2859/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Access to high-quality careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) is essential for our young people, particularly given the wide range of courses on offer under the entitlement framework. I am committed to the continuous improvement of careers education in schools through the full and continuing implementation of the joint careers strategy and action plan. Careers management forms part of the statutory curriculum. Taught, timetabled provision of careers information includes opportunities for personal planning, cross-curricular development of employability skills and planned and relevant work-related learning.

Schools have a number of tools at their disposal to support them in the development of good careers education. The Education and Training Inspectorate has developed tailored, quality standards indicators for self-evaluation,

and my Department has published a map and guide to link careers across the curriculum. Schools have formalised their joint working with Department for Employment and Learning careers advisers through partnership agreements.

The role of employers is invaluable in providing careers information and advice. My officials have been engaging with business representative bodies to explore how the business community can play a greater role in careers education.

From April 2010, when the quality of CEIAG was routinely reported on by the Education and Training Inspectorate, the figures have shown a marked improvement in quality and standards since the period 2008-2010, when CEIAG was last evaluated as good or better in only 37% of post-primary schools. The recent chief inspector's report highlights that the percentage of schools inspected as good or better has almost doubled since 2010 to 68%. Although I welcome that improvement, I am not complacent in this important area, and I expect school leaders to continue to place the interests of the pupils first.

Mr Ross: I am sure that the Minister will agree that it is important that we move away from careers advice that is simply half an hour a week reading a university prospectus towards one that is about career paths. I am sure that the whole House will agree that it is up to individual pupils to decide what path they follow, but can the Minister give the House any guidance on specific strategies that he has in place to encourage young people to follow a course in the science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects where, of course, jobs will be created in future?

Mr O'Dowd: Careers advice has certainly moved on from half an hour a week or a teacher being grabbed in the corridor and asked to give a class of young people some careers advice. It is a much more informed and dedicated service than it once was, and the inspectorate report shows that its value has increased immensely over the years.

It is difficult for young people to decide their career pathway. Career pathways can change. I am sure that there have been many different career pathways in the House. After each Question Time I think about changing my career, but that is the way it goes.

On a more serious note, the Member is absolutely right: there is a greater focus on the STEM subjects in their totality, and careers advice on STEM subjects is vital. Over the past number of months I have been meeting STEM employment providers and talking to them about how we can enhance love of the STEM subjects among pupils at an early age. We need to allow pupils to think beyond the traditional academic careers, such as law, medicine, teaching or whatever, and look at the STEM subjects as a good career.

We are getting better at it, but there is more work to be done. We have to learn from the employers. It is difficult to project what the shape of the economy will look like, but any student with a number of STEM subjects under their belt will be well equipped for future career choices.

Mr McDevitt: I am sad to hear that the Minister is finding it tough at the moment and is thinking about a career change. I assure him that I would be quite happy for him to stay in post as long as he does not play as much party politics as he has played this afternoon.

Seriously though, what emphasis will the Minister place on economics, business and enterprise education in future careers guidance programmes?

Mr O'Dowd: I did not say that I was finding it tough; I said that I was thinking about a career change. It might be a more challenging career that I am looking for.

All the career options are there to be evaluated by students. The key is that students are given the right advice at an early stage about courses and examinations that relate to the apprenticeships, vocational courses or university choices that they may move on to. It is vital that students are kept informed so that, particularly when it comes to choosing a university, they follow the right examination process.

Advice on all the subjects that the Member mentioned is available. I am not saying that we have got things 100% right yet, but I believe that careers advice in our schools is much improved on any experiences that anyone in the Chamber can remember and even on what it was five years ago. There is a much improved careers service out there.

We all have a role to play, particularly parents, in talking to young people about careers. As I said, if it is academia that you are interested in, think beyond medicine, law or teaching. Think about the STEM subjects and other fields. Let us look at how the main economies around the world are developing. A delegation of Ministers is away to China. Let us look at what China, India and Brazil are developing. Let us look at nations around the world to see what direction their economies are going in. Let us take ideas from where they are going with career choices and allow career choices here to be broad and adaptive going into the future.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his replies so far. What discussions, if any, has he had with his colleague the Minister for Employment and Learning about a review of careers policy?

Mr O'Dowd: I regularly meet the Minister for Employment and Learning to discuss a wide range of issues. One of the issues under discussion is a review of careers policy. In fact, one of the first functions that I carried out as Minister was a joint launch of the science and engineering education advisory group (SEEAG) review with Mr Farry. We have a good working relationship. Our Departments work well together on a variety of subjects. We have joined-up thinking about careers advice. Mr Farry will speak for himself, but I have no concerns about co-operation with DEL.

Middletown Centre for Autism

Mr McGlone: Ceist uimhir a cúig, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Can I ask you to translate?

Mr McGlone: Question 5, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

5. **Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Education, given the budgetary restrictions in both jurisdictions, when he expects the plans will be in place to extend the services available at Middletown autism centre. (AQO 2860/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat. The planning of the expansion of services at Middletown is at an advanced stage. The process has involved considerable consultation

with officials from the Department of Education and Skills and the board of directors and staff at the Middletown centre. Departmental officials are in the process of completing an appropriate business case. It is anticipated that the expansion of services will commence shortly after the business case receives the necessary approvals. The expansion of the centre's operations should be able to be delivered with a relatively modest increase in funding and will be phased in over a two-year period as the centre builds its capacity to deliver an expanded service.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht na bhfreagraí sin. I thank the Minister for his response. What procedures are in place to ensure that the good practice identified in a recent inspection report is made available to autism support groups?

Mr O'Dowd: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as a cheist. The fact that the centre had a good inspection report is partly as a result of sharing good practice and working with charitable organisations and support organisations when such a request is made. The objective of the centre has always been outreach and to learn from best practice and good experience and to share that with other providers. The latest inspection report shows not only that the centre is delivering a service to the people who come to Middletown but that those experiences are being shared throughout the education sector and with support organisations and parents in the community. Despite sometimes facing political uncertainty and political questioning rather than questions about what the service is about, the centre has shown everyone that it is a valuable service for those who have autism, their families, the broader community and education on either side of the border.

Mr Storey: The Minister refers to the centre broadening its provision. In answer to my question in the House this week, he said that a relatively modest increase in funding would be phased in over a two-year period. Can he give any indication of how much money there will be additional to the current budget for the Middletown centre?

Mr O'Dowd: The expansion is premised on additional funding of around £900,000 being made available by each Department over a two-year period, including £75,000 for the refurbishment of an existing residential block at the centre to provide staff accommodation and a model classroom. Those are the figures that I have currently. If there is any update of those figures, I will share it with the Member and the Committee.

Mrs Overend: My question is similar. Can the Minister provide an update on the total cost of the building integrated project to date?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not have those figures in front of me, but I will provide them to the Member. The cost of the service has been relatively modest when you look at the universal budget for the Department of Education in the North and the Department of Education and Skills in the South. As the recent inspection report has shown, the provision of services at the centre has been outstanding, and many trainers, professionals in autism and families have benefited from the services that are delivered at Middletown. Middletown has now been able to stamp its authority on its autism services. There is recognition that the centre, which, at the start, had difficulties to do with being caught in political crossfire, has gone ahead

and delivered the service that it was designed for, which is to support young people and adults with autism and their families and education services on either side of the border.

Schools: Inspections

6. **Mr Craig** asked the Minister of Education, should the Education and Training Inspectorate be given more independence under the Education and Skills Authority, how influential the Department, schools and teaching unions will be in the inspection of schools. (AQO 2861/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The ETI reports as it finds, without fear or favour. I am determined to ensure that the inspectors are able to carry out their work without interference or any form of influence that would distract them from their key role as advocates for learners and in raising standards. The ETI is fully committed to working collaboratively with teachers, their representatives and all stakeholders to ensure that all learners get the best possible educational experience. The ETI will consult the teaching unions on any changes to the inspection process, but how the ETI inspects is not open for negotiation.

Mr Craig: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he acknowledge that there is a feeling out there that, because of the close links between the Department and the inspectorate, the Department has influence over the inspectorate about who it inspects? With that in mind, will the Minister agree that more independence should be given to the inspectorate system so that there can be a high degree of assurance among the teaching staff out there that the inspectorate is completely independent?

Mr O'Dowd: It depends on whether you wish to be reassured. I have no role whatsoever in identifying schools for inspection by the ETI. I have no notion from day to day, week to week and month to month what schools will be inspected by the ETI. The first I hear of an ETI report is when it is published on the website. It is now also sent out on the Executive Information Service (EIS) Twitter service as well, to make it available to as many people as possible. That is the first that I am aware that the inspection has been carried out.

I saw the final draft of the latest inspection report, the inspector's biennial report. I did not change one word in the report, even though, quite rightly, Members this morning challenged me as Minister over the findings of the report and asked whether I as Minister and my Department were involved in the right policies to deliver change in the education system. I can assure Members who wish to be reassured that the training inspectorate is completely independent from me and that it has no political interference from my Department. If it had, I could surely have come up with a more glowing report than we received earlier this month.

Mr Dallat: The Minister will be aware that, for many years, the inspectorate visited schools where the conditions were appalling both for the staff and for the pupils, when it should have been screaming from the rooftops. What will change in the future that will influence his Department when inspectors go to schools in which the fabric of the buildings is not fit for purpose?

Mr O'Dowd: The inspectorate reports on the fabric of the buildings if the conditions of the school are a barrier to

good learning. My Department is rolling out a capital build programme and a maintenance programme, but neither budget will meet the demand. If, as is unfortunately the case, inspection reports highlight urgent requirements for health and safety measures to be carried out, they should, rightly and properly, be carried out, and the education and library boards have the responsibility to do so. The simple answer is that we do not have the budget to meet the needs of our education estate. We are working towards improvement at every angle we can, and, in the most recent Executive initiative for jobs and the economy, the Department of Education was awarded somewhere in the region of £17 million towards capital build programmes and school maintenance.

We are making our bids when necessary, and we are winning the argument around the Executive table, but it is going to be a long, hard slog to bring our schools estate up to standard.

3.00 pm

Private Members' Business

2012 Paralympic Games: Legacy

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 to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who are selected to speak will have five minutes.

Mr McMullan: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the magnificent success of our athletes at the 2012 Paralympic Games in London; and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and Disability Sports NI to secure the support of district councils and the relevant Departments to ensure a lasting legacy of the games and to increase the number of sporting opportunities available to people with disabilities at all levels of sport in every area.

Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Disability Sports NI is Northern Ireland's main disability sports organisation. It was recognised by Sport NI as the key body responsible for the development of sport and physical recreation opportunities for people with physical, sensory and learning disabilities. At present, it represents over 100 groups. Since its establishment in 1997, Disability Sports NI has gradually increased the provision of sports opportunities for people with disabilities, and it currently runs a range of events, participation programmes, performance initiatives, training courses and education projects, which, last year, benefited 16,000 children and adults.

That work has been underpinned by Sport NI's disability mainstreaming policy, which led to a significant improvement in disability sports provision in Northern Ireland. That improvement in provision is most notable at a performance level. The London 2012 Paralympic Games were the most successful in history. Eight athletes from Northern Ireland qualified for the games: six in the Paralympics Ireland squad and two in the Paralympics GB squad.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Could I ask the Member to please pull the microphone closer?

Mr McMullan: Sorry.

Those athletes secured a total of seven medals, including five gold medals, which made Northern Ireland the most successful region of the UK or Ireland as regards gold medals secured per million of population.

That success clearly demonstrates how much the disability sports system has improved in Northern Ireland over the past 10 years as a direct result of the work of Disability Sports NI and Sport NI. However, despite those improvements, the reality is that the vast majority of people with disabilities in Northern Ireland simply do not get the opportunity to participate in sport. The most recent research carried out, the 2010 Northern Ireland sport and physical activity survey (SAPAS), found that disabled people are half as likely to participate in sport as others. Only 19% of

disabled adults participate, compared with 37% of non-disabled adults.

The challenge in moving ahead is to create a genuine legacy of the games by greatly increasing the scale of the sports provision across Northern Ireland, giving people with disabilities the opportunity to lead an active and healthy lifestyle through sport, without fear of any Department interfering.

Disability Sports NI believes that that can be achieved through the development and implementation of a new, more ambitious strategic plan for the period 2013 to 2019. However, such is the scale of the task ahead that that cannot be achieved with the support of Sport NI and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) alone. It will require the support of a number of Departments and, as we move into the review of public administration (RPA), all 11 of the council groupings. Currently, Sport NI is finalising its first draft of the Northern Ireland Olympic and Paralympic Games evaluation report, the outcomes of which will also feed into the strategy.

The Minister's Department, over a four-year period, funded a very innovative education project involving the Northern primary schools: 'The 5 Star Disability Sports Challenge'. That was funded to the tune of nearly £160,000. Between March 2009 and September 2012, a total of 25,781 children from 177 primary schools completed the project. That project is now finished, but instead of sitting back and looking at it, we have been proactive and have taken it forward. Talks with the education authority are ongoing regarding possible support from the education sector to reinvigorate it.

Does the Assembly now take the issue forward? We are lucky to have teachers in our special schools who gladly give up their time to train and mentor athletes. Unfortunately, many schools have stopped because of the lack of funding. It costs an average of £400, for example, to take a pupil to Dublin to compete. We need to be concerned about those areas.

We are moving into the RPA, and there is no better time to address the problem. We must now ensure that all 11 council groupings have it on their books and look at providing more facilities for Paralympic sports. The only other group that is not aligned to Disability Sports NI is the Special Olympics. That group mainly does everything on its own. It raises funds and, as I said earlier, teachers do exemplary work. The work that is done by the teachers in Castle Tower School in Ballymena, including Mr McCaughan, is phenomenal, and I am sure that other schools and teachers do the same. However, we are failing them by not giving them proper backup. Funding is needed.

In recent correspondence, NILGA stated that the present arrangements could be improved and made more consistent as long as councils are materially involved in the strategic plan. NILGA also stated that it would be willing to meet Disability Sports NI, as long as it was agreeable and informal.

Mr I McCrea: The Member referred to the RPA and the importance of this being done under the new council structure. Does the Member not agree that it is important that the councils that are currently in place take the matter forward? To some extent, it could be too late when the RPA is in place, given that the next Paralympics will be even closer.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Member for his question. I totally agree with you. Councils need to add this into their community plans now. You are quite right that it is a priority. When the councils are grouped, some will border on the rural/urban side of things. Councils such as Newtownabbey have the facilities, and there may be some in the Member's area. However, other council groupings do not have the facilities.

I spoke to someone recently who is in charge of a youth club, and I suggested introducing bocchia, but that man did not even know what that is. That is the problem: we have to take this issue out to the people and educate them. The Assembly, through the Departments and its influence, can pull all those people together. This needs to be done departmentally, and we need to involve the Special Olympics. Departments need to set funding aside. Take the rural White Paper, for instance, in which Departments are included. What are they doing with that? We need to add money in. We saw what was done in the Paralympics.

I want to go back to one point very quickly, and I am mindful of the time. The savage cutback in welfare scares a lot of people who have children with special needs and who go into the Special Olympics. I have spoken to parents who have been told that, if their child takes part in Special Olympics and their mobility is seen to have improved, their welfare benefits could be cut. That stops a lot of parents from allowing their children to go forward. That issue does not get a lot of publicity. I think that it is time that it was made public, and I will ask the Minister to look at it. There has to be some way of safeguarding these children. Their mobility will never improve, and they compete at their own level. It is not about competing; it is about getting them out there and giving them something that makes them feel worthy.

We must not allow the success of the Olympics and the Paralympic Games to pass us by. We have a glorious opportunity to strengthen the aims of Disability Sports NI and the Special Olympics. I recognise what was said here today about Lisburn being selected as the European City of Sport. I am sure that the Olympics and the Paralympics went a long way in helping to achieve that.

Members, I ask today that we get all Departments together and that we involve Sport NI, the Special Olympics and Disability Sports and get everybody, especially the councils, together through NILGA.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr McMullan: We must get the programme together to build on this year. I remind Members of a very old saying, "We should get down on our knees to thank God we are still on our feet." Go raibh maith agat.

Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure): As Chair of the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee, I welcome the opportunity to speak in today's debate and support the motion.

At the outset, I place on record, again, my thanks and congratulations to everyone from Northern Ireland who took part in this summer's Olympic and Paralympic Games in London and contributed to its great success. That includes our coaches, volunteers, schoolchildren, games makers and, of course, our athletes. Their dedication and commitment to sport has been simply outstanding.

I am sure that everyone will agree with me when I say how amazing the Paralympic Games were. Watching so many athletes succeed and triumph over their disability was truly inspirational. Regardless of whether they returned home from the games with a medal, there can be no doubt that their greatest achievement was to change other people's perceptions of and attitudes towards those involved in disability sports.

The Committee wishes to ensure that there is a genuine, lasting legacy from the 2012 Paralympic Games and that the opportunities for disabled people in sport and physical recreation become more widely available. To that end, the Committee invited Disability Sports NI to brief it on the impact that the Paralympic Games has had locally and to ascertain whether more needed to be done to build on the momentum and success of our Paralympic athletes.

The Committee received its briefing on 18 October. During that briefing, the Committee heard of the huge increase in demand among people with disabilities wishing to take part in sport, of the tremendous success of the games and of how the games had helped to transform people's attitudes. Although that is certainly a positive and welcome development, the Committee also heard that one of the major challenges still facing disability sports is that we cannot meet the needs of those who wish to participate, particularly those with high levels of impairment, who are often the hardest to reach.

The Committee heard that 37% of non-disabled adults participate in at least 30 minutes of sport a week, compared with only 19% of adults with a disability. One of the Minister's targets in the Sport Matters strategy is to deliver at least a 6% increase in participation in sport and physical recreation among people with a disability by 2019. Clearly, there is still much to do, and Disability Sports NI is in the process of developing a six-year strategic plan outlining how that can be achieved.

The responsibility does not lie solely with the Minister and Disability Sports NI, as Mr McMullan outlined in his opening statement. Other bodies, including other Departments, local government and sport governing bodies, also have a pivotal role to play. The Committee was, therefore, disappointed to learn of a lack of targeted and bespoke programmes aimed at people with disabilities in local government and our biggest sport governing bodies. That is why the Committee wrote to the Minister, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA), the Department of Education, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the IFA, the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) and the GAA to ascertain what more could be done individually and collectively to continue to build on the success of the Paralympic Games for our disabled athletes.

Disability Sports NI's partnership approach with two individual councils and four district council consortia has led to the delivery of many successful projects, including participation projects, which gave over 6,000 people with disabilities the opportunity to lead a full and active lifestyle through sport. Unfortunately, those projects are not offered or delivered by other local councils. That is why, in the new year, the Committee intends to host an informal meeting with Disability Sports NI and the NILGA subgroup to discuss those issues in more detail.

3.15 pm

The Committee is pleased that successful programmes are delivered in football for those with cerebral palsy, visual and hearing impairment, wheelchair confinement, and mild learning disabilities, and that rugby is establishing a special needs tag rugby advisory group. However, the Committee urges sports governing bodies to deliver a co-ordinated strategy for promoting disabled sports. Further, the Committee urges the governing bodies to engage with Disability Sports NI in the design of their regional stadia at Ravenhill, Windsor and Casement, and to ensure that those parks are fully inclusive sports facilities.

The Committee acknowledges the work already undertaken by Disability Sports NI in its efforts to secure a lasting legacy from the 2012 Paralympic Games. We urge the Minister to continue to support Disability Sports NI in those efforts and to engage with sports governing bodies, local councils and others to ensure an inclusive —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Miss M McIlveen: — sporting infrastructure designed to attract disabled people.

Mr McGimpsey: I support the motion and am grateful to the proposer for bringing it forward at this time, bearing in mind that the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics are still very vivid in our memories. We witnessed that huge and successful spectacle and the part that athletes from Northern Ireland played in those Olympics.

London 2012 was first mooted at the UK Sports Cabinet, some 12 years ago, when I was Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. As part of that bid, Tessa Jowell came forward with the proposal that she wanted to get support from the four home countries to bring the Olympics to London in 2012. We were, to varying degrees, happy to support that. My only query was around what would happen to our lottery money, if we were successful. I got assurances on that. London 2012 could only have gone forward with the four home countries supporting the bid. Indeed, it proved a spectacular success. London proved to be a fabulous venue, and the Olympics and Paralympics proved to be a fabulous success. Huge achievements were made by UK athletes across the board, and huge achievements were made by athletes from Northern Ireland. Clearly, there is a legacy from the Paralympic Games, and it is so important that we seize the moment.

How do we do that? It is about increasing participation in sport among individuals suffering disabilities. In Northern Ireland, 20% of the population have either a long-term illness or a disability, and inclusion in sport is so important for their personal development. Providing that access and community support is so important. Above all, it is about equality. All citizens in Northern Ireland have exactly the same rights. Whether they suffer from a disability or are able-bodied, they have the same rights and should have exactly the same right of access to promote their quality of life.

As for the mechanisms that we can use, we have, as an example, Disability Sports Northern Ireland. That is a key body playing a key role in this area. It requires support and, indeed, is getting support from the Department and Sport Northern Ireland. As has been mentioned, councils will play an increasing role. They need to look at their

statutory obligations to ensure access for the athletes that we are talking about. We also have 'Sport Matters', a key strategy document coming out of the Department that can, again, drive forward this agenda. There are other opportunities, such as the Special Olympics.

No one in the House would deny the benefits that would come forward for our society and for those individuals through promoting access to sport. It is good for individuals physically and mentally, and it is good for personal development. It is about promoting increased participation, increased understanding, increased demand and, above all, increased access. This is about equality of opportunity. This is about the rights of individuals who have disabilities. They have the same rights as everyone else, and we require support for those individuals.

We can query the target of 6%, bearing in mind that around 20% have suffered disabilities, but we will examine that and see how we get on as we promote that. However, this is clearly something that is in the popular mind and in the popular imagination. We understand as a society that we have a focus here, and this is exactly the right time to be pushing forward.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Éirim le tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún. I support the motion and thank the Members who tabled it.

The Olympics and the Paralympics were memorable, major events for these islands, and they will remain in our memories for many years to come. The memories retained by the athletes who were participants will be with them all the days of their lives, but, like them, I want to see the legacy of the games to be more than just a memory. I would like the spirit of the games to continue to inspire long after their conclusion: to inspire our athletes to reach greater heights in the future; to inspire young athletes to realise that the next games could be their games; to inspire us all to be more active for the sake of our health and well-being; and to inspire our Executive and local government to resource better facilities for all sportspeople, especially athletes who have to deal with a physical or learning disability.

We remember the achievement of our athletes: James Brown, Sally Brown, Eilish Byrne, Bethany Firth, Laurence McGivern, Michael McKillop, Jason Smyth, Sharon Vennard, Michael Conlon, Paddy Barnes, Alan Campbell and the Chambers brothers. They will continue to inspire us, as will Katie Taylor and all the other medal winners from these islands. It is good to see that those athletes are out and about visiting schools, youth clubs and other venues and getting the message of participation across to a wider audience.

It is interesting to examine how England is dealing with the legacy of the games. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has a programme called Places People Play, which is the legacy project of the Olympics and the Paralympics. An investment of £150 million is coming from the British Olympic Association and from lottery funds and other funding sources. DCMS is investing in a number of iconic multisports facilities and is protecting and improving hundreds of playing fields and preserving high-quality spaces for local people to play and enjoy sport.

It is also recruiting, training and deploying 40,000 sports leaders to organise and lead grassroots sporting activities. It hopes to motivate 100,000 adults to test themselves in multiple Olympic and Paralympic sports and, in doing so,

to raise millions of pounds for charity. It is giving young people the opportunity to receive six weeks of coaching to guide them into regular participation in their community. It is investing £8 million on tackling the barriers that disabled people face when they want to play sport, as well as ensuring that every element of the programme works for disabled sportspeople. That is a considerable investment in the legacy of the games, and it includes provision for people with disabilities and suitable facilities for them.

Places People Play seems to me to be quite a comprehensive response to the games. The first tranche of funding was released before the games, and further releases are due this autumn. As I said, the programme has benefited from British Olympic Association and lottery funding.

We in Northern Ireland deserve a similar type of response here. We should not be fumbling in the greasy till, trying to get a few pence here and there from various local councils. There should be a centralised and co-ordinated response to the legacy. It should be well-funded, visionary and ambitious. I call on the Minister to respond to me on that issue and to ensure that our response to the games is every bit as visionary as that of England, well-funded and well-resourced, and serves all of our people well. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Ms Lo: The Paralympic Games were a huge success. We must pay tribute to all of our athletes. They did us proud. Eight athletes from Northern Ireland qualified for the Paralympic Games; six on the Ireland squad and two on the GB squad. They secured seven medals, five of which were gold. That makes Northern Ireland the most successful region of the UK in terms of gold medals secured per million of population.

The games inspired many people and did much to raise the profile of disabled people. The English Federation of Disability Sport has published a legacy survey, which found that the Paralympics had a significant impact on perceptions of disability. The survey showed that eight out of 10 non-disabled people said that they were now interested in watching disabled people play sport. Eight out of 10 disabled people considered taking part in more sport or exercise. That is very positive.

The games cost around £9 million. If all that we could show for that was six weeks of sport, it would not have been worth it. It is, therefore, imperative that we ensure the games' lasting legacy. The Paralympics demonstrated athletes' abilities ahead of their disabilities. That is testament to their hard work and dedication. We must not forget this summer of sport. The Paralympics have raised respect for the sporting ability of disabled people, celebrating what disabled people can do in their chosen fields.

Despite our great Paralympics success, the reality is that the vast majority of people with disabilities in Northern Ireland simply do not get the opportunity to participate in sport. Research by the Northern Ireland sport and physical activity survey in 2010 found that disabled people were only half as likely to participate in sport, with only 19% of disabled adults participating in comparison with 37% of non-disabled adults, as the Chair of the Committee mentioned earlier.

We must ensure that no-one is made to feel cast out of society because of their disabilities. We must build on the achievements of the events in the summer and keep up the momentum to encourage more disabled people, through

schools, sporting clubs and communities, to become interested in sport and to aim high. They must have access to sporting facilities, like any other, able-bodied athletes.

The Five Star Disability Sports Challenge, which was funded by DCAL, took athletes into schools to raise awareness through getting the children involved in Paralympic sport. Not only does that help to change perspectives among the younger generation, but it teaches tolerance — a condition that we, undoubtedly, all agree is essential for an inclusive society. I would like to know whether the Minister has any plans to reinstate that programme.

We must enable talented children and adults with disabilities to train, compete and achieve high levels of performance in sport. That has many benefits, not least of which is raising self-esteem and boosting morale. Cultural well-being gives a sense of togetherness and creativity, and stimulates the imagination.

The 2012 Olympics allowed millions of people, from different cultural backgrounds, the opportunity to participate in events linked to the celebration of the games. We as a society go to great pains to stress the importance of social inclusion, but I fear that those with disabilities are often overlooked. Let us use the momentum of the Paralympic Games to rectify that. The Paralympics is not just about talent; it is about creating aspiration, training, coaching, resources and a positive mental attitude. Sporting activity is not only valuable in its own right but increases confidence, empathy and —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Ms Lo: — a sense of community. With co-ordination between councils and groups such as Disability Sports NI and with leadership from the Government, we can ensure a lasting legacy of the Paralympic Games. I support the motion.

3.30 pm

Mr Irwin: The success of our Paralympians in London this year is of huge importance. The eight athletes from Northern Ireland who competed won a haul of seven medals, including a magnificent five golds. That was a great result for our athletes, and they rightly deserve our highest praise. Those results are testament to the significant advances in the disability and sports systems in place in Northern Ireland and, of course, to the tireless work of Disability Sports NI and Sport Northern Ireland, both of which are to be commended.

The games were a momentous occasion for our disabled competitors, and I think that, over the entire games for able-bodied and disabled people, the interest in sport and the uptake of sports activities have increased to unprecedented levels. That is good news for everyone as more and more people get active, and that will, of course, contribute to a healthy and more vibrant country. Those findings are well documented in the work of Disability Sports Northern Ireland, which states that interest in its activities and competitions has received a huge boost. For example, a recent swimming competition attracted a 40% increase in entries compared with previous events. That shows just how much interest in disabled sports has increased.

There is a need to build on that increased awareness and ensure that we provide the necessary opportunities for disabled people to take part in sport and have easy access to associated infrastructure. That is not fully the case at the moment. I take the research carried out by the Northern Ireland sport and physical activity participation survey 2010 as a case in point. It showed that only 19% of disabled adults participated in sport compared with 37% of all adults. So disabled people are only half as likely to take up sport as able-bodied people. That statistic obviously takes in a wide range of reasons for non-participation, but we must realise that the opportunities for disabled participation in sport need to increase, along with the increased interest following such a successful Paralympic Games. Disabled sportspeople are totally committed to their chosen sport, and, in many cases, it takes far greater physical and mental effort for them to train and compete than for able-bodied people.

As an Administration, the House must ensure that our structures, regionally at the Assembly and locally through our councils, engage with disabled sporting organisations and ensure that the opportunities for participation are in place. It is not good enough that a disabled person is dissuaded from participation in sport because their home town does not have adequate provision for them or that they have to travel significant distances to access venues, clubs or training facilities. I fully support Disability Sports NI's efforts in developing what it has described as a more ambitious strategic plan. I also support its call to action to our Departments and local councils in order to ensure that the necessary support and opportunities are available to allow disabled people the greatest opportunity to take up a sport. There is no better time than the present, following such a successful Olympic Games, and it would be wrong not to make the most of the opportunity to capture the enthusiasm that currently exists and increase our capacity to cater for disabled sports. I support the motion.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún seo inniu, a bhaineann lenár lúthchleasaithe áitiúla, a raibh an-bhua acu ag na Cluichí Parailimpeacha.

I support the motion, which is about the success of our local athletes at the Paralympic Games. We in the North of Ireland can rightly say that our athletes were fantastic competitors and ambassadors this year and that they did us all proud. However, those would be mere empty words if they were not followed up with action that provided a fitting and lasting legacy to that success. So, today we commend the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, who has been absolutely to the fore as a cheerleader for our Paralympians. We ask her to take the necessary action to secure the support of all local councils and relevant Departments to ensure that the games will have a lasting legacy.

Tá a fhios agam, ar ndóigh, nach bhfuil deiseanna spóirt i dTuaisceart na hÉireann chomh maith agus a ba chóir dóibh a bheith. We know, of course, that sporting opportunities in the North of Ireland are not what they could or should be. Most of the local focus seems to go to the three big sports: GAA, rugby and soccer. The Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure recently asked all local sports to outline the issues that they feel are facing them so that we could have the necessary information to ensure that the right provision is in place to allow

them to compete to the best of their ability. Responses were received from 22 sports, and there was general agreement among them about the kind of challenges that they face. Those include lack of funding, poor facilities, low media profile and legislative problems. So, if sporting organisations in general feel seriously challenged, how must it be for disabled athletes? Cad é mar atá cúrsaí ó thaobh lúthchleasaithe faoi mhíchumas de?

A recent edition of 'Sporting Matters' revealed that people without a disability participate more in sport than people with a disability. No surprises there, of course. However, the following statistics may be a revelation to most of us: in the North of Ireland, 21% of the adult population have some form of disability; 40% of households include at least one person with a disability; more than 47,000 people are blind or partially sighted; more than 35,000 people are wheelchair users; and 81% of people with a disability never participate in sport. Clearly, this is a problem for a large section of our population, and more needs to be done to facilitate and encourage those with disabilities to become involved in sport. Given those statistics, that will be a huge challenge, but it is one that we must rise to.

We also have a serious duty to highlight the health benefits of sport, both physical and mental. Those who engage in regular sporting activity are much more likely to adopt healthy attitudes to other areas of their life. Evidence also shows that they are much less likely to suffer from weight problems and the many mental health conditions that exist, such as depression and schizophrenia. In these worrying days of increasing incidence of obesity, mental health problems and suicide, there are good reasons why we need to proactively encourage all people to participate in sporting activity, whether they are disabled or able-bodied.

We want to say to those heroic athletes who took part in the Paralympics that we are proud of them and will continue to support them. We are determined to ensure that, following on from their example, those whom they have inspired will have the funding, resources and facilities to participate and compete in the sport of their choice in a way that is equal to that of any able-bodied person.

Molaim na buaiteoirí bonn, rannpháirtithe, agus oibrítthe deonacha a tháinig arais ó Londain i mbliana, iad lán díograise agus áthais. I commend the medallists, participants and volunteers who came back from London this year full of enthusiasm and joy. People such as James Brown, Sally Brown, Eilish Byrne, Bethany Firth, Laurence McGivern, Jason Smyth, Sharon Vennard and, last but not least, Michael McKillop, who so deservedly picked up the Whang Youn Dai Achievement Award as one of two athletes who exemplified the best spirit of the Paralympic Games.

I wish to leave you with the words of double medal winner Jason Smyth, the fastest Paralympian on the planet, who is aiming to reach Rio in 2016. He said:

"As an athlete I want to reach my potential and wherever that is I'm going to strive to do that."

Caithimid a bheith cinnte go bhfuil an soláthar cuí ann. We need to ensure that we have the appropriate provision in place.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Ms McCorley: We want to know that Jason and others like him will not be prevented from achieving their potential by our lack of action. Let that be the legacy of 2012.

Mr Hilditch: I support the motion, as we seek the support of district councils. I will declare an interest as a member of Carrickfergus Borough Council, although that will not deter me from giving it a touch if needed, as it is a stakeholder in this important area of sports development. I recognise the work of the Minister, the Department, Sport NI and Disability Sports NI to date in trying to develop and increase the opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in competitive sport and, of equal importance, to take part in general physical recreation.

There are many facets to the issue. Although in the euphoria of the games we hail the successes of the Michael McKillops and the Jason Smyths, there is also the other end of the scale, which is perhaps the weekly participation in a game of bocce, a sport that provides people with special needs with the opportunity to have social contact, develop physically and gain self-confidence, which can make all the difference to someone's weekly routine.

There is much more to do. The success of our athletes in the Paralympic Games gives us the springboard to raise the game. I welcome the monetary awards to Disability Sports NI for increased participation development and the financial support to Special Olympics Ulster for its ongoing work with people with learning difficulties. Now is the time when the Department must be prepared to dig deep if we are serious about ensuring a lasting legacy.

At central government level, the benefits are cross-departmental. Perhaps today we can begin to make a real difference by harnessing all the expertise in sport, education, health etc and establishing a legacy working group that is intent on taking sport to a new level by grasping the nettle and really bringing the Sport Matters strategy to life.

I turn to the district councils and their involvement in this area of development. They are crucial partners in the scenario as local delivery units for leisure and sport. Much work has been done by many councils that can be acknowledged and applauded, but a fresh overview in light of the motion would not go amiss. Indeed, on the negative side, a council in my constituency has suddenly put pounds before provision. It does not fully understand that leisure and sports facilities will never be money-making ventures; they will mainly incur costs to the ratepayer. A balance must be struck, even in these times of austerity, but that council and its new management appears to be solely focused on balance sheets. For example, the income from sports development programmes, instead of being reinvested in the same area of work, is now being used to offset deficiencies in other areas of its budget, thus giving a false impression. It is an opportunity missed to invest in exactly the issues that are before us today.

Facility use is another area in which councils could step up to the mark. I have a perfect example of opportunities being missed. It is a local one, where a high-spec AstroTurf floodlit facility can lie unused at times, particularly during off-peak periods. Surely, instead of chasing mainstream sports, which may be more financially lucrative, programmes and initiatives could be developed in what would be a safe and secure surrounding. Local government needs to think outside the box. Hopefully,

today's motion can change the mindset of those who have not yet got it.

If there is anything to come out of the success of the Paralympics and the successes of our individual athletes and their heroic performances, it is and should be an end to the prejudice suffered by people with disabilities in our society. All too often, when disabled people attempt to normalise their life — sport is a great vehicle to do that — they are treated appallingly. It comes from all quarters of our society, and it still exists. If we can end those prejudices and change the mindset of those who are in positions of influence and cannot acknowledge and see the benefits of disabled participation in sport, that will be a real legacy.

Mr Swann: A comment made by Ms McCorley has left me somewhat distracted. She said that the Minister was a cheerleader for disability sports. I am afraid that I just cannot get that image out of my head; it has put me off my train of thought. I am sure that you would make a fantastic cheerleader, Minister, if you so desired.

The motion refers to the legacy of the Paralympic Games, but it would be remiss of us not to mention the legacy of the Olympic Games participants and the games-makers who took part from Northern Ireland and across the UK. The range of aspects that we can look to for the legacy have been mentioned in great detail with regard to the development of athletes and facilities and all the rest of it. The Cultural Olympiad was another part of the Olympics that had an effect even on the House; we should not be remiss about that either. Maurice Orr's exhibition 'The Screaming Silence of the Wind' was displayed in the Great Hall. It was an art exhibition that was available to touch and had an audio-sensory aspect. That was also fully available for people with disabilities. It is those parts of the legacy of the Olympics that we have to look to to make sure that we get maximum effect in Northern Ireland. I know that Ballymena Borough Council also took the opportunity to display Maurice's artwork.

3.45 pm

When we look at legacy, it is not just necessary to look at buildings and facilities. A number of Members mentioned Michael McKillop, and we had a Matter of the Day to discuss the fact that he was awarded the Whang Youn Dai Achievement Award as one of two athletes who exemplified the best spirit of the Paralympic Games. That was not just to do with Michael's achievement; it was to do with the work that he did in going around schools and promoting the Paralympics prior to the games and building up that knowledge. I know that he was also present at an event that the Minister ran in conjunction with LOCOG to highlight the games. When we look at the legacy of those events, it is important that we look at all the activities in that broad spectrum.

When Disability Sports NI was before the Committee, it indicated the real legacy of the games. It has witnessed an increased participation in sports. William Irwin mentioned the 40% increase in participation in one swimming event and the increase in expressions of interest. We hope that the legacy of the Paralympics is to enable young people with a disability to look at sportsmen or sportswomen with a disability similar to theirs and get the encouragement and self-confidence to take part and become involved in a sporting activity that they would not naturally have

been involved in. They might not be medal winners of the future, but hopefully we can give them the confidence to participate in a sporting activity that is usually seen to be applicable only to able-bodied professionals rather than someone with a disability. If that is to be our legacy from the Paralympics, we will have achieved something in this place.

In its report, Disability Sports NI stated that disabled people were half as likely to participate in sports, with only 19% of adults with a disability participating compared with 37% of all adults. I know that targets have been set to increase participation by able-bodied and disabled adults, but work has to be done to increase those percentages. I am sure that the Minister is committed to doing that. If we miss this opportunity, it will be a long time before we in this place have another such fantastic event to build a legacy on. That is why we have to grasp the opportunity now. We will have the World Police and Fire Games, and there will be legacies from those games, but those legacies will not be for children and young people with a disability, who can look to their heroes and the medal winners who have been listed here by other Members.

Mr McDevitt: Each country that took part in the 2012 Paralympic Games will celebrate and honour its athletes. Each country will seek to create a lasting legacy in a way that reflects its culture and sporting heritage. Each country will seek to inspire future Paralympians by providing more sporting opportunities. We who sit at the apex of two sporting nations should be no different.

The legacy of the 2012 Paralympic Games is, I hope, well under way. The headlines endure. It is a historic fact that the most successful athletes ever to emerge from this island are not two able-bodied athletes but two young men from these six counties who have had to face up to disability in their life. That is a fact that should humble us all and make us reflect on the true meaning of that beautiful word "superhuman". To find what resilience means; to understand what achievement can look like; to reduce to dust the barriers that get put up in front of young people by the state, by circumstance and by their disability; and to reduce this island and these small counties of ours in Northern Ireland humbly to tears of admiration were, I think, the true legacies of the games.

I will talk a little about Laurence McGivern, a Paralympic swimmer from Rostrevor in County Down. He found his extraordinary talent in the swimming pool because of Newry and Mourne District Council's commitment to the Disability Sports NI programme. Like others, he has gone on to inspire young athletes with disabilities. Councils around Northern Ireland deserve some credit, and Newry and Mourne is one of them. Its participation in the Disability Sports NI swimming championships rose dramatically in the aftermath of performances by Laurence and Bethany Firth at the games.

Swimming was not the only sport to receive positive exposure. I will talk a little about the runners in a second, but it is worth noting that Northern Ireland athletes excelled in cycling, tandem, archery, equestrian events and other sports.

Participation in sport is special. It builds character, it builds muscles, it builds soul, and it builds humans. It gives young people the opportunity to be old beyond their years as they face up to the challenge of competitive sport from a reasonably early age. It also gives them an opportunity to understand that, if they are in a team sport environment,

the sum of the parts is always much bigger than anything that they could do as individuals in that number.

This is a real moment to seize on a fantastic sense of achievement. There is a great duty on the House to accept the fact that disabled sportspeople outperformed all our able-bodied ones, to treat them as equals, to give them the prominence that they deserve and to provide them with the backing that they have earned.

I am sure that many Members never thought that we would see a green vest hurtling down a sprinting track to take Olympic gold, not once but twice. As much as those of us of Eamonn Coghlan's generation believed that he might just have done it in Moscow, I never thought that I would see the day when two 800-metre gold medals would go to athletes in Irish vests. Those men are the inspiration to the next generation of runners from this region and this island.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr McDevitt: Let us support them, and let us do so generously.

Mr G Robinson: This summer, we were treated to a spectacle of sport that reminded us that having a disability does not mean that you cannot take part in competitive sport. Many of us were enthralled at the high quality of sport that the Paralympics provided. I also commend the parents and teachers for the tremendous support that they gave to all our young people who participated in the games.

We have been left with a very positive picture of all those who have a disability. I wonder whether the Paralympians realise the immense good that they have done for all people who have a disability, how the public perceive a disability and the example that they have set for disabled as well as able-bodied athletes. Although we are all aware that finances are severely strained, it would be beneficial for all athletes who have a disability to have access to good facilities, which could be used by visiting teams as a training base, to ensure that athletes can achieve their personal bests and bring further success to Northern Ireland and Team GB. For the proud record of achievement to continue, we need to ensure that funding is put into disabled sport by the Minister and the Executive. I appreciate that the Minister and the Executive have a budget, but whatever money can be invested should be invested, so that people with a disability can improve their participation in their preferred sport. I also encourage all local councils that do not have disabled facilities to make sure that all their facilities cater for those who have a disability.

Limavady has its own Paralympic star in Sally Brown. Like every area that has a competitor, we are intensely proud of all our home-grown talent. Sally and others deserve to have superb training facilities so that they can achieve further success and continue to inspire their own and younger generations. Sally is just one of the many Northern Ireland stars of whom we are all so proud. Despite my expressed concerns about funding, I urge the Minister and Executive to do the best they can in aiding our Paralympic athletes to leave the greatest legacy so that they can achieve even further success.

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I thank the Members who tabled the motion and the 11 Members who have spoken in the debate so far. This has probably been one of the best debates that I have

been involved in since becoming Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. That is not because I have memories of the Paralympics fresh in my head, as does everyone else, but because of the whole spectacle of the pre-games training and the lead-up. I did not anticipate anything other than cross-party support for ensuring that what the Paralympic Games had to offer leaves a legacy. I listened carefully to the debate and to the views expressed on the motion. Although there are many similarities, some issues brought to our attention need fairly careful consideration.

I want to use the opportunity again to congratulate Eilish, James, Bethany, Michael, Jason and, indeed, everyone who participated in the 2012 Paralympic Games. I thank those who participated and their families, coaches, communities and clubs. I also thank the media for the positive way in which they reported the Paralympic Games. One of the things that I will always remember is that, when I was leaving the closing ceremony of the Olympic Games and going to the airport, billboards were being posted that said, "Thanks for the warm-up, lads". For me, that summed up the spirit and our anticipation of the forthcoming Paralympic Games. Indeed, it was a warm-up. The legacy that many Members spoke about today needs to happen and to endure.

I congratulate Robin Swann on bringing the Cultural Olympiad into the debate. The whole aspect of culture is very important. In 2012, we saw the power of the spectacle that art and sport create together. I think that it was a taster, and I would like to build on that.

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

I congratulate every Member on the passion with which they spoke about the games. As the mover of the motion, Oliver McMullan, outlined, there is a need to ensure continued support from my Department and from across the Executive, not just for Disability Sports Northern Ireland. I am a big advocate and fan of that organisation and always have been. It has led by example, and its work is exemplary. From 2009 to 2012, 177 primary schools have been impacted by its five-star challenge programme. I challenge anyone involved in outreach and development work, regardless of the area that it is in, to meet such a target. This needs to have further support through the Executive. The Special Olympics are different in that they receive support from four Departments. However, we need to make sure that Disability Sports Northern Ireland and its five-star challenge and any other work and needs emerging from that work have my support.

Michelle McLveen, Chair of the Committee, recorded her congratulations. Like every other Member, she spoke about the inspiration that came not only from those who succeeded but from those who participated in the Paralympic Games. I congratulate the Committee on planning an informal meeting with Disability Sports NI to see, with regard to NILGA as well, where we go from here.

4.00 pm

I think that every Member who spoke mentioned the role of local government, and I listened to David Hilditch's contribution with a lot of interest. I believe that we are in a time when we are looking at what ratepayers can get for their money. Michael McGimpsey spoke in a very elegant way about equality and rights, which I am 100% behind. There should not be an either/or; every citizen, regardless

of their ability should have access and rights. There has been an imbalance around access for people with disabilities to arts, sports and many different strata of life in our communities. That is not good enough.

Questions were also raised about the three stadia. I think that it was Michelle McIlveen who urged the governing bodies to make sure that there is access to those stadia. I can say on the record now that, not only will those bodies meet their statutory obligations, they should continue to work with Disability Sports NI and others to make sure that we provide the best standard for access and not just the minimum. I recently met Audiences NI to discuss access to the arts. When big infrastructure developments are happening here, we must make sure that disability is considered upfront rather than as an afterthought. I am sure that those who have visited the MAC, the Lyric and the Titanic building recently can see where good thinking and good working relationships can have better outcomes for people with disabilities.

It is important that we see what we can learn from other people. Dominic Bradley raised the issue of the Places People Play initiative and the, I think, £100 million that the British Olympics is bringing forward with the lottery. Based on economy of scale, and there being more than 1.5 million people here, £14 million should be brought forward for our Active Communities programmes. That is fair enough. However, if I picked the Member up right, although it is a good start, we need to do more. We particularly need to look at the role of local government and, given my primary responsibility for sport, how I can get more money to spend on facilities for those with disabilities. The figures were impressive: 40,000 sports leaders; 100,000 adults who test out different aspects of sport; and six weeks of coaching. I will certainly look at that strategy and work with Disability NI to see what else we can do around that, and I will look at any other strategy that produces good outcomes for people with disabilities.

Anna Lo, William Irwin and others, including the Chair, spoke about pride and raised the issue of the minimum 6% increase. I will be looking to see that increased well above that. That 6% is the minimum that we can do in the Sport Matters strategy, but given the right support and investment, Disability Sports NI is convinced that we can increase that target, which is what we will seek to do.

Rosaleen McCorley, David Hilditch, Robin Swann and other Members spoke about the legacy that we hope to achieve. Conall McDevitt is right: for their numbers, our Paralympians yielded more medal success. Regardless of that, the sense of pride that we have in our athletes will endure until the next Olympics, and we have the Commonwealth Games next year. The one thing that all the athletes who competed in the Olympics and Paralympics have done and will continue to do is their outreach and work around schools, youth clubs and communities. They have been an inspiration.

The games-makers, volunteers and everybody involved made those games, and our memories of those games will endure. We hope to learn lessons from the experience of those games-makers and the volunteers that we can put to use in the World Police and Fire Games and in everything else. All sport, whether for the able-bodied or disabled, relies largely and heavily on volunteering. Without the support of volunteers and their families, we would not have as much success, and a much smaller percentage of

people than at present would participate in or be involved with sport.

We should not forget, and George Robinson reminded us, that there are challenges on our budget. However, if I picked George up correctly, he said that, notwithstanding those challenges, we need to make sports for people with disabilities a priority.

I pay tribute again to everybody who spoke. To give reassurance, if it is needed, I am fully prepared to work with everyone, but mainly the stakeholders, to establish what we can learn and how we can best take forward the lessons that we have learnt to make sure that the legacy endures. We also need to make sure that the action plan and the approach that we have taken increase participation, because that in itself will be a legacy. We need to look at how we can put more investment into buildings and infrastructure.

I am looking forward to having discussions with NILGA, particularly about how RPA will be realised. It concerns me that there are facilities that have floodlit pitches and are well secured but are not being used. It concerns me that money generated through sport is not being reinvested in sport for people of all abilities and people who are disabled. That concerns me a lot. I understand where local government has been, but if we are to move forward through the provision of better facilities for every citizen, we need to do so and make sure that that is done well so that it is not the case that people have or do not have facilities depending on their postcode.

Dominic Bradley, Conall McDevitt and others cited Newry and Mourne District Council as an example, and there are many others. Credit to those councils where it is due, such as Belfast, Antrim and many others. Of every council area that I visited in the lead-up to the Olympics and the Paralympics, I have to say that most had done as much as they possibly could, not only around pre-games training but around promoting the Olympics and the Paralympics. I feel that the support was unprecedented compared with previous years. Even though I was a councillor for only a couple of years, it was the first time in my memory that I saw in concert across the North and, indeed, across the island as much support as possible given. It was a good start, and I do not think that we are done yet.

I hope that we can learn lessons through continued support for Disability Sports NI, which has done an absolutely marvellous job and will continue to do so. The programmes that it has put to the Executive for support will be invested in. We will carefully consider what the emerging needs are, because we cannot pay lip service to a legacy. We cannot be talking about the legacy of 2016 if we did not take full advantage of the legacy of 2012.

I thank the Members for tabling the motion and thank every Member who spoke, and who did so with such passion and commitment to making sure that we have full access and full equality — again, the rights of every citizen — as far as is possible.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas le achan duine a ghlac páirt sa díospóireacht. I thank everybody for taking part in the debate.

As the Minister rightly acknowledged, there is a great sense of cross-party agreement on the motion. We have all acknowledged the achievements of our Olympians

and Paralympians at this year's games. Since the Paralympics, James Brown, Eilish Byrne, Bethany Firth, Laurence McGivern and Sharon Vennard have all become virtually household names. I reserve a special word of congratulations for the two outstanding athletes from my neck of the woods, Sally Brown and Jason Smyth, both of whom I know. I also congratulate double gold-medal winner Michael McKillop, whom I met here at the reception. I will touch on that after a bit. He was selected for the Whang Youn Dai achievement award for his great sense of spirit throughout the games. Perhaps one of the legacies of the games is that sense of spirit, and I hope that it lives on.

As we marvelled at our athletes' achievements, there was a sneaking suspicion that we might slip yet again into the pre-Olympic ambivalence to our Paralympic athletes and disabled sports. Others, such as Seb Coe, assured us that that could not happen. As I said earlier, at the reception I met Michael McKillop, and after talking to him, I felt the same. Indeed, the words of Minister Ní Chuilín expanded on that when she said:

"The Games may be over, but the future starts now and its opportunities are limitless."

The motion aimed to explore those opportunities with the major deliverers of sport and leisure — our local authorities, the governing bodies of our sports, where applicable, and the other relevant Departments — to ensure a lasting legacy of the Games.

Rosie McCorley spoke about the recent Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure meeting at which we began to conduct a review of issues facing bodies other than the big three sports. This review specifically identified the legacy aspect from the 2012 Olympics and Paralympic Games and received a significant level of replies. Issues that were identified included funding, inadequate facilities, limited resources, lack of media profile and some legislative issues.

Suggestions as to how increased participation could be brought about included a joined-up approach, a 100% rates relief for sports clubs, greater schools participation, and taster and trial days and weeks for disabled and non-disabled sports.

A stakeholder event will be held on 22 November, which, no doubt, will further explore the opportunities for legacy issues. I urge the various sports development officers and recreation development officers in our local authorities, as well as senior officials from our wide gamut of sporting bodies, to attend that event.

The issues that we have discussed today will also, no doubt, contribute to the debate. Oliver McMullan said that disability sport provision was central to this year's Paralympics success. He praised the work of Sport NI and Disability Sport NI while outlining the shortcomings in the numbers of adults participating in disabled sports. He also talked about the challenges that might arise as a result of RPA and the delivery of facilities for Paralympic sports. In an intervention, Ian McCrea highlighted the need for councils to closely examine such provision. Mr McMullan went on to outline the difficulties that are experienced by parents of disabled children in relation to welfare and participation in the Special Olympics.

Michelle McIlveen, the Chair of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, paid tribute to everyone who made up

the Olympic and Paralympic teams in 2012. She also outlined the significant numbers of disabled adults who are not participating in sport and related the work of the Committee with all the stakeholders in the delivery of disabled sport. She advised the House of a forthcoming meeting with NILGA and others in the new year to discuss that issue.

Michael McGimpsey concentrated on the legacy aspect of the 2012 Paralympics and the key role of Disability Sport NI and the Department's document, 'Sport Matters'. Dominic Bradley described some of the ongoing work to provide facilities and support for disabled sports from lottery funding and the Olympic association.

Anna Lo considered the change of attitudes by non-disabled people to disabled sport and the increase in respect and diversity. William Irwin urged everyone to engage with the disabled sporting organisations to establish their requirements and needs.

Rosie McCorley commended the Minister for her work and asked her to ensure the support of all the local authorities. David Hilditch outlined the participation of people in sports such as boccia, which is an important part of many people's weekly social interaction routine. He put forward the idea of a legacy development group. That deserves consideration. He challenged the input to date of some local councils, including his own.

Robin Swann mentioned the role of the Cultural Olympiad, which was part of the Olympic celebrations. He also mentioned the wonderful exhibition that we visited in Ballymena and which was also seen here, of the work of Maurice Orr.

Conall McDevitt rightly pointed out that the disabled athletes were the toast of everyone on these islands. He went on to praise the work of Newry and Mourne District Council. George Robinson outlined the need for funding for sports facilities. I hope that he will back that at tonight's meeting of Limavady Borough Council, which will be discussing that matter and the delivery thereof.

The Minister related her own Olympic experience and gave a holistic overview of the Games period. She offered her support for all the bodies that are currently involved in sport. She also congratulated the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure for its work to date. She made a telling comment at the end of her speech when she said that we cannot simply pay lip service to the legacy of the Olympic Games.

Before I finish I want to point out that there is still a general lack of awareness, which we must act on, of the difference between and the delivery of the Special Olympics and the Paralympics. There is some confusion there on which we need some clarity.

I thank Members for their contributions this afternoon. It has been a very enlightening debate. I am glad that the motion has received the support of all the Members who have spoken. I support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the magnificent success of our athletes at the 2012 Paralympic Games in London; and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and Disability Sports NI to secure the support

of district councils and the relevant Departments to ensure a lasting legacy of the games and to increase the number of sporting opportunities available to people with disabilities at all levels of sport in every area.

4.15 pm

Motion made:

*That the Assembly do now adjourn. —
[Mr Deputy Speaker.]*

Adjournment

Special Needs: Taughmonagh

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes. The Minister will have 10 minutes to respond. All other Members who wish to speak will have seven minutes.

Mr Spratt: I thank the Minister in advance for responding to today's debate. The Minister was at the official opening of Taughmonagh Primary School and knows the area reasonably well.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise this very important issue, which affects families living in Taughmonagh. I was shocked to learn that 47.5% — almost half — of the total number of children who attend the local primary school in Taughmonagh are registered as having special educational needs (SEN). That is a truly shocking statistic, and it is so important to highlight it here today. More and more children are being diagnosed as having special needs in other areas of Belfast and, indeed, throughout the Province. That must be taken into consideration when budgets are allocated to schools.

To put this in context: the Taughmonagh estate is situated in one of the most affluent parts of South Belfast, yet it houses families with very complex needs and suffers deprivation to the same degree as inner-city areas of the South Belfast constituency.

I would like to put on record the excellent work being done by the special needs co-ordinator, principal and staff at Taughmonagh Primary School. The pressure that they are under should not be underestimated in any way. As well as the statistic that I quoted earlier, the school has a speech and language unit with an additional 32 children with special needs. Those children are from not just the Taughmonagh area but all over the city of Belfast. Every teacher wants to ensure that every child reaches his or her potential, but that is incredibly difficult given the high numbers of children with special needs.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) carried out an inspection two years ago. It recognised that many children and families in the local area have an increasingly complex range of needs and that the quality of special needs provision is very good. It went on to state that there is a good integration of children with a wide range of additional needs. The teachers in the special needs unit have a very challenging remit, and the inspector could have gone further to acknowledge that. It is unfair to compare Taughmonagh to other schools, given the high levels of special needs amongst its pupils. It is a tribute to the staff of Taughmonagh Primary School that the children are making good progress. I am sure that that will continue to be the case.

There are a number of issues that I would like to raise given that more and more children are being diagnosed as having special needs and the budget is being reduced.

The statementing process is taking too long, and there is not enough access to educational psychologists. Children are having to wait too long to see their psychologist, and, as a result, there are currently two places in the speech and language unit yet to be allocated. It is vital that class sizes are kept small as these children need one-to-one attention and each child needs his or her own schedule.

It is all too easy to say that there is simply not enough money to increase the budgets. However, the system is simply not working effectively. If we wish to place children with special needs into mainstream schools, there must be an increase in funding. If not, compared with their counterparts in special schools, those children will be at a considerable disadvantage. All the teachers in Taughmonagh Primary School are trained to level 1 and 2 in SEN. Considering the rising numbers of children who are being diagnosed, perhaps we need to ensure that all new teachers are trained to meet these children's needs.

The children in the school have joined up with Glenveagh special school to complete an art project, and they have also teamed up with Harberton school to work on a tree project. I welcome those links and hope that there can be greater collaboration between schools in the future. A sharing of services would be beneficial to the staff and pupils at Taughmonagh.

There has been much debate recently on how to address the wider issue of special needs. It is not a case of simply providing more teachers and psychologists; it is essential to improve early years provision and ensure effective early intervention. Aspirations in families need to be raised, and I hope that the social investment fund will go some way to address that. However, special needs provision in Taughmonagh and, indeed, other primary schools must be reviewed, because many of the schools really are at breaking point. I understand that this issue must be looked at as part of a wider multiagency approach, but the responsibility for special needs provision lies with the Department of Education.

I ask the Minister to address a couple of specific issues. First, as I said, we must ensure that every child in the education system reaches his or her full potential, and we must also ensure that schools have the adequate resources to provide that opportunity. The Minister needs to look at the length of time that is taken to statement a child, and he also needs to provide more access to educational psychologists. At a time when a record number of children are being diagnosed with special needs, it is essential that financial and human resources are increased and that budgets are not cut.

Minister, I ask you to take these points on board very seriously. I know that Taughmonagh Primary School is one of many schools in the inner city that is in a similar position. I know about the issues on the budget and so forth, but we need to look at the issue very seriously, particularly as there are high numbers of children with special needs — almost 50% — in inner city areas. I know that you have been doing work on that, and I thank you for the work that has been done. I ask you to take this particular case on board when you are looking at the overall situation throughout the rest of the Province.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Jimmy Spratt for securing the debate on this topic. It gives all the representatives from the area an

opportunity to support him in his call for some additional support and attention for the school and the overall provision for children who have either learning difficulties or special needs.

I also thank Janet Douds and her team in the school in Taughmonagh for the tremendous work that they have been involved in, notwithstanding the difficulties and challenges that they face in the school, and, indeed in the surrounding area. As Jimmy outlined, those difficulties are a result of the levels of deprivation and other social and economic challenges that that community faces. Perhaps it is even more commendable from Janet's point of view that, when I spoke to her, she was at pains to point out that, although the school has its difficulties, so too do many other schools. So, I pay tribute to Janet for that sentiment. Of course, she also wanted to highlight the difficulties that her school and pupils face. As principal, she wanted to highlight her colleagues' ability to educate the children to the highest standards and to give them an opportunity as they go forward in life.

Michael McGimpsey will well recall the discussions that we had in 1994 and 1995 in the context of the Belfast European Partnership Board. The South Belfast constituency is on the more affluent part of the spectrum in the North. However, within it there are many "pockets of deprivation" as they are called, and, indeed, Taughmonagh would have been referred to then as an "enumeration district". It is quite a small area within a wider affluent area which requires additional support. Taughmonagh was high on the list of enumeration districts. We have pointed out, for some considerable time, that it is a pocket of deprivation in a more affluent constituency which needs additional support and resources.

I thank Jimmy for securing the debate this afternoon. I do not want to rehearse all the arguments. However, this particular school has 150 pupils, and there are perhaps 70-odd children in the nursery school; and it is quite alarming to hear that in every class there are two or three children with some form of learning difficulty or special-needs requirement. Some 47% — I thought it was 49% — of the children have some level of learning difficulty. I was given the figure of 12% of children who may well be diagnosed within the autistic spectrum. This is, obviously, a very serious cause for concern, and I know that the Minister will respond to these arguments later.

It is also important that the children have access to an educational psychologist so that they can be assessed through statementing or whatever. There is a need to identify the extent of the problem. That is the first base from which we can work out what support the school, and its children, need.

The following arguments have been put forward so far. Taughmonagh School is in an area of high need, which faces many social and economic challenges. Children going to the school are part of that community. The school itself will provide the best education that it can, and as I said earlier, I commend the team in the school for that. However, the children require additional support, and all the area representatives present will want to give that support to the school and support the Department in its ability to continue to divert resources to areas and schools such as this. For me, this underlines the need for us to look deeper into the education system. We must make sure that

we give every child the best opportunity that we can, no matter what area or community he comes from.

On that basis, I support Jimmy in bringing the debate to the House today, and I commend the school for all its efforts, notwithstanding the challenges that it faces locally.

Mr McGimpsey: I thank Jimmy Spratt for securing this debate, concerning special needs within Taughmonagh Primary School. As Alex Maskey said, Taughmonagh is surrounded by the affluent Malone and Upper Malone areas, but is an area of strong social and economic disadvantage. Therefore, it needs proper support.

I was at the opening of the new primary school a couple of months ago. I was pleased that the Minister also attended that event, when Dame Mary Peters opened the school. It is a beautiful school with good facilities, led by a very committed headmistress and a team of teachers and support workers and delivering to the very best of their abilities for the local community and its children. They do those children proud. The new school is the result of many years of campaigning. Taughmonagh is a very committed community, and I was proud, over the years, to give it what support I could to deliver a new school.

We have the new school in place. However, it does not stop there. We have to provide an education system that is specially tailored to the mixed talents and abilities of our children, and we also have to bear in mind the needs of those children. In fact, as indicated, around 49% of pupils in the school have special needs. They have a variety of special needs, and that includes the 12% who are on the autistic spectrum.

4.30 pm

Early detection and early intervention are key. After that, the appropriate support for each child, as an individual, must be provided. It seems to me that the situation is a bit like health: you assess the need and then you address that need. It is not about saying that our budgets are curtailed and that we will curtail them to save money. If we do that, and if we ignore or do not fully provide, the effect on special needs children of their not getting the support that they need is highly detrimental to them personally, and can be detrimental to the class and to the wider community. It is important that money follow need, and there is a clear, identifiable need here.

There is a huge challenge for the teaching staff, and Janet and her team are up for that. However, they must get the support that is required. As has been mentioned, classes in Taughmonagh are small; therefore, the percentage of the pupils with special needs is commensurately higher. It may be that the teacher has one classroom assistant only for a class that has a number of special needs children, and that creates great challenges and pressures for that teacher.

There is also a particular concern around funding for early-years special needs, and early intervention is key. Early intervention and early detection equals a better outcome.

Another issue that could be mentioned is that when the inspectorate comes into the school, it is made fully aware of the situation in the school. It is not, perhaps, like another primary school in South Belfast, where the percentage of children with special needs would be much lower. For example, I am on the board of governors of Stranmillis

Primary School in Knightsbridge Park, and its special needs pupils account for about 6%, which is very much lower. Therefore, the inspectors need to be aware of the challenges that the staff face, the different environment that the teachers operate in and the different situation that they face.

The Minister was present at the opening of the school, and the local community was very pleased to see him and grateful that he took the time to come along. Therefore, I appeal to the Minister that, having provided the brand new facility of a beautiful new school, the next step is to ensure that the needs of the children in that school and the needs of the local community are fully met in one of the key areas for government in Northern Ireland. If we look at our key areas, this is obviously one. The sooner we can provide the support that is required, the better. Early intervention and early appropriate support are everything for those children as they grow up and develop.

Dr McDonnell: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. I apologise for the fact that I was tied up earlier and was a few minutes late for the debate. However, I hope that you will forgive me, and I hope that Mr Spratt will forgive me for my late entry.

I want to make some brief comments. Taughmonagh is a new school, supported by a very dedicated team, including Janet and her team of teachers, who work extremely hard to ensure that the children get the best attention possible.

The school consists of a primary school, a two-classroom nursery and the special speech and language group. However, as Members have said, the problem is that this is not a normal school like others in South Belfast.

About half the children have special needs. I think that it is 49% — a figure that has been quoted already by others. However, that is compounded by the fact that a substantial number of children are on the autistic spectrum. It is about 12%, which is quarter of the 49% who have special needs. That figure is six times higher than the Belfast average. That means that while a teacher in an average school might expect to have a child on the autistic spectrum of needs in every second class, there are three or four in Taughmonagh. In fact, I think that there are four children with autistic special needs in one class. That is a tremendous demand on the teachers, because those children almost need one-to-one teaching and, at worst, one-to-two teaching. If you have a teacher who is trying to look after a class and trying to look after four children who are on the autistic spectrum, there is work there for three people, not one. That really needs to be looked at. In such a case, the autistic children suffer, because it is impossible for the teacher to give them the special attention they need to meet their individual, personal and educational needs. Those children are high demand because of their particular condition.

There are also a large number of children with special needs other than autism, and they find themselves being overlooked, for no malevolent reason, as the teacher is pulled to look after the children with autism. So, there are children with special needs being neglected a little.

The remaining pupils in the class, particularly the average pupils, are being neglected, again because of the high demands of the children with heavy demand. As I see it, that whole dynamic puts immense pressure on the very committed teachers in the school.

Like Michael and others, I was involved when pressure was being generated during a previous Assembly mandate to get the school built, and I visited the school on a number of occasions. They are very grateful, but we are at risk now of having a good school and a very good team of people but burnout taking place.

There is a special needs co-ordinator based in the school who can request help for children, but that help is not always available. They have access to a psychologist, but only for a limited number of hours. As I understand it, there are 75 children in the school in need of psychological support, and there is provision for five. So they have to have a lottery to find out which five are going to get attention and which 70 are going to be left at a loose end. That is also very stressful and demanding on teachers. The school is left to run that lottery and to make the decisions on that lottery, and it is not fair that the teachers or the principal, Janet Douds, have to make that decision. Those things are pressures. Yes, there is help coming in from Harberton Special School. If it has spare capacity, it dedicates some of its staff to assist in Taughmonagh. Last year, one teacher was able to come across twice a week and work with eight of the children with learning disabilities. That support is welcome, but it is not nearly enough.

Inspection reports have been very good. In 2010 and 2012, the reports stated that Taughmonagh was doing a tremendous job under very difficult circumstances. There is, arguably, a very strong case for increased provision, and I think we are all agreed on that, because the teaching staff at Taughmonagh are already stretched. The difficulty we have is that when the Department is making its assessments, or whatever, it looks at the school, but it does not dig down or drill down into it to see the children who are there. There is an overload of special needs.

There is six times the average level of autism spectrum illness in this school. That means that there are sometimes up to four such children in a class. That is an impossible demand for a teacher to meet. Seventy-five children need psychological support, but only five get it. Statistically, the Department tends to pay little or no attention at times to that, because it has a view that the special needs are spread out. Special needs are highly concentrated in the school. The school is doing an outstanding job, and I would not want anything that I or my colleagues might say to cast aspersions on that. Those people are doing an outstanding job in almost impossible circumstances. I urge the Minister to find some way of coming up with a strategy to support those vulnerable children and their teachers, who are overloaded and at serious risk of burnout.

Ms Lo: I thank Mr Spratt for securing the debate. As other Members said, the inspectorate's report shows that almost half of the children attending the school are in need of additional learning support, with 6% of them having been statemented. That is a much higher than average proportion of children with special educational needs than in any of the mainstream schools in Northern Ireland. The school has a small number of children for whom English is not their first language.

All those difficulties pose huge challenges for Taughmonagh Primary School. However, the inspectorate's report that was published in November 2010 was, overall, very positive about the quality of teaching in the school. I commend the school for its more than satisfactory

performance over the years. I thank the teachers, classroom assistants and administration staff for their commitment and good work on behalf of the children.

The report praised, in particular, the response from the special educational needs co-ordinator, who provides effective support to pupils in the school. The report highlights another of the school's strengths, which is to identify children who are underachieving. Those children are then given short-term intensive support in booster groups, which appears to have a very positive influence in helping children to make good progress in areas of need.

It is important that problems are identified early. That means that they can be addressed faster, children are not left behind for too long, and shorter interventions are required. For many years, I worked with immigrant children. If such children get intensive help, within a year or two, miracles happen. They progress in leaps and bounds. It is important that they are given that priority attention in booster groups.

Another important measure is the school linking up with other areas of expertise. Taughmonagh certainly seems to work very well with a number of outside agencies, including a neighbouring special school and support from the Belfast Education and Library Board. A multidisciplinary approach provides a more comprehensive response to meet the differing needs of the children in the school.

Although I support the call from every Member who spoke for more SEN provision, smaller classes and greater access to educational psychologists, there is also a need to look at the wider issues facing the Taughmonagh community. We learn from the report that almost half of the children at the school get free meals, which is a clear indication of deprivation in the community. There is a need to look at a more holistic approach to help the community. An interdepartmental approach is needed and a concerted effort to tackle poverty, unemployment and training needs in the area.

The school must work with parents to involve them in their children's educational and developmental progress. Early years education programmes such as Sure Start should be put in place to give children a head start. Parenting programmes are also beneficial to parents and enhance them in helping their children's early development. All in all, tackling special needs alone is not enough for the Taughmonagh community, which faces the full spectrum of disadvantage.

4.45 pm

Mr McDevitt: I join Mr Spratt and colleagues in supporting the call for special attention to be paid to Taughmonagh Primary School.

As colleagues noted, and as the Minister knows well because he was present for the opening, the new school really is a beautiful facility. It is a really nice space and a lovely learning environment. Those of us who are privileged enough to do this job and have the opportunity to visit all the schools in our area know that this school community is very warm and welcoming. I know that Mrs Douds puts huge emphasis on keeping that warm, friendly, family environment in her school, and it is very obvious that that environment, despite the challenges that many of the kids who go to the school face, is never, ever compromised.

Colleagues have covered the vast majority of what I would have wanted to say at this stage, but there are a couple of points of context that might be worth putting on the record. The shifting demographics of our constituency and the acute socio-economic divisions in South Belfast, on which every Member who has spoken so far has reflected, mean that a small number of our schools end up, through circumstance, I guess, having to cope with a disproportionately large number of children and young people with particularly special requirements. It is a hidden problem inside what is otherwise a very affluent place.

Indeed, Taughmonagh is a very beautiful place. It is a leafy place, and it is a community that has spent a huge amount of time in the past couple of decades investing in itself, and, when you walk around there, you know it. It feels like a community that is on the turn, but, still and all, because of the divisions and inequalities that exist in South Belfast today — ironically, they are not necessarily to do with community inequality but to do with financial inequality and inequality of means — the school bears a disproportionate burden.

My colleagues have said that they are very fortunate to have Harberton Special School close by. There have been good inter-school partnerships, and specialist teachers have been able to offer up some time. However, it is an opportunity for the Minister to explore very specific and targeted support programmes. Taughmonagh would not pop up in the wider map of social or economic need because it is ironed out by the affluence around it. Yet and all, the school has particularly special requirements.

The great thing about Taughmonagh is that all of us have absolute confidence in the school team. We know that, if resources were directed towards it, they would be used really well and stretched as far as they possibly could, and the outputs would be brilliant. As proof of that, it is worth noting that the nursery in Taughmonagh is one of the most oversubscribed in our constituency. Indeed, many of the families who live in the very large houses in immediate proximity to Taughmonagh, on both sides of the community divide, are very keen that their kids are able to attend that nursery. That is proof of the culture and positive atmosphere that exists around the primary school.

Without detaining the House any more, I urge the Minister to reflect on what has been said to him by every one of us who has the privilege of representing our little part of Belfast. I assure him, in the full certainty that he will find it within his means to make some investment in this school and acknowledge its special circumstances, that we have absolute confidence that that investment will pay dividends — and good dividends at that.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Mr Spratt for securing the debate, and I thank Members for the tone of the debate. It has been informative and useful in raising a number of issues with the special educational requirements of pupils attending Taughmonagh Primary School.

Indeed, once again, it emphasised, as all Members did, that we are dealing with a very good school, namely Taughmonagh Primary School. In recent years, it has seen investment in the fabric of the school, and I was delighted to be invited to the school's opening. I found it a very enjoyable event, with the community, parents and pupils all

taking part and presenting a very good and happy school to all those who attended. It is a credit to them.

The investment in the fabric of the school is, in itself, a statement to the community of Taughmonagh that the Executive, the Department and the education board have not forgotten about them and that they want to make a difference to people's lives. However, it was not a final statement; we have to continue to make provision to change young people's lives in that area.

The Belfast Education and Library Board and my Department are aware of the social anomaly that exists around the school being set in a rather affluent area but suffering from social deprivation and the challenges faced by the school. The board endeavours to ensure that the school benefits from all the initiatives that are available. The school has been in the Achieving Belfast programme since the project started and has benefited from additional support and resources as a result of its participation. Those have included an additional allocation of teaching support, statistical analysis of pupil data and target setting, and enhanced psychology — though I take on board the comments that were made by Mr Spratt on that matter.

This is not a defence; it is just a statement: funding for special educational needs has been ring-fenced. It has not been subject to the cuts that have been made to budgets elsewhere. However, I accept that even that ring-fenced budget is not enough. We need to continue to seek investment for that budget. I have assured special educational needs providers that that budget has been ring-fenced. It will not face the cuts that other areas have faced. However, a challenge still exists there.

The Belfast Education and Library Board would say that the impact of the measures that it has taken has been positive. In the past, Taughmonagh Primary School has also been supported through parenting programmes. The school has made very positive links with the communities, as local representatives are aware.

There are three special speech and language units in the school. That skews the number of pupils who are recorded as having special educational needs. Children from throughout Belfast attend Taughmonagh Primary School. It is recognition of how good a school it is that parents are prepared to travel across the city to have their children attend the school. In the 2011-12 year, there were in the school around 32 pupils from the Taughmonagh estate with special educational needs.

Special educational needs covers a very wide range of issues that a child may face. Those issues may be lifelong or a challenge to the child at that moment in time. They may be physical or psychological. They may be as a result of bereavement or something that has happened in the family at that time, and the child will require special interventions, such as reading or language support. A lot of that support can be, and is, delivered by the classroom teacher. In other circumstances, in which children have statements, etc, a classroom assistant or further support may be provided. In general, a lot of that support is provided through the school.

I have never ever said that the Education budget is sufficient for all of the challenges that we face. To the credit of schools like Taughmonagh, they continue to battle forward to provide a good education — excellent education in

many instances — to young people and those with SEN. However, I accept that we should not take them for granted.

I will take on board the comments that were made by Members on a number of issues, such as the availability of child psychologists. I will follow that up further with the board. Over the years, we have run a number of initiatives to recruit child psychologists. The Department co-funds courses at Queen's University. In the past, we have had difficulty recruiting. I am not saying that that is the problem now. However, we have had difficulty recruiting board psychologists in the past. I will follow up that matter with the school, as requested by Mr Spratt and others.

As regard the broader SEN programme and how we deliver support to children with special educational needs, we are dealing with a system that has been place for around 25 years. It is slow, cumbersome and difficult to access.

As I am sure Members are aware from their constituency clinics, when children are in the system, it can be very frustrating for parents and, indeed, for schools. It is one of the reasons why my predecessor brought forward the SEN review. It attracted around 3,500 responses. It has taken us time to work our way through those responses and to come to an agreed format.

I have been in detailed discussions with the Committee for Education. Those discussions have proved fruitful. We have brought to the Executive a policy memorandum, on which we have received approval. We will bring legislation to the House next year that will speed up the assessment process, put in place a more rigorous programme of work around the special educational needs of young people and empower schools more. As part of the preparation for that, we have been running a number of pilot schemes, in which Taughmonagh has been involved. The evaluation of the schemes will continue. I think that it is important that a school such as Taughmonagh was involved in a pilot scheme, because it is at the coalface of changes to existing SEN policy. We want it to be able to help shape future SEN policy and how we deliver special educational needs provision to our young people.

I cannot emphasise enough how well Taughmonagh Primary School is doing. As I emphasised, I am not taking it for granted. I will look at and follow up all the concerns raised by Members today.

It is worth putting on the record again that the percentage of SEN pupils leaving school with five or more GCSEs at grades A to C and with two or more A levels at grades A to E has more than doubled over the past five years. It is the foundation stage provided at primary school that has allowed us to do that.

At Taughmonagh Primary School, the percentage of pupils assessed as achieving level 2 or above in Key Stage 2 English has risen from 33.3% in 2008 to 68.2% in 2010-11. That is an amazing improvement and statistic, and it is a credit to the school. The equivalent figures for maths show an increase from 46.7% to 63.6%. Again, that is a credit to the school. Members referred to the chief inspector's report, which also highlights the improving nature of Taughmonagh.

I will end by saying this: I assure Members that my Department and the Belfast Board will contact Taughmonagh school; reassess the programmes of work taking place there; familiarise it with the programmes of

change coming through for SEN; and identify any specific issues that we may be able to assist it with. I am not suggesting that we have an open chequebook, but if there are specific issues that we have not properly identified or resourced, I think that there is a duty on us to look at them again and see whether we can assist the school further than we have done in previous years. As all Members said, Taughmonagh Primary School is doing an excellent job under very difficult circumstances.

Adjourned at 4.57 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 19 November 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Suspension of Standing Orders

Mr Dickson: I beg to move

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 19 November 2012.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members that the 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 19 November 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.

Executive Committee Business

Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment)

Bill: First Stage

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development):

I beg to introduce the Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill [NIA 16/11-15], which is a Bill to enable the Department for Regional Development to continue to make payments to water and sewerage undertakers for a limited period; and to make provision requiring certain notices to be registered in the Statutory Charges Register.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Superannuation Bill: Final Stage

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

That the Superannuation Bill [NIA 6/11-15] do now pass.

I record my gratitude to the Chairperson and members of the Committee for Finance and Personnel for their detailed scrutiny of the Superannuation Bill. That was evidenced by the need to extend the Committee Stage beyond the usual time and the number of evidence sessions that were held with the Civil Service trade union representatives and other stakeholders, including the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, the Human Rights Commission, the Equality Commission and departmental officials. I also thank Members for their support, and I look forward to their continued support in the passage of the Bill through to its Royal Assent.

I now turn to the Bill. The Superannuation Act 1972 in Great Britain was amended in December 2010 to remove the requirement in that Act for trade union consent to detrimental changes in the Civil Service compensation scheme in Great Britain. However, it also augmented the procedure for consultation with trade unions by introducing new reporting requirements to document the consultation that is being carried out with the aim of reaching agreement on changes.

As Members may know, the Northern Ireland Civil Service generally operates pension and compensation scheme arrangements on the basis of parity with Great Britain. The Superannuation Bill will amend the Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 to position the Department of Finance and Personnel to introduce equivalent secondary legislative changes to amend the terms of the compensation scheme for the Northern Ireland Civil Service in line with those introduced for Home civil servants in December 2010. However, until the Superannuation Bill becomes law, the Civil Service compensation scheme in Northern Ireland cannot be amended. That means that the terms of the compensation scheme for the Northern Ireland Civil Service remain more generous than those in operation in the Home Civil Service scheme. Failure to maintain parity with Great Britain and to realign the two schemes will exert an unjustifiable pressure on public expenditure in Northern Ireland. In short, the Bill is important and necessary legislation.

As you know, during Committee Stage, the Committee considered that a strong case existed for amending the Bill to provide for a measure of Assembly control. As such, the Committee proposed an amendment that would subject any scheme that has the effect of reducing the amount of compensation benefit to negative resolution. I welcomed the opportunity to consider that amendment and, after consultation with the Office of Legislative Counsel, I agreed to it as it will strengthen the role of the Assembly, address the trade union concerns about fairness and scrutiny and provide a level of assurance in that regard.

As discussed at Consideration Stage, the newly reconstituted pension forum offers the opportunity for compromise and agreement on potential nuances in the timing and substance of compensation scheme changes. The pension forum continues to meet regularly, and I believe that it is a perfect vehicle for meaningful

engagement and consultation between my Department and trade unions.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the Final Stage of the Superannuation Bill.

As part of the Committee's consideration of the Bill, it received written submissions and held oral hearings with key stakeholders. The Committee agreed a number of key conclusions and policy recommendations in addition to the amendment to the Bill, all of which helped to address issues raised in evidence. Those were set out in detail in the Committee report and were accepted by the Minister. I addressed the provisions of the Bill in detail during the debates at its previous stages, but I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the work that the Committee will be concerned with as a result of the Bill coming to pass.

Members were mindful that the removal of the requirement for the Department to obtain the consent of the Civil Service trade unions for a reduction in benefits provided under the Civil Service compensation scheme was always going to be a contentious issue. During Committee Stage, the Department provided important clarification that engagement between Civil Service management and the trade unions offers opportunity for compromise and agreement on potential nuances to the timing and substance of compensation scheme changes in the North. In its report, the Committee recommended that local consultation with the trade unions should be undertaken at the formative stage of policy development and in tandem with, rather than subsequent to, the respective Whitehall Department. The Committee believes that the pensions forum has the potential to provide an appropriate mechanism for meaningful engagement in that regard.

I now turn to the agreed amendment to the Bill, the specifics of which were well rehearsed during the debate at Consideration Stage. The Committee believes that the agreed amendment will provide a measure of Assembly control, which is appropriate in the context of devolution. After some debate, the Committee opted for the negative resolution procedure in the amendment to align more with the provision in the 1972 Order for changes to the compensation schemes of other public servants. In addition, the Minister has provided assurances to the Committee regarding the Department's intention to observe the 21-day rule in the laying of a scheme under such Assembly control.

The work that arises from the Bill, in particular the engagement undertaken in relation to future subordinate legislation, will, therefore, be conducted in the context of the safeguards in the Bill and the assurances that the Department has provided to the Committee and the wider Assembly. In terms of the assurances, consultation reports laid by the Department under clause 2 of the Bill will be expected to demonstrate and provide transparency by setting out in detail the appropriate steps that have been taken to try to secure agreement between management side and trade union side.

I thank the Minister and departmental officials for their responsiveness and assistance to the Committee throughout the development of the legislative proposals. On behalf of the Committee, I formally support granting the Bill its Final Stage.

Mr Cree: I support the Bill's Final Stage. As the Committee Chairman said, quite a lot of evidence was taken, and members decided to support the Bill throughout and are pleased to support its Final Stage.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Éirím le tacaíocht a thabhairt do Chéim Dheiridh an Bhille. I support the Bill at Final Stage.

The Minister referred to the amendment to the Bill, which I think strengthens the Assembly's role by giving Members, the Committee and political parties the opportunity to hold the Department to account. Without that amendment, it would simply have been a matter of taking the veto away from the trade unions and handing it to the Department, and there would certainly have been an element of hypocrisy in that. It will become the case that a veto, if there is one, will be given to the Assembly, which is where I believe it should be. That is good for the devolved institutions and for democracy.

The Committee had some debate about the differences between consultation and negotiation. At the end of the day and because of the lack of case law around negotiation, the Committee preferred to follow the legal precedent associated with consultation. However, I think that the amendment urges the Department to consult seriously with trade unions. The report produced as a result of such consultation would be subject to negative resolution, and I think that will encourage the Department to ensure that real efforts are made to reach agreement with the trade unions. So, I think that the Committee's scrutiny has been helpful and has produced a fair outcome in relation to the Bill. For that reason, I support the Bill.

Mrs Cochrane: I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak briefly at the Bill's Final Stage. Given the ongoing economic uncertainty facing our society, there is an evident and pressing need for us to continually revise and refine how we govern. That applies equally to the processes that we employ to maintain the pension and compensation schemes for our public sector. As other Members have said, the Bill primarily amends the Superannuation (Northern Ireland) Order 1972, with a fundamental change relating to trade union engagement when changing the Civil Service compensation scheme.

The enactment of the Bill will remove the requirement for trade union consent to any proposed changes to reduce compensation levels payable to civil servants on redundancy. However, as the unions play a vital part in representing our public sector workers, the new requirements in the Bill will call upon the Department to report on the consultation process that is undertaken. The introduction of such a requirement places the responsibility on the Department and the Minister to be transparent and accountable in how they present information and engage in consultation. That should ensure due process and that credence is given to the trade union voice. The Alliance Party, therefore, supports the passage of the Bill.

12.15 pm

Mr Wilson: I thank Members for the contributions that they have made in this short debate. It is an important issue. I do not think that the shortness of the debate is in any way reflective of how important the issue is. Of course, it is an important issue, but the fact that the debate has been a short one is an indication of how much work was

done at Committee Stage to satisfy the members that the legislation that is coming forward has sought to provide the safeguards that they wished to see, while at the same time recognising the reality that I spelt out at the start of the debate — namely, that we need to have the changes in place if we are going to have the changes in the superannuation scheme. If we do not bring those through, it will, of course, be very costly to the Assembly. I think that Members at least recognise that, where there are parity issues and where deviation from parity is going to incur huge costs to the Assembly, whether they like parity or not, and whether they would like to plough their own furrow or not, nevertheless, there are constraints upon us. It really is cavalier to suggest that we can go our own way regardless of the economic consequences.

I thank the Members for the way in which they have conducted the scrutiny of the Bill. As I have said, and as Members have acknowledged, as a result of that scrutiny and of recommendations that were made, we have amended part of the Bill to try to strengthen the role of the Assembly. All of the Members made the same point, which was to ask, if we are taking away the veto from trade unions, what we can do and what we are doing to ensure that at least there is proper consultation and that, when we say that we are going to consult, there is some mechanism to determine whether that consultation has been proper.

There are a number of things. First of all, we have the pensions forum, which meets monthly, where those issues are discussed, as Mr Bradley and the Chairman said, at an early stage with the trade unions. There is a long process of looking at any changes that are to be made so that there can be a proper input. I actually think that that ongoing work is better than what some people suggested, which was to have a fixed period of consultation, because it allows all the nuances that people have talked about to be gone through.

The second thing is that not only does there have to be that process but a report has to be made to the Assembly on what consultation has taken place, with records of that consultation. We have said that, when the Assembly is considering any changes to the compensation scheme, we will lay the regulations 21 days prior to the discussion. So, there is the report looking at the consultation; there is the 21-day period; and then, of course, there is the change that we have agreed with the Committee, which is the negative resolution. I am not so sure that we would call it an Assembly veto, as Mr Bradley described it, and I hope that it is seen not as that but as a genuine attempt to give the Assembly its say and a chance to look at all the information in terms of any superannuation changes and how we have come to reach that point.

Mr Bradley raised the issue, which the Committee had talked about, of whether it should be consultation or negotiation. It is quite clear from the terms of the reference of the pension forum with the trade unions that it was formal consultation and not negotiation. The whole idea of consultation is that it is designed to reach agreement, if that is possible. In negotiations, of course, you have to reach agreement, so there is a difference. Negotiation is used more for pay issues than superannuation issues.

I hope that I have shown to the Assembly that, first, although this change is necessary, it reflects what is happening in the rest of the United Kingdom. It is necessary if we are to get changes made quickly, but

it still has built-in safeguards. For those reasons, I ask the Assembly to pass the Bill and allow it to move quickly to Royal Assent. That will allow us to put in place the arrangements that are necessary to change the compensation scheme in time to avoid any economic penalties for the Executive and the public purse in Northern Ireland.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Superannuation Bill [NIA 6/11-15] do now pass.

Committee Business

Committee on Standards and Privileges: Report on Complaints Against Mr Jim Wells MLA

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for this debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. Mr Wells will have 10 minutes to make his contribution, and all other contributors will have five minutes.

A valid petition of concern was presented on Friday 16 November in relation to this motion. I advise Members that the vote on the motion will be on a cross-community basis.

Mr McCarthy (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on Standards and Privileges): I beg to move

That this Assembly, in consideration of the report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges (NIA 71/11-15), imposes upon Mr Jim Wells MLA the sanction of exclusion from proceedings of the Assembly for a period of seven days beginning on the day after the resolution.

Before I start, Mr Speaker — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McCarthy: — I congratulate you and all of your staff on a wonderful weekend of celebrations for this Building.

I move the motion on behalf of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, and, in doing so, I ask the Assembly to agree to impose upon Mr Jim Wells the sanction of exclusion from the proceedings of the Assembly for a period of seven days.

I take no satisfaction whatsoever in asking the Assembly to do this. However, I think that the Assembly has a duty to respond to the breach of the code of conduct that has been identified by the interim Assembly Commissioner for Standards and the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

All Members have received a copy of the Committee's report on the complaints about the conduct of Mr Wells that were made by Ms Carál Ní Chuilín and Ms Mary McArdle. Each complained about separate encounters with Mr Wells in June 2011. The former interim Commissioner for Standards, Dr Tom Frawley, investigated those complaints, and Members have also received a copy of his reports.

Ms Ní Chuilín alleged that, on 8 June 2011, Mr Wells confronted her on the West Staircase in Parliament Buildings in an aggressive and threatening manner. She said that Mr Wells had pointed his finger very close to her face and told her that she would not be welcomed by the Ulster-Scots community and that neither she nor her special adviser would be going to south Down.

As we all know, Ms Ní Chuilín's special adviser at that time was the other complainant, Ms McArdle. Specifically, Ms Ní Chuilín claimed that Mr Wells had said to her:

"You needn't think you are going to bring that murderer to South Down."

Ms Ní Chuilín described Mr Wells as having been very angry, venomous and intimidating during this encounter

and said that she had found the exchange completely unexpected and unsettling. Ms McArdle alleged that Mr Wells confronted her later the same month. She said that he passed her on the first floor corridor in Parliament Buildings and said to her, "There is the murderer herself." She went on to say that Mr Wells told her that she had murdered a young woman coming from her place of worship, that she was a disgrace and that she had better not dare come to south Down. Ms McArdle said that the whole exchange lasted one or two minutes and that, during that entire time, Mr Wells wagged his finger in her face. She described Mr Wells as having been forceful, aggressive and intimidating during the encounter and said that she considered his conduct to be an abuse of power.

Mr Wells has accepted that separate exchanges took place between him and each of the complainants on the dates in question. There is no real dispute about the general tenor of those encounters. There are, however, some specific differences between the complainants' and Mr Wells's accounts of the respective exchanges. In respect of his encounter with Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Wells said that he told her that he disagreed with the appointment of Ms McArdle as her special adviser. He considered that he had most likely made a remark along the lines of, "You had better not bring her to south Down." Although Mr Wells believed that he may have wagged his finger towards Ms Ní Chuilín, he had no recollection of having pointed his finger at her in an aggressive manner.

In respect of his encounter with Ms McArdle, Mr Wells disputed the allegation that he called her a murderer, although he said that he had mumbled a snide remark as he passed her. He said that he had used the phrase "monster adviser" before saying to her, "You murdered Mary Travers coming out of her Catholic place of worship." Mr Wells said that he may well have said to Ms McArdle that she was a disgrace and that she had better not come to south Down. However, he disputed that he had used the word "dare" in this context.

The interim Commissioner was unable to corroborate either Mr Wells's or the complainants' accounts of the exchanges that occurred. The interim Commissioner, therefore, examined the provisions of the code of conduct against the conduct that Mr Wells himself acknowledged in responding to each of the complainant's complaints against him. Having done so, the interim Commissioner concluded that Mr Wells had breached the code of conduct. Specifically, the interim Commissioner said that Mr Wells's conduct on both occasions was in conflict with the principles of conduct of respect and good working relationships.

The Committee has agreed with the interim Commissioner's conclusions. The code of conduct requires Members to treat other Members and their staff with courtesy and respect. Individuals should not be subjected to unreasonable and excessive personal attack. That is clear. It is the Committee's view that, on each of the two occasions in question, Mr Wells's conduct went beyond what is acceptable under the code of conduct.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCarthy: No; sorry. I am too busy at the minute with this. You will have plenty of time to contribute afterwards.

The Committee also reached that view after giving the matter careful consideration. We recognise Members'

rights to express their opinions, and we agree, of course, that Mr Wells should not have been prevented from expressing his opinion on Ms McArdle's appointment. However, the issue is the manner in which Mr Wells expressed his opinion. When you confront someone in the corridor, call them a monster, point your finger in their face and warn them to keep out of a certain area, you have crossed the line into unacceptable behaviour.

It is a matter of real regret that the Committee had to bring this motion to the Chamber. The Committee had agreed that an appropriate apology from Mr Wells would have been a fitting and proportionate resolution to the matter. It is very disappointing that Mr Wells chose not to apologise. His failure to apologise left the Committee with no option but to bring forward this motion to impose a sanction and, therefore, to have this debate.

Before concluding my remarks, I would like to make a few comments on behalf of my party and on my own behalf.

Once again, I express sincere sympathy to the Travers family on the heinous and shocking loss of a beloved member of their family. It is obvious that, as for so many other victims of the Troubles, their pain and suffering continue. No doubt, today's proceedings will exacerbate that pain.

Our primary aim as Members is to make good legislation, to help and advise all our constituents and to abide by a set of rules. We should be using this hour and a half to help eradicate poverty, to help get jobs into Northern Ireland and to help prevent so many people — 392 people — losing their home — *[Interruption.]*

12.30 pm

Mr Speaker: Order. I ask the Member to take his seat. The motion before the House was tabled by the Standards and Privileges Committee. This debate is about nothing else and nothing more. I warn all sides of the House that I will not allow any Member to widen the debate. I will not allow that to happen. Mr McCarthy, please continue.

Mr McCarthy: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The entire Assembly approved the appointment of an independent ombudsman. He has completed his work fairly and squarely. Surely we have a duty to support his findings, whether we like them or not. I thank Dr Tom Frawley and his staff for the work that they have completed on our behalf.

Mr Wells must surely acknowledge that he went overboard and crossed the line. He could quietly have made amends for his actions. Of course, Mr Wells was not the only one outraged at the appointment: we were all outraged. Why is it so difficult for DUP Members and perhaps other Members to say, "Sorry"? Even David Cameron, the British Prime Minister, stood at the Dispatch Box and said, "Sorry".

Mr Speaker: Order. I am being reasonable with the Member, but he is going outside the brief of the motion.

Mr McCarthy: Members have got the gist of what we are talking about today. I was disappointed to learn this morning that a petition of concern had been tabled. That is another misuse of the mechanisms of the House. I urge Members to support the motion.

Mr Ross: First, I thank Mr McCarthy for proposing the motion. As Chair of the Committee, I would generally do

so, but, given that I am totally opposed to the motion, voted against it in Committee and will vote against it again today, it was not appropriate for me to propose it.

On his personal remarks as a member of the Alliance Party, I must ask Mr McCarthy, if he thinks that we should follow the Commissioner for Standards on everything that he does, what the point is of having the Committee in the first instance.

I, too, am disappointed that we have got to this stage. Many difficult decisions in Committee have been handled with a level of maturity, as such issues should be. However, the fact that we have brought the motion to the Floor of the House shows a degree of failure in the Committee.

The motion calls for the suspension of Mr Jim Wells for a week from the House. It is not about whether Mr Wells broke the code of conduct when he had his encounter with the two individuals. Mr McCarthy, it is important to clarify that there was not agreement in Committee on whether Mr Wells had breached the code of conduct in the first instance, nor was there agreement on whether we should table the motion. There are Members on this side of the House who argued that Back-Benchers have a fundamental right to express their own views and a right to challenge Ministers on decisions that they have taken, particularly those that were taken in a context in which people across Northern Ireland were left very upset.

I also heard, during the discussions on the report, Committee members talking about how it was important that we protect the integrity of the Committee and the integrity of the House. That was absolutely right, but the motion does nothing to protect the integrity of the House or the integrity of the Committee. Indeed, I heard Mr McCarthy propose in Committee that we should suspend Mr Wells for an indefinite period. That would do nothing to enhance the integrity of the House. The motion in front of us was proposed by Members from Sinn Féin and supported by the SDLP, the Alliance Party and the Green Party.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Member for giving way. I do not recall saying what you have just said I said. When it was proposed that Mr Wells be suspended, I remember posing the question of whether he would be suspended with or without pay. That is a different subject.

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

Mr Ross: I appreciate that, Mr Speaker. My recollection is very different, and I will be interested to hear if other Members agree with my recollection that the Member proposed that Mr Wells should be suspended indefinitely until he came to the House for an apology.

Let me put on record the reason why I think the House should oppose the motion. It is very simple: this is not a proportionate response to the alleged breach of the code of conduct. To suspend a Member for a week for allegedly having had an encounter with a Minister and her adviser in the corridors in which they claimed that they were upset is not —

Mr McCartney: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the Member said that there was an alleged breach. From my reading of the report, there was a breach. I want the Speaker to rule on that.

Mr Speaker: Allow the Member to continue.

Mr Ross: It is not a punishment that in any way fits the crime, and it is not a proportionate response. If Members take a cursory look at other legislatures around the United Kingdom and in the Irish Republic, they will see that this is not a proportionate response.

I want to draw the House's attention to other jurisdictions in which there have been suspensions of a Member for a week or longer. On 12 May 2011, Mr David Laws was suspended from the House of Commons for seven days for a breach of rules regarding rented accommodation. It was around the misuse of expenses. On 25 January 2008, Derek Conway was suspended from the House of Commons for 10 sitting days for serious misuse of parliamentary funds when he was paying his son for work that he was not judged to be doing. Again, that is a serious financial matter. On 2 February 2005, Mr George Galloway was suspended for 18 sitting days for receiving undisclosed personal financial benefit from the regime of Saddam Hussein. Mr Clive Betts was suspended for a week for the employment of a personal friend whose study visa had expired and for being party to altering a letter that was then presented to an immigration official. Again, that was a very serious breach of the code of conduct in the House of Commons, and he was suspended for seven days. In 2002, Keith Vaz was suspended for a month for allegations that he had interfered with an investigation.

It is not just the House of Commons that we can look to for evidence; we can look at the Scottish Parliament. On 1 March 2007, Mr Brian Monteith was given a suspension of five days for disclosure of confidential information to the media. Again, that was a serious breach in which a Member leaked information to the media. On 1 July 2005, a number of Members — Colin Fox, Frances Curran, Rosie Kane and Carolyn Leckie — were suspended for a month for disorderly conduct during First Minister's questions, and that matter was referred to the Scottish Committee. Again, the Scottish examples are about serious breaches of the code of conduct. Something similar happened in Wales in May 2012, when Keith Davies was censured for unreasonable behaviour in a hotel room that was paid for by the taxpayer.

Mr F McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Ross: I will not give way because I have very little time left.

I have made the point that this is not a proportionate response. In other jurisdictions throughout the United Kingdom, this is not how such a situation is handled. It will set a precedent in Northern Ireland that a Member who commits a minor breach of the code of conduct will be suspended for a week.

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

Mr Ross: I ask the House this: given that a precedent is being set for such a minor breach, what will we do with a Member who seriously breaches the code of conduct? I urge the House to protect the integrity of the Committee and the House and vote against the motion today.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is up.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom cúpla focal a rá i dtacaíocht an rúin. I will say a few words in support of the motion. I disagree with the Chair. It is his role to direct and guide the Committee,

and the majority of people in the Committee voted for the motion. Mr Speaker, I am glad that you gave the direction on how the debate should take place, because I do not want to see people going off on a tangent. This is about a motion being tabled by a Committee and brought to the Floor of the House by the majority of the Committee. I would like Members to stick to the motion. Unfortunately, over the past number of weeks, a few contentious motions have been brought to the Floor of the House, and this is another one. As the Deputy Chair of the Committee said, we should be talking about unemployment and poverty and everything else. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr Boylan: This is a Committee motion; it is not a Sinn Féin motion, so Members may understand that. Although my name is on it, it is normally the procedure that the Committee's name should be on it because it tabled it. However, I accept that my name is on it.

I want to bring a few things to the Floor of the House. This whole Building is an office, be it the basement for refreshment; the ground floor, where this very Chamber is based for debate; the first floor, where people can bring issues to Ministers; the second floor for administrative backup; the third floor offices; or the fourth floor for IT and HR. The whole Building is used for the benefit of Members to bring debates and to support them in their role as MLAs. We are talking here about the Nolan principles and how Members should — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Boylan: — conduct themselves in this Building. It is an office. Members can deny that all they like, but, basically, that is what it is. The Chair spoke about what happened in Committee. The issue is that the Member has been found in breach, and that is in the report. I had to laugh when I heard him, because I have experienced working with Mr Wells in Committee in a previous mandate and I have never heard Mr Wells mumble anything. He is very articulate in everything that he puts across — I will give him that — so I do not accept what he said here in response. He will have a fair crack of the whip.

I want to spend my remaining two minutes talking about the role of the Committee. All Members are mandated to represent their communities here, but they also signed up to the Good Friday Agreement and this institution and how it should — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Boylan: — and the formation of the institution. They are either here to respect that or they are not. They are either going to follow the rules and regulations of it or they are not. That is what I am saying. So, we are part of a scrutiny Committee. We have gone down the route of having an independent commissioner bring forward a report, and the majority of the Committee respected the decision on that.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Boylan: OK.

Mr Wells: It is important that we put it on record very clearly that no unionist on the Committee at any stage supported any aspect of the report. It was supported entirely by a cabal of Sinn Féin, the SDLP and the smaller parties.

Mr Boylan: Maybe the Member is hard of hearing. The majority of the Committee supported this, so the Committee brought it forward. I said the majority. Those are the rules, and that is what we are adhering to. I will say this: the majority of the Committee supported the motion and the report from an independent commissioner. There are Committee staff here at the minute. I could very well ask this: what is the point of having a scrutiny Committee on Standards and Privileges?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Boylan: Thank you very much. It is not so much that I want to challenge the Committee on Standards and Privileges and say that it does not have a role after today. The Member said that we were setting a precedent. There is a petition of concern in, so we are not going anywhere down the road of setting precedents. The issue is about respecting the decisions and respecting what is here. If the role of the Committee is to ensure that a commissioner brings forward a report as part of the process, you should respect that. That is what will come out of today. I go back to this: it was a Committee —

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mr Boylan: OK. Go on.

Mr Ross: I will be very brief. The interim Commissioner for Standards did not bring forward a proposal to suspend the Member from the House. That is what the Assembly is being asked to do today. That is the issue in protecting the integrity of the House. It is on the question of suspending a Member for seven days for such a minor alleged breach of the code of conduct.

Mr Boylan: The Member would not apologise, and, to be fair, the Committee gave the Member ample opportunity. *[Interruption.]* To be honest — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, Members. Members should not shout across the Chamber. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr Boylan: With the last 10 seconds I have. The Member was given ample opportunity to write an apology. Actually, I did not favour that, but the Committee supported it. With that in mind, I support the motion.

12.45 pm

Mr Nesbitt: Let me touch on some of the background that might explain the motivation for these complaints. Within the debate and, frankly, despair in the community about the appointment of Mary McArdle, the Ulster Unionist Party identified one certainty, which is that Sinn Féin was wrong not to notify the Travers family that it was about to promote a woman convicted for her part in the murder of Mary Travers. It is wrong because Sinn Féin says that it understands victims and understands their needs. They even tell us that they themselves are victims. So they understand that victims are not only traumatised by the event that happened to them and their loved ones but live in a constant, relentless fear of being retraumatised, of waking up some morning to news that plunges them back. That is what Sinn Féin did to Ann Travers. The complainants understand victims, so they know that they should have done something to warn Ann Travers, to send a message or find an intermediary to say, "Look, in a couple of days, you will wake up to news that you will find impossible to take. It will fast-track you back to the blackest day of your life".

Mr Molloy: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Surely, the debate is about the motion from the Committee on Standards and Privileges. Mr Nesbitt's role as commissioner is not what we are debating today.

Mr Speaker: Order. I warned the whole House earlier: the debate is about the motion before the House; it is about nothing else. So, I warn all sides of the House. I will allow Members some latitude around all these issues, as Members know from the past. So, as far as possible, contributions should be to the motion.

Mr Nesbitt: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I just emphasise that I was trying to give some context to the motivation for the complaints coming from two members of Sinn Féin, a party that demands respect, human rights and equality — certainly, when it suits them.

I will skip on, then, to Mr Wells. What should we think about Mr Wells and what he is supposed have said and done? It appears that he said and did things that are matters of regret. It would perhaps be better if he had not said and did whatever he said and did. However, he was angry; like most people, he was angry. It is not just me saying that it is a matter of regret: Ann Travers thinks it would have been better left unsaid. I know that because the Ulster Unionist Party asked her. We do not just say, as a piece of rhetoric, that we understand victims; we put victims first, by asking them, "What do you think about this?"

Here is an interesting fact: Ann Travers feels guilty about what is happening in the Chamber today. I do not need to tell Sinn Féin that; they understand victims, of course. They get it immediately. However, for the rest of us, the point is this: a part of Ann thinks that it is her fault that we are having this debate and that, if she had not — these are her words, not mine — "made such a fuss" about Mary McArdle being promoted by Carál Ní Chuilín, we would not be here doing this. You can say that that guilt is irrational, but ask Sinn Féin and they will tell you — they know all about victims — that those feelings of guilt are very common among victims. So these complaints and the long slow process towards resolution have served only to put Ann Travers through hell once again. I can put it no more simply than this: given that Sinn Féin understands victims, I can only conclude that it is cynically exploiting Ann and her family with these complaints.

Now, there is another side to Ann's reaction, and I must again ask Sinn Féin to excuse me for stating the obvious. I listened to the Minister, Carál Ní Chuilín, on the BBC television news last week, reacting to Jim Wells. She said that we all needed to respect each other. She said that an insult to one elected representative was an insult to the people who elect them. This is the same Carál Ní Chuilín who once posted a tweet on her social media site describing Michael McDowell, an elected politician and Irish Government Minister, as — I quote — "a complete gobshite". She said of this elected representative, Michael McDowell, that — I quote:

"It makes you think of white sheets and of burning crosses".

I am sorry that the Minister is troubled by those images, but, forgive me, I am more concerned about the mental images that Ann Travers has to cope with when she thinks of Mary McArdle. She thinks of her sister bleeding to death in her mother's arms, a gun pointed at her mother's head

that misfired not once but twice and of the gun pumping shot after shot into her father.

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Nesbitt: I will.

Mr Givan: I am sure that the Member would like another minute. Does he not think, given the traumas that Sinn Féin, the SDLP and the Alliance Party are revisiting on Ann Travers, that they should withdraw the motion rather than push it to a vote?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute added to his time. Once again, I make the point that even interventions need to keep to the motion before the House — *[Interruption.]* Order. I remind the whole House and the Member who has the Floor that this is not about the Culture Minister and it is not about any other Minister: it is about the report from the Standards and Privileges Committee, which the House is debating.

Mr Nesbitt: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the Member for his intervention. I think that Ann Travers would feel that she wants this to finish. So, if the easiest and quickest way for it to finish would be for Sinn Féin to withdraw the debate, absolutely, that would suit her. However, because this has gone on for so long — she has lived with this for well over a year now — she is questioning, although she does not really need to question, the motivation of those who brought the complaint.

Mr Speaker, you said that today is about Jim Wells, and I accept that. However, it is also about other people, with your indulgence. It seems that the debate has turned its focus to say that this is not about what Mary McArdle did; it is about what was done to her. Therefore, in the virtual world of Sinn Féin, as the clock strikes 13, the perpetrator becomes the victim. The victim of what? Exposure to what most people were thinking at the time. How will the Ulster Unionists vote? I asked Ann Travers if she had any advice, and she said just three words: "Support Jim Wells".

Mr Eastwood: I do not propose to speak for long. I am sure that you will be delighted. The SDLP will provide only one Member to speak in the debate, because we believe that there are much more important issues to be discussed in the Chamber today. It is unfortunate that we have school students in here watching the debate. I hope that Members are mindful of the fact that people are looking at this place and looking to us to provide leadership and hoping that, maybe, we can provide a different kind of leadership for our young people.

The fact is that the Committee on Standards and Privileges had a report from the interim commissioner that said that Mr Wells breached the code of conduct for Members in the way that he acted in the House. My view on that is that it is simple: there has to be some form of sanction. However, it must be pointed out — Mr Wells, maybe, needs to know this — that many members around the Committee table tried to avoid this day. We did not want to bring this to the Chamber, mainly because we did not want to give Mr Wells and all the other people another platform. We offered Mr Wells a way out. Mr Wells was offered the opportunity to provide an apology to the offended parties. He refused to do that, and now we are here today. This is being debated in the House today because of Mr Wells. The bottom line —

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Eastwood: No, I am sure that you will have your say, Mr Wells. The bottom line is this: it is incumbent on all of us in the House to treat each other with respect, whether you like them or not, whether you agree with them or not and whether you are in government with them or not. You have to treat each and every person — each and every colleague in the House — with respect. It is very unfortunate that, again in the House, we are repeating and regurgitating old arguments when we could be dealing the thousands upon thousands of people who are leaving our shores or joining dole queues. Instead of doing that, we are talking about Mr Wells. Let us get this done and done quickly. This is on Mr Wells: he had an opportunity to apologise, and he did not take it.

Mr Campbell: I want to deal with one practical issue in the report before us today before developing the theme a little. There is an issue with the timeline. The complaint was received on 30 June, and Mr Wells was contacted, presumably, on 3 September. When the issues being raised include supposedly as serious a matter as wagging your finger close to someone's face and you are expected, two months later, to remember whether you did in fact do so, that is inappropriate. On any future occasion, if a complaint is lodged, the Member concerned should be informed as soon as possible thereafter so that their memory of how close or otherwise to the face a finger was wagged is fresh.

I move on to the body of the report. This is a serious matter. However, when I read the report, I found shades of Basil Fawley. At the start of the report, Ms Ní Chuilín says that she found her altercation with Mr Wells unsettling. So, a Member who served four years for her terrorist occupation and involvement with weapons in a bomb attack found it unsettling that words were exchanged. After spending four years in jail for terror offences, she was unsettled because somebody raised their voice at her. Then, of course, she spent 10 years as a co-ordinator for Tar Anall or whatever it is called, which is a project for republican ex-prisoners. So I am sure that there were many occasions during those 10 years when people waved finger close to her face. We have no record of her finding those occasions unsettling, but she found this one unsettling. Then, she went on to say that Mr Wells conducted himself in an aggressive and intimidating manner. Intimidating? A Member involved in terror found a raised finger intimidating.

I will almost rest my case there, but I feel the need to move on because Ms McArdle then put in a complaint as well. She used a whole range of phrases to describe her conversation with Mr Wells, words such as forceful, aggressive, hostile and intimidating. I will take the Fawley Towers analogy a bit further: I cannot second-guess the secretary in the interim commissioner's office, but even that person did not put the following in inverted commas. Whether they were too embarrassed to do so, I do not know. Ms McArdle also said that she did not expect anyone to be subjected to such behaviour in their place of work. This is a person who, as we all know, was convicted for their part in the murder of Mary Travers, but she talks about people being subjected to such behaviour as a raised voice in their place of work.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Campbell: Yes, I will.

Mr Wells: Does the Member accept that, as stated in the report, six members of staff reportedly heard the two meetings between me, McArdle and the Minister, but, when interviewed by Tom Frawley, not one of them heard it, and not one of them remembered it?

Ms Ruane: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it appropriate for the Member to speak in such disparaging terms and not address her as Ms McArdle?

Mr Campbell: Well, Mr Speaker, unfortunately, and Mr Eastwood made the point —

Mr Speaker: Order. On that point of order, it is important that Members use proper names when debating any subject.

Mr Campbell: On the point that Mr Eastwood made, people have to work out the rationale for bringing the motion. They cannot have it both ways. They cannot say that we should be involving ourselves in more important business, put their hand up in Committee to bring a debate on the report here and then say that it would be far better if we were talking about jobs. Do you want to talk about jobs or the report? You cannot bring the report to the Assembly and then say that it should not be here.

I will expand the theme that Mr Eastwood developed. Mr Wells is the centre of attention today because of the Committee vote that brought the report here.

1.00 pm

If people want more indications of unionist anger at what Sinn Féin did in the past, they will get them. I just wonder why I have treated Sinn Féin in a particular way for 14 years and there has never been a complaint. Have people got the stomach for a complaint? Do they not want to complain? What is your problem with making a complaint?
[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. Members must make their remarks through the Chair.

Mr Campbell: You see, Mr Speaker, some unionists react to Sinn Féin as though that party had never been involved with terror. Some other unionists —

Mr O'Dowd: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Member is skating on very thin ice with regard to Sinn Féin, which is a political party that is represented in the Chamber. He knows that fine well. He is trying to get a reaction. However, we cannot let it pass. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr O'Dowd: Sinn Féin, who they share power with around the Executive table and who they share the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister with, was never involved in terror.

Mr Campbell: As I said, Mr Speaker, some unionists react to Sinn Féin as though it had never been involved with terror. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr O'Dowd: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It would appear that the Member is ignoring the Speaker's ruling. Is his language appropriate or not?

Mr Speaker: Order. Once again, let us bring Members back to the report. I ask Members to be careful with their language and how they use it in the House.

Mr Campbell: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Other unionists react to Sinn Féin as though it had never been forced to stop their involvement with terror. However, all democrats in the Chamber deal in different ways with those who were past terrorists. I know the way that I have dealt with them. I support Mr Wells.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. First of all, I support the report by the Committee on Standards and Privileges. The fact that the Chairman did not present the report is a reflection on the Committee itself and on the Chairman. In any situation, whenever someone chairs a Committee, we expect the Chair to represent the Committee at different times, regardless of whether they agree with it.

Mr Ross: I did not speak in the debate as Chairman of the Committee. However, does the Member honestly suggest that it would be appropriate for the person who voted against the motion in the Committee, and who proposes to vote against it today, to move it? That would be a preposterous position to adopt.

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

Mr Molloy: If the Chairman reflected on his role as Chair, he would be able to reflect on the Committee and present a report from whatever quarter it came. After all, it is your Committee. It is not a Sinn Féin Committee or an SDLP Committee. It is your Committee — the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mr Molloy: No. I will not give way again.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Ross: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I take umbrage with the fact that the Member is trying to suggest to the House that, in some way, I am biased in my chairing of the Committee. If any Member has a complaint to make about how I chair the Committee, I propose that he or she brings it forward. I will not accept any Committee member's suggesting to the House that I chair it in any way partially.

Mr Speaker: The Member has certainly put his remarks on record. Let us move on.

Mr Molloy: We will reflect on that.

The role of the Chair is an important issue, but it is not the main one. The petition of concern is more important. We now have a situation where it is pointless to have a Committee on Standards and Privileges, because every report that that Committee brings forward will simply be deferred by the DUP when it does not like it. So, what would be the point of having a Committee on Standards and Privileges in future?

Mr Wells has got his backup and support today. It is noticeable that he used to be away down in the corner of the Chamber on his own, which is where he took himself once when he fell out with the party. Now the party has moved down to him and has given him a wee bit of support to get round today.

Before us today is a report from the interim Assembly Commissioner for Standards. He has upheld the complaint. Whatever else happens, with the petition of concern or whatever else it could be, Mr Wells has been

found guilty by the commissioner and the Committee on Standards and Privileges. So, he is guilty of the offence and of the complaint that has been made against him. Whatever about the petition of concern, it will not save the fact that Mr Wells has been found guilty. Remember this is a future Minister of Health. A future Minister of Health has been found guilty of bullying. When he is the Minister of Health, he will have to say that he does not want staff in hospitals and in the health service to be bullied. This is the man who actually is bullying around this Chamber.

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us return to the motion. All contributions should be on the motion.

Mr Molloy: A Cheann Comhairle, I think that it is very relevant.

Mr Humphrey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it in order for the Member who has just sat down but who currently has the Floor to suggest that Mr Wells has been found guilty of bullying? No such guilt has been found at all.

Mr Wells: Apologise. You did not treat me with respect.

Mr Speaker: Order, Members. Order. I take it that most Members have read the report, and its findings are absolutely clear. Let us move on.

Mr Molloy: Thank you, a Cheann Comhairle. We have had an indication that Mr Wells bullied two women outside the House. We also had the situation in which he bullied women in the House and called them names. On that occasion, he very quickly realised his position and apologised. It is a pity that he did not do the same in this situation, but he failed to do so. So, we have a situation now in which unionists have filed a petition of concern, which is their safeguard.

South Down is a no-go area for Sinn Féin or for Ministers and whoever Mr Wells does not like in this situation, so he will decide who actually can come in and out of south Down and actually threaten everyone else who he does not want to come into it. That is a threat against the Ministers of this Assembly. Again, I ask Members to reflect on the fact that we are talking about Ministers of the Assembly. Whether you like them, agree with them or oppose them, they are Ministers and represent the Assembly, so they should be given respect, as should other Members in future.

Mr Clarke: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. When reflecting on this debate tomorrow, Mr Speaker, I ask that you read Hansard. The Member has just said that Mr Wells threatened people with their lives if they came to south Down. From reading this report, I do not believe that there was ever a threat made against anyone's life. Will you make a ruling on that, Mr Speaker?

Mr Speaker: Let me read Hansard and reflect on all that has been said in the debate.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat. I treat threats as threats. I do not know in what other way you could treat a threat but in that way.

We could have come here today and talked about Ulster Resistance, the red berets and the unfound arms that the DUP and Ulster Resistance reported — *[Interruption.]*

A Member: We could talk about Special Branch.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Molloy: — but we did not do that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I have already warned the Member that he should not shout across the Chamber. All remarks must be made through the Chair.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat. I will get there eventually. We could have talked about all those issues, which again are about bullying in the community, and, unfortunately, about some sad bullying right across the board.

Mr F McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Molloy: OK.

Mr F McCann: Does the Member agree that the Members across the way are giving the impression that they put up a stout defence of Mr Wells yet that could not be further from the case?

Mr Molloy: I do not think that you can defend the indefensible. The problem is that the Committee found that it could not defend the indefensible. In fact, the Committee as a body tried to get Mr Wells to respond and apologise, which would have dealt with the situation, but he refused to do so.

We are here debating along the lines of what is in the report. Mr Wells said that he mumbled something. We are talking about a Christian gentleman. We have an opportunity here for the truth. I think that it would be very fitting if Mr Wells, even if he did not apologise, simply said, “Yes, I did say that” or, “No, I did not say that. I just mumbled something.” He may be quite happy to do that. Having failed to tell Tom Frawley exactly what he said — he said that he just mumbled something — it is important that Mr Wells say today exactly what he said and what he meant, and what he meant by, “Do not bring that woman to south Down.” What exactly was that threat? How was he going to carry it out? How was he going to ensure that that woman did not come to south Down? It looks as though Mr Wells has a barrier around south Down that nobody crosses unless he reflects on it.

I ask him to reflect on something else. He was part of the old Stormont. I think that today is a reflection of the old Stormont. Unfortunately, unionism did not learn from the old Stormont. It is still repeating the same thing that we —

Mr Speaker: The Member’s time is almost gone.

Mr Molloy: — had before. We have an attempt today to have one-party rule —

Mr Speaker: Time is gone.

Mr Molloy: — that dictates to the rest of community.

Mr Poots: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Mr Molloy made a statement that Mr Wells is part of the old Stormont. I think Mr Wells probably was not old enough to vote when that was done away with in 1973.

Mr Speaker: Order. It is not a point of order. Let us move on.

Ms P Bradley: As a member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, I take Members’ conduct very seriously. It is appropriate that our behaviour does not bring the Assembly into disrepute. That being said, I find that I cannot support the findings of the Interim Commissioner’s report on the allegations brought by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and her staff, and nor can I support the proposed sanctions.

In order for me to explain my reasons for not supporting the proposed sanction, I need to talk about the Commissioner’s report. For me, one of the most crucial points of the report is the lack of independent evidence that is available. Although all parties concerned in both cases tell roughly the same story, in the case of the Minister it is obvious that this was a chance encounter. It was not premeditated, a fact that I feel is acknowledged by both parties. Mr Wells admits that he did make a comment to the Minister, who was walking away from him at the time and who then proceeded to turn round and face him. Had she not done this, she would not have seen the alleged wagging of the finger, which of course Mr Wells denies.

Mr Wells has maintained that he did not tell the Minister that she was not welcome in his constituency, but rather that her unelected, unvetted, convicted murderer member of staff would not be welcome. It could therefore be argued that by doing this and making this view known, Mr Wells was indeed placing forward a view that was at the forefront of his constituents, and therefore —

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Ms P Bradley: Yes.

Mr Wells: I think that is an important point. The reason I made it very clear that the Minister’s adviser was not welcome is that almost all of the Ulster-Scots culture groups and sporting clubs in south Down, in my community, have at least one person who was a victim of IRA terrorism. It would be an absolute insult to the memory of their loved ones to have McArdle coming to south Down accompanied by the Minister.

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

Ms P Bradley: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank Mr Wells for his intervention.

As Mr Wells stated in an earlier intervention, despite a number of Ushers being present — a fact acknowledged by both parties — none remember this incident, something again which suggests to me that the exchange was not as aggressive as portrayed by the complainant. These halls, as you know, Mr Speaker, echo quite a lot. Is it really conceivable that a man so angry as to frighten a woman would not have raised his voice, or that his body language would not have alerted someone in the vicinity that there was a heated exchange happening? I also have serious concerns regarding the time lapse between the exchange happening and the complaint being investigated.

As regards Ms McArdle’s complaint, again a number of issues have not been resolved. First, Ms McArdle accepts, as does Mr Wells, that the initial comments —

Mr McNarry: Will the Member give way?

Ms P Bradley: Certainly.

Mr McNarry: I appreciate that. Will the Member agree that, resultant from this motion, Unionists in this House, from this day, will be wary of any discussion or engagement with Sinn Féin in the future? What is next on the agenda? Will terrorist war crimes be accepted as legitimate complaints in this House, and where will that take us?

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Member, and I have to say I agree with him.

I will go back to the point to do with Ms McArdle. First, Ms McArdle accepts, as does Mr Wells, that the initial comment was a snide comment, and not made directly to Ms McArdle as she walked past. She then turned and confronted the Member. Now, bearing in mind that the Minister had already had a run-in with Mr Wells regarding Ms McArdle's appointment and was apparently frightened, would she not have conveyed this to her staff, advising them not to get into confrontation with such an aggressive person? And, if not, was this not a dereliction of her duty of care to her staff's safety?

Despite this, Ms McArdle alleges that the word "murderer" was used, and Mr Wells said "monster" was the word. The facts are clear; Ms McArdle is a convicted murderer, and Mr Wells may well view her crime as monstrous, as would most law-abiding citizens. Either word could be argued as legitimate to be used in regard of Ms McArdle. Many people in Northern Ireland were sickened by her crime, and under freedom of speech should Mr Wells not have the right to make his views known? I also note that, once again, there were no independent witnesses, despite people being present, and I find it amiss that Ms McArdle was not asked about her demeanour or tone when she turned to confront Mr Wells, because that is exactly what she did: she turned to confront Mr Wells.

I doubt very much that she was speaking in the same tone as I am today, and I believe that Miss McArdle had some idea of Mr Wells's views.

1.15 pm

As for the apology, Mr Wells does not feel that he has anything to apologise for, and he feels that an apology would not be genuine on his part. The Committee is recommending a sanction that is too harsh for the crime due to all the inconsistencies that I have highlighted in the evidence. Mr Wells was merely mirroring the views that many of his constituents held, and there was no premeditation in his acts. Suspension is too harsh and will serve no one, and it sets a dangerous precedent of Members making apologies that they do not mean. For that reason, they will, effectively, be worthless. Therefore, I cannot support the sanction.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tugaim tacaíocht do thuirisc an choiste. I support the Committee's report.

I am not going to rehearse what happened; we know what happened. We have heard about it and read about it. Committee members have discussed it at length. Commissioners have taken the time to give everyone the opportunity to air their point of view. Having listened to everyone, they concluded that Mr Jim Wells was guilty of breaching the code of conduct and that he should apologise in writing. We have the report. He has not done that. Is that such a hard thing to do?

Now, I do not know what Jim Wells is going to say, although I could probably have an educated guess. However, this is not about political opinion or religious belief. This is not about what happened in our conflict in the past, although Jim and his mates might try to dress it up as that. This is about anti-Catholicism, sectarianism and misogyny. The definition of misogyny is hatred or dislike of women and girls. That is what Jim Wells has

done and has been found guilty of. What makes it even worse is that it is a mixture of sectarianism —

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ruane: No, I will not give way.

It is a mixture of sectarianism and misogyny, a lethal cocktail. Here we have a Member who has been elected for many years, so he cannot claim ignorance —

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ruane: No, I will not give way. I have heard enough from the lads across the way. Here is a Member —
[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: — who claims to support the institutions, yet refuses — [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us have remarks through the Chair, and let us refer to Members by their proper names.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, Mr Speaker. Here is a Member who claims to support the institutions yet refuses to take up the opportunity to attend a Committee of the institutions that he claims to support. Here is a Member who is being talked about as a Health Minister in the near future yet who shows complete disdain for the decisions arrived at democratically by a Committee of the Assembly. I ask Mr Nesbitt in particular to note that this is not a Sinn Féin motion; it is a Committee motion.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ruane: No, I will not. I could accept it if Jim Wells stood up and said, "My apologies. I lost the head. I feel very emotional about people who were killed in the conflict." Then, we could have a real debate about how dreadful our conflict was and how difficult it was for all families, for the Travers, for Enniskillen, for Loughinisland, for Teebane, for Bloody Sunday. But, you see —

Mr Elliott: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ruane: No, I will not.

The motion is not about the people killed in the conflict. Do not dress up misogyny as pretending that people care for particular families. It is much more complex than that. If we are serious about dealing with our dreadful past and the hurt that was caused collectively, let us create a framework in which to do that. However, that is a debate for another day.

A Member asked earlier why other complaints did not come to the Committee. During my time in education, Mr Wells, who now does not support the report, was one of the people who brought a vexatious complaint to Tom Frawley about me. The reason it did not come through a Committee — [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: I will tell you why: the reason it did not come through a Committee was that it was unsubstantiated. He was joined by his friend down the bottom of the hall.

Mr Wells told Mary McArdle and Aire Carál Ní Chuilín, Minister Carál Ní Chuilín, that they are not welcome to come to south Down. Well, the last time that I looked at the election results for the past five elections, Sinn Féin got significantly more votes than Jim's party. So, he should never assume that he represents everyone in south Down;

he clearly does not. The people of south Down understand that there was a conflict and that people in every community suffered greatly, people like the Loughinisland families and young James Morgan, RUC, British Army and IRA volunteers. The people of south Down understand that. My — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. *[Interruption.]* Order. We are debating a motion that has come to the House on behalf of the Standards and Privileges Committee. Let us, as far as possible, have contributions about the report.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, Mr Speaker. Thank you.

My message to Mr Wells is this: gone are the days when there was not a Fenian about the place and when women did not have the vote or power. Sinn Féin will not tolerate bullying behaviour or inequality. It certainly will not tolerate misogyny or anyone being treated as a second-class citizen. If Mr Wells thought that he could intimidate two strong women, he has another thing coming.

My message is simple: I do not agree with Mr Wells's views —

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

Ms Ruane: — but I respect the fact that he has a mandate and that people have voted for him. We expect the same from him. Before Members vote —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone

Ms Ruane: — supporting misogyny — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: — they really need to think about it. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Poots: People will look in and will think that the debate is somewhat bizarre and farcical. They can thank Sinn Féin and the SDLP and the Green Party and the Alliance Party — it always seem to vote with the SDLP and Sinn Féin — for bringing the motion forward and wasting the Assembly's time.

I have known Mr Wells for many years. I have known him since I was a young person — he was not just as young — and I have always found him to be a very honourable man. He is very forthright and speaks his mind, but, at the same time, Jim would hurt neither an animal nor a human being. Jim is very conscious of all of that. I believe that Mr Wells works very hard and carries out his duties for the Assembly and his constituents in a very honourable way. He should not have been brought before the House as he has been today.

I should say that no decision has been taken. A recommendation was made to the Committee, and the Committee has made a recommendation to the House. However, the House will make the decision.

Mr Molloy: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The report of the Committee very clearly says that Mr Wells has been found guilty and a recommendation of what should be done has been brought before the House today.

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us clarify the issue: both complaints were upheld. Let us move on.

Mr Poots: The House will make the decision on Mr Wells's suspension, nobody else. We will wait and see what happens.

Nonetheless, people have been described as being offended and hurt by a comment that Mr Wells made. We have heard today from Ms Ruane about misogyny and the hatred of women. What hatred of women was involved when someone saw fit to pump Tom Travers and his daughter Mary full of bullets? That was a real hatred of women. I will give way to Ms Ruane if she wants to apologise on behalf of Sinn Féin for the travesty that was carried out against the young woman Mary Travers.

Ms Ruane: I will certainly talk about misogyny in the House. This Member — *[Interruption.]* The Member has to understand — *[Interruption.]*

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

Mr Poots: I note that Ms Ruane could not bring herself to apologise for the murder of a young Roman Catholic woman, who was leaving the chapel —

Mr Molloy: Will the Member give way?

Mr Poots: You had your chance. The Member had his chance.

That young woman was leaving a chapel and was gunned down by the IRA. Ms Ruane had her chance to apologise, and she failed to do so. Yet, on the other hand, she has demanded that Mr Wells should apologise for doing what? Waving his finger. It is not good enough if you wave your finger, but it is all right if you put it on a trigger. That is the situation we find ourselves in, and Ms Ruane has tried to bring misogyny into it. How pathetic of Ms Ruane. Thank goodness she is no longer our Education Minister.

As to what happened, I am not sure whether Mr Wells called her a monster or a murderer. Had he called Ms McArdle a murderer, he would not have been the first to do so; because, on one day, the learned judge, in effect, said to her, "You're guilty of murder. You're going down". So, Ms McArdle is a murderer, and if Mr Wells described her as such, he was not describing her inaccurately. He was being factual.

What amazes me is that we have Ms Ní Chuilín and Ms McArdle, who were prisoners that Sinn Féin would deem to have been prisoners of war and thus soldiers. These "soldiers" of the IRA were actually afraid because somebody waved their finger. Thank goodness that we had the SAS on our side and not Mary McArdle and Carál Ní Chuilín, if they are afraid of a finger being waved at them. *[Interruption.]*

Ms Ruane: On a point of order — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. There is a point of order.

Ms Ruane: The SAS — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: The SAS was found guilty of serious murders. I respectfully ask the Speaker to rule on the Minister's support for the SAS.

Mr Speaker: Order. Once again, I ask Members to come back to the report that is before the House.

Mr Poots: The report concludes that Mr Wells spoke out of turn. I have to say that many in the community in south Down and across Northern Ireland will fully support what Mr Wells did and what he said.

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Poots: Yes.

Mr Givan: The Member is right to make it clear to Sinn Féin that, while it clearly wants to put manners on Mr Wells, it is right that we put manners on its members. They were the victim makers, not the victims.

Mr Speaker: Order. Once again; let us get back to the report that is before the House. Continue Mr Poots.

Mr Molloy: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I ask through you, is the Member issuing another threat that he will put manners on Sinn Féin? Because I tell him that he will have a long way to go. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us move on. Continue Mr Poots.

Mr Poots: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am sure that Sinn Féin will probably want to move on and forget that Mr Molloy is actually proud of the fact that he is ill-mannered. I was taught from quite young in life that a little manners will take you a long way.

In the eyes of many of the Northern Ireland public who we represent today, Mr Wells has done nothing wrong in identifying that Ms McArdle is a murderer and that many sections of the south Down community would be less than welcoming to Ms McArdle were she to come and visit that community. The fact that we are debating this here today is a disgrace on the parties opposite. It is a disgrace on the Green Party and the Alliance Party that they stood with Sinn Féin and Colum Eastwood, the man who carried the coffin of the dissident terrorist. It is a disgrace that they stood with them and that we have this debacle this afternoon.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Beidh mé ag labhairt ar son an rúin seo. I speak in favour of the motion.

I always find it bizarre and farcical when a Minister says that he finds a debate bizarre and farcical yet gets up and speaks in it. That is particularly so on a day of news reports that there are all sorts of problems in the accident and emergency departments in the Belfast Trust, yet the Minister has time to come here to watch a bizarre and farcical debate. Perhaps, his time would be better spent doing the job that he is elected to do.

That apart, we get lectures here all the time and from many in the House about due process, and the argument today is about due process. People who work in this Building are entitled to bring complaints to the Standards and Privileges Committee, which determines whether someone should investigate such complaints and then comes up with the findings. In this instance, the complaints were upheld. The Member in question — I do not see him about — was found guilty of what the commissioner described as an “unreasonable and personal attack”.

Therefore, in that instance, it is straightforward that the Member should do what any other person would do: either stand over it or apologise. However, this Member has form, as we have seen in the Chamber, where he verbally attacked and abused a Member who happened to be a woman. He was then asked to apologise. He did so, though not in my opinion. He was described last week by somebody as Corporal Pike.

1.30 pm

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for giving way. Are you at odds with Ms Ruane? You say that it was a Member who happened to be a woman, whereas Ms Ruane says that it was misogyny.

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

Mr McCartney: Put it like this: it is some coincidence that the three people whom he has personally attacked are women. Male Sinn Féin Ministers have appointed male former political prisoners to the position of special adviser without there being any attacks, personal abuse, finger waving or, as he now describes it, mumbling in the corridor. Therefore, there is a good case to be made that, in this instance, he is guilty of abusing women and not men. If that is misogyny, he is guilty of it.

Mr Nesbitt: You said “happened to be”.

Mr McCartney: I am pointing that out, and you gave me the opportunity to do so. Three women — those are the people whom he seemed to attack. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr McCartney: There are other important points to be made about the role of the Committee. Francie Molloy and Cathal Boylan touched on this, and you, as Speaker, may need to address it in the future. Where now for the role of the Committee on Standards and Privileges? It is a Committee set up by statute and given a design and a template on which it operates. Now, it is circumvented by a petition of concern. There is one thing that I will say to Mike Nesbitt, who, I know, has been lecturing republicans over the past number of days: when you march through the Lobby today, you should bear it in mind that you are clearly saying to people that the lessons of one-party rule have not been understood by you or your party. This is a one-party decision to usurp the role of the Assembly. That is what you are signing your party up to, and, when you walk through the Lobby today, that is what you will be doing.

Gregory Campbell may feel that he has been confronting Sinn Féin for the past 14 years, but I know of no instance when he put his finger into the face of a person in Sinn Féin. He certainly has not put his finger into my face, nor would I allow him to. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Wells: I was first elected to the Chamber in 1982, and one of the most difficult roles I had to perform was attending the funerals of many decent members of the security forces murdered by the Provisional IRA. When it came to 2007, after following so many coffins, it was a very difficult decision for me whether to vote to go into coalition with those who had been the spokesmen for those dastardly activities. However, I knew that a large number of people yearned to move on to build a better future for the people of Northern Ireland. Having done that, I expected that the Members opposite would have had some understanding of the enormous hurt and pain that they had caused the ordinary, decent people of this community over the past 40 years. What I did not expect them to do was to gloat and revel in their past misdeeds. I will give a few examples: we had Mick Murphy, the former Member for South Down, organising a tour —

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member will know that I have given some latitude. He now needs to come back to the report before the House.

Mr Wells: You have not exactly given me much latitude, Mr Speaker, as you allowed the Member for Mid Ulster to ramble on about red berets etc.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member is coming very close to challenging the authority of the Chair. I have said that I am prepared to give the Member some latitude, provided that he can link whatever he is saying to the report.

Mr McCartney: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. If you make a ruling, can the DUP overrule it by a petition of concern? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order.

Mr Wells: Mr Speaker, of course, I would never dream of questioning your ruling. What I am trying to do is set the context of why I respect neither the decision taken by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure nor her appointment of Mary McArdle as her adviser.

Mr McKay: I thank the Member for giving way. I understand that he is raising the issue of appointments. In 2004, the Member oversaw an appointment in Ballymoney, when Gary Blair, who was convicted of the murder of a Sinn Féin member in Ballymoney, was appointed to the DUP officer board in that area. The Member was there and oversaw that. He saw no issue with that appointment. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Even interventions need to be in and around the report. That should be very clear. Yes, I will allow Mr Wells some latitude in setting the scene, but he needs to come to the report sooner rather than later.

Mr Wells: We had Mr Mick Murphy, the then Member for South Down, organising a tour for Sinn Féin ghoulies around the Warrenpoint massacre site. He showed them where they planted the bombs and where the snipers sat and murdered 18 members of the security forces. We had Gerry Kelly coming to the Russell Gaelic Union in Downpatrick telling us about the wonderful Maze escape. He forgot to mention that that led to the death of a prison officer. More recently, we had Gerry McGeough getting the support of Sinn Féin members of Dungannon council, who were trying to get him out early. However, the decision that caused even more discontent and anguish in the community was the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure's decision to appoint Mary McArdle, the convicted murderer of a young Roman Catholic woman who was coming out of her place of worship. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Wells: There is no hierarchy of victimhood, but I have to say that murdering someone and trying to murder her father and her mother as they were coming out of a place of worship has to be sinking to an all-time low.

When the Minister made that decision there could have been only one of two issues in her head at the time. One was that she did not understand the enormous hurt that that decision would cause. The second and perhaps more likely — I notice that she is not here to answer; she is scared to stand up and justify herself — was that she was aware of the hurt that that would cause the ordinary, decent community and the Travers family but continued to make the decision. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Wells: There were only two options, but one thing is absolutely certain: Mary McArdle would not have been appointed to a £60,000-a-year salary as the adviser to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure had she not murdered Mary Travers. The reason that the two women knew each other so well was that they shared a cell. McArdle was the IRA commandant of the women's wing in prison. She was, effectively, the Minister's boss while she served eight years for her attempted murder of police officers at Crumlin police station. The community was outraged because it felt that McArdle was rewarded for her murder of that totally defenceless and innocent young woman by being given this very important post. That caused outrage.

I was angry. The community was angry. I was concerned. Have I a right, in a democratic society, to express that concern? Yes. If I did not have the right to express it forcibly in a way that can even cause concern or upset, there would be no freedom of speech in this Building. I have to have that right, and I exercised that right.

Just to make it absolutely clear, I did accuse Mary McArdle of murdering Mary Travers. I did, because it is true. I said that she was unfit to be an adviser because of her activity. A totally innocent woman was murdered by Mary McArdle.

Mr Molloy: Will the Member draw us back to when he was talking about the number of coffins that he followed? Will he also express concern about the Ulster Resistance weapons and the red berets that were in his constituency at that time? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Once again, I warn all Members that interventions must be around the motion and on Members' contributions.

Mr Wells: The difference is, of course, that there was no attempt to appoint anybody from any loyalist paramilitary body to become a £60,000-a-year adviser to any Minister. That is the difference, and that is what stuck in my craw and angered me intensely. I tried to articulate that on behalf of my constituents.

I expressed a view about Mary McArdle not coming to south Down. Members should note that I did not say that about the Minister; I said it about her adviser. As I said, throughout south Down every unionist community group, soccer team, sports society or Ulster-Scots society has at least one person who has suffered greatly as a result of IRA terrorism. Can you think of anything that could be as insulting to those people as to have Mary McArdle arriving in a chauffeur-driven Skoda to some event in south Down and getting out of the car and behaving totally normally? That would be the ultimate insult, because her name was on everyone's lips when that decision was made.

How does Sinn Féin get respect? I am told that I showed no respect to either the Minister or her adviser. What respect did McArdle show Mary Travers and her family? What respect did the Minister show the family and the community when she raked over the embers and brought back to memory all the horror of what happened outside that chapel all those years ago? I do not have respect for those decisions, but we need to move on as a society.

Mr Boylan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: I certainly will.

Mr Boylan: Is the Member saying that he does not respect this report or the institutions in which he is here to represent his constituents? Basically, that is what you are saying. As I said, it is about respect. Do you have no respect for the role of the Standards and Privileges Committee?

Mr Wells: It is about non-unionists in a Committee ganging up against someone expressing his point of view in this Building. I thank the Ulster Unionists and my colleagues for their support, but we need to move on.

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: Yes.

Mr Allister: Is the issue here not hardened terrorists who are victim makers seeking to go down the perverse route — a well-worn path for Sinn Féin — of trying to be victims themselves and trying to don the mantle of victimhood to the point that waving a finger apparently offends them? They say, “We can support the use of terror and cold-blooded murder, but how dare anyone point out what we are?”. That is the ultimate perversity of victim makers trying to turn themselves into the victim.

Mr Wells: I noticed Ann Travers's comments in one of the regional newspapers during the week. She said that she wished that her late sister Mary could be given the choice between having a politician wag his finger in her face or being murdered coming out of a chapel. That is the choice that she would like her to have.

We need to move on. What do we need to do? I attended a church service five years ago at which there was a former loyalist paramilitary who had become a Christian. He decided to have a completely clean sheet. He sat down at his word processor and wrote out every crime that he had committed in torturing his community for 30 years. He had it bound, brought it into his local police station, handed it to the sergeant and said, “Arrest me. I have done that”. The sergeant said, “We have never heard of you”, but he arrested him anyway. That man did two years under the terms of the Belfast Agreement. He gave all those victims the who, the what, the why and the where. He gave them a form of closure that they would not have had otherwise. I say this to the Members opposite who have committed terrorist crimes: you need to start writing. I will provide you with a binder — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. As the Member will know, I have given him quite a bit of latitude to present his case and defend himself. I ask that the Member, as far as possible, come back to the motion.

Mr Wells: I see Mr Molloy getting —

Mr Speaker: Order. There should be only one Member on his feet at a time.

Mr Molloy: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Mr Wells said that he would hand us a sheet to fill in and has accused us of having been involved in violence.

Mr Speaker: Order. I have already ruled on the issue. Mr Wells, you have one minute left.

Mr Wells: Mr Molloy, you need to start writing. Mr Kelly, you need to start writing — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Wells: Mr McGuinness, you need to start writing — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I ask the Member please to come back to the motion.

Mr Molloy: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I ask the Member to withdraw or clarify his last remark, because it was a very serious remark. It shows why the report on Mr Wells's attempts to intimidate and bully people is before the House today.

Mr Wells: All that I can say is that until the honourable Members opposite start writing —

Mr McKay: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wells: No, I have given way enough.

Until they start telling us what they did over the past 40 years —

Mr Speaker: Order, if the Member does not come back to the report and the motion, I will move on. I will allow the Member to finish.

Mr Wells: All that I can say is that, if the honourable Members opposite are waiting for me to apologise for articulating the views of my constituents about the dreadful murder of Mary Travers and the appointment of her murderer to a £60,000-a-year job as adviser to the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, they will have a very long wait indeed.

1.45 pm

Mr Agnew: Thank you, Mr Speaker —

Mr McKay: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the Member for East Derry said from a sedentary position:

“Stick it in your pipe and smoke it.”

I ask you to make a ruling on that.

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us move on.

Mr Agnew: I support the motion, and I wind on behalf of the Committee on Standards and Privileges. Before I do so, I want to make a few comments in my individual role as a member of the DUP. *[Laughter.]* Apologies. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sure that the Member will want to correct himself.

Mr Agnew: I apologise to the House. I wish to withdraw that remark.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Agnew: I stand as a Green Party Member to express my sorrow that the debate has descended into name calling and abuse across the Chamber and, to some extent, disrespect from both sides of the House when we are here to discuss the code of conduct for Members and how we should act respectfully towards one another.

It seems incongruous that, on the one hand, the DUP wishes to sit in government with Sinn Féin but on the other believes that it is OK to name call and abuse.

Mr Campbell: Yes, that is exactly right.

Mr Agnew: I believe that that is disrespectful.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor. He is winding on the motion. Order.

Mr Agnew: It is disrespectful not only to the Member whom you abuse in that way but to these institutions, the rules of which all Members have to accept to some degree when they take their seat in the Chamber. As Members, we accept the code of conduct, and we accept that we must treat one another with a level of respect. We should respect one another's mandates, because we sit here as elected Members. An opportunity has been lost today to show that this is a mature institution and that the party at the head of them is mature.

We discussed the issue in Committee, and there was respectful debate around the Committee room. There was some concern, particularly among DUP members, that a debate on the issue in the Chamber would descend into what it did today. Their concerns have been realised. I suggested that, if Members were genuinely concerned about that, they should go back to their party Whips and do as the SDLP did today: choose one Member to speak, keep it respectful, keep it moderate and stick to the issue. The issue is not what we think of Ms McArdle or Ms Ní Chuilín, it is whether the code of conduct has been breached and whether the proposed sanction is correct.

The Chair of the Committee, in his capacity as a Member, stated that the proposed sanction was too strong. In Committee, several sanctions were proposed, and the DUP members did not agree to any of them. They showed a complete lack of ability to acknowledge the view of others on the Committee and of the interim commissioner that the code of conduct had been breached. That code of conduct underpins how we behave as Members. The DUP has shown, by tabling a petition of concern, that it will not accept any sanction against its Member. That is regrettable.

I will move on to speak on behalf of the Standards and Privileges Committee. First, as I have expressed, I am disappointed by the tone of the debate. Some contributions were deliberately antagonistic and fractious. Maybe, that does not surprise some people, but it contrasts starkly with how we dealt with the matter in Committee. There were differences of opinion, and we heard those today, but those differences —

Mr D McIlveen: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: I will not give way because I have to represent the complete views of the Committee.

Those differences were aired in a respectful and courteous manner in the Committee, and, given some of the sensitivities involved, the Assembly would have been better served if all Members had taken that approach today.

Objectivity and impartiality should be at the heart of what we were doing. An independent investigation by the interim Commissioner for Standards has concluded that Mr Wells has breached the code of conduct. The Assembly's Committee on Standards and Privileges has also concluded that Mr Wells has breached the code of conduct. Mr Wells has been given the opportunity to apologise, but he has decided not to do so. In those circumstances, the Committee really has no option but to seek an alternative sanction. To do anything less would undermine the measures that we have in place that ensure that Members are accountable for their conduct.

A number of Members, including Mr Wells himself, have said that he was entitled to express his views on Ms

McArdle's appointment and that he should not be denied his right to free speech. I agree with that entirely, and so does the Committee. The Committee said in its report that it is clear that all Members should be free, within the law, to express any political opinion that they may hold and that the Assembly should not seek to prevent or limit any political opinion being expressed legally. The Committee also acknowledges that Members are entitled to express their opinions in a robust and forceful manner and that this is to be accepted in the normal cut and thrust of political life. However — this point is crucial — safeguarding Members' rights to free speech is not the same as saying that Members can behave in an aggressive, confrontational or threatening manner when they express their opinions. The Assembly code of conduct makes that clear. Individuals should not be subjected to unreasonable or excessive personal attack. Mr Wells has not breached the Assembly code of conduct because he spoke out robustly against the appointment of Mary McArdle: he breached the code of conduct because of the manner in which he confronted the complainants. It is not acceptable for any Member to confront another Member or a member of staff in the way that Mr Wells confronted the complainants.

Some Members have said that the sanction of exclusion from proceedings of the Assembly for seven days is disproportionate and too severe. Of course, this is the first time that the Committee has ever tabled a motion to impose a sanction on a Member for a breach of the code, so we do not have precedents to draw on. However, I would point out that the Committee's initial preference was not to impose a sanction at all. The Committee had agreed that an appropriate apology from Mr Wells to the complainants would have resolved the matter in a fitting and proportionate manner.

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: I will not give way.

We think that it is most regrettable that Mr Wells did not accept the Committee's view on that and did not apologise. Had he done so, there would be no motion for a sanction before the Assembly today. I would also point out that any Member who felt that the Committee's proposed sanction was too severe could have put down a motion for a lesser sanction. I can say that the Committee considered the matter of an appropriate sanction carefully and, in doing so, had regard to Mr Wells's failure to apologise. The Committee felt that suspension from proceedings of the Assembly for a period of seven days was fair and proportionate.

Some Members have spoken about what Ms McArdle has done in the past and her conviction in relation to the awful murder of Mary Travers. I fully recognise how strongly many Members and, indeed, the public feel about Ms McArdle's appointment as the Minister's special adviser, but, no matter how strongly Members feel about Ms McArdle, it does not relieve them of their responsibilities and duties under the code of conduct. The Assembly has agreed that Members should be required to uphold the principles of respect and good working relationships. Specifically, the code of conduct says that individuals should not be subjected to unreasonable and excessive personal attack and that Members must treat other Members and their staff with courtesy and respect. It does not say that that requirement only applies some of the

time or only in respect of certain Members or certain staff members. We cannot pick and choose when we should adhere to the principles of the code of conduct or ignore what is set out in the code, no matter how legitimate or justified we think our position is.

I will make brief reference to a few other points that have been made. The lack of evidence was raised by Paula Bradley. Mr Frawley acknowledged in his report that he was unable to corroborate any of the accounts. However, he decided, on the strength of Mr Wells's own account of what happened, that a breach of the code of conduct had occurred.

Mr Wells: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: I will not give way. Sorry, I have to finish.

I conclude by reminding all Members of their duty to observe the principles of conduct as set out in the Assembly's code of conduct. These principles include the principles of respect and good working relationships. Members must treat other Members and staff with courtesy and respect. I sincerely hope that this is the last time that the Committee has to table a motion in relation to a matter like this. I urge the House to support the motion.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 49; Noes 51.

AYES

Nationalist

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Molloy, Ms Ni Chuilin, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Other

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Eastwood and Ms Ruane.

NOES

Unionist

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, 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 McClarty, Mr B McCreagh, Mr I McCreagh, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

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

<i>Total Votes</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>Total Ayes</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>[49.0%]</i>
<i>Nationalist Votes</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>Nationalist Ayes</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>[100.0%]</i>
<i>Unionist Votes</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>Unionist Ayes</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>[0.0%]</i>
<i>Other Votes</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>Other Ayes</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>[100.0%]</i>

Question accordingly negated (cross-community vote).

Welfare Reform Bill: Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements

Mr Speaker: The next item is a motion from the Committee for Social Development under Standing Order 35. Order, Members.

Standing Order 35(3) restricts the debate to a brief statement to propose the motion and a brief statement to oppose it. I have ruled previously that the time limit for such statements should be five minutes each. The Minister for Social Development has indicated that he will speak to oppose the motion.

One amendment has been selected and appears on the Marshalled List. As Standing Orders are silent on the arrangements for amendments in these circumstances, I have ruled that the proposer of the amendment and one Member who opposes it will each have five minutes in which to speak.

I inform Members that a valid petition of concern was presented this morning on both the amendment and the motion.

As required by Standing Order 28, no votes can be held on either the amendment or the motion until tomorrow. Those votes will be the first item of business tomorrow morning. The vote on the amendment will be on a cross-community basis. However, because there is a petition of concern to the motion, Standing Order 60(4) now applies. That means that the Question that will be put tomorrow on the motion will automatically become one by which I will ask the House to agree that the Welfare Reform Bill may proceed without reference to an Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements. The Question must be passed with parallel consent. I am conscious that these are complex issues and that this is the first time that the provisions have been used. If Members have any queries, I ask them to take the Clerks' advice or to come to the Speaker's Office.

Let us move on with today's business. Given the speaking restrictions, Members should not try to intervene, and I will not take any points of order until this item is concluded. Let us proceed.

Mr Allister: On a point of order on the motion, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Point of order on the motion.

Mr Allister: I am much obliged. I have been trying to listen above the hubbub to what you have been saying, Mr Speaker, but I question the validity of the motion, given the wording that has been chosen.

When one looks at Standing Order 35, one sees that there is a very clear process in it. Up to the point where a Bill has been referred to the Statutory Committee, it can be referred to an Ad Hoc Committee, but, once a Bill is with the Statutory Committee, as in this case, the wording of Standing Order 35(10) is not that it shall be referred to an Ad Hoc Committee but that it shall be "transferred" to the Ad Hoc Committee.

I suggest that the language that is used in the Standing Order is done so deliberately. There is a distinction, because, at this moment, the Bill is reposed with the Statutory Committee. The Standing Orders anticipate that it cannot be in both that and the Ad Hoc Committee. Therefore, the Standing Order requires that the motion

shall transfer it, but the motion before us does not seek to transfer it. It seeks only to refer it. Therefore, it would leave the Bill before two Committees, which is not compatible with Standing Order 35. So, I ask you to rule that the wording of the motion is not something that can be done under Standing Orders.

Mr Speaker: Members will know by listening to the learned Member that these are complex issues. I agree with the Member that it would be more accurate if the motion had used the word "transfer" rather than "refer", but I am satisfied that it is competent. The Member will know that I take counsel on these issues, and I am satisfied that the motion is competent.

Mr Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 35(10)(a) and (b)(i), the Welfare Reform Bill be referred to an Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements; and that the Ad Hoc Committee shall consider and report only whether the provisions of the Bill are in conformity with the requirements for equality and observance of human rights.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I move the motion under Standing Order 35 on behalf of the Committee for Social Development, and I do so for a number of very important and compelling reasons.

First, I place on the record that, when the Committee Stage commenced, all the Committee members endeavoured to complete the consideration of the Bill within the statutory 30 working days, but, due to the volume of clauses and the importance of the Bill, the Committee rightly invested a significant amount of time and effort in scrutinising the Bill. In fact, we have been meeting for three days every week since mid-October, including through recess. We have taken oral evidence from almost 30 organisations and received close to 50 written submissions. That is probably an unprecedented volume of engagement with any Committee in the lifetime of this particular Assembly. We are very pleased that that has been the case, because of the importance of the issue.

2.15 pm

During presentation of their evidence, stakeholders raised a whole range of serious concerns, including the human rights and equality implications of the Bill. The presentations that we received came from a wide range of organisations that represent our community, such as Churches, trade unions, a whole range of disability advocacy organisations, and the community and voluntary sector. For the purposes of this particular motion, we dealt with the Equality Commission and the Human Rights Commission. I will come to that in a second or two.

Notwithstanding the very important and extensive consideration of the Bill by the Committee and across all parties, given the compelling evidence that was presented to us that highlighted a whole range of concerns, the Committee felt that it was important that we carry out the maximum and most robust scrutiny. That is what we have been involved in. Given the radical nature of the changes that the Bill will represent, the Committee, in its wisdom, felt that it was necessary to give even further,

closer consideration to the Bill's human rights and equality requirements. I will outline why in a moment.

I assure all Members of the House, as I assured the Minister and departmental officials when I met them at the Minister's request the other evening, that the purpose of the motion is not about delay; rather, it is about ensuring that we maximise the scrutiny that is available to the House on issues of concern about human rights and equality provision requirements.

In its evidence, the Human Rights Commission advised the Committee that the Department had said that it had conducted a full analysis of the Bill against the European Convention on Human Rights but that a lot more work needed to be done to ensure that the Bill was compliant with all human rights requirements. The Human Rights Commission was very clear that it had not been involved in full, proper and appropriate levels of consultation with the Department during the whole legislative process thus far.

The Equality Commission also placed on record that it had a number of concerns and that, although it had engaged with the Department over the past number of months and the Department had provided a number of assurances, none of them had as yet been realised.

All Committee members expressed serious concerns. I can say without fear of contradiction that every single member, across all parties, shared the vast majority of concerns that have been placed before the Committee. We have heard compelling evidence that we cannot and must not ignore. If the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission come to me, as Chair of the Committee, and tell me that they are not satisfied with the degree of consultation that has been had with them or that their concerns have not been addressed, I will ensure, to the best of my ability, that the House will be given the benefit of full and maximum scrutiny in order to ensure that the Bill complies with the concerns of the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission. As I said, concerns have been raised by the trade union movement, Churches and a raft of other organisations. We have also heard concerns expressed by organisations such as NICEM on EU provisions in the Bill that could adversely affect other EU nationals.

It is very clear that all Committee members across all parties are concerned about the Bill. What we are saying to the Minister and the Department, and as we said to Lord David Freud, is that these matters are of such importance and will potentially have such a negative impact on the people whom we collectively represent that it is imperative that we do our job. I presume that the Minister will refer to the meeting that he asked to have with me as Chair the other night. I urge the Minister to embrace the concept of full scrutiny. I also urge him, when the Department quotes figures, not to quote figures that were presented by Department for Social Development officials months ago.

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

Mr Maskey: In my view, those figures distorted the actual financial consequences of the Bill.

This is not about delay but about maximising scrutiny. The people whom we represent are likely to be very adversely affected by the Bill. It is very important that all Committee members continue to do their job. That is why there is a petition of concern against the motion.

The following amendment stood on the Marshalled List:

Leave out all after "35(10)(a);" and insert

"and (b)(ii), the Welfare Reform Bill be referred to an Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements; and that the Ad Hoc Committee shall, in addition to considering and reporting on those matters, carry out the role of the Statutory Committee in relation to the Bill." — [Mr Campbell.]

Mr Campbell: The amendment in my name and that of my colleague was tabled to try to ensure that an issue would not arise whereby the Committee could not continue to finalise amendments and clauses in the Bill but could in fact conclude its business rapidly. Not to do so would cost several million pounds. Unfortunately, the tabling of the petition of concern means that the amendment is superfluous, and I, therefore, withdraw it.

Amendment not moved.

Mr Speaker: Order, Members. The amendment has not been moved. I call the Minister for Social Development, who has five minutes to oppose the motion standing in the Order Paper.

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):

I welcome the opportunity to respond to the motion. I have addressed the Assembly on a number of occasions on the Welfare Reform Bill, its process and the financial and, indeed, societal repercussions if the Assembly further delays its introduction. It was only four weeks ago, on 22 October, that I spoke against a motion tabled under Standing Order 34. That motion was defeated, and I am dismayed that human rights issues are featuring again as part of today's motion.

On the other issue of equality, around which today's motion has been tabled, I have already outlined the steps my Department has taken in that regard. As part of the process for me as the Minister for Social Development bringing forward the Welfare Reform Bill to the Executive and introducing it here at the Assembly, my Department carried out a detailed analysis of the proposals in the Bill for their conformity with equality requirements, including, I might add, a public consultation on those same proposals.

It was on 5 September last year — more than a year ago — that the Department published its draft equality impact assessment on the proposals in the Bill. That document was sent directly to 65 different organisations, as well as being made available on the departmental website and to all 108 MLAs. The consultation period ended on 30 November, and the Department received a total of 27 responses representing the views of 37 groups. It is worth noting that neither the Human Rights Commission nor, indeed, the SDLP bothered to respond.

For me, the whole issue is very simple. If we proceed in the direction in which some Members want to go, we will cost the people of Northern Ireland a substantial amount of money. If this process proceeds in the direction indicated and is taken away from the Social Development Committee and into an Ad Hoc Committee, the matter will be stalled until the Ad Hoc Committee finishes its work. That will be the result of what is proposed. We are already operating under a very tight timetable and framework. I notice that the Committee Chair said that it is not the intention to delay, but the fact is that it will cause delay.

Let us look very clearly at the implications of this. If we delay the process by 10 days, and I take that figure, because 30 days is the normal period set out for an Ad Hoc Committee, then the cost to the Northern Ireland Budget would be £4 million — £4 million pounds for a 10-day delay. If it were the full 30 days, the cost would be £13.1 million. If we go beyond that — and if you look very carefully at the timetable, you will see that it may well do so — it would run up to £28 million. The fact is that there is no need to squander that money, because it is possible for the Social Development Committee to fully explore the issues of equality and human rights without the sort of delay that it is contemplating.

Let us just think of the cost that would be incurred. In a few months' or a year's time, when someone says that they need some money to sort out a leaking roof in a classroom, or deal with damp, or because drugs are not available in a hospital, or because we do have not enough to mitigate some of the detrimental effects of welfare reform, I will come back and say, "If you had not squandered the £4 million, the £13 million or whatever the figure was, we might have been better positioned to deal with that." This matter can be dealt with at no extra cost — not one penny — if the Social Development Committee deal with it. The fact is that the expertise resides with that Committee.

This is not about welfare reform. It is about a squalid little squabble between the SDLP and Sinn Féin. The SDLP wants to be able to say, — and this all came out in this morning's press statement from Mr Durkan — "We led Sinn Féin by the nose. We pulled them along. We are the people who did it. We got them over the line." This is about an inter-nationalist squabble. It is nothing to do with the issue before us. Anyone who suggests that the matter can proceed in the Social Development Committee and the Ad Hoc Committee at the same time is wrong. The matter is stalled within the Social Development Committee.

Mr Speaker: The Minister's time is almost gone.

Mr McCausland: It cannot proceed in parallel, and I urge the House not to squander money on funding what is basically an SDLP/Sinn Féin stunt.

Mr Speaker: The Question will be put at the start — *[Interruption.]* Order. The Question will be put at the start of business tomorrow morning. The Business Committee motion to establish an Ad Hoc Committee, which is the next item on the Order Paper, cannot now be moved. Let us move on.

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

The sitting was suspended at 2.25 pm.

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

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Regional Development

B59: Cloughfern Corner, Newtownabbey

1. **Ms P Bradley** asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to alleviate congestion on the B59 Doagh Road at Cloughfern corner, Newtownabbey. (AQO 2871/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Mr Deputy Speaker, I hope that you will give me some credit for being on time today. Let me also claim your indulgence by welcoming a group of elected representatives, including Mayor Tom Crosby and officials from Roscommon County Council, who are present in the Chamber.

On 24 October 2012, I announced the making of the vesting order for the proposed £60 million major works scheme to improve the A2 Shore Road between Belfast and Carrickfergus at Greenisland. That will enable my Department to acquire the land necessary to construct a new dual carriageway between Shore Avenue at the University of Ulster and Seapark. Roads Service anticipates that the upgrading of that section of the A2 will reduce the number of vehicles using the B59 Doagh Road and alleviate traffic congestion. Work on the proposed A2 scheme is expected to commence in the early part of next year and will take approximately two years to complete.

Due to the delays experienced by motorists who use the B59 Doagh Road at peak times, Roads Service is currently undertaking a feasibility study to investigate the possibility of introducing traffic signals at the junction of Doagh Road with Station Road and O'Neill Road, known locally as Cloughfern corner. If progressed, the scheme would also replace the existing zebra crossings with fully controlled pedestrian facilities incorporated into the traffic signals. The feasibility study is still at an early stage. Once it is completed, any potential scheme will be prioritised and will have to compete for funding against the large number of other potential minor improvement schemes in Roads Service eastern division. I, therefore, cannot currently give a firm indication of when or, indeed, whether the scheme will progress.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answer thus far. I welcome what the Minister had to say. I know, as someone who used to work along there, just how bad it gets. I welcome the Minister saying that there is a feasibility study, but is there anything at all that he can do in the interim? The cars are using residential areas. They go through Fernagh to get from the Doagh Road to Station Road, and that, in itself, causes a hazard.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her question and her kind comments. Of course, my officials continue to examine how we can bring forward improvements, particularly in the light of the larger scheme that is due to take place and the likely impact that it will have. Of course, you cannot make omelettes without breaking eggs, but,

still and all, you want to try to manage the situation as far as possible.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Minister for his answers so far and for his welcome comments about progress on the A2. During the construction of the A2, further pressure will be put on the B59 and Cloughfern corner. What efforts will your Department make in terms of traffic management to ensure that what is a rat run does not become an even bigger one?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member. I accept the point that he makes. The implementation of a major project, such as the A2 Shore Road to Greenisland, will inevitably cause significant disruption along the A2 and the adjacent roads during the construction phase. There are, of course, significant challenges associated with carrying out those works within the space available on that very constrained urban corridor. They include laying new gas mains, sewers, water mains and electricity and telephone cables. All utilities to the adjoining properties must be maintained during the construction of the road while accommodating the 35,000 vehicles that use the road every day.

To tackle those issues, Roads Service has established a temporary traffic management strategy group, known as TTMSG — that rolls off the tongue — which includes representatives from PSNI, Translink transportation unit and officials from Newtownabbey Borough Council and Carrickfergus Borough Council. The aims of that wide-ranging group will be to minimise disruption and keep all those affected informed of the works and the developments throughout the contact. I very much hope that we can make progress on that basis.

Ballynahinch Bypass

2. **Mr Wells** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on plans to build a bypass for Ballynahinch. (AQO 2872/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will recall that I met elected representatives, traders and council officials in Ballynahinch to see for myself the road network and traffic conditions in the town prior to my announcement in January 2012 of the preferred line for the A24 Ballynahinch bypass scheme. Roads Service officials have confirmed that work to progress the development of a specimen design is ongoing, together with the planning and completion of the required surveys, including a detailed environmental survey, that are necessary to progress the scheme.

As the Member will appreciate, strategic road improvement schemes, such as the Ballynahinch bypass, can only be provided at considerable cost, which in this case is estimated to be in the range of £40 million to £50 million. That level of funding is not available in the current Budget period, during which the A5, A8 and A2 schemes are being progressed. However, Roads Service will continue to progress the A24 Ballynahinch bypass scheme, as resources allow, so that it can be ready for construction should finance become available. I would welcome the Member's support in helping to secure the funding necessary to progress the scheme.

Mr Wells: I also welcome the delegation from Roscommon. I hope that they have the famous TD Ming with them. He is an individual whom I have always wanted to meet.

Moving back to the subject of Ballynahinch, I am concerned that, when the bypass was first suggested in 2001, the price was £9 million, yet now you are telling me that the estimated cost of construction is between £40 million and £50 million. The whole project is rapidly running out of control. If we do not act soon and provide it, we will simply never have the money to provide that much-needed bypass to relieve traffic congestion in the crowded town of Ballynahinch.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his comments. It has been indicated that he will become a member of the Executive — if he behaves himself, at least. On that basis, he will be able to assist me in my efforts to obtain even more finances for my Department to bring forward road schemes like the Ballynahinch bypass.

Mr McCallister: Will the Minister confirm his commitment to the project and to identify the necessary funding to move this much-needed project forward?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question and his ongoing commitment. Strictly speaking, Ballynahinch is no longer in the South Down constituency. Indeed, my party leader, Mike Nesbitt, has not been slow in making representations on behalf of the Ballynahinch bypass scheme. I am very aware of it as a scheme, as I am with other schemes throughout the length and breadth of Northern Ireland. Those include the A26, which will please Robin Swann, the Millennium Way, which will please Sam Gardiner and Jo-Anne Dobson, the Enniskillen bypass, which will please Tom Elliott, and, of course, a great many others. I am very dedicated to bringing forward and making as much money available to my Department as possible and to arguing at the Executive on that basis, so that we can improve the road network throughout Northern Ireland.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As the Minister is on the subject of bypasses, will he give us an update on the status of the Dungiven bypass, now that the public inquiry has been heard?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. The fact that I did not mention the Dungiven bypass earlier does not mean that I have forgotten about it — you would not allow me to anyway. We have had the public inquiry, and, as the Member knows, it is a matter of available finance. I will continue to battle for funds to bring forward projects such as the Dungiven bypass and the A6 as quickly as we can.

Mr McCarthy: Does the Minister not feel very disappointed that, after 30 or 40 years, we are no further forward? I was alarmed to hear the Minister say that the scheme is only at the design phase. I would have thought that, after all these years, we would be ready to go once the money was available. Sammy Wilson announced a lot of money last week. Could some of that not be diverted to Ballynahinch, which is in my constituency?

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Member for his contribution. However, I am also conscious that Ballynahinch is a new addition to your constituency, so you may not know the background to it. You may not be as well informed as you think. Let us not worry about the past, which I cannot change. As roads Minister, I would like to carry forward the Ballynahinch bypass project. I would like to continue to advance the argument to get the funds necessary to complete that and other schemes.

Donegall Road, Belfast: Roadworks

3. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the roadworks on Donegall Road, Belfast. (AQO 2873/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Roads Service has advised that the resurfacing of approximately 650 metres of carriageway on the Donegall Road from the Broadway roundabout to Euterpe Street is now complete. The works, which began on 13 August 2012 and were completed by 17 September 2012, typically took place between 7.00 am and 8.00 pm, thus minimising noise disturbance to residents. This scheme, which was valued at approximately £220,000, was undertaken to improve the safety and strength of the road. No further works have taken place on the Donegall Road since the completion of the resurfacing scheme.

The Member may also have noted that works at Hope Street and Sandy Row are now complete. Final resurfacing was substantially completed over the weekend just past. Those works included the introduction of two-way traffic on Hope Street, with the commissioning of traffic signals at the junction with Sandy Row and Linfield Road — yes, Linfield — on 28 October 2012. This provides controlled pedestrian crossings at a busy location that is particularly important to the residents of the Sandy Row area, as it provides a connection with the city centre. It also provides an additional northbound route via Hope Street, Sandy Row, Durham Street and College Square North for traffic on Great Victoria Street and improves local access to the area. Roads Service has been monitoring traffic flows at this junction and across the city, both on the ground and by CCTV, and traffic has been flowing well. As further works are completed across the city and traffic patterns are established, further traffic management measures can be considered where necessary to target any specific issues that arise.

Mr McGimpsey: I thank the Minister for his answer and for the long explanation about the Hope Street/Wellwood Street scheme, even though I did not ask for it; it is nice to get it. Will the Minister confirm that the roadworks that have now ceased on the Donegall Road will carry on right down to the junction with Shaftesbury Square, particularly because of the very poor condition of the pavements in that area? Will he also confirm that the moratorium for Christmas will not affect those works?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. Obviously, my officials will continue to carry out all the necessary works that they can. I am pleased to say that the moratorium on public works from now until Christmas is now in operation. That is good news for everyone concerned — residents, travellers, shoppers, tourists and everyone who works or spends time in Belfast — and has been widely welcomed by the Chamber of Trade and other public representatives. I hope that it confirms the signal that Belfast is open for business, as are other towns and cities across Northern Ireland, such as Lisburn, Newry and even villages such as Bessbrook.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. I generally welcome the works that have been done on Donegall Road and Hope Street. I also commend the Minister on the resurfacing in progress on the Malone Road; it is very welcome. I also commend Roads Service for the flexibility that it has shown to people getting in and out while that work takes place. It is useful to make

a positive comment the odd time. However, I draw the Minister's attention to the terrible state of many roads across Belfast as a result of the ice and snow and perhaps even the machines used to deal with the ice and snow in the past couple of bad winters —

Mr Deputy Speaker: May we have the question, please?

Dr McDonnell: Have you any long-term plans? Nearly every road needs resurfacing. Is there a work scheme, plan or programme in place to resurface roads and replace some of those potential potholes?

2.45 pm

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for the challenge that he raises. It would be a significant challenge to reinstate every road. Obviously, we continue to bid for moneys to help with structural maintenance. That is fundamentally the Member's point. I welcome his positive comments on the work that has been carried out and on the approach adopted by my officials in Roads Service and, indeed, in the other utilities in co-operating to ensure that, when necessary works are being implemented, there is minimum disruption or as little disruption as is practically possible. I am very interested in continuing to get the necessary funds to maintain the road network that we have not just in south Belfast or Belfast but across Northern Ireland.

Ms Lo: I also commend the Roads Service for the good work carried out on Donegall Road. It is really a great improvement for the area. Will the Minister give an update on the proposal to resurface Rugby Road? Many of the residents oppose that, because it is not in keeping with the character of the area.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her supplementary question, which strays somewhat from the Donegall Road and Sandy Row area. However, I confirm that ongoing discussions with the residents that will hopefully achieve a resolution to the issue are happening or are about to happen.

Flooding: South Antrim

4. **Ms Brown** asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration has been given to addressing the persistent flooding in south Antrim. (AQO 2874/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Roads Service has identified locations in the south Antrim area that are prone to flooding. Some of those flooding problems have been programmed for remedial repairs, and the required funding has already been allocated. NI Water has also identified a number of properties in Antrim town, Newtownabbey, Randalstown and Glenavy that may be at risk of out-of-sewer flooding. Each of those properties is the subject of a detailed appraisal study of the sewerage infrastructure. That may identify possible improvements. Any schemes arising from that process will be considered for implementation in NIW's capital works programme, subject to available funding and competing priorities.

I understand that, following previous river flooding incidents, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Rivers Agency undertook extensive investigations and completed feasibility studies on the Sixmilewater, Fourmile burn and Doagh river. A flood alleviation scheme is nearing completion on the Fourmile

burn, and other alleviation works have been carried out along the Sixmilewater to improve flood protection at Muckamore and Meadowside in Antrim. Officials from Rivers Agency, NI Water and Roads Service have engaged in meetings with residents from Antrim and Muckamore affected by flooding and with officials from Antrim Borough Council and local public representatives to address their concerns. Rivers Agency will take forward further works and schemes on a prioritised basis and on the basis of available resources.

Ms Brown: Will the Minister outline what action has been taken to upgrade identified poor drainage systems, particularly in Templepatrick, where traffic tends to come to a standstill in heavy rain on the A6 Antrim Road and the A57 towards the M2 slip road in both directions?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for her supplementary question. Obviously, she will know that co-operation with Rivers Agency is necessary and desirable on drainage issues. Indeed, that is the case with the other responsible agencies and Department. My Department is responsible for the maintenance of the storm water gullies in the public road network. We aim to clean all gullies in urban areas twice each year. That policy ensures that a reasonable level of maintenance is carried out on the drainage system while taking account of the Department's finite funding and staff resource levels. I understand the Member's point about Templepatrick, and, if I have any further information on that that would be valuable, I will provide it in writing.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister, and I also congratulate Roads Service in both the Antrim and Newtownabbey areas for being extremely quick in helping.

My question follows on from what the Minister was talking about. How does his Department engage with the other Departments, such as DARD on flooding, and with councils, particularly on sandbags? Those issues affect roads because of blockages such as those at Parkgate and Templepatrick. How does his Department engage with the Department of the Environment on building new developments on flood plains?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question and his kind comments about Roads Service, its officials and the other agencies involved.

I am happy to confirm that Roads Service is in regular contact and co-operates fully with other Departments on all flooding-related issues. It has established a network of divisional flood liaison officers to provide clear channels of communication for other Departments, local councils and area health emergency planning co-ordinators. Roads Service, as well as NI Water, plays a key role on the flood liaison group, which promotes co-operation and co-ordination between the main organisations required to respond to flooding incidents, such as Rivers Agency, NI Water, Roads Service and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. What developments are taking place in his Department to introduce sustainable urban drainage systems?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. Obviously, sustainable systems would be a desirable outcome to arrive at as quickly as possible. There is, of course, the issue of cost and budget,

and that has to be measured in the current climate. I will write to the Member with an update.

Road Maintenance: Ards Borough Council Area

5. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister for Regional Development how the level of funding for roads maintenance in the Ards Borough Council area compares with five years ago. (AQO 2875/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Roads Service has advised that the current level of funding for roads maintenance in the Ards Borough Council area has increased when compared with that of five years ago. In the 2011-12 financial year, out-turn spend on structural and routine maintenance was approximately £5.7 million, compared with £2.5 million in the 2006-07 financial year.

Although Roads Service's initial roads maintenance budget for the current financial year was lower than 2011-12 levels, my Department has been bidding vigorously in an effort to secure additional in-year funding, most recently as part of the October monitoring round. That has resulted in further interim allocations that have enhanced funding across all council areas, including Ards Borough Council area, where current funding is well in excess of the out-turn figure for 2006-07, thus allowing more maintenance schemes to be carried out.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister. Notwithstanding and without prejudice to Ballynahinch, where does the resurfacing of Main Street in Greyabbey fall on his Department's list of priorities?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. It seems that Ballynahinch will not be enough; it will have to be Greyabbey as well.

Roads Service has advised that it considers the scheme to be of a high priority. I should point out that NI Water recently completed utility works on Main Street in Greyabbey and that the reinstatement works that it carried out are currently within the maintenance guarantee period as required by the Street Works (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

The maintenance guarantee period runs for a minimum of two years, during which time NI Water is responsible for the condition of the reinstatement, including dealing with any settlement that may occur in its trench. I know that the Member will understand that it makes sense to allow time for the reinstatement to bed in prior to embarking on any reconstruction or resurfacing scheme.

The cost of the proposed work would represent a significant proportion of the annual structural maintenance budget for the entire Ards area. Therefore, it is likely that the scheme would have to be split into two or three stages. However, we have been bidding proactively for additional funding, and, should sufficient funds become available, it is hoped that resurfacing works can commence late in 2013-14 or early in 2014-15.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before calling the next contributor, I remind Members that supplementaries to this question must be specific to roads maintenance in the Ards Borough Council area now and five years ago.

Mr McCarthy: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I stand as a proud member of Ards Borough Council. I must express gratitude for the work that has

been done in the Ards Borough Council area, but there are loads of work to be done. In relation to the Ballynahinch one —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr McCarthy, we need a question.

Mr McCarthy: After years of having minor projects on work schedules, land acquisition seems to be the problem. Will the Minister plan well ahead and purchase the land? I am thinking of improved sightlines, as there are in the programme for our local section office. The land could be purchased quickly so that the project could then be got on with when the funding is available.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Sorry, Mr McCarthy. I ask you for a question for the second time.

Mr McCarthy: I think that the Minister has got the gist of what I am on about.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the member for his supplementary. I have got the gist, but I am not sure that it is the right gist. I was talking about Main Street, Greyabbey. Where did you go off to? *[Laughter.]* I gave a detailed answer on Main Street, Greyabbey. I think that, in my initial answer, I proved conclusively my commitment to trying to get more moneys for structural maintenance that can be spent not only in the Ards Borough Council area but in all parts of Northern Ireland.

Mr McAleer: Will the Minister give us any indication of how much funding has been transferred from the A5 pot to the roads maintenance budget for Ards and other parts of the Six Counties?

Mr Kennedy: That was an ingeniously delivered question from the Member. I have made it plain that, while the legal situation in respect of the A5 persists, I am limited in what I can say. However, I can confirm that we have had discussions with the Department of Finance and Personnel about reprioritising the allocated funds. We very much hope that the situation can be resolved. I still believe that it will be possible to bring forward the A5 scheme, hopefully at the earliest possible point.

Car Parking: Cycle Lanes

6. **Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department is taking to address illegal parking in cycle lanes. (AQO 2876/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I want to begin by saying that I fully appreciate the concerns and frustration of cyclists caused by vehicles that park in cycle lanes during their operational hours. Motorists should be mindful and considerate towards cyclists when using our roads and should not park illegally in cycle lanes. Roads Service has advised that a traffic attendant can issue a penalty charge notice to a vehicle that is parked on a mandatory cycle lane. However, a penalty charge notice cannot be issued to a vehicle that is parked on an advisory cycle lane, unless other parking restrictions apply; for example, clearway restrictions or bus lanes. When a traffic attendant observes a vehicle parked in a cycle lane in contravention of a restriction, the appropriate enforcement action will be taken.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he also give us an update on the parking enforcement awareness programme that was due to commence on 30 October?

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member. Obviously, the Department encourages cycling. We are committed to

providing safer roads for the growing number of cyclists and pedestrians. We have done that through a range of measures such as road safety engineering, traffic calming and the enhancement of the pedestrian and cycling network. All these initiatives, including those brought forward by Travelwise, are key elements of the sustainable travel options involving cycling and its promotion.

Mr McDevitt: I thank the Minister for his ongoing commitment to cycling. Given that it is the beginning of road safety week, will the Minister indicate to the House whether he is willing to strongly consider the merits of introducing 20 mph zones on a statutory basis or to support the private Member's Bill due before the House in the coming months that will do so?

3.00 pm

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his supplementary question. I know that he is a keen and very active cyclist. I am aware of the private Members' Bill and of the representations made by those in favour of introducing 20 mph schemes. Although I am not opposed to such schemes, the issue seems to be one of enforcement: how such limits are to be enforced, whether the PSNI can commit the necessary resources and whether responsible motorists and vehicle users will be prepared to accept the restrictions that are placed upon them. That is an ongoing discussion that I am having with my officials, and we will see what emerges.

Employment and Learning

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 13 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer. Jonathan Craig is not in his place, so I call Thomas Buchanan.

Steps 2 Success

2. **Mr Buchanan** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on his Department's proposed Steps 2 Success programme. (AQO 2887/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Steps to Work, my Department's main adult return-to-work programme, is due to end on 31 March 2013, when the current contracts for delivery expire. Steps 2 Success is being developed as the successor to the outgoing programme. A public consultation exercise outlining the high-level design of Steps 2 Success ended on 12 October, resulting in over 80 responses from a wide and varied range of organisations. The level of interest in the programme is very encouraging. My officials are collating and evaluating the responses received and will use that feedback to inform the design of the programme.

A summary response to the consultation exercise, which will include recommendations on the way forward, will be published once this work has been completed. It is planned that procurement for the new programme will commence in February 2013, with an anticipated start date of February 2014.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Minister for his response. What implications, if any, will the delay in bringing forward the Steps 2 Success programme have for students?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his substantive and supplementary questions.

We do not anticipate the delay having any meaningful impact on any key stakeholder group. It is important that we get this right. In fact, I would not even suggest that there is a delay in practice: we are simply shifting the timetable in a slightly different manner to make sure that we fully take on board the responses to the consultation.

The House will be aware that the Minister for Social Development has set a timescale for the introduction of universal credit on 1 April 2014. Although that is an entirely separate programme, there will obviously be a spin-off between the two different strands. It is anticipated that this element will be in place ahead of the introduction of universal credit.

Mr B McCrea: Following on from your last answer, Minister, there must be some connection between welfare reform and universal credit. Will you identify what that is for us?

Dr Farry: In Northern Ireland, we have had the Steps to Work programme as the main employment programme. That was a successor to the New Deal. Even without welfare reform taking place in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, we would have been in a situation where we would have had to re-contract and redesign our main employment programme.

Obviously, an employment programme is important, because it is critical to assist people who have been out of work for a long time in returning to work. Obviously, universal credit is designed to improve the employability of people, incentivise people who have been on benefits to find work by making it more attractive — in some cases by having a combination of some benefits and some work — and address the catch that many people who find themselves on benefits experience, where not finding work is actually beneficial and pays its way. So, what we do in our work programme is critical to maximising the employability prospects of people who are on benefits today and who will be on universal credit in the future.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Minister, you said that you had consulted widely on the programme. Just how widely has your Department consulted with the voluntary and community sector on the proposed Steps 2 Success programme?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. In some respects, this could be viewed as a simple recontracting exercise, and, as such, there would not normally be an expectation of a full public consultation. Given the importance of getting people into work and the new contracts arising from that, I took the decision that it was important that we had a public consultation. It is by no means a done deal, and we are very keen to hear the views of the public and different organisations on the ongoing design of the programme. We received over 80 responses to the consultation, and that was in excess of what we had anticipated, hence we needed to take more time to properly analyse those. I was pleased with the degree of response from the community and voluntary sector. In addition to the formal consultation, the Department organised a number of information sessions, through which we engaged with the community and voluntary sector.

Unemployment: East Belfast

3. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what training and employment programmes his Department is planning to tackle levels of unemployment in east Belfast. (AQO 2888/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department has a range of programmes to support those who are unemployed back into work. Steps to Work is being delivered successfully in east Belfast by Bryson FutureSkills. Since being awarded the contract for that area, the organisation has introduced several pre-employment initiatives, known as Step Into, and is engaged with GEMS NI, Penna Plc and FIT NI to develop further employment initiatives in east Belfast. The recently announced First Start and Step Ahead 50+ initiatives will also help to address unemployment in east Belfast.

In July, I launched the youth employment scheme to help young people gain experience, acquire new skills and find employment. Training for Success provides a guaranteed training place for unemployed 16- to 17-year-olds, with extended eligibility for those with a disability up to age 22 and 24 from an in-care background. Contracted training suppliers, including those in east Belfast, deliver the programme, which aims to progress participants to higher-level training, further education or employment by addressing personal and social development needs, developing occupational skills and employability skills and, where necessary, essential skills. Programme-led apprenticeships offer unemployed young people a guarantee of training of up to 104 weeks followed by a level 2 apprenticeship framework.

In addition to the above measures, a community family support programme pilot is being introduced in east Belfast, west Belfast, Strabane, Cookstown and Newtownabbey to support parents, help prevent younger family members falling into the not in education, employment or training (NEET) category and to help other young family members already in that situation to re-engage with education, training or employment. It is anticipated that, following an evaluation of the pilot, an upscaled community family support programme will be rolled out to all areas over the period 2013-15.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for a comprehensive response. Will he confirm that the target for those entering training schemes to gain employment is around 23%? What percentage is being achieved?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. While he may praise me for a comprehensive initial answer, I do not, unfortunately, have a comprehensive follow-up answer for him on the precise figures for each different strand. I can say that they are, in the main, in and around the targets that we have set, and while I am pleased that we are in a position to more or less meet the targets that have been established, we can by no means be complacent, and we need to be ever more mindful of the need to improve the performance of our employment programmes.

I will jump back to Steps 2 Success. It is worth highlighting that one of the reasons why we are going through a redesign of the programme is to ensure that we are in a better position to increase the performance level of placing people into sustained employment. Steps to Work is performing well on its targets, but, clearly, we can and should do a lot better, and, in many respects, some of our employment programmes have, starkly, tended to be some of the lesser performing among equivalents elsewhere in the UK.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the Minister have the figures on the number of young

people from east Belfast and, indeed, Strabane who are not in education, employment or training?

Dr Farry: Members are quizzing me on some very specific things. I will write to the Member with those particular figures in so far as we can break them down. It is important that the House appreciates that the figures are often compiled from the labour force survey, which, by its definition, is a survey and does not necessarily lend itself to a ready breakdown on a constituency basis. In so far as we can provide those figures, I will do so to the Member. In the same way, I will write to Mr Douglas to give him the precise figures for each of the relevant programmes that I referred to in my main answer.

Mrs Overend: As there are regional variations in unemployment statistics, does the Department for Employment and Learning have regional variations in its strategies?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for her question. Obviously, there are major subregional variations in unemployment. Again, it is worth stressing that we have the labour force survey, which is a survey, and we also have the claimant count, which can provide a more accurate basis of unemployment on a local geographical basis. Obviously, we seek to take into account regional variations in the way that we design and take forward programmes.

Again jumping back to the Steps 2 Success issue, one of the key aims is to ensure that any future providers treat people across Northern Ireland equitably, that they address particular needs and there is not a situation where providers are able to address and cream off the easier cases to help, allowing people to fall through the cracks. That applies to people's existing level of attainment and employability as well as any subregional variations that there may well be.

FG Wilson: Job Losses

4. **Ms P Bradley** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the assistance offered by his Department to people affected by the job losses at FG Wilson. (AQO 2889/11-15)

Dr Farry: Since I last reported on this matter, my Department, through the redundancy advice service, has worked in partnership with the Social Security Agency, further education colleges, HMRC and other agencies to provide 15 clinics across all three FG Wilson sites affected by these announcements. Through this service, my officials provided advice on alternative job opportunities and mentoring, access to training courses, entrepreneurship, education opportunities and careers advice, as well as on a range of other issues such as benefits and taxation. This service was delivered free of charge to all employees facing redundancy.

In addition, the Department for Employment and Learning arranged six jobs and training fairs, and, again, these were delivered across all three sites. My officials worked proactively to target and identify over 30 companies that expressed an interest in attending the jobs fairs, with 28 attending the Larne event, 16 at Monkstown and 16 at Springvale. At the training fairs, my Department worked in partnership with, among others, further education colleges, training providers, industry experts and employment and careers counsellors. Workers affected

were provided with access to opportunities and pathways into a different career.

Moving forward, the further education sector will have a key role in providing assistance to individual employees. The further education sector's response is being co-ordinated by the Northern Regional College with support from other colleges, in particular Belfast Metropolitan College. Following the jobs and training fairs, the Northern Regional College received 31 training needs questionnaires from employees based at the Larne and Monkstown sites. These are currently being analysed by the college so that individuals can be signposted to the appropriate provision.

Finally, my staff in the jobs and benefits offices are currently dealing with fresh claims for benefit being made by FG Wilson employees, and my Department continues to liaise with the company should they require any additional services.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his answer, and I find what has happened so far to be very encouraging. There have been several schemes in the past, including the one that we had when we had the Nortel job losses. How confident is the Minister of the effectiveness of this scheme, and has he any evidence that past schemes were productive in retraining and employment?

3.15 pm

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for her question and her supplementary. Retraining is of fundamental importance. It is not just an issue in this society; it affects many other countries around the world whose economies are going through transition. I know that the recently re-elected US president, President Obama, has placed a very heavy emphasis on the reskilling of workers affected by economic downturns. He has had discussions on this with a number of US officials.

What we are doing can be very effective, both in identifying new employment for affected workers and in providing retraining. In some cases, the retraining simply gives an accredited qualification to someone who has already worked for many years in a company without the need for formal qualifications to demonstrate the skills that they already have.

To date, most of the people who have gone through the process were those taking voluntary redundancy, and they may be in a different context from those facing compulsory redundancy. However, it is important to stress that workers need to consider alternative job opportunities. They need to be very open-minded about their ability to relocate or commute to different employment that might not necessarily be right on their doorstep, unfortunately.

Dr McDonnell: Have any further applications for funding been made to the European Union, with a view to further upskilling the workers involved? Has the European Union been of any benefit through providing extra funding from its social development fund, or whatever?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. Money from the European social fund is already being drawn down for a wide range of schemes in the community and voluntary sector. The Member perhaps refers to the European globalisation adjustment fund, which is controlled at UK level by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). My officials have been in touch with DWP officials to

explore the applicability of the fund to Northern Ireland. However, there is the danger that that fund would simply give us funds to duplicate provision that we currently make in Northern Ireland and, at the same time, ask us to surrender money to balance additional investments being made through that fund. So, at this stage, we are sceptical about whether that fund will be of any particular benefit to our situation in Northern Ireland. However, discussions are ongoing with DWP.

The United Kingdom Government have not yet made any advances or application to the European globalisation adjustment fund. It may well be that a test application will be made relating to FG Wilson or to the Ford closure that was announced in Dagenham in recent weeks.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister give us an update on his work with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in relation to the staff at FG Wilson who are now unemployed?

Dr Farry: My officials and I work in close co-operation with our counterparts in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. There is a clear division of labour in what the two Departments seek to do. My officials work closely with the employees affected on their reskilling and try to facilitate placements in existing companies with vacancies. It is encouraging to see companies coming forward and participating in job fairs.

My colleague the Minister of Enterprise Trade and Investment is very much minded further to develop business opportunities in Northern Ireland, particularly in east Antrim, and to see how the presence of, and any future developments in relation to, FG Wilson and Caterpillar can be consolidated there.

Mr Beggs: I welcome the clinics and training fairs, etc, that have happened. Is the Minister yet able to indicate what the outcomes have been? How many employees, whether agency workers or permanent employees of FG Wilson, have been able to get permanent employment?

Dr Farry: We do not yet have the precise figures for placements and jobs filled as a consequence of those events. It is very much a work in progress. I can tell him that the number of people who have been affected to date by the redundancies is 490. That figure breaks down into 108 agency staff, 332 hourly production staff and 50 salaried engineering staff.

Community Family Support Programme

5. **Mr Swann** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action is being taken through the community family support programme pilot. (AQO 2890/11-15)

Dr Farry: The community family support programme pilot is part of the wider Pathways to Success strategy that will take a range of actions across the Executive to prevent young people falling into the NEET category. Initially, the pilot programme will be delivered by the Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) in partnership with the existing health and social services provision. It will commence in January 2013 and will focus on the needs of 44 disadvantaged families in the targeted areas of east and west Belfast, Strabane, Cookstown and Newtownabbey.

The families that are involved in the pilot programme will get help from a dedicated family liaison officer, who will ensure that the delivery of support is directly matched to the expressed needs of the families. They will help the families to address a range of issues and will provide support to enhance parenting skills. They will also work closely with schools to ensure that young people receive additional help with the essential skills of numeracy, literacy and ICT. Help and support for social and economic issues, health, housing, alcohol and drugs will also feature in the support package, and everyone of working age will get help to develop skills to find work.

All families participating on the pilot will also have access to one of a number of Strengthening Families programmes. Those are nationally and internationally recognised evidence-based family skills training programmes that are designed to foster effective parenting skills, reduce problem behaviours and delinquency, and improve social competencies.

My Department is committed to Delivering Social Change. Through the provision of £2 million for the signature project, Pathways to Employment for Young People, the pilot will be upscaled and rolled out to deliver support to 500 families in the period 2013-15.

Mr Swann: Will the Minister outline how the 500 families will be selected for the extended programme and what areas they will be focused on?

Dr Farry: As I said, we will initially pilot the programme in a number of identified areas. That is very much linked to the areas where LEMIS is in existence. The full roll-out of 500 families will happen across Northern Ireland. That will be prioritised on the basis of identified need and where we can make the biggest intervention. In that way, we will use the money that we have available for the best possible outcomes.

Mr Eastwood: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Will he detail the funding for the project until the end of the Assembly term?

Dr Farry: I am grateful to the Member for his question. We have a significant budget set aside for the NEETs programme overall across the next number of years. We are spending approximately £10 million in total over the remaining three years of the current comprehensive spending review period.

We will be spending slightly in excess of £2 million to help people with this strand. Of course, a number of other strands are part of the NEETs strategy. In particular, I draw attention to the announcement that we made about a new training allowance for young people who are currently on European social fund-type training schemes. In the past, they have fallen out of formal support that is given through the educational maintenance allowance because they are not part of the statutory system. That has been a source of grievance. A lot of Members, including those on the Committee, picked up on that. There was a debate in the House about the matter, and we were pleased to be in a position to follow through on that and to address the issue.

Post-primary Schools: Area Planning

6. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the discussions he has had with the Minister of Education on the post-primary area planning proposals. (AQO 2891/11-15)

Dr Farry: Following both Minister O'Dowd's statement to the Assembly in September 2011 about post-primary area planning and the discussion at the Executive in December 2011 on the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority, I wrote to the Minister supporting his proposals. In particular, I emphasised the need to ensure that area planning arrangements take full account of the further education estate and of the vocational provision that further education colleges can deliver. That sector has huge potential to assist in the achievement of many of the objectives that were highlighted in Minister O'Dowd's statement. He confirmed that he will require the Education and Skills Authority to consult with the further education sector when drawing up or amending area plans.

We are agreed that there is a need to avoid duplication in education provision and that it is important for schools and colleges to plan collaboratively in the interests both of young people and the economy.

I understand that the revised plans, taking account of the consultation responses, are due in the Department of Education by 7 December 2012.

On the wider front, the mix of academic education in schools and vocational education in colleges results in motivating young people, helps them to make better career decisions and delivers better results in examinations. I have had a number of discussions with Minister O'Dowd, including on the wider implementation of the entitlement framework here, and I look forward to more detailed discussions, particularly on the post-primary area planning proposals.

Mr I McCrea: I welcome the Minister's response about ensuring that the further education sector is included. The Minister may be aware of the Magherafelt learning partnership, which brings together the very things that he has referred to on the post-primary sector and further education colleges.

Does the Minister agree that colleges play an important part in delivering the best education for children at post-primary level? Will he ensure that he keeps a very close eye on any proposals that come out of the Minister's final decision?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question and for his supplementary question, and I agree with the thrust of what he is saying. It is important that we do not overly focus on institutions when approaching this important issue. This is about giving young people choice and the full range of options, and about ensuring that we have the best possible situation for outcomes. It is important that we allow and recognise the different interventions that schools and further education colleges can make in that regard and which are best placed to deliver the particular emphasis that they bring.

The colleges have a lot to offer through applied subjects and vocational training, and it is important that we plan as far as possible around the existing colleges and what they can do. To give one clear example of the benefits that arise from collaboration, there is often concern rightly expressed about the level of attainment of young people, in particular their basic essential skills at GCSE level in maths and English. Young people are often not motivated in a more clear-cut academic environment, but when they are placed in and have the benefit of a degree of vocational training through partnership, they more clearly understand the

benefits and rationale as to why they need maths and English. It is those young people who more often get a better level of attainment in those basic qualifications than those who may go down a more classic academic route but are lacking in motivation to achieve.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Has the Minister seen any recent improvements in the way in which grammar schools interact with further education colleges to deliver the entitlement framework?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. This is very much a work in progress. It is important that we make the point that collaboration around area planning and, in particular, around the delivery of the entitlement framework is not just something for non-selective schools and the further education system to take forward. It is very much something for grammar schools as well. No matter what setting young people find themselves in, they benefit from having the maximum range of choices before them. We should not talk about a pure academic route or a pure vocational route. Young people may benefit from being able to mix and match, and that applies as much to students in a grammar school setting as it does to students in any other type of school.

Mr Allister: I listened to what the Minister said about joined-up thinking with the post-primary review. In the light of that, can he give his assurance that, when it comes to the future of the Ballymoney campus of the regional college, we can look forward to that being strengthened rather than weakened, as some have suggested?

Dr Farry: I am reluctant to go into the specifics of what may or may not happen with particular college campuses, but the House will well know that Ballymoney is an issue to the forefront.

I will certainly give the commitment that I will continue to push the importance of joined-up collaboration between the further education sector and the secondary level sector. It is to everyone's benefit that we use what we have to the best possible and maximum outcome for students, in particular, and for the economy.

3.30 pm

DEL: European Political Institutions

7. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline his Department's plans to engage better with European political institutions. (AQO 2892/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department is committed to making a full contribution to raising Northern Ireland's profile on the European stage. Earlier this year, I met László Andor, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, in Brussels to discuss issues such as youth unemployment and improved access to European employment and social affairs funding programmes. We also discussed how Northern Ireland's universities and further education colleges could increase access to European research funding and participation in mobility programmes.

My Department is making preparations for the next round of structural funding and, in particular, developing the context of the next Northern Ireland European social fund programme 2014-2020, which the Department has

been requested to do by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP).

My Department is an active player in the implementation and co-ordination of European Union initiatives. For example, we engage with the regional skills education and training network to identify partners for future projects in support of themes in the Northern Ireland skills strategy. My Department's employment service engages with EU institutions, including the European Employment Services and the Partnership between Employment Services group.

The employment service, with financial assistance from the European Commission, has organised a major jobs fair that will take place this Wednesday in the Europa Hotel, Belfast. I will officially open the Belfast European jobs day.

In partnership with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I am establishing a substantial higher education EU support fund from 2012-13 onwards, the purpose of which is to increase significantly Northern Ireland's drawdown of European research funding.

My Department plays a full part in the Barroso task force arrangements. It has supported the appointment of four desk officers for the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels to improve contacts with EU officials and help Departments and the broader sectors with which they work to pursue potential funding opportunities.

Private Members' Business

Child Poverty Action Plan

Mr Deputy Speaker: As two amendments have been selected, up to one hour and 45 minutes will be allowed for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to make a winding-up speech. The proposer of each amendment will have 10 minutes to propose and five minutes to make a winding-up speech. All other speakers will have five minutes.

Mr Nesbitt: I beg to move

That this Assembly takes account of the recently published annual child poverty report; notes that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is falling far short of the targets contained within the Child Poverty Act; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to publish an action plan for the child poverty strategy.

Anybody expecting a speech that is based on an emotional appeal because the debate deals with children, and disadvantaged children at that, will be sorely disappointed with what I have to say. It is not about pulling heartstrings; it is about pulling together to offer joined-up government slightly quicker than we do at the moment in order to tackle an issue that no one can dispute is not only important in its own right, but may be seen as one of the litmus tests of the efficiency and effectiveness of any Government. It will not be an emotional appeal because that would be self-indulgent.

Earlier this year, I visited an area of dereliction in north Belfast. I walked the streets with some of the young people who live there. Those young people have no great hopes that better times lie ahead for them unless they move. We looked at some boarded-up housing and a small pitch that is years behind the 3G facilities that some more privileged children have access to these days.

Then, we turned a corner, and ahead of us lay the majestic Titanic signature building. Tens of millions of pounds' worth of modern technology was invested in that beacon of the new Belfast and post-ceasefire progress. That is all very welcome, of course, but it sat, for them, Tantalus-like just out of reach. I would have said that it was taunting them, but it appeared that I was the only one who seemed to notice. The young people were reconciled to the fact that it was not part of their future or fate. The Titanic building seemed to do no more for them than they think we do in this Building. They are unemotional and very much grounded in their assessment of their lives.

We have a population of only 1.8 million. Yet, among that number, more than 100,000 children are deemed to live in relative poverty, and of that number, 40,000 live in severe poverty. Surely, that is not tolerable. The question then is this: what are we doing about it? The answer is that the lead has come from Westminster, with the UK Child Poverty Act 2010. That legislation sets targets across four key areas, with the overarching aim of almost eradicating child poverty by 2020. Flowing from that is the duty on the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) to publish a child poverty strategy and an annual report on progress. The first of those reports came out earlier this year. However, "early" is not really the word; it was late.

I have to say that late arrivals are a trend in the Department. Just this morning, BBC Radio Ulster highlighted the delay in dealing with another strategy that could make a huge difference to tackling child poverty. 'Good Morning Ulster' has caught on to the fact that, two years on from promising a childcare strategy, the money for that remains in OFMDFM's bank account. That is £12 million that could be used to empower people who cannot afford to work because of the cost of private sector childcare — the very people whose children are living in child poverty.

So, what is the problem that has led to that blockage in releasing money? Apparently, the Department is keen to ensure that the time is taken to "get it right". I have often heard that phrase when Departments have been challenged over inaction. We have to take the time, they say, to get it right. Coming from the private sector, I find the notion that there is a right answer strange. Businesspeople tend to find themselves faced with a series of options, none of which you could call "right", and all of which, in fact, fail to get it right in absolute terms, because they all have their downsides.

Getting it right is, by all means, a laudable ambition, but is there a right answer for a child-minding strategy? I suspect not. I suspect that what is required is for somebody, faced with a number of options, to make a judgement call. That person needs to understand the positives and the negatives of the judgement call and then have the political courage to make that call, knowing that there will be voters who will not like the decision.

When it comes to tackling child poverty, what we need is an action plan. I have outlined the sequence to date: the UK legislation, followed by the devolved strategy and the annual report. However, we still need action. One of my party's criticisms of the way the devolved Government works is that there is a huge focus on producing strategies. Strategies are high-end documents that float high over the ground that they are supposed to reach. We have to take the next step and agree on delivery plans.

Siobhan Fitzpatrick, the chief executive of Early Years, told Radio Ulster this morning that devising a child-minding strategy was not exactly rocket science. I wonder whether the same is true of tackling child poverty. We have that annual report on year 1 of our local strategy.

Let me quote from a couple of points. Point 7 states:

"Joblessness is the most profound cause of poverty. Being out of work impacts directly on income."

That is hardly rocket science.

Point 8 states:

"Research and analysis shows that poverty has a detrimental impact on people's life outcomes. Disadvantage affects their health and wellbeing as well as their circumstances".

Again, that is hardly rocket science.

So what will achieve take-off in the fight to eradicate child poverty? The answer is the use of funds and resources already available, such as the £12 million unspent on child-minding or the £80 million in the social investment fund. Let us not forget that that was supposed to be £80 million over four years. However, nothing was spent in year 1, and it is now clear that next to nothing will be spent in year 2,

given that the First Minister told the House recently that it will take the zonal advisory panels three to four months to devise and submit their area plans. That will take us just about to the end of the financial year. And yet, that money is for tackling dereliction and deprivation, the very issues that we could say underlie child poverty.

Read the year one report on the local child poverty strategy, and you get a mixture of motherhood and apple pie and a series of case studies, identifying Executive actions that I would suggest were already in play, unless OFMDFM is arguing that, say, for example, the Department of Education's Every School a Good School policy was a direct and singular result of the desire to tackle child poverty.

So what would be the brave thing to do? What would take a bite out of the problem? A brave politician will be truthful about the scale of the problem and how long it may take to fix. In fact, given that the UK strategy sets 10-year targets, you do not even need to be that brave to acknowledge that the problem is not going to go away in the short term. A brave decision would be to say that we are going to help the hardest hit; those who are in persistent child poverty. That, indeed, is one of the four targets in the UK strategy. Relative low income is one measure; combined low income and material deprivation a second; absolute low income a third; and persistent child poverty is the fourth.

Now, the voluntary and community sector here identified as long ago as 2008 that persistent child poverty in Northern Ireland stood at over 20%, which is more than double the figure in Great Britain, and yet it is not a target of the Programme for Government. The Minister will know how critical organisations such as Save the Children have been of the lack of a target. So why not change that? Target it with some of the £12 million that is sitting in the bank ring-fenced to give meaning to a child-minding strategy. Tackle it with some of the £80 million in the bank for the social investment fund.

I believe, Deputy Speaker, that we will hear an amendment that suggests that we should go and seek additional funding from elsewhere to tackle this problem. I question whether that is necessary if you actually use the funds that are already available. I have outlined £92 million that has been ring-fenced that could be used to tackle this fundamental problem. If you are looking for additional help, as the UKIP amendment suggests, what about looking to Europe? European territorial co-operation from 2014 to 2020, ending the same year as the child poverty strategy from the UK, holds a promise of INTERREG V and possibly Peace IV. Of the 11 criteria that will underpin both those prospective programmes, criterion nine is social inclusion and combating poverty.

The problem with child poverty is getting worse, by all measures. More children and more families are being disadvantaged. I have no doubt what defence we will hear from the Department: factors, they will say, beyond our control. Indeed, there are many, but there are also many, many billions of pounds sterling at our disposal.

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

Mr Nesbitt: Let us not strategise endlessly; let us perform the process of government by delivering for our children.

Mr Moutray: I beg to move amendment No 1:

Leave out all after "report;" and insert

"notes that the child poverty targets set in the UK-wide legislation are challenging and that all regions across the UK are struggling to meet the targets, given the current international economic downturn; and calls on the Executive to work with the devolved Administrations and the UK Government to identify actions to meet the statutory targets and reduce poverty."

Unfortunately, we do not have to look too far within our constituencies before finding a child who is suffering as a result of poverty. Indeed, it is a known fact that child poverty is often linked to family poverty, which I know every Member of this House is endeavouring to tackle on a day and daily basis within their constituency.

I firmly believe that when poverty is involved, children's expectations of their own lives are greatly reduced. This can lead to a cycle where poverty is repeated from generation to generation. Indeed, I know Barnardo's has raised and continues to raise this very point when discussing child poverty issues. Also, when children move from childhood into adulthood, they are more likely to find it difficult to obtain employment and may suffer ill health, possibly face homelessness, or become involved in offending, drug and alcohol abuse, and abusive relationships. It is therefore vital that there are both local and national efforts to tackle child poverty and eradicate it from our society.

I state at the outset my disappointment with Mr Nesbitt and Mr Kinahan for bringing forward the motion. They know full well that much work is being done by the Assembly and the Executive to tackle issues that are contributory factors to child poverty in our society. Although there is merit in flagging up the issue of child poverty in the House, the motion in no way takes cognisance of the fact that much work is being done and that the current difficulties lie with the challenging targets that were set by the UK Government and which, obviously, have been affected greatly by the international economic downturn.

3.45 pm

Today's motion would have been better served by recognising more recent up-to-date poverty figures that reveal a decrease, rather than solely leaving the task at the feet of OFMDFM. I commend the First Minister and deputy First Minister and all Ministers who are putting every effort into improving the quality of life for the most vulnerable.

Ultimately, we are bound by the Child Poverty Act, which provides a statutory basis for joined-up action across the UK to reduce poverty among children. That legislation underpins and supports any localised efforts. The duty and the challenging targets have been implemented by the UK Government. Obviously, it has been commissioned that each of the devolved Administrations should work with the UK Government to develop personalised and joined-up strategies that will work towards the overall goal of eradication by 2020. We must take heart from the fact that all regions are finding the targets extremely challenging. Nonetheless, strides are being made locally, as every Member knows.

In tackling poverty, it is crucial to break the cycle that exists in households and communities. Undoubtedly, education is a key element in that, as are the initiatives that involve

people, such as the ones that develop their skills, increase their employability chances, lead to job creation, decrease the cost of living, keep rates down, and ultimately aid communities in finding their own solutions to the problems in their community. Indeed, the Government have not been found wanting in tackling poverty and deprivation. You only have to think about the social investment fund, which provides £80 million of investment for community-led projects that will tackle youth unemployment, dereliction, and health and well-being issues. That will, no doubt, make a huge contribution and will really go some way to tackling deprivation and poverty.

We also have to think of the efforts that have been made to try to tackle unemployment, with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment playing a key role in endeavouring to attract new businesses to Northern Ireland. We have been able to develop and build on our apprenticeship targets. Also, 79,000 people have improved their maths, English and information and communication technology (ICT) skills through the Department for Employment and Learning's (DEL) Essential Skills programme. All of those improve employability.

We think of the freeze on regional rates and the fact that our rates bills are the lowest in the UK again. That is aimed at tackling the cost of living and the cost to families who are struggling. We also have been able to freeze the water rates, cut prescription charges, and provide heating and insulation grants and assistance. In terms of education, we have improved on healthy eating schemes in schools, improved the provision of after-school activities for young people, increased our contribution to uniforms and to free school meals. We have also invested significantly in neighbourhood renewal areas. We know that sports can play a key role in developing children socially and physically. Unfortunately, the figures for much of what I have said will not show because the measurement of poverty is based on income.

Work is still to be done to tackle child poverty. As I stated at the beginning, I am sympathetic to those good folk who cannot put food on the table. We all want to help those who cannot get employment. We all want to ensure that children are brought up in an environment in which they are safe and have the potential to grow into well-respected citizens who are able to support themselves and their families through well-paid jobs. I want to see the cost of living reduced and the employment opportunities increased. However, as the amendment states, the other institutions and Westminster need to work together so that a joined-up approach can be taken.

Additionally, OFMDFM has stated that it intends to produce a plan that will identify several key projects that will add value and will work in a cross-departmental way to tackle child poverty. It has developed a framework called Delivering Social Change to deliver and support work on child poverty. I believe that the House has been tackling and continues to tackle the real issues that affect people.

Mr McNarry: I beg to move amendment No 2:

At end insert

"and to identify additional funds associated with limiting the damage of the recession for use in combating child poverty."

Hopefully, my amendment is a convincing proposal. In the context of the overall financing of Northern Ireland through the block grant, especially with the inability of the Executive to generate new receipts during a prolonged recession, it is critical to have a feasible funding plan. That is why we need to tease out ways to deliver better performance on existing targets, including on child poverty.

In 2009, the Economic Research Institute for Northern Ireland (ERINI) published a document on options for the Northern Ireland Executive. At the time, I was supportive of some of the ERINI ideas, which were a range of suggestions for the identification of new money. One suggestion was the rephrasing of capital programmes. I know that a certain amount of rephrasing has taken place.

So, what has been or what is the pattern of rephrasing across all the Departments? To what extent has new money been generated by freeing up funds to deliver on the central anti-poverty remit? I ask those questions because I believe that it is clear that not all Departments are delivering equally or evenly on rephrasing options. Surely, we can bring forward conventional procurement projects that could create enhanced employment opportunities and, with that, an increased money supply in the community, which would prove to have a flow-down effect on child poverty. Perhaps the junior Ministers in OFMDFM will give us details of the rephrasing and where we are with it to date. That would allow us, in the Assembly, to assess the performance of some Departments and to reach our own positive conclusions.

Of course, my primary concern in all this is that we can resource greater spending on realising and actioning child poverty targets by identifying more money. It goes without saying that, during a recession, some Departments will need more money and some will get by with less. I know that the monitoring rounds provide some help with reallocating funds between Departments during a financial year. However, generally, Departments are reluctant to declare reduced requirements until well into the year and, in many cases, until it is too late. There simply has to be a more systemic exercise of reallocation earlier in the year and within the context of the Executive's overall priorities. Has that been attempted in order to deliver on child poverty targets?

The recession changed everything, and it should have provoked the rewriting of Government priorities. However, it has not fully done so, and that is why we have the problem with child poverty targets. The fact that there is a recession should not be an excuse for a failure to deliver on targets, especially child poverty targets. We, in the House, cannot say to such children that we cannot do it because there is a recession. The case can be made — let me attempt to make it — that, when there was not a recession, we did not stand up the figures. We did not provide. We did not meet child poverty targets. So it is a bit lame, at this time of the day, to introduce the issue of a recession that is hitting everyone.

The New Policy Institute's report stated that certain groups in Northern Ireland are at risk of child poverty. Over half of children in severe poverty are from single-parent families. Those living in rented accommodation make up 63% of children in severe poverty. Having young parents aged under 25 and being a child in a workless family are further risk factors. Absolute child poverty levels now stand at somewhat lower than one child in five. Let me be very

clear: I think that it is the view of the House that no matter what the level of poverty is, it is today too high for us all.

With five weeks to go until Christmas Day and the delivery of the Christian good news message, it is more than likely that that message will pass by many of our children in poverty. I trust that we will today hear some good news for children who are, frankly, oblivious to international economic recessions but who, nonetheless, would welcome any benefit from an announcement identifying additional funds to combat child poverty. I trust that such an announcement will be delivered today, because I happen to believe that the money is there. I see it found for too many other things that are very important to some, and, in moving amendment No 2, I just ask this question: will the junior Ministers announce that they have found some money for this very noble cause?

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. Child poverty is an issue of major importance, and it is only right that the Assembly should debate it. It is vital that we debate it from a position of knowledge and understanding and not one of ignorance and attempted party point-scoring. Sadly, the proposers of the motion have adopted the latter approach. The motion:

"notes that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is falling far short of the targets contained within the Child Poverty Act".

Anyone who has read the Child Poverty Act will know that it calls for each of the Departments here to set out the measures that it proposes to take. If the proposers of the motion had wanted to have a serious debate, the motion would no doubt have read, "That the Executive are falling far short of the targets set out in the Child Poverty Act". However, that is, of course, not what the motion states.

Sadly for the many families affected by child poverty, we are unlikely to achieve the targets set out in the Child Poverty Act. That will not be because of a lack of effort on the part of some Ministers in the Executive. Rather, it will be down to the Tory agenda of attacking the most vulnerable by cutting benefits that are set against an already low baseline and seeking to find ways to exclude as many as possible from the benefits that they so badly need and deserve. Changes to child benefit payments will leave many parents no choice but to cut back on vital necessities. We need to ensure that children are protected as much as possible.

The motion is proposed by Members of a party that seeks to deflect attention from where the real blame lies; Members who campaigned to get the Tory party into office and who now seek to pretend that they have nothing to do with the Tories as they wash their hands of their dirty work. The motion's proposers will neither wipe away the evil of child poverty nor remove their part in contributing to it. It would have been better had the proposers of the motion acknowledged the steps taken by the Executive to help to address this very serious issue and brought forward their ideas and proposals for debate. In the absence of those, at least —

Mr McCallister: Will the Member give way?

Ms McGahan: No, not today, sorry.

Mr McCallister: Not until next week.

Ms McGahan: Whatever. In the absence of those Members at least apologising for their support in getting the Tories into office, thousands of children across our communities are today, and will be in the future, worse off because of the actions of the party whose Members proposed the motion.

The Assembly, rather than calling for action plans, should be calling for more actions like those recently announced under the banner of Delivering Social Change and ensuring that they are targeted at addressing the evil of child poverty.

4.00 pm

Mrs D Kelly: I begin by congratulating the BBC Children in Need appeal and all those who participated at the weekend. I think £794,000 was raised in Northern Ireland alone, which is a record achievement. Even in these tough times, there are still people who think of others and contribute their skills, talents or, indeed, their money.

It is interesting to hear that the way in which Sinn Féin has answered the proposers of the motion and the amendments is to throw out a blanket criticism. I welcome the junior Ministers here this afternoon and hope that they can shed some light on the four or five flagship projects that OFMDFM indicated to this Assembly and, more recently, to the OFMDFM Committee in May this year.

Throughout the world we can all watch how some attempt to suppress children's access to education. We know that education is a way out of poverty. In improving educational outcomes for our young people here and, therefore, their employability and job skills, one would have hoped that, within the term of this Assembly, we would have agreement on an early years strategy and that we would have seen some of the money that Mr Nesbitt referred to being spent. We would also welcome a progress report on the childcare strategy.

I know that junior Minister McCann's predecessor, Ms Anderson, referred to the social investment fund at the Committee, alongside Mr Bell, and — I paraphrase — said that they believed that the social investment fund was a critical project to tackle child poverty. It is interesting and disappointing to note that, as Mr Nesbitt said, no money has been spent. Worse than that, Mr Nesbitt, that money is likely to be spent badly. They are now setting up steering committees right across the nine regions. Those regions have been told to get together very quickly and make decisions on spend of £40 million on capital projects and £40 million on research projects on whatever you could think of — whatever you are having yourself, practically. Many people outside the Executive will, quite rightly, scrutinise how that money is spent at a time when people are losing their jobs.

Many have referred to the importance of interdepartmental and collaborative working. I welcome the fact that the junior Ministers head up a ministerial subgroup and look towards their ministerial colleagues in all working to a common objective in tackling child poverty. Perhaps Ms McCann can give us an update on where we are across that range of Departments.

It was most regrettable and alarming to note that last week Minister Nelson McCausland returned £8 million that was intended for social housing. We all know the importance of housing to health outcomes. Indeed, the child poverty

strategy refers to the importance of environment in a child's overall well-being and opportunity for learning and learning through leisure and play. I am not sure whether OFMDFM has actually agreed its flagship projects on play and leisure. Perhaps some of the existing members of the OFMDFM Committee might pick up that point in their contribution. I recall there being disagreement around some of those projects. In fact, year on year, the money for the flagship projects on play and leisure was returned in the monitoring rounds. I have thus far not been made aware of any such project being put in place.

Other Members referred to health outcomes. I know that the junior Ministers, particularly junior Minister Bell, have a particular interest in social care and fostering and adoption services. I am sure he will agree with me and acknowledge the fact that far too many of our young people in Northern Ireland are going into care because of — I am sure there is a myriad of reasons — the lack of support for families. That is an investment we want to see. Once the children are in care, however, we need to make fostering and adoption much easier for would-be parents. There is a three-year time frame before a child can be placed with a loving family, which is much too long —

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member must bring her remarks to a close.

Mrs D Kelly: — particularly at such a critical time in a child's development. At the opening of an Asda store last week in Portadown, which I welcomed, it was stated that disposable income in Northern Ireland was £89 a week for the average family and £149 in England.

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

Mrs D Kelly: There is something terribly wrong with all that.

Mr Lyttle (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I will start by saying a few words as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in order to briefly inform the Assembly of the Committee's work on the issue, after which I will speak as an Assembly Member.

The Committee questioned the junior Ministers on 23 May 2012 about progress on child poverty reduction targets and the need for a specific action plan to enable the effective monitoring of delivery on this important issue. The junior Ministers indicated that the Delivering Social Change framework was the action plan that would be most successful.

The junior Ministers described their role in chairing two ministerial subcommittees, one regarding children and young people and the other dealing with poverty and social inclusion. The Ministers also advised that one of the Delivering Social Change programme board's first tasks will be to develop a plan.

On 20 June 2012, OFMDFM officials briefed the Committee on the report on the Child Poverty Act 2010, which was due in March 2012. In response to a question about an action plan they again referenced the initiatives that would be brought forward under the Delivering Social Change framework.

On 12 September 2012, the Committee was again briefed by officials on OFMDFM Programme for Government delivery plans. Although that briefing was in public session,

the delivery plans were presented in confidence. The Committee has yet to receive a response to its request to make the delivery plans relevant to the children and young people amenable to public consideration.

The Committee also conducted an inquiry into child poverty and published recommendations as long ago as 2008. Some of those specific recommendations included a regional action plan, specific actions in the Programme for Government, affordable childcare, a benefit uptake strategy, debt advice services, adequate disability children's services and additional early years education support for those in need of it most.

Speaking as an Alliance Party MLA, I think it is clear that OFMDFM delivery on this important issue is, regrettably, not a record of timely and accessible action. I, therefore, support the motion as tabled.

Recent figures suggest that 28% of children in Northern Ireland live in poverty. I appreciate the efforts of the DUP, by way of its amendment, to set this problem in the context of a global economic downturn that, of course, has had a devastating impact on families throughout the world and to recognise the need to work to change the policies of other Governments. However, the Assembly must specifically support the original motion and a specific child poverty action plan with open monitoring in order to co-ordinate the work of the Executive in lifting children and families out of child poverty.

The Child Poverty Act 2010 set challenging targets for the whole of the UK, and OFMDFM's May report detailed progress against those targets. One action cited was the abolition of prescription charges. However, research shows that those on a low income spent significantly less than those on higher income levels. Another action recorded was the freezing of rates, but many families on a low income do not pay rates, as they receive housing benefit or rate relief.

There were significant omissions from the OFMDFM report. There was no mention of the action plan.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. It is not all about being unemployed. The cost of childcare is prohibitive for many working families as well.

Mr Lyttle: I agree absolutely. Working families face incredibly difficult times at the moment. Early years education and affordable childcare are absolutely critical to them, yet we have seen years of delay from OFMDFM in the delivery of action on that issue. The failure to deliver a robust childcare strategy is probably the most major failure in relation to child poverty. Any action plan relating to child poverty must have a commitment to provide affordable, accessible childcare at its heart. Childcare in Northern Ireland is among the most expensive in the UK. We also need to raise awareness among parents of the availability of childcare vouchers and the childcare element of working tax credit.

While the global economic downturn has had an unprecedented effect on our local economy, there are measures that the Assembly can take to lift our most vulnerable children out of poverty. We need a specific action plan with monitoring mechanisms to co-ordinate the work of the Executive response on this issue.

Mr G Robinson: I support amendment No 1. This debate is about one of the major economic challenges that we

face in Northern Ireland. It is one to which there is no easy or definitive solution. It is made more difficult by the reduction in our block grant from Westminster, which was made by the former political partners of the proposer of the motion. Calling for an action plan on a child poverty strategy wastes more precious time and financial resources without making any positive contribution to the current problem.

A January 2012 briefing note on the Child Poverty Act 2010 states:

"Section 16(3) of the Act requires OFMDFM to take economic and fiscal circumstances into account in the preparation of its strategies ... and ... the relevant Northern Ireland department must have regard to ... the effect of the implementation of the strategy on those resources."

Unless I am mistaken, this means the less money there is in the block grant, the less money there is for a child poverty action plan. The supporters of the motion, therefore, campaigned for Westminster seats on the basis of implementing cuts. However, they do not want them when it is not politically expedient.

It is better to get parents into work and to take children out of poverty in that way. In preparation for the upturn in employment, it is essential that the programmes announced by the Minister for Employment and Learning are supported. The constant efforts of the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment are to be acknowledged and praised. In case the proposer is not aware, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has expended much time and effort in attracting employment. She is to be congratulated on her determination and success in the current fiscal climate.

As the amendment states, the targets set in UK-wide legislation are challenging, but Northern Ireland is not unique in finding the targets challenging. We must look at a UK-wide approach and, within that approach, put our case for additional funding due to the unique problems that Northern Ireland is experiencing in this harsh economic downturn. We must all remember that we are the only part of the UK that shares a land border with another European sovereign state. It has lower corporation tax, which puts our plans to attract business at an immediate disadvantage. As the Assembly does not currently have tax-altering powers, great challenges remain in addressing the differential.

The Executive, including the Minister for Regional Development, are very aware of the problems and see it as sensible to ensure that our population is trained and ready to take jobs as and when they become available. The Minister for Employment and Learning assured me, in response to several questions for written answer, that third-level education establishments and his Department try to ensure that the courses offered meet the skills that are required by employers. That is a practical approach to reducing child poverty.

I repeat that it is essential that there is a UK-wide approach to ensure that all ways of tackling poverty are examined and shared. That is why I believe that amendment No 1 is a practical and, hopefully, non-divisive way forward.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Child poverty is obviously a major issue, and I am glad that

we are talking about it in the Chamber today. It is vital that we combat child poverty, particularly in times of austerity. There are currently 120,000 children living in poverty in the North — that is one in four — and one in 10 lives in severe poverty. Some of the most deprived areas of Europe are here in the North of Ireland. Indeed, poverty is a growing issue that is being acutely felt across the island of Ireland. The increasing number of food banks is just one of many testaments to that fact.

There is an old saying that actions speak louder than words. I think that we have an Executive that take that to heart. They have, through their Delivering Social Change agenda, started to ensure that resources are directed to where they are most effective and will do most good. I and many people in my constituency who are directly affected by child poverty want to see that approach continuing.

4.15 pm

Of course, we need to ensure that what is done has a positive effect. We know from the responses in the Assembly of the First Minister and deputy First Minister that they have engaged with the National Children's Bureau and the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services so that they work with Departments to ensure that they develop models by which all actions can be assessed for their impact on child poverty. That is an important and very welcome step, but, of course, having an outcomes model is no good if the resources are not available. Again, we can see where the Executive have stepped up to the mark by allocating resources to help address child poverty.

Of course, we have to recognise that child poverty cannot be separated from family poverty, as over half of the children who live in poverty in the North come from a working family. However, it is more difficult for us to tackle child poverty now in the North as working parents will be attacked under the banner of welfare reform and cuts and the false narrative that child poverty is a result of the dependency culture is stuck on repeat. However, I welcome the recent Executive commitment of £26 million to support education, health, families, training and employment. All of that has the potential to impact positively on addressing child poverty. We also had the commitment of an additional £80 million of ring-fenced funding to support the most disadvantaged communities.

There is still a lot to do if we are to alleviate child poverty. That should be factored into future thinking and budgeting in every Department. As we move towards the next comprehensive spending review, we need to set aside specific funding in each Department to tackle poverty, and if we are serious about doing that it cannot be business as usual. It means being prepared to take a bit less so that other people can have more. The interests of children have to be at the core of every Department in the Executive. I am afraid that is not the case at present. The Child Poverty Act calls on the Executive as a whole to act on child poverty.

Another mechanism that we should all use to tackle child poverty is the EU. We must take advantage of Ireland's upcoming EU presidency and put pressure on the Dublin Government to keep child poverty on the EU agenda in a big way and ensure that the beneficial work carried out by Cyprus during its presidency continues. We must also put pressure on the EU, with its forthcoming budget for 2014

to 2020, and the European social fund, to ensure that child poverty remains a priority.

Those are all positive steps, and we all could and should welcome them rather than using this serious and sensitive issue as a means of political point scoring. We all have a duty to every child, and all too often we take for granted things like food, clothes and even heat. It is absolutely essential that we are able to give children the best start in life to ensure a better and brighter future for them.

There is a clear link between social deprivation and educational attainment. Unfortunately, in the long run that also means employability and job skills. Children from a poorer background are twice as likely to be unemployed when they leave school. Poverty is a vicious circle, and it is vital that we break the poverty trap that families so often end up in. Often, child poverty affects not just one generation of a family but one after the other after the other. The harsh reality of child poverty is kids being sent to school in flip-flops in November and being sent to school on an empty stomach. I do not want that reality to be lost in a sea of rhetoric.

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The last time I witnessed someone walking in front of Ms Fearon, the Member for Newry and Armagh, I said it was the worst example I had ever seen. The conduct of the Member for West Tyrone just now was even worse. It is extremely off-putting for the Member and shows her absolutely no respect. I ask you to rule that that is not allowed to continue.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I note what the Member has said. In the House, we encourage Members not to walk in front of other Members who are speaking. I check who is speaking on the monitors outside to make sure that I do not inadvertently do that.

Mr McAleer: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I apologise to the Member for walking in front of her.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's apology is noted.

Ms Fearon: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I do not need Mr Wells to stand up for me. I am sure that Declan McAleer did not mean any harm, but thank you for bringing it up.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I move on and call Mrs Brenda Hale.

Mrs Hale: I welcome the opportunity to support the first amendment. From the outset, I must state that the motion falls short of having any consideration of the wider UK context, the responsibility of the Secretary of State to achieve poverty-related targets and the current global economic downturn, which has made targets for child poverty incredibly difficult to achieve. Indeed, I find it somewhat hypocritical that the motion has been tabled by UUP Members who ran under the Conservative Party banner, the same party whose plan to squeeze the public sector is leading to more and more people dropping below the poverty line on a daily basis.

I am sure that all Members in the Chamber today agree that the Assembly should do all in its power to tackle child poverty and ensure that we break the cycle of generational poverty that has plagued many families for decades. It is not acceptable that 122,000 children in Northern Ireland live in poverty. That is a figure that we cannot ignore. However, in trying to tackle child poverty, we must

remember that sometimes our hands are tied. As with our colleagues in Scotland, our devolved power covers many important areas in relation to tackling child poverty, such as health, education and housing, but policies on taxation and the benefits system, which play such a major role in tackling child poverty, remain with Westminster.

Having recently read an article by Mr Neil O'Brien, the director of Policy Exchange, I found myself asking how the Government measure policy and why the poverty target focuses mainly on one aspect, namely income. Focusing on the target of income has meant that, if the Government divert money from housing benefit to spend on social housing, child poverty goes up under the current measure because, instead of giving people income through benefits, you help them with lower rent. Likewise, if the Government tried to divert money from the benefits system to allow the Executive to spend more on creating jobs, that would push up the relative measure of child poverty. That is because, under the current measure, success in increasing employment does not show up much in the target. In fact, the increasing employment of non-parents pushes child poverty up.

In relation to the Assembly, education spending does not show up on target, nor do the free hours of childcare, and the treatment of addictions and mental health problems do not feature. In effect, the current target says that money must always take precedence over other priorities. If you transfer that concept to Northern Ireland, the Assembly is taking considerable steps to raise aspirations and achievement, increase access to opportunities through education, support parents back into work and provide much-needed support to those most at risk.

Since the creation of the child poverty strategy, OFMDFM has used flexibility in resources to support families by keeping down direct household costs. The establishment of the social protection fund has been used to support the £22 million winter fuel payments scheme so that people living in poverty can heat their home. Approximately £36 million a year is invested in free school meals for some 58,000 children to ensure that they have a healthy, nutritious meal each day. During 2011-12, £26 million was invested in providing EMA to those from a low-income family, and there was a £40 million social investment fund to support physical regeneration and a further £40 million to tackle employment issues and community services. There has also been a £13 million package to tackle rural poverty. On top of that, the regional domestic rate has been frozen at the rate of inflation, and Invest NI has secured over £2.6 billion of investment. The list goes on.

Measuring child poverty via income makes it easy to gauge but does little to gauge a child's well-being and ability to succeed in life and fails to represent the experience of those living in poverty. For the Assembly and the Executive, it means that all the good work across the Departments to combat the factors that lead to child poverty is missed because it is not considered when measuring poverty among children.

I welcome the amendment tabled by my colleagues as we need to ensure that we work more closely with Westminster to revisit the targets in light of the economic downturn and, at the very least, evaluate how we measure poverty. Indeed, I welcome the recent announcement by Iain Duncan Smith that he plans to introduce a holistic approach to measuring child poverty, and I look forward

to reading the feedback to the Government's consultation on that issue. I welcome the debate and support our amendment.

Mrs Overend: I rise to support the motion in the name of my colleagues. I apologise for my voice today; hopefully you can hear me OK.

It is positive that we have the opportunity to debate the issue today. The annual child poverty report sets out that some work is being done but it does not adequately deal with what action is needed to improve the situation. Child poverty is a serious issue. It is not limited to Northern Ireland, but it is particularly severe here. The statistics bear that out. In some constituencies, the figures are frightening, specifically North Belfast, West Belfast and Foyle. It is incumbent on the House to ensure that we do all in our power to combat poverty and deprivation in all its forms.

I will deal specifically with some of the statistics that are available for child poverty. As we know, there are four measures: relative low income; combined low income and material deprivation; absolute income poverty; and persistent poverty. It is possible to get caught up in statistics too much when we should focus on real outcomes and results on the ground. However, I want to make a few points on that. First, all of the four measures are getting considerably worse and have been since 2007. This is despite junior Minister Jonathan Bell's bizarre claim during an OFMDFM Question Time that there has been a 19% reduction in child poverty. It is also the case that the gap between the child poverty figures in the rest of the UK and Northern Ireland are widening. A briefing from Save the Children from the beginning of this year stated that a gap of 8% had opened up between the child poverty figures in Britain and Northern Ireland. Further to that, in June 2011, the Institute for Fiscal Studies published a report that suggested that an average of 24% child poverty may be present throughout the UK by 2020 and that Northern Ireland could be even worse, at as much as 34% by that time. So, we can see that Northern Ireland's performance in tackling child poverty is worse than the rest of the United Kingdom on average, with the gap expected to widen.

With the situation being so severe, we must bring new policies forward to tackle poverty and deprivation. One of the announcements in the four-year Budget, as well as being a subsequent Programme for Government commitment, was the social investment fund, which was supposed to represent £80 million assistance to tackle deprivation and dereliction as well as to create pathways to employment. It is simply not good enough that, 18 months into this Assembly term, we have not seen a single penny of that money administered to the social investment zones. We must remember that the zones include places such as north and west Belfast and Foyle, which so badly need that investment. The blockage with the fund needs to be sorted out and the money allocated to those most in need.

My party is calling for an action plan flowing from the child poverty strategy. This is needed because, to quote a criticism from Fergus Cooper, the head of country for Save the Children and chair of the Child Poverty Alliance, the child poverty strategy contains no specific Northern Ireland targets, measured steps or timelines. It has been widely accepted that an action plan would be forthcoming, and OFMDFM outlined on a number of occasions that work was ongoing on drafting one. Members will be aware of

that from answers to written and oral questions that have been asked from around the House. However, this now appears to be shelved, with that work being subsumed within the Delivering Social Change programme.

I ask that there be clarity today over the intentions of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in setting out the clear actions that they will take to tackle child poverty over a set timescale. The Ulster Unionist Party is not caught up about whether it comes as part of the Delivering Social Change programme or whether it is an action plan, an implementation plan or some other plan, but it has to contain clear actions and must come sooner rather than later.

In conclusion, I will deal briefly with the DUP amendment. I cannot support the amendment, as it does not truly reflect the situation in Northern Ireland, where, as I have stated, the gap with the rest of the UK is widening. Child poverty in some areas, such as north and west Belfast, is among the worst in the United Kingdom. Although, there is, of course, merit in working with the other devolved Administrations, OFMDFM needs to unequivocally take the lead and come forward with a specific and dedicated action plan to tackle child poverty now. Earlier in the debate, Mr Robinson made what I would describe as snide comments about the position of our party in relation to where we stood two years ago. Perhaps he needs a brief lesson on what devolved government is about, and maybe he could ask his colleagues about the £200 million that was reshuffled only two weeks ago. Maybe that would help him to understand better.

4.30 pm

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Thank you, deputy First Minister — sorry, Deputy Speaker. It is getting late in the afternoon.

My two colleagues have addressed the motion. Obviously, as a party, Sinn Féin opposes the motion. We think it unfortunate that people would seek to score points on an issue as important as this.

I only want to make a few brief points. It is very important to recognise that the Executive and a number of the Ministers are doing their best, within a very challenging environment, across a range of Departments. A lot of them, maybe all of them, could be doing better. That is what we have to continue to press for, to ensure that every Department does what it is required to do. That is what the Child Poverty Act 2010 is all about. However, in the context of the debate, we simply cannot ignore the overarching environment within which all the Ministers and Departments have to work, particularly as it impacts on children.

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

I think it important that we continue to learn lessons as to how the Executive can do their work on a joined-up basis and in a planned and methodical way, so that we can carry out the work that the Executive have set themselves and which the Assembly has endorsed under the Programme for Government. We must effectively tackle the whole issue of child poverty. As I have said, we cannot be neglectful of the environment within which we work.

We have been met with what can only be described as an absolutely disgraceful cuts agenda from the Government in Britain. That Tory-led administration has, over two

mandates, slashed the Budget available to people here. In the last term, it was absolutely shameful that the Government reneged on very important commitments that they had made to help the process of re-establishing these institutions. It is important that we continue to repeat the fact that that Government robbed this Executive and these institutions of a substantial amount of money which it had committed. So there has been serious lack of integrity from the British Government, and that imposes a serious challenge upon people here.

So, we have a substantially reduced budget within which Ministers and the Executive have to try to function and deliver on the Programme for Government commitments. We also have, facing us, a Tory welfare reform cuts agenda. That is something that we cannot ignore. I urge Members who have the motion before them to reflect, long and hard, on how they will vote with regard to the Tory welfare reform agenda.

Clearly, we have that Bill in front of us, and I know, and I am very satisfied, that Members across House, from all parties, have expressed a whole range of concerns about aspects of the Welfare Reform Bill. The Ulster Unionist Party has done so as well. However, ultimately Members of the Assembly will have to cast their votes in respect of that particular Bill, and aspects of it. So I urge Members to realise that and to invite the public to be aware that a demonising, propagandistic approach is being taken in the media and by some politicians — including some here, unfortunately — towards people who are unemployed and on low incomes. Those people are being blamed for their own problems.

Components of the Welfare Reform Bill which will undoubtedly have a negative impact on people here, and particularly on children, include the removal of the disability child premium, which will result in a minimum cut of £25 per week on families with children who have disabilities. That is a direct cut on those people. That money would have been available as part of the tax credit.

To people who are currently employed, albeit on a low income, I say that this Welfare Reform Bill is not just directed against the unemployed, or some notional cohort of people who are all sitting on benefits and getting a lot of money. A lot of people who are currently on low incomes will be negatively impacted upon by some of the provisions of that Bill. The whole question of the passported benefits will impact upon schoolchildren, school meals and other aspects. The whole question of the underoccupation of housing means that, if a person gets a part-time job, he will lose mortgage interest support. So there is a whole raft of measures in the Welfare Reform Bill that will have a dramatic impact on children because they will affect families.

That also includes such things as the benefit cap, which will also impact, presumably negatively, on families with a large number of children. I want to make the point that our party is opposed to the motion. We want to see all —

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

Mr Maskey: Thank you. We want to support all the measures that are required across the Executive to tackle child poverty, but we want all the parties in here that say that they want this thing tackled to shoulder their responsibilities as well.

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

Mr Eastwood: It was the playwright, Sean O'Casey, who said that poverty is the disease that gets into the bones. Therefore, I think that it is essential that we take our responsibility seriously in tackling poverty when it begins, and that is with children.

We have heard a lot today about how serious child poverty is in this part of the world, and we all know the figures. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation states that 120,000 young people in Northern Ireland are living in child poverty; 46% of the children in west Belfast are living in child poverty; and in my constituency of Foyle, the figure is 36%.

I do not think that it is good enough for us to do a Pontius Pilate and not take responsibility for issues in our own constituencies. We all have a responsibility to eradicate child poverty. It is not just the Tories; it is not just at Westminster. In fact, if you are so concerned about Tory cuts, people should go to Westminster and vote against Tory cuts when they are being implemented in Westminster.

Mr Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Eastwood: I will gladly give way.

Mr Maskey: Is the Member trying to give the House some assurance, or some understanding at least, that his party went to Westminster? In fact, it fought the last Westminster election campaign on the basis that it needed to be there to stop the cuts. Well, his party has not stopped a single penny of the cuts. How many other MPs would you need — another 100, perhaps? There are only 18 here in total, and we have five. Therefore, the five would not have made any difference. Your party certainly made no difference.

Mr Eastwood: It is interesting to note that that is the new philosophy for Sinn Féin democracy: we just do not bother going, because it will not make a damn bit of difference. It will not matter.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, order. Make all remarks through the Chair. *[Interruption.]* Order. I ask all Members to have respect for the House. We have one Member speaking at a time. Mr Eastwood.

Mr Eastwood: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. We all went through the Lobbies this morning to vote on something when we knew the outcome, because the DUP had put down a petition of concern. However, we all did it anyway. If we are concerned about something that is happening to the young people in this part of the world, I think that it is essential that we go wherever we have to go to try to stop it. The SDLP will do that regardless.

I am very happy to kick the Tories and very happy to talk about welfare reform. We know that there are difficulties because of the Tory cuts and the proposed welfare reform. However, we have to take responsibility for ourselves here. We go round telling people how great devolution is, how important it is that we are all involved in the political process here, and that we need to support the stability of these institutions. If that is the case, we need to take responsibility. I accept that every Member of the House is committed to getting rid of child poverty. The fact is this: we have failed, and we have failed the children who need us most. That is an indictment on this place. This is not about political point-scoring. It is about trying to make sure that we succeed in future.

The Executive's report on the progress of the last Programme for Government states that all of these things are still left in red: to meet the target to halve child poverty by 2010, not done; to work towards ending severe child poverty by 2012, I do not think that that is done either; to meet the target for a reduction of 15% in the rate of suicide; to reduce by 50% the life expectancy differential between the most-disadvantaged areas and the Northern Ireland average; to increase the attainment levels in primary schools with the majority of pupils from a neighbourhood renewal area to within 5% of the Northern Ireland average. Mr Deputy Speaker, the fact is that we did not do those things. We have not succeeded in getting rid of child poverty.

The SDLP tabled an amendment and, unfortunately, it was not selected. We were asking that this part of the world — Northern Ireland — takes responsibility for its own issues. We said that there should be individual targets for Northern Ireland so that we can ensure that we can work towards dealing with the problems that exist in this jurisdiction. Unfortunately, our amendment was not accepted.

However, the SDLP will support the motion, and it will also be happy to support Mr McNarry's amendment. The fact is that it is time for the Assembly to take responsibility, because far too many of our young people are leaving: they are getting on the plane to Australia. Thousands of others are in the dole queues. In my constituency and in other constituencies around the North, that is even more acute. We can no longer blame the Tories. We have to take responsibility for the things that are within our remit. It is important that every Member of this House recommits and redoubles their efforts to eradicate child poverty, because we are not going to meet the targets set down. By the way, we would not have met them anyway, even before welfare reform was introduced and the Tories came into power, because we were nowhere near the target at that stage. We need to take responsibility for where we are at, and I do not think we are anywhere near where we need to be.

Mr Agnew: I want to make it clear that I stand to speak in favour of the motion and amendment No 2 as a member of the Green Party.

We need to start at a different starting point because it is assumed in our economic strategy and in answers to questions that I have asked that economic growth will solve child poverty. We need to start off from a different starting point because economic growth does not necessarily mean a reduction in poverty. We could see GDP rise, but that would be as a result of those at the top end of society having an increase in their income or wealth. In such circumstances, we would see an increase in GDP, but we would also see an increase in child poverty. So, the two things are not the same. GDP growth and tackling child poverty are not the same thing.

We need to start to measure income inequality, which is something that we do not do adequately in Northern Ireland. I have asked questions around that, and it is clear that there is currently no intent to measure income inequality. I do not believe that we can tackle child poverty if we do not have that data to work from.

The current proposals coming forward from the Executive are inadequate, and, in some cases, counterproductive. Take, for example, the proposal to cut corporation tax.

That will see anywhere between £200 million and £400 million that would otherwise be spent on health, education and, in particular, essential early years services being taken away to supplement the profits of the largest businesses in the hope of a small handful of jobs in return. Those few, low-paid jobs that could result from such a tax cut will do nothing to tackle child poverty, particularly in families where, as we have seen from statistics, there are a number of people in work who are still living in poverty and whose children live in poverty.

The Department for Social Development states that the number of dependent children who live in a household where either one parent or both parents are in full-time work and where the household is considered to be low-income or in poverty was 58,400 in 2009-2010. So, creating jobs in and of itself is not an adequate approach to tackling child poverty, and it is certainly no comfort for the sick and disabled who cannot avail themselves of those jobs and are permanently out of work as a result of circumstances outside their control. The strategy of taking money out of our block grant to give to large companies is not a way of tackling poverty for them.

Equally, the economic downturn cannot be used as an excuse. That is very much the thrust of the DUP amendment. Child poverty is a measurement relative to median income levels, so, if we have an increase in child poverty in a time of economic downturn, that only serves to show the inequalities that are inherent in our society. In fact, the wealthiest incomes are being buffered in this time of austerity, while those at the lowest end are suffering the worst of the UK Government's austerity measures, and, indeed, of the policies of this Assembly.

We must also spend the money that we have better. Members may know that I am working on a private Member's Bill to better co-ordinate how we spend money on children and how we provide services to children. We have a situation in which every Department has a greater or lesser responsibility to children, yet they are not working together to achieve shared aims. For example, I visited a Home-Start project. I asked the people there how it was funded. They cited three different funding streams from the Department of Health. That required three different application forms, three different forms of monitoring, and three times as much bureaucracy than is necessary. We must cut that type of inefficiency out of the system.

4.45 pm

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

Mr Agnew: It is no excuse to simply blame the Tories. The failure of Departments to work together is the Assembly's responsibility. The failure to bring forward an action plan on child poverty is the failure of the Executive. The failure to produce a childcare strategy is the Executive's failure.

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

Mr Agnew: The failure to deliver an early years strategy is the Executive's failure.

Ms J McCann (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Go raibh maith agat, Mr Deputy Speaker. First, I want to say that I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on the issue on behalf of the Executive. It is an important matter, as many Members

have already said. Many Members have also already said that it is a matter to which the Executive have given significant priority.

I want to highlight some of the progress that has been made on the issue since the Executive published their first annual report on child poverty in June 2012. First, I want to say that poverty is multifaceted, as many Members have said. While there is income poverty, there is also poverty in other areas. When we address child poverty in particular, it is important that we look at household income. Most children live in some form of household. We cannot deal with child poverty in isolation from overall poverty. It is important to remember that.

I want to set other developments in the intervening months in the context of the challenges that we face. This is one of those occasions when OFMDFM represents the position of not just one Department but of all Departments. It is important to remember that: it is the responsibility not just of OFMDFM Ministers but of the Executive to challenge and combat child poverty. Requirements in the Child Poverty Act 2010 apply to each and every Department. They require all of us, individually and collectively, to work towards reducing child poverty in all its guises and, just as importantly, to tackle the issues that give rise to child poverty. Those issues are many and impact on the work of every single Department.

I want to turn to inaccuracies in the terms of the motion. The first annual report was published five months ago. It was laid before the Assembly by the First Minister and deputy First Minister in a written statement to the House on 6 June 2012. Later that month, officials appeared before the Committee, which is chaired by Mr Nesbitt, to answer his questions on the report. Further correspondence between Ministers and the Committee followed. Despite that multi-layered approach to informing Mr Nesbitt and the Committee of what we were doing to tackle that challenge, he almost seems reluctant to recognise or offer his support for the progress that has been made and is being made.

Another flaw in the motion is that Ministers have not fallen short of targets in the Child Poverty Act 2010, because the Act does not set any targets for the Executive. In fact, it sets targets only at a UK level. Some Members' advocating for a set of measurements and targets other than those set out in the Child Poverty Act 2010 runs the very real risk of regionalising and massaging child poverty levels down without any material improvement having been made to the lives of those who actually live in poverty. It is important to remember that. We do not want to massage the figures. We want to have real action that will make real difference. We have listened to the sector's concerns in asking us not to go down that path. We have engaged with the sector. That is what it is telling us.

We will not settle for a second-rate measure or accept a second-class outcome. We will not allow the position of people across the North to be measured in terms that are less than those expected by people elsewhere in these islands.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the junior Minister for giving way. In what way would an open and specific action plan to co-ordinate or monitor the Northern Ireland response to child poverty negate the need for a holistic approach to the issue?

Ms J McCann: As I said, we need to have those measures. Otherwise, there is no point. People here earn

less. The median wage or income is less. We, therefore, have to be measured in the same way. What I can say is that the outcomes, policies and actions we put in place need to be specific, targeted and focused. We stand by the measures called for, but we want to see progress measured consistently against those standards.

Last week, DWP announced proposals for a consultation on alternative measures of poverty. The proposals do not suggest a change to the statutory measures provided for in the Child Poverty Act 2010. OFMDFM is committed to reporting against the measures in the Act and will do so again in the next annual report, which is due in March 2013. However, in whatever way it is measured, we should be aware that there is a real concern among many stakeholders in the community about the potential for child poverty to increase, not least on foot of the changes to welfare benefits and the tax policies of the coalition Government. Some Members covered that.

The first annual report of the Scottish Government shares our view that various actions of the Westminster Government succeed only in making it more difficult to achieve the goal of eradicating poverty by 2020. We will not measure poverty in terms that suit the needs of the Government rather than reflecting the needs of the people. The measures need to reflect the variation in circumstances across these islands. Differences in economic opportunity, family size and rates of disability all have a direct and meaningful impact on the scale of child poverty.

When the Westminster Government introduced the Child Poverty Act, they did not legislate to share poverty equally across the UK, did not find a magic formula that would allow wealth to be distributed evenly across the lands and did not create a challenge that fell evenly between Westminster and the devolved Administrations. Nevertheless, it is a challenge that we accept. The Executive collectively agreed the Programme for Government, which builds prosperity and tackles disadvantage, and we will drive forward the child poverty strategy under the latter heading.

Members asked what we have done, and I will outline some of that. Since early this year, my predecessor Martina Anderson and I, working with junior Minister Bell, have led the development of a range of interventions under the banner of Delivering Social Change. Junior Ministers have held bilateral discussions with virtually all their ministerial colleagues to press them on the areas where their Departments could intervene meaningfully to address and reduce child poverty.

Those one-to-one meetings with Ministers were constructive and encouraging, and as a result, we have identified a range of areas, as set out in the Executive's child poverty strategy, that we believe will identify the interventions that can work most effectively to reduce child poverty. Those interventions have to be targeted and focused. Members spoke about statistics here today. We need to look at the constituencies where child poverty is statistically highest and provide interventions for areas, families and communities on the basis of need.

Our approach is two-pronged. In the short term, we aim to improve early interventions that will improve children's education and health and those that will support families as they face up to the scourges of low pay; unemployment;

a legacy of poor educational achievement; unsatisfactory health outcomes; and significantly higher levels of disability, including and especially mental disability. To make a start on achieving that, we have announced a number of signature programmes, worth £26 million, under Delivering Social Change, which lead Departments will take forward on some of those issues.

In March, the Executive endorsed the Minister for Employment and Learning's proposals to introduce an assistance package to alleviate some of the worst effects of growing youth unemployment. His Department was allocated £5.8 million in June, and last week, the Executive announced allocations of £15.6 million in 2013-14 and £19.6 million in 2014-15. Those amounts are in addition to the £200 million in the economy and jobs initiative.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for giving way and for highlighting some of the interventions. Does she agree that, if those interventions are to be effective, they need to have statutory targets in each Department and that a proper monitoring and timely framework has to be introduced in order to ensure that those targets are met? I am sure that she will agree with her colleague in the Dáil. Mary Lou McDonald said that over 100,000 of our children live in poverty and that, if Labour and Fine Gael are serious about making the best interests of the child paramount, they need to produce a strategy to end child poverty. Surely she would agree with that sentiment. Therefore, as junior Minister with specific responsibility for child poverty, she must want such a strategy to be introduced in the North.

Ms J McCann: I thank the Member for her intervention. Certainly, I think that interventions must be based on outcomes, which have to be monitored and reviewed, because there is no point in us throwing old money after new and consistently doing things that do not work.

Schools will also benefit greatly from the allocations in this financial year and those agreed for the next two years. They secure adequate funding for the school sector to ensure that we continue to drive excellence in our education system.

The Executive have allocated £12 million to the development of the childcare strategy, which a number of Members mentioned. The first awards, worth £322,000, were made in 2011. Bids submitted in 2012 have just been assessed, and five proposals, which will deliver up to £4.5 million, were successful. The projects selected address a range of needs, including after-school clubs, children with disabilities and the childcare requirements of vulnerable families. Work on a consultation document on a childcare strategy is at an advanced stage and, following Executive agreement, will be published shortly. I know of and share the frustration at the lack of a childcare strategy because I have spoken before in the House about that. I hope that it will be produced soon.

Secondly, we aim to develop a range of measure that will point the way to a difference in the long term. Our efforts to support communities as they build resilience, develop entrepreneurship and reap the benefits of the economic development strategy will offer dividends that can and will be counted in the scale of reduction in child poverty. Improved services to children; better environments, including play and leisure facilities; and the stronger

employability of parents and young adults will all contribute to reducing child poverty in future years.

The work that OFMDFM has been leading to develop a child poverty outcomes model illustrates how Departments have been given a new focus and improved tools to allow them to recognise both the role that each can play in reducing child poverty and the means to measure the extent to which their interventions have made a difference. OFMDFM has commissioned work to deliver tools to Departments to help them to better understand their role in addressing child poverty. This work has already started, and we expect to see results early in 2013-14.

We are pleased that this approach has attracted support from external stakeholders, including members of the Child Poverty Alliance, who have sought a more focused relationship between what we do and what we want to happen. We welcome their involvement and support in helping to shape the progress.

Where we find interventions to be less effective than we had hoped, we will now have the means by which to quantify that performance. We have the tools by which we can justify how and where we will target further interventions. This is innovative social policy and targeted project management. This is the exercise of good government that will make a difference to those who are unable to access private schools, private healthcare or personal pensions.

When the First Minister and the deputy First Minister announced the social investment fund, they did not package it as a child poverty action plan. When they announced £26 million of investment in new approaches to tackle problems of numeracy and literacy, the development of family hubs and targeted support for young people not in education, employment or training, they did not produce a glossy brochure with an action plan title.

We now have a clear strategy, endorsed by all Executive Ministers. We have clear arrangements in place to develop measurements of how each Department is contributing to reducing child poverty, and we have begun to deliver specific programmes that will make a meaningful difference to the immediate and longer-term needs of children and young people and, in turn, their children in generations to come.

I am grateful for the opportunity to make clear what the Executive have been doing to deliver on their commitments under the child poverty strategy.

I am saddened to see that some Members might feel that they might be scoring political points. Tackling child poverty is a very serious issue. I hope that all parties will ensure that we take this forward in a collective manner and that Ministers take it forward in a collective and holistic way. One child living in poverty here is one too many. We need to challenge it on a united front. If we stay united, we can look forward, instead of going into petty party politics on the issue.

5.00 pm

Mr McMullan: On a point of order. There seems to be a separate meeting on the Benches across the way. It is not very respectful to anybody who is speaking.

Mr Deputy Speaker: If I feel that I need to intervene because they are disturbing the Assembly, I will do so. I have intervened in the past.

Mr McNarry: I thank all the Members who spoke for their participation in this serious debate. It drew out the vagaries of poverty. It seems that, to some, poverty is just another casualty of recession. We have heard a proposal and two amendments. It seems that they are quite similar; they ask similar questions. There is more than a hint that something is wrong. Otherwise, the motion would not be made, and there would be no amendments to go alongside it.

Not for the first time is the leader of the Ulster Unionists confusing himself. He misreads my amendment. Hopefully, after hearing my submission, he now understands that my claim for additional funds are funds that are brought through reallocation.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr McNarry: I would normally, Chris, but I am pushed for time. Let us see how we go.

I remind the House that, on 23 January this year, I referred Members to the work of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in the very first mandate, when the absolute child poverty levels fell from 29% to 19%. That was dramatic. Clearly, something was done at that time that was right and was impressive. We, as an Assembly, need to re-examine our predecessors' work from that time to see what different circumstances, if any, exist today. The point that I make is that we should not be so ready to write off earlier successes and forget what was achieved in the first mandate on this issue.

There is no serious division and no reason for slick sound bites. I have been impressed by their absence. Most important is the outcome. It is the message, because the outcome that I want to see is fundamentally the reallocation of funds — the funds that are underused or returned moving across to uplift targets on child poverty. That is how I see it being done. There are no acceptable excuses. My amendment says that funds are available. It points to a way to energise and even to suggest to the junior Ministers that they plunder some money for those vulnerable children to benefit from.

The junior Minister highlighted progress in addressing poverty. She took us through the cross-departmental responsibilities. She refuted child poverty targets that are aligned to an Act, but she did not detail the use of funds that are set to her Department's own criteria of targeting child poverty. It is the upgrading of targeting that children will benefit from. I ask the Minister to take that on board. I welcome the advancement of intervention she talked about, which arose from meetings led by her and her colleague Jonathan Bell.

However, regrettably and disappointingly, despite what was said by the proposer of the motion, me and, to a lesser extent, the proposer of amendment No 1, the junior Minister's message fell short of an announcement of new money and a pathway for funds to an outlet that is waiting desperately to be targeted with cash. The junior Minister awaits some outcomes in 2013-14, and I will hold her to those. I only hope that the children can hold on, because she has given no figures and no guarantee that poverty will be reduced.

Mr Lyttle, I will oblige you now.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he recognise that there are certain budgets available, especially in childcare, in OFMDFM that have gone unspent and are underutilised, and that, as it stands, resources are available?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McNarry: I very much thank the Member for his intervention. I would not, perhaps, dwell on that subject, but an exposé of budgets that are underspent and underused in the Assembly is perhaps long overdue. That will be key. It appears to me that Departments are unable to get their heads around using the money they bid for. It is nearly criminal that Departments bid for money and then send it back, and that because of that children in need find themselves —

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

Mr McNarry: — unable to avail themselves of that spending.

Mr Hamilton: It has been said often in the House, although not a terrible lot by some in this debate, that we are living in tough times. It is a source of shame that so many children in Northern Ireland are in child poverty and that areas in Northern Ireland repeatedly top UK league tables for child poverty. It was drawn out by many in the debate that the situation for many is getting worse, with no short- or medium-term signs of improvement.

This is a very worthy and proper subject for the Assembly to debate, and it is an issue that should have our utmost attention. Sadly, I do not believe that the intention behind the motion was to do that. Rather, it was to continue to develop a narrative around criticising the Executive and their performance. Yet the Member who proposed the motion, through the Member sitting to his left, remains part of the said Executive that his party seems so freely and willingly obliged to criticise.

It was as much about what the motion did not say as what it did say. There was not a single acknowledgment anywhere in the contributions of Mr Nesbitt or Mrs Overend of the fact that, although it might be easy to criticise the Executive and say that they are not meeting their child poverty targets, the situation is the same across the United Kingdom. There is not a region in the whole of the United Kingdom that is not struggling to meet its child poverty targets. The reason for that passed the Members of the Ulster Unionist Party by, and they gave no acknowledgement to it.

Mrs Overend said that child poverty seemed to get worse from 2007, and I wondered what was happening around 2007. Therein lies the answer: 2007 was the beginning of one of the worst downturns and recessions that any of us have ever seen. There was no acknowledgment that the downturn, the coalition's cuts and the reductions in welfare spending for some are having a serious impact on child poverty.

There was also no acknowledgement of the fact that a national debate is going on — and it was started by the Department for Work and Pensions last week — about whether the measurements for child poverty are accurate. We are having a debate about failing to meet targets, yet the national Government that set those targets and are responsible for them do not know whether the measurements are appropriate. So, they are looking at whether factors should be taken into account such as

family breakdown, educational underachievement, debt, and drugs and alcohol dependency, and Iain Duncan Smith has launched a consultation on that basis. It is only right and proper that that happens. Even though the benefit system may assist a family in which there is alcohol or drug dependency, and raise its income through increased benefits, that income may go on drugs or drink and may therefore not help the children in that family at all. Those children may be lifted statistically out of poverty but may not be materially any better off as a result.

I heard Iain Duncan Smith say last week that 300,000 people across the UK had been lifted out of child poverty since 2010 because the poverty line had dropped because average incomes went down over that period. So, there is a question mark over the veracity of the figures, and it is only right that we look at those again. It is important, too, that Northern Ireland contributes to doing that. There is no acknowledgement of the fact that those statistics are also going down in Northern Ireland. Mrs Overend said that she did not really want to dwell on statistics, and I understand why she did not want to when those statistics disprove her point. A Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency report in June showed a reduction in relative child poverty rates in Northern Ireland from 22% to 21%. There was no acknowledgement of that happening.

Neither was there any acknowledgement of the actions taken by the Executive, of which the Ulster Unionist Party is a member, that will not always show up as having an impact on incomes or, therefore, on child poverty statistics. I am thinking about the £26 million going into Delivering Social Change, which some Members talked about. It is targeting literacy and numeracy; family support; job creation — £22 million; the social protection fund, on which £200 million will be spent over the next number of years; and an economy and jobs initiative. We should also be proud of the fact that we have continued to maintain the lowest household bills in the United Kingdom.

I think that all of us believe that creating a job is the best way out of poverty for anybody and any family, and we have gone about investing in infrastructure that creates jobs. I, for one, —

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

Mr Hamilton: — am not going to criticise Titanic Belfast, as Mr Nesbitt did, when it has created jobs directly and has had spin-off benefits for the tourism sector. People looking for an action plan need only look at actions such as those.

Mr McCallister: Listening to Mr Hamilton, I am relieved that all is so well in the world and that we really do not have much of a problem after that dramatic fall of 1% in child poverty. That begs the question; why have the debate? My colleague Mr Nesbitt set out the reasons. Surprisingly, the only party that mentioned political point-scoring, which the junior Minister was critical of, was actually her own party. Its Members were the only ones who said that this was about political point-scoring. Everyone else at least accepted that there is a genuine desire to tackle the issues surrounding child poverty and that we must do significantly better than we have over the last number of years.

My party colleague Mr Nesbitt talked about the issues around child poverty and was most critical of the fact that money is going unspent in the social investment fund; money that could be used not next year or the year after

but today. It is available to us today. We could use it to make a difference to people's lives in areas of all of our constituencies. Those include some of the constituencies that Mrs Overend talked about, such as North Belfast and West Belfast, and Foyle was also mentioned. They are areas that need that type of input. They need the work to be done and they need money invested in them to tackle the scourge of child poverty. That is what Mr Nesbitt made the case for.

We have had everything today from Tory cuts and blaming the Tories for everything. It will be a sad day when Sinn Féin does not have the Tories to blame for everything that is wrong in the world.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he recall the Finance Minister, Sammy Wilson, giving evidence to the Grand Committee at Westminster? As reported in Hansard, he talked about the settlement:

"it is not a particularly good or bad deal; it is the kind of deal we would have expected ... given the settlements ... for other Departments across the United Kingdom. I and my party have not joined in the siren calls to 'resist the Tory cuts' and to ignore what is a reality."

5.15 pm

Mr McCallister: I thank my colleague for that useful intervention. I am glad that DUP Members are listening to that, because it is important that they get that message and listen to their Finance Minister.

There are many things that we should and could be doing. This is about looking at how the money is spent and what it is spent on. Mr McNarry said that we still had child poverty even in the best of economic times, which is an important point to reiterate. We did not solve the issue of child poverty when our economy was in growth and we had literally billions of pounds being thrown into public spending. We did not solve all of the problems in our health service or tackle all of the social ills that we needed to deal with.

Of course, one of the key drivers, as Mr Hamilton mentioned, is job creation. He will of course know, as the Finance Minister designate, that something like one million jobs have been created in GB. Where is Northern Ireland's job creation, which is sitting at 8,000, 9,000 or perhaps 10,000 in the private sector? That is probably well behind what has been created in the rest of the country, so we are not doing as much as we should or could on job creation. I agree with the point that Mr Nesbitt made, that creating jobs for people to take up is one of the key ways out of poverty. It is one of the biggest advantages. We need to create and grow that private sector wealth, create the jobs and create that purpose for people, and for children growing up in families, so that they get used to seeing someone going out to work, and that would improve educational outcomes. All of those issues are related.

I will go through some of the contributions. Mr Moutray said that it is something that not only the local Government but the national Government need to do, working together. He talked about eradicating it by 2020. If we go at the pace we are setting now, that seems highly unlikely. He talked about some of the achievements, such as the lowest rates bills, and Mr Hamilton reiterated them. As Mr Lyttle pointed out, many people trapped in poverty are on housing

benefit or get rate relief so they would be unaffected by that. Freezing prescription charges has helped a great many people, particularly those with long-term illnesses, but, again, some of the people on poorest incomes would get free prescriptions anyway.

We need to look at all of those issues and not be so downbeat about what we can do or think that, just because we have had cuts in our Budget, we can afford to have underspend elsewhere. Some Members of Sinn Féin were saying that each Department should be looking at what it is doing with regard to the Child Poverty Act. I do not disagree with that. Mr Nesbitt and Mrs Overend did not disagree with that. Many people who spoke did not disagree with that. What they have called for is to stop having endless strategies and start doing some action plans and implementing some of the policies that might help the very people we are elected to try to help. Those are some of the issues, instead of always blaming Tory cuts and welfare reform.

Ms Kelly congratulated the marvellous effort of Children in Need. I think it is important to show that people are still giving in that spirit of generosity in Northern Ireland, and that is to be commended. She rightly made the point about agreement on an early years strategy. Too many of the strategies that we have looked at have no action plans with them. We have been locked with strategies that, quite frankly, in some cases, are meaningless. Some of the early years strategy, when it was before the Education Committee and other Committees, was meaningless about what the interaction was without adequate cross-departmental working.

George Robinson talked about the economic challenges. He also mentioned the Tory cuts, so he obviously missed Mr Wilson's reference to them in his evidence to the Grand Committee at Westminster. He talked about lowering corporation tax and what that could achieve for job creation.

Ms Fearon talked about the levels of severe poverty. We agree that those need to be tackled, but we did not hear anything from the junior Minister about what that is going to look like. We hear the warm words about working very diligently, but we do not see any actions or outcomes. It has to be about the outcome of eradicating child poverty. That is the outcome on which we should all be focused.

Mr Maskey spent his entire contribution doing his welfare reform speech, but for what end? He has been offered support from the SDLP on at least one occasion so far, and I am sure that it might offer on other occasions to sign a petition of concern. In that case, he could quite easily stop the Welfare Reform Bill. It was pointed out to him that his colleagues do not go to Westminster to vote against welfare reform.

Mr Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCallister: I will, briefly.

Mr Maskey: Does the Member realise that he will have an opportunity tomorrow morning, by way of a petition of concern, to make a call on referring the Welfare Reform Bill for further scrutiny on the grounds of human rights and equality compliance?

Mr McCallister: It is great that the Member has brought the motion that will be voted on tomorrow. He has had his chance with the SDLP, and I am quite sure that it will

provide him with other opportunities in the future. Let us then see if he puts his money where his mouth is and signs it and follows through. He has the numbers; the SDLP does not. He could make a difference if he supports the SDLP.

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

Mr McCallister: Let him stand up and be judged then.

Mr Maskey: You should put your money where somebody else's mouth is, then.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I advise Members that both amendments may be made and that one amendment does not preclude the other.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 58; Noes 36.

AYES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Ms McGahan, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Molloy, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Douglas and Mr G Robinson

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Mr Ford, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGimpsey, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McNarry, Mr A Maginness, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McCallister and Mrs Overend

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question, That amendment No 2 be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly takes account of the recently published annual child poverty report; notes that the child poverty targets set in the UK-wide legislation are challenging and that all regions across the UK are struggling to meet the targets, given the current international economic downturn; and calls on the Executive to work with the devolved Administrations and the UK Government to identify actions to meet the statutory targets and reduce poverty and to identify additional funds associated with limiting the damage of the recession for use in combating child poverty.

Cross-border Education

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Members, if you wish to have a conversation, please leave the Chamber.

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

Mr Kinahan: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes, with concern, the consultation on cross-border education; recognises that there are circumstances in which parents living close to the border may wish to send their children to a school in the neighbouring jurisdiction; further notes that this only happens in a small minority of cases; expresses concern that this consultation, on an issue of potentially significant consequence for the future of education, was confined to a narrow geographical area; and calls on the Minister of Education to reflect on his priorities and address the outstanding issues which he is already facing such as area planning, finding an equitable solution on selection and tackling educational inequality.

I very much welcome the chance to put forward our ideas through the motion. A little bit of me feels that it is rather like carrying on the boxing motions from the past few weeks and that there should be a "Ding, ding. Round 4". It seems to be an endless battle as we try to get our points across. I want to use today's debate as an alarm call, but not the Strawberry Alarm Clock or the tinkle or buzz of your phone and not just a wake-up call; this is an alarm call for all that is going on. Our education system is being destroyed by stealth, deliberate vagueness, a lack of clarity, a deliberate lack of explanation of what is going on and a lack of consultation. In a way, it is a despotic or tyrannical way of doing business.

Mr Flanagan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: No, I want to carry on, thank you.

It is a strange attitude towards our schools. Last week, the Minister, one or two others from here and I attended the Primary School Governors Association. The inspectorate and the Department were there for a question-and-answer session. By the end of it, there was a simmering anger as the inspectorate and the Department insisted that what they were saying had to be followed with no chance of discussion. That is the problem. We had discussions on the Northern Ireland numeracy assessment (NINA) and the Northern Ireland literacy assessment (NILA) and how the assessment system was failing, and we had concerns about the new rules and regulations that are coming in for governors. However, at every turn, both said, "The Minister instructs us as follows", which was as good as saying, "You must obey." So, it seems that, today, the debate focuses on a very poorly actioned survey that has phenomenal potential to affect our education system and be misused in future debates. At present, sections of the Assembly seem to be not just asleep but positively comatose. As I said, I want to use the debate as a wake-up call. I want to see

everyone coming together and to stop this galloping virus of changes that this Minister of Education is proposing.

Yesterday, those of you who watched 'Sunday Politics' saw the head of St Malachy's restate the Ulster Unionist call for a pause, a stop and, as it was put yesterday, a step back. Schools are at breaking point, overcome with reviews, changes and top-down directives, and are not able to concentrate on teaching for pupils. We need everyone — everyone — working together for a joint, long-term strategy and vision. At the moment, we seem to have a comatose attitude to all the changes that are coming our way.

In today's motion, we are initially talking about a cross-border survey, one that is conducted online, one that has controlled access only, one that talks to parents but only three years out of 14, and one that only talks to parents within six miles of primary schools or within 12 miles of the border on post-primary. However, the premise is not wrong. We should look at anything that moves with parents' choice, but here it is a very limited number of parents who we will actually hear from. At a time when budgets are tight and the system is failing, I do not believe that this is a good use of Department time or funds. We will end up with a survey that is not representative and not accurate and will, I am sure, be used as part of the dogma-driven action of the future. Let us all step back, work together and concentrate on agreeing a way forward. Will the Minister take that step back? Will he sit down and engage with all parties on the way forward?

I ask all the parties here to join us in forming a committee that can work together on selection, but it needs Sinn Féin to take part this time. We need to resolve so much, and we cannot go on as we are, as if we are all in a coma. As we saw from yesterday's programme and from the past two weeks, many pupils are taking five exams. The numbers who are taking them have gone up. Although the Minister disputes the figures, some 7,000 pupils are taking the tests. More and more are taking them. Sir Kenneth Bloomfield said yesterday that this is a democracy and that that means choice. Let us sit down together and sort out this mess. We must have some form of streaming, so let us have one agreed exam, as we have been calling for, for the next two years and sit down and find a democratic solution for the future.

As I said, the Minister ignores or disputes the figures. In Committee, we continually have the Department producing numbers and statistics, but, when we speak to schools, we get a very different story. As a party, we do not disagree that changes need to happen. We need ESA. We need area planning. We need assessment. I could go on, but, most importantly, we all agree that we must tackle the disadvantaged areas and put forward every possible way so that they too can have the choice and a chance to go to whatever type of school they want to go to.

In the ESA debate, the Minister rightly picked me up when I failed to mention in my long speech the need to help with Protestant disadvantage. I take that on board. I listen, and I hope that he does too. As a party, we would like to see a pupil bonus scheme brought in. If the savings that, we are told, will come in with the introduction of ESA appear, let us see them pay for it. That is just one of the many ways that we can help the disadvantaged.

5.45 pm

I go back to the main point: can we have a pause, a stop, a step back? There seems to be a propaganda campaign from bishops and from some areas of secondary education to say that selection does not work. They do not want to understand the other side of the argument. Some make it a class matter. Yes, we have a problem. Let us all sit down and resolve it. In the Programme for Government, we have a target for shared education, albeit a small one. In area planning, we see a worsening of division being put in place, as sectors are forced into even more sectarian groupings. We are losing the learning communities where shared education is thriving. Here, we need to step back, change legislation and make area planning help increase the sharing in education as much as we can.

We have CCMS saying that it will get rid of grammar schools, with no democratic notice from the people. I acknowledge that it has its own good education system and that it controls that. However, it is as much at fault as grammars may be in its inclusiveness. This decision to force the hand on grammars is not democratic, and to only join together in area planning all the same types is as exclusive and badly thought-out as can be. It is time to sit down together. I could go on as much about this mess, but we cannot just go on opposing each other. We must find a way through.

Today, we have a small matter of cross-border education and a consultation process. For that, we must be grateful, because consultation is not something that we see much of. My colleague Tom Elliott will concentrate more on the border issues. The end of the motion concentrates on tackling education equality. Let us all sit down and do that together. Regarding the amendment, I support its content, especially the call for consultation to be robust and to be included in area planning. However, I do not believe that the focus of the debate should be diverted from the motion by the amendment.

A word of warning: I spoke to one headmaster from a Protestant school in County Cavan.

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

Mr Kinahan: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. The headmaster said that, if we open up the border, all his pupils will go to Northern Ireland and his school will have to close. We need to think through where this cross-border consultation is taking us. However, let us sit down and agree a joint long-term way forward.

Mr Rogers: I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after first "notes" and insert

"the consultation on cross-border education; recognises that there are circumstances in which parents living close to the border may wish to send their children to a school in the neighbouring jurisdiction; and calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that this consultation is robust and is included as part of the area planning process."

I listened to Mr Kinahan. Sometimes, when we stray off the topic, the Speaker will pull us back. To me, this debate is about cross-border education. I agree with many of the comments that Mr Kinahan has made, including his reference to the elephant in the room, which is selection. He repeats a call that I made some time

ago that we need to get around the table to sort that out. However, this is fundamentally about cross-border education. I am confused about the motion. On the one hand, it is concerned about the consultation on cross-border education; on the other, it acknowledges parental preference and the need to focus on area-based planning. Surely cross-border education needs to be a part of the area-based planning process.

In the 'Belfast Telegraph' on 16 February, the Ulster Unionists called on the Assembly to lobby the Irish Government to protect Protestant schools in Donegal that are in danger of closing. Surely, the best way to do this is for the Department of Education and the Department of Education and Skills to work closely to ensure that this survey is part of the area planning process. In a 'Belfast Telegraph' article in April, the DUP articulated its view against cross-border consultation. I disagree with the DUP's assertion that the survey is a bid to prove that:

"there is a demand for an all-Ireland education system".

If we are to put pupils, families and communities first, we should have considered this issue from July 2012, when the area-based planning process began.

The SDLP amendment recognises the importance of facilitating parental preference on a cross-border basis. We all note the change in school population right across the North. It is no different in border areas; in fact, in border areas, there are, in many cases, more serious demographic problems. This affects both sides of the community. At last year's Church of Ireland synod in Dublin, major concerns were expressed about the future of their smaller primary and post-primary schools. In one area in County Cavan, 99% of the children have to travel up to 20 miles to get to school. Irrespective of which border county it is, North or South, the problems are the same. Cross-border education co-operation could become a lifeline for small schools and their communities. Many small schools on both sides of the border face extinction. Real and meaningful consultation could become a lifeline for the small Protestant and Catholic communities in border areas.

In a recent review of Catholic post-primary education in Fermanagh, the closure of St Mary's High School in Brollagh was recommended. Although the school is over an hour's journey from Enniskillen, it is about 15 minutes travel from Ballyshannon, County Donegal. It makes sense that we should consider the cross-border dimension; otherwise, what is the long-term effect on the community of closing the school in Brollagh? What young couple would wish to settle down in an area where there is no primary, never mind post-primary, education? It will result in further migration from our rural areas. That will have a knock-on effect on other services in the local community.

Although the closing date for consultation on the northern part of the survey is now past, I am reassured by the comments of Mr McLean during the Education Committee's meeting on 12 September:

"Area planning was never seen as a one-off exercise to be done, completed and dusted and then put on the shelf. It is seen as an iterative process that will ... set the strategic direction."

I need to remind the proposer of the motion that the Good Friday Agreement makes it incumbent on the Governments

on both sides of the border to protect the rights and interests of minorities. Surely, access to locally provided education is a fundamental right.

I understand the concerns of Members opposite, as there are many issues with our education system in the North. This is not a distraction but an integral part of the area planning process. We all know that there is lots of work to be done. Yes, there are financial implications when children from one jurisdiction attend school in another jurisdiction, but that problem is not insurmountable and can be resolved quite easily between the corresponding Education Departments. Our primary objective should be to provide a high-quality education for all our children who live here. Therefore, we must consider cross-border education, because, in some cases, the best option may be to go to a school in the Republic. If we are to build an all-Ireland economy, education, health, cross-border business, telecommunications, cross-border taxation, banking, housing and third-level study are all important considerations.

Miss M McIlveen: Given the history of Sinn Féin's tenure of the education portfolio, whenever a project is undertaken by one of its Ministers, it is, understandably, met with a degree of scepticism. However, the motion appears to simply suggest to the Minister that he should prioritise other matters, such as area planning, selection and educational inequality over a consultation on cross-border education. Therefore, I am happy to support the motion. I absolutely agree that issues such as those should be high on the agenda. I have little doubt, however, that finding an equitable solution on selection ranks extremely low on the Minister's list of priorities. We need only look at Sinn Féin's refusal to take part in cross-party meetings on transfer and its refusal to even acknowledge the work of that group.

I would certainly like to see a greater focus on educational inequality, with particular attention being given to raising the standards of working-class Protestant boys. The Minister and his party are fond of referencing the underachievement of working-class Protestant boys, but I would like to see some action taken to address that.

I am not sure whether it should be an issue of where such a survey falls in the scheme of things to be done or whether it should be done at all. The primary concern should be the motivation behind the survey. Currently, schools in the border areas of Northern Ireland accept pupils who reside in the Irish Republic, but priority is given to pupils living in Northern Ireland. From my perspective, it is right and proper that our children should be given priority.

The Minister has said that the joint survey is to examine how education is provided along the border corridor and whether there is scope to engage in joint planning of the respective school estates in the area. That suggests that he intends to remove the priority of our pupils having a place in our schools. In the Irish Republic, there is no legal requirement for a school to prioritise children from the Irish Republic over those from Northern Ireland. So the attitudes of Northern Ireland parents to educating their children in the Irish Republic should be fairly evident. It also stands to reason that the only area to potentially lose out in this change is Northern Ireland. Is there the potential for Northern Ireland schools in border areas to be oversubscribed, thereby forcing our pupils to seek

education in the Irish Republic, where a different syllabus and examination system are in place?

The concerns about funding cuts to Protestant schools in the Irish Republic have been well highlighted. The potential result of removing the priority for our pupils in our schools is that it would place Protestant pupils at a disadvantage if they were to seek a school in the Irish Republic that reflected their ethos. I hope that the Minister will take that factor into consideration.

The first issue that should have been addressed, before even contemplating a survey on widening opportunities for children from the Irish Republic to attend Northern Ireland schools, is that of who pays. We pay for children from the Irish Republic to be educated here, and the Irish Republic pays the costs of educating children from Northern Ireland there. The figures available in May showed that we were funding 401 primary and post-primary pupils resident in the Irish Republic. Of course, that is the number who actually declared that they were resident in the Irish Republic, so it may be higher. I understand that half that number go in the opposite direction, so we already get the short end of that stick. I am aware that the Finance Minister raised this at an NSMC meeting. Can the Minister provide us with the current cost differential and the projected cost should there be a greater flexibility in admissions criteria in Northern Ireland?

We also know of some parents, particularly in the Fermanagh area, who were not aware of the consultation, which raises a further concern about the accuracy of the results of the survey. That is in addition to complaints about the sporadic nature of the questionnaire, its lack of focus and the difficulty that some parents have accessing it.

Ultimately, we should be concerned that the Minister is concerned more about politics than children in this instance. We have already expressed our concerns about the direction in which he wishes to go with GCSEs and A levels.

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

Miss M McIlveen: Now we need to express our concerns about the availability of Northern Ireland school places to Northern Ireland pupils in the border corridor.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I will speak against the motion and in support of the amendment.

The motion calls on the Assembly to note:

"with concern, the consultation on cross-border education".

I simply do not agree that the cross-border survey is anything to be concerned about. Moreover, having read the various statements from the Minister and the comprehensive information pack that accompanies the motion, I was unable to find a single reference to such a consultation. It does not exist. What we are talking about is a survey, which is being jointly conducted by the Department of Education in the North and the Department of Education and Skills in the South. It will gauge the level of interest among parents along the border corridor in securing a place for their child at a school in the other jurisdiction.

The survey will no doubt reflect how people in the border area live and avail themselves of services, including

education. With the nature of border life continually changing, many parents now live in one jurisdiction and work in the other, but their children can face obstacles to crossing the border for their education. Therefore, it is important that a survey such as this will flag up some of the obstacles that prevent parents from sending their children in either direction. Although many parents are often not aware of the options that exist, some obstacles may require legislative adjustment, and I am delighted that Minister O'Dowd and Minister Quinn will examine ways in which that can be amended accordingly.

Legislation currently requires that schools and preschools give priority in admission to those who are resident in the North over those who are not. Legislation also permits assistance with home-to-school transport only for journeys to schools in the North. Sinn Féin believes that the legislation should change to reflect and facilitate the reality of the lives led by people in border areas and the way in which they access public services.

6.00 pm

I understand that investigations are going on so that we can better understand the nature of current legislation in the context of EU mobility laws. Any progress on this issue will, no doubt, be a positive development in the planning of education provision in border areas.

Surveys such as this are vital, as they allow us to build better relationships and outcomes for all our young people who live in these areas. We have cross-border travel for those in further and higher level education, so it is important that we actively assess how we can improve primary and post-primary education provision for border communities. In a recent press statement, the UUP's Tom Elliott described the survey as a "political stunt", yet Mr Elliott was doing the somersaults by, on the one hand, claiming that the survey was a waste of money and, on the other, requesting that it be more extensive, which would consequently have made it more expensive.

If we do not have a survey of where resources can be best spent along the border corridor, we will undoubtedly continue to duplicate them, as two education systems will be operating back to back. It makes perfect sense to assess parental choice in border communities to see where, if necessary, we can share resources. Fears that the initiative will cost the Assembly a fortune are misguided and prejudicial. We have had pupils travelling back and forth across the border for some time now. Whenever students leave the jurisdiction to go south, we pick up the bill, and whenever students from the South come north to this jurisdiction, the Dublin Government pick up the bill. The survey is simply about flagging up obstacles and issues that may need to be addressed. It is also about helping to illustrate the best use of resources along the border corridor and giving us a quantifiable illustration of how education can best be utilised.

Moreover, the outcomes of the survey will be used to assess potential cross-border planning opportunities for area planning. The chief executive of the CCMS, Jim Clarke, said to the Committee recently:

"I welcome the survey ... I think that it is better to have information on which to base perceptions rather than to simply have perceptions. I also think that it is a logical way to respond to local needs. We know that there is

cross-border movement. Some of it is official, but a lot of it is not."

He went on to say that we are seeing the logical rationalisation of reality. Area planning for post-primary provision has marked the first step on this journey on the transformation of our education system and the schools estate. The consultation period has come to an end recently, and the boards are analysing the various responses before reporting on the plans.

It is incumbent on us all as public representatives to assure parents and schools that we have begun a process of much-needed transformation. Any facet of change will be carefully planned, and, indeed, such plans will be reviewed regularly and updated to reflect local characteristics and developing circumstances.

Without doubt, the Minister will face difficult decisions. Those will not always be popular, but this process is about making the right, not the easy, decisions. The Minister is responsible for shaping an education system and schools estate for not only our children but our grandchildren and the generations to come. When the various boards came to the Committee recently, they were keen to stress that the area-planning process was a journey and not an end in itself.

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

Mr Hazzard: That is a very important point. The process has created a fertile space for debate, which was not possible in previous years. For once, educationalists are asking themselves whether they are capable of providing a curriculum that can and will continue to meet the needs of our young people for generations.

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

Mr Hazzard: I will not support the motion, but I will support the amendment.

Mr Lunn: We will also support the amendment but not the motion. I have to congratulate Mr Kinahan; I think that this is the first time ever that we had a 10-minute speech on a motion that did not mention that motion until the ninth minute.

I can see that he is using cross-border co-operation as an excuse to discuss a range of issues on the education system that go far and wide. I do not want to dwell on it, but I do not disagree with a lot of what he said on the wider issues. However, that is not what the motion is about. As Chris Hazzard rightly said, the consultation is on a North/South ministerial agreement to conduct a survey.

The motion refers to an issue of "potentially significant consequence" that was:

"confined to a narrow geographical area".

I would have thought that a 12-mile corridor for primary school pupils and a 24-mile corridor for secondary school pupils was perhaps adequate to address the problems of cross-border issues. If secondary school pupils from the South want to travel north more than 12 miles, good luck to them. I think that that is a pretty fair test of opinion, and I think that the survey is a good idea.

Why should our area-based planning be cut off at the border? Mr Rogers referred to St Mary's High School in Brollagh, and Michelle McIlveen referred to the possibility

of schools being oversubscribed on our side of the border. I do not see that happening, but what I do see is that an influx of Southern pupils might be the saviour of a school along the border, in whatever sector.

I mention sectors. Daithí McKay asked a question a few months ago on the number of schools adjacent to the border — in the corridor that we are talking about — with a Church of Ireland or Presbyterian ethos. The number of post-primary schools on the Southern side of the border with that ethos is only four: one each in counties Cavan, Louth, Monaghan and Donegal. I can certainly see the problems that Protestant pupils and their families in that region may have. If the better solution is for them to come north, that is to be welcomed. This is Europe now, not just Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland. We need to think a bit wider than that.

There are a dozen such primary schools, but even with a dozen spread along the border, of which I think half are in County Donegal, the Northern authorities do not have to take Southern children until they have at least reviewed all the applications from the North. Apparently there are no such criteria in the South, where the same criteria have to be applied to all applications.

There seems to be a fear that there will be a massive influx of pupils from the South to the North. Let us wait and see whether that is one of the things that the survey indicates. I believe that 12,000 surveys have gone out. I do not know whether that is to 12,000 families in the North or the parents of 12,000 children. On the same basis, the survey has perhaps gone out to 20,000 in the South. That is 12,000 of our school population being consulted — most of whom will want to stay on this side of the border — out of a school population of whatever the figure is now. It is certainly well over 300,000.

I do not see any potential wrecking of the system here, yet Mr Kinahan has accused us of being guilty of sleepwalking into some kind of destructive Sinn Féin plan for the education system. I think that he used the word "comatose". I can assure him that most of us are not comatose. We have the same concerns as him but not in the same terms. There are major items that need to be sorted out that have nothing to do with cross-border education.

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

Mr Lunn: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I wish him luck with his suggestion that he is going to create another committee to discuss the selection issue. He is very welcome to have the report of the committee that I set up around three years ago. If he can move it any further forward, I will congratulate him. In the meantime, we support the amendment but not the motion.

Mr Craig: I support the motion. I do not think that any of us is sleepwalking into anything. The only danger is that, given the level of debate, we may end up comatose ourselves.

Minister O'Dowd has the notion that we should look at and do a survey on cross-border co-operation. That is all well and good, but when I look around the education system, the biggest issues that I see out there do not concern whether we are sharing schools well enough across the border, no matter from which side we cross it. We are in danger of losing sight of the real issues out there. Thankfully, this Minister has started to focus on

the underachievement of pupils in the bottom third of our schools. That to me is the biggest issue of all, not whether pupils go to school in the Republic or Northern Ireland. The point is that they are going to schools that are failing them, and if the Minister were to spend much more of his time looking at that issue and doing something about it, the entire education system would be much better off.

Mr Flanagan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Craig: On you go.

Mr Flanagan: The Member said that the Minister should spend more of his time dealing with specific issues. Does the Member have access to the Minister's diary to see how much time he is spending on each of the issues?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Craig: As the Member well knows, if I had access to the Minister's diary, I would be in serious trouble, so the answer is clearly no.

Whether we deal with a six-mile radius, a 12-mile radius or whatever across the border, there is no real demand of any serious nature for a lot of this. The numbers, as was quite rightly pointed out by another Member in the Chamber today, are small. That is why I worry about us becoming fixated on an issue that, quite frankly, in the longer term, I doubt will go very far at all.

I noted a series of issues that need to be looked at and rectified when it comes to cross-border education. If we look at the ethos of a lot of schools in the Republic of Ireland, we see that there is a lot about teaching the Irish language. I know that the Minister is fixated on that issue, but a large section up here has no desire to learn Irish.

The other issue is this: are we going to get to the stage where we start transferring teachers back and forward across the border? If we are going to do that, we are going to have to do away with a lot of barriers in the Republic of Ireland that stop qualified teachers here teaching there. There are discriminatory factors down there that need to be tackled if we are ever going to get to the situation where you could, on a day-to-day basis, transfer pupils and teachers across the border. As I said, we are miles away from even thinking about those issues; the reality is that we have bigger issues in our entire system to look at.

While I support the motion with regard to having the focus put back on other issues and not becoming fixated with cross-border co-operation in education, I do not support the amendment. I do not think we need to have our eyes taken off the ball of where we should be in education. I think we need to be very careful about and focused on the issues that I outlined.

While it is all right looking at this in the cold light of day, I appeal to the Minister not to let us become fixated on small numbers, which I feel, in the end, will be to placate what will eventually come to light with the closure of many maintained schools along the border.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the amendment and oppose the motion. I was not aware of a consultation on cross-border education, but I am aware of a survey that the Minister conducted to see whether there is a demand in this area.

The motion states that people wishing to send their child or children to a school in a different jurisdiction are in a small

minority. I want to ask this: has the UUP conducted its own survey? If so, I would be interested in seeing its findings.

I represent a border area, and I know all too well the difficulties that families encounter, particularly in the South of Ireland, with families wanting to send their children to school in the Six Counties.

I am on record in this House and, indeed, in the Education Committee as speaking in favour of pupil access to education in both jurisdictions, and I have never heard anyone in the Education Committee saying otherwise.

One of a number of families who contacted my office for assistance in this area conveyed to me the difficulties that they have encountered. For a family who live in Lifford in County Donegal, which is one mile from Strabane, the nearest primary school in the South is 10 miles away. Given their domestic situation — they have a number of small children who need to get to school at different times, which involves access to transport — it does not suit them to send their children to a school 10 miles away. Their preferred school of choice is one mile over the border in Strabane. It makes sense to that family to send their child to school in Strabane. I believe that they should have that option.

One parent told me that she feels "very marginalised" because her child was not given priority and was not accepted in the school of her choice in Strabane. They are a Protestant family. That family has begged and pleaded with me and others in the Chamber to change legislation in the hope that the changes that that would bring will happen soon for them and before her second child starts school so that she would not have that problem any more. So, I ask the Members on the opposite Benches who tabled the motion whether they understand fully the problems of accessing education in border areas.

6.15 pm

The Department states that over 12,000 pupils have been identified in years 1, 7 and 8 in 143 primary schools and 63 post-primary schools. The Department says that the parents of those children will have most recently considered cross-border education, so those families are the target population for the survey. You cannot ignore the plight of over 12,000 children, which is hardly a minority. I believe that the survey is critical in determining area planning, and it will allow Minister O'Dowd and Minister Quinn to get to work on policy and provision.

Another barrier exists when someone has a child with special educational needs who attends school in the North and lives in the South. That child is not entitled to a statement of need. They are not entitled to be assessed for special educational needs. We need to protect their rights. I welcome the work that both Ministers are doing in that area. I look forward to the outcome of the survey. I believe that neither the UUP nor any other party in the Chamber has anything to fear from the survey. I support the amendment.

Mr Elliott: I thank my colleague Mr Kinahan for tabling the motion.

Some of the discussion that I heard has been quite interesting. One of the most unusual contributions came from Mr Lunn, who said that Mr Kinahan spent 10 minutes speaking but did not actually speak to the motion. Coming from Mr Lunn and the Alliance Party, that surprises me.

They are experts at that. If anybody were to do that well, it is Mr Lunn and his party colleagues. So, I have to say that that is rich coming from the Alliance Party and those who try to criticise my party colleague for doing that.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Member for giving way. I just want to say that he is talking complete nonsense, so I suggest that he sit down again.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Elliott: Thank you very much for that extra minute, Mr Lunn. You have just given me an extra minute to talk instead of sitting down. It is quite interesting that Mr Lunn and the Alliance Party is trying to close down democracy and debate in the Assembly. I am very surprised at that.

Turning to the survey, I listened to Mr Hazzard and Ms Boyle. It is quite interesting that the first question on the survey asks whether someone is resident in the North of Ireland or the South of Ireland. Ms Boyle has left the Chamber now, but if someone who lives where she does, which is somewhere around Strabane, were asked that question, I would assume that they lived in the South of Ireland, because, obviously, Donegal is much further north than Tyrone. Clearly, I am interested in the survey.

Not every parent who was supposed to get the survey actually got it. Not every parent of children in those years got the code to enable them to log on to the survey on the internet either by e-mail or whatever other electronic means. From start to finish, it has obviously been a shabby survey and a shabby process throughout. That is very concerning to my colleagues and me, particularly when the Department is paying for it and could think of much better ways to spend that money.

I am sure that the Sinn Féin Minister and his party colleagues are under significant pressure from many schools in border areas, particularly those such as St Aidan's High School in Derrylin and St Mary's High School, Brollagh, in Belleek. Those schools are under particular pressure to survive. There is no difficulty with them having cross-border co-operation. Cross-border education and co-operation has been going on for generations.

I am sure that most of you will know or at least recognise that it has been quite a long time since I was at school. However, even back then, I was in the same class as pupils from the Republic of Ireland. I know still of a number of pupils who are resident in Northern Ireland but cross the border to be educated in the Republic of Ireland, and vice versa. There is nothing to stop that happening at the moment. I do not see why we need a survey that costs money and is of very limited use. What use is a survey of primary school kids living within six miles of the border and post-primary pupils living within 12 miles of it?

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Member for giving way. He started off by saying that there was no need for the survey, and now he is criticising the Minister because the survey area was capped at six miles and 12 miles. Which is it? Are you opposed to the survey or do you want a wholesale survey of the whole island? Will you clarify that for us?

Mr Elliott: I will clarify that quite easily. I never said that I wanted a full survey of the entire island. What I am merely pointing out is this: what use is a survey of a limited area? It is very restrictive and is obviously subjective. As Mr Flanagan knows, people who live more than six miles

from Belleek may have more of an interest in cross-border education than those who live on the border. As others said, many people who live on the border in Fermanagh travel the 20 miles to Enniskillen to be educated rather than cross the border, even though they have that choice at the moment. Therefore, I do not see what the relevance of the survey is.

It is quite clear that it is a political stunt. What the Minister wants to do is stamp his authority on cross-border education. It would have been much more in his interest and that of others if he had put the money into resolving the issues that Mr Kinahan and others talked about. Pupils at Devenish College in Enniskillen, for example, were promised a newbuild school in 2004 — I am sure that it was the same for schools in other areas — but because consecutive Sinn Féin Ministers and others procrastinated and refused to build that school, the parents, pupils and teachers were left to work in much more difficult conditions than should have been the case.

There are ample opportunities for the Minister to progress education in Northern Ireland and assist co-operation, where possible or necessary. I have been to St Aidan's in Derrylin and to Brollagh and Belleek and have discussed the opportunities and —

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

Mr Elliott: — cross-border potential there. They know that I will support that, but I will not support a waste-of-money survey carried out by a shabby Minister.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. First, I want to pick up on Mr Elliott's point about the newbuild that was planned for Devenish College.

The Member will be well aware that a proposal was put forward for a newbuild in 2004. However, in 2004, Sinn Féin did not hold the education portfolio. It was not Caitríona Ruane or John O'Dowd who promised a newbuild there. The problem was that the controlled sector could not come to an agreement about Devenish College. Nearly everybody in the House knows that, but, for some reason, those on the opposite Benches have put their head in the sand and continue to blame Sinn Féin Ministers. There cannot be a newbuild at Devenish College until there is agreement in the controlled sector. The sooner that that happens, the better.

I will return to the —

Mr Elliott: Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I will happily give way.

Mr Elliott: For clarification, is that Department of Education policy?

Mr Flanagan: The Member will be aware that there is currently a process called area planning.

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Will the Member give way?

Mr Flanagan: I will happily give way.

Mr O'Dowd: Is the Member from the Ulster Unionist Party suggesting that I build a school in an area where there is no agreement? His party spokesperson gave me a 10-minute lecture on seeking agreement, but now he is suggesting —

Mr Deputy Speaker: All remarks through the Chair, please.

Mr Flanagan: I thank the Minister for intervening. He responded much quicker than I could have.

I return to the text of the motion. My party colleagues laboured the point that this is not a consultation but a survey. It is not simply a consultation; it is much broader than that. The fact that the motion refers to a consultation really shows that — pardon the pun — the UUP has not done its homework.

The motion also talks about this only happening in a small minority of cases where there is a demand for cross-border education. I live very close to the border, like a number of other people in here, and it is clear that there is a demand for that. There are barriers to cross-border education, and I commend John O'Dowd and Ruairí Quinn for their proactive response to this. In fact, going by the media response on the BBC and RTÉ when this was announced, there is a clear demand. There is clear public interest in this, and it is something that we should be looking into. The UUP is criticising the fact that a survey is taking place at all, but then complaining about the fact that it is limited to six or 12 miles. It really highlights the deficit of knowledge and comprehension of the UUP cheerleaders for education.

I also note that missing from the text of the motion is a reference of any kind to ESA, given that ESA is one of the big pieces of work that is being undertaken by the Department of Education. Mr Kinahan referred to a number of other pieces of work that are under way, but he has left out ESA, and I really have to wonder why. Perhaps it is because Mr Kinahan is too busy writing to every principal in the North of Ireland, purporting to be representative of the Education Committee, with headed paper saying he is the Deputy Chair of the Education Committee, outlining his personal opposition to ESA and encouraging principals to outline their opposition to ESA. It would be much better for Mr Kinahan, instead of wasting time writing to every principal in the North, to sit down and talk about ESA with sensible people, and not just write letters to people who do not want to hear from him.

I will move to the debate itself. The motion talks about democracy and a clear lack of democracy, and two Members in the far corner raised it. In response to the area-planning process, 1,300 people from west and north Fermanagh responded to the consultation that was put out by the Western Education and Library Board and the CCMS. They outlined their view that there should be a cross-border element to the future of education in that area. What about those 1,300 people? Do their voices not get heard? Do we completely ignore the democratic wish of the people in that area?

The view of those 1,300 people, as they have clearly outlined, is that they want to see a cross-border area learning community established. They want a pilot model that would assess the barriers that exist to the development of cross-border education and that could be used as a template for development in other areas to tackle the fact that there are schools facing closure in rural and border communities.

Mr Kinahan has brought a number of motions to this House, and they have been used to criticise Sinn Féin's stealthy road to a united Ireland. One of them was about the public ownership of Lough Neagh. The last one was

about ESA. I am absolutely amazed that he has not used the opportunity today to talk about a stealthy road to a united Ireland; this would have been his best opportunity ever.

One of the terms of reference for the area-planning process was that the Minister asked the education and library boards and the CCMS to explore possibilities for cross-border sharing. Members of the Education Committee will know that that has not been done. In the absence of that, it really is up to parents and pupils to outline their preference for a cross-border model, because it is clear that it is not going to come from the education and library boards and the CCMS. It is going to have to come from the ground.

Michelle McIlveen and Tom Elliott claimed that people in Fermanagh did not know that this consultation was taking place, but every parent of a child in P1, P7 and first year got a letter from John O'Dowd saying that this survey exercise was under way and encouraging them to go online. Better than that, Mr O'Dowd appeared in the 'Impartial Reporter' a fortnight ago urging the 1,100-odd parents of people in those years in Fermanagh to complete the survey.

Jonathan Craig claims that there is no demand for this, but the whole purpose of this survey is to identify the demand. How can somebody hanging out in Lisburn say that there is no demand for sharing or the further development of cross-border education in a border corridor? He then goes on to say that we are not at a stage yet where teachers and parents can go across the border.

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

Mr Flanagan: I welcome those comments from the DUP. It seems that it wants to move to the stage where pupils and teachers can freely cross the border for educational purposes.

Mr Allister: Is it a sign of the total disconnect of this House from reality that only one other Member in this debate about cross-border education even mentioned the matter of cost? Every day that we meet here, we discuss issues around austerity. We had a debate today about the failings in child poverty.

We are constantly told about the cost pressures. We hear about them in the welfare debate and in everything else. Yet, here we have a proposition that inescapably costs the Northern Ireland taxpayer substantial amounts of money. We already know that 400 children from the Irish Republic are educated for free in the schools of Northern Ireland and that fewer than 200 children from Northern Ireland are educated in the schools of the Irish Republic. Straight away, one can see that there is a financial deficit. When the Finance Minister was asked about that deficit, he said that it was more than £1 million. When the Education Minister is asked about it, he has no interest in it whatsoever.

6.30 pm

It does not end there. We now know from questions that I have asked that there are over 4,000 students from the Irish Republic in our regional colleges getting education for free at a cost of over £8 million per annum. There are over 4,000 students from the Irish Republic in our universities getting education that we subsidise at a cost of over £4 million per annum. In education alone, the Northern

Ireland taxpayer puts his hand in his pocket to educate students and pupils from the Irish Republic to the tune of £13.5 million a year. I have no problem with students from the Irish Republic coming to study in Northern Ireland, but they need to bring their chequebook with them. This is not a free handout, but that is what it has been.

It is in that sense and on that path that the Minister wants to take us further. With no regard to the cost, he wants to have more students from the Irish Republic whom we educate at our expense in our schools, and they walk in free. More than that, one of his colleagues said that we needed to provide them with free transport. Is there no point at which this House connects with reality and begins to face up to what we are talking about? If there is going to be any talk about cross-border education, it is time that it is costed and paid for. Those who benefit from it or their Government should pay us for it. We cannot go on like this.

Of course, because the Minister sees no border and wants no border, he is happy to peddle his all-Ireland agenda, of which this, undoubtedly, is a part. He peddles it in terms of parental choice. That from the Minister who, with the greatest possible totalitarian vigour, stamps on parental choice in Northern Ireland when it comes to parents who want their kids to go to a grammar school or to go through a selective process. He is the man who is most vigorous in denouncing and denying parental choice. When it comes to this matter, it is all dressed up in giving the parents of the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland the choice of where they educate their children and we will pay for it. I think not.

It is not just a matter of paying for it in the sense of paying for the teachers and the cost of education. There is also the question of capital costs. If you have an influx of pupils and you need a school extension in Northern Ireland, who will pay for it? The Northern Ireland exchequer will pay for it. That is why I come back to the point that it really is time that we rooted this debate —

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

Mr Allister: — in some reality, and that reality is the financial reality. The fact that so many just want to close their eyes to that is indicative of the motives that they really have.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Beidh Comhaltai ar an eolas, ón phreasráiteas d'eisigh mé ar 23 Deireadh Fómhair agus le déanaí ó na fógraí sna nuachtáin áitiúla ar chonair na teorann, go bhfuil suirbhé ar bun ag mo Róinn le trí sheachtain anuas — *[Interruption.]* It is good to hear the ignoramuses from across the Chamber, who, in an education debate — *[Interruption.]* Go and look "ignoramus" up in the dictionary, and you will find its true meaning. During an education debate, they will criticise someone for using another language. Every time it happens, it amazes me that, during an education debate, you would be criticised for using the Irish language or, indeed, another language. Then again, some people from across the Chamber never cease to amaze me.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy] in the Chair)

From my recent press release of 23 October and, more recently, from adverts in the local papers along the border corridor, Members will be aware that my Department has been undertaking a cross-border survey. Neither I nor my Department is involved in a cross-border consultation,

as the motion suggests. It is important that motions are accurate, and the Business Committee or the Business Office may wish to investigate or reflect on that.

Earlier this year, through the medium of the North/South Ministerial Council — a body that was established under the Good Friday Agreement and ratified again under the St Andrews Agreement and is part of the institutions that we are all Members of — I discussed the importance of facilitating parental preference in the selection of schools. We noted the change in population on both sides of the border and discussed how that might impact on schools. We recognised that the current budgetary climate presented opportunities — note that line — for school planning in border areas.

Mr Kinahan spent most of his presentation telling me that I did not listen, that I needed to sit down and listen and that we needed to stop and listen. A survey gathers the views of people. Surely that is listening.

Mr Kinahan: It is an example.

Mr O'Dowd: It certainly is an example, so why are you looking to me to stop it? Why are you looking to me to stop conducting the survey, which, by the way, is estimated to cost approximately £5,200? That is information that I think it is important for Members to have. That is not a big amount, and I have to congratulate my Department on the work that it has undertaken through its data and statistics branch. That has saved significant funds. So, here we are: as Minister, I am conducting a survey and gathering views and seeing what the reality is on the ground, as Mr Kinahan tells me I have to do.

I have been a Member for eight years, but I am not aware of the cross-party working group around the Minister for Regional Development, which advises him what policy decisions he should make. However, Mr Kinahan has suggested that I, as Minister of Education, should have an all-party working group around me that would advise me on what decisions I should take. That is strange. I am also aware that, when a Minister from the UUP held the Employment and Learning portfolio during previous terms, there was no all-party working group advising or perhaps telling the Minister for Employment and Learning what decisions he should make. Mr Kinahan and his party have somehow misread the 1998 Act and the St Andrews Act, and they believe that they have the authority to establish an all-party working group around me, as a Sinn Féin Minister, to tell me what decisions to make. It does not exist in legislation, and it is not going to happen. I am the Minister of Education, and I make the decisions; that is my job. That is my job under the ministerial code, it is my job under legislation, and it is my job as the person responsible for making the decisions. I do not shirk from those decision-making responsibilities. For some reason, Mr Kinahan has decided to set himself on a course in the Chamber as the person who is going to cause controversy in education. I have listened to three speeches from Mr Kinahan in the Chamber, and I have not heard one policy proposal in any of them. I have heard a collection of mistruths, half-truths and factual inaccuracies, but I have not heard a policy. That is the difference between Mr Kinahan and me.

Mr Kennedy: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I would be grateful if you or the Speaker would review the comments of the Minister of Education. He

implied that my party colleague Mr Kinahan was guilty of “mistruths” — I think that was what he said. There should be detailed scrutiny of the Minister of Education's inflammatory comments, and you or the Speaker should bring forward a response.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I will certainly refer to the Hansard report. I also advise all Members to moderate their comments and to make them from a standing and not a sedentary position.

Mr O'Dowd: Thank you, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. If any of my comments were unparliamentary, I will have no difficulty whatsoever in withdrawing them.

The important difference between Mr Kinahan and me is that I have policies that I am prepared to defend and debate and engage with people around. Mr Kinahan has no policies.

Mr Kinahan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: No, you have had all your time. You have had three speeches in which to deliver policies, and I have not heard one.

So, that is the difference. Now, disagreeing with a policy is different from saying that the policy is rubbish or a mess or that there is a crisis. Why would any Education Minister want to destroy the education service or the Education Department? That is just nonsense. You may disagree with my policies, but I assure you that I am serious about education. I am serious about making changes in young people's lives. I am serious about creating the world-class education system that your party and others in the Chamber claimed for decades that we had. When it failed the young people who were supposed to be getting a service from that system, it was not the service's fault, it was the young people's. You left generations of young people behind you, and, when I hear you talk about education, all I hear is the needs of a minority of schools. I am not interested in the needs of a minority of schools; I am interested in all schools and all young people.

Why have we brought forward the cross-border survey? To put it quite simply, it is because we need to know the attitudes of people around the border to education services and whether we can or should deliver them on a cross-border basis.

Mr Allister referred to figures. I do not know whether the figures relating to the Employment and Learning Minister's responsibilities are accurate; I will allow that Minister to respond to those. Mr Allister purports to say that I spend around £1 million a year on pupils from the South. In its context, that figure is correct. He does not take into account the number of pupils who travel from the North to the South. His original figure of £1 million represents 0.05% of my budget — an important amount that I am not dismissing but putting into context for Members. If we follow the equation through as we should and take into account the number of pupils who travel to the South without being charged, a saving comes back to us. So, we are actually talking about 0.025% of my budget. That is what Mr Allister is getting vexed about in the corner.

I was reared in a family where I was told that the pennies make pounds, and he is quite correct that we have to look after all our finances. I am not sure that it is worth the rise in blood pressure that it brings to Mr Allister, but it is not the finances, you see, it is —

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I will, briefly.

Mr Allister: Of course there is a balance between the two-way movement. However, whatever the figure is, does the Minister agree in principle that the Government of those to whom we provide a service should pay for it and vice versa? Do you agree with that principle?

Mr O'Dowd: I certainly agree with that principle. In the first discussions that Minister Quinn and I had about cross-border education, the issue of finance was raised. One of the issues that we will have to deal with, as we consider the returns from the attitudinal survey and the report at the next North/South Ministerial Council and whether there is to be a further programme of work from this, will be how each jurisdiction finances the cross-border element of the work. Of course it is relevant, but I do not think that that is your objection or the objection of some Members across from me in the House. The objection — 14 years on from the Good Friday Agreement — is “cross-border”. Political unionism somehow wants to believe that politics in this society has not moved on and that the Good Friday Agreement did not happen. The truth is that Ministers from North and South meet very regularly and plan the delivery of cross-border services to the communities that they represent. It is happening daily; in fact, it is now routine. When Ministers come to the House to report on the North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meetings, Members hardly attend, because it happens every day of the week. Members' lack of interest may be a good or a bad thing, but it is clear that services are being delivered, particularly to border corridor communities.

6.45 pm

I note Mr Elliott's comment that a number of his constituents did not receive the survey or did not receive the code to go on to the computer. I would be interested if Mr Elliott could provide me with more information on that. I would be disappointed if we left families and individuals out of the survey. I want to have as broad and representative a voice as possible heard in relation to this matter, because, through that, we will be able to establish a better service for whatever is needed across the border.

Members may also be interested to know, in terms of cross-border planning, that Minister Quinn plans to build at least 20 new schools in his jurisdiction. Most of those will be around the main population centres, but some of them may well be along the border. Surely there is an opportunity there for a wee bit of cross-border planning for us to save the money that Mr Allister is concerned about. If we do not have to build a school on our side of the border and Minister Quinn builds a school on his side of the border, surely that is a wee bit of common sense — cross-border services being delivered, the public purse being protected and services being delivered to the communities that need them. It works both ways. We need to know exactly what the demand is, what the barriers are and what the potential is. Then we will plan, going towards the future, how we will deliver services to the border communities. It also has to be recognised — representatives from all sides of the House will know this — that border communities can be some of the most marginalised communities in our society and that they have been derelict of public investment for many years. That matter is now being slowly but surely rectified, and,

through this small piece of work, we will be able to do more on that.

Some Members were concerned that my only concern at the moment was the cross-border survey and that I had more important things to concentrate on. Indeed, the motion states that I have more important things to concentrate on. This is only an element of my work. It is one part of the programme of work that I have rolled out. There are other important elements of work being rolled out.

I note Members' concerns about selection. Mr Kinahan has proposed that we should continue a single test for two years. What about this for a counterproposal: what about abandoning academic selection for two years, moving on from there and having a debate? There is a proposal that is worth as much merit as your proposal to keep the status quo for two years. The Democratic Unionist Party says that I should concentrate on academic selection. Is the DUP prepared to put the legislation that protects academic selection on the table for discussion? That would be an interesting discussion, and it would open up a whole load of options for the future of academic selection. The current scenario is not the best way forward. I firmly believe that academic selection is unnecessary. I also know that we have not convinced all the people we need to convince to move away from it, but Members opposite cannot demand that academic selection be retained and not learn from all the other processes that we are involved in. If there are going to be discussions about academic selection, put everything on the table and allow an open and frank discussion to take place around that, instead of walking into discussions, as we have seen in the past, with the protection of legislation in place and saying that we will discuss everything but not the legislation. That is not the best way forward. I can assure Members that my —

Mr Kinahan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr O'Dowd: Very quickly.

Mr Kinahan: Does that mean that the Minister is willing to sit down if everything is put on the table? Does that mean that we can all be involved and all have a chance to influence education?

Mr O'Dowd: I am prepared to sit down and discuss individual topics, but I am not prepared to hand over my ministerial authority to an all-party working group. I am the Minister. I make the decisions. However, if the Member is suggesting that there is potential for individual subjects to be discussed and debated, of course I am up for that, but let us put everything on the table for discussion, where everybody walks into the room as equals, where everybody's opinion is equal and where opportunities are made to resolve that. I am prepared to do that and have always been prepared to do that.

Members, I can assure you all that my total focus is not on the cross-border survey. It is an integral part of my work programme, but it is not the only part of my work programme, as Members will be acutely aware.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. The motion has been proven to be rather confused, contradictory and, indeed, poorly drafted. I doubt that it would pass my learned friend's muster, were he to subject it to detailed examination. On the one hand, it:

“recognises that there are circumstances in which parents living close to the border may wish to send their children to a school in the neighbouring jurisdiction”

and expresses concern that the survey was confined to too small an area. However, it offers no alternative. Mr Elliott plucked a figure out of the air, but we have no indication of whether that is the Ulster Unionist policy. On the other hand, the motion recognises the issue as being of:

“potentially significant consequence for the future of education”.

That sounds to me like an issue of huge importance. However, it states that the Minister should make it secondary to other important issues such as area-based planning, selection and equal access to education standards. There is an obvious contradiction here. Area-based planning is one of the important issues raised by the motion. Surely a consultation on that should include the areas that interface with the border. As I said, it is clear that the motion is confused and contradictory.

The SDLP amendment, on the other hand, states clearly that the cross-border survey should be part of area-based planning. This was the very point that I was getting at when, at Question Time on 25 September, I asked the Minister to say to what extent cross-border co-operation would be considered as part of area-based planning. The Minister, in his response, made it clear that he expected the education and library boards to include information collected through the survey on cross-border education in their plans.

The areas that the survey will cover extend for six miles on either side of the border in the case of primary schools and 12 miles for post-primary schools. The area was selected on the basis of current trends and seems reasonable under the circumstances. I have heard no sustainable rationale from the supporters of the motion for any enlargement of this area.

Mr Kinahan appealed for a group to be set up to deal with outstanding issues. There was such a group previously, and, as I recall, the then Ulster Unionist Party spokesperson on education rarely attended. When he did attend, he could not wait to leave in order to leak information from the group to one of the evening newspapers here. If a group is established, I hope that it is more watertight from an Ulster Unionist point of view than its predecessor.

Mr Lunn: Does the Member agree that the Member to whom he refers also put out statements on meetings that he had not attended?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute.

Mr D Bradley: I recall that that happened on several occasions. Of course, the Member afterwards denied that he did it.

Mr Rogers made a strong case for the amendment. He gave the example of St Mary's High School in Brollagh, which is 15 minutes from Ballyshannon and an hour and a half from Enniskillen. He said that its closure would kill a rural community. He said that access to locally provided education is a right, not a privilege, and that it makes sense to have co-operation between Ballyshannon and Brollagh. Tom Elliott, to give him his due, agreed with that.

Mr Allister and Miss McIlveen were very concerned with questions of cost. The Minister dealt with those questions.

Mr Hazzard referred to the fact that the survey will reveal key information on cross-border educational co-operation and that, on the basis of that information, we will be in a better position to make informed decisions about co-operation in education along that border corridor. The outcome will indicate where such co-operation needs support and development. Surely that information will be extremely useful to the education system here.

Mr Lunn outlined a strong argument for the amendment on behalf of the Alliance Party and stated that cross-border co-operation could be very beneficial to religious minorities on both sides of the border.

Tá mise sásta tacaíocht a thabhairt don leasú, agus gabhaim buíochas leat as ucht deis cainte a thabhairt domh ar an ábhar tábhachtach seo. Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to speak on this issue. I urge Members to support the amendment.

Mrs Dobson: I support the motion. During the debate that we had in the House last week on school inspections, I made the point that a conflicting conveyor belt of policies is coming from the Department. Those policies deflect the attention of principals and their staff away from achieving the wholly effective leadership that is in the best interest of pupils and their schools.

Mr Flanagan: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Dobson: No. I want to make my points.

It is also true that those conflicting policies deflect the Department's attention away from dealing with the issues that are most important to our schools and, ultimately, every pupil in Northern Ireland.

Concentrating time, effort and funding on politically motivated issues such as cross-border education, which impacts on a minute number of pupils, is merely a Sinn Féin sideshow that further dilutes the efforts being made to tackle the major issues. During last week's debate, Sinn Féin accused Mr Kinahan and me of failing to show political leadership. The Minister later accused me of not representing all my constituents when I made representation to him to retain the successful and popular Dickson plan in Upper Bann.

The Ulster Unionist Party motion highlights clearly Sinn Féin's politically motivated agenda in the education of our young people and how, through a narrow focus on cross-border education, major priorities are left on the sidelines as dogma is placed before delivery. If we were to look at Sinn Féin's political leadership in education over the past 11 years, we would see that it has presided over a catalogue of failure and missed opportunity shown by, among other things, thousands of empty school desks; demoralised teaching staff; school leadership that is classed as failing because of the Department's interference in school management; and failed computer systems that are a frustration to teachers and potentially damaging to pupils' education. All that comes at a time when literacy and numeracy achievements among the most deprived, especially among Protestant working-class boys, are unacceptably low.

At the end of it all, the Minister argues that his focus is not on schools but on pupils. That is a thinly veiled

argument for introducing politically motivated reforms that do not have the support of the majority of people in Northern Ireland. It is only right that those of us in the House who oppose these policies make our views known. This motion provides that opportunity. Given the massive challenges facing teachers, parents and pupils, it is Sinn Féin and Sinn Féin alone that stands bereft of the qualities necessary to lead our education system into the future.

We must work towards a modern system that delivers academic excellence for all our children. Political solutions that ignore the views of those at the coalface of education cannot ever deliver effective change. Principals, teachers, parents and pupils need to be fully involved in and consulted about the future of their schools. That should not be achieved by politically time-bound consultations designed to merely rubber stamp decisions that have already been taken but by the Department refocusing on the major issues and directly involving all those affected in genuine and open debate. It should not be done by fixating on political issues that have little impact beyond dogma and, indeed, could pre-empt and conflict with other departmental policies and consultations, such as area planning.

Danny Kinahan explained that the motion should be a wake-up call for many in the House to stop the galloping reforms and changes that the Education Minister proposes. He called for people to step back and pause and for everyone to work together towards one educational vision and to concentrate on an agreed way forward. He said that we could not go on the way that we are.

Important steps are required on ESA, and that is where the Minister's focus should be instead of on pressing simple political posturing. Mr Kinahan said that we need to think through where the cross-border consultation is taking us.

7.00 pm

Sean Rogers said that the debate is fundamentally about cross-border education. He also said that he is confused about the motion and that cross-border education needs to be part of the area-based planning debate. He said that he understood the concern of Members regarding the Department's priorities.

Michelle McIlveen said that she supported the motion and agreed that issues such as area planning and the selection process should be given greater prominence by the Minister and the Department. She said that she would also like to see a greater focus on addressing educational underachievement and suggested that, as a region, Northern Ireland could draw the short straw when it came to the Minister's priorities towards cross-border education. She suggested that the different education system, including examinations, in the Republic, may disadvantage pupils from Northern Ireland. She also suggested that the Minister is more interested in the politics than in the pupils.

Trevor Lunn said that he could see the problems that Protestant families could have. He spoke about the possibility of an influx of pupils from the Republic to Northern Ireland and said, "Let us wait and see". Surely he would agree that it is better to raise concerns in the Chamber than to adopt a wait-and-see stance.

Jonathan Craig spoke about the importance of not fixating on the issue of cross-border education.

Michaela Boyle asked whether the Ulster Unionist Party had conducted its own survey. She may or may not be aware that only last week we sent correspondence to every school and board of governors in Northern Ireland. Only a week later, we have already been inundated with responses, many of which contain a palpable sense of frustration and express a continued annoyance at the direction of travel from the Department, a direction that is increasingly political. Those are the people with whom the Minister should be consulting.

It may come as a surprise to the Minister, but I do speak to principals in primary, secondary and further education campuses in all sectors across my constituency. It is a sad fact that I very seldom hear them talk about his Department in complimentary terms. In fact, I am often told of the copious missives that our schools receive from his Department every week, often conflicting and seldom helpful.

As the Minister reflects on his priorities, will he give the House his assurance that he will endeavour to build bridges with school leaders and begin the process of drastically improving communication between his Department and schools? Will he show that leadership and begin to refocus on delivering solutions to the major issues? That can only be in the best interests of all our pupils, not just sections of them. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 48; Noes 43.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mr Rogers

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, 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, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Dobson and Mr Kinahan

Question accordingly agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 48; Noes 43.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mr Rogers

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, 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, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Dobson and Mr Kinahan

Main Question, as amended, accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the consultation on cross-border education; recognises that there are circumstances in which parents living close to the border may wish to send their children to a school in the neighbouring jurisdiction; and calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that this consultation is robust and is included as part of the area planning process.

Employment Law Reform

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

Mr Ross: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises that the national Government have undertaken a review of employment law to reduce the regulatory burden on businesses; and urges the Minister for Employment and Learning to ensure that Northern Ireland does not fall behind the rest of the UK in terms of reforms.

In recent months, a number of motions have been brought to the Floor of this House asking for various measures to be taken to help stimulate our local economy. We have no remit over many of those measures, and we call on Westminster to take action. However, today's motion is something that the Minister in the devolved Assembly can take some action on.

Employment law is an area devolved to the Assembly, and, therefore, the Minister in this House could take steps to help local businesses. Given that it is a devolved issue, we could take a different route and tailor a response that is specific to Northern Ireland. However, I will argue that, in this specific area, that will not be in the interests of the Northern Ireland economy. I fear that if we do not keep up to speed with reforms that have already taken place at Westminster, that will be bad for attracting investors and will be bad for local business.

On Wednesday, we were briefed on the issue by the Minister in the Committee. Mr Flanagan made a point during that briefing that he harboured a suspicion that perhaps unionists were just backing this issue because that is what they were doing in the rest of the United Kingdom. It is true to say that, in employment law, Northern Ireland has generally mirrored what has happened in the rest of the UK, but if we have increased levels of red tape for businesses looking to set up here in Northern Ireland, elsewhere in the UK suddenly becomes much more attractive to them. Therefore, we would be at a competitive disadvantage to other regions of the United Kingdom.

I make the point to Mr Flanagan that, when we have identified areas where we are at a competitive disadvantage to our neighbours — the greatest example is when we are at a competitive disadvantage to our closest neighbours in the Irish Republic — unionists on this side of the House have taken steps that bring us out of step with the rest of the United Kingdom. Examples of that are the devolution of air passenger duty (APD) and the devolution of corporation tax. Those are issues that we, on this side of the House, will look at individually in order to help our economy.

As I said, the Minister has now taken the step of briefing the Committee. He brought a motion to the Floor of the House, which is encouraging, but it is fair to say that, up until this point, the Minister has walked somewhat of a tightrope, and he has not given too much away in

respect of his preference of whether he will bring forward reforms to this House. The amendment in the name of his colleagues in the Alliance Party reflects that position and probably leaves us no clearer about whether the Minister intends to bring forward any legislation on this issue. However, it is important that Members from all sides of the House are able to tease out some concerns that they have with reforms or to push the Minister to bring those forward. Given that we are keen on this being a take-note debate, we will not divide the House because of the amendment.

The Minister has already outlined to the House and to the Committee on Wednesday that there are many areas where there is general agreement between employer bodies and the trade unions, and I hope that he will go through those again in his summing up. Indeed, there are some areas where there is agreement among Members of this House. Greater use of the Labour Relations Agency is an example that Members from all sides of the House have welcomed. Early resolution is important in reducing costs to small businesses that, more often than not, are forced to settle early to avoid the time and cost of these things rumbling on any longer.

There are other areas in which we are ahead of the United Kingdom, which we, obviously, do not need to change.

7.30 pm

However, concerns have been expressed by Members opposite in certain areas. One such area is the extension of the qualifying period for unfair dismissal claims from one year to two years. I am sure that the Minister, in his response, will inform Members that this is nothing new: changes have been made to that period many times over the past number of decades. There has not been any notable impact on employees' abilities to protect themselves.

It is important that we give business the flexibility and confidence to hire and, indeed, to let staff go as their needs change or if staff underperform. I do not subscribe to the view that this will dilute workers' rights. Indeed, I think that there is a strong argument, which I put to the Minister on Wednesday 14 November 2012, that a longer period allows companies more time to fully assess an employee's performance. Therefore, it can be beneficial to workers, particularly in areas of employment where sales targets are important.

Many areas of the reform introduced by the coalition Government are about making systems simpler and avoiding unnecessary cost to small businesses for dispute resolution. Obviously, that is important to Northern Ireland, which has a small-business economy in which 98% of firms employ fewer than 20 people. SMEs provide some 80% of private sector jobs here. I noted from the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) members' survey in 2011 that 70% of its members believed that employment law in Northern Ireland deterred and discouraged growth. There is a fear among employers who want to take on new staff that employment legislation can often be used to take advantage of them. That should be of concern to us. If small businesses feel vulnerable and are being disincentivised from taking on more staff, we need to look at that very seriously.

It is also important to note that it is not just a matter for small businesses. Time and again, we listen to larger

businesses, such as Tesco, BT, etc, tell us — in fact, they emphasise — how important it is that regulations are the same across the whole of the United Kingdom. Again, it is fairly self-evident why that would be the case. Having different employment regulations in Northern Ireland would mean that it cost those businesses more for systems and training to ensure that they are compliant. That point is also made by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), which says that managing employment law variance in different regions of the UK incurs an additional cost.

Of course, if there were two regulatory systems, it would also be potentially very damaging to our efforts to continue to attract back-office operations from elsewhere in the UK and run them here in Northern Ireland. The additional legal and other costs for separate systems could disincentivise firms from doing that. BT is a prime example. If it cost BT more to run an office in Northern Ireland than it would in, say, the Midlands or Glasgow, those jobs will ultimately be lost. Members must stand up and recognise that, in the modern world, work is mobile and costs are critical to all businesses.

It is, perhaps, most evident in the work that we do to pitch Northern Ireland to foreign investors. A significant part of our foreign direct investment (FDI) pitch is that Northern Ireland is part of the same regulatory framework as the rest of the United Kingdom and that we operate under the same labour laws and legal framework. We need to ensure that we do not dilute that message by having different regulations and less business-friendly employment laws in this part of the United Kingdom than would be the case in Great Britain.

Previously, I heard the Minister say that we lack evidence of the impact of some of these reforms. However, if he honestly believes that having a tougher regulatory system for businesses to comply with will be more attractive to potential investors, he needs to get out and speak to more companies. Recently, in my capacity as Assembly private secretary in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), I had the opportunity to meet representatives of a number of companies from the United States that were considering whether to invest in Northern Ireland. All of them raised with us the issue of employment regulations in various parts of Europe. They said that it was a key determining factor in whether they would invest.

If we are less attractive than the rest of the UK and laws here remove flexibility for companies to adapt their workforce, they will seek to invest in other parts of the United Kingdom. It will not be good for us if we are unable to compete with other regions. It is a clear reason why we need to ensure that Northern Ireland does not fall behind reforms elsewhere. If we are serious about job creation in Northern Ireland, Members should argue that, as a minimum, we keep up to speed with the rest of the UK. Indeed, that is why, of course, all major parties in the House are behind a reduction in corporation tax. It will help us to attract companies to invest in Northern Ireland, particularly companies from overseas, including the US.

In conclusion, I fear that we are already behind the rest of the United Kingdom in the reform of employment law. We need to ensure that any time lag is kept to an absolute minimum. We often hear people ask what Stormont is doing to create jobs. Of course, it is not the Government that creates jobs; ultimately, it is employers and business. It is our role as legislators to create the right atmosphere

and environment for employers to have the confidence to take on more staff and to create job opportunities for people across Northern Ireland by investing here.

A business-friendly regulatory framework, coupled with the highly skilled workforce that we boast of, will undoubtedly make Northern Ireland a very attractive place to do business. Even though we have fallen behind the rest of the UK in respect of reform, if the House gives a clear indication today that it will ensure we are not less attractive than other regions of the UK and that it is serious about helping business rather than hindering it, we will send out a strong message to small business that we are on its side and a signal to possible inward investors that Northern Ireland is open for business and is a more attractive place to invest than alternatives elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

I urge the Minister to push ahead with reforming employment law here, and I ask the House to endorse the motion and ensure that Northern Ireland is an attractive place to do business.

Mr Lyttle: I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after "Assembly" and insert

"notes that the Minister for Employment and Learning has initiated a wide-ranging review of employment law in line with the commitment made in the economic strategy; endorses a modern, efficient and integrated employment law system that works in the interests of business, helps our economy to grow, attracts investment and encourages companies to recruit new staff, and at the same time provides sufficient protection for the rights of employees, with opportunities for redress; and calls on the Minister to have due regard to changes in employment law in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland."

I welcome the opportunity to debate such an important economic issue as employment law. The amendment is in line with the Alliance Party's aim to produce employment law that will deliver competitiveness for employers and protect employee rights in the region. The amendment notes that the Minister for Employment and Learning has, indeed, initiated a wide-ranging review of employment law in line with the commitment made in the economic strategy to achieve that aim. The Minister outlined details of the review in the House recently.

During the statement, he also declared three outcomes that he hoped to achieve as a result of the review. I broadly agree with those outcomes, the first of which is to make Northern Ireland a model for employment relations and to consolidate it as a place to do business.

The second is to shift the balance of how complaints are addressed and to establish a culture and process of alternative dispute resolution in order to ensure that the bureaucracy that Mr Ross spoke about earlier is decreased and that early resolution is encouraged. I welcome the fact that the Labour Relations Agency is leading change in that area.

The third outcome is to simplify the tribunals process. It is the Alliance Party's view that if that can be achieved, we would create a better system for dealing with employment law in Northern Ireland than would be the case if we were simply to follow the Great British model. I agree that the

current system is too time-consuming for employees and employers and that it can create unnecessary stress for both.

I welcome that, in an effort to achieve consensus among employers and employees in the region, the Labour Relations Agency will soon facilitate a round-table forum for key employee and employer bodies. I hope that that reform can help to lay the foundation for an efficient and integrated employment law system that works for business, helps the economy to grow, attracts investment, encourages companies to recruit staff and protects the rights of employees. I believe that the Assembly has the opportunity to show the public and businesses in Northern Ireland how devolution can work to their benefit.

I also welcome the fact that Department for Employment and Learning officials are identifying appropriate support mechanisms for the SME sector in order to assist compliance with employment law and that the Labour Relations Agency is undertaking early resolution projects to consolidate an emphasis on early intervention.

In closing, I welcome the opportunity to debate this important issue. I ask Members to support the Alliance Party amendment, as it acknowledges that the Minister has initiated a sound work programme for employment law in Northern Ireland, while recognising that we as legislators have an opportunity to create a system of employment law, unique to our region, that could be held up as best practice by other Governments.

Mr B McCrea (The Chairperson of the Committee for Employment and Learning): I am happy to have the opportunity to talk on this issue. I agree with the proposer of the motion that what we are really looking for is a way of simplifying bureaucracy and encouraging employment in this part of the world. The motion calls for us to make sure that we keep up to speed with what is going on in other parts of the world, specifically the United Kingdom. The question, of course, is whether keeping up to speed actually means doing the right thing. We may be able to do things that are better than what others are doing. We will probably want to address that. The issue is not just about keeping up to speed; it is about whether we could be different and, if we are going to be different, whether we could be better.

So, I will move to address, in general terms, the amendment that my Alliance Party colleague tabled. The issue about the aspirations is admirable. *[Interruption.]* I did think about that, actually, but it is too late. It is late. *[Interruption.]* It is too late.

Mr Kinahan: Is there something that you want to tell me?

Mr B McCrea: I will tell you later, Danny. It will be all right.

When we look at the aspirations that Mr Lyttle set out, we see that they are all, of course, very worthy. The question is how to reconcile some of the divergent views that are put forward in the consultation process. I have to say that that is really the key to all this. We have to resolve any disagreement.

So, there is a discussion about whether there should be a qualifying period of one or two years. I listened to the Minister talk about the fact that some people argued that moving to a two-year qualifying period would actually be detrimental to the process. That is because you would switch claims that would have been dealt with in an unfair

dismissal tribunal to something that is to do with equality legislation.

I know that this suggestion for the Minister is not for the faint-hearted, but I think that any all-encompassing review that he is considering should look at the impact of the equality legislation. All the issues that we have brought forward and all the reports that I have seen said that all the matters involved have more or less been resolved. We ought to be able to deal with equality issues by exception rather than rote. There must be something that we can do to take the burden away from that. Nobody is trying to defend any instance where there has been inappropriate action, but we have largely done the job on that particular case. So, I would be interested to hear from the Minister whether he will tackle that.

I will also say, in a fairly benign way, that, like the Member who moved the motion, I am happy to accept the amendment. That is because we are really at the start of this discussion and dealing with it in Committee and suchlike. I think that that Member asked a fairly pertinent question of the Minister when he asked what the Minister's view of all this is. The Minister has been very good about saying that we must consult, we must take on people's views, everybody's stakeholders are in there, and that he would be particularly keen to hear from stakeholders about where you can get some agreement between employer bodies and employees. However, nowhere have we actually heard what the Minister thinks or what he would like to drive forward.

What is his vision? What would he recommend to us at this stage? What is he trying to achieve? I think that that is what it is going to come down to. He will not be able to resolve every single issue that comes across his table, because, quite simply, there will be a divergence of views. So, his role is to say, as the Minister for Employment, and I suppose, Learning as well, that, "These are the recommendations that I would like to see implemented. This is what I want to do; this is what I want to do." It needs something of a charge, and I said to him that I would rather that we were in the vanguard of this procedure than following meekly behind.

I know that there is sometimes an argument that, if we wait a bit longer, we will get it right. Actually, our economy is in such a situation that we need to try to overcome employers' reluctance to take on new people at this stage. We need to encourage them to take people into their place of work, because once they are working, it is easier to train them up and to skill them. They will also find that people are worth keeping on. The biggest tragedy for our economy will be if we do not get young people in some form of placement or, in fact, anybody in some form of placement. If we could, within reason, remove the regulatory burden, encourage people to go into work, encourage employers to take them on board and find a way through to that solution, I would be in full support of it. On that basis, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I support both the amendment and the motion.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Before I start, I apologise to the Minister and to the Members who will speak after me. I have to leave after I speak, because I have to be in Enniskillen for 8.00 pm, which will be a good feat. *[Laughter.]* I welcome this debate and the opportunity to take part in it. This is part of a wide-ranging discussion that is currently under

way on a reform of employment law. It started out with an extensive consultation document that the Minister launched. That was followed by the changes that have and are taking place in Britain and the rest of Ireland, the statement that the Minister made to the House and the visit by the Minister to the Committee last Wednesday. Those are all very useful parts of the process. As the Chair of the Committee said, we are still no further forward in finding out what the Minister's specific proposals are, but hopefully they will come. I will review Hansard tomorrow to see whether they come out this evening.

7.45 pm

There is a general and widely held acceptance that we need to have a review of employment law. Clearly coming out in the Alliance Party amendment is the fact that the review and any proposals that come from it should meet the needs of businesses and employees in a very balanced way. It is clear from Minister Farry's sentiments and comments that he is trying to strike that balance. I suppose that we will all support him in that stance. He has to shuffle difficult cards and has difficult things to manage while taking on board the views of the business community, employers, trade unions and other politicians. It is quite ironic that the Labour Relations Agency has been brought in to mediate on the dispute.

Having recently met the Institute of Directors (IOD) and the CBI, it is obvious that there is a need for a review. The business community is clearly calling for one. Anybody would be daft to ignore that. However, I made it known at the Committee last Wednesday — Mr Ross picked up on this — that we cannot do it simply because it has happened in Britain. We cannot implement what the British Government have simply for the sake of it and just to maintain parity. At the end of the day, it has been done at the whim of the business community; it has not really been done by taking a long-term view into consideration. I really do not know how much consideration has been given to the rights of workers over there.

I have yet to hear the exact views of or proposals from the Minister or any other political party. I am going to spend the next two and a half minutes not making any either, so we will all get on the best.

The one big issue that most people talk about is the qualifying period for unfair dismissal claims. I have yet to hear a convincing argument that increasing the qualifying period for unfair dismissal claims will be of any benefit. A number of people have said that increasing it from one year to two years will make it easier for businesses to hire people. My gut reaction to that is to ask whether it will make it easier to fire people.

Last Thursday, the CBI made the very pertinent point that, for businesses that have the majority of their operations in Britain and want uniformity here, it makes sense for them to have a similar system here. That is something that we cannot ignore. However, an awful lot of those businesses would not simply be based in Britain with a smaller operation here. An awful lot of them would have operations across these islands, across Europe and in many other countries. If there is a different qualifying period for unfair dismissals or a whole host of other things that may or may not change, those are things that businesses, when they move into a new market or are working in other territories, have to take into consideration.

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for giving way. He makes an interesting point about the similar regulatory system right across the United Kingdom. In our efforts to try to draw back-room jobs to Northern Ireland, which will look after HR for the whole of the United Kingdom, it is imperative that we have the same regulatory system. Those jobs will not come to Northern Ireland if we have a different system.

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

Mr Flanagan: I put it to the Member that we would be trying to attract organisations to provide back-room services for companies in not only Britain but all of Europe. There are different employment laws across all of Europe. I completely understand the point that he is making. I see that it is not just based on unionism principles of trying to keep everything the same as Britain; there is a pragmatic approach and an alternative argument to be made. However, I remain to be convinced by it. Before we can make any decisions on what we are doing, it would be useful to see what the Minister proposes. We will all then complain about them in harmony. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr P Ramsey: I support the motion and the amendment. I welcome the amendment from my colleague on the Committee. He made an interesting point about the complex needs of employment law. It might be an idea for the Minister to take up the new 500 student places for Northern Ireland and create a new school of employment law at Magee College, for example. Thanks, Chris.

It is imperative that the economic conditions around regulation and legislation are supportive of economic output in jobs and businesses. The review of employment law in GB and here presents a number of opportunities and, indeed, challenges to not only enhance the business climate but to modernise and tweak some labour laws.

As employment law is a devolved matter, the SDLP does not accept that we should simply mirror the laws in Britain. We have a different operating climate for businesses and different economic challenges, which mean we should grasp the responsibility and customise our employment legislation to meet our specific needs and goals. A precise balance of support for businesses and workers must be our main focus. The motion refers to not falling behind. However, I believe that we have the chance to sail well ahead of the mooted reforms in Britain.

Take, for example, the Beecroft report. Produced as part of the BIS reform of employment law, it suggested some harsh changes to employment law, some of which will have a detrimental effect on workers' protection, whether in unfair dismissal, the dilution of convention rights or the reduction of social gains that have been fought for over many years, such as flexible parental leave. Among other things, the report suggests that the period during which an employer can dismiss an underperforming employee should be extended from one year to two years. The author of the report was strongly in favour of a system whereby an employer can dismiss someone without giving a reason, provided that they make an enhanced leaving payment.

Compensated no-fault dismissal as it is known gives employers an easy way to sack workers, rather than helping to improve the skills and productivity of employers. It also does not take into consideration the implications on workers' employment records and possible long-term

unemployment, which will result in a higher benefits bill. In this time of economic uncertainty, the last thing that we need is for more people to be out of work as a result of relaxing labour laws such as that. Indeed, in a BIS progress report on the recommendations of the report, the Government accepted that there was evidence that the majority of businesses did not support that measure.

Another suggested measure was that small businesses should be exempted from measures such as unfair dismissal, flexible parental leave and equal pay audits. Surely that cannot be something that we would want to introduce in this region. All those proposals do is remove hard-won protections for workers. The SDLP will certainly not accept that.

The Government have conceded that the author's proposal to reintroduce the default retirement age at a higher age bracket is probably in contravention of the European Convention on Human Rights. Again, that is something that I do not want the House to support.

Interestingly, the report refers to consistency of industrial tribunal rulings. A report by the Employment Tribunal System Steering Board (ETSSB) found that consistency in outcomes was not as it should be, and it made a number of recommendations. In his latest speech on the local review, the Minister referred to the Underhill report, and I welcome the fact that he is taking the time to assess all the information on tribunals. Tribunals provide a valuable service, but if we can improve them, we should endeavour to do so. I also welcome the Minister's patience and his sensible and practical approach so far.

Recommendations on the reform of the criminal background check system have been dealt with via the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, and the Home Office is on course to deliver the new online system in spring 2013.

Finally, the equal pay audits that were mentioned in the Beecroft report have been dropped by the Government. They were not welcomed by businesses, but they did identify that some businesses are still discriminating on the basis of sex when paying their workers. The SDLP is very clear that equality means equality for all and not just for men or for women.

Those who tabled the motion should ask themselves what kind of working and trading environment they want here.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr P Ramsey: I strongly support the amendment proposed by Chris.

Mr Buchanan: As a member of the Employment and Learning Committee, I support the motion in the name of my two party colleagues. Our Committee spent considerable time and energy on the complex issue of employment law. We had the Minister's Assembly statement, and a follow-up briefing by him and his officials last week. The motion gives us the opportunity to further air our thoughts here.

Employment law is a devolved matter, as we all know. Therefore, we have the opportunity to tailor it to suit the circumstances and needs of Northern Ireland's businesses and workers. However, we must be careful to ensure that we do not make it a greater burden for employers and employees to comply with. I am in no doubt that the Minister will assert strongly that he is seeking to do

precisely that by making it less complex. His statement to the House on 5 November updated the progress to date, but it is clear that this will be a fairly lengthy process. As we go to public consultation next month, there is no doubt that this will take considerable time. I have no difficulty with developing our own approach, but it is not surprising that businesses, particularly those that operate internationally, find a range of different laws and regulations irksome.

The default position ought to be that we maintain some sort of parity, or at least keep fairly closely in line with the rest of the UK, unless there are compelling reasons to do our own thing. Mike Mullan, chair of CBI Northern Ireland's employment and skills committee, said:

"Northern Ireland is the only region in the UK that has the policy tool and power to create an employment framework that encourages job growth, investment and can become a leader in modern employer/employee relations."

Although I agree with him that we can be different, in the interests of employers and employees, our employment law should be as closely aligned as possible with that in the rest of the UK.

The crux of the motion is that we recognise the work that is being done on employment law by the coalition Government at Westminster, and that we ought to be careful not to fall behind the rest of the United Kingdom. I will take as my main example the vexed issue of the qualifying period for unfair dismissal. The Minister said that there are widely ranging views on that among various stakeholders, and we therefore must take our time. However, I am not so sure that we have the luxury of taking our time on this matter.

We must consider that, from 6 April 2012, in England, Scotland and Wales, the qualifying period for employees wishing to bring an unfair dismissal claim will be two years, an increase from one year. Even if a decision is taken to bring Northern Ireland into line with that, to do so could take up to spring 2014 for that to happen, two years behind the rest of the UK. Is that good practice? Is that good for businesses? I do not think that it is.

I understand that Invest NI has some concerns that the differential may have an adverse impact on firms thinking of investing in Northern Ireland. If that is the case, such a situation is simply untenable. Any impediment to our economic recovery must be tackled and removed, where possible, without delay. Firms in the United States of America — the source of much of our inward investment — are used to flexible employment arrangements in relation to sacking staff who are not up to the job. That must be a factor in our consideration of the qualifying period. That is the sort of issue that we need to address with more urgency. We need the facts and figures to help us to decide on the right way forward. I strongly believe in the rights of workers, but we must remember that many of our firms are SMEs, and a balance must be struck between competing rights.

I was interested in the Chancellor's suggestion at the Conservative Party conference last month that workers should be given the chance to have shares in a company in return for sacrificing some of their employment rights. I understand that that is to come into effect in GB by April next year. Again, it is something that requires careful

consideration here. However, in view of the nature of our business base, it may act as an incentive for employers and employees. Whatever we do or do not do —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Buchanan: — let us make sure that we do not fall any further behind the rest of the UK and that we do not create a greater bureaucratic burden for our businesses. I support the motion.

8.00 pm

Mr F McCann: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I will begin by welcoming the wide-ranging review of employment law being undertaken by the Minister. He has to be commended for that. While the Assembly has the power to pass employment law, we should act on that in a compassionate way. We should not rush down the road of following what has taken place in Westminster, which has seen a diminution of workers' rights over the past number of years.

At the outset, I want to emphasise that we can arrive at a legal framework that helps businesses succeed but also respects the rights of employees. Helping business to succeed does not have to be at the expense of workers' rights. Indeed, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions has pointed out that making it easier to sack people is not the answer to economic prosperity. Rather than diminishing workers' rights, we should enhance their working conditions. I understand that a similar review is being undertaken by the Dublin Government at this time. Would it not be great if both Administrations worked in close co-operation to harmonise employment law where possible?

Mr Ross: Will the Member give way?

Mr F McCann: Yes, certainly.

Mr Ross: It is an important point to make. This is not about making it easier for firms to sack employees. It is about giving them flexibility and confidence in order to take on additional staff. That is good for workers. However, if there is a circumstance where workers are underperforming, of course it is important that businesses are able to get rid of those staff and replace them with more staff to make them more competitive. That is what this is about. It is not a charter for sacking workers.

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

Mr F McCann: It always ends up like that. If you listened to the speech of the last Member who spoke, you would have heard him quote British Ministers who talk not only about making it easier to sack people but about incentives and people getting shares if they accept a diminution of their workers' rights. You would think that Iain Duncan Smith wrote it. There are serious problems there for people, and it could be used and abused right across the board.

People should work in close harmony, certainly cross-border, because they are going through a similar thing at the present time. Maybe the Minister can respond to the point about cross-border co-operation.

I also seek assurance that the Department has engaged meaningfully and had meaningful discussions with trade unions and the Law Centre. Will the Minister, if possible, provide detail on whatever emerging issues there are?

We should remember that workers' rights were hard won. It took several generations to put the rights of workers on a firm footing. We have witnessed successive British Governments continuously eroding those hard-won rights. This is a time when we are facing the biggest unemployment statistics in decades, emigration levels at their worst for years and rising and a welfare Bill that will have deep consequences for tens of thousands of our constituents. It is also important that we get it right when providing training for young people to ensure that they have the skills that will equip them with the experience they require to take up new types of employment. That is why it is crucial that we have an experienced, well-trained workforce — a workforce that knows that we in the Assembly have its back in terms of employment rights.

The motion calls on the Minister to ensure that regulatory burdens on business are reduced. I was concerned because that usually means an attack on workers' rights. I am glad that the supporters of the motion have now accepted the Alliance Party's amendment, which recognises the need for a modern, efficient and integrated employment law system. At the same time, the amendment speaks of the protection of employees' rights, with opportunities for redress. We should always recognise that, in our economy, we have the lowest-paid workforce. We also have the new communities, which are treated differently when it comes to employment law. We are the only ones they can turn to for help.

I listened to the British Prime Minister this morning, with his right-wing ideology, saying that he will abolish the need for equality assessments to be carried out. Slowly but surely, workers' rights are under attack. Let us not go down that road. We should be the voice of business but also the voice of workers.

Mr Hilditch: I support the motion tabled by my colleagues. From time to time, we hear much criticism of business being brought to the Floor of the Assembly that has no relevance to our legislative powers or is outside our control, but, with employment law, we have something that has historically sat separately, on a regional basis, and that now, under devolution, can be shaped and worked to suit our needs and requirements in Northern Ireland. In practice, of course, we need to be mindful of what has been established at European Union level and how that can restrict any radical change to the law and the protection afforded to workers that Europe encompasses. That said, as a regional Government, we now have the opportunity to develop the system and, in particular, ensure that Northern Ireland does not fall behind the rest of the United Kingdom in terms of reform.

The motion recognises that the national Government have undertaken a review of employment law and that it has been policy that the law here should be broadly in line with that in Great Britain. On a lighter note, however, I do not think that, despite the usual time delay that happens in the implementation of some legislation, we will ever again have to wait the 21 years that it took to bring in the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order here in 1997, legislation having been enacted in Great Britain in 1976.

We are aware, of course, that a process of review has started in Northern Ireland, and I acknowledge the work of the Minister and his Department to date. When the discussion paper was launched in May, it was to get the views of all the stakeholders, bearing in mind the

main issues of early resolution of disputes, efficient and effective tribunals and better regulation in general. That exercise has proved to be useful, and a large number of responses were subsequently received.

The Minister's recent statement to the House and his appearance at the Committee last week were encouraging for those who wish to see the matter gather momentum and move forward to a designated timetable if possible. It has been very useful at this stage to determine which policy areas are being taken forward for consideration and which proposals have been identified.

The aim of the motion is to ease and reduce the regulatory burden on business, and, hopefully, the actions that are being taken currently by the Minister and his Department are the beginnings of such easements and a fit-for-purpose legislation that will help to balance the needs of our economy with respect for the rights of every worker.

Although the review will help existing businesses to grow, we must also work to ensure that we are best placed to compete in the global market. Nowadays, we hear only too often of the displacement of industry to other areas or the loss of contracts that do not come our way. I am not saying that current employment law is the reason for that, but, if those charged with bringing in inward investment were armed with good, practical, reformed laws, we just might create an advantage for ourselves over places with poorer or difficult employment legislation.

We need to place ourselves well in the market. I am encouraged by the Minister's initiative of a benchmarking exercise to identify international best practice in employment relations.

In conclusion, I believe that this debate and support for the motion will assist in moving the matter of employment law forward. As we enter the consultative stage in spring 2013 and on towards potential legislation, there will be many more debates and discussions on the more sensitive issues, but we should all focus on best practice. Rather than falling behind on reform, we should make Northern Ireland a model for the workplace.

Mr Kinahan: I am pleased to speak on such a vital matter. It is one that affects all our companies, whether they are small, medium or large concerns. Any motion that tries to lessen bureaucracy and the legal burdens on business is extremely welcome, and, in this day and age, we need to see urgent and dynamic action.

I understand that all these matters have been dealt with well by the Committee and that its members have clarified many of the relevant points, so I will be brief. I am pleased that the UUP is supporting the motion, but, in looking at the amendment, it is essential that the rights of employees are not forgotten. Therefore, we will support the amendment. However, within the amendment lies one of the main difficulties inherent in all that is going on. We need to find a dynamic way of resolving difficulties so that businesses can thrive, employ more people and, at the same time, not forget human rights. There lies the rub. We need all sides to be flexible in trying to find a way forward quickly. I look forward to hearing from the Minister how he thinks we can do it. We cannot go on bleeding jobs and closing businesses. The knock-on effects will be frightening if the spiral keeps going. We all need to think hard about where we are going if this crisis keeps on going in that direction.

I am not going to go into the details of what is happening at Westminster — we all know about Mr Cable's plans for change — other than to highlight that I, in my brief time as an MLA, have been lobbied often on the difficulties of us not being the same as Westminster in having only a one-year qualifying period rather than two when it comes to unfair dismissals. At the same time, I have been lobbied on the high costs of tribunals. We need to find our way forward on that. Sometimes, it may be worth the short-term pain that a two-year qualifying period allows when it lets a company have the flexibility to expand or shrink, employ more or fewer people and make sure that it survives through the present times. After all, that is what we want. I know that one company in Ballyclare is doing its best to find all 25 of its employees jobs across the water while it closes here. We have to keep that in mind all the time.

Mr F McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: I am happy to give way.

Mr F McCann: All that I have heard in the debate from that side of the Chamber is about the burden on employers, about making it easier for employers and about the erosion of rights to protect workers. I would expect that from the UUP, because you were tied to the Conservatives in the last election. However, when you turn round and look at the DUP Benches, you see people who represent working-class communities. It is terrible when people continually talk about employees as if they do not mean anything. We can have the best of both worlds. We can bring in well-paid employment and train people up so that they can go into well-paid jobs. We should keep that in mind. When we talk about the erosion of workers' rights, we are talking about people.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute.

Mr Kinahan: I am glad of the intervention. As I said, there lies the rub. We have to look after employees' rights.

Mr Ross: I thank the Member for giving way. I just want to respond to the accusation made across the way. Does the Member not agree that, in making it easier for businesses to come to Northern Ireland and set up here, we are setting the environment in which jobs can be created? This is about job creation. Anything that we can do to help job creation will help our constituents, whether they are from working-class areas or anywhere else in our constituencies. That is what this is about. It is about job creation and helping those who provide the jobs in society so that our constituents can get them.

Mr Kinahan: I do not get another minute sadly, although I will not go on that long.

That is exactly why we are here. We are here to focus on creating jobs. In a really thriving employment world, which we are not in, when someone loses their job, there should be somewhere else that they can get a job. That should be part of the system. It is vital that companies can expand and keep working and employing. I go back to the point that there lies the rub. We need a quick system. We need to find a way of looking after people who have lost their job so that they can get their next job quickly, while the companies thrive and make sure that they can employ more people. That is the difficult point that we always struggle with.

It is better that the huge costs that can be built up around tribunals are paid into the company and to the employees or towards investing in the company rather than the money going into lawyers' pockets. We need to change that. Many changes are in place. I look forward to hearing what the Minister will say, because one of the most difficult points is about how you get that balance. We need to find a way to do it quickly. We need to keep people in jobs and, most of all, for our companies to thrive; that is what we are after.

Mr Anderson: I rise as a member of the Employment and Learning Committee to speak in support of the motion. I congratulate my two party colleagues on securing the debate. As has been said, it is timely that we have secured this debate now, in light of the Minister's statement to the House on 5 November and the ministerial briefing at last week's Committee meeting.

The economy is at the heart of the Executive's Programme for Government. We must, therefore, make sure that we do everything in our power to free up business. In this debate, we are considering an area that is vital, especially in light of the fact that our economy continues to struggle. In the last few years and indeed in the last few months, we have seen some businesses downsize and others go to the wall. In this difficult climate, it is vital that our local businesses are not restrained or hampered by layer upon layer of unnecessary red tape and bureaucracy. That is often how much of our employment law is viewed.

For far too long, businesses have had to endure bureaucracy imposed on them not only by Europe, which seems to specialise in the manufacture of red tape, but from a raft of other laws, directives, rulings and regulations. All of that can pose big challenges even for the larger businesses, which are in a better position and have more resources to cope with it than small business set-ups. Employment law is a major challenge for SMEs, which, as has been said, are the backbone of Northern Ireland's economy. Something like 90% of our employers are small or medium-sized enterprises. Often, they are family-run businesses that do not have the time or expertise to deal with the raft of form-filling involved. Indeed, that can often be the final nail in the coffin of some of these businesses. As was said in the House today, we need to get a balance in our employment law that recognises the demands placed on employers and the rights of workers.

8.15 pm

Adam Marshall, the director of policy at the British Chambers of Commerce, summed the situation up well during a recent interview with the BBC. He said:

"Of course employment rights are important, but should be weighed against opportunities for the unemployed who are looking for work."

That is an important point. The rights of workers are not helped when businesses are reluctant to hire new recruits because of the mountain of form-filling and red tape involved. I know of one small business whose mistake filling out a form meant that a young employee could not be retained. That is intolerable, particularly in light of growing youth unemployment levels.

As the motion points out, the coalition Government at Westminster have undertaken a major review of employment law. That will last for the life of the Parliament,

and has three key objectives: to improve growth through increased labour market flexibility; to reduce the burdens on business; and to give employers the confidence to take on more people. Those should be the three pillars of our strategy, and they are the sort of fundamental areas that I referred to earlier.

In assessing how best to proceed in Northern Ireland, we should resist the temptation to reinvent the wheel. It seems that the work being done by the coalition Government is worthy of our serious consideration, not just the "due regard" referred to in the Alliance amendment. To date, the Westminster review has delivered a number of positive outcomes. I will not go into those now, but they are listed in detail on the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills website. I am concerned that we are not moving on this as quickly as we should be, and I support the motion and its call for swift action by the Minister.

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):

I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate, which comes in the wake of an important statement that I made to the Assembly on the employment law review on 5 November. As Members stated, I have subsequently had a further constructive engagement with the Committee for Employment and Learning.

Today's motion presents Members with an opportunity to have a more formal debate and give their views on this critical subject. It is important that the Assembly and the Executive work together to create a modern, efficient and effective employment relations system that assists the further development of a dynamic economy and equitably meets the needs of employers and employees. I have made a commitment, in line with the Executive's economic strategy, to carry out a review of employment law so that it works in the interests of business, helps our economy to grow, tracks investment and encourages companies to recruit. At the same time, any such review should provide sufficient protection for the rights of employees and opportunities for redress.

Historically, Northern Ireland has sought to replicate Great Britain in employment law matters. Therefore, legislation in the two jurisdictions is strikingly similar. However, employment law is a devolved matter, and Northern Ireland does not need to rigorously follow developments elsewhere. Devolution provides a real opportunity to determine our own future in that respect and create an integrated employment relations system in which economic competitiveness and workers' rights are balanced and in harmony with each other.

At the same time, we should give full regard to the developments in employment law in the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland. In doing so, we will be taking into consideration the reality that many businesses operate on a transregional or transnational basis and that differences in employment law and its administration can be a factor. Furthermore, we must, of course, be alert to the competitive position of Northern Ireland as an investment location. However, we should not become a slave to those developments. We should seek to mirror what happens in other jurisdictions when it is clearly in our interest to do so, but, when it is not, we should seek to do things differently. Devolution allows us to shape employment law and its implementation to suit the particular interests and circumstances of Northern Ireland, and that is appropriate as the structure of our economy and labour market can be

different from the rest of the UK. At times, Northern Ireland has done things differently from the rest of the UK. For example, during the last mandate, the Assembly passed the Employment Act 2011, which made fundamental changes to the way workplace disputes are resolved here. In contrast to the situation in Great Britain, it retained the statutory procedures that employers are required to follow when taking disciplinary action or dismissing an employee. Our legislation also modified our already unique fair employment legislation to make it possible for fair employment tribunal and industrial tribunal cases to be considered in a single hearing.

Since coming into office, I have continued to develop and maintain Northern Ireland's employment law framework and, last year, secured the Assembly's agreement to transpose the agency workers directive. There was a compelling case for opting in to the 12-week derogation that had been agreed between the social partners at the UK level. That achieves an estimated 60% reduction in the regulatory costs to business per annum. In September of this year, I launched the Labour Relations Agency's enhanced statutory arbitration scheme, which offers a viable alternative to employment tribunals. That service is not available in the rest of the UK. It confirms my commitment to delivering on early intervention and prevention in government.

Although not rejecting the original motion, I have some difficulty with its emphasis. I reject the premise that not following everything that happens in Great Britain in some way means that we would fall behind. In my earlier statement to the House, I challenged the notion that the employment law review needs to be pitched in the context of the interests of business against the rights of workers. I also rejected the argument that all forms of deregulation will automatically lead to growth and prosperity. I am not sure that all the proposed reforms in Great Britain meet those tests. However, I have a sense that the real and positive intent behind the motion is to ensure that Northern Ireland does not fall behind the rest of the UK in our competitive position and to ensure that we have growth in the global context. It is important that we do not lose sight of that objective. Therefore, I am most certainly alert to any prospect of Northern Ireland's economy falling into a competitive disadvantage. That does not necessarily arise from not automatically mirroring everything that happens in the rest of the UK. Indeed, doing so would raise fundamental questions about the purpose of devolution. Devolution is not just about copying what others do but, rather, taking the opportunity to be creative and innovative in policymaking. Therefore, Northern Ireland has the opportunity to do things better than elsewhere and to fashion a system that works well for employers and employees. The amendment enables what is, in essence, a take-note debate on the current employment law review and reflects the opportunity to take full advantage of devolution while recognising the responsibility to consider properly what is happening in other, especially neighbouring, jurisdictions.

My Department's review of employment law represents the most significant consideration of our employment relations system since employment law was returned to Northern Ireland after devolution in 1999. It covers every aspect of the employment relationship and will require a partnership involving all the employment relations representative bodies. I assure the House that I am committed to evidence-

based policymaking, better regulation and to making the decisions that best serve employers and employees. I do not propose to go into the detail of how precisely the review will be taken forward: that is already a matter of public record following my statement to the Assembly on 5 November. Some measures have been initiated and decided, including much greater use of alternative dispute resolution, the launching of a fundamental review of the tribunal rules system, taking into account the Underhill review in Great Britain, and active consideration of early neutral evaluation both in the Labour Relations Agency and, potentially, in the tribunals system.

As I indicated in the earlier statement, there is a need for a more detailed options appraisal of a number of other items that could, in turn, require primary legislation to implement. I am committed to keeping the most important of these on the agenda. I am working, therefore, towards the finalisation of a paper to go to the Executive in the new year so that a more formal public consultation on a range of proposals and, indeed, a number of different options can be facilitated. Following any such public consultation, I will bring final recommendations on the way forward to the Executive and, with the Executive's approval, to the Assembly. It is important that we strive to work to proceed on the basis of consensus, where possible. That applies in the Executive and the Assembly, as well as in the wider community. I have been struck by stakeholders' commitment to work in partnership to assist the Department in that. I am encouraged by the initiative that the Labour Relations Agency has shown in hosting a round-table forum of the key employee and employer bodies. The purpose of that group is to seek to identify proposals that would be agreeable to all stakeholders. We have not had that type of structured engagement between all the key stakeholders for quite some time. That type of joint working is likely to create the stakeholder confidence that will be needed to underpin any of the policy decisions that will flow from this review. Clearly, I will give serious consideration to any proposals that enjoy the support of both employee and employer interests.

I have been encouraged by the nature of the debate and the strength of argument that Members offered. However, it is worth highlighting that there remains a significant divergence of opinion on a number of critical issues. That has also been reflected in some of the meetings that I have had with key stakeholders. It sets us a significant challenge, and I urge all Members to support and contribute to a more collaborative and inclusive approach, which I am adopting, to my Department's employment law review.

I will now respond to some of the specific issues that were raised during the debate and speak about some of the substance that is involved in looking to the way forward. There has been quite a lot of discussion on unfair dismissal. That issue will require careful consideration, and, as Members are aware, the qualification in Great Britain was recently increased from one year to two years on the basis that it would increase business confidence and encourage companies to recruit more staff. It is argued that any difference in the medium term between Northern Ireland and Great Britain could undermine our competitive position and be a negative factor for investors. However, others point out that Northern Ireland, Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland already have some of the most liberal labour laws in the world. They point to the risk that workers in a more uncertain employment

situation will be less likely to spend their money in the local economy.

In addition, there is a danger of the unintended consequence of claims that would otherwise have been dealt with as unfair dismissal cases simply being transformed into alleged discrimination cases, which can be more complex and costly to address. Given that a change to unfair dismissals may have a limited practical impact, some may say that the case for Northern Ireland marketing itself presentationally in similar terms to Great Britain is, therefore, a lot easier to make. By contrast, others may draw the opposite conclusion and claim that there is less need for reform. I am prepared to give the House the commitment that I believe that this is a sufficiently critical matter to the Northern Ireland economy to the extent that it should be considered as part of a more focused public consultation. There may be a number of options that we can consider as part of that, so it will remain part of our agenda, but there is no predetermined outcome. Any consultation would enable stakeholders to provide a stronger evidence base and allow us to assess the validity of the various arguments and the different options.

Other substantive measures could be taken forward as part of a formal consultation. Those measures would require legislation. One is to do with the compulsory routing of all claims through the Labour Relations Agency in the first instance. That would better expose claimants and respondents to the possibilities of alternative dispute resolution, and it would be part of a system of streamlining the process and making it a lot more efficient in finding responses. Protected conversations is another area where Northern Ireland potentially now has the ability to strike out in the lead. It means that a space can be created in the workplace where certain issues can be raised on a without prejudice basis. So far in Great Britain, they have not been able to find a way forward with that, but we are willing to try to find a meaningful way that that can be taken forward in Northern Ireland.

8.30 pm

Members mentioned a number of other points that I want to address. Mr Ramsey mentioned the Beecroft report. I am not impressed by many of its recommendations. Indeed, in my statement on 5 November, I made the point of ruling out the compensated no-fault dismissal. In any event, that is not going forward in Great Britain.

Someone else referred to the proposals by George Osborne on people buying shares in companies in return for writing off all or some of their employment rights. That is to be taken forward purely in Great Britain. We can consider it in Northern Ireland, but I have to say that I am very sceptical of the benefits of that particular proposal at this stage.

Bureaucracy and red tape was mentioned. In the first instance, a more streamlined employment relations system, which includes greater use of alternative dispute resolution and a much more efficient, effective and consistent tribunal system, will hopefully address some of the regulations and the burden that employers find themselves with. Employees can also find the tribunals to be a very onerous and challenging environment. Therefore, there is a common interest across the spectrum in making the system work a lot easier.

As much as I am a fan of the European Union, I recognise that there has been a tendency at times to gold-plate certain regulations. We are very willing to have a review of regulations to see whether we can simplify things. Perhaps it was not a coincidence that the statement was made to the House on 5 November. We could talk about a bonfire of the regulations. We are starting the process to see whether things can be done more efficiently through consolidation of regulations. That is a programme that we will work through.

Reference was also made to equality legislation, and it is worth making the point that parity works both ways. We in Northern Ireland do not currently have parity with the rest of the UK on equality legislation. We are now falling behind. There is an issue over the complexity and inconsistencies of equality law, which also create problems for employers. That is not an issue for my Department, but it is something that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister may wish to reflect on.

Let me confirm to Mr Flanagan and Mr McCann that I have had discussions with my counterpart in the Irish Government, Richard Bruton.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Minister please bring his remarks to a close?

Dr Farry: The Irish Government are taking forward their own reforms, and we have had detailed discussions both with trade unions and the Law Centre.

Mr Dickson: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate, to wind on the amendment and to comment on what others said. For the record, my previous employment, prior to coming to the Assembly, was as a senior conciliation officer in the Labour Relations Agency. I hope to speak later in my contribution in a personal capacity on the role and work of the Labour Relations Agency.

Many of those who contributed to the debate spoke in very similar terms about the need for Northern Ireland to remain competitive and the need, nevertheless, for a Northern Ireland model of employment relations. Those are things that Chris Lyttle referred to. He also referred to the Labour Relations Agency round table, as indeed did others, and to the need for early resolution in disputes.

Mr McCrea referred to the link between unfair dismissal and other legislation as both a deterrent and a positive, in respect of changing time limits. He also indicated that he and his party were willing to accept the amendment. He also challenged the Minister to provide his views on any proposed changes to the legislation. Mr Flanagan referred to the needs for the review, the relationship between employees and employers and the need to create a balance. Balance was a term used by many Members who spoke in the debate.

Mr Ramsey and others indicated that they would support the amendment. He said there was a need to modernise employment law but that we are operating in a different climate, both economic and to the rest of the United Kingdom, given our close relationship with the Republic of Ireland.

Mr Buchanan said that we must be careful not to impose a greater burden on employers, particularly in these times, given business needs. He referred to parity of employment legislation across the United Kingdom and said that we should be aligned with the rest of the United Kingdom. He also said that not making changes would put us two years

behind the rest of the United Kingdom. He also raised the issue of shares in companies, as did the Minister.

Mr McCann welcomed the review. He said that we should not necessarily run down the United Kingdom road, but that we should respect the rights of both employees and employers and enhance their rights. He said that there were serious problems, but that we should be looking for cross-border harmony as well.

Mr Hilditch referred to the fact that the powers were not outside our control. He said that we could shape the powers of employment law to meet our own needs, and that we should ensure that Northern Ireland does not fall behind the rest of the United Kingdom. He referred to the length of time that it took for the Race Relations Act to be brought on to the statute book in Northern Ireland. He also referred to easing the burden on employers and Northern Ireland's place in the marketplace.

Mr Kinahan referred to the legal burden on businesses and the essential rights of employees. He acknowledged that in the amendment, and that was welcomed. He also referred to the number of times that he had been lobbied as an MLA about the change in the time limits. Mr Anderson said that this was a timely debate. He referred to the struggles in our economy and called for swift action on those issues.

The Minister referred to other jurisdictions and how our market is different from the rest of the United Kingdom. He also referred to the Employment Act in Northern Ireland, which, as we know, makes us different from the rest of the United Kingdom. He referred to the Labour Relations Agency's enhanced arbitration scheme, and he also referred to the round-table conversations that the LRA, as I understand it, is about to embark on. He suggested that we should not just copy the rest of the United Kingdom legislation, but that we should attempt to better that legislation.

He referred to tribunal rules and various other initiatives that were on the agenda, the partnership of stakeholders and the need for the round-table forum. He also referred to the time limits on unfair dismissal, and some initiatives, for example, all claims —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Dickson: — going through the Labour Relations Agency. He also referred to protected conversations.

Mr Weir: Members will be happy to learn that I will not simply be regurgitating the individual contributions that have been made. To their credit, the Members left in the Chamber have pretty much sat through the entire debate, so they have heard all the points that have been made.

With regard to the long-term impact in Northern Ireland, this has, perhaps, been today's most significant debate. I suspect that it will not necessarily be the lead debate in the news headlines and, despite the fact that we have contrived to finish the debate before 9.00 pm, I suspect that it will not be leading the nine o'clock news. Nevertheless, and despite the rapt attention of the Public Gallery and of the Members who have stayed to the bitter end, it has been a debate and a day for revelations. I appreciate that there may be someone sitting in the Public Gallery at an angle that I cannot see. I am glad that one of the Members opposite has won the I-spy competition as regards the Public Gallery.

During one of the debates earlier today, Steven Agnew announced his obvious defection to the DUP. Tonight, at least in terms of implication, Basil McCrea announced that he was joining the Alliance Party. Despite that, a number of significant things were said during the debate.

As the proposer indicated, part of the debate was to tease out concerns. It was an opportunity to have a take-note debate on what is a very important issue. When the motion was tabled, it predated the Minister's statement and the overall review of employment law. As such, this side of the House is prepared to give the Minister the opportunity to come forward with concrete proposals that, hopefully, can make the necessary step change in the economy that we all want to see. To that end, we are happy to give the Minister that opportunity by accepting the amendment, although it would not necessarily be the way that we would have drafted it. The compliments may end at that point, but, nevertheless, we are prepared to do that.

At the heart of this debate is the attempt to ensure that we do not have a competitive disadvantage in Northern Ireland. It has been shared on all sides of the House that we want to see an economy and a workplace that are fit for purpose. A key role in that is played by employment law. There have been some divergences within that.

A constant theme came from a number of Members, particularly on this side of the Chamber, and, to a certain extent, from the Alliance Party as well, about simplifying bureaucracy, as Chris Lyttle put it, and reducing employment law to ensure that that burden was not there. It is fair to say that a much more suspicious tone was taken on that attitude from Sinn Féin and the SDLP, who seem a bit more sceptical of change. They are concerned and see the phrase "reducing the burden of regulation" as some sort of right wing Trojan horse.

It was a generally well-tempered debate, but I took exception to one thing. Fra McCann claimed that everybody on this side of the House seemed to be obsessed with diminishing workers' rights. I am not sure that there was a single contribution on this side of the House or in the debate that talked about reducing workers' rights. What we are talking about is trying to reduce bureaucracy.

Mr F McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: I will be happy to give way.

Mr F McCann: I referred to the submission made about people accepting shares in return for a diminution of their rights as workers.

Mr Weir: An example was given of what had happened in England. As others indicated, there is scepticism towards that. It was simply an illustrative example, but we should not look at this as simply some attempt to diminish workers' rights. We should try to find a balanced way forward that ensures that we have a reduction in bureaucracy.

As indicated by the Minister and others, there is a range of things that can be a win-win in this situation; for example, greater use of the alternative dispute resolution and the Labour Relations Agency. Mr Dickson spoke of his own experience. I am not sure whether a period in the Labour Relations Agency qualifies one to be a Chief Whip. Perhaps I should have had that training myself, but those are things that can be embraced and which in no way diminish workers' rights.

As Sydney Anderson said, we have to be mindful that, in Northern Ireland, you have small, local businesses, which are often family businesses, and we have to ensure that the bureaucracy placed on them is not overly burdensome. It is also the case, as was made by a number of Members —

Mr Dickson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: I will give way briefly.

Mr Dickson: Following on from the theme of the burden, particularly on small employers, the Labour Relations Agency, through the Minister, brought regulations to the House on the arbitration scheme that now covers all jurisdictions. It is a free service, and it is available to all employers and employees in Northern Ireland who find themselves in those circumstances. There is no need to go through the burden or cost of a fair employment tribunal. You can do it through a free process. We are steps ahead of the rest of the United Kingdom in that service being available.

Mr Weir: Mention was made of the tribunal system. I think that we would all embrace the idea of making that bureaucracy less onerous, simplifying it, making it less expensive and making it swifter in delivering a result. That would help to lift the level of regulation from employers, and a lot of employees would also embrace it. So, there is a range of things that can be win-win on that basis.

One of the other main themes has been the level of divergence from the rest of the United Kingdom. A number of Members have said that we are not going to slavishly follow every crossed t and dotted i across the water. However, there is a concern and a need to ensure that our level of divergence is not so great that it damages our competitive advantage. That is important.

Mention was made of foreign direct investment. My colleague who proposed the motion, particularly from his experience of DETI, knows the attitude of foreign companies, particularly from the United States. They do not want to believe that this is some a simple place apart, where they are going to be faced with a plethora of burdens. So, it is important that we get that right.

8.45 pm

It is also the case from the point of view of national delivery that where there is a situation where we can provide something that can be replicated and, indeed, used to service all of the United Kingdom, it is important that we do not put up barriers that discourage those jobs from being based here. At present, we see that with regard to back-office functions in social security, for example, and in a range of other private firms. That is why it is important to get it right.

There is concern. A number of Members spoke about it. Tom Buchanan talked about the need for urgency and said that we do not really have the luxury of time. It is important that, while we welcome the progress that has been made on the employment law review, we do not find ourselves in a situation in which we fall behind the rest of the United Kingdom. There is an argument that, purely from the point of view of time, we already are somewhat behind. It is important that when we reach the end result, it is done swiftly and correctly and provides that level of urgency. We have got to recognise that we are in a global marketplace and, as such, it is important that we meet those issues.

A very important issue was, indeed, raised by Basil McCrea, when he talked about the impact of equality and whether we need to look at that by way of exception. That needs to be examined as part of the review. The Minister talked about the need to ensure that the interests of business are protected and that we do not fall behind. Quite naturally, given the fact that he is at the start of the review, a number of Members challenged him with, "What are the real views of Stephen Farry?" I think that, perhaps, we did not get too many of his views tonight. That is, perhaps, understandable given the Minister's position.

Dr Farry: Will the Member give way?

Mr Weir: Unfortunately, I have less than a minute left.

Dr Farry: You will have to wait.

Mr Weir: I appreciate that, perhaps, the real views of Stephen Farry could be encapsulated within a minute and it would still give me time to reply. However, I will not necessarily take that chance.

I have to say that the review is to be welcomed. We will test that when we see the end product. With regard to the Minister's announcement, I know that a range of concerns have come, for instance, from the likes of CBI and FSB. Some of those have been met. In other areas, we are still falling short.

We will wait to see what emerges from the review. Certainly, we, on this of the House, will wait and hope to see robust changes to employment law that ensure that Northern Ireland is at the cutting edge and, indeed, has the most dynamic and competitive business sector and environment that can be provided in this region. Consequently, we are prepared to give the Minister that chance. Therefore, we are happy to support the amendment to the motion.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes that the Minister for Employment and Learning has initiated a wide-ranging review of employment law in line with the commitment made in the economic strategy; endorses a modern, efficient and integrated employment law system that works in the interests of business, helps our economy to grow, attracts investment and encourages companies to recruit new staff, and at the same time provides sufficient protection for the rights of employees, with opportunities for redress; and calls on the Minister to have due regard to changes in employment law in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

Adjourned at 8.48 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 20 November 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. This relates to the vote that is about to be taken on an Ad Hoc Committee on welfare reform. It is really to seek your guidance, Mr Speaker, on how the Committee will carry out its work in the time that an Ad Hoc Committee carries out its functions. There was some uncertainty about the Social Development Committee's deliberations in the period when an Ad Hoc Committee would meet. The Committee is currently engaged in its clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill, and I understand that it can reach no definitive conclusion or outcome in the absence of that Ad Hoc Committee concluding its business.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Member for his point of order. There are a number of issues within it. Number one is that, if the Bill is considered by an Ad Hoc Committee for equality, the clock will then stop. The Bill will then go back to the Social Development Committee for its consideration of the Bill. I said to Members yesterday that these are complex issues. That is exactly the procedure if the Bill is referred to an Ad Hoc Committee this morning.

Committee Business

Welfare Reform Bill: Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements

Mr Speaker: The first item of business today is the postponed vote on the motion to refer the Welfare Reform Bill to an Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements.

I remind Members that the amendment to the motion was not moved yesterday, so there will be no vote on that amendment. As there is a valid petition of concern, Standing Order 60(4) applies, and the Question will not, therefore, be put on the Committee for Social Development's original motion. Instead, the Question becomes that the Welfare Reform Bill may proceed without reference to an Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements.

The vote must be passed with parallel consent. I know that these are complex issues, and I know that when we bring a petition of concern here what it normally does. In fact, the petition of concern being presented actually does the opposite, so it is trying to be as clear as possible to the House and Members.

Question put.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 41; Noes 52.

AYES

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Other:

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms P Bradley and Ms Brown.

NOES

Nationalist:

Mr Attwood, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Molloy, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist:

Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Other:

Mr Agnew.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Durkan and Ms Ruane.

<i>Total Votes</i>	<i>93</i>	<i>Total Ayes</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>[44.1%]</i>
<i>Nationalist Votes</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>Nationalist Ayes</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>[0.0%]</i>
<i>Unionist Votes</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>Unionist Ayes</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>[73.9%]</i>
<i>Other Votes</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>Other Ayes</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>[87.5%]</i>

Question accordingly negatived (cross-community vote).

Mr Speaker: The motion has not achieved parallel consent, so the House has rejected the proposal that the Bill may proceed without being referred to an Ad Hoc Committee. The result, therefore, is that the Bill must be referred to an Ad Hoc Committee.

Assembly Business

Welfare Reform Bill: Establishment of Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements

Mr Speaker: The next item is a business motion to establish an Ad Hoc Committee. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Resolved:

That, as provided for in Standing Orders 53(1) and 60(1), this Assembly establishes an Ad Hoc Committee to consider and report on whether the provisions of the Welfare Reform Bill are in conformity with the requirements for equality and observance of human rights.

<i>Composition:</i>	<i>Dup</i>	<i>4</i>
	<i>Sinn Féin</i>	<i>3</i>
	<i>UUP</i>	<i>2</i>
	<i>SDLP</i>	<i>1</i>
	<i>Alliance</i>	<i>1</i>

Quorum: The quorum shall be five members.

Procedure: The procedures of the Committee shall be such as the Committee shall determine. — [Ms Ruane.]

Mr Speaker: I ask the House to take its ease as we move to the next business.

Executive Committee Business

Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Speaker: I call the junior Minister Mr Jonathan Bell to move the Consideration Stage of the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill.

Moved. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Mr Speaker: Members will have a copy of the Marshalled List of amendments detailing the order for consideration. The amendments have been grouped for debate in my provisional grouping of amendments selected list.

There are four groups of amendments, and we will debate the amendments in each group in turn. The first debate will be on amendment Nos 1 to 5, 7, 8, 71, 73, 75 and 79, which deal with the terms of reference of the inquiry. The second debate will be on the 39 amendments listed, which deal with changing the presiding member's title to "chairperson" and a small number of technical amendments. The third debate will be on amendment Nos 9, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27 to 30 and 50 to 52, which deal with the end of the inquiry and reporting obligations. Group 4 comprises 17 amendments, which deal with the proceedings of the inquiry and its administration.

Once the debate on each group has been 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 of the Bill. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

Clause 1 (The inquiry)

Mr Speaker: We now come to the first group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 1, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 2 to 5, 7, 8, 71, 73, 75 and 79. Members will note that amendment No 1 is a paving amendment for amendment No 4; amendment No 3 is mutually exclusive with amendment No 2; amendment No 7 is consequential to amendment No 5; amendment Nos 73 and 75 are consequential to amendment No 2; and amendment No 79 is consequential to amendment No 8.

Mr Eastwood: I beg to move amendment No 1:

In page 1, line 5, at beginning insert "Subject to this section,".

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2: In page 1, line 5, leave out from "as" to the end of line 7 and insert

"(a) to examine the arrangements in place in institutions in Northern Ireland for the protection of children from abuse during the period between 1922 and 1995;

(b) to examine if there were systemic failings by institutions or the state in their duties towards children in their care during the period between 1922 and 1995;

(c) to make relevant findings and recommendations, including recommendations to ensure that abuse is prevented effectively in the future." — [Mr Allister.]

No 3: In page 1, line 7, leave out "31st May" and insert "18th October". — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 4: In page 1, line 7, at end insert

"(2A) The inquiry may report recommendations on changes to law, practice and procedure to prevent future abuse." — [Mr Eastwood.]

No 5: In page 1, line 8, leave out

"amend the terms of reference of the inquiry at any time"

and insert

"at any time amend the terms of reference of the inquiry by order". — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 7: In page 1, line 10, at end insert

"if a draft of the order has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, the Assembly". — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 8: In page 1, line 12, leave out "1945" and insert "1922". — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 71: In clause 21, page 10, line 10, at end insert

"'abuse' includes physical or mental violence, injury, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse,". — [Mr Allister.]

No 73: In clause 21, page 10, line 11, at end insert

"'child' means any person less than 18 years old,". — [Mr Allister.]

No 75: In clause 21, page 10, line 13, at end insert

"'institution' means any body, society or organisation having responsibility for the care, health or welfare of children in Northern Ireland which, during the period between 1922 and 1995, provided residential accommodation and took decisions about and made provision for the day to day care of children,". — [Mr Allister.]

No 79: In the long title, leave out "1945" and insert "1922". — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

Mr Eastwood: I will take this opportunity to say what a significant day I think today is. There have been a number of difficult but good-natured meetings of the Committee. I think that everybody in the Committee and everyone who attended the meetings, including the Department, the victims in particular, and all of the people who contributed to the Committee's discussions, acted in a manner that we can all be proud of. We are here today because people decided to get here as quickly as possible. We also decided to try to do it right and ensure that we had a Bill that we could all be proud of. We need to be mindful of that.

We also need to be mindful that some major changes are being proposed to the Bill, as shown by the number of amendments. We welcomed the Bill when it came before the House, but we recognised the fact that there were changes that needed to happen, not least the change from 1945 to 1922. The Department willingly decided to change that because of the evidence that we heard, not least from the victims of abuse.

There are still some outstanding issues — we have talked about them before — that will not be taken into consideration in the Bill. The issue of clerical abuse needs to be dealt with, as does the issue of people from the North being abused in Southern care homes. I think that the Department agrees with us on that, and I hope that it will now begin the process of moving forward in that regard.

I will come to the amendments now, Mr Speaker; I see you looking at me. As you said, amendment No 1 is a paving amendment for amendment No 4. Our view on amendment No 4 is that we believe that it is important that the inquiry and the inquiry chairman should be allowed and encouraged to recommend changes to law, practice and procedure. My view on that is simple. It should be explicit in the Bill. I know that the argument is made that it is implicit, but I do not think there is any harm in making it explicit.

I do not think that anybody here can stand up and say that we have a perfect system as things stand, but there have been major changes and major advances made in the past number of years. We have to recognise the fact that the people who will be involved in the inquiry are already experts in their field and will be even greater experts by the end of the inquiry. So, the intention of amendment No 4 is to encourage, where possible, changes to procedures, law and practice to ensure that we prevent future abuse.

I encourage Members to support that. I do not believe that it is good enough that it is implicit in the Bill. I would like to see it made explicit. For me, the primacy of legislation is very important. We have seen in the South recently how not having legislation in place can have very real consequences. I encourage Members to support amendment Nos 1 and 4.

Mr Nesbitt (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): Before commenting on the group 1 amendments, at this point I will briefly inform the Assembly about the work of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in our Committee Stage consideration.

Before the introduction of the Bill, the Committee received a briefing from departmental officials on the draft Bill on 6 June 2012. The briefing focused on the terms of reference, the appointment of the chair and the draft Bill. During the briefing session, the Committee raised a number of issues with officials, including the scope of the Bill, changes to the terms of reference and the length of the inquiry.

11.00 am

On referral of the Bill to the Committee after its Second Stage, the Committee wrote to key stakeholders and certain Statutory Committees on 18 June. A total of 19 submissions were received by the Committee. While the Committee waited for submissions, it took a briefing from officials on 26 June on the Department's consultation undertaken in preparing the Bill. At the same meeting, the Committee was briefed by the Assembly's Research and Information Service and considered a research paper on the Bill.

On 4 July, the Committee took a briefing from the chair of the inquiry panel, Sir Anthony Hart, who was accompanied by Ms Norah Gibbons, a member of the acknowledgment panel, and Mr Andrew Browne, the secretary to the inquiry. Sir Anthony Hart gave the Committee his initial thoughts

on how he saw the inquiry progressing and on how it would commence its work.

At its meetings on 5, 12 and 19 September, the Committee took oral evidence from victims and representatives of victims and some of the organisations that the inquiry will investigate. Evidence from victims left Committee members keenly aware that those most impacted by the abuse have waited a long time for this investigation. Now that it is within reach, they fear any delay in progressing the Bill. In seeking a short extension to the Bill's Committee Stage the Committee bore those concerns in mind but was also focused on the need to get it right and ensure that the inquiry met victims' needs. On 17 September, the Assembly agreed the Committee's motion to extend the Committee Stage to 26 October.

On 26 September, the Committee was briefed separately by the Department and by the inquiry chairperson, who responded to the issues that had been raised in submissions and during oral evidence sessions. The Committee was pleased with the way in which OFMDFM Ministers have responded to and accepted Committee requests for changes to the Bill. The Bill is stronger as a result, due particularly to the contribution made by the victims and survivors themselves in their evidence to the Committee. I would also like to thank the inquiry chairperson for his contribution, which the Committee found very helpful.

On 10 October, the Committee undertook informal clause-by-clause deliberations and considered the Department's response to the Committee's request for amendments. It commenced formal clause-by-clause scrutiny on 17 October.

I wish, briefly, to inform the Assembly about a number of issues that were of significant concern to stakeholders in their submissions to the Committee, although they are not directly the subject of amendments under consideration today. On the estimated costs of the inquiry, the Committee sought clarification from the Department of whether the figures in the financial and explanatory memorandum of between £7.5 million and £9 million remained accurate. Officials advised the Committee that the estimated costs had been revised upwards — doubled, in fact — to between £15 million and £19 million to take into account the complexities of the inquiry and the associated legal costs. The departmental officials assured the Committee that the necessary funds would be made available despite the absence of a current budget line for the expenses of the inquiry.

Another issue was the risk of self-incrimination by witnesses in giving evidence to the inquiry. This was raised with the Committee in the context of clause 10, which deals with privileged information. The Committee raised the issue with the inquiry chairperson, who advised that the inquiry would not compel anyone who refused to answer a question on the basis that it might incriminate him or her.

There were other submissions that raised issues in relation to provision for the disclosure of information, specifically access for institutions under investigation to information and records relevant to the case that they would have to meet. The Committee raised this issue with the inquiry chair, who advised us that the inquiry will make available to individuals and institutions under investigation all material relating to them and will allow reasonable time in which to

consider all such material and to prepare what they wish to say to the inquiry before moving to a public hearing.

A concern was also raised by institutions in relation to the use in subsequent legal proceedings of documents that come into existence in the course of the inquiry and whether the anticipated inquisitorial nature of the inquiry proceedings created any specific difficulties. Having considered advice on those issues and noted the key role of the inquiry chairperson in ordering the inquiry's proceedings, including his duty to act with fairness, and the privilege afforded to witnesses by clause 10, the Committee was broadly satisfied and was content with clause 10 as drafted.

A number of submissions to the Committee, including that from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, highlighted a range of powers for OFMDFM that they considered undermined the inquiry's independence. Those powers, some of which I will come to later in the context of related amendments, include the power to amend the terms of reference and to bring the inquiry to an end. Another such power, which I would like to touch on briefly, is the Ministers' power to bring to an end the appointment of inquiry panel members under clause 3. That power, in conjunction with others referred to, led the Human Rights Commission to the view that the proposed Bill did not meet the required level of protection under the European Convention on Human Rights. The Department's response to the Committee on this issue emphasised the reasonable grounds that Ministers require to terminate appointments, including ill health, conflict of interest, failure to comply with his or her duties in relation to the inquiry and misconduct. The Department's view was that intervention on those grounds could not threaten the inquiry's independence. The Department also highlighted the requirement to consult the inquiry chairperson before ending the appointment of other inquiry panel members. The Committee was broadly content on that issue.

The Human Rights Commission and others also raised concerns regarding the reduced time limit for judicial review in clause 16. The advice to the Committee on that issue and the inquiry chairperson's evidence to the Committee were quite emphatic that a 14-day limit would present no difficulty to competent legal practitioners. In light of that, the Committee was content with clause 16 as drafted.

I turn to the specific group one amendments. The Committee received considerable evidence in relation to the 1945-1995 period that the inquiry was to cover. That is set out in the terms of reference and in the Bill at clause 1(4) and the long title and is the subject of amendment Nos 8 and 79. In relation to the 1945 date, a significant number of submissions indicated that the inquiry should be able to investigate abuse that occurred in institutions pre-1945. There were also some responses that made a case for the removal of the 1995 date. The inquiry chairperson informed the Committee that he had no issues with the 1945 date being rolled back but warned of time and resource implications if the 1995 date were moved forward. The Department also advised that Ministers were "very sympathetic" to the removal of the 1945 parameter. At its meeting on 3 October, the Committee agreed to ask the Department to bring forward an amendment to replace the 1945 date with 1922. At the Committee meeting on 10 October, the Department provided the Committee with draft departmental amendments to the Bill that addressed

that and an amended terms of reference that would be issued to give effect to the change from 1945 to 1922. That is reflected in amendment No 8 to clause 1(4) and amendment No 79 to the long title. The First Minister and deputy First Minister issued a written ministerial statement on 18 October containing amended terms of reference reflecting that change, which would be brought into the Bill by amendment No 3. The Committee welcomed those amendments.

The Committee received a number of submissions recommending that the terms of reference be placed in the Bill to address concerns, including concerns about OFMDFM's power to amend the terms of reference in clause 1(3). However, there was no consensus in the Committee about bringing the terms of reference within the Bill, as amendment No 2 would do. At the meeting on 26 September, the Department advised that it would bring forward an amendment to provide for changes to the terms of reference to be made by way of order subject to a draft affirmative resolution of the Assembly. The Committee welcomed that decision and, at its meeting on 10 October, considered and was satisfied with the proposed departmental amendments to give effect to that change, which is reflected in the Ministers' amendment Nos 5 and 7. The Human Rights Commission raised the lack of any provision for consultation with victims in relation to any amendment of the terms of reference. The Committee was broadly content with the Department's assurances that the normal principles governing consultation provided adequate guarantees of consultation with victims regarding changes.

Clause 1(5) prevents the inquiry making any findings of civil or criminal liability, and concerns were raised with the Committee about the relationship between the work of the inquiry and possible civil or criminal proceedings. The Department provided clarification to the Committee, saying that the:

"statutory framework requires that, where allegations of child abuse come to light, these must be reported immediately to PSNI and social services for investigation."

It continued by saying that the inquiry panel:

"is not intended to replace the PSNI or the courts in investigating criminal activity."

The inquiry chairperson advised that he is working with the PSNI to establish protocols to address these issues.

Amendment Nos 1 and 4 and amendment No 2 touch on a key issue raised during evidence to the Committee, namely whether the inquiry would be able to make recommendations about changes to law, practice and procedure to prevent future abuse. Many of those who made submissions believed that the terms of reference did not provide for such recommendations. The Department indicated that it felt that the terms of reference were broad enough to include such recommendations. The inquiry chairperson believed that the power to make such recommendations was implicit in the terms of reference but considered that it would be helpful, by way of allaying concerns, for this to be made explicit.

The Committee agreed to request that Ministers consider an appropriate amendment to make the inquiry's power in this regard explicit. On 10 October, officials provided the Committee with proposed revised terms of reference

for the inquiry, including the insertion into the terms of reference of the words:

“Bearing in mind the need to prevent future abuse”.

These words would be inserted into the terms of reference in the paragraph preceding the listed matters on which the inquiry is to make findings and recommendations. That is set out in paragraph 99 of the Committee’s report, if Members have it to hand.

The Committee considered this proposed change to the terms of reference and agreed to write to the Department to request that Ministers consider the addition of a specific fifth bullet point to that list of recommendations and findings to be made. That bullet point would provide for recommendations on changes to law, practice and procedure to prevent future abuse. The Department’s response of 16 October stated that Ministers considered that the Committee’s suggestion would take the inquiry well beyond the scope of what it was set up to do and that they would not accept it. Most Members were satisfied with the Department’s proposed amendment to the terms of reference in conjunction with the inquiry chairperson’s evidence of 4 July, in which he stated that he was satisfied that he could address the issue.

During the Committee’s final clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill, Mr Eastwood proposed Committee amendments, now amendment No 1 and amendment No 4. Those were rejected by the Committee by eight votes to two.

Amendment No 75 would bring the definition of “institution” into the Bill. The Committee also received a number of submissions highlighting the limitations of the scope of the inquiry by way of the definition of “institution” in the terms of reference and indicating a need for the scope of the inquiry to be expanded to cover abuse outside institutions. Other witnesses supported the scope of the present inquiry but emphasised that other action was required to acknowledge and meet the needs of victims who suffered abuse that is outside the scope of this inquiry. The Department indicated that:

“the categories to be covered by the inquiry and investigation were selected because of the very particular vulnerable nature of this type of residential care.”

The inquiry chairperson indicated that widening the scope would require a complete restructuring of the inquiry and significantly affect the resources and time needed to produce its report.

The Committee’s report on the Bill acknowledges that there are victims and survivors of abuse who fall outside the scope of the inquiry into historical institutional abuse, and the Committee will engage further with OFMDFM on this issue.

Another issue raised in a number of submissions was whether “abuse” should be a defined term in the legislation or terms of reference, particularly in light of other inquiries, such as the Ryan inquiry, and relevant international conventions and guidance. Amendment No 71 proposes such a definition. The Department considered that the meaning of “abuse” was already clear from the terms of reference:

“failings by institutions or the state in their duties towards those children in their care”.

The inquiry chairperson stated that, if a definition of abuse was included in the Bill, it could prove to be restrictive and unhelpful, and the Committee did not pursue the inclusion of such a definition.

The anticipated inquiry duration of two years and six months is also dealt with in the terms of reference. The Committee received a number of submissions from stakeholders whose perception was that the inquiry chairperson’s right to request an extension of time related only to the six-month period following the inquiry’s conclusion or, in other words, the report-writing phase. The inquiry chairperson expressed the view that it may be helpful if he had a formal right to request an extension to the inquiry. The Department reassured the Committee that the right to request an extension applies to the whole lifetime of the inquiry, including the inquiry and investigation stages of the process, and not just to the report-writing stage. That concludes my comments on the group 1 amendments.

11.15 am

Mr Moutray: As one who recently joined the Committee, I state my commitment to the process and to the legislation. The people whose lives have been marred and maimed by such abuse deserve this Government’s commitment to them and their families. However, I know that, at this stage, Mr Speaker, I must direct my remarks to the amendments, and, to that end, I will, in some instances, deal with some of the amendments individually and with others on a group basis.

We, as a party, reject amendment Nos 2, 4 and 73, given that they are already covered in the terms of reference and, therefore, there is no requirement for them to be in the Bill. I understand that the chairman is content for the terms of reference to be referenced in clauses 1 and 2 and that additional protection through amendment Nos 5 and 7 is proposed to ensure that any changes will require affirmative resolution by the Assembly. Therefore, the proposals are unnecessary. Indeed, having the terms of reference instead of the proposed amendments enables the Assembly to react relatively quickly to address any unforeseen circumstances that may arise during the inquiry as opposed to having to amend legislation. The way forward that the Department and the Committee propose is, therefore, practical and logical. Therefore, I reject amendment Nos 2, 4 and 73 but support amendment Nos 5 and 7.

Our party supports amendment No 3, given that it is a technicality and proposes a minor change to the Bill. Our party supports amendment Nos 8 and 79 and believes that the change in date from 1945 to 1922 is welcome. The amendment obviously comes on the back of considerable consultation on the issue, and I am aware that the political parties and, indeed, the chairman support the inclusion of people who were subjected to abuse prior to 1945. Given the time lapse, that inclusion will facilitate a relatively small number of people, but I and my party want them to be included in the process and their views and personal stories fed into it. I know that those who were affected pre-1945 had the opportunity to go to the acknowledgement panel process, which allows them to

tell their experiences. However, being date-specific in the Bill will allow those affected between 1922 and 1945 the same level of scrutiny and will, in particular, allow them to attend the statutory element of the inquiry and feed in to this important process. No matter what year in history those people were subjected to such systematic failings by the state or institutions in their duties, it is vital that they all have their say on the matter to aid them in endeavouring to find closure on such a heart-wrenching and life-changing ordeal for all involved.

We reject amendment No 71 owing to the fact that the abuse is already covered by the remit of the inquiry in the terms of reference as:

“failings by institutions or the state in their duties towards those children in their care”.

The duties referred to will be clearly set out in legislation and guidance that applied at the time. That offers clarity and certainty on the remit of the inquiry and investigation. Therefore, I do not believe that we should complicate and prolong the process by tampering with the proposed remit and definition.

We object to amendment No 75, given that it is detailed in the terms of reference and there is no requirement for it to be in the Bill.

In conclusion, our party is supportive of amendment Nos 3, 5, 7, 8 and 79 and is opposed to amendment Nos 1, 2, 71, 73 and 75 for the reasons outlined.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the opportunity to speak on what is an historic day, as has been said already. Child abuse in any form is an appalling crime, and it is absolutely right that Ministers have moved to set up a process that will investigate it thoroughly. The Alliance Party welcomed and recognised the introduction of the Bill and hoped that it would provide an opportunity for victims and survivors to be heard and for their needs to be met. After a constructive Committee Stage, we are moving in the right direction.

I pay tribute to all the organisations that engaged with the Committee Stage and particularly to the victims and survivors, from whom I learned a significant amount in hearing their testimony. I also recognise the work that Conall McDevitt did in engaging with the victims and survivors organisations, particularly SAVIA and Amnesty International for bringing the process to this stage. I supported the SDLP amendments at Committee Stage, and I am happy to support them in the first group today.

On many occasions, the Committee heard that the scope of the inquiry excluded victims outside an institutional setting. I am not speaking on behalf of the Committee, but it is clear that another process is required. However, there was a strong opinion on the Committee not to delay the inquiry into historical institutional abuse.

I turn to the group 1 amendments. It is clear that a significant issue was the inquiry's time frame. I welcome the speedy way in which the First Minister and the deputy First Minister have moved to table amendments and, indeed, to change the terms of reference to include victims from before 1945 and from 1922. There are people in my constituency of East Belfast who were affected by the initial date, and I know that they are hugely welcoming of the change from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

As I said, my party supports the SDLP amendments to specify the power to make recommendations on changes to law practice and procedures. A clear theme coming from organisations that presented to the Committee was that that needed to be clarified further. I also welcome the amendments to ensure Assembly approval for any further amendments to the terms of reference. That is a balanced safeguard for the process.

Mr Allister will move amendments on the terms of reference and definitions. The Committee received significant evidence to suggest that, in the terms of reference, the safeguard approval that would be sought from the Assembly was adequate. We have a point of reference: the First Minister and the deputy First Minister have moved quickly to table an amendment on the time frame through the terms of reference. That is a good example of where having that flexibility has benefited the inquiry, and the victims and survivors whom it seeks to serve. Therefore, we will oppose those amendments.

On the definition, Sir Anthony Hart himself gave clear evidence to suggest that the definitions were adequate and provided him with the flexibility to meet and serve the needs of victims and survivors.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I begin by rightly paying tribute to all those who have been victims of abuse. The period in question is a horrifying time in our history, and I sincerely hope that where abuse occurred it can be exposed and that the inquiry established under this legislation can bring some truth and justice to the victims of institutional abuse, victims who have had their life dominated by the pain of that abuse. I also commend OFMDFM officials and Committee members for the hard work that went into the Bill. I only came to the Committee at a late stage.

It is crucial legislation, ensuring that victims get some form of justice for the heinous crimes that were inflicted on them. It is clear that, in the past, there were severe failings on the state's part to protect vulnerable people in state institutions. I welcome the fact that the Bill's development has been based on a victim-led approach for what victims require. Over the years, too many people have been subjected to the pain of abuse by those who have held positions of trust. The victims were let down in the past, not only by their abusers but by those who covered up the abuse.

A welcome change was to widen the scope of the Bill. The parameters were extended to include cases as far back as 1922, instead of 1945. That decision was taken because it is vital that all victims can take part in the inquiry and the acknowledgement process. That extension allows for the inquiry to hear from every living victim. The alteration will, hopefully, reassure those who were originally excluded. That is what it was intended to do.

The acknowledgement forum opened for registration at the beginning of October, and I know that all parties will be united in saluting and paying tribute to the courage of victims who have come forward thus far and those who will come forward.

On amendment No. 4, which concerns recommendations about changes to law, procedure and practice to prevent future abuse, my party's position is that broad scope for that has already been provided for in the Committee amendment, which reads:

"Bearing in mind the need to guard against future abuse,"

The terms of reference have already been amended to allow the inquiry to make recommendations about the future, and, indeed, the inquiry Chair, Sir Anthony Hart, was satisfied that sufficient scope was provided already for recommendations to be made in relation to changing the law, with a view to preventing future abuse. So, my party will not support the amendment.

I will speak only briefly on Mr Allister's amendments. All victims of any abuse — institutional, clerical or in another setting — are equally entitled to find justice for the abuse that they suffered. However, the Bill deals specifically with institutional abuse, and it needs to be narrow so that it does what it needs to do. This is the view that the inquiry chair also holds. The changes that Mr Allister seeks to make would make the inquiry something entirely different. Clerical abuse is just as sensitive, emotive and important an issue as institutional abuse, so it may be the case that it should be dealt with separately, so that it is dealt with appropriately and given its own prominence. That does not, in any way, attempt to detract from the distress that has been inflicted on many others as a result of abuse in other settings. Therefore, Sinn Féin will oppose amendment Nos. 71 and 75.

Sinn Féin is satisfied with the Bill and believes that it enables the inquiry panel to complete what it is intended to do. However, it must also be noted that the inquiry cannot be rushed. We welcome this legislation and its objectives and recognise that transparency and impartiality is key to achieving those objectives. This entire process is and should be victim-centred. The Bill and the inquiry are for the victims, as they attempt to find some sense of justice after years of pain.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate on what is very important legislation for the many people who suffered abuse in institutions in Northern Ireland. Many victims of abuse have lobbied courageously to get to a stage where this inquiry will become a reality. They are indeed to be commended for their efforts, determination and, as I have said, undoubted courage.

We have a raft of amendments at the Consideration Stage of the Bill; there are, I understand, 79 in total. The vast majority of them have come from OFMDFM, and I welcome the presence of the junior Ministers. My party leader chairs the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, which considered the amendments in detail, and has indicated that it was generally content with them.

I want to focus particularly on Mr Allister's amendments, which would broaden out the historical institutional abuse inquiry and are included in group 1. Mr Allister, as I understand it, seeks to make four amendments in this group, including amendment No 75, which gives a different definition of institution to that in the terms of reference of the inquiry, as established in the statement by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and amendment No 2 which also seeks to alter the terms of reference of the inquiry.

The issue of who the legislation should cover is an important one, and I want to consider that in some detail, having received representations on that from constituents. We have to bear it in mind that there are children from Northern Ireland who suffered abuse in the Republic of

Ireland and children from the Republic of Ireland who suffered abuse in Northern Ireland. Those victims, most of whom are now adults, exist in jurisdictional limbo. There has been an impression that neither side or jurisdiction wishes to take responsibility for that. Indeed, I raised this matter separately with Mr Alan Shatter TD, the Minister for Justice in the Republic of Ireland, but, in short, it has been left to be someone else's problem.

11.30 am

Today gives us an important opportunity to say to those people that they are recognised as victims, that they will get the time and space to tell their story, and that all efforts will be made to ensure that never again will people be exploited and abused in this way. I refer specifically to those children who resided in either the Bethany home in Dublin or the Westbank home in County Wicklow. Both institutions took in mothers and babies from Northern Ireland and also sent Southern children to Northern Ireland. Some ended up in loving homes, but some ended up in abusive situations.

Let me make it clear that I do not say that all those who resided in those homes were abused, nor do I say that all staff and people in responsibility were abusers. To a large degree, it happened without the knowledge of people who were supportive of those homes and who had supported the homes through their contributions and their wider support. However, it is undeniable that abuse happened, and that is something that we must acknowledge and address.

There is little that can be said here that anybody can be proud of, not least since the trafficking to and fro was purported to have been done in the name of Christianity. None of us can take any comfort from the disgraceful actions of some individuals that were carried out in the name of Christianity, from whichever Church it emanated from. There are examples from as far back as 1926 of individuals who were handed over in trust to Bethany House.

There are numerous examples of children who suffered greatly through abuse and, indeed, a number of specific examples have been brought to my attention. For instance, a young person who suffered gross malnutrition had to be rescued by the local Church of Ireland clergyman and was sent back to Dublin. He was then sent to a relative of the family in Northern Ireland, where he suffered further neglect. I have also been told of a mother whose children were sent to the Westbank orphanage that closed in 1998 and who were denied knowledge of sibling relationships. I have also been informed that other children often lived in Westbank into their late twenties. Many were given false names and, as I mentioned, they later found out that they had brothers or sisters.

In the past week or so, the spotlight has been on multinational corporations that escaped taxation in one jurisdiction by registering profits in another. In a sense, that is what Westbank did. It exploited another jurisdiction, avoiding regulation in Northern Ireland by setting up an orphanage in the South. In that home, many of the children were malnourished and suffered physical abuse. They were given injections if they wet the bed or they were beaten with electrical leads. Some suffered sexual abuse. A gentleman with a mission — I use the term advisedly — to children would arrive at yearly intervals, take children out on hiking patrols and insist on sleeping with them

in tents in the garden. He used that position of trust to sexually abuse some of those children.

That situation was evident in the Republic of Ireland, and I believe that it is appropriate that we consider those issues and that they are, at least, aired today, given the fact that they concern children from Northern Ireland. Although I understand that the Bill may not be suitable for an all-encompassing inquiry into child abuse, we must, at least, take cognisance of the terrible abuse that occurred within institutions outside Northern Ireland and, therefore, out of the reach of the Bill.

Whatever decisions are taken in this place today, we cannot undo the wrongs that those children have had visited on them, and we cannot reverse what has happened. However, we can ensure that we do not lose the opportunity presented by the Bill to recognise, broadly, those children who have been victims, whether in this jurisdiction or elsewhere and whether that abuse was physical or sexual.

This is our opportunity to begin to help to right the clear wrongs that have happened. It is a very significant responsibility, and we should make sure that we do our best to bring victims the maximum sense of justice. It is important that those people have a voice in the Assembly. I urge the junior Ministers present today, on behalf of OFMDFM, to reflect on that. It may not be possible to deal with the issue today as part of the Bill, but it is essential that the recommendations from the inquiry to be undertaken by Judge Hart are brought forward to OFMDFM and that it takes them further and continues to engage further, even with Alan Shatter and the authorities in the Republic, so that justice can prevail.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Mr Allister, may I say that I understand, Members, that this is a very sensitive issue; I really understand that. However, I ask that Members refer to the amendments, as far as possible, and link whatever they say to the amendments that are before the House. I really understand the sensitivity of the particular issue before the House this morning.

Mr Allister: At this stage, I will speak to amendment Nos 2, 71, 73 and 75.

I begin by expressing regret that amendments that I sought to table, to widen the scope of the inquiry to include clerical abuse, are not before the House. Right as it is that we address the issue of institutional abuse, I think that it is unfortunate that in doing so we create a hierarchy of abuse victims — those abused within institutions, and those abused outside institutions, who, predominantly, were the object of clerical abuse. I have heard others in the debate say that that issue cannot be forgotten about and cannot be swept aside, but the reality of the Bill is that it does forget about it. I have yet to hear affirmations that that will change. I think that this was an opportunity to address all abuse, including clerical abuse, and I very much regret that it has not been taken.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for giving way. For the record, is the Member willing to go further to acknowledge that Members have said not just that victims of clerical child abuse should not be swept aside but that there should be a process to investigate that type of abuse?

Mr Allister: I have said that I have heard Members say there must be a process, but I am waiting to hear of that

process. That is the point I was making. There is certainly nothing in the Bill to advance such a process in that regard.

I make the observation about the hierarchy differential between an inquiry for victims of institutional abuse and no inquiry for the victims of clerical abuse in the context where one has concerns at the manner in which, heretofore, clerical abuse has been dealt with. I invite Members to cast their mind back to just a couple of years ago, when this matter came up before the Policing Board, for example, and issues were raised. Why was it that the PSNI, in investigating clerical abuse, was satisfied with simply receiving résumés or summaries from the church hierarchy on what their archives contained? It never saw or investigated the archives, and there seemed to be a deal —

Mr Speaker: Order. Earlier, I said that this is a very sensitive issue, but we really should not be debating an amendment that has already been rejected and not selected. I am trying to give Members as much latitude as possible in and around these sensitive issues, but I ask the Member, and Members, to come back to the amendments that are before the House this morning.

Mr Allister: Mr Speaker, I ask only for the latitude that might parallel, to a lesser degree, that given to Mr Kennedy to talk about abuse in another jurisdiction. I am talking about abuse in this jurisdiction. There was no restraint on someone else talking about abuse in another jurisdiction. I will not labour the point, but I want to make the point that there is a residual degree of resentment among the victims of clerical abuse. Some have told me that this inquiry has no focus for them. That is unfortunate in the context that, heretofore, there have been suggestions that the PSNI, in investigating clerical abuse, has been satisfied with summaries of the archives from the Catholic Church, rather than actually seeing the documentation. There seemed to be some sort of deal that led to that situation, and that was wrong. The issue was raised by Mr Basil McCrea when he was a member of the Policing Board, and it is still unresolved. So I regret that we are not widening the ambit of the Bill to deal with that issue.

Amendment No 2 seeks to import into the Bill the terms of reference. I find it bizarre that we are processing a Bill to set up an inquiry into institutional abuse, and one of the things that we consciously and deliberately leave out of that Bill is the terms of reference. We reference them only by referring not to one but to two documents, which have never been brought to or debated in the House. Two documents were issued as written statements — one to correct the other — by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Instead of putting the terms of reference into the Bill so that everyone could read them, we have this obscure device whereby we say that the terms of reference are to be found in a statement of a certain date by the First Minister and deputy First Minister. That, from first principles, seems to me to be an absurd way to proceed. What is the problem with putting the terms of reference into the Bill? What are Members so scared of that causes them to rush to reject that suggestion?

Anyone who has read my amendments carefully will note that I do not propose to omit from the Bill the incoming power further to amend those terms of reference. I am not saying that we should write them in stone and leave them alterable only by amendment of the legislation. I am happy

to live with the upcoming amendments, which would allow subsequent change and addition to the terms of reference, but the starting point should be that we have the basic terms of reference in the Bill. I say that because it is the right thing to do and because, frankly, the quality of the written statements from the Ministers is, in drafting terms, appalling.

There is a section headed “terms of reference”, which deals with one term of reference about finding out about systematic failings. Then it drifts off into all sorts of administrative issues about the timescale and various other administrative arrangements. It finishes with terms of reference, or so it seems, and goes on to talk under new subheadings about an acknowledgement forum, a research and investigative team and an investigation inquiry panel. Under that, it seems to return to new terms of reference, which are not even in the paragraphs quoted as terms of reference. It talks about:

“Bearing in mind the need to prevent future abuse, the report will make recommendations and findings on the following matters:”

It goes into matters of apology, and so on. Even in the manner in which the Ministers’ written statements are drafted, they lack the clarity, cogency and chronological nature that you would expect, and you would see, in legislation if the terms of reference were laid out.

11.45 am

That is why I say that, without prejudice to the right to add to those terms of reference by other devices, we should have basic terms of reference in the Bill. Before you come to the only real term of reference in the statement — establishing whether there were systematic failures by institutions — the first term of reference in the Bill should say that the first thing that should happen is an examination of the arrangements that were in place in institutions in Northern Ireland to protect children from abuse. That should happen before you move to the second question, which flows from that, of whether there were systematic failures in the light of that. So, logically, it seems inescapable that the terms of reference should start with an invitation to the inquiry to establish what arrangements were in place, how they were deficient, how they failed, and how it was that, consequently, there were systematic failures, if there were any.

That is also why I say that the first term of reference should be as suggested in my amendment. You then have to add to that. It is not good enough just to ask what the failings were. You then have to move to the point of asking what we can do about it. That is the purpose of putting into the terms of reference a statutory requirement that relevant findings and recommendations will be made, including recommendations to ensure that abuse is prevented effectively in future.

If this inquiry is to have any lasting impact and is really to be something that is worthwhile for the future not only does it need to identify and give solace to those who were so hideously abused but it needs to make recommendations on how such things can never happen again. That is why the terms of reference should include the statutory exhortation and requirement that, within them, there must come forward recommendations so that we can effectively ensure that such abuse is prevented in future. Is that too

much to ask? Is it such a strange proposition that the House write terms of reference into the Bill and that they include the need to bring forward recommendations on how to prevent all that in the future? It seems to me to be elementary that those matters be in the Bill.

If I may say so, it also seems that it flows from that that one would want to define those to whom the Bill applies. A child is not defined in the Bill as someone who is under 18 years of age. That would be my amendment No 73. The very institutions to which the Bill would refer are not defined in it. That would be my amendment No 75. Perhaps what is even more elementary is the need to define abuse itself, because what it means is capable of various ducking-and-diving interpretations. That is why I say to the House that we should put all that beyond doubt. The language that I used is not my language. The definition that I suggested is not just my concoction. It is lifted from article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which defines abuse as:

“physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse”.

That is a well tried and tested definition of abuse that is relevant to an inquiry such as this. I say to the House that you have much to gain and absolutely nothing to lose — nothing to lose — from putting those definitions in the Bill, and improving the Bill in consequence. I say to the House, you should really get beyond the macho, knee-jerk reaction of not wanting to change a Bill because it was your Bill, so to speak, and certainly not wanting to change it because someone of my ilk might suggest changes. You should recognise that there is merit and worth in doing what the amendments would do. On that basis —

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for giving way. I ask him what his view or assessment is of the view of the independent chair that flexibility would be preferable in those definitions. Indeed, why does he think that such an independent chair would not be referring anyway to the definitions that are set out by the law that he refers to?

Mr Allister: I will make two or three points on that. First, let me make it very clear that I have the utmost confidence in Judge Hart. He is a man whom I have known professionally for most of my professional life. I have appeared in his court many, many times. I have no reason to doubt his integrity, his thoroughness or anything whatsoever that goes to his professional capacity. He is a good choice for this post, and I thought that from the very first time that I heard him named.

However, it is, with respect, for this House, not the chairman of the tribunal, to determine the terms of reference and the definitions. I do not think that we should hide behind the wisdom and experience of the judge to dodge those issues. Indeed, it is a protection, because anyone who knows anything about the law knows that there are many ways in which people can contrive to dispute matters and interpretations but that one can restrain that if the definitions are in statutory form, rather than some moving feast in a ministerial statement. Therefore, it would bring far more certainty and far more clarity to the issue if the definitions were in the Bill and the legislation under which the judge operates. That is not at all to tie the judge’s hands; it is rather that this House, as is its place, sets the statutory framework within which the

inquiry is held, and we aid the judge by providing within that the definitions that we wish him to operate within.

The definitions are not rigid. Look at the definition of “institutions” and look at the definition of “abuse”. There is nothing rigid about them. They have flexibility. Therefore, I say that there is no flexibility to be lost by putting those matters into the Bill. On that basis, Mr Speaker, I recommend the amendments to the House.

Mr Agnew: I wish to speak particularly to amendment No 4. I know that there has been some discussion about whether it should be included in the Bill, but it seems clear to me that, where there is agreement across the House, the ability to report recommendations on changes to law, practice and procedures should be in the terms of reference. I see no reason why we do not strengthen those terms of reference through their application in the legislation.

I found Mr Allister’s arguments for amendment No 2 very compelling. Again, where we have a level of consensus as to what it should focus on, I see no reason not to empower the inquiry through legislation.

I want to echo briefly some of the views of Mr Kennedy, who talked about those victims who have been trafficked across the border. Constituents who suffered abuse in institutions in the Republic of Ireland have come to me about that issue. Although I recognise that the scope of the Bill, as set out in the terms of reference, cannot include investigations into institutions in the Republic of Ireland given that it is outside this jurisdiction, I believe that we should not be turning away anyone in Northern Ireland who is a victim or survivor of institutional abuse from the support of the inquiry or from having their voice heard. For that reason, I ask that the acknowledgement forum and the advocacy service be open to such victims.

I also ask that the investigation looks at whether institutions in Northern Ireland that may have referred, with the best of intentions in some cases, women and children to homes such as the aforementioned Bethany or Westbank complied with the moral duty of care that they had to such women and children.

As I say, although I accept that those institutions cannot be included in the Bill’s terms of reference, I further ask that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister engage with Ministers in the Republic of Ireland to see how both jurisdictions can work together to ensure that that group of victims and survivors, first and foremost, have the circumstances of the abuse they faced acknowledged and that we have some mechanism for investigating such cross-border trafficking and the subsequent abuse that took place.

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): First and foremost, I salute the victims and survivors of abuse. It is their courage, dignity, tenacity and the triumph of their human spirit in the face of suffering, the extent of which none of us, I think, can ever fully understand or appreciate, that have brought us to where we are today. This is a truly historic day, and this is one of the most vital pieces of legislation that, I think, we will ever deal with.

At the request of the victims and survivors who have spoken to us, I also pay tribute to those who have gone before and who are not alive to see this day, and, equally, I

salute their courage and tenacity in helping us to get to this point and do not underestimate the pain they suffered and endured during this process.

It is the pain of the most vulnerable. These were children who did not have a mum or dad, or a stepmum or stepdad, or another form of care-giver to go back to. These were people who were abused and hurt in the most horrible ways by the people entrusted to care, support and love them. That is why we have defined residential abuse. These were children who had nobody to go back to and who became the victims of those who should have been there to care for and protect them but shamefully did not do so. So, first and foremost, we place the victims and survivors front and centre of the legislation.

I thank the Committee Chair and Committee members for their scrutiny of the Bill. They worked diligently and were thorough in their examination of the work in front of them. The Committee asked searching questions and proposed helpful changes, all of which the First Minister and deputy First Minister were pleased to accept.

In fact, of the 79 amendments proposed by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, 44 stem from Committee proposals.

12.00 noon

I also thank the inquiry chairperson for his support. He has been generous with his time and advice. He discussed the Bill thoroughly and at length with officials. He has distinguished himself in legal expertise and is of noted legal brilliance. He took the time to suggest changes to strengthen the Bill. He appeared before the Committee, and his insights have been invaluable and helped to shape our thinking on the amendments. The chairperson has assured our officials that he is content with the amendments that we have proposed.

I thank junior Minister Anderson. When she and I came into office, we were instructed by the First Minister and deputy First Minister that this was to be our priority in terms of work that we were to undertake. We made it our priority in that the first people whom we met were the victims and survivors of abuse. We also made it a priority, rightly, in the time and energy that was expended to ensure that we got the best Bill we could for the victims and survivors of abuse. It is a baton that has been passed on to junior Minister McCann, and she made it her priority to meet, first of all, victims and survivors of abuse. I know from them that they appreciated that work.

Clause 1 provides for the First Minister and deputy First Minister, acting jointly, to set up the inquiry into historical institutional abuse. It refers to the terms of reference announced on 31 May, in which the relevant period for the inquiry was 1945 to 1995. Victims and survivors argued that the 1945 parameter would exclude some people. The First Minister and deputy First Minister were happy to agree to the Committee’s proposal that the relevant period should be extended back to 1922. They announced amended terms of reference on 18 October, and amendment Nos 3, 8 and 79 update the Bill to take account of those.

Colum Eastwood and Conall McDevitt — I will try to reply towards the end to points that other Members raised — propose that the Bill should provide for the inquiry to make recommendations about changes to law,

practice and procedure to prevent further abuse. That amendment is completely unnecessary. The Committee raised that issue with the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and they dealt with it by amending the inquiry terms of reference. The inquiry terms of reference were carefully thought out. They stem from an excellent paper by victims and survivors themselves, and they were informed by the work of the interdepartmental task force. We discussed them with the victims and survivors and then agreed with the chair of the inquiry before they were published. They are broad-ranging, requiring the inquiry to make recommendations and findings, first, on an apology, by whom it should be made and the nature of the apology; secondly, on institutional or state failings in their duties towards the children in their care and whether those failings were systematic; thirdly, on an appropriate memorial or tribute to those who suffered abuse; and, fourthly, on the requirement or desirability for redress to be provided by the institution and/or the Executive to meet the particular needs of victims.

We are confident that, where the inquiry identifies lessons for the future, it has the scope within its terms of reference to include those in the recommendations. However, the Committee argued that that should be made explicit, and so the amended terms of reference say that, in making its findings and recommendations, the inquiry should:

“bear in mind the need to guard against future abuse”.

As the issue is fully covered in the terms of reference, there is no need to add it to the Bill. Amendment Nos 1 and 4 should be rejected.

Mr Allister proposes that we do away with the published terms of reference completely. However, we believe that that would have the effect of detrimentally reducing the detailed remit of the inquiry. After consultation with the chair, there is satisfaction that we retain the terms of reference and give them statutory footing through reference in clause 1. In addition, Mr Allister's amendments have no reference to an apology or a memorial, and no consideration would be given to the desirability of redress. In amendment Nos 71, 73 and 75, Mr Allister suggests that “child”, “institution” and “abuse” be defined in the Bill. There is no need for that: the definitions of “child” and “institution” already appear in the terms of reference. Had Mr Allister followed the Committee proceedings or even consulted Hansard, he would have seen that the chairman cautioned the Committee against defining abuse. The remit of the inquiry is to examine systemic failings by institutions or the state in their duties towards children in their care. There is, therefore, no need for a further, new definition. The duties of institutions are already set out in legislation. The First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Executive made it clear in the terms of reference that the inquiry will be concerned with systemic failings by institutions or the state in their duties towards children in their care. This is not what victims and survivors said that they needed; it is not what we are committed to; and it is not what the chairman and his panel are working towards. I urge you to reject Mr Allister's amendments.

Clause 1 also deals with the process by which the inquiry terms of reference can be amended. As it stands, the Bill provides for the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly to amend the terms of reference

after consulting the chairman. Amendment Nos 5 and 7 change the process so that any future changes to the terms of reference will be subject to affirmative resolution in the House. Those amendments were inspired by the Committee, and I urge you to support them.

The issue of clerical abuse was raised first by, I think, Mr Eastwood. Let me be very clear: the issue of clerical abuse is no less important or emotive than institutional abuse. We are mindful of the equally destructive impact that it has had on many individuals. I, like anybody else who practises professionally in social work, know of the equally destructive impact that emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect has on children, whether it is perpetrated by people who are employed or unemployed, teachers, doctors, nurses or, at times, even social workers. So, the Executive will have to give careful consideration to how clerical abuse should be dealt with following the inquiry into historical institutional abuse. As I said before, those children did not have homes to go back to. They did not have parents or caregivers to go back to. The people they went back to for their home were the people who were abusing them. That is why we have brought forward the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill. The categories to be covered by the inquiry were selected because of the very particular and vulnerable nature of that type of residential care. Setting the parameters in that way does not, in any way, undermine the trauma that has undoubtedly been inflicted on many other individuals as a result of abuse in a domestic setting or any other setting.

The issue of Southern care homes was, I think, first raised by Mr Eastwood and then by Mr Kennedy. The jurisdiction of this inquiry reflects the jurisdiction of this Administration. It will investigate events in Northern Ireland care homes between 1922 and 1995, but we cannot investigate events in the Republic of Ireland.

Mr Nesbitt raised the issue of the costs of the inquiry. The original costs of the inquiry were set between £7.5 million and £9 million. They were calculated in March, which was very early in the process and before the terms of reference had been agreed. Since then, there has been extensive research and analysis, and we have benefited from the expert advice of the chairman, the acknowledgement forum and the panel members. As a consequence, we now have much more realistic and robust costs for all phases of the inquiry. In particular, we have been able to estimate the costs of conducting the judicial element of the inquiry, including witness support.

With regard to abuse in institutions outside Northern Ireland, which Mr Kennedy raised, those allegations fall outside the jurisdiction of the Northern Ireland Executive and cannot be investigated by the inquiry. However, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister have already communicated their concerns about Bethany home. The survivors of Bethany home have also communicated their concerns to Alan Shatter TD, who has indicated that he is considering the issue.

I now turn to some of the points raised by Mr Allister. I tell him that the Bill has been drafted by experts in the Office of the Legislative Counsel, and there is nothing obscure in its drafting. The Bill provides for what is needed for the inquiry, and Sir Anthony Hart, who is widely acknowledged — including by Mr Allister today — as a person of legal brilliance, is content that the terms of reference are not in the Bill. Were the terms of reference in the Bill, an

amendment to the Bill would be required to change them. I think that that fairly comprehensively deals with that issue.

The terms of reference issued in October were updated to reflect the change in the relevant period of the inquiry from 1945-1995 to 1922-1995 and to include a reference to:

“Bearing in mind the need to guard against future abuse”.

That was not a correction, as Mr Allister wrongly suggested, but a response to the requirements of victims and survivors.

From the beginning, we committed to agreeing the terms of reference with the chairman, and that is reflected in the Bill. The chairman did not wish to have abuse defined in the terms of reference of the Bill, so we do not support that amendment.

The acknowledgement forum was raised by Mr Agnew. It is a crucial part of the inquiry and cannot be concerned with people who were abused in other jurisdictions. There is an advocacy service that is designed for the victims and survivors here. However, as I said, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister have communicated their concerns about abuse that is alleged to have occurred outside the jurisdiction of the Northern Ireland Executive with the relevant person in that jurisdiction.

12.15 pm

Mr McDevitt: I am happy to conclude the debate on the group 1 amendments. For the record, I again pay tribute to all the survivors who got us to this point. Also, with your indulgence, Mr Speaker, I pay a personal and heartfelt tribute to Mrs Carmel Hanna, without whom we would not be at this point. It took some courage to bring this matter to the House in 2009, when it was not universally well received. She and the people on whose behalf she spoke out have been vindicated. Continuing her work has been my great privilege, as I am sure it has for Colum Eastwood in the Committee.

The Bill was last before the House at its Second Stage, when widespread and serious concerns were raised about a number of aspects. The Bill was very welcome but, it is only fair to say, very far from perfect. The extent to which the Bill was deeply imperfect is reflected by the number of amendments before the House today. Those amendments are principally in the name of the Bill's sponsors. I welcome that, and it is testament to the good work of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, which has done its work at Committee Stage well, thoroughly and properly.

A number of the amendments are not from the First Minister and deputy First Minister. Just because they do not come from them does not mean that they do not have considerable merit. They are, first, amendments that relate to the issues that Mr Allister raised on the basic question of whether to incorporate terms of reference into a Bill. Secondly, there is an amendment in Mr Eastwood's and my name about whether to specify, again in the Bill, the importance of the legacy of an inquiry.

An inquiry's legacy is measured in several ways, as amendment No 4 seeks to prove. The first way in which a legacy of an inquiry should be measured is in its discovery of truth through the establishment of fact, identification of wrongdoing and the proper clearing of children whose names were brought into serious disrepute by the institutions

and individuals who had charge of them. An inquiry should clearly identify the substantial shortcomings of the state. The genesis of this inquiry is the duty that the state has to children, a duty that, in this jurisdiction and in this context, the state undoubtedly and miserably failed to fulfil. That is the basic issue.

The inquiry will go quite close to the heart of the state. It will not simply deal with what happened in institutions; it will also have to consider the way in which the state failed to regulate, monitor and protect and to prosecute individuals who were abusing children. As a legislator and one of a select few who have the power to change the nature of this state, I feel uncomfortable about the fact that we are not willing to allow the chair of the inquiry the specific and unchallengeable power to challenge the state substantially. I wonder why we resist doing so.

The other point worth making is that this will be the first public inquiry to be established by the Assembly since our coming into being. It will inevitably set a precedent. It will be looked to as a model, maybe not specifically in legal terms, but certainly in parliamentary, procedural and policy terms.

I ask colleagues on all sides of the House to reflect on an inquiry in a different context. That could be an inquiry into an aspect of our past, such as the Finucane situation or the Ballymurphy situation. I ask colleagues to think about whether we would feel comfortable allowing the degree of latitude that is built into the Bill if the inquiry were dealing with those situations. The amendments would reduce the latitude that is available to those in political office. They would place this Assembly and legislature on a firm footing and give the Assembly certainty that the decisions that it is taking in establishing the inquiry are right not just for the specific circumstance of historic institutional abuse but for future circumstances. I appeal to colleagues, before they walk through the Lobbies, to reflect deeply on that. We should not set a precedent that we may live to regret. We may live to regret it in the context of this inquiry, but I suggest that we will almost certainly live to regret it in the context of future potential inquiries.

Amendment No 4 is a guarantee that this House, not the Executive, a Minister or the First Minister and deputy First Minister, is ultimately in control of the nature, depth, breadth and jurisdiction of the inquiry. When I read the evidence that Sir Anthony Hart himself gave on 4 July, it was clear to me that he was clear that it is a matter for those setting up the inquiry to decide on the specific jurisdiction of that inquiry. However, he also clearly said:

“I did not see it as my function either then or now to rewrite the terms of reference in the sense of saying that this should be included or that should be included where those matters would involve policy. That was for those setting up the inquiry, but I did offer some comments”.

He went on to say:

“I am not entirely clear in my own mind why, unless it is simply because of their length and complexity, the terms of reference do not appear in the legislation that you are being asked to consider”.

Later in that meeting he spoke about not being clear about why his powers would not be made very specific to him.

The key phrase for us to reflect on in the House — the legislature — is the statement he made that:

“That was for those setting up the inquiry”.

“Those” are us. It is this House that will set up the inquiry, because it is a statutorily based inquiry. It is not the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, yet we are asked to accept that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister will be the custodian of the terms of reference.

I do not want to delay the House much longer, but I want to say as clearly and concisely as I can that it is important that we bolt down every last bit of this. The terms of reference, as currently constituted, meritorious as they may not be, are not fully bolted down, nor is the extent to which the report that would be published can really effect the sort of change that, I believe, all of us as individuals not only want it to achieve but demand that it achieve. Would it not be a terrible tragedy if, six years from now, we came back to look for that report and found it gathering dust? Why? That would be because the House, at this time, did not see the need to make it a requirement in law that that report, where necessary, would have the opportunity to be binding in law on us as a legislature.

Question put, That amendment No 1 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 22; Noes 70.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan,

Mr Eastwood, Mr Ford, Mrs D Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McClarty, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs McKeivitt and Mr Rogers

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCreagh, Mr I McCreagh, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O’Dowd, Mrs O’Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms Fearon and Mr G Robinson

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time. We will return to the Bill after Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.37 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 9 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises: Research and Development

1. **Mr P Ramsey** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how her Department intends to promote and support research and development for small and medium sized businesses which have not previously benefited from such support, to encourage growth and job creation. (AQO 2901/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Since 2009, Invest Northern Ireland has significantly increased the amount of budget available to support companies to undertake research and development. On average, an annual budget of £35 million has been allocated, with a key focus on encouraging companies that are new to R&D. That is done through a combination of advertising, direct marketing and innovation advisers who proactively seek out and advise businesses on the range of support available, such as the highly successful innovation vouchers. Since April 2011, Invest Northern Ireland support has leveraged £92 million of business investment in R&D, with 56% coming from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). That has helped us to raise the level of business expenditure in R&D to its highest-ever level in Northern Ireland.

Mr P Ramsey: I thank the Minister for her response. Could she outline how her Department is working with the Technology Strategy Board to access new funding arrangements and how that information could be disseminated and passed on to small businesses in particular?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. The Technology Strategy Board is a key player as we try to encourage more companies to become involved in research and development, particularly in the public sector, and as we try to get companies to become more innovative.

We are talking to the Technology Strategy Board about innovation and procurement. I know that the Member will take an interest in that, because one challenge for us with regard to our small and medium-sized businesses is to ask those in charge of procurement whether we can do something different in our procurement contracts to get Northern Ireland companies to come forward with new and innovative ways of doing things here. I very much welcome the work that is ongoing, particularly with the Technology Strategy Board and through other knowledge transfer programmes, and we will continue to work with those.

I am very pleased with the increase in spend on research and development in Northern Ireland, particularly at a time when the economic circumstances are not good. I

know that it is difficult for companies, particularly small companies, to take in the message that they need to spend more on research and development, but it is the only way forward because we need to keep ahead with new technology and new innovation.

Mr Cree: Can the Minister outline the assistance received by Northern Ireland companies to date from the small business research initiative (SBRI)?

Mrs Foster: The small business research initiative is part of what we are doing with the Technology Strategy Board, and, as I said, we very much recognise the importance of utilising the buying power of the public sector as a key driver in the economy. The SBRI is central to that. We want the Northern Ireland public sector to run a much greater number of small business research initiatives and more Northern Ireland companies to win SBRI's across the UK and European Union. I do not have the precise figures with me, but I am happy to write to the Member with those. The good news is that we are very much engaged with the Technology Strategy Board on research and development and SBRI's.

Energy Firms: Investment

2. **Mr Givan** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the level of confidence among energy firms in relation to investment, in light of the recent decisions by the Utility Regulator on price reviews. (AQO 2902/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Utility Regulator has the statutory responsibility for the price control process. Mechanisms exist to challenge regulatory decisions should companies feel that the regulatory decision is incorrect. It is not for me to become involved in the due process to be followed in determining the price controls. However, it is important that the price control process ultimately gets to the point where there is an appropriate balance between ensuring that the energy firms have sufficient financial cover to make the investments necessary in infrastructure and ensuring that the costs to consumers are minimised.

Mr Givan: The Minister will know that the Competition Commission's indications are that the Utility Regulator has failed to act in the public interest in the case of Phoenix Natural Gas and that, ultimately, the actions of this Utility Regulator are damaging confidence in investors, and consumers will be left to pick up the cost.

The Minister will know that Professor Littlechild has done a damning report, saying that this Utility Regulator is undermining the regulatory system in Northern Ireland.

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

Mr Givan: Does the Minister believe that the Utility Regulator is damaging confidence in investors and, therefore, is damaging to consumers, who will, ultimately, be left to pick up the cost?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. Recent responses to my Department's consultation on the new Energy Bill have shown that energy firms do have some concerns about the way in which the Utility Regulator is operating. Of course, these concerns need to be balanced against the principal duties of the regulator and, indeed, of the Department, particularly for electricity. The duty is to protect the

consumer, so there is a difficult balance. That is recognised, and that is why checks and balances are in place. If a utility company does not accept the price control that is determined by the regulator, there are other mechanisms to deal with these issues. The message is that it is a difficult balance, but it is a balance that needs to be achieved. That is the job of the regulator.

Mr Elliott: Given the concerns that were outlined in the answer to Mr Givan, is it within the Minister's remit or power to review the Utility Regulator's role? If so, is there any intention to do so in the near future?

Mrs Foster: As I indicated, these concerns have been raised in response to the consultation on the Energy Bill, and I recognise that there are genuine issues that we need to address around accountability and the need to ensure that the regulatory framework for energy in Northern Ireland ensures the right investment for the future. That is why I am introducing proposals in the new Energy Bill that will ensure provision to ensure that this happens.

Specifically, I am introducing a proposal for a new strategy and policy statement, which will be developed by the Department. Obviously, it will be consulted upon and laid before the Assembly for debate and agreement. We have in mind that the regulator will have a duty to have regard to that strategy and policy statement in the performance of his duties. It would also ensure that the regulator is aligned with the Executive's strategic energy goals. Of course, we are not suggesting for one minute that he does not do that at the moment, but we are providing confidence that there will be greater coherence between policy and regulation. I intend to bring that to the Floor of the House so that we can all discuss that issue. I have to recognise that those concerns have been registered with me.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister alluded to the fact that there are concerns within energy companies about the level of confidence that they hold in the Utility Regulator. Will the Minister clarify whether the office of the Utility Regulator still has her full confidence?

Mrs Foster: It does, because I recognise that there are difficult decisions to be taken. It is about balancing the different remits and ensuring that companies have enough cover to make their investments. At the same time, it is about ensuring that the controls on price are there as well. As energy Minister, I cannot take sides on the issue, but I am concerned to ensure that appropriate investment can continue. That is critical, but that investment must continue not at any cost to the consumer but at a fair cost. That is where I sit on this issue.

Mr A Maginness: I am pleased that the Minister has spoken forthrightly in asserting confidence in the Utility Regulator. I and my party support that. In the current situation, the Minister must be aware that the proposals put forward by Northern Ireland Electricity would mean an increase of 5% plus inflation for businesses and 4% plus inflation per annum for domestic users. That, surely, would be unacceptable.

Mrs Foster: The Member has, again, pointed out the balance that has to be achieved by the regulator's office — it is an office, as opposed to a person, and I think that sometimes Members forget that.

It is important that we have that balance between price control and the need for investment by companies. That is certainly what the regulator has to take into account when looking at all of these matters. Indeed, we have the system that we do so that companies do not have to accept the price control but can reject it. Then, other mechanisms are used to try to deal with the matter effectively. It is important that public confidence is retained in regulated industries because that is key for us moving forward.

China: Trade Mission

3. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the opportunities that exist in China for Northern Ireland companies, in light of her most recent trade mission to that country. (AQO 2903/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am delighted to report, following my visit last week, that a broad range of opportunities for Northern Ireland businesses exists in China. Announcements were made last week by Wrightbus, Yelo, Texthelp and Glenarm Organic Salmon. I visited the Shenyang Aircraft Corporation and Shenyang Dimplex Electronics, both of which are important links in the supply chain of companies here.

I also promoted our universities and further education colleges in government meetings. Companies on the multi-sector trade mission and those exhibiting at Food Hotel China generated a significant number of leads that will require follow-up. With commitment from our companies, there are clearly opportunities to grow our export sales to China.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for her response. Given the excellent news today that the G8 conference will be hosted at Lough Erne Resort in Fermanagh next year, how does the Minister envisage that Northern Ireland can be showcased? I think especially of the excellent agrifood industry that we can showcase to all from around the world who will visit Northern Ireland.

Mrs Foster: Mr Deputy Speaker, it will not surprise you to know that I am ecstatic that the G8 summit is coming to Fermanagh in 2013. It says a lot about Northern Ireland today that our Prime Minister can have the confidence to come to the most westerly part of Northern Ireland to hold the G8 summit in what he said today is "one of the most beautiful" parts of the United Kingdom. *[Interruption.]* I am only quoting the Prime Minister; others can check that.

The G8 presents us with a huge opportunity to showcase companies right across Northern Ireland and show the world, from a tourism perspective, the opportunities for people to visit here. I think that it opens up Northern Ireland to be showcased in a way that, in the past, we have not been able to do. Some places in the world are aware of Northern Ireland for the wrong, negative reasons. This is a great opportunity for us to be positive about the place in which we live, and I hope that all parties will join me in saying how great an opportunity this is for Northern Ireland and, indeed, for Fermanagh.

Mr McClarty: I congratulate all concerned on bringing the G8 conference to Fermanagh. My only regret is that the G8 conference is not coming to the premier tourist area of Northern Ireland.

I return to the original question of China. Does the Minister agree with me that the establishment of the Confucius Institute at the University of Ulster in Coleraine has been

instrumental in creating openings and opportunities for delegations leaving Northern Ireland to go to China?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. The Confucius Institute has really opened up China to us in a way that we have been waiting for. I very much look forward to subregional hubs being established right across Northern Ireland, so that we can look forward to Mandarin being taught right across Northern Ireland and our children and young people being educated about what is a global opportunity.

Mr Moutray referred to our agrifood companies. I have to say that the agrifood companies that were with me at the Food Hotel China event felt that there were huge opportunities and leads to be followed up. They said to me that China was a market wherein they felt that they could do business. That is not to say that there are not challenges in China; of course there are. There are cultural and language challenges and, indeed, challenges with export licences, and so on. However, we will work very hard to make sure that we overcome those challenges, and I think that the Confucius Institute is part of overcoming some of the cultural and language issues.

2.15 pm

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she tell us about the business opportunities that have been identified in China and how they will be informed by and promoted with local businesses?

Mrs Foster: As I indicated, a number of announcements were made while the First Minister and deputy First Minister were in China along with me and the Agriculture Minister.

There was an announcement about a deal with a company called Yelo involving a £1 million deal to China. New clients in China based in Beijing, Shenzhen and Shanghai have purchased laser diode systems from the company. We are also very pleased to see that Wrightbus continues with its product, which, as we know, is very innovative. It was able to say that 50 bus kits will go to the Kowloon Motor Bus Company, a company with which it has been doing business for some time. Glenarm Salmon was able to announce an export deal. Lastly, Texthelp, a partnership deal between the China Education Alliance and a provider of online education, which is based in Antrim, was also announced.

Those announcements have already been made. I think that the opportunities are very clear for all to see, not least for tourism. I think that, again, the G8 summit comes in at that point. Although China is not a member of the G8, it will allow us to globally sell Northern Ireland from a tourism perspective. China will have 100 million tourists by 2012. That is a huge outflow of people right across the world. We want to get some of that to come to Northern Ireland, and we can do that through our presence in China and through our products and food. I think that food is a key area that we should continue to press on the Chinese market.

Ms Lo: My question to the Minister about tourism has just been answered. I congratulate the Minister on the success of the investment and business links with China. I was just ahead of the Minister, as I was in China about a week or so before her.

Minister, I have written to you before about the Schengen visa agreement. Have you explored that issue any further, given that tourism has huge potential for Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: I hosted a Tourism Ireland lunch when I was in Shanghai, and I spoke to some journalists from the travel media. We talked about visas and access into Northern Ireland. Some of them did not realise that, if they had a UK visa, they were able to visit Northern Ireland. We were able to tell them that, under the travel arrangements that have been agreed with the Republic of Ireland's Government, they can go to the whole of the island of Ireland. So, if they have a UK visa, they can come to the British Isles and not have to worry about visas. I think that that is very important and is something that we need to keep pushing. The Schengen argument, of course, is different and is one that our national Government takes up.

World Police and Fire Games: Hospitality Sector

4. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she is taking to ensure that the demands on the hospitality sector arising from the World Police and Fire Games can be met. (AQO 2904/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My officials and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board have had discussions with the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau, the World Police and Fire Games company and the wider hospitality industry to ensure that participants in the games, as well as visitors, will have a good experience. Almost 20 seminars will have been held with local businesses using the tourist information centres and industry association networks. The Tourist Board, convention centre and games company will continue to encourage the whole of Northern Ireland to meet the demands of hospitality and maximise the opportunities from tourism in 2013.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister for her answer. She will know that the greater Belfast area has 3,764 hotel rooms. If you replicate the 86% occupancy rate that was achieved for the relevant period this year, that will leave some 527 rooms spare for anticipated visitor numbers of 15,000. Does the Minister agree that that is a tight fit?

Mrs Foster: Yes, and I am not asking them all to share. We are fully aware of the challenge that lies ahead of us with the World Police and Fire Games. It is a challenge that we now face with the G8 as well, because we know that thousands of people will come to Northern Ireland for that event.

This is about being flexible, working with accommodation providers, being innovative — pop-up hotels, for example — and making sure that we stay very close to the limited company that is planning the World Police and Fire Games, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. Will she confirm that her Department's plans are, in fact, to ensure that Northern Ireland's economy benefits from the games in the longer term?

Mrs Foster: Of course, we want to benefit at the time, but, as was the case with our plans this year during Our Time, Our Place, we also have to ensure that we leave a legacy. I very much hope that the World Police and Fire Games and the UK City of Culture in Londonderry will leave substantial

legacies for Northern Ireland. Again, it is an opportunity for us to shine and to show how we can rise to the challenge.

Over the past year, we have risen to the challenge when it has been delivered to us. We have found that the best way in which to face challenges is to work alongside our partners, and we are doing so. We are working alongside the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau, 2013 World Police and Fire Games Ltd and all other partners, such as Tourism Ireland. We will work together to make sure that the games are the great success that we want them to be.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for the response. Will she provide assurances that the accommodation needs and demands of Derry and the north-west, as part of Fleadh Cheoil and City of Culture, will also be accommodated?

Mrs Foster: The plans for the World Police and Fire Games will, of course, be part of our challenge next year. The UK City of Culture up in Londonderry and all the events surrounding that will have to be accommodated as well, and I think that I have told the Member before in an answer that we will be as flexible and innovative as we can be with accommodation. The providers in the city are getting themselves ready for the upcoming events, but we will have to go wider than that to look for accommodation provision. We will be as innovative as we can be, and I will use any power that I have to be flexible with regulations.

Renewable Energy

5. **Mrs Hale** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what level of assistance will be in place to support investors in renewable energy generation after 2016. (AQO 2905/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The closure of the Northern Ireland renewables obligation (NIRO) to new generation in 2017, as part of UK-wide electricity market reform, will require the introduction of separate incentive mechanisms for large- and small-scale renewable electricity generation. A UK-wide feed-in tariff with contracts for difference will be in place to support renewable electricity generation above five megawatts installed capacity commissioning from 2016. A separate, less complex feed-in tariff will support small-scale renewable electricity generation below five megawatts.

Mrs Hale: I thank the Minister for her answer. I am sure that she is aware that there is a lot of interest in anaerobic digestion projects as a renewable energy source. What assurances can she give people who are starting digestion projects that support will be available post-2016?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for her question. There are currently six anaerobic digestion stations accredited under the NIRO, and they are contributing to the mix of renewable technologies. I was very pleased to visit one such anaerobic digestion plant at Ballyrashane Creamery in Coleraine. That is a very good example of a local company taking its environmental obligations seriously, but doing it in a way that makes a difference to its energy costs bottom line. I was very pleased to see the way in which that has developed.

I cannot confirm the amount of support that will be available post-2016, but, as in all other cases for Northern

Ireland, we will be evidence-led. We will look for evidence to see what sort of incentive is needed at that particular time, and then we will ensure that we have the proper mix in the Northern Ireland energy solutions. It is important that we have a diverse range of energy products. I understand that there are approximately 80 plants at various stages of the planning application process for anaerobic digestion projects, and I think that that shows the interest that is there across Northern Ireland.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. When does the Minister expect legislation and incentives to be in place to support the development of our deep geothermal resources, especially in places such as Ballymena?

Mrs Foster: The Member will know that I intend that the second phase of renewable heat will come on stream next year. We are looking at all the renewable heat processes and the different technologies and sources, and that is something that I hope to be able to clarify early next year.

Mr Copeland: Does the Minister have any plans to increase the number of renewables obligation certificates per 255 kilowatt wind turbine? That would incentivise and help to increase their number across Northern Ireland in order to meet her 2020 targets.

Mrs Foster: We are on course to meet our 2020 targets as it is, and, frankly, the evidence is not there to support an increase. As I have said, all our incentive rates are set by looking at the industry, seeing what is available and taking an evidence-based approach to our incentives. Therefore, I have no plans to increase the incentives as the Member has asked.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises: Start-up Grants

6. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the steps her Department is taking to implement an effective grant support system for start-up small and medium-sized enterprises. (AQO 2906/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest Northern Ireland has developed grant support specifically designed for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through its growth accelerator programme (GAP). SMEs account for 76% of all jobs promoted through the jobs fund since its launch. Financial support is also available under export start and global start schemes.

Grants are part of the solution for SMEs. However, these businesses also benefit from the many areas of capability support provided by my Department through Invest NI. That includes support available under the current Regional Start and Boosting Business initiatives, which provide direct access to expertise in areas that are of particular concern to SMEs, such as business planning, skills, markets and finance. My Department has worked to ensure that these products are well promoted, accessible, and delivered at local levels.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her answer. Does she agree that very often when a new one-person business is starting off, a start-up grant is crucially important? In the 1980s and 1990s, start-up grants were crucial for starting up many small businesses that have now grown. I encourage the Minister to consider a further start-up grant for some one-person businesses.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. He is right. When I came into this job, the level of grant was £400 for a business start-up under the Go For It programme. At that time, as is normal with all these programmes, we had an evaluation carried out, and the experts told me that the £400 was dead weight. In other words, it was not needed for people starting up their new businesses.

However, I am minded to look at the matter again because of where we find ourselves and because of the continued difficulties in relation to access to finance, particularly for small companies. However, I hope that the small loans that we are bringing out very soon will give that capability to companies, but I am minded to look at this matter again and to look at the evidence base to see if there is a need for us to reintroduce a small level of grant again.

Mr Dunne: Will the Minister advise on what Invest NI is doing to address the needs of the wider business community in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: As the Member knows, we launched Boosting Business last October. That has been very well received by the wider business base. It comes in many different guises. It can come in the guise of the jobs fund, which is there to try and help support new jobs in local businesses. As I have often said, if every business in Northern Ireland could just provide us with one or two extra jobs, that would deal with the unemployment issue that we have here in Northern Ireland. As I said in my substantive answer, we also offer many types of advice, assistance and capability planning and perhaps looking at business plans and advising in relation to access to finance.

Invest Northern Ireland has changed to become an organisation that is accessible to everyone regardless of what their business is, where they are or the size of their business. I hope that, when constituents come to see them about their difficulties, Members of the House will advise them that there is a resource and that they should use it.

2.30 pm

Environment

Planning Service: Communication

1. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of the Environment what measures he plans to introduce to improve communication between his Department's Planning Service and applicants and agents who presently have to use the NI Direct (101) system. (AQO 2916/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I thank the Member for his question. As Members know, in 2008, NI Direct was phased in, with the Planning Service as one of the initial anchor tenants. Some of the figures confirm that the process has bedded in well and can bed in further. For example, between April and October 2012, NI Direct, on behalf of Planning Service, handled over 57,000 calls, with 22% of that total number being dealt with by the initial contact staff and others being referred on in the appropriate way to Planning Service. The consequence of that, together with the planning portal that was introduced in 2012, means that citizens have much easier and better access to Planning Service and planning information than was the case previously, when they had to ring the planning office directly.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his reply. Does he accept that the present system causes further frustration and unnecessary delay for applicants and agents? As a result, there is a detrimental effect on the economy, as small businesses, especially architects, struggle to bring forward projects to boost the economy.

Mr Attwood: That is not, by and large, what agents, the planning industry and citizens tell me. I am sure that there are always, as we know, levels of delay and frustration with contact centres, but I am not being told that that is the broad experience. If 22% of contacts are being dealt with by the contact centre, 80% of other issues are being responded to by Planning Service within 24 hours and calls are being answered within 15 seconds of being made, all of that suggests that the new approach to citizen/agent/developer contact with Planning Service is beginning to bed in more and more. Together with access to the planning portal, where there are over 130,000 points of contact every month, that certainly all helps the planning process. Certainly, there will be nobody in the planning system, including me, who would not call for even better performance than that. However, I think that that performance is working to the benefit of the development industry.

Mr Cree: As many of the calls to 101 result simply in a call-back request for the planner concerned, is it possible that requests could be sent either by e-mail or text and, therefore, save time? For general enquiries about policy, fees and that nature of thing, is it possible for telephone attendants to be competent enough to deal with those issues directly with the applicant?

Mr Attwood: As I indicated, 22% of initial points of contact are dealt with by the person who is contacted. Therefore, given the NI Direct system and the skills of staff who manage those calls, 22% of initial points of contact on planning concerns and requests for information are dealt with there and then. That demonstrates that, even though it is not a specialist service, one in four citizens gets the information that he or she requires at the point of contact. As Members know, MLAs have direct access to the planning system, thereby improving communication between developers, planning agents and those who make representations on behalf of applicants.

We intend to roll out changes to the planning system that will see applications being made online, rather than, as in the current system, through the paper process. So, yes, we will continue to look at opportunities to roll out and improve the service, but I think that people are voting with their feet. The figures suggest that fewer and fewer people find that they need to contact the Planning Service directly, because the response time from the Planning Service to 80% of the cases and the initial response through NI Direct to 20% of the cases are beginning to work more and more effectively.

Mrs D Kelly: Are there any measures in the draft Planning Bill that will actually assist planning applicants and give them confidence that there will be improvement?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for her question. Yes, I believe that, as we try to upgrade the planning system and make it more fit for purpose, the Planning Bill that I would like to bring to the Floor of the Assembly in the near future will do that. It will not just do it in the short term, but it will make the planning system more fit for purpose in

the rundown to the transfer of planning functions to local councils and at the point of transfer in 2015. How will that be done? The Planning Bill will accelerate provisions in the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. It will enable people other than those in the Planning Appeals Commission to conduct inquiries. It will create statutory consultee timelines so that those who are consulted are required to respond in a proper manner within a good period of time, perhaps as little as 21 or 28 days. It will encourage pre-application discussions between a developer and the local community, which is good in itself, but it is also in anticipation of the RPA transfer of the community planning function to local councils. In all those ways, the planning system can be improved, but we need to improve it, and to improve it we need to have the law before this Chamber. I hope that the Executive will sign off as quickly as possible on the Planning Bill to allow it to come to the Floor of the Chamber so that all those reforms that are in the interests of the economy, the citizen and the developer can be accelerated.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before we go on to our next question, I advise Members that questions 4 and 8 have been withdrawn and require a written answer.

Permitted Development Rights

2. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the changes he is intending to make to the permitted development rights regime as outlined in the Executive's economy and jobs initiative. (AQO 2917/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member, for this is an important question. If we are able to amend and reform the planning system around permitted development rights, we will simplify the planning system and make it more responsive, in my view, to the economic conditions that currently prevail. There has been a roll-out, over the last two years in particular, of various permitted development rights, but in my view the Department has to stretch its ambition in that regard. That is why, earlier this month, I announced a consultation on PD rights for agricultural buildings, including buildings that would hold anaerobic digesters, proposing, unlike any other part of these islands, that PD rights would extend to a scale of building of 500 square metres.

In the near future — in the course of 2013 — I intend to roll out further PD rights in respect of non-domestic microgeneration, public utilities, telecommunications and temporary use of land for street markets, thereby creating more opportunity for quite moderate but useful development in a way that might encourage the construction industry, encourage development and respond to the needs of the wider community in terms of what should or should not have full planning permission when it comes to planning development.

Miss M McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his answer. Further to that, what does he anticipate will be the impact on the economy of the changes that he has outlined? Does he anticipate any legislative change for those proposals?

Mr Attwood: No, there is no need for change in primary legislation, but clearly regulations will have to be issued in respect of the PD rights that will be amended. What will the difference be? From my conversations with the farming industry, I understand that, when it comes to agricultural buildings or buildings that hold anaerobic digesters, 500

square metres PD rights are of some significance. That is not small-scale development, and it would be useful in allowing the farming industry to grow its opportunities. Similarly, if we have more flexible PD rights for solar panels; ground- and water-source heat pumps; renewable technology; the replacement of telecommunication masts for the telecoms industry; and public utilities around railways, docks or harbours — all those taken together — we will free up the planning process to deal with other significant applications and free up business to have some development that will sustain their business models going forward.

Mr Nesbitt: In the Minister's substantive answer, he talked about the economic conditions that currently prevail. Given those conditions, does he have any plans to extend the rights to small and medium enterprises?

Mr Attwood: Two months ago, PD rights were extended for shops, financial and professional institutions, schools, colleges, universities, hospitals and in relation to demolition. That indicates that, although there is consultation on agricultural PD rights, for which proposals will be outlined next year, a family of PD rights has already been introduced, because that is desirable and may provide some net economic gain. In addition to the categories already named, PD rights have been extended for domestic microgeneration and caravan sites. We must always be mindful that permitted developments have to be within certain limits when it comes to boundary proximity, height and ground area and are subject to those necessary standards. The extension of PD rights over the past 18 months and the further extensions that will be rolled out over the next eight months deal with the very issue that the Member refers to.

Mrs McKeivitt: With particular reference to the proposed changes in the area of permitted development, will the Minister outline the benefits to small businesses, particularly in rural areas?

Mr Attwood: If you look at what has already been agreed and is in place, you will see that we have more flexible PD rights when it comes to home extensions, loft extensions, permeable hard surfaces, solar panels and various other developments. When you take that family of PD rights and translate it into construction on the ground or the installation of a solar panel on a roof or, in future, an agricultural extension on farm property and scale it up in respect of its economic benefit to small business, be it urban and rural, and when it comes to construction opportunities and so on, you see that therein lies the answer.

Town Centres: Dereliction

3. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the scope to make further dereliction interventions in town centres. (AQO 2918/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I welcome the question. My answer is this: go to Portrush and Portstewart or to Derry/Londonderry in the run up to the City of Culture. The interventions there to mitigate decay and dereliction have proven and continue to prove that that is a worthwhile investment for a moderate sum of money.

I made a bid for moneys for Derry in June monitoring, but that was denied. I also made a bid for moneys in September monitoring and in the recent economic

package, but that was denied. However, I think that the argument is gathering pace around the Executive table that deploying a relatively small scale of moneys to address decay and dereliction in towns and cities across the North has added value in this time of recession. That is why, at the moment, my Department is asking all councils to bring forward proposals. I encourage them to do that, so that, in the event of further money becoming available in the Department or through monitoring in January that has to be spent by the end of the financial year, there will be shovel-ready projects across council areas in the North in order to do what worked so well in Portrush and Portstewart, namely interventions at 20 or 25 sites of decay and dereliction that improved the appearance of that part of the world to the benefit of residents and tourists alike.

2.45 pm

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his reply. I have to agree with him that some people now describe Portrush as a northern version of Kinsale, which is the highest accolade that you can afford any town. Has the Minister any plans to roll out his successful scheme to other towns and, indeed, to encourage, if not compel, property owners to take a greater interest in property that has fallen into dereliction or is an eyesore?

Mr Attwood: I wrote to the chief executive of Coleraine Borough Council acknowledging the good work that has been done and asking him to share the best practice that was deployed and whether there was something more that we needed to do so that Portrush can be more and more like Kinsale going forward. I indicated what I thought the ambition of this project should be. I look forward to the deployment of, I hope, significant sums of money from within the Department or through January monitoring for projects across council areas.

Councils have responsibility as well. Belfast City Council uses the pollution order to good effect to deal with derelict sites and properties. All councils should do the same, and I will write to them in that regard. Belfast City Council has a suite of local law that deals with dangerous buildings. Most other councils have the same suite, and they should deploy their legislative powers to bear down on developers and landowners, particularly those who are still viable and in business, to meet their responsibility to their local community and citizens to deal with pollution, dangerous buildings, decay and dereliction. So the process is twin-track. On the one hand, we will give money, as demonstrated in Derry, to improve the appearance of the city in advance of the year of culture, but Derry and all the other councils should deploy all the legal weapons in their armoury to go after the developers and landowners who have money and a responsibility that they are not facing up to.

Mr G Robinson: Does the Minister agree that positive action in addressing dereliction in small towns such as Limavady and Bangor creates a better image of such towns and makes them more attractive to possible investors?

Mr Attwood: I hope that the Minister of Finance and Personnel is listening to that claim and that, when it comes to January monitoring, if there is money available and five, 10 or 15 councils in the North have brought forward costed proposals to spend money in the run-up to the end of the financial year, he will agree with his colleague and say that Limavady needs money to deal with decay and dereliction.

I am not saying this in a stand-and-deliver moment to the Minister of Finance and Personnel. Without breaking Executive confidence, although that has not stopped me before, he said at a recent Executive meeting that he thought that the Portrush and Portstewart model had worked very well. I suspect that he said that because people like you have said it to him, and he may have seen it himself. If it works very well, has a disproportionate impact on trading confidence and the appearance of the area and may even sustain if not create trading opportunities for small and medium enterprises, it is one of the better models for spending end-of-year moneys and moneys year in and year out, to deal with decay and dereliction, improve trade, sustain local business and give confidence to people at a time of economic downturn.

Mr Flanagan: What is the Minister's assessment of the state of the planning guidelines for businesses that wish to cover a boarded-up window in high street premises with some form of advertising to highlight the fact that there is a business in the vicinity and take away the bad look of that boarded-up window?

Mr Attwood: They should do so but in a way that is consistent with the guidelines. That applies whether boarded-up windows are covered with advertisements or, as happened in Bushmills, paintings. The paintings were not just of any old thing but of local people and personalities. That was done to bring local character to derelict properties, and I encourage other councils to do that, too. If I can provide money to help them to do that, so be it.

Mr McGimpsey: When looking at issues such as dereliction, which is what we are talking about, and considering that around 20% of our shops lie empty, we should realise that boarding up windows in places such as Belfast city centre and the other shopping areas in Belfast is not going to do it. Surely the Minister needs to look at the real threat to the shopping cores, which is the massive out-of-town superstores with free car parking. They draw shoppers away from the city centre and create this dereliction. Should he not look at something such as a 10-year moratorium on out-of-town shopping centres?

Mr Attwood: If a shop is in decay and dereliction, it is better to try to mitigate its appearance than not. If you can board up windows in a discerning and tasteful way to reduce the appearance of dereliction, that would seem to be a good idea. I see that the Member shakes his head. I do not know whether he has been in Portrush or Portstewart or whether he has spoken to the councillors there. Knocking down eyesore buildings, building urban parks and creating hoarding around derelict sites and so on has helped. It is a moderate intervention that has, in my view, a disproportionate benefit.

If I said today that there was a moratorium on out-of-town retailers, you know what would happen. There would be a rush to the PAC or the courts. People would say that such a moratorium was against the law and planning policy and that the action would not be legal. So, what am I doing? I will make the decisions on out-of-town retail, but, as with NIIRTA, I agree on the principle of town centre first. I will take a precautionary approach to out-of-town retail that is consistent with the law and planning policy to mitigate the risk of legal challenge, while — I have just come from a meeting at which we discussed this — developing a new PPS 5 that very much lives up to the sentiments of the Member's question. Those sentiments are that it is

town centre first and there should be a rebalancing and reconfiguration of town centre and out-of-town retail.

Mr McClarty: I congratulate the Minister on his initiative to deal with derelict buildings, particularly in Portrush and Portstewart. Portrush is not quite the Athens of the north, but it is a lot better than it was. What steps is the Minister taking to recover the costs of dereliction intervention from the property owners?

Mr Attwood: When it was agreed with landowners or property owners that people could go on site, a provision was put into the contract that there could be clawback of moneys that were invested. I referred to the letter that I sent to the chief executive of Coleraine Borough Council. In that letter, I asked him to advise me further on whether and how any clawback provision should be deployed. Given the scale of investment in a lot of the sites, it will sometimes not be very cost-effective or a good use of council time to deploy the clawback mechanism. However, where there may have been substantial investments and where clawback was executed between the landowner and the council, I encourage the council to see what can be done.

Strategic Waste Infrastructure Programme

5. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the strategic waste infrastructure programme following the decision by the Southern Waste Management Partnership to abandon procurement of a long-term waste infrastructure contract. (AQO 2920/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for her question, if I can just find it.

As the Member knows, the SWaMP project on future waste procurement has, for various reasons, been concluded. Those on the Arc21 scheme continue to have conversations, and their discussions with their bidder are in their latter stages. However, although it was anticipated that, on the far side of some technical and environmental statement issues being dealt with, something more material would emerge by February, I now understand that that may not arise for another six months after that date.

The appointment business case for the third scheme — the North West Region Waste Management Group scheme — has been forwarded to DOE and DFP for approval. As I understand it, if that is approved, the North West Region Waste Management Group can consider moving to preferred bidder status, with the intention of having financial closure in the early months of 2013.

I want to make it clear that I have been very vigilant on these matters, because the scale of money involved and the number of years for the contracts is so significant that there was a heightened responsibility on government to ensure that the schemes and proposals were diligently managed. As a consequence, I have been very assertive in saying to the three procurement groups that this is the time and the place for all the issues of deliverability and affordability to be concluded.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for his detailed answer. Was legal advice given at any stage not to proceed further with the SWaMP project?

Mr Attwood: Owing to commercial confidentiality and because SWaMP was the contracting party, I have to be careful about what I say. Any arrangements were between

SWaMP and its contractor or contractor consortium. Clearly, on concluding that particular project, SWaMP received various pieces of advice, including legal advice, that led it to believe that, for legal and other reasons, it should not proceed with its proposal.

Ms Lo: With SWaMP pulling out, there will be a gap. Has the Department or the Minister had any conversations with SWaMP to see how it plans to meet its waste management targets?

Mr Attwood: All three procurement groups had and have contingency plans in place, in the event of none of the procurements getting over the line. They needed to have those plans to satisfy EU landfill and other requirements. That said, in a gateway review that I conducted of all the procurements, it was concluded that one or two procurements, not necessarily three, was all that is necessary to deal with the waste profile in this part of the world over the next 20 or 25 years. Consequently, beyond the interim contingency plans that may be in place in the event that no procurement succeeds, the assessment is that one or two procurements are all that is necessary for us to comply with our landfill diversion requirements.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister please provide an update on work being carried out on a North/South basis in the area and remit of waste management?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. The South has the same issues that we have with waste procurement requirements to fulfill European obligations. As I indicated in my statement to the House last week on the NSMC environment sectoral meeting, there is a lot of work going on and growing opportunities on the island to co-ordinate if not integrate our waste strategies.

As I have indicated, 30% of plastics on the island of Ireland are recycled, and 70% are not. Of that 30%, 30% is recycled on the island of Ireland and the rest is recycled outside the island.

That is a clear issue for our green agenda and for market opportunity. It is similarly so for bulky waste items such as large furniture and white goods. Consequently, the North/South market development steering group is taking forward work in respect of plastics and bulky waste to identify how we can do more to reuse bulky plastics and, in doing so, create market and job opportunities in the island, going forward.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That ends questions to the Minister of the Environment. I ask Members to take their ease while we change Clerks at Table.

3.00 pm

Executive Committee Business

Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill: Consideration Stage

Debate resumed:

Mr Deputy Speaker: We now resume the Consideration Stage of the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill.

Clause 1 (The inquiry)

Amendment No 2 proposed: In page 1, line 5, leave out from "as" to the end of line 7 and insert

"(a) to examine the arrangements in place in institutions in Northern Ireland for the protection of children from abuse during the period between 1922 and 1995;

(b) to examine if there were systemic failings by institutions or the state in their duties towards children in their care during the period between 1922 and 1995;

(c) to make relevant findings and recommendations, including recommendations to ensure that abuse is prevented effectively in the future." — [Mr Allister.]

Question put and negatived.

Amendment No 3 made: In page 1, line 7, leave out "31st May" and insert "18th October". — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 4 not moved.

Amendment No 5 made: In page 1, line 8, leave out "amend the terms of reference of the inquiry at any time" and insert

"at any time amend the terms of reference of the inquiry by order". — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Mr Deputy Speaker: We now come to the second group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 6, it will be convenient to debate the 38 amendments listed in group 2, which deal with changing the presiding member's title to "chairperson", and a small number of technical amendments. I call junior Minister, Mr Jonathan Bell, to move amendment No 6 and address the other amendments in group 2.

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I beg to move amendment No 6: In page 1, line 9, leave out "presiding member" and insert "chairperson".

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 10: In clause 2, page 1, line 21, leave out "presiding member" and insert "chairperson". — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 11: In clause 2, page 2, line 5, leave out "presiding member" and insert "chairperson". — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 12: In clause 2, page 2, line 8, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 13: In clause 2, page 2, line 9, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 14: In clause 2, page 2, line 10, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 15: In clause 3, page 2, line 41, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 16: In clause 3, page 2, line 42, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 17: In clause 4, page 3, line 11, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 18: In clause 4, page 3, line 13, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 19: In clause 4, page 3, line 16, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 20: In clause 5, page 3, line 21, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 23: In clause 5, page 3, line 23, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 26: In clause 5, page 3, line 28, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 31: In clause 6, page 3, line 37, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 32: In clause 6, page 3, line 39, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 34: In clause 6, page 4, line 2, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 37: In clause 7, page 4, line 6, leave out “presiding member” (in both places) and insert “chairperson”. —

[Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 38: In clause 7, page 4, line 14, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 39: In clause 7, page 4, line 15, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 42: In clause 8, page 4, line 23, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 43: In clause 8, page 4, line 27, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 44: In clause 8, page 5, line 1, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 45: In clause 9, page 5, line 19, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 46: In clause 9, page 5, line 27, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 47: In clause 9, page 6, line 1, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 48: In clause 9, page 6, line 4, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 59: In clause 12, page 7, line 8, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 60: In clause 13, page 7, line 22, leave out from “fails” to the end of line 24 and insert

“without reasonable excuse

(a) contravenes a restriction order; or

(b) fails to do anything which that person is required to do by a notice under section 9,

is guilty of an offence.” — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 61: In clause 13, page 7, line 39, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 62: In clause 13, page 8, line 1, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson

(The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 63: In clause 13, page 8, line 3, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 65: In clause 14, page 8, line 15, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 70: In clause 20, page 10, line 1, leave out subsection (2). — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 72: In clause 21, page 10, line 11, at end insert “ ‘chairperson’ means chairperson of the inquiry;”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 74: In clause 21, page 10, line 12, at end insert “ ‘harm’ includes death or injury;”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 76: In clause 21, page 10, line 15, at end insert “ ‘member’ includes chairperson;”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 77: In clause 21, page 10, leave out line 18. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 78: In clause 21, page 10, line 22, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

Mr Bell: The group 2 amendments are technical. They do not involve any change in policy. They are, nonetheless, important in tightening up the Bill. We are grateful to the Committee and the inquiry chair for proposing them.

The Bill as introduced refers to the person who is the presiding member of the inquiry. Neither Sir Anthony Hart nor the Committee were comfortable with that term. For that reason, amendment Nos 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23, 26, 31, 32, 34, 37, 38, 39, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 59, 61, 62, 63, 65 and 78 all change “presiding member” to “chairperson”. To complete the transformation, amendment Nos 72, 76 and 77 amend the definitions in clause 21 to remove the term “presiding member” to show that “chairperson” does indeed mean the chairperson of the inquiry and to ensure that the term “member” includes the chairperson.

Amendment No 74 inserts in clause 21 a new definition making it clear that “harm” includes death and injury. Under clause 8, the chairperson may, by order, impose restrictions on attendance at the inquiry or at any part of the inquiry or on disclosure or publication of evidence or documents given, produced or provided to the inquiry. Clause 13 already makes it an offence for a person to fail to comply with the restriction order. Amendment No 60 strengthens that to make it an offence to contravene a restriction order. Amendment No 70 removes a provision that was intended to amend the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, as that

Order has been repealed. Those are the amendments in group 2.

Mr Nesbitt (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): In relation to the changes in nomenclature from “presiding member” to “chairperson”, I can confirm that the Committee requested that the Department bring forward the necessary amendments, as acknowledged by junior Minister Bell. Everybody was using the term “chairperson” at the Committee, and it seemed sensible to reflect it in the Bill. As Mr Bell said, Sir Anthony was candid enough to suggest that he would be more comfortable sitting as a chairperson than as a presiding member. The Committee was also content with the related amendments to clause 21, reflected in the Minister’s amendment Nos 72, 76, 77 and 78.

In relation to clause 13 dealing with offences, there were no issues raised during the Committee’s consultation, and, just before its final clause-by-clause decisions on the Bill on 17 October, the Committee received a proposed departmental amendment. Officials spoke to the proposed amendment, reflected in the Minister’s amendment No 60 today, and members indicated that they were content with clause 13, subject to that amendment.

With regard to the Minister’s proposed amendment No 70 to clause 20, which is to leave out subsection 2, with the reference to the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults Order (PoCVA), that was not brought to the Committee during its scrutiny of the Bill. The Committee was content with clause 20 as drafted. However, amendment No 70 was noted at the Committee’s meeting on 14 November and no issues were raised.

At its meeting on 10 October, the Committee also considered another proposed departmental amendment to clause 21, which would insert a definition of “harm” to make clear that “harm” included death and injury. That is reflected in the Minister’s amendment No 74. That amendment was deemed necessary by the Department in relation to harm for the purposes of clause 8(4)(b), which states that the chairperson must have regard to:

“any risk of harm or damage that could be avoided or reduced”

when considering making a restriction order under clause 8. The Committee was content with clause 21, subject to the Department’s proposed amendments.

Members raised no issues in relation to clauses 2 and 4 and the Committee was content with the clauses subject to the Ministers’ nomenclature amendments.

Mr G Robinson: First, as a member of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I sympathise with all those poor human beings who were so cruelly abused over many years, and I commend the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) for bringing this Bill to the Floor of the Assembly. I thank all the Committee staff for their hard work in helping to craft the Bill.

I will speak to amendment Nos 6 to 48 inclusive, amendment Nos 61 to 70 and amendment Nos 77 and 78 in the second group of amendments, which were all made at the request of the chairman and serve to change the title

of “presiding member” to “chairperson”. My party is content with this proposal.

Amendment No 74 is, again, made at the request of the chair and is self-explanatory regarding the definition of harm that is to be used. My party supports this amendment.

Amendment No 76 includes simply changing the term “presiding member” to “chairperson”. Again, my party is happy to support this amendment.

Mr Eastwood: We support these amendments.

Mr Lyttle: We, too, support these amendments, given their largely technical nature.

Mr Bell: I think that this is the only occasion since I had the privilege of coming to this House on which I have had universal agreement across the Benches. I thank all the Members who contributed.

I will not go over each of the points in turn because I have already made them, and Members have responded well. Jennifer McCann, Martina Anderson before her and I wanted to produce the best Bill that we possibly could. I place on record my thanks to the Chairperson of the Committee and Committee members for helping us, even on technical amendments, to tighten up the Bill and make it better.

Question, That amendment No 6 be made, put and agreed to.

Amendment No 7 made: In page 1, line 10, at end insert “if a draft of the order has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, the Assembly”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 8 made: In page 1, line 12, leave out “1945” and insert “1922”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Mr Deputy Speaker: We now move to the third group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 9 it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 21, 22, 24 and 25, amendment Nos 27 to 30 and amendment No 52, which deals with the end of the inquiry and reporting requirements.

Members will note that amendment Nos 22, 24 and 25 and amendment Nos 27 to 30 are mutually exclusive with amendment No 21. Amendment Nos 24, 25, 27 and 30 are consequential to amendment No 22.

3.15 pm

Mr Eastwood: I beg to move amendment No 9: In page 1, line 16, at end insert

“(6) Without prejudice to any finding it may make in its final report, the inquiry panel may publish an interim report on the requirement or desirability for redress to be provided by the Executive to victims of historical institutional abuse.”

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 21: In clause 5, page 3, leave out lines 23 to 33. — [Mr Allister.]

No 22: In clause 5, page 3, line 23, leave out “a notice given to the presiding member”

and insert “an order made”. — [Mr Eastwood.]

No 24: In clause 5, page 3, line 25, leave out “a notice” and insert “an order”. — [Mr Eastwood.]

No 25: In clause 5, page 3, line 26, leave out “notice is sent” and insert “order is made”. — [Mr Eastwood.]

No 27: In clause 5, page 3, line 29, leave out “give a notice” and insert “make an order”. — [Mr Eastwood.]

No 28: In clause 5, page 3, line 31, leave out “set out in the notice” and insert “publish”. — [Mr Eastwood.]

No 29: In clause 5, page 3, leave out lines 32 and 33. — [Mr Eastwood.]

No 30: In clause 5, page 3, line 33, at end insert

“(5) No order shall be made under subsection (1)(b) unless a draft of the order has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, the Assembly.” — [Mr Eastwood.]

No 50: After clause 10 insert

“Reports

Submission of reports

10A.(1) *The chairperson must deliver the report of the inquiry to the First Minister and deputy First Minister at least two weeks before it is published (or such other period as may be agreed between the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly and the chairperson).*

(2) *In this section “report” includes an interim report.* — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 51: After clause 10 insert

“Publication of reports

10B.(1) *The chairperson must make arrangements for the report of the inquiry to be published.*

(2) *Subject to subsection (3), the report of the inquiry must be published in full.*

(3) *The chairperson may withhold material from publication to such extent—*

(a) *as is required by any statutory provision, enforceable EU obligation or rule of law, or*

(b) *as the chairperson considers to be necessary in the public interest, having regard in particular to the matters mentioned in subsection (4).*

(4) *Those matters are—*

(a) *the extent to which withholding material might inhibit the allaying of public concern;*

(b) *any risk of harm or damage that could be avoided or reduced by withholding any material;*

(c) *any conditions as to confidentiality subject to which a person acquired information which that person has given to the inquiry.*

(5) *Subsection (4)(b) does not affect any obligation of a public authority that may arise under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.*

(6) *In this section ‘public authority’ has the same meaning as in the Freedom of Information Act 2000;*

'report' includes an interim report." — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 52: After clause 10 insert

"Laying of reports before the Assembly

10C. Whatever is required to be published under section 10B must be laid before the Assembly by the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly, either at the time of publication or as soon afterwards as is reasonably practicable." — *[Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]*

Mr Eastwood: Amendment No 9 is the first of two substantive amendments that we have in this group. It deals with the issue of redress, which is probably one of the most difficult and sensitive issues in the Bill. Our view is that this amendment would not dictate to Justice Hart or require him to produce an interim report on the issue of redress. However, it would allow him to do that if the opportunity became available.

We believe that it is essential that the inquiry meets the needs of victims. Many of them would like to see the redress issue dealt with as quickly as possible. If the direction of travel on redress becomes obvious to the inquiry, we suggest that he should have the opportunity to produce an interim report. Many of the victims have waited a very long time — far too long, in our view — to get to this stage. Many of them would not even be included in the inquiry if the start date had not been moved from 1945 to 1922.

So, let us not further disadvantage any of the victims by making them wait even longer. For some of them, it might be too late to wait until the end of the inquiry. Many of them are interested in redress — although not all of them, it has to be said — because they want to have something to leave to their loved ones when they go. Think about the period of time that the inquiry will cover: it will go right back to 1922. Therefore, you can imagine that a number of the victims are very fragile and frail and coming to the end of their life. We believe that any opportunity that we can take to address the redress issue at the earliest possible stage should be taken. I ask Members to take that into consideration.

The other substantive amendment that we have put down is amendment No 30. It deals with the termination of the inquiry. Many of the changes proposed today have been brought forward by the Department as a result of the work of the Committee, the victims and groups like Amnesty International. Many of the amendments have been brought forward to ensure and improve the independence of the inquiry. Our view is that amendment No 30 aims to ensure and improve the independence of the inquiry.

It is our firm belief that, as the inquiry is set up by this Assembly, no one should be able to terminate the inquiry without first seeking the approval of this Assembly. I am surprised that the Department would not accept that proposal. If we are all committed to the independence of this inquiry and future inquiries, no one should really have anything to fear from ensuring that the Assembly has the last word on the issue. This is surely the democratic body that should have the final decision on whether or not the inquiry should be terminated, for whatever reason. There may not be a reason, but I believe that it should come to the Assembly first.

There have been some arguments around precedent. People have said that it will not create a legal precedent for future inquiries. Our view is that it will create a parliamentary and procedural precedent in this House. As we are all aware, there will hopefully be future inquiries into past events in this country. We need to ensure that everything that we do today ensures not only that we have the best possible and most independent possible inquiry into this very serious issue but that future inquiries that will be equally sensitive are given that level of independence and that there is no political interference in any of the inquiries to come.

Mr Nesbitt: Group 3 amendments bring us to some of the key issues that the House needs to consider, not least amendment No 9, which deals with the nature of the redress that the inquiry may recommend; the length of time that it would take for the inquiry to report and for the Executive to discuss and agree any potential redress, which could be 2016 or even thereafter; and, as Mr Eastwood highlighted, the impact of that delay on elderly victims and survivors.

Many submissions highlighted the issue. Some suggested the possibility of an interim report on redress and reparation to enable thinking on this issue to be progressed without having to wait for the final report. The Department's position was that redress is an issue for the Executive to decide on and that they should do so only after receipt of the inquiry report and its recommendations on redress. The inquiry chairperson stated that it would be difficult to provide an interim report and make recommendations on redress without having heard all of the evidence.

Some members expressed concern about this, and during the Committee's final clause-by-clause decisions on the Bill, the Committee considered, but rejected, Mr Eastwood's proposal for a Committee amendment in the form of amendment No 9 in his name. However, the Committee's report on the Bill recommends that the First Minister and deputy First Minister facilitate and expedite Executive discussion and agreement on the nature and extent of potential redress on receipt of the inquiry's recommendations in that regard.

I move on to clause 5, which deals with the power of Ministers to bring the inquiry to an end by way of notice to the inquiry chairperson, and the related amendments in this group. This power was raised in a number of submissions and by witnesses who gave oral evidence to the Committee, which suggested that it undermined the independence of the inquiry. The Department said that it saw the clause as a safeguard for unforeseen circumstances.

The Committee considered the possibility of an amendment to require that this power be exercised by affirmative resolution of the Assembly. At its meeting on 3 October, the Committee requested a briefing paper from the Assembly's Research and Information Service on the mechanisms for bringing inquiries to an end that have been used in other situations. The Committee considered the briefing paper at its meeting on 10 October and noted that clause 5(1)(b) mirrors a similar provision in section 14 of the Inquiries Act 2005. The Northern Ireland Court of Appeal looked at that section 14 power and said:

“We have reached the view that the independence of the inquiry could not be said to have been compromised by section 14 of the 2005 Act.”

So the Court of Appeal is satisfied that there are no implications.

Although most members of the Committee said that they were content with clause 5 at the meeting on 10 October, some indicated a preference for a Minister's power to end the inquiry to be exercisable subject to affirmative resolution in the Assembly. During the Committee's final clause-by-clause decision-making on 17 October, Mr Eastwood proposed Committee amendments to that effect — reflected in amendment Nos 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29 and 30 — which were defeated by eight votes to two.

The Committee was content with clause 5, subject to the Department's proposed amendments. That is reflected in the Minister's amendments to clause 5 in the group 2 amendments, which we have already discussed.

Ministers proposed a number of new clauses after clause 10, dealing with the report of the inquiry. The Committee received a number of submissions on the arrangements for publication of the inquiry report. The terms of reference are silent on the arrangements for publication, but submissions indicated a concern about where the authority to publish lay, the timing of publication and whether the report would be published in full or in part.

The Department's response to the Committee indicated that the inquiry's report would be published when the inquiry had been concluded and that Ministers had no intention of delaying publication or withholding any part. It also clarified that there would be a report from the acknowledgement forum. The inquiry chairperson stated:

“To allay any public concern there may be about that, I think that there is much to be said for the chairman of any inquiry being the person who is responsible for the publication of the report.”

On 3 October 2012, the Committee requested that Ministers consider an amendment to make explicit the inquiry chairperson's authority to publish the inquiry report. At its meeting on 10 October, the Committee considered draft amendments from the Department on this issue and received a briefing from officials. That involved inserting new clauses after clause 10, two to deal with publication and the third to provide for the inquiry report to be laid before the Assembly. That is reflected in the Minister's amendment Nos 50, 51 and 52.

The first, clause 10A, would require the inquiry chairperson to deliver the report of the inquiry to Ministers at least two weeks before publication. The second, clause 10B, would provide that the inquiry chairperson must, along with related provisions, make arrangements for the report to be published. The third, clause 10C, would require Ministers acting jointly to lay the inquiry report before the Assembly:

“at the time of publication or as soon afterwards as is reasonably practicable.”

The Committee was content with the proposed new clauses. That concludes my comments on the group 3 amendments.

Mrs Hale: As a new member of the Committee and having recently met survivors from Survivors and Victims

of Institutional Abuse (SAVIA), I will say that the people whose lives have been scarred with such heinous abuse are deserving of the Assembly's commitment to them. They are still suffering and are damaged as a result of what they were subjected to as vulnerable children by the very adults who were meant to protect them.

I am aware, at this stage, that I must keep my remarks to the amendments. I will, in some instances, deal with the amendments individually and with others on a grouped basis. As a party, we will support amendment Nos 50, 51 and 52 and oppose the rest.

Amendment No 9 proposes an interim report. We fail to see how making recommendations in the middle of a report process before there are conclusive findings will benefit the survivors, institutions or the counselling groups that help to support them. Indeed, an interim report may remove the focus from the inquiry, entangling it in superfluous dogma and subjecting it to legal challenge.

We believe that amendment Nos 21, 22 and 29 will remove OFMDFM's ability to bring the inquiry to a conclusion, and an open-ended inquiry will serve neither the survivor nor society well. We believe that survivors want certainty and positive action that results from the inquiry, and our concern is that the provisions of those amendments run the risk of making the inquiry drag on and perpetuating unnecessary hurt and distress to all those affected. We hope, of course, that those clauses will not need to be used and that there will be no unnecessary or unjustified delays. I believe that the quality of the chairperson will ensure that. However, it would be remiss of the Department not to have any provision in the event of serious and unjustified problems that result from arising delays.

Finally, I will turn to amendment Nos 50, 51 and 52. I am content to support those amendments, which we believe will increase transparency and accountability. We welcome that OFMDFM will receive a copy of the report's findings before Sir Anthony Hart publishes. However, the key issue is that the amendments give the statutory right and duty to publish to the independent chair, rather than the Department, thereby protecting the chair's independence and integrity.

In addition, the provisions require the report to be laid before the Assembly, thus ensuring due process of democratic accountability. Indeed, amendment No 51 will make specific provision for the publication of the report, which will be subject to the rule of law, and amendment No 52 will guarantee that the report comes before this House.

In conclusion, we will support amendment Nos 50, 51 and 52 and oppose the other amendments in the group.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On behalf of Sinn Féin, I oppose the amendments in the group from No 9 to No 30 and support amendment Nos 50, 51 and 52.

I was a member of the Committee and had the opportunity, long before the Committee was tasked to deal with the matter, to speak directly to the survivors and victims of historical abuse. I place on record my support for those individuals and, in some cases, families who have suffered horrendously over a long period of time. Although it was quite some time ago, their pain, hurt and victimhood nevertheless remain very alive with them to this day. That is why, during their presentations and Committee

deliberations, my party was more than happy, at both OFMDFM and Committee level, to support the inclusion of victims of abuse going back to 1922.

3.30 pm

As I said, I want to place on record my commendation of those victims and survivors for their courage and strength over a long number of years in very difficult and, often, very lonely times. I thank all the people who have helped and supported them in their quest to have justice at this time. Therefore, I thank the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for introducing the Bill. The Bill came from the specific work of the Department, albeit supported by others in advance. Other Members referred to individuals earlier in the debate. Nevertheless, the Department introduced the Bill having dealt specifically with victims and survivors, and it continues to consult those victims and survivors, who have made their case very ably in recent years. I commend the Department for doing so.

There are a number of departmental amendments to the Bill. A number are technical, and some are more important, including amendment Nos 50, 51 and 52 in this group. None of those amendments had to be dragged out of the Department. In fact, it is fair to say that a characteristic of the process is of the Department very readily, from day one, acknowledging that it was prepared to take changes on board where people identified defects or deficiencies in the Bill, and the Department made those changes very swiftly. Therefore, there should be no suggestion from any Member that anyone had to be forced, coerced or embarrassed into changing the Bill. The Bill is being changed for the better, thankfully, because this is about delivering for the people who have been victimised as a result of historical abuse.

Arguments were made about independence and political interference. I take exception to remarks of that nature, because this is an historical abuse inquiry, so there is no question that anyone involved in any of the Departments, any of the parties in the House or any Member is in any way involved or implicated or could have been involved or be implicated in the abuse that we are dealing with. It is historical abuse, often going back many years. Members referred to state interference or a state cover-up, and I take particular offence when they introduce the Pat Finucane case and the case of the Ballymurphy families to the debate.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Maskey: Surely.

Mr McDevitt: I hope that Mr Maskey is so sure of what he says that he can say what he says. I certainly could not say that. This inquiry will take us right into the 1990s. Can you really say, with confidence, that no one in the system could potentially have had any involvement with any of this? It seems to me that, when we come to the House to make law, we do not come to make assumptions. We come to, in many ways, guard and protect against the worst potential outcome, so I think that it is a very important remark. It is not made in a partisan way but simply to point out that we should take time to reflect on the potential conflict that could exist. If there is a potential for one, we should take steps to mitigate the possibility of it becoming an issue.

Mr Maskey: I thank the Member for his intervention, but I reiterate the point that the different types of inquiries that have been required have no bearing on this inquiry. I and a lot of Members who support people such as the Pat Finucane family and the families of the Ballymurphy massacre know that those situations and this inquiry are entirely different. In those situations, there are allegations of direct state involvement. That is not the question here in respect of any current party or Minister who is involved in the establishment of this inquiry. I make a very clear distinction. I do not think that anyone could suggest that any party, individual Minister or Member here who is involved in any of those institutions is involved in any of the decision-making on behalf of the state, as was asserted earlier.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Maskey: OK.

Mr Lyttle: Not to put words into Mr McDevitt's mouth, but the point that is being made is that there needs to be a recognition that there is state responsibility for these issues. That is the comparison that I draw as a result of his remarks. Whether anyone was directly involved in the actions or not is not the point. It is the fact that there is state responsibility, and the independence of the inquiry from the state has to be firmly established.

Mr Maskey: I thank the Member for his intervention. I take his point entirely, and that is why the inquiry is established on the basis that all the institutions will be subject to the scrutiny of the legislation. I am very satisfied about that. We speak about the state, but the state today is very different to what it was a number of years ago. I am just making the point.

Obviously, like all other Members, I want to make sure that the victims have legislation at their disposal that will deliver for them. That is what we are all agreed on in the House; that is what we want. We may take issue with particular amendments, but we have all agreed that what we want is a Bill that is appropriate and will deliver some measure of justice and perhaps closure — an awful word — to the victims who have come forward and to the many others who, undoubtedly, will do so as a result of this legislation. So, I am very pleased with the degree of unanimity on that. It is important to maintain that as we go forward, because this is all about the victims. I am satisfied with that.

As I said, only in the last few weeks have I had to step back from the deliberations of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. As you are aware, the Social Development Committee, has been involved specifically in work on the Welfare Reform Bill. However, I have maintained my information and interests in this matter, along with my party colleagues. I am satisfied that the Bill, as presented and with the amendments proposed by OFMDFM, will deliver a better and more effective inquiry. I had the opportunity to listen to Sir Anthony Hart and others on a variety of the issues at stake. So, for example, I hear arguments and accept entirely that all Members in the Chamber have not only the right but the duty to make sure that we scrutinise and get the best legislation. However, when someone says, on the one hand, that he wants to make an amendment that may not be totally prescriptive but tends in the direction of the prescriptive with regard to what he wants the inquiry panel to do and then, on the other hand, says that he wants to

make sure that there is no interference and no dictation to the Chair or the panel, he contradicts himself.

Sinn Féin will not support amendment No 9 because we do not believe that it is necessary to meet the needs of the inquiry team. Far be it from me to contradict Sir Anthony Hart, who has made it very clear that he does not want to be governed by any even quasi-prescriptive measure in the Bill. More importantly for me and my colleagues, he is satisfied that his panel will be permitted to take this inquiry to where it has to go and he will report accordingly. Therefore, the panel does not want to have any notion of prescription imposed on it. However, members of the panel also made it clear — I repeat that: they made it very clear — that they see that as a liberating element, as it allows them to produce whatever they feel necessary to produce at the given time.

A number of the amendments, such as amendment Nos 29 and 30, seek, in my view, to subvert the role of OFMDFM and, on that basis, we will not support them.

I recommend that Members read amendment Nos 50 to 52. The previous Member who spoke addressed the specific issue of people being worried about reports not being published, who will publish them or where the democratic accountability lies. The amendments provide specifically for those concerns. They are very necessary provisions. On that basis, my party supports and is pleased to see the amendments proposed by OFMDFM, namely amendment Nos 50 to 52.

I will finalise my remarks. I place on record my deep gratitude to the victims and survivors who have come forward in a very courageous way. I commend all the Members and the Department, who at all stages, in my experience of this Bill, have been very co-operative. There has been no question of any amendment having to be forced out of the Department. I am pleased that the Department came forward at all times willingly and purposefully and in a constructive manner to engage with the Committee. The Department took on board our concerns. As someone said earlier, many of the amendments derive specifically from direct engagement between the Department, the Ministers and the Committee. That was a positive engagement, not a negative one. The amendments cannot be described as concessions.

For me, this is a positive exercise. I hope that the victims and survivors of historical abuse take comfort from the fact that we have a Bill before us. We are debating it, and I presume that we are nearly at the point of finalising it. We will do so very shortly. I am delighted that the work of the inquiry team and the acknowledgement forum have already commenced. That has to be some considerable comfort to the victims and families of victims who are working with Committee members and the Department as we speak.

I look forward to the Bill being passed eventually and the work being formalised. Hopefully, it will be finalised sooner rather than later. On that basis, we oppose amendment Nos 9, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29 and 30 and support amendment Nos 50, 51 and 52.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the third group of amendments. The victims and survivors from whom the Committee heard and those to whom I have spoken consistently called for a robust, judge-

led, independent public inquiry on the issue. There are two key areas in this group of amendments that will test whether the Bill achieves that aim. One is the timing and manner of the reporting of the inquiry's findings and recommendations, and the other is the power of OFMDFM to terminate the inquiry.

I welcome amendment Nos 50, 51 and 52, which, undoubtedly, show a commitment from OFMDFM to make sure that the report of the findings and recommendations is published by the chairperson and in a timely manner. That is welcomed, and it is in line with the timely actions of OFMDFM on a number of other issues that the Committee raised in relation to the Bill.

I see merit in the SDLP's proposal for allowing a facility for the chair to consider an interim report, and, as Deputy Chair, I supported that at Committee Stage. I say that because, in my communications with victims, some of whom are in my constituency, even the smallest delay and periods of lack of information have caused real concern and, as some would even contend, further traumatisation to victims and survivors. That was particularly relevant in the delay over clarifying whether the inquiry would extend to 1922. Older victims and survivors were particularly concerned about the lack of information coming forward on that, albeit that it has been firmly clarified now. The facility to consider an interim report would provide the chairperson with an opportunity to convey some further communication and findings of what is coming forward in the inquiry, and that is a sensible amendment.

With regard to the power of OFMDFM to terminate the inquiry, the Human Rights Commission expressed concern that that could undermine the independence of the inquiry. I do not agree with Mr Allister's amendment to remove that power completely from the Bill, because I understand the rationale that has been put forward for a degree of control over the timescale of the inquiry. However, the SDLP has tabled a sensible amendment to make the power subject to affirmative resolution of the Assembly — Assembly approval, in effect. That is another sensible amendment that I am happy to support.

Those are two key issues that the House has an opportunity to clarify to ensure that we achieve the aim of delivering what the victims and survivors have called for, which is a judge-led, independent public inquiry that is the best that it can be for the victims and survivors.

3.45 pm

Mr Allister: I speak to amendment No 21, which focuses on the issue of superimposing the right of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister to gratuitously call the inquiry to an end. To understand the import of that, you have to examine clause 5(1)(a), which states clearly and correctly:

"(1) For the purposes of this Act the inquiry comes to an end—

(a) on the date, after the delivery of the report of the inquiry, on which the presiding member notifies the First Minister and deputy First Minister that the inquiry has fulfilled its terms of reference;"

Under clause 5(1)(a), it is clear that the inquiry cannot end until you have the product, until you have what you set it up for: the report. Yet, bizarrely, clause 5(1)(b) and the rest of the clause are devoted to aborting the process so that

you never have a report. That is clear from the wording of subsection (1)(b), where it states, "on any earlier date". That has to be a date that predates the delivery of the report. So, at a point before you get a report, the First Minister and deputy First Minister can step in and abort the inquiry. What is the rationale for that? What is the rationale for setting up an inquiry to deliver a report and to spend the months, running into years, that it may take to get to the point of conclusions and recommendations if you set within the Bill the right to abort the inquiry at the whim of the First Minister and deputy First Minister? It will undermine not only the independence of the inquiry but the bona fides of why we are having it, if it is seen that there is some necessity to hold this residual power in OFMDFM to abort the process.

I have listened to many fine words today and on previous occasions about the need for this inquiry, the dreadful issues that have to be investigated and the hurt that has been caused, and I find that that does not sit comfortably with the retention of a power to abort the inquiry before you get to the delivery of the product, which is the report. I do not think that that is what the House should endorse. There is enough control freakery about the inquiry in the Bill from OFMDFM, without the ultimate coup de grâce in that regard.

OFMDFM has an immense free hand. It can determine the number of panel members, revise the terms of reference, increase the panel membership, remove panel members and, now, it can terminate the inquiry. It can also tamper with restriction notices, rein in and control the inquiry by stopping the payment of the panel and make the rules about evidence and procedure. There is enough control there, way beyond what is rational and reasonable, without giving it the ultimate power to kill the inquiry.

Why does OFMDFM need that power? We are told that it is in case of unforeseen circumstances. That could cover a multitude of things. What could the circumstances be that cause the First Minister and deputy First Minister to want to keep unto themselves the power to kill the inquiry? Despite all the platitudes that they do not anticipate exercising the powers and that they would be used only in unforeseen circumstances, thus they cannot tell us how or when they would exercise them, the very fact that they want to hold those powers in reserve undermines the very establishment of the inquiry. It does no service to anyone; it is utterly unnecessary to the good conduct of the inquiry and to the delivery of the product, which will be the report. Therefore it should be expunged from the Bill, and the Bill would be the richer for it, rather than having this dead hand and threat of aborting the inquiry prematurely for unspecified reasons. It is wholly unreasonable, and the House should not support it. That is why I recommend amendment No 21.

Mr Bell: In amendment No 9, honourable friends Eastwood and McDevitt proposed to provide for the Chair of the inquiry to produce an interim report relating to redress that would be submitted to the Executive before the work of the inquiry was completed and before it had completed its terms of reference. However, the terms of reference have always envisaged a report at the end of the inquiry process in which there are findings and recommendations. The inquiry has been designed, resourced and planned on that basis.

It would be neither realistic nor reasonable to expect the inquiry to reach conclusions without first completing its work of gathering and considering all the evidence and distilling the findings by which the recommendations would be informed. How could the inquiry make conclusions and recommendations without first hearing all the evidence? Not only would the credibility of the whole inquiry be called into question, but it would be wide open to legal challenge. In addition, the inquiry will recommend a yes or no in relation to the desirability of redress only. The detailed nature or the amount of redress is a matter for the Executive on foot of the report.

Anyone who has yet to come to the inquiry would rightly ask, "What is the point? The inquiry has already drawn its conclusions". The chairperson of the inquiry made that point to the OFMDFM Committee during its scrutiny of the Bill, and, following consideration of the issue, the Committee elected not to propose an amendment of this nature. This amendment, as it stands, would be at odds with the terms of reference. It would be contrary to the advice of the chairperson of the inquiry, and it would not seem reasonable to extend the length of the inquiry in order to facilitate an additional layer of administration, which, at any rate, would not be fully informed and would draw conclusions without listening to all the evidence that is available. I am, therefore, unable to support the amendment, and I strongly urge Members not to accept it.

The Bill provides for the inquiry to end when it fulfils its terms of reference. That is what we fully expect to happen. As a safeguard, however, clause 5 allows the First Minister and deputy First Minister to conclude it before that, should they need to. Mr Eastwood, through his amendments, makes that process unnecessarily complex. We fully expect the inquiry to complete its terms of reference, and we believe that this safeguard should be proportional to the need for which it is intended. By contrast, Jim Allister's amendment No 21 irresponsibly seeks to remove that safeguard altogether, allowing no scope for Ministers to end the inquiry in the event that unforeseen circumstances require it.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Bell: It is of vital importance that that safeguard stays in the Bill. I will come back to some of your points towards the end. I, therefore, urge Members to reject all the amendments and to retain clause 5 in its current form.

Amendment Nos 50, 51 and 52 propose the insertion of three new clauses after clause 10 that relate to the submission, publication and laying of the inquiry's report before the Assembly. In the terms of reference, it states that a report will be brought forward by the acknowledgement forum panel outlining the experiences of victims and survivors. It also states that the inquiry panel will submit a report to the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the chair of the investigation and inquiry panel will provide a report to the Executive.

We have a common understanding with the chair of the inquiry that he will be responsible for publishing the reports. However, this has not been set out in the Bill as introduced. The Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister requested an amendment to make it explicit that this is the responsibility of the chair. To remove any ambiguity, we propose, with the Committee's support, the insertion of three new

clauses. These require, first, the chairperson to submit the inquiry's reports to us prior to publication and, subsequently, to publish it; secondly, the chairperson must publish the report in full, except elements that he is required by law to withhold or that he determines must be withheld in the public interest; and, thirdly, acting jointly, we must lay the inquiry report in the Assembly. I urge Members to support the final three amendments because they set in statute the responsibilities of the chair for publishing the inquiry's report and providing assurance that the report will then be brought before the Assembly.

I turn to some of the Members' contributions. Mr Nesbitt, again, I put on record my thanks to the Committee. I hope that I have done so throughout and in accepting the amendments that have been tabled. I concur fully with Brenda Hale's remarks about SAVIA. I know that junior Minister McCann would do so, too, as would the former junior Minister Anderson. SAVIA was one of the first groups that we met when we took office. I pay tribute to its work among the work of all the victims who met us individually or collectively.

It was said that having an interim report would be "superfluous", perhaps even "superfluous dogma". We have set out the case for why an interim report should not be produced.

We can all agree with Mr Maskey's commendation of victims and the work that they have done. I appreciate that he said in reference to the work of the Committee and individuals that the characteristic of the process was one of co-operation and providing information that was as full and thorough as possible, speedily and effectively. I pay tribute to my officials in the private office — Tim, Maggie and their teams — whose diligence in getting that information back and forward to the House allowed the amendments to be taken and accepted. I thank my special adviser, Emma, for her invaluable legal steer. I pay tribute to the Department for the co-operation that Mr Maskey received.

Chris Lyttle welcomed amendment Nos 50, 51 and 52. I have laid out why they are appropriate.

Mr Allister used the dramatic words — not for the first time — "bizarre" and "gratuitous". Those words refer more to his contribution than to anything that relates to the inquiry. The clause to which he referred is one of caution. We cannot foresee whether there will be an unreasonable or unnecessary delay in receiving the report. Would it be right for the staff and the whole edifice of the inquiry to continue in the event of not receiving the report, leaving no legal way for it to be ended? We do not envisage using it, but a default is always wise and necessary. We have made it clear consistently that we expect the inquiry to end when its terms of reference are completed and its report is delivered. That is explicit in the Bill. The power to end the inquiry before then is a safeguard. Of course, if we could foresee the unforeseen, it would not be necessary. That is a fairly elementary part of the process.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way? He says that it is a safeguard, but against what? He says that if we do not have this provision, we could go on and never get the report. The point is that the powers that he wants to take guarantee that he would never get a report. So, even by the Minister's standards, this really does beggar belief. Just tell us what safeguard we need to put in place? What are we protecting against?

4.00 pm

Mr Bell: It seems that Mr Allister is more capable of speaking than he is of listening. I will go through it and try to break it down into bite-sized chunks so that he can understand it, for the second time. We took this consistently through an expert lawyer, Mr Allister, who was fully supportive of what we have. That expert lawyer is the inquiry chairperson that you paid tribute to.

Let me try and break it down again. We are envisaging that the chair will produce the report and that, at that stage, the inquiry will come to a natural conclusion. We are looking at a default mechanism to deal with any problems that may emerge, such as an unreasonable delay in the report's production. The clause, therefore, is largely an administrative one to ensure that the costs do not continue to run. So, it is a clause that I think that any reasonable person would feel is necessary and appropriate. It is about caution. I cannot foresee all the circumstances, Mr Allister; if I could, I would not be calling them unforeseen. We do not envisage using the power, but I believe that it is necessary where prudence and wisdom are concerned.

Mr McDevitt: I will maybe just wind up on some of the substantial issues that have been raised. As the junior Minister rightly pointed out, amendment No 9 makes provision for an interim report that would lay the foundation for a redress process. The Minister just told the House that having a redress process that ran concurrently with an inquiry would be unthinkable and unprecedented. It is neither unthinkable nor unprecedented because it is exactly what happened in the Republic of Ireland, where a redress board ran concurrent to a public inquiry.

The point of redress is not the same as the discovery of fact. You go into a redress process because you do not expect every single individual who comes to the inquiry to have to prove their case to it. You deliberately take them out of that process, and you set up a compensation reparation mechanism that does not require them to prove, to the standard of a public inquiry, their involvement in certain events. That, if you like, humanises the process. I appreciate that the First Minister and deputy First Minister have taken a decision, which is a political decision, that they will run the inquiry and then, consecutively, the redress process. However, they really should not come to the House and describe it as an unthinkable proposition. It is a perfectly logical and legitimate proposition for which there is ample, credible precedent.

There is a further point to be made about redress, which is that the survivors are demanding it. They have every right to demand it — absolutely every right to demand it. The survivors are not getting any younger. For many of them, the opportunity of redress is the chance to make amends for their families and for the people who they believe have been affected by the circumstances surrounding their experience of abuse as children.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy] in the Chair)

Amendment No 9 is not a dangerous amendment. It is not a reckless amendment. It is not an amendment or an idea, colleagues, that is without precedent. In fact, it is well founded, and it is a perfectly legitimate choice for this House to make. If this House takes the decision to make amendment No 9, it is leaving it up to the chair of the inquiry to decide whether it is appropriate, for many very legitimate reasons, to bring forward a redress

process during the inquiry. There are ample reasons why Sir Anthony Hart may consider it appropriate to do that. The amendment is not saying that he must do it, but it allows him the possibility to do so. If we fail to make this amendment, we are saying categorically to the inquiry and to survivors that there is no circumstance in which a process of redress will even be considered until after a final report has been received. I can only say, from my experience of working with survivors, that that is not what, I believe, they want. I, therefore, ask colleagues, from a compassionate point of view, to reflect on the matter.

Mr Maskey: I thank the Member for giving way. I understand the point that he is trying to make in support of amendment No 9. However, does he accept that the chair of the panel made it very clear that he does not want anything imposed on the panel that may create an expectation, a demand or is in any way prescriptive, and that there is nothing whatsoever in the legislation that prevents it from bringing forward any report at any point?

Mr McDevitt: I thank Mr Maskey for his insight. I appreciate that, because he obviously had the benefit of the Committee Stage and had much greater interaction with the chair of the inquiry than I did. I am sure that that is the case, but what is also the case is what the junior Minister just put on the record in the House. Unless I misheard the junior Minister, only 15 minutes ago, he said that it would be unthinkable that a process of redress would commence until after the final report had been published. In fact, he said very clearly to the House — I will give way to the junior Minister if he wants to correct the record, because this may become an important point of challenge at a certain point in the future — that the question of redress was not on the table and that the inquiry was not, in fact, to go there but that, after the report was received, redress would be thought about from an Executive point of view.

Mr Bell: My point was about the inquiry having the opportunity to hear all the evidence before coming to its conclusion. I think that that is self-explanatory. On a point of clarification to my honourable friend, there has been no commitment to a redress process, as that is a matter for the chair of the inquiry. I think that Mr McDevitt needs to be very careful about erroneously raising expectations of a Ryan-type redress scenario here. This is a different process.

Mr McDevitt: I appreciate the junior Minister's clarification. I am not trying to raise expectations. I am trying to get to the bottom of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister's attitude towards the issue of redress. I appreciate the junior Minister's honesty. With respect, however, I do not believe that that is what survivors believe to be the case today — I really do not. If the situation is as the junior Minister outlined, I think that there will need to be some honest and frank conversations with survivor groups because that is not, as I understand it, their understanding of the situation today. I further question, to the House and to all of us as a group of legislators, whether the junior Minister's position is the correct one.

On the question of redress, there is no escaping one harsh reality at the heart of this process, and that is that, in this jurisdiction, the state failed fundamentally in its duty of care to children. It failed twice. It failed in its duty as the state to protect children, and it failed again when it allowed children to be put into the care of others and to be

abused in that care. This entire process, since the motion was brought to the House in 2009, has been built on the basic premise that the state failed in its duty to vulnerable children. If that failure lies with the state, in its duty to vulnerable children, the responsibility for redress lies, first and foremost, with the state, as does the responsibility to compensate children in later life who had their position so awfully undermined. That is without prejudice to the state's right to pursue religious institutions, homes and other parties for recompense.

The failure in that duty, however, lies with the state. We are not setting up an inquiry and then washing our hands of responsibility. We are setting up an inquiry that looks into the heart of our own failings. I have to say to Mr Maskey that the state is the state. We may have a different political context. I celebrate it and really am very proud of the political context in which we operate today, but the same legal framework and basic protections for the rights of the child, the same duties, apply today in the context of this debate as they did 15 or 20 years ago.

So, I strongly encourage Members to reflect on the merits of amendment No 9. It does not require anyone to do anything; it makes it possible for the inquiry to do something that would be in its interests. Amendment No 9 would allow all the issues to be fully discovered without us, in any way, dictating terms to the inquiry, because the amendment does not seek to do that.

I do hear what the Minister says about the difference between an inquiry and a redress process. It is important to keep them separate because they are separate. The inquiry needs to go where it needs to go; redress does not. That is not what redress does. Any lawyers in the House who have done litigation can explain that, I guess, in much greater detail than I would ever be able to do.

Amendment No 30 is the second substantial amendment that Mr Eastwood and I have for debate. Again, I hear very carefully what the Minister says about it being superfluous, in his opinion, that we would need to come back to the House to end the inquiry prematurely. How could it be superfluous to give the House a say on such a politically sensitive issue? The House will establish the inquiry, debate the report of the inquiry and hold Ministers to account for any failings within the systems of the state identified by the inquiry. The House will vote through whatever redress needs to be established to compensate those who, through the work of this inquiry, are found to have been abused.

It is perfectly and absolutely appropriate for the House to seek to assure itself that if the inquiry is being ended before its time, for whatever reason — and there may be very good reasons, and I do not dispute that — that it just has the power to do so. That is in everyone's interests. You would think that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister would want that to be the case so that there is no potential that someone from outside the major two parties could accuse them of ending the inquiry for political purposes.

It is a common sense measure and one that we write into legislation every week around here. We spend hours complaining about what we call permissive legislation. I remember Mr Maskey in the previous mandate rightly raising, time and again, numerous situations in which Ministers were trying to write in the power to make

statutory orders and statutory instruments without having to come back to the House and the House rightly saying, "No, hold on a second, the power lies here." We are not saying that we do not have confidence in you but that we want you to have confidence in us to be able to support you in making good decisions and against making bad decisions.

Again, colleagues, I strongly urge you to reflect on amendment No 30. There is nothing in it that in any way undermines the integrity of the inquiry or is in any way superfluous — quite the opposite. It sends a very powerful signal to those who are conducting the inquiry that this is a very serious matter; a signal to survivors that we all want to validate anything that happens with the inquiry; and a signal about future inquiries, which is equally important.

I want to return to an important point that Mr Maskey made, in his contribution, about the nature of this inquiry and how it is different from others. I was very grateful to the Committee for its report, particularly when I have not had the chance to be on the Committee — it keeps you going whenever you cannot sleep at night.

4.15 pm

One of the interesting things about the Committee report is that it highlights just how important it is that when you are shaping an inquiry such as this, you shape it within the appropriate international legal framework. The Committee report acknowledges the importance of doing so. In fact, it includes the Human Rights Commission's advice, which, as far as I understand, the Committee was very content with in that regard. It cites a very specific case as evidence of how important it is to consider particular international jurisprudence when setting up this type of inquiry. I will briefly read it. Paragraph 29 of the Human Rights Commission's submission states:

"In a case which originated from Northern Ireland, Jordan v. the United Kingdom, the ECtHR have identified the essential elements of such an investigation as follows:

- i. The persons responsible for and carrying out the investigation must be independent from those implicated in the events. This means not only a lack of hierarchical or institutional connection but also a practical independence.*
- ii. The investigation must be capable of leading to the identification and punishment of those responsible. The authorities must have taken all reasonable steps available to them to secure the evidence concerning the incident.*
- iii. The investigation must be prompt.*
- iv. There must be a sufficient element of public scrutiny of the investigation or its results to secure accountability.*
- v. The next of kin of the victim must be involved in the proceedings to the extent necessary to safeguard his or her legitimate interests."*

I know that Mr Maskey is very familiar with the Jordan case. I believe that many of us in the House are exceptionally familiar with that case; it was an exceptionally important decision by the European Court of Human Rights. What I have read out proves two things. First, inquiries are connected. When you set up an inquiry to do one thing, it is immediately tested against the standards of inquiries that were set up to do other things. Secondly, the standards that are outlined by the European

court in that judgement are absolutely applicable to the two amendments that the SDLP has proposed today. Those include standards of accountability, standards of independence, and perceived, practical and potential conflicts of interest. Thirdly, the interests of victims must be kept at the heart of this.

I strongly suggest that the evidence is there that the compelling logic behind a positive attitude towards amendment Nos 9 and 30 is well and truly justified and present. The House should show itself capable of reflecting on the potential for good that is in those two amendments.

Question put, That amendment No 9 be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 21; Noes 70.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Ford, Mrs D Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Durkan and Mrs McKeivitt

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Ms McGahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McAleer and Mr G Robinson

Question accordingly negatived.

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

Clause 2 (Appointment of members)

Amendment No 10 made: In page 1, line 21, leave out "presiding member" and insert "chairperson". — *[Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]*

Amendment No 11 made: In page 2, line 5, leave out "presiding member" and insert "chairperson". — *[Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]*

Amendment No 12 made: In page 2, line 8, leave out "presiding member" and insert "chairperson". — *[Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]*

Amendment No 13 made: In page 2, line 9, leave out "presiding member" and insert "chairperson". —

[Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 14 made: In page 2, line 10, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Clause 2, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3 (Duration of appointment of members)

Amendment No 15 made: In page 2, line 41, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 16 made: In page 2, line 42, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Clause 3, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4 (Assessors)

Amendment No 17 made: In page 3, line 11, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 18 made: In page 3, line 13, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 19 made: In page 3, line 16, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Clause 4, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5 (End of inquiry)

Amendment No 20 made: In page 3, line 21, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 21 proposed: In page 3, leave out lines 23 to 33. — [Mr Allister.]

Question put and negatived.

Amendment No 22 proposed: In page 3, line 23, leave out “a notice given to the presiding member” and insert “an order made”. — [Mr Eastwood.]

Question put and negatived.

Amendment No 23 made: In page 3, line 23, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I will not call amendment Nos 24 or 25 because they are consequential to amendment No 22, which has not been made.

Amendment No 26 made: In page 3, line 28, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. —

[Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I will not call amendment Nos 27 or 28 as they are consequential to amendment No 22, which has not been made.

Amendment No 29 not moved.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I will not call amendment No 30 because it is consequential to amendment No 22, which has not been made.

Clause 5, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill

Clause 6 (Evidence and procedure)

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Amendment Nos 31 and 32 have already been debated and are technical amendments to clause 6. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group these amendments for the Question.

Amendment No 31 made: In clause 6, page 3, line 37, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 32 made: In clause 6, page 3, line 39, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: We now come to the fourth group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 33 it will be convenient to debate the 16 other amendments listed in the fourth group, which deal with the proceedings and administration of the inquiry.

Members should note that amendment No 35 is consequential to amendment No 33, and amendment Nos 54 and 58 are consequential to amendment No 53.

Mr Bell: I beg to move amendment No 33:

In page 3, line 40, at end insert

“(2A) Subject to any provision of rules under section 18, a statement made to the inquiry on oath by a person outside Northern Ireland through a live link is to be treated for the purposes of Article 3 of the Perjury (Northern Ireland) Order 1979 as having been made in Northern Ireland.”

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 35: In page 4, line 3, at end insert

“(4) In this section ‘live link’ means a live television link or other arrangement whereby a person, while absent from the place where the inquiry is being held, is able to see and hear, and be seen and heard by, a person at that place.

(5) For the purposes of subsection (4) any impairment of sight or hearing is to be disregarded.” — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 36: In clause 7, page 4, line 5, after “Subject to” insert “subsection (3) and” — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 40: In clause 7, page 4, line 16, at end insert

“(3) The proceedings of that part of the inquiry described in its terms of reference as the Acknowledgment Forum are to be held in private and references to the inquiry in

subsection (1) do not include that part of the inquiry.” — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 41: In clause 8, page 4, line 21, at end insert

“(c) disclosure or publication of the identity of any person”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 49: In clause 9, page 6, line 8, at end insert

“(7) The powers conferred by this section are exercisable only in respect of evidence, documents or other things which are wholly or primarily concerned with a transferred matter.

(8) In subsection (7) ‘transferred matter’, in relation to a power conferred by this section, means a matter which, when the power is exercised, is a transferred matter within the meaning of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.” — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 53: In clause 11, page 6, line 21, leave out

“OFMDFM may award such amounts as it”

and insert

“The chairperson may, with the approval of OFMDFM, award such amounts as the chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 54: In clause 11, page 6, line 26, after “where” insert “the chairperson with the approval of”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 55: In clause 11, page 6, line 30, leave out

“attending the inquiry to give evidence or”

and insert

“giving evidence to the inquiry or attending the inquiry”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 56: In clause 11, page 6, line 32, leave out “OFMDFM” and insert “the chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 57: In clause 11, page 6, line 35, after “OFMDFM” insert

“and notified by OFMDFM to the chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 58: In clause 12, page 7, line 1, at end insert

“(1A) OFMDFM must pay any amounts awarded under section 11.” — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 64: In clause 14, page 8, line 13, leave out

“a notice under section 9 or a restriction order”

and insert

“, or acts in breach of, a notice under section 9 or an order made by the chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson

(The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 66: In clause 18, page 9, line 24, at end insert

“(1A) Rules under subsection (1)(a) may in particular

(a) provide that evidence given for the purposes of any particular part of the inquiry must not be disclosed

(i) in the proceedings of any other part of the inquiry unless the chairperson so orders; or

(ii) in any criminal or civil proceedings in Northern Ireland unless it is necessary to avoid a breach of Convention rights (within the meaning of the Human Rights Act 1998);

(b) make provision for orders similar to witness anonymity orders within the meaning of section 86 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009.” — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 67: In clause 18, page 9, line 28, leave out “inquiry panel” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 68: In clause 18, page 9, line 28, leave out “panel” in the second place where it occurs and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

No 69: In clause 19, page 9, line 34, after “Northern Ireland” insert

“except as provided by subsection (2).

(2) The powers conferred by section 9 are not exercisable so as to require any evidence, document or other thing to be given, produced or provided by or on behalf of Her Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom, the Scottish Ministers or the Welsh Ministers.” — [Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister).]

Mr Bell: This legislation is specific to the historical institutional abuse inquiry. In developing it, as I said earlier, we have benefited greatly from the advice and insights of the inquiry chairperson.

A number of the amendments in this group are designed to address very important practical points arising from the work that he and his panel have been doing to establish the acknowledgement forum and to prepare for the other work of the inquiry.

I am grateful to the inquiry chairperson and his panel for their contribution to the Bill. I am also very grateful to the OFMDFM Committee for all its work in identifying the areas where the Bill could be strengthened. Its scrutiny has been invaluable.

The events with which the inquiry is concerned occurred many years ago. Some people who will be required to speak to the inquiry will be old and may well be infirm. Some will be in far corners of the world. Therefore, the inquiry chairperson proposes to use live television links to hear evidence when it makes sense to do so.

Clause 6 is sufficiently wide to allow evidence to be heard under oath via a live TV link. However, anyone giving evidence from outside Northern Ireland would not be subject to the provisions of the Perjury (Northern Ireland)

Order 1979. Amendment Nos 33 and 35 are designed to address that. They mean that evidence given to the inquiry on oath by a witness outside Northern Ireland via a live TV link shall be treated, for the purposes of article 3 of the Perjury (Northern Ireland) Order 1979, as having been given here. That means that, if they wilfully make a statement that they know to be false or do not believe to be true, they shall be guilty of perjury. They would possibly be liable to imprisonment for up to seven years, or to a fine, or to both.

Clause 7 provides that the chairperson must take steps to ensure that members of the public, including reporters, are able to attend the inquiry or to see and hear a simultaneous transmission of its proceedings and obtain or view a record of its evidence and documents.

A vital part of the inquiry is the acknowledgement forum. It is an opportunity for victims and survivors to recount in private their experiences of abuse in the institutions and for those experiences to be acknowledged. We need to make crystal clear that evidence given to the acknowledgement forum is given in confidence, that reporters and the public can never be present, and that no one can read the evidence. Amendment Nos 36 and 40 to clause 7 ensure that the proceedings of the acknowledgement forum are to be held in private.

Amendment No 66 will give OFMDFM powers to make rules to protect the records made in any particular part of the inquiry, such as the acknowledgement forum, so that they cannot be disclosed in another part of the inquiry, unless ordered by the chairperson, or in criminal or civil proceedings. To protect witnesses from threat or actual harm, the chairperson is seeking the powers to protect their identities — for example, by using pseudonyms — in rare instances should it be necessary.

Amendment No 66 also allows OFMDFM to make rules conferring on the chairperson the power to make orders similar to witness anonymity orders made under section 86 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009. Such orders might be made by the chairperson where a witness has demonstrated that harm or damage may ensue should their identities become known. We are proposing amendment No 41 to strengthen clause 8 so that the chairperson can restrict the disclosure or publication of the identity of any person.

As currently drafted, the wording of clause 19 is ambiguous as it does not expressly state the reach of the legislation. We want to be clear that the Act will bind only the devolved Administration. Amendment Nos 49 and 69 to clauses 9 and 19 respectively, which deal with powers to require production of evidence, make it clear that the powers of the inquiry are to be exercisable in respect of evidence, documents and other things that are wholly or primarily concerned with matters that are now transferred.

Clauses 11 and 12 provide for the payment of witness expenses. Amendment Nos 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 67 and 68 make clear that the chairperson, with the approval of OFMDFM, may award such amounts as he considers reasonable, including in respect of legal representation, and that OFMDFM will pay these amounts. They also ensure that those who are giving evidence by live television links are eligible for awards in respect of legal representation on the same basis as those who give evidence on the inquiry's premises.

4.45 pm

Of course, not all witnesses will be awarded expenses. OFMDFM will set out in rules the criteria against which the chairperson will consider applications for expenses. Amendment No 58 goes on to clarify in clause 12, which deals with the payment of inquiry expenses by OFMDFM, that the Department must pay any amounts awarded under clause 11.

Earlier, we debated amendment No 59, which would make it an offence to contravene a restriction order. Amendment No 64 makes it clear that that type of offence is liable to the penalties prescribed in clause 14.

Those are the amendments in group 4.

Mr Nesbitt: On clause 6, which deals with evidence and procedure, submissions from the perspective of both victims and institutions raised concerns that the duty on the inquiry chairperson to have regard for the need to avoid any unnecessary cost, whether to public funds or to witnesses or others, could adversely affect the inquiry's effectiveness, particularly around legal representation. While most members of the Committee are content on that issue, some have lingering reservations.

On 10 October, officials briefed the Committee on proposed departmental amendments to clause 6, which provided that statements from witnesses to the inquiry, on oath and by live television link, would be treated, for the purposes of article 3 of the Perjury (Northern Ireland) Order 1979, as having been made in Northern Ireland. Members raised no issues in relation to those proposed amendments, and the Committee was content with clause 6, subject to the Ministers' proposed amendment Nos 33 and 35.

On clause 7, there were no issues raised during the Committee's consultation or deliberations. Just before its final clause-by-clause decisions on 17 October, the Committee received proposed departmental amendments, which made it clear that the proceedings of the acknowledgement forum element of the inquiry would be held in private and that references to the "inquiry" in clause 7 do not include the acknowledgement forum. Officials spoke to those proposed amendments, and the Committee was content with clause 7, subject to the Ministers' amendment Nos 36 and 40.

Turning to amendment No 41 and clause 8, which deals with restrictions on public access, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission's submission raised a concern that the Bill did not provide for representations to be made by interested parties prior to restriction orders being granted. The Department clarified that, under normal legal principles, anyone adversely affected by the making of a restriction order should be given the opportunity to make a case against the making of an order. The Department confirmed that the rules on governing procedure would be subject to public consultation.

At its meeting on 10 October, the Committee considered the proposed departmental amendment to clause 8, which provided that a restriction order might also be made in respect of the:

"disclosure or publication of the identity of any person".

Members raised no issues with that proposed amendment, and the Committee agreed that it was content with the

clause, subject to the Department's proposed amendment, which is reflected in the Ministers' amendment No 41.

On clause 9, there were no issues raised during the Committee's consultation. The Ministers' amendment Nos 49 and 69 to clauses 9 and 19 respectively were not brought forward during the Committee Stage. At its meeting on 14 November, the Committee noted correspondence from the Department, with proposed amendments to clauses 9 and 19.

On clause 11, which deals with the expenses of witnesses etc, there were a number of concerns raised regarding choice of legal representation and the payment of legal costs. The Department confirmed that the Bill enables OFMDFM to make rules subject to negative resolution in that regard, which will be subject to consultation.

Just before its final clause-by-clause decisions on the Bill on 17 October, the Committee received proposed departmental amendments to clause 11 and officials spoke to them. The amendments included clarification of the respective roles of the inquiry chairperson and OFMDFM in relation to decisions about expenses. Members indicated that they were content with the proposed amendments. Ministers' amendment No 53 differs slightly from that considered by the Committee but not in substance. Ministers' amendment Nos 54 to 57 reflect those that the Committee considered and was content with.

I will turn to clause 12 and Ministers' amendment No 58. Clause 12 provides for the payment of the inquiry expenses by OFMDFM. In written submissions and in oral evidence, the Human Rights Commission and Amnesty International raised concerns about the impact of that power on the independence of the inquiry, specifically because Ministers can give notice to the inquiry chairperson if they believe that the inquiry is acting outside its terms of reference. The Department advised that the withdrawal of funds will only happen in the highly unlikely event that the inquiry persists in activities that are outside its terms of reference.

As I indicated in my opening remarks, the Committee took advice regarding the Human Rights Commission's view that, in light of this and other powers, the Bill did not meet the required level of protection under the European Convention on Human Rights. Advice to the Committee indicated that the power over the inquiry's expenses, like other discretionary powers in the Bill, cannot, under section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, be exercised by Ministers in a way that is incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights.

In the overall context of the inquiry's independence, the Committee was reassured by Ministers' agreement to bring forward a departmental amendment to provide that changes to the inquiry's terms of reference are subject to affirmative resolution of the Assembly. Just before its final clause-by-clause decisions, the Committee received a proposed departmental amendment to clause 12, which inserted a specific obligation on OFMDFM to pay any amounts awarded under clause 11, "Expenses of witnesses, etc". The Committee was content with clause 12 subject to that amendment, which is reflected in Ministers' amendment No 58.

Clause 14 deals with enforcement by the High Court to support the inquiry's exercise of its powers, and no issues were raised with that clause during the Committee's

consultation. Just before final clause-by-clause decisions, the Committee received a proposed departmental amendment to clause 14, to which officials spoke at the meeting. The Committee was content with clause 14 subject to that proposed departmental amendment, which is Ministers' amendment No 64.

Amendment Nos 36 and 40 to clause 7 make it clear that the proceedings of the acknowledgement forum will be conducted in private. Those amendments also address the concerns raised by some institutions in the context of clause 15, which deals with immunity from suit. They feared that victims' accounts of abuse would be accepted by the inquiry via the acknowledgement forum without the robustness of what may be very damaging allegations being tested.

The Department clarified that the acknowledgement forum will proceed in private and will feed into the judicial aspect of the inquiry. The investigation and inquiry panel will test the robustness of the evidence that comes forward to it. The Department considers that those processes are a matter for the inquiry chairperson. The inquiry chairperson commented that any inquiry into a matter of public interest that sits in public inevitably involves the risk of unsubstantiated allegations being raised and inquired into. It will be the duty of the inquiry to ensure that only allegations that appear to be of substance are proceeded with, and the inquiry will make it clear when those are justified and when they are not. The Committee was content with clause 15 as drafted. For the record, the Committee was content with clauses 16 and 17 as drafted.

Clause 18 deals with rules. No issues were raised on that clause in the submissions or in evidence to the Committee. The Committee raised no issues with the clause. Just before its final clause-by-clause decisions, the Committee received a proposed departmental amendment to clause 18, which is reflected in Ministers' amendment No 66. The heading of the draft amendment indicated that the intention behind the amendment was to protect the acknowledgement forum's documents. However, officials informed the Committee that the proposed amendment would enable rules to be made in relation to other elements of the inquiry and not just the acknowledgement forum. Having heard from officials, the Committee was content with the proposed amendment to clause 18, which is reflected in Ministers' amendment No 66.

Two further proposed Departmental amendments to clause 18 were received at the same time, relating to the envisaged role of the inquiry panel in the assessment of awards under clause 11 and transferring that responsibility to the inquiry chairperson. Having heard from officials, members indicated that they were content with the proposed amendments, and the Committee was content with clause 18, subject to the proposed departmental amendments reflected in Ministers' amendment Nos 67 and 68.

No issues were raised in relation to clause 19 in the submissions or evidence to the Committee on the Bill. During the Committee Stage, officials told us that the Department was considering amendments to modernise clause 19. In the absence of departmental amendments, the Committee was content with clause 19 as drafted. At its meeting on 14 November, the Committee noted correspondence from the Department with the wording of proposed amendments to clause 19 and to clause 9.

Members raised no issues in relation to these proposed changes. For the sake of completeness, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, the Committee was content with clause 22, dealing with commencement etc, and with clause 23, the short title of the Bill, as drafted.

Finally, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will stray for a moment, if you will permit me, from the amendments. As Chair of the Committee of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, I acknowledge how all members of the Committee, who represent the full range of party political views and all the parties of the Executive, conducted themselves during our deliberations. I particularly acknowledge their awareness of the importance of the input of victims and survivors.

We often talk about the importance of storytelling. Storytelling only has true value if the victims and survivors who are telling their stories realise that their stories are being listened to and acknowledged, and that was the case throughout the deliberations of the Committee. I am grateful to my fellow members for that.

Mr G Robinson: Amendment Nos 33, 35 and 55 deal with issues surrounding live-link opportunities for those wishing to give evidence to the inquiry. This enables evidence to be taken without the trauma of witnesses who are living abroad being brought to attend the inquiry and also enables them to give personal and, if need be, confidential evidence. I and my party welcome these amendments as they will ensure that people who have a disability that makes travel difficult for them will have the opportunity to take part in the inquiry at minimum inconvenience to them personally.

Amendment Nos 40 and 41 ensure that people giving evidence in the acknowledgement forum can do so in private. This is a welcome move to enable everyone who may be concerned about anonymity that they can do so without fear of being publicly named, which could cause problems for an individual.

Amendment Nos 49 and 69 are proposed at the request of the NIO to ensure that the inquiry stays within the devolved powers that the Assembly has. We must remember that we are limited to devolved matters. This is, however, a practical and sensible amendment, which my party supports.

Amendment Nos 53, 56 and 57 give the chair of the inquiry powers that ensure that he is independent from political influence. My party welcomes and supports these amendments. Amendment No 58 is a technical clause to clarify who pays and is basically a good housekeeping matter. My party welcomes this essential clarification.

Amendment No 66 is again related to anonymity for witnesses. Again, my party welcomes this, as we believe that it is important that as many witnesses as possible are encouraged to take part to make the inquiry as comprehensive as possible. We firmly believe that we must ensure good participation to ensure that the inquiry is as thorough, relevant and helpful as has been hoped.

None of the amendments will negatively impact on the inquiry and, indeed, will provide the chairperson with a greater degree of independence, which is essential.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. I want to take this opportunity to commend all of the victims of abuse for their courage and bravery in seeking justice. I support all of the amendments in group 4. Abuse is wrong. It is wrong

in 2012, wrong in 1995 and wrong in 1922. Being a victim of abuse is as relevant and has much of an impact on the daily life of an elderly person as on a younger victim.

So, the focus of this inquiry was selected because of the vulnerable nature of that type of residential care. However, that does not in any way diminish the trauma that has been inflicted on many other individuals as a result of abuse in domestic and other settings.

The inquiry will hear evidence from every living victim and will hopefully bring some comfort to those who were originally excluded. The inquiry is concerned with events that occurred many years ago. Some people who will be required to speak to the inquiry will be old or infirm. Some of the victims may be located throughout the world. In the light of that, the chairman, Sir Anthony Hart, proposes to use live television links where necessary to hear evidence. Clause 6 is sufficiently wide to allow evidence to be heard, under oath, via live TV link. I welcome the acknowledgement forum's registration scheme, launched on 1 October. All appointments to that scheme are strictly confidential.

Sinn Féin welcomes the objectives and aspirations of the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill. It is critical that it delivers for the victims and that it is independent, fair and transparent. I am satisfied that the Bill meets those requirements, and along with my party colleagues, I support the Bill and all the amendments in group 4.

5.00 pm

Mr Eastwood: Very briefly, we support these sensible amendments.

Mr Lyttle: I also support these sensible amendments on procedures and administration, including witness arrangements and expenses. I particularly welcome amendment No 35, which will confirm that evidence can be given by secure video link. We welcome the clarification on giving evidence. Although there are institutions with serious allegations to answer about their conduct, it is important that the inquiry facilitates due process.

As Deputy Chair of the OFMDFM Committee, I join the Chairperson in recognising the work of the Committee members and staff who, I believe, honoured the commitment given to victims and survivors to conduct a timely and focused Committee Stage. That has facilitated significant amendments and improvements to the Bill, not least of which is the time frame.

It is not a perfect Bill, however, and notable concerns remain. Not the least of those is that OFMDFM need to consider quickly how victims and survivors of clerical abuse will also be given a voice and process to meet their needs. However, it is important that, despite those significant issues, the message goes out from the Assembly today that we have worked together to move the legislative process in a decisive manner to deliver a long overdue inquiry process for the victims and survivors of institutional child abuse.

Mr Bell: I thank everyone who has participated for the questions and issues that have been raised on the groups of amendments. I appreciate the support on all sides of the House for this group of amendments.

I will take each point in turn. The Chairperson of the OFMDFM Committee competently and coherently outlined

the work that he and each of the Committee members undertook. Many people will regard the Committee as having distinguished itself by doing its job in a timely and accurate way. I concur fully with the idea that it is important for victims that they are listened to and actively heard. I know that that active listening, to which Mr Nesbitt referred at the end of his speech, will bring a lot of solace and comfort to the victims who had the courage to come before the Committee.

In his reference to amendment Nos 40 and 41 and the acknowledgement forum, my colleague George Robinson brought out the need for privacy and anonymity. He concluded by stressing the importance of the devolved Administration staying within their devolved powers.

My honourable friend Bronwyn McGahan rightly underlined the point that child abuse is wrong whatever the date, whether that is 2012 or 1922. That is an important point. She elucidated the importance of the live TV links and rightly brought into focus the need for independence, fairness and transparency. She made the case that the Bill has met those requirements. I thank my honourable friend Mr Eastwood. I do not think that he has ever accused me of being sensible before, but I appreciate it. As Deputy Chair of the Committee, Chris Lyttle also endorsed the point that it was sensible. He paid tribute to Committee members for the timely and focused way in which they set about their work, which was done with seriousness and integrity. Today shows that that work has been translated directly into the Bill. The hours of work that have been spent on it were valuable, and the Committee can see the results of that. Mr Lyttle raised the issue of clerical abuse, and I dealt with that earlier.

As I conclude, I make the point about why we are dealing with historical institutional abuse. Child abuse is child abuse is child abuse. It does not matter whether it comes from a parent, a step-parent, a family friend, a stranger, a teacher, a doctor, a nurse or a social worker. I have seen it too many times in my professional life. Child abuse is child abuse. We will look at where clerical abuse has come from at a later stage. However, the point that must not be missed is that these children had nowhere else to go — nowhere else to go. It was their home. They did not have a mum or dad to go back to. They did not have anybody outside to tell them that what had happened was wrong. They did not have that. They were abused in what was their home, and they had nobody else to go to. That is why the integrity of the Bill is so important, and I thank everyone for their work on it. The children in those institutions had simply nowhere else to go.

I conclude where I started by saluting the victims. Their courage and integrity over many years has brought us to where we are today. From talking to victims, I am also aware that, for some, the abuse was more than they could bear. People hurt themselves and took their own life as a result of what happened. Many people have died without seeing the outcome of this work, and to them we also owe a salute.

Question, That amendment No 33 be made, put and agreed to.

Amendment No 34 made: In page 4, line 2, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 35 made: In page 4, line 3, at end insert

“(4) In this section ‘live link’ means a live television link or other arrangement whereby a person, while absent from the place where the inquiry is being held, is able to see and hear, and be seen and heard by, a person at that place.

(5) For the purposes of subsection (4) any impairment of sight or hearing is to be disregarded.” — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Clause 6, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 7 (Public access to inquiry proceedings and information)

Amendment No 36 made: In page 4, line 5, after “Subject to” insert “subsection (3) and”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 37 made: In page 4, line 6, leave out “presiding member” (in both places) and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 38 made: In page 4, line 14, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 39 made: In page 4, line 15, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 40 made: In page 4, line 16, at end insert

“(3) The proceedings of that part of the inquiry described in its terms of reference as the Acknowledgment Forum are to be held in private and references to the inquiry in subsection (1) do not include that part of the inquiry.” — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Clause 7, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 8 (Restrictions on public access, etc.)

Amendment No 41 made: In page 4, line 21, at end insert

“(c) disclosure or publication of the identity of any person”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 42 made: In page 4, line 23, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 43 made: In page 4, line 27, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 44 made: In page 5, line 1, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Clause 8, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 9 (Powers to require production of evidence)

Amendment No 45 made: In page 5, line 19, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 46 made: In page 5, line 27, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 47 made: In page 6, line 1, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 48 made: In page 6, line 4, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 49 made: In page 6, line 8, at end insert
“(7) The powers conferred by this section are exercisable only in respect of evidence, documents or other things which are wholly or primarily concerned with a transferred matter.

(8) In subsection (7) ‘transferred matter’, in relation to a power conferred by this section, means a matter which, when the power is exercised, is a transferred matter within the meaning of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.” — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Clause 9, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 10 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New Clause

Amendment No 50 made: After clause 10 insert

“Reports

Submission of reports

10A.(1) The chairperson must deliver the report of the inquiry to the First Minister and deputy First Minister at least two weeks before it is published (or such other period as may be agreed between the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly and the chairperson).

(2) In this section “report” includes an interim report.” — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

New clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New Clause

Amendment No 51 made: After clause 10 insert

Publication of reports

10B.(1) The chairperson must make arrangements for the report of the inquiry to be published.

(2) Subject to subsection (3), the report of the inquiry must be published in full.

(3) The chairperson may withhold material from publication to such extent—

(a) as is required by any statutory provision, enforceable EU obligation or rule of law, or

(b) as the chairperson considers to be necessary in the public interest, having regard in particular to the matters mentioned in subsection (4).

(4) Those matters are—

(a) the extent to which withholding material might inhibit the allaying of public concern;

(b) any risk of harm or damage that could be avoided or reduced by withholding any material;

(c) any conditions as to confidentiality subject to which a person acquired information which that person has given to the inquiry.

(5) Subsection (4)(b) does not affect any obligation of a public authority that may arise under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

(6) In this section-

‘public authority’ has the same meaning as in the Freedom of Information Act 2000;

‘report’ includes an interim report.” — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

New clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New Clause

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Amendment No 52 has already been debated and is consequential to amendment No 51, which has already been made.

Amendment No 52 made: After clause 10 insert

“Laying of reports before the Assembly

10C. Whatever is required to be published under section 10B must be laid before the Assembly by the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly, either at the time of publication or as soon afterwards as is reasonably practicable.” — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

New clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 11 (Expenses of witnesses, etc.)

Amendment No 53 made: In page 6, line 21, leave out

“OFMDFM may award such amounts as it”

and insert

“The chairperson may, with the approval of OFMDFM, award such amounts as the chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 54 made: In page 6, line 26, after “where” insert “the chairperson with the approval of”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 55 made: In page 6, line 30, leave out

“attending the inquiry to give evidence or”

and insert

“giving evidence to the inquiry or attending the inquiry”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 56 made: In page 6, line 32, leave out “OFMDFM” and insert “the chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 57 made: In page 6, line 35, after “OFMDFM” insert

“and notified by OFMDFM to the chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Clause 11, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

5.15 pm

Clause 12 (Payment of inquiry expenses by OFMDFM)

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Amendment No 58 has already been debated and is consequential to amendment No 53, which has already been made.

Amendment No 58 made: In page 7, line 1, at end insert

“(1A) OFMDFM must pay any amounts awarded under section 11.” — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 59 made: In page 7, line 8, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Clause 12, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 13 (Offences)

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Amendment Nos 60 to 63 have already been debated and are technical amendments to clause 13. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group the amendments for the question.

Amendment No 60 made: In page 7, line 22, leave out from “fails” to the end of line 24 and insert

“without reasonable excuse

(a) contravenes a restriction order; or

(b) fails to do anything which that person is required to do by a notice under section 9, is guilty of an offence.” — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 61 made: In clause 13, page 8, line 1, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 62 made: In page 8, line 1, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 63 made: In page 8, line 3, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Clause 13, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 14 (Enforcement by High Court)

Amendment No 64 made: In page 8, line 13, leave out

“a notice under section 9 or a restriction order”

and insert

“, or acts in breach of, a notice under section 9 or an order made by the chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 65 made: In page 8, line 15, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Clause 14, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 15 to 17 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 18 (Rules)

Amendment No 66 made: In page 9, line 24, at end insert

“(1A) Rules under subsection (1)(a) may in particular

(a) provide that evidence given for the purposes of any particular part of the inquiry must not be disclosed

(i) in the proceedings of any other part of the inquiry unless the chairperson so orders; or

(ii) in any criminal or civil proceedings in Northern Ireland unless it is necessary to avoid a breach of Convention rights (within the meaning of the Human Rights Act 1998);

(b) make provision for orders similar to witness anonymity orders within the meaning of section 86 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009.” — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 67 made: In page 9, line 28, leave out “inquiry panel” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 68 made: In page 9, line 28, leave out “panel” in the second place where it occurs and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Clause 18, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 19 (Application to the Crown)

Amendment No 69 made: In page 9, line 34, after “Northern Ireland” insert

“except as provided by subsection (2).

(2) The powers conferred by section 9 are not exercisable so as to require any evidence, document or other thing to be given, produced or provided by or on behalf of Her Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom, the Scottish Ministers or the Welsh Ministers.” — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Clause 19, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 20 (Consequential amendments)

Amendment No 70 made: In page 10, line 1, leave out subsection (2). — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Clause 20, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 21 (Interpretation)

Amendment No 71 proposed: In page 10, line 10, at end insert

“ ‘abuse’ includes physical or mental violence, injury, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse;”. — [Mr Allister.]

Question put and negatived.

Amendment No 72 made: In page 10, line 11, at end insert

“ ‘chairperson’ means chairperson of the inquiry;”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I will not call amendment No 73, as it is consequential to amendment No 2, which has not been made.

Amendment No 74 made: In page 10, line 12, at end insert “ ‘harm’ includes death or injury;”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I will not call amendment No 75, as it is consequential to amendment No 2, which has not been made.

Amendment No 76 made: In page 10, line 15, at end insert “ ‘member’ includes chairperson;”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 77 made: In page 10, leave out line 18. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Amendment No 78 made: In page 10, line 22, leave out “presiding member” and insert “chairperson”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Clause 21, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 22 and 23 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Long Title

Amendment No 79 made: Leave out “1945” and insert “1922”. — [Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Long title, as amended, agreed to.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

The next item on the Order Paper is the Consideration Stage of the Charities Bill. Members may take their ease for a few moments while we change the desk.

Executive Committee Business

Charities Bill: Consideration Stage

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland, to move the Bill.

Moved. — [Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development).]

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Members have a copy of the Marshalled List of amendments, detailing the order for consideration. The amendments have been grouped for debate in my provisional grouping of amendments selected list. There is a single group of amendments. The debate will be on amendment Nos 1, 2 and 3, which require certain orders to be subject to negative resolution procedure and make minor, technical changes to the law on charities, together with the Minister for Social Development’s opposition to clause 3. Once the debate on the group is completed, and further amendments in the group will be moved formally as we go through the Bill. The Question on each will be put without further debate. The Question on stand part will be taken at the appropriate point in the Bill. If that is clear, we shall proceed.

No amendments have been tabled to clauses 1 and 2. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group these clauses for the Question on stand part.

Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New Clause

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: We now come to the group of amendments for debate. With amendment No 1, it will be convenient to debate amendment Nos 2 and 3 and the Minister for Social Development’s opposition to clause 3.

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): I beg to move amendment No 1: After clause 2 insert the following new clause:

“Debt relief orders, debt relief restrictions orders and bankruptcy restrictions orders

2A.—(1) The 2008 Act shall be amended as follows.

(2) In section 33 (power to act for protection of charities), in subsection (4)(a) at the end of sub-paragraph (ii) there shall be added ‘or

(iii) having previously been the subject of a debt relief order, has been discharged from all the qualifying debts under the debt relief order;’.

(3) In section 86 (persons disqualified for being trustees of a charity)—

(a) in subsection (1)—

(i) in paragraph (b), after the word ‘discharged’ there shall be inserted the words ‘or D is the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order’;

(ii) after paragraph (g) there shall be added the following paragraph—

‘(h) D is subject to—

(i) a moratorium period under a debt relief order; or

(ii) a debt relief restrictions order.’;

(b) in subsection (2)—

(i) in paragraph (b), for the words ‘or the sequestration there shall be substituted the words ‘, the sequestration or the making of the bankruptcy restrictions order’;

(ii) in paragraph (d), for ‘(g)’ there shall be substituted ‘(h)’;

(c) in subsection (3), after ‘subsection (1)(b)’ insert ‘or (h)’.

(4) In section 87 (person acting as charity trustee while disqualified), in subsection (2)(b) for ‘or (g)’ there shall be substituted ‘,(g) or (h)’.”

The following amendments stood on the Marshalled List:

No 2: In clause 6, page 3, line 35, leave out

“and section 5(2) or, as the case may be, section 5(1)”

and insert

“or, as the case may be, subsection (1) or (2) of section 5”.
— [Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development)]

No 3: In clause 9, page 4, line 21, at end insert

“(5) Any other order under this section is subject to negative resolution.” — [Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development)]

Before I move on to the detail of the amendments, I thank the Chair and members of the Social Development Committee for their effective scrutiny of the Bill and for the timely publication of their report.

The first amendment, which is referred to as clause 2A, has arisen due to some further insolvency law amendments. These were notified to my Department on 10 October and therefore did not form part of the Bill as introduced. In short, changes to the Charities Act 2011 in England and Wales have added to the list of persons disqualified from being trustees of a charity. In addition to persons subject to a bankruptcy restrictions order, already picked up by clause 3 of the Charities Bill, disqualification extends to persons subject to a moratorium period under a debt relief order or a debt relief restrictions order.

The Department has also been advised by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) that the words “interim order” in the current clause 3 are not appropriate to the equivalent Northern Ireland legislation and that those words should be dropped from the Bill. My officials advised the Social Development Committee of this possible amendment on 18 October. If accepted for inclusion in the Bill, the amendment will alter a number of sections of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, including section 33(4)(a), “Power to act for protection of charities”; section 86(1) and (3), “Persons disqualified for being trustees of a charity”; and section 87(2)(b), “Person acting as charity trustee while disqualified”.

If accepted by the House, the amendment will effectively become the new clause 3. Therefore, I ask Members to oppose the Question that the existing clause 3 stand part of the Bill.

5.30 pm

Amendment No 2 relates to clause 6 and the definition of “transfer date”. During scrutiny of the Bill, the Office of the Legislative Counsel pointed out that the existing drafting of the definition of “transfer date” in clause 6 was not accurate. As it stands, it reads that clause 4 and

clause 5(2) will come into operation on the one date and that clause 5(1) will come into operation on another. The correct definition is that clause 4 and clause 5(1) will come into operation on an appointed day and clause 5(2) will come into operation the day after Royal Assent has been granted.

Amendment No 3, which will amend clause 9, was discussed and agreed during the Committee’s scrutiny of the Bill, and it relates to the provisions that delegate legislation-making powers. For that purpose, the Department prepared a delegated powers memorandum, which the Examiner of Statutory Rules considered. He advised the Committee that orders made under clause 9 that do not amend, repeal or modify a statutory provision should be subject to negative resolution rather than, as the Bill stands, to no Assembly procedure. Orders that amend, repeal or modify a statutory provision are already subject to draft affirmative procedure. The Department and the Committee accepted the Examiner of Statutory Rules’s advice on that point and agreed clause 9, subject to this amendment being taking forward.

That concludes the amendments that I tabled at Consideration Stage. I request Assembly approval on the basis that they are non-contentious and will enhance the new regulatory framework for charities in Northern Ireland.

Members will be aware that the main purpose of the Bill is to amend the public benefit provisions in the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, bringing public benefit requirements in Northern Ireland into line with those in England and Wales. I previously stated that I do not expect that to be an undue burden for the vast majority of charities. Indeed, public benefit should be at the very heart of what they do. However, I want to comment specifically on a recent case in England relating to the religious denomination commonly known as Exclusive Brethren. My understanding is that the issue hinges on the withdrawal from contact with general society and the absence of any wider public benefit.

The courts have generally recognised religion as being for the public benefit, precisely because of the moral improvement in society that it is thought to encourage. That might be undermined if there were no or very limited societal interaction. As that case is now the subject of a tribunal hearing, the court will decide the outcome, and should we receive a similar application in Northern Ireland, the charity regulator in Northern Ireland will have regard to that judgement. However, it is important to stress that that case is most unlikely to have any implications for other faith-based charities in Northern Ireland, as the holding of public worship is regarded as being for the public benefit.

I have held discussions with representatives from the churches sector in Northern Ireland, and they are satisfied that charity regulation offers no threat to their activities or to their long-term charitable status. They are also further assured by concessions that have already been made to faith-based organisations in the 2008 Act, which introduced a specific designated religious charity status. That enables local churches to apply for an exemption from certain provisions in the Act that cover charity investigations and inquiries. That is a reflection of the unique governance structure in local churches, and it will enable the relevant governing body to address matters of concern rather than to seek intervention from the charity

regulator. In conclusion, I commend the amendments and the Bill to the House.

Mr Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his comments in introducing the Consideration Stage. On behalf of the Committee for Social Development, I want to make a few points and outline a number of concerns and issues that have been raised with and, of course, deliberated on by the Committee.

The Bill was referred to the Committee for Social Development in accordance with Standing Order 33(1) on completion of its Second Stage on 11 September 2012. The Committee received nine written submissions and took oral evidence from NICVA and the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. The Committee also, of course, heard from the Department on the provisions in, and the rationale for, the Bill.

Members may be aware that, in June 2010, senior counsel acting for the Charity Commission identified a technical difficulty with the public benefit test provision of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, and the Minister referred to that. As the Minister explained at a previous stage of the process, that difficulty arose as a result of a hybrid form of legislation made up of a combination of unrelated provisions on the public benefit test from the Charities Act 2006, which applies in England and Wales, and the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005. That produced a legal uncertainty, which has meant that the Charity Commission has been unable to fulfil its obligation under the 2008 Act on the registration of charities, simply because the public benefit requirement under that Act was not workable in practice.

Members are aware, or should be aware, that the Committee's report demonstrated that the overall purpose of the Charities Bill is to amend the public benefit provision of the Charities Act 2008 to provide clarity on the requirement to be met in determining whether an institution is or is not a charity within the meaning of that Act, to which the Minister referred in part just a few minutes ago. In effect, the Bill's purpose is to clear up the legal uncertainty that I just referred to. The stakeholders who responded to the Committee's call for evidence universally welcomed the clarification that the proposed amendment to section 3 of the 2008 Act — the public benefit test — would bring.

There are two key issues relevant to the Bill, and those were the focus of the Committee's consideration and stakeholders' concerns. The first is that all charities in the North will be required to prove that they meet one or more of the charitable purposes, are purely charitable and operate for the public benefit. The second is that the clarity provided by the amendment to section 3 of the Charities Act (NI) 2008 means that the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland will be able to begin the process of registering charities here.

On the second point, however, the Committee also recognised that the Charity Commission has already established what it refers to as a deemed list of some 6,700 charities, which it has been working closely on with HMRC. Therefore, it has not been sitting idly by waiting on this legislation to be worked out. It has already done a lot of preparation work.

The Committee also recognised and accepted the importance of the issues to the community and voluntary sector. Indeed, the Committee recognised the importance of a charities' register so that people — that is, the general public — can be confident that the charities to which they contribute their hard-earned cash meet the public test requirement and are, therefore, bona fide charities.

There are further issues relating to the proposed amendments. The first is that, on 18 October 2012 — the day on which the Committee had scheduled to agree its report — it took oral evidence from departmental officials, who advised the Committee that clause 3 may be subject to amendment owing to issues raised by DETI officials concerning insolvency. Again, the Minister referred to that. The Committee was advised that it was possible that the Minister would table an amendment at Consideration Stage to address that. We note, therefore, that the Minister has given notice that he intends to oppose the Question that clause 3 stand part of the Bill. The Committee also notes the new clause — currently referred to as clause 2A — to be inserted after clause 2. The new clause relates to debt relief orders and restrictions and bankruptcy restriction orders. The Committee also notes amendment No 2, which is a minor rewording of clause 5.

Finally, the Examiner of Statutory Rules brought clause 9 to the attention of the Committee, indicating that any order under that clause should be subject to negative resolution, which is just to give further democratic accountability to the Assembly, given the nature of the issue. The Department agreed and Members will see that that is amendment No 3 on the Marshalled List.

I reiterate that the organisations that responded to the Committee welcomed the Bill. None of them suggested amendments, and all were content with the wording of the key clause — clause 1 — which, as I mentioned, substitutes a new public benefit provision for that in section 3 of the 2008 Act. On that basis, the Committee, therefore, supports the progress of the Bill through the House.

I just want to make two final points. I do not want to labour this point, but the hybrid nature of this type of legislation, which has been in fits and starts since 2008, meant that it has been less smooth than the Committee would have preferred. Notwithstanding that, we are very conscious that the Charities Commission has been preparing, as I have said, a deemed list of organisations that will qualify. Of course, the Committee had some concerns about which organisations may qualify. We are fully conscious of the fact that, once the Bill goes through, the Charities Commission will embark on a formal public consultation with all the relevant stakeholders to work out the finer detail of the public benefit test.

On that basis, the Committee is more than happy to support the Bill. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the Charities Bill as amended. As stated at Second Stage, the SDLP supports the passage of the Bill as it is a welcome step towards rectifying the problems with charity regulation in this jurisdiction. The main reason that those problems have occurred is due to the unworkable and ambiguous public benefit test laid down in the existing Charities Act, but we will not go into that.

I recognise the support of the Charities Commission and its eagerness to get the legislation through in order to

regulate and develop the sector more effectively. NICVA, as the Chair said, also welcomed the Bill. I commend both organisations for their work in relation to the legislation. I thank them for the support that they have given to the Committee on this complex issue.

To date, it has been a difficult task for the Charities Commission to make full determinations on whether an organisation is a charity, as it has been unable to apply the definition contained in the 2008 Act as the public benefit test issue has yet to be resolved. Having had the benefit of being briefed by the commission, members of the Committee for Social Development are aware that, over the past six months or so, 40% of enquiries to the commission have related to charity registration. It is thus most welcome that the Assembly moves to support the work of the Charities Commission and, in turn, supports all charities and the invaluable work that they do in our communities and further afield. It is essential that we show charities our full support, especially at a time when the demand on so many of their services is unprecedented.

The passage of the Bill will aid the commission in carrying out its registration and regulatory functions, which, to date, have been hamstrung by the public benefit requirements problems. Section 3 of the Act, which relates to the public benefit clause, is where the main problem facing the charities sector has arisen. As drafted, the provision is unworkable on a technical, legal and practical basis. That is largely due to the legislation being a hybrid of English, Welsh and Scottish charity legislation. That has made it impractical, if not impossible, for charities here to comply with the two different public benefit requirements.

The SDLP is in favour of a public benefit requirement that ensures equality of treatment for all charities. That would go some way to increasing public confidence in the sector as well, as the Charities Commission would be able to consult on guidance for a public benefit requirement, which would create an opportunity to get input from stakeholders and trustees and to iron out any potential difficulties. Therefore, we are pleased that the Bill and the amendments have been brought to the House, with a view to creating an approach that is consistent with the English and Welsh legislation and which will enable the commission to begin working on the establishment of a system of regulation and accountability. It wants to do that as quickly as possible so that it can start registering charities. The new system will be simpler and fairer. Accountability will be enhanced. Consequently, public confidence, as I have said, will be increased. Donors will be reassured that the money that they give is going to benefit those in genuine need.

The Bill also sets out to transfer some functions from DSD to the commission, and it contains other minor and consequential amendments. I do not perceive those to be contentious or problematic. The amendments that were tabled today are technical and relate to the delegation of powers. Again the SDLP and the Social Development Committee welcome their inclusion.

5.45 pm

The SDLP is pleased to offer its support to the Charities Bill, as amended. It looks forward to working with charities and the Charity Commission to ensure that the benefit of this legislation is seen and felt on the ground without delay.

Mrs Cochrane: I also welcome the opportunity to speak at this stage of the Bill. As I said previously, I support the sentiment behind the Bill, which clarifies and corrects the public benefit provisions of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, and transfers functions from DSD to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. Although the Charity Commission has some powers of regulation, those are not straightforward without a register. I know that the commission is keen for the Bill to progress so that it can formally commence the registration process for charities in Northern Ireland.

Registration will assist the Charity Commission in its regulation of the operation of all charities of different sizes and descriptions. It will give the public confidence that any charity on the register is for the benefit of the public. With registration and regulation, charities, beneficiaries and donors can have confidence that charities will use their charitable resources effectively in a well-governed and regulated environment, which is open, transparent and accountable in its organisation.

As stated by other Members, the amendments relate to delegated powers and are of a technical nature. I will also support all the amendments and oppose the Question that the existing clause 3 stand part of the Bill.

I hope that the Bill, when enacted, will deal with all the discrepancies from the 2008 Act, and that this will be a positive step forward for the charitable sector in Northern Ireland.

Mr McCausland: I thank the Chair of the Committee and the other Members for their contributions to the debate on the proposed amendments. It is clear that there is broad agreement across the House for the Charities Bill and for the amendments that have been tabled. I am grateful for that.

I certainly concur with Mr Maskey's view that the amendment to the public benefit provisions will create legal certainty and allow full registration to commence. I want to thank him for his support for the three amendments. As Mr Maskey pointed out, the Charity Commission has progressed with the regulation of about 6,700 charities on the deemed list that had registered with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. It has also successfully completed over 100 investigations to deal with matters of public concern. The figure of 6,700 charities on the deemed list gives us some indication of the scale and scope of the charities sector in Northern Ireland. That is a good thing in itself. It is a very strong, expansive and vibrant sector, and that is a good thing.

Having met with the charity commissioners last week, I know that they are keen to progress with their work. They welcome the decision we are going to take very shortly, which will enable them to proceed further with that work.

Mr Durkan commented on deficiencies in the 2008 legislation and touched on those very carefully and circumspectly. In the interests of peace and harmony, I will not dwell on that matter any further — I would not want to cause any awkwardness or embarrassment. I also welcome the support from the Alliance Party.

Once the Bill has progressed through the Assembly and receives Royal Assent, it will enable the Charity Commission to commence consultation on the public benefit guidance. That will be important for local charities in considering how they might demonstrate public benefit to the commission once the registration process starts.

It is expected that registration will get under way in 2013. That will be an important step in promoting accountability and transparency in the local charitable sector.

Question, That amendment No 1 be made, put and agreed to.

New clause ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Minister's opposition to clause 3 has already been debated.

Clause 3 disagreed to.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: No amendments have been tabled to clauses 4 and 5. I propose, by leave of the Assembly, to group those clauses for the Question on stand part.

Clauses 4 to 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 6 (Supplementary provisions)

Amendment No 2 made: In page 3, line 35, leave out

"and section 5(2) or, as the case may be, section 5(1)"

and insert

"or, as the case may be, subsection (1) or (2) of section 5".

— [Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development).]

Clause 6, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 7 and 8 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 9 (Power to make supplementary and transitional provision etc.)

Amendment No 3 made: In page 4, line 21, at end insert

"(5) Any other order under this section is subject to negative resolution." — [Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development).]

Clause 9, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 10 and 11 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 to 2 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes the Consideration Stage of the Charities Bill. The Bill stands referred to the Speaker.

Small Charitable Donations Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

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

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the Small Charitable Donations Bill and that its operation be made an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The Small Charitable Donations Bill was introduced at Westminster on 21 June 2012. It legislates for a new gift aid small donations scheme that will enable charities and community amateur sports clubs (CASCs) to claim relief on small cash donations that they receive. This measure was first announced by the Chancellor in 2011, and it is intended that the new scheme will come into operation from April 2013. It will complement the existing gift aid scheme, but, importantly, charities will now be able to claim top-up payments for those small cash donations for which it is difficult to obtain a formal gift aid declaration.

The Bill's policy objective is linked to the UK Government's big society agenda, and its aim is to encourage charitable giving and to build a more socially conscious society. The scheme will apply only to small cash donations of £20 or less, and it will be open to organisations with a good track record of claiming gift aid for at least three tax years. There will be an annual limit of £5,000 per organisation on donations eligible for the top-up payment. The scheme is designed to be administered by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs in the same way as gift aid. Therefore, a small donation income of £5,000 will entitle the charity or CASC to a maximum top-up payment of £1,250 each year.

Although the scheme will be administered by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, it cannot be treated as tax relief under normal gift aid arrangements. That is due to the fact that for small cash donations of £20 or less, there is normally no recorded link between the charity, the donor and their tax affairs. Any payments made to charities under the scheme will be regarded as grant payments, and it is, therefore, regarded as a transferred matter.

In order to be eligible to make claims under the scheme in respect of small donations made in a particular tax year, a charity must have been in existence for at least three years. It must also have made at least three gift aid exemption claims in the previous seven tax years. The minimum period for a new charity or CASC to qualify for the new scheme is, therefore, three years. Those qualifying conditions are important to minimise the potential for fraudulent claims. These are public funds, and it is vital that proper control measures and safeguards are in place. In drafting the Bill, Treasury has sought to strike a balance between the need for accountability and the requirements of small charities that may wish to benefit from the scheme.

There will be special rules in certain circumstances to increase the maximum amount of small donations on which top-up payments can be claimed by some charities. If a charity runs a range of separate charitable activities in a community building, for example, the maximum limit is increased from £5,000 of small donations by up to a further £5,000 for small donations collected in each community building.

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

The new scheme is to be welcomed, and will allow over 6,000 charities in Northern Ireland that are currently registered with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to claim additional revenue from HMRC. That will be important for local charities, especially for those that are finding it difficult to make ends meet in these challenging financial circumstances. I am aware that some concerns have been raised about the complexity of the proposed scheme, both at Westminster and during the Committee for Social Development's scrutiny. The scheme is naturally linked to gift aid and, therefore, claims must be processed through HMRC's current systems. Officials from HMRC have advised that, from April 2013, it will be an online system, and that claims under the small donation scheme will be straightforward to complete. The Treasury Minister also indicated at Committee Stage that the scheme would be reviewed within three years to examine the level of take-up and to identify any barriers to charities submitting claims.

As the scheme will be applied across the United Kingdom, Members will appreciate that it is important that it is applied in a consistent manner. As is the case with gift aid, Treasury will not consider any regional variations to the scheme. The Executive have, therefore, agreed that it should be made an excepted matter under schedule 2 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998. In summary, I welcome the introduction of the Small Charitable Donations Bill at Westminster and the fact that it will be extended to Northern Ireland. I trust that Members will approve the legislative consent motion before the House to enable our local charities to take full advantage of this financial opportunity.

Mr Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for tabling the legislative consent motion and making his comments. I will rehearse a number of points on behalf of the Committee for Social Development. The Committee took evidence from departmental officials and NICVA on the legislative consent motion. The Committee could clearly see the benefit of the Small Charitable Donations Bill to charities here. As the Department noted, it could potentially allow up to 6,000 charities in the North to benefit from the proposed new gift aid and small donations scheme. The Minister referred to that. The Committee also accepted evidence from NICVA that the scheme could potentially introduce excessive bureaucracy, particularly for smaller charities. The Committee also recognised that the eligibility may prevent organisations from benefiting from the additional revenue that the scheme would generate.

On the back of that, the Committee, therefore, wrote to the Chairperson of the Small Charitable Donations Bill Committee in Westminster expressing those concerns. The DSD officials returned to brief the Committee on 8 November and provided details of the mainly technical amendments to the Bill that followed the Westminster Committee's consideration. Although the Committee reiterated its concerns, it was clear that if the Assembly did not support the motion, charities in the North could not take part in the scheme. The Committee acknowledged that the scheme would be reviewed after three years and that issues of concern to the Committee and other stakeholders could be assessed at that point. Therefore, despite the concerns that we shared with others, the

Committee felt that the scheme was ultimately beneficial to charities here. With that in mind, the Committee supports the principle of the extension to the North of the Small Charitable Donations Bill and for it to be made an excepted matter under the NI Act 1998.

Put very simply, the Committee obviously shared the concerns that were expressed to it primarily by NICVA, which is an organisation that represents the community and voluntary sector. However, the Committee endorses the extension of the Bill to here and the idea that this be made an excepted matter, notwithstanding our concerns that it might inhibit the Committee or the Department taking further action in the longer term. We had to weigh up the positive impact that the Bill will have on the up to 6,000 organisations that could benefit from it.

Taking the negative consideration, not supporting the Bill would prevent those 6,000 organisations from being able to participate in a beneficial way. So, on the basis that we can review and reassess this after a period of time, as the legislation allows for, the Committee supports the Bill.

6.00 pm

Mr Kinahan: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this legislative consent motion. If nothing else, it serves as a reminder that the Social Development Committee still has a programme of work other than welfare reform to oversee.

It would be difficult to find anyone who disagrees with the broad policy objective of the gift aid small donations scheme, which the Assembly will hopefully support today. Its aim is to encourage charitable giving and to build a more socially conscious society.

Many of us are, no doubt, involved in smaller charities that survive year to year on the generosity of not only their members but people who are not affiliated to the organisation in any way but have taken the conscious decision to part with their hard-earned cash. Therefore, the proposal to enable charities and community amateur sports clubs to claim a top-up payment that is equivalent to gift aid on up to £5,000 that they collect each year is one that my party can strongly support.

Churches may be the biggest beneficiaries of the proposals. Anyone who has attended services will not have missed the sight of collection plates laden down with loose change and notes. For churches that are registered as charities, the noose of heating and maintaining old large buildings may be loosened ever so slightly. Without wanting to appear too cynical, it was a pleasant surprise to find that, for once, the Government appear, on the surface at least, to be holding out a hand to smaller charities and are, at last, recognising the immense contribution that they make to society.

By allowing charities to claim an effective gift aid payment on individual donations of £20 or less without having to obtain a declaration, we are giving up to 6,000 charities in Northern Ireland the chance to benefit up to an additional £100 million in revenue per annum. That will serve not only as a huge boost for many of our local charities but will represent a welcome shot in the arm for our local economy.

This initiative is all the better given that it comes at no cost to the block grant. However, it would be wrong for me to say that my party is fully satisfied with today's proposals. For example, we do not agree with the definition of an

eligible charity as described in clause 2 of the Westminster Bill, which states that it has to have:

“made a successful gift aid exemption claim in at least 3 of the previous 7 tax years”.

Many of our smaller charities have not been registered for that length of time, and even of those that have, some will not have made a claim due to the perceived complexity of the process. For what it is worth, we believe that a single year's claim would have been sufficient.

On the point of the registration of charities, I will use this opportunity to, once again, reiterate the ludicrousness of the Assembly having to watch the Charities Bill, which was just discussed, going through the entire legislative process again. Maybe if the original Bill in 2008 had been drafted appropriately and there were clarity on the requirements that are to be met in determining whether an institution was a charity by the meaning of the word, the recent years of uncertainty about and delays with the Charity Commission's even carrying out the most basic of tasks, such as putting together a registry, could have been avoided.

Nevertheless, getting back to the issue that is before us today, the Executive must ensure that, when the scheme comes into operation next year, the whole process is as streamlined and efficient as possible. They can do that only through making effective representation to Treasury. What charities need least at present is a new mountain of paperwork.

As with most of the UK's taxation policies, this scheme belongs best with the Treasury. Therefore, we support the provisions being placed in schedule 2 to the Northern Ireland Act.

Mr McCausland: I thank the Chairperson of the Social Development Committee and other Members for their comments on the legislative consent motion. I appreciate the fact that the Committee took the time to consider the matter carefully and produce a report when it is also dealing with other important and time-consuming matters of primary legislation.

I welcome the fact that there is broad agreement across the Chamber for the proposal to extend the Small Charitable Donations Bill to Northern Ireland. Local charities will wish to benefit from the potential new revenue stream, and the Assembly's consent is required if Northern Ireland charities are to be included in the scheme from next April.

I acknowledge that some Members are uncomfortable with the fact that this is being made an excepted matter, which is not ideal. However, as the scheme will be administered centrally by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, with no cost to the Northern Ireland block grant, it would not be reasonable to allow for any regional variations. It will therefore be treated in the same way as other tax reliefs.

On the comments by the Committee Chairperson, Mr Maskey, I acknowledge the concerns that some charities may find the scheme complex and that the qualifying conditions are stringent. I am advised that further amendments are under consideration at Westminster and that they will be to the benefit of local charities. Further detail on those changes will be available after the Bill's Third Reading on 26 November. Therefore, within a matter

of days, we will know the outcome of that. I certainly welcome the Committee's support at this stage.

I thank Members for their support, and I seek approval for the legislative consent motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the Small Charitable Donations Bill and that its operation be made an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Private Members' Business

Energy Strategy

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

Ms Lo: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes that approximately 99% of primary energy needs are met from imported fossil fuels, which costs approximately £2.3 billion annually; recognises the need to improve energy security and energy independence; further notes the importance of reducing the cost and our exposure to price fluctuations in fossil fuels, while creating Northern Ireland-based jobs through the expansion of indigenous renewables and low-carbon energy sources; and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in conjunction with the Executive, to develop a long-term energy strategy for a low-carbon future.

I am delighted to move the motion and want to thank WWF Northern Ireland for providing much of the background information for my introduction to the debate.

Energy is essential to every aspect of our lives, and it is vital that we plan how we will access energy in the long run. We rely on imported fossil fuels for 99% of our energy needs, which include not only electricity but heating and transport demands. That is a deeply worrying statistic. Although 14% of electricity in Northern Ireland is currently generated from renewables, it is making only a marginal contribution to other energy forms in Northern Ireland. We need to find alternatives in order to prepare for a fossil fuel-free energy future.

Crude oil production from existing fields is dropping steadily from its peak in the late 1960s. It is calculated that only one barrel of oil is now discovered for every three consumed. According to the 'BP Statistical Review of World Energy: June 2012', we have only 54 years of oil and 63 years of gas left. What should a place that is 99% dependent on imported fossil fuels do in the long term? How will we meet our energy needs? Where will we source the energy that we need daily to grow, distribute, transport and prepare our food or run our hospitals, schools and all the other public services? How will we manage our communication and transport systems? How will people heat their homes and cook their food? How will we transport goods and people in a carbon-constrained world?

Ahead of the prospect of oil and gas becoming scarce, we have to plan now for the shortages and related price rises that seem inevitable. If we put this off, we will be less able to cope with the economic, social and environmental consequences of the impact of decreasing availability and increasing prices.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's (DETI) strategic energy framework, which has been approved by the Executive, is a welcome and important contribution to Northern Ireland's energy planning. However, the framework is not a long-term energy strategy

because it looks only as far as 2020; we need a 40-year plan. The framework is not an energy strategy, as it does not address transport fuel at all, nor does it address 60% of electricity and 90% of heat demand in Northern Ireland. The framework states that only 40% of our electricity and 10% of our heat should come from renewables by 2020. There are glaring gaps.

Northern Ireland has been almost completely reliant on outside supplies of energy. Clearly, that cannot continue indefinitely. Circumstances are already changing, and we must prepare for a very different future. Countries less dependent on fossil fuels than Northern Ireland are preparing for a low-carbon future, so why are we not? Major economies such as China, the USA and Germany are investing heavily in green technology. Many other developed economies, including Denmark and Sweden, have made plans to go partially or completely fossil fuel-free. The green economy is where the smart money is going. We need to grasp the opportunity soon to ensure that we are not left behind.

Mr Newton: Will the Member give way?

Ms Lo: I am sorry; I am really tight for time. Maybe later, is that OK?

It was announced yesterday that Areva, one of Europe's largest offshore wind energy companies, plans to build a new offshore wind manufacturing plant in Scotland, creating 750 jobs directly and many more in the supply chain.

Reducing the demand for energy is fundamental, but it also offers a win-win situation: lessening our dependence on the import of fossil fuels provides an opportunity to save money. By investing in a low-carbon economy, we can create tens of thousands of jobs in the local market and save money in the long run, mainly by reducing the enormous bills for imported fossil fuels.

A 2012 Green Alliance report found that although the overall UK economy has shrunk, the green economy has grown by 13.9% from 2007. According to the UK Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, in 2007, the whole Northern Ireland low-carbon and environmental goods and services sector was worth approximately £3.3 billion across 1,600 companies and employed 31,000 people. The Carbon Trust stated that having 15% of UK energy from renewables by 2020 has the potential to create more than 500,000 jobs in renewables in the UK and up to 33,000 in a sector that could be worth almost £1 billion in Northern Ireland. Given our huge natural resources in the form of wind and wave, and the potential for bio-energy, our opportunity for developing a low-carbon economy is indisputable. We must make the most of it.

6.15 pm

Developing a long-term energy strategy is a matter of need, not choice. The strategy has to address how fossil fuels and renewables will meet our electricity, heating and transportation needs. It must address how much we can and will reduce demand and how we use energy more efficiently.

The strategy needs to address new and emerging technologies such as hydrogen and the potential for other alternative fuels. It is essential that it prepares us for a very different future. It does not have to be written in stone but should provide a framework for how we will meet our

energy needs in the longer term in response to a changing energy landscape.

I believe that Northern Ireland needs a long-term energy strategy that sets clear, mandatory targets to 2050. Those targets must aim to reduce our over-dependence on fossil fuels and increase energy production from renewables. They must set out how to improve energy efficiency, especially in homes and businesses, as this will help to reduce our energy bills and increase our energy security. We need targets that take advantage of the significant opportunities for inward investment and job creation in renewables for which this region has the greatest potential. We need a plan to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, especially carbon dioxide, that contribute to climate change.

Although it is appropriate that DETI, with responsibility for energy policy, takes the lead in this, we need to stop looking at energy policy as an issue for a single Department. This is an issue that cuts across every Department and affects every one of us. Cross-departmental involvement is necessary, and that is why we have called on DETI to lead but for all Departments to play a part.

In November 2009, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment acknowledged:

"The cost of inaction on renewables now would lock us into potentially even higher costs over the long-term. The era of low energy prices is over."

Complacency is not the answer. We cannot afford to just sit by while we inexorably run out of those sources of energy on which we rely so heavily. So often, the Assembly has been criticised for short-term and non-joined-up thinking. Now is the time for all of us to show leadership and plan for all of us into the future. I ask the House to support the motion for a long-term energy strategy.

Mr McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas le moltóirí an rúin. I thank the proposer of the motion. I listened very carefully as Ms Lo said that this was an issue that cuts across every Department and affects each of us.

I will speak initially as Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. In the previous mandate, the Committee conducted an inquiry into the barriers to the development of renewable energy. The current Committee continues to monitor the implementation of the recommendations from that inquiry. The Committee will next consider progress at its meeting of 6 December 2012.

What became very clear from that inquiry is that, although DETI has responsibility for matters relating to renewable energy, it is not the only Department with responsibility for making sure that our long-term renewable energy needs are met. For that reason, the Committee called on the Executive to develop a long-term vision for renewable energy. Such a vision must recognise the responsibilities of other Departments and agencies. Therefore, the Committee made recommendations that acknowledge those responsibilities.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel would have responsibility for making certain renewable energy technologies mandatory for newbuilds. The Minister

for Social Development would have responsibility for implementing initiatives such as the green new deal, and we await further word on that one. The First Minister and the deputy First Minister would have responsibility for developing the renewable energy potential for public buildings.

It was because of the cross-cutting nature of the renewable energy remit that the sustainable energy interdepartmental working group was established. The sustainable energy action plan was approved by the Executive on 5 April. It includes a commitment to establish a long-term vision until 2050, as recommended in the Committee's inquiry. The Committee will receive an update from the Department in December; that will include updates from other relevant Departments.

The Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee has recognised that renewable energy cannot be considered in isolation and must be considered as part of our overall energy mix. The Department has developed the strategic energy framework (SEF) up to 2020. The SEF contains targets for 40% of electricity and 10% of heat to be consumed from renewable sources by 2020. On the Committee's recommendation, the SEF now contains interim targets for consumption of electricity and heat from renewable sources. To drive its renewable heat target, the Department introduced the renewable heat incentive last month.

There are strategies in place both for offshore and onshore wind development. At last week's meeting, the Committee considered the policy proposals for the forthcoming Energy Bill. Among other proposals, the Bill will contain suggestions for energy efficiency duties and obligations on DETI and the Utility Regulator in respect of sustainability and the introduction of a small-scale feed-in tariff for renewable energies.

I will now speak wearing my party hat. There is a need for us to vastly change how we produce energy. Climate change has had a global impact — some in the Chamber have not yet accepted that impact — not just through physical implications but in respect of how the global economy works. We have targets that we must meet, but it is about much more than just meeting those targets. It is about shaping our economic future.

The cost of fossil fuels, and our reliance on them, are making it so difficult for many to heat their own home or run a car. We must address these issues now, as we are so far behind on such matters. Take the examples of Albania, Austria, Brazil, Ethiopia and Iceland, where there is minimal reliance on fossil fuels for electricity generation. In 2009, Norway, and probably countries much closer too, had 96% non-reliance on fossil fuels for generation of electricity; they are probably much closer to 100% non-reliance now. Ireland and the UK are a considerable distance behind all those places, with figures as low as 10% or 12%. The figure is about 20% for Germany and 30% for Spain.

Too often, green energy targets are sceptically dismissed as a hindrance or nuisance. However, there is an opportunity not just to improve the statistics and meet the targets for renewable energy but to create jobs and stimulate the economy. The green industry is without doubt a growth industry. In 2011, total investment in renewable energy across the globe was more than £160 billion. That figure was up from £130 billion in 2010, and, as recently

as 2004, it was less than £20 billion. Green energy is the future. Can we afford to sit back and do nothing, or will we seize this opportunity?

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

Mr McGlone: OK. Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Newton: The proposer of the motion said that she was delighted to be proposing it. I cannot say that I see many other Members around the Chamber who look delighted to be speaking on this motion at this time of the night.

The proposers are guilty of looking at the current energy policy wearing political blinkers and of turning a deaf ear to, and taking no account of, the good work that has already been done by the Executive, the Minister and her Department. All the information on the progress was presented to them in the Research and Information Service information pack. Information on what can be done, and on what is being done, is available in the economic strategy document and the corporate plan.

The motion mentions energy security, energy independence, reduction of costs, creation of jobs and the development of a long-term strategy for a low-carbon future. I say this a wee bit tongue-in-cheek, but you would nearly think that they are talking about nuclear energy.

Ms Lo said that green money is where the smart money is, but I have the publication that tells us how we can create a dynamic and world-class economy: the report from the Northern Ireland Economic Conference 2012. Not one of the international experts who contribute to that report speak of a huge drive towards a green economy. In fact, the report states that the development of a nuclear plant policy shows a good direction of travel. Yet, that avenue is completely ignored, even though it produces everything that those who tabled the motion are looking for in their proposal.

However, in 2010, the Executive published the strategic energy framework, which set out Northern Ireland's strategic aim for a sustainable energy system where our power supply or our source is used cost-effectively and as economically as possible, where much of our energy is from renewable sources and where our energy is as competitively priced as possible. As we move away from our reliance on fossil fuels stage by stage, we must always make certain that we have a safe and protected sustainable energy future. That should be our key concern.

There is a balancing act required concerning the need to keep energy costs for consumers and businesses as low as possible while, at the same time, keeping the interest of investors and building the confidence that Northern Ireland has an energy supply that is fit for now and for years to come. All that must happen while we attempt to increase the energy supply in line with the objectives and targets set out in the strategic energy framework.

The target set for 2012 was to have 12% of our energy source coming from renewables. That has been achieved, and the next target is to have 25% coming from renewables by 2015.

Mr Flanagan: On a point of clarification, the Member spoke about 12% of our energy generation coming from renewables, but that is the figure for electricity generation.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Newton: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank the Member for that clarification.

The target for 2015 is going to be achieved, so good progress is being made. The strategic energy framework is the strategy that the Chamber debated, and it was consulted on outside this Chamber. Hitting the first target is a good achievement. There is still much to be done to fulfil all the actions in the SEF.

The SEF was scrutinised by the ETI Committee, on which all parties in this House had members. It might be appropriate for me to pay tribute to Sean Neeson, who was a member of the Committee at that time and played an extremely active role. His interest in the subject was beyond reproach, and his diligence, work rate and energy in this area was second to none. If my memory serves me right, he is from the Alliance Party.

Mr A Maginness: He is ex-Alliance.

Mr Newton: He is ex-Alliance. Well, anyway.

A reliable energy source and supply make a positive contribution, obviously, to any western economy, and no less so to the Northern Ireland economy. They make a real difference to an economy that is spiralling downwards. We have a policy that is going to take us forward with an acceptable standard of progress.

It is interesting that just last week representatives from the Age Sector Platform confirmed in this building that one of their main concerns for the people they represent was their ability to keep warm over the winter. Last Thursday, the energy regulator confirmed that Northern Ireland has the lowest domestic electricity and gas costs in the UK and that the prices here are also much cheaper than they are across the border in the Republic. That concern from Age Sector Platform is about affordability for those on tightly-fixed budgets.

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

Mr Newton: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Alliance Party Members responsible for tabling this useful motion. The reaction so far from the DUP to the motion has been a wee bit disappointing: it is clearly not an attack by the Alliance Party on the Executive or the Minister.

It is simply highlighting the fact that we need to plan beyond what is in the SEF and move towards 2050. In fact, the Minister has acknowledged that we need to do that. It is clear that we need to have a long-term strategy for our energy generation and to move towards a low-carbon future. We need to plan towards 2050 and reduce our carbon consumption considerably.

6.30 pm

The island of Ireland has more than three times its energy requirements available from renewable sources, and all we need to do is exploit them. Unfortunately, due to some of the measures that are in existence, that really is not possible. For example, there is protection for the gas industry in the North under the Energy Order 2003, where the principal objective of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Utility Regulator is to promote

the natural gas network. While that is there, it will always be a barrier to the development of the renewables industry.

It is also very clear that, in the public sector, there is a mass reluctance to convert from fossil fuel-based heat generation in particular towards renewables. Across Executive public service buildings, the only renewable heat generator is in Stormont Castle, where there is one biomass boiler. Some others are coming on stream, but there have been no clear moves by the Department of Finance and Personnel or any other Ministers to move beyond that approach.

I have been working with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to ensure that, when the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's headquarters moves to your constituency, Mr Deputy Speaker, it is a low-carbon building and is heated using renewable sources. That is where we need to go, particularly with new buildings. We need to look at how they are planned for and what types of regulations there are, because all new buildings should now have stricter regulations to be more energy efficient and to consume less carbon.

In the future, we need to decarbonise our energy generation, as the price of carbon will only continue to increase. Nobody is saying that, overnight, we stop using gas, oil or coal to either heat our homes or create electricity, but we need to move to a situation where we are not so reliant on it that we have no alternative. An awful lot of good work has been done in electricity generation from renewable sources, and, as the Minister has launched the renewable heat incentive, we are starting to get into a situation where more and more is being generated from renewable sources. That is a positive start, but we need much more, and we will all work proactively with the Minister to support her as she tries to achieve the targets that have been set out.

Other Members highlighted the long-term economic benefits of the green economy and of sustainable and low-carbon energy generation, particularly with the jobs that can be created. A number of people in my constituency and in others are employed in energy generation such as biomass, but opportunities even exist for farmers to diversify by moving away from traditional farming methods and towards the growth of renewable crops, and they will still be able to claim the single farm payment for the land. That needs to be marketed better to farmers, and they need to have more opportunities to sell and distribute the stuff.

The last time there was a debate in this Chamber on energy and how we could reduce the cost of it, the Minister was hugely surprised that nobody from my party mentioned the North/South interconnector, so, I will not make that mistake again. Our party is clearly on record about the North/South interconnector: we want to see that constructed but connected underground. That has been our party policy for many years, and it has been endorsed as our party policy at successive *ard-fheisenna*.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he realise that, if the North/South interconnector was to go underground, the customers would ultimately bear the brunt of the investment needed for that? How does that sit with him?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Flanagan: Given the way that the Member made his point, you would take it that the construction of a North/South interconnector underground would cost more money than we have at the minute, but that is not the case. The development of a North/South interconnector underground is not as economically profitable for consumers and industry as doing it overground would be; I think that the cost is about three times higher, but it is still economically viable and can still work. That is the view of our party, but we will not get into a lengthy debate on that.

There has been too much emphasis on renewable energy generation for electricity and not enough for heat. The majority of our carbon is used in heating space and water. An awful lot more work needs to be done, both on energy efficiency and in reducing overall energy consumption. The easiest way to reduce the consumption of people's energy in the home is to increase energy efficiency. Although the boiler replacement scheme is a decent enough measure in the short term, it will not have the long-term impact that a wholesale retrofitting scheme such as the green new deal would have.

Finally, in my last 15 seconds, I will touch on the issue of fracking. There is no way that this House can sit back and say that it is in favour of a low-carbon future and then continue to push forward with proposals to carry out fracking. There is no way that the two of them are compatible.

Mrs Overend: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the motion. It is both economically relevant and vastly important for the environment. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment stated in her foreword to the Energy Bill policy consultation that it was a:

"difficult balancing act between keeping costs as low as possible, while ensuring that NI has enough energy for now and the future, while trying to increase the sustainability of the energy supply as we implement the ... SEF".

That is an accurate reflection of the complexity of the situation.

I will focus mainly on the renewable energy industry, because developing that must be at the core of any long-term energy strategy for a low-carbon future for Northern Ireland. Renewable energy is often referred to as Northern Ireland's single biggest economic opportunity. The Northern Ireland Renewable Industry Group estimates that, to achieve the DETI target of 40% energy from renewables by 2020, more than £1 billion needs to be invested in the industry on top of what is already in place. Major challenges stand in the way of achieving this target, the first of which could be cited as the absence of the North/South interconnector. The Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone already mentioned that.

In addition, developers face planning problems, difficulties accessing finance and grid connection itself. Meeting DETI-led climate change targets, growing our indigenous renewable energy industry and improving our security of supply and energy independence all rely on having an electricity grid that can meet the demands of the 21st century consumer. To this end, Department of the Environment (DOE) planning and the regulator must work positively with those who are responsible for electricity infrastructure provision to ensure that the extensive upgrades that are required to modernise our electricity

grid can be achieved without delay. Obviously, today's announcement means that issues are still outstanding on this concern.

Furthermore, a fundamental aspect of any long-term energy strategy should be the development of a bespoke planning policy for electricity infrastructure. While acknowledging and addressing residents' concerns, this will define clear parameters for both the applicant and objectors, avoiding long and costly delays in the planning process, such as those that are currently being experienced with the North/South electricity interconnector. With the potential to save Northern Ireland consumers in the region of £7 million per annum, the North/South interconnector is an example of a key strategic project that could be delivered as soon as possible, and I ask the Minister for an update on this issue.

It is also vital that, when determining renewable energy planning applications, DOE Planning Service reflects the positive message that is set by current policies. I understand that the Environment Minister, Alex Attwood, has worked extensively in this area, and I commend him on the progress that he has made to date.

I also want to mention the relevance that the motion has for agriculture. Renewable energy should help to diversify incomes for farmers and the wider rural economy. In this context, I am very pleased to see growth in small-scale wind and anaerobic digestion projects on farms across Northern Ireland. The small-scale wind industry, consisting of turbines with a generating capacity between 100 kilowatts and 250 kilowatts, offers significant economic and environmental benefits to our economy and gives many farmers the opportunity to secure valuable extra income for their business, while, obviously, playing a role in helping Northern Ireland to achieve greater energy independence, as is identified in the motion.

It is imperative that the Executive establish stable, long-term policies offering attractive incentives to secure the private investment that is needed to establish a thriving, indigenous renewable energy industry. I am told continually by people in the renewables industry that the continuing references to reviews of incentives undermine investor confidence, and they believe that reviews should be restricted to four-to-five year periods to allow time for planning and deployment issues to be resolved.

The Assembly and the Executive must redouble their efforts to co-ordinate all aspects of planning and energy policy to help to meet the 2020 target of 40% of electricity generation coming from renewables. My party wants a good mix of renewable generation to be developed, including wind, biomass, tidal, hydro and energy from waste. However, it is realistic enough to know that, unless DETI and DOE do more, these targets will not be met.

Mr Dunne: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this matter. Energy is a very important issue that affects everyone across Northern Ireland. It is, therefore, imperative that we continue to look at all possible options to ensure that we maximise our potential in developing and improving our energy supplies in order to keep improving our energy efficiency and affordability. That is vital to stimulate business competitiveness and ensure value for money for householders across the Province. I would like to commend the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister, Arlene Foster, on leading on this very important

matter and ensuring that a more sustainable energy policy is in place right across Northern Ireland.

We all recognise the current over-reliance on fossil fuels. We need to continue to look for and encourage alternative energy sources; ensure that we have security of supply and a competitive energy market that provides genuine price-competitiveness for customers; and we must have in place a sustainable energy infrastructure.

The strategic energy framework sets out ambitious and positive goals that we should continue to focus on. There is no doubt that renewable energy has economic and environmental benefits that can reduce our exposure to volatile fossil fuel prices while helping us to achieve further energy independence in Northern Ireland. Some small-scale wind turbines have gone up recently in rural locations and brought much-needed revenue into family farms while creating an alternative source of energy. Both onshore and offshore renewables have a key role to play in developing our energy sources in the future.

Other alternative supplies, such as gas, should be further encouraged. We would like further extension of the gas network. I would also like a greater uptake of gas, particularly in the greater Belfast area. Perhaps, more incentive schemes should be introduced to improve that uptake. Approximately 50% of householders in the greater Belfast area, where the gas system already exists, are connected to the gas supply.

The uptake of gas by commercial and large manufacturers has been positive and good, and it is encouraging to see them gaining from the more competitive cost of gas compared with oil and electricity. Business suffers from energy price increases, and many businesses increasingly cite rising energy costs as a burden on competitiveness. That is yet another barrier that businesses have to face as they battle to keep their doors open in tough economic conditions. The knock-on effect of hard-working families not having the cash flow to support their local businesses also has a negative effect.

It is also important that we continue to make progress on the North/South interconnector to improve energy efficiency, ensure direct savings for local consumers and enhance our security of electricity supply, which is experiencing ever-increasing demand. The interconnector, which has the support of the Utility Regulator, is recognised as a facility that will allow for flexibility in the generation of power, with generation being altered according to cost and supply. The Utility Regulator also has an important role to play in ensuring that consumers get value for money.

6.45 pm

Unfortunately, many householders right across every constituency, including North Down, which is my own, continue to struggle with fuel poverty. Every week, constituents struggle to heat their homes. Some good work has been done through a number of energy efficiency measures to help to tackle fuel poverty, and I commend the Minister for Social Development on leading on that important matter.

It is vital that we continue to work to ensure that we identify the best energy supply for Northern Ireland, enhance security of supply, reduce our dependence on imported

fossil fuels, help to reduce our carbon footprint and, most importantly, minimise the cost to all our consumers.

Ms Maeva McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I fully support the motion, which proposes that a long-term energy strategy be implemented, and I thank the proposer for bringing it forward.

I think that we need to start from the basis that people in homes and businesses are struggling daily with the cost of energy and that that is increasingly becoming an issue. We need to reflect that, in 2008, customers in the North of Ireland endured a 53% increase in the price of electricity. Although the price of electricity dropped by 5% in 2012, evidence suggests that the biggest cost of electricity is in its generation.

As Members said, the energy strategy must move away from that dependence on fossil fuels to a place where much more of our energy comes from renewable sources. The strategic energy framework confirmed new renewable targets of 40% renewable electricity and 10% renewable heat by 2020. The Department for Social Development (DSD) has responsibility for domestic energy efficiency in terms of fuel poverty, and, as far as I am aware, its current target is to assist some 9,000 homes per annum. In addition, the scheme must deliver 40% of the measures to vulnerable rural properties. However, in the deliberations with DETI and DSD, how much consultation has taken place specifically on fuel poverty?

I think that it is important to note that five out of 21 respondents were not in favour of the introduction of an obligation. We must be clear that, in this process, there is no possibility of some consumers paying more for energy without getting any benefit from the obligation. I specifically refer to people who have installed energy efficiency measures prior to the scheme coming into operation. We need to be very careful that that does not happen.

Paragraph 2.45 of the policy consultation states that contracting out the provision of those services could be possible. It would be very interesting to discover whether there would be the potential for job creation under that obligation.

The Department goes on to state that not having an energy efficiency scheme would leave the North open to challenge under the EU energy efficiency directive. As I understand it, it is not clear how that would apply to the North of Ireland. Maybe we will get an update on that.

The energy efficiency measure is welcome, but I need to point out that there are a number of minor obstacles to improving energy efficiency. I refer specifically to the payment of building control fees on some installation works and the warm homes scheme, which is not included in the tender contract. Therefore, it is unfair to expect what are mainly small contractors to take the hit on each of those installation jobs.

We are disappointed that a green new deal is not proposed, and we suggest that the Department's argument on that does not stand up. As Members said, DETI and the regulator's objective of protecting the natural gas industry should end. We should not be encouraging customers to move to natural gas in instances where renewables are readily available and prove more cost-effective and sustainable.

We are told that DETI has £25 million to develop and support the renewable heat market, and it is planning to carry out a socio-economic analysis of renewables. Members who have spoken, including my colleague Phil Flanagan, referred to the single electricity market, which was introduced in 2007. It is about developing those economies of scale and promoting and prompting greater co-operation. To date, as evidenced by the Utility Regulator, we are being told that it has been a big success, and we are also being told that we will move to more integration by 2016.

In conclusion, it is important to note previous statistical reports. Specifically, I reference the Muldoon report, which stated that the balance of risk and reward between electricity generators and the needs of customers needs to be reviewed. It is clear that that relationship is unbalanced and that more needs to be done to empower the customer.

Mr Frew: I understand why the Alliance Party would table such a motion. It covers a multitude of points about creating Northern Ireland-based jobs through the expansion of renewables and developing a long-term energy strategy for a low-carbon future. It notes the importance of reducing cost and our exposure to price fluctuations in fossil fuels and the need to improve energy security and energy independence. It is a wide-ranging motion.

I can stand here relaxed to talk about it, because we already have a strategy in place. We are going over old ground. It is ground that the Executive have already studied and decided on. We have the strategic energy framework, which was published in September 2010 and leads us through to 2020. It contains targets that, I must say, are ambitious. One of the targets is to hit 40% renewable energy electricity by 2020.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for giving way. I do not disagree with what he is saying, to some extent, but the motion calls for a long-term strategy. In my view, the long term goes beyond 2020.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for his contribution. I apologise, because I did not hear all of Ms Lo's opening comments. Perhaps she covered the long term. How long is long term? We need to make sure that we focus on what we can do now, because so many of the targets and ambitions are reliant on third parties coming through for us.

We can talk about all sorts of issues, and I know that I have limited time, but I would like to concentrate on the North/South interconnector. It is vital to the target that I mentioned that we have the North/South interconnector in place as soon as possible, because, at present, the grid that we see and drive by is not fit or suitable. It cannot cope with the number of new renewable energy sources and amount of input that we need it to in order to cope with 40% renewable electricity. That is one of the biggest threats to our meeting that target, and that is what we should be focused on.

The interconnector is stuck in the quagmire of planning rules and regulations, and it will not come out of that until a determination is made. That is something that needs to come sooner rather than later. We cannot be held hostages to fortune in this way as an Executive or Department. We need to be in better control of the decisions and the destiny that we have in our own hands.

It is very important to me and to my constituents of North Antrim that we get this right and that we push strategy as far as we can. It is right that we have ambitious targets and that we push ourselves to meet those ambitious targets. You only have to speak to the global companies in North Antrim to know the energy costs pressures that they are under. Their masters are playing on a chessboard that is truly global. No global company, or a plant within a global company, wants to be at the top of the league of energy costs. No one wants to be in that position. It is of the utmost importance to me, as an MLA, and to my constituents in North Antrim that those companies are sheltered and saved from being at top of the league when it comes to energy costs. It is important that we get this right, but what is even more important than the drive for renewable energy is to make sure that we have a grid that can cope.

Our energy generators are ageing. There are problems around planning with respect to the North/South interconnector. Our Moyle interconnector is faulty: it needs to be repaired and it needs additional works and funding. That is what we need to concentrate on in the short term. If we do not deal with this matter in the short term, we can forget about long-term targets and long-term planning. We need to get these issues sorted as soon as possible because we will lose business if we do not, and we can forget about targets in the future.

I was at the Waterfront Hall recently to hear the Crown Estate announce the results of the first Northern Ireland offshore leasing round in October. It is going to have an offshore wind farm in place that will generate more energy than some of our smaller power stations. That is good news. Even in my constituency of North Antrim, offshore technologies and renewable energy will be created there, and I welcome that. That is the way forward, but we need to concentrate on the thing that is hampering us at the moment, and that is the North/South interconnector. Interconnection is as vital and as important as generation in this country.

Mr A Maginness: This green isle, this emerald isle, has been famous throughout the centuries for its beauty; but, given the natural resources that we have in wind, sea, and the ability to grow grass and other vegetation, we are naturally blessed to develop renewable energy. Therefore, we are in a unique position to do that.

I welcome the motion, but I listened with some concern to the proposer because there seemed to be an absence of any reference to what we have done already in respect of the strategic energy framework and the energy plan. Any reference to the amount of work done in relation to renewable energy seemed to be absent. I gave the benefit of the doubt to the proposer in so far as I think that this proposal is thinking beyond 2020. However, if we think up to 2020, then we have a very ambitious target of 40% in respect of electricity.

There are considerable barriers, as the ETI Committee pointed out not so long ago in its very detailed report, which the Department accepted. We have to work very hard on the practical problems and barriers to developing renewable energy, such as connection with the grid, as Mr Frew mentioned, the interconnector, as Mr Dunne referred to, and the planning issue, which Mr Attwood is trying to work on to get faster, more consistent planning decisions in relation to renewable energy. However, a fantastic

amount of work needs to be done. It is very difficult and the target is ambitious, but it is right to be ambitious, and it is right for us to put considerable emphasis on renewable energy.

However, I have to say that we will never have an economy that is completely renewable. I do not think that it will happen. Certainly, it will not happen in the next 20, 30 or 40 years.

7.00 pm

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way. I take his point entirely when he says that we will not be completely dependent on renewable energy. It is, therefore, very important that we not only extend the gas network to the west but spread it out to the 10-towns area, so that it covers a much greater area and includes my constituency of North Antrim.

Mr A Maginness: Well, North Antrim is a place unto itself. I agree entirely with what the Member has just said. I say to the Minister that we have to be more proactive in extending our natural gas connection, not just to the 10 or 12 towns, as they are now, but in the greater Belfast area. We cannot simply rely on the market. There have to be active interventions by government with regard to upfront capitalisation costs for connections to natural gas. We need people to switch from oil to natural gas. That does not contradict a policy to create renewable energy. It simply does not contradict it. We are working on a long-term timescale. We have to work at that.

We could do more towards greening the economy. We have to be innovative in that regard. The new technologies that are being developed fairly rapidly and are, thus, coming down in price could be used here to great effect to provide employment and security of supply for all people in Northern Ireland and to de-carbonise the economy. We have to pursue the green new deal to allow us to improve the efficiency of heating homes, which, in turn, will improve health; keep people out of hospital during the winter; ease the pressure on the already overworked health service; and will be an added boost to industry, particularly the construction industry, which is under such stress at present.

Furthermore, the opportunities that will come from the green investment bank must be taken. Sensible, practical, sustainable projects can benefit from that. The Executive should take an immediate interest in the potential of the green investment bank. We must ensure that the right skills and training are provided to the workforce and that those who want to take advantage of the green investment bank do not face the traditional problems of bureaucracy and red tape —

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

Mr A Maginness: All too often, they halt vital projects.

Mr Moutray: The Assembly is often criticised — sometimes, rightly — for debating matters that are of little importance or relevance to the people of Northern Ireland. The same cannot be said for this motion. Energy, particularly its cost, is of great importance and relevance to everyone in Northern Ireland.

I understand that, at the end of September, an average of 14% of energy in Northern Ireland was generated from renewable sources. The Northern Ireland renewables obligation has undoubtedly played an important part in increasing the amount of electricity that is generated from

renewable sources, and we welcome that. The motion highlights the annual cost of imported fossil fuels. We all agree that that needs to be tackled robustly.

Just over two years ago, in September 2010, the Executive published their strategic energy framework, which sets out a clear path for targets and actions over a 10-year period. It has four key goals: building competitive markets; ensuring security of supply; enhancing sustainability; and energy infrastructure. The strategy seeks to move us away from our traditional dependence on fossil fuels and to build a basis for sustainable energy sources for the future.

Earlier this year, we met our 2012 target of 12% electricity consumption from renewable sources. Our next target for renewable energy is 20% by 2015. Beyond that, the aim is 40% by 2020. We should not underestimate the significance of the growth of the natural gas market in Northern Ireland. Not long ago, it seems, we looked with envy at the way in which our fellow citizens in Great Britain were able to avail themselves of natural gas. We did not have access to any of that; all we really had was electricity, coal and oil. However, that has changed radically. Today, natural gas has helped to deliver lower energy costs for households and businesses. Houses that have natural gas are more likely to sell quickly. Increasing competition in the gas market is also encouraging. Above all, the increasing use of natural gas has contributed towards lowering our carbon footprint. I encourage the Minister to do all she can to support the expansion of the natural gas market.

I know that the Minister takes the whole energy debate very seriously, and I commend her for her efforts to get the balance right, both in the short and in the longer term. She will shortly bring forward a new Energy Bill, and this will be another key element of the development of the overall energy strategy. We look forward to its being presented in the House, and to debating it here and in Committee.

Mr Agnew: The fact is that Northern Ireland will move to a low-carbon economy. It may do so because the EU will require it; it may do so because fossil fuels will inevitably run out, given that they are finite; or it can do so because, rather than seeing such a move as a burden, we can seize the opportunity in moving towards a low-carbon economy. Scotland has recognised the potential. A country that has argued — and indeed a party, in the SNP, that has argued — for years that North Sea oil and gas could ensure Scotland's independence, now sees that actually, as that oil and gas run out, it must look for a new, indigenous energy source to ensure that Scotland can be economically independent. I would like to say that Alex Salmond and others in his party are heartily committed to renewable energy, and they may well be, but I think they see the cold, hard reality and the practical fact that if Scotland is to prosper as an independent nation, should it pass its referendum, the potential of renewable energy must be seized.

In Europe, Northern Ireland is second only to Scotland in wind potential. We are the envy of Europe, but, to some extent, we are the laughing stock in that we have taken so long to realise it. I do acknowledge the work that has been done on the strategic energy framework. We are starting to make efforts to maximise our renewable electricity generation potential. We have seen the announcement of the offshore projects, which Mr Frew referred to. We are talking here about projects, particularly when we talk about offshore wind, of hundreds of millions of pounds,

which, over their lifetime, will generate thousands of jobs. I regret the fact that it does not come with the fanfare of the opening of a new supermarket, or whatever else it might be, because we still do not seem to have got our head around the real, true potential of renewable energy, but those jobs will come, and I will be glad to see it.

As I say, we need to look beyond 2020. We will get to a low-carbon economy, so we have to decide how we hope to get there. Work does need to be done, as the proposer of the motion pointed out, across Departments, and not just with the Enterprise Minister. This is a cross-departmental issue, whether it is the planning issues that have been mentioned or the gridlock with the North/South interconnector, which is a particular problem. Across the board, grid connection, the problems in the network and the planning that is going to be required if we update our network have to be addressed. We have to tackle planning issues. We need a level playing field, which does not currently exist. You can get a single turbine passed in one division of the Planning Service but not in another, in very similar circumstances.

I cannot fail to mention the green new deal, because at the heart of any energy policy has to be energy efficiency. That has to be where we start from. As much as I love and promote renewable energy and see the potential of it in creating jobs, reducing carbon emissions and stabilising bills, we must start with energy efficiency. Loft insulation may not be as visible as a solar panel, but it is a starting point. That is why the decision not to fund the green new deal dumbfounded many of us. Virtually every party signed up to the green new deal, as did the CBI, the Institute of Directors, Friends of the Earth, trade unions and the farmers' unions, and yet it was rejected. I think that that shows a weakness in government. The fact that one departmental economist was able to derail such a scheme is, I think, regrettable.

We must decarbonise our transport infrastructure, including rail. We are heading in completely the wrong direction, with £500 million spent on a road, and the public transport system continuously neglected.

We must also look at stimulating the renewable energy market by switching to renewable forms of heating in our public buildings. I have heard the supposed commitment to renewable heat, but this twin-track approach is prioritising gas, as has been mentioned, ahead of renewables. If you want to see evidence of that —

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

Mr Agnew: — you only need to look at the fact that we spent £25 million on a renewable heat incentive but are proposing to spend £50 million on gas. We have to prioritise renewables.

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

Mr Agnew: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I thank Members for their contributions to the debate. Most of you are aware that the strategic energy framework of September 2010 sets out our key energy goals of building competitive markets, ensuring security of supply, enhancing sustainability and, of course, developing our energy infrastructure. Those of you who have taken the time to read the framework will also know that it recognises the need for Northern Ireland to move to

a low-carbon future. In that regard, it proposes the targets of 40% renewable electricity and 10% renewable heat by 2020, which we talked about today. It also recognises that substantial investment will be required over the next decade to meet those targets.

What disappoints me about the wording of today's motion is that the very issues that the Executive and I are being called upon to develop mirror those at the very heart of the strategic energy framework and the ministerial foreword. I think that it was Ms Lo who said that the strategic energy framework should not be set in stone but developed. For that very reason, I accepted the very extensive work that the Committee, under Mr Maginness, undertook around renewable energy. I accepted what the Committee gave to me. Indeed, part of that was about looking at what we could do in relation to 2050, and I will talk more about that later.

In the foreword, I stated:

"Within Northern Ireland we are dependent on imported fossil fuels for most of our energy needs. That is why, looking to 2020 and beyond, I believe we must seek to shift the balance with regard to Northern Ireland's energy mix."

Further on, I said:

"I believe that Government must send clear and timely signals of priorities now, signals that will guide market participants and encourage increased levels of renewable energy and provision of the associated new infrastructure necessary to improve security and diversity of energy supply, and support economic activity while at the same time contributing to reduced carbon emissions."

So it is all in the strategic energy framework.

We are just over two years into the implementation of that framework, and I have to say that significant progress has been on the key targets. I want to take this opportunity to highlight some of those targets to the Members present. Energy costs, as many Members indicated, remain a very significant issue, not just for businesses but for many of our constituents. The most recent tariff review by the Utility Regulator resulted in gas tariffs remaining unchanged and a significant reduction of 14% in electricity prices for domestic and small business customers. That is very welcome at a time when we have seen the main energy suppliers in Great Britain announcing tariff increases.

7.15 pm

I am also pleased that in greater Belfast, where the gas market is open to competition, we have Firmus Energy continuing to compete against what is now Airtricity gas supply, formerly Phoenix, thus providing consumers with the option to choose their gas supplier. It is disappointing that more people have not taken up gas in Northern Ireland, which was a point made by Mr Maginness and, I think, Mr Dunne. Our belief that there should be more take-up of gas in those and wider areas is precisely why the duty to promote gas is still in the Energy Bill. When we compare the situation with Great Britain and the way in which people on the gas network there have taken up gas, it is disappointing to note that that has not been in the case in those areas that have had access to gas. So, we will continue to help with that.

From October 2012, the 10-towns gas licence area outside greater Belfast has been open to competition for larger energy users, and it will be fully open from April 2015 for smaller business and domestic consumers. Although I fully recognise the importance of a much higher level of renewables in our energy mix — I will come to that shortly — I believe that the current provision and uptake of natural gas has delivered significant carbon reductions in Northern Ireland and, overall, has provided lower energy costs for consumers. That is a critical point, and we should not shy away from that. Further provision of gas networks can build on that success.

We are moving ahead with providing natural gas to wider parts of Northern Ireland. Taking natural gas to new areas will provide domestic consumers with greater energy choice, help to reduce fuel poverty through easier budgeting of energy costs, enhance security of supply and reduce carbon emissions. That is for domestic consumers. As regards businesses, I cannot stress enough to the House the excitement that is building in relation to the provision of the gas network to the west for businesses in Tyrone, Fermanagh and other areas. The fact that they will be able to access gas for their businesses will mean a huge difference in their competitiveness. They are, as I said, very pleased that we are progressing with that.

Provision of the new energy infrastructure will have long- and short-term employment benefits, especially for those engineering and construction sectors that have been so badly affected by the economic downturn. I consider the new energy infrastructure to be an investment. We are seeing greater availability of natural gas throughout the world. Despite what Ms Lo says about the dwindling resource of gas and oil, there are new finds of gas all the time. Therefore, the new gas pipes will provide a future option for renewable energy sources — this is a point I want to make to Mr Agnew — such as biogas and those technologies that are becoming more popular as well.

Mr Maginness's point about making sure that we take up new technologies is absolutely right. We should always be looking to future-proof what we are doing in respect of infrastructure. It is important that the new infrastructure should be able to take biogas into those pipes.

I am keen to see the gas network extension in as short a time as possible. I look forward to work by the Utility Regulator during 2013 in relation to the new gas licences and, indeed, to the construction of the transmission pipelines in the west and north-west. We are looking forward to those, and I would like to see that commence by 2015.

What we have been doing with renewables, and the mix that we continue to see in Northern Ireland, and offshore Northern Ireland, is a good story. It was quite amusing that Mr Frew is now claiming the territorial waters off North Antrim as well as North Antrim, but that is fine. If he is excited about it, I am happy enough to allow him those territorial waters as well. Mr Agnew is right: that was a huge announcement in respect of offshore renewables. Given the scale of what we are planning, and working with the communities in those areas, it was a huge announcement. I am just sorry that others in the media did not think so as well, because it has the capacity to change the dynamic in respect of renewables in Northern Ireland. That is why we have been working on that whole area for quite some time now. We have been working on

jurisdictional issues and with the Crown Estate to make sure that we made the correct announcements and that it was able to get the right mix of companies together, because they are collaborations, to deliver those offshore renewables.

Invest Northern Ireland is working very closely with very many companies and looking at what we can do to create jobs in green energy, not least the opportunities that exist with DONG Energy down in the harbour. We are very pleased with that ongoing work and, of course, with our own Harland and Wolff. The greater deployment of all forms of renewable energy offers potentially significant economic benefits for local businesses through supply chain opportunities. At a time when other parts of construction and engineering face great difficulties in the economy, we will continue to highlight all those supply chain opportunities for a wide range of local companies. That, I think, is the point that Mr McGlone was making.

Some 250 Northern Ireland companies are already actively selling to the offshore renewables market. It is estimated that our companies secured sales of £52 million in offshore contracts in 2011 and 2012. Those companies include Harland and Wolff, B9 Energy, McLaughlin & Harvey, Barton Industrial Services, Doran Consulting, RPS and Farran Technology, all of which are pushing ahead with offshore renewables.

I have touched on the great news about the offshore renewables. The draft plan for moving forward has been the subject of a strategic environmental assessment. The environmental report and non-technical summary were published for public consultation last year. Since then, the habitats regulation assessment has been undertaken and is now reaching completion. The results of that assessment are that the consultation responses and discussions with other Departments will have a role to play in delivering the final plan, which I hope to bring to the Executive within the next few months. There has been much work ongoing in the field of renewable electricity generation since the publication of the SEF in 2010, and that work continues.

We are developing the whole area of renewable heat technologies, and we are continuing to use natural gas as well. As we know, we have that 10% renewable heat target. It is a pretty ambitious and stretching target. To reach it, it is essential that support mechanisms are developed to encourage the uptake of renewable heat technologies in the domestic, commercial, industrial and public sectors. That is why I was pleased to launch the Northern Ireland renewable heat incentive (RHI) on 1 November. That will provide businesses, community groups, schools and churches with the incentive and support that they need to switch to renewable heating. I expect that my RHI will support the installation of 20,000 technologies by 2020 as well as securing our target for renewable heat. It is available for non-domestic customers in the first instance, with a view to extending it to the domestic market in due course. In the meantime, of course, householders can avail themselves of grant support from the Department under the renewable heat premium payment scheme, which I launched in May this year. We have received over 350 applications and offered over £570,000 of support, which represents a total investment in the sector of some £2 million.

We need a mix of renewables, but we also need energy efficiency. Mr Agnew made that very important point. I think that Ms McLaughlin referred to the energy efficiency obligation. I intend to include a proposal for an energy efficiency obligation in the Energy Bill. Hopefully, that will bring a step change in energy efficiency in Northern Ireland because we must always address energy efficiency before we do anything else.

That is right, whether you are the private owner of a house, live in public sector housing or are a commercial entity. So, that will come in the Energy Bill, as, indeed, will a duty to promote renewables. I look forward to bringing that duty forward too.

I think that this was the crux of the criticism, albeit very mild criticism, about the way that we are delivering strategic energy, but looking beyond the period to 2020, I have started planning for the longer term. I am in the process of awarding a tender for a contract to help my Department, working with the Department for Regional Development on its transport responsibilities, to bring forward a vision for energy to 2050. That vision will help to shape our direction of travel and inform the immediate steps that Northern Ireland Departments will need to take to reach out with that vision.

That is the point of all this debate. It is not just about DETI; all the other Departments must play their roles. That is the reason that we have a sustainable energy interdepartmental working group, which we have had for some time. We all come together and look at the energy resources and at how we can make the most of them.

As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, marketing for energy is now centrally held so that we can all put the same messages out. I accept that there are challenges ahead. We will continue to work on the strategic energy framework and on our vision for renewable energy and energy policy in general —

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

Mrs Foster: — in Northern Ireland. I welcome the debate and hope that my comments have been helpful on the matters that were raised.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister and everybody else who spoke in the debate. I do not sense any need for a Division. We have had one or two mild rebukes from around the Chamber about the wording of the motion and its emphasis. However, I can only say that it was certainly not —

Mr A Maginness: Sorry.

Mr Lunn: Yes; I was looking at you. The motion is what it is. Its first line notes that:

"approximately 99% of primary energy needs are met from imported fossil fuels".

There is no getting away from that. I accept that 14% of our electricity generation now comes from renewable sources. That is great, and it is on target as we move towards 2020. I hope that we get there and exceed the target.

I totally take on board all that the Minister said about the progress that has been made so far and the quite exciting projects that are in hand for the next 20 years. In fact, it is more than that, as we are now talking about 2050. That is what Ms Lo asked for, so we cannot complain about that.

However, at the end of the day, some stark facts still confront us all not just as a Northern Ireland economy or population but as a global economy. The dependence on fossil fuels just cannot continue. Anna mentioned that one barrel of oil is discovered for every three that are used. Try getting away from that. That is a stark figure. Someone has worked out that we have 54 years' worth of oil left. I would not know whether we have 54 years' worth or 200 years' worth. The fact is, however, that we still do not know how much will still be discovered, and I am sure that we can go on digging holes in the ice cap and all the rest of it and find some more. However, the point is that oil will become more expensive and there will be more competition for it.

I heard a lot of references to improving the gas infrastructure and network across Northern Ireland. That sounds very desirable. I do not believe that I would speak against it, and I think that it must be a good thing. However, we need to keep in mind where the gas is going to come from in future years. At the moment, it might be coming out of the North Sea, where I believe reserves are running out, so it could then come from continental Europe. However, I think that, ultimately and not very far in the future, it is going to come from Russia via Ukraine and goodness knows where else. It will then not be a question of price or sufficient supply but of politics and upheaval in some of the most volatile parts of the world. That, of course, also applies to the oil supply in the Middle East.

Mr Flanagan: The politics apply here too.

7.30 pm

Mr Lunn: I am not too worried about political instability in Northern Ireland at the moment affecting energy supplies. We have other difficulties.

The other thing is that we are not the only place in the world that is looking for natural resources. The Chinese are mopping up everything in sight if you look at the price of copper and other — *[Interruption.]* I am sort of surrounded by private conversations here at the moment, Mr Deputy Speaker. In fact, they are so engrossed that they cannot even hear me. However, the Chinese and the Indian economies — all the booming world economies coming to the fore — are going to soak up energy, and that could be at our expense.

Many Members have talked about the green new deal and the need to recycle, reuse and achieve greater efficiency in our energy production. All of that is fine and clearly the way to go, and that is the thrust of the motion. We have various options here. We can continue as before, which is not quite such a terrible prospect for people of my generation. If I were a lot younger, like, let us say young Mr Ross, young Mr Flanagan or even young Mr Frew, I would —

Mrs Foster: What about the young Minister?

Mr Lunn: — be a bit more concerned. Or were I as young as the fragrant Minister. *[Laughter.]* Sorry, I nearly fell over there.

Mr A Maginness: You are just an old charmer.

Mr Lunn: I know. The more serious point is that I can continue to turn up my central heating up until I shuffle off this mortal coil. However, were I looking towards the next 50 years, I would be a lot more worried about where that

energy will come from and what it will cost. Therefore, we need to maximise the resources of what Mr Maginness called this green and pleasant land or this sceptred isle or green jewel set in a silver sea or whatever it was.

Mr A Maginness: The emerald isle.

Mr Lunn: Emerald isle. Somebody else — I forget whom — mentioned that we are the envy of Europe. That is a fact. We are in the right place and have all the right equipment when it comes to our wind, our waves, our green grass and our ability to grow willow and everything else that points us towards developing a renewable energy-based economy, so why not go for it?

I was intrigued by Mr Newton's contribution because he seems to have gone nuclear. To my recollection, that is not the first time that he has mentioned that. However, I frankly doubt whether that will come about. It certainly will not come about in Northern Ireland, and whether it will come about on a UK-wide basis, I would not —

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lunn: Absolutely.

Mr Frew: Does the Member realise that, as we get into more interconnection, we will use more nuclear power.

Mr Newton: We are using nuclear power.

Mr Frew: We are using nuclear power. Moreover, does the Member agree with me that, to facilitate wind farm growth in the west, we need more pylons there?

Mr Lunn: I take the point about nuclear power, of course. I wonder what the UK is going to do about the future of its nuclear industry, because a lot of it needs upgrading, and there are huge decisions to be taken.

Mr Newton: We need a nuclear strategy.

Mr Flanagan: A long-term one.

Mr Lunn: We will see where that goes.

Somebody else mentioned, as an aside, fracking. If we do not mend our ways and do not manage to refocus, as we should, on renewable energy and the green new deal, we could be forced towards things like fracking. It sounds like a prospect that I would not look forward to, but it is a possibility. Look at the way that the Americans are going. Even Mr Obama seems to think that fracking will provide the new source of energy for the United States for the next, was it, 50 or 200 years? There are an awful lot of estimates out there.

However, there is no doubt about it: we have the facilities here. We have wind and wave, biomass, bioenergy and energy from waste. I am glad that the Minister is promoting anaerobic digestion in a big way, because I think that there is a future for that, too.

Before I turn to what individual Members said, I will talk briefly about wind energy. These wind turbines certainly generate discussion, do they not? To me, they are some of the most unsightly things I have ever seen on the horizon. However, love them or loathe them, I do not believe that we can do without them. I think they are vital to the future of our energy production.

At the moment I hear people saying that they are not economic; that it costs too much to put them up and that the wastage in trying to get energy from them to the grid is

unacceptable, etc. I will just say this: one of the things that the world has managed to do in the last number of years is become more efficient. It has become efficient in so many different ways, so I look at wind energy and wonder how efficient that can become. Like a lot of other things, maybe there is a lot of scope for more efficiency. I am thinking of what is in my pocket here, which is turned off, Mr Speaker. That used to be the size of a half-brick 20 years ago, and look at it now. Look at the developments in electric cars and hybrid cars. All of those things are coming over the horizon.

I think I am nearly out of time. We have to hope for the best, but, in the meantime, I hope that the House will accept the motion. It is not meant to be a criticism of anybody. We accept that Mrs Foster's Department in particular has made great strides, and will continue to do so. We will see where we all are in 50 years time.

Mr Deputy Speaker: For the present — *[Laughter.]* — the question is that the motion standing on the Order Paper be agreed.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes that approximately 99% of primary energy needs are met from imported fossil fuels, which costs approximately £2.3 billion annually; recognises the need to improve energy security and energy independence; further notes the importance of reducing the cost and our exposure to price fluctuations in fossil fuels, while creating Northern Ireland-based jobs through the expansion of indigenous renewables and low-carbon energy sources; and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in conjunction with the Executive, to develop a long-term energy strategy for a low-carbon future.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Deprivation: Belvoir Area, Belfast

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes, the Minister will have 10 minutes to respond, and all Members who wish to speak will have approximately seven minutes.

Ms Lo: First of all, I thank all the Members who are remaining in the Chamber at such a late hour of the day. I welcome the opportunity to highlight the multiple deprivations in the Belvoir and Milltown areas of south Belfast.

I will start by expressing my disappointment that the Minister for Social Development has not listed Belvoir as a region to receive support under the new areas at risk programme. Ballybeen, Tullycarnet and Cregagh have, quite rightly, benefited from a range of interventions and support programmes, but those have not been extended to include the Belvoir and Milltown areas of the Minnowburn ward. Belvoir and Milltown are neither neighbourhood renewal nor neighbourhood at risk areas. There are no paid community workers and almost no evidence of trust-provided health improvement activities or programmes.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

A survey undertaken by Belvoir residents recently found that there is a range of needs in the estate and surrounding area that appear to have gone unnoticed in the plans and strategies of the Government, most specifically relating to the health and well-being of older people and services for young children and families. There is also a perception that there are gaps in the provision for young people and that youth unemployment is increasing.

Minnowburn is the most deprived ward in Castlereagh, which requires early intervention within the area. The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust's community development data from 2010 paints a worrying picture of Minnowburn. There are high levels of low-birth-weight babies, higher levels of smoking during pregnancy, at over 25%, and lower levels of breastfeeding, at 30%, at discharge.

The baby clinic is now poorly attended, and many Belvoir mothers and babies have moved to the Knockbreda centre. There is no access to registered childminders or daycare, and nursery schools are oversubscribed, with no playgroups to provide an alternative. The only early years services that are available are church-based parent and toddler groups, not all of which are supported by the annual trust grant of £200.

The poor educational attainment in Belvoir is very concerning. Only 16% of school leavers obtained five GCSEs at grade C or above, as opposed to the average of 75.7% for the Castlereagh borough.

The Belvoir clinic is now closed, and the Knockbreda centre has no drop-in facility, which means that residents are having to go to their GPs for all manner of ailments. Belvoir GPs are so busy that a high number of families are registered with GPs all across the city — some even in Lisburn, which is 10 or 11 miles away. The empty clinic

offers a perfect community resource. However, there has been no real support from statutory bodies to take over the clinic.

Belvoir has no community centre. I am aware that there is one room that is available to residents, but it is frequently already booked for use. What is needed is a community hub of activity where social cohesion can be created. With no community centre, no library and no early years services, the residents of Belvoir could be forgiven for thinking that they have been overlooked and forgotten.

Government Departments have intervened in partnership with many other local communities. What has been done in other areas could be used as a model for Belvoir. There is a worrying lack of community development, and we need a statutory body to pull it all together. Without initial conditions in place, there is no room for capacity building, without which community cohesion cannot flourish.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Member for securing the debate this evening.

Just a week ago in this House we discussed primary school facilities and, in particular, requirements for children with special needs in Taughmonagh. That was an important debate, and the Member has raised early years provision, the Belvoir clinic, and other issues around educational under-attainment and community facilities in Belvoir, which are limited, to say the least.

This debate underlines the need for a much greater focus on people in communities such as the Belvoir estate, because it is set within a broader area of much greater affluence. You can see the familiar pattern emerging where largely working-class communities are wedged in between more affluent areas and, as a result, are overlooked and neglected in real terms.

It is important that we all take whatever steps we can to work with people in that community to, first, get them the resources and facilities that they clearly need and, secondly and more essentially, help them to build capacity in the short- to medium-term so that they can continue to articulate their case better in the longer term.

Ultimately, any community that is going to be dependent on individual elected representatives or one statutory agency to help it out of a difficult situation will, in my view, be waiting for a long time. Therefore, although it is important to acknowledge and commend the people from within that community who are working alongside people from outside it who have helped or are attempting to help them, nothing can help a community better than the capacity to help itself.

7.45 pm

I commend the Member for bringing this to our attention again tonight. I think that everybody would want to endorse the sentiment behind her contribution. We pledge our support for that community. You can see that, in many ways, it is a beleaguered community. It is a community that is very seriously challenged in respect of its resources and positive outcomes, particularly for the young people living there who need better outcomes and more hope for the future.

I commend the Member for bringing this to the House's attention tonight. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response. I, along with the rest of the Committee for Social Development, also look forward to working with that

community as far as we possibly can to add some value to their particular strengths.

Mr McGimpsey: I am grateful to Anna Lo for bringing forward this Adjournment debate on Belvoir, which is an area that I am very familiar with and have first-hand experience of. Every Thursday morning, I hold a surgery in the Belvoir activity centre in the heart of Belvoir estate. The problems that we encounter there reflect the needs of the area as regards rehousing, housing repairs, benefits, antisocial behaviour and health issues.

In respect of multiple deprivation, Minnowburn in Castlereagh is ranked 82 of the 582 wards in Northern Ireland. That area includes Belvoir and Milltown, and it is by far the most deprived of all the wards in the Castlereagh Borough Council area. Tullycarnet, which is ranked 109, is next. That is a very worrying trend for the Minnowburn ward. There are parts of the Belvoir estate, which was built largely in the mid-1960s, where people have a more comfortable lifestyle than in others. In other parts, there is real deprivation and social isolation, particularly in the high-rise flats, the maisonettes and parts of Milltown.

As far as health inequalities are concerned, Belvoir is in the 64th most deprived of the 582 wards. That reflects poor outcomes in respect of life expectancy, lifestyle, smoking, cardiovascular health and diabetes. Such issues are much more prevalent in areas of deprivation than in more prosperous areas; Belvoir is no exception. Recently, a new health and care centre was built at the end of the dual carriageway in south Belfast in an effort to address those issues, particularly in communities such as Belvoir, Knock Eden, Flush and Rosetta.

There are also issues with educational underachievement. Sadly, a very good primary school in Belvoir lost a very good headmaster when Billy Tate died a year or so ago. It is a very good school with a very good team, but that area is ranked the 66th most deprived in Northern Ireland in respect of educational underachievement. That is then reflected in employment prospects.

The closure of the library in the middle of Belvoir was a bitter blow. That library was well used by the large elderly population in Belvoir, who saw it as a very important part of their environment.

It is the 66th most deprived area in Northern Ireland in respect of unemployment. The population there is affected by high unemployment and dependency on low-paid work.

As far as the living environment is concerned, again we have a mixture. The Housing Executive has done extensive and very good work, particularly on the high-rise flats. However, the living environment in some areas remains very poor. Of the 582 wards in Northern Ireland, it is ranked the 74th most deprived.

In the area, 31.5% of people are living in households with a deprived income. That is an indication of the poverty there. A multiagency approach is required to health, education and the work that Nelson McCausland and his Department do to give support from early years to retirement. That is what is required.

I, like Ms Lo, believe that this is an area that should have that type of support. It is an area that qualifies for support and intervention, and it deserves it.

When we look at the economic challenges that Northern Ireland has, we see that there are high levels of unemployment. There are households that are used to maintaining their standard of living and looking after their families with two jobs. In many cases, mum and dad would both have been working, but you are likely now to find dad out of work and mum working in the health service in Knockbracken or somewhere down the road, trying to maintain the family and keep it together on one low wage. Those are the sort of challenges that households are facing. Some have no wage at all coming into the house.

All the indicators suggest that Belvoir is an area that deserves intervention. I am not going to make comparisons with other areas, because it is not right to compare and say that others are better off and someone does not win. That is an insidious competition. Belvoir is an area that requires intervention, and I ask the Minister to look hard at it and intervene in the same way as he has done in other areas.

Dr McDonnell: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for your tolerance in staying to this time of the evening. I thank Anna Lo for bringing this worthy topic to the House for debate.

Belvoir has suffered considerable neglect over the years. There are many issues there, such as housing. Some of the housing there looks fairly good having been built in the 1960s, but many of those houses and apartments are poorly insulated and some of them are damp. They were built in the 1960s when building standards were not as high as they are today, and there is a need in many cases for refurbishment and the replacement of windows with double glazing.

There are health problems and challenges, as the proposer of the topic for debate rightly suggested. There is considerable educational underachievement, although some of that was remedied by the sterling efforts of Billy Tate. There are limited employment opportunities.

I have worked with the people of Belvoir for many years as a GP. The proposer of the topic should know that people in Belvoir very wisely chose to come down the Ormeau Road to my surgery, where they got a very high standard of care. Unfortunately, only a minority of them did so, and we did what we could for them. Many of my best friends, as a result of the relationships that I built up over the years, live in Belvoir.

I have also worked in the area as an MLA and an MP, and I was aided in my work there by a wonderful woman called Rosaleen Hughes, who toiled as an auxiliary nurse and was subsequently elected as a councillor for the area. Rosaleen is still held in high regard there and remains steadfastly committed to the area even after her retirement from Castlereagh Borough Council.

We have campaigned with individual residents and the Belvoir Community Association on a number of issues. There is a long list of issues, many of which have been mentioned and others that could be mentioned. On that note, I compliment Brian Dunwoody, who is a good friend of all of us and has worked there unselfishly for many years.

Particular issues that jump out in the context of this debate include the closure of the post office, which we all campaigned to save. Unfortunately, we were left frustrated, because they went ahead and closed it anyway. There was

also the closure of the library, which acted as a hub in so far as there was a hub in the area. That closure was brutal.

Sadly, there are very few, if any, community facilities there, and it is another example of a community that has been stripped of key survival assets.

Thankfully, some years ago, some of us campaigned to save the playing fields at Hydebank when others thought that they should be turned into a supermarket. Thank God we managed to conserve those playing fields because they at least provide some outlet for children.

Throughout all that, we worked closely across parties and across all sorts of shapes and forms with the late and great Billy Tate, who was the principal of Belvoir Park Primary School. We worked on a range of issues that directly affected the school, its pupils and their parents, including trying to secure funding for maintenance and repair of the school. We introduced all sorts of extra-curricular activities that benefited the children and created shared understanding and reconciliation projects that opened up a lot of new horizons for pupils who were, quite frankly, denied opportunity and hope in the past.

In that, I pay tribute to Billy Tate, who was an inspirational man and died far too young and well before his time. He was a wonderful school principal, and he was dedicated to that school, the children there and the community at Belvoir. He was intent on ensuring that the children at his school got the best possible life opportunities that he could bring, and he was relentless in pushing for those and pushing those of us who were public representatives in that direction.

The subject of the debate is multiple deprivation, and, yes, Minnowburn ward, which is largely Belvoir with Milltown, is high on the indexes. Others have quoted the indexes overall in Northern Ireland. In spite of fairly severe deprivation in places such as the Donegall Road, the Markets, Donegall Pass and Woodstock Road, Belvoir ranks sixth worst for unemployment. People are inclined to think that those inner city areas are worse, but, in fact, Belvoir is in a difficult situation with employment. It is eighth worst in the health and disability statistics and thirteenth in education and skills under-attainment. Across all those fronts, Belvoir is clearly deprived. Regardless of whether you take it across Northern Ireland, Belfast or south Belfast, it falls into the marginalised category.

Departments are not fully fulfilling their duty. Much more needs to be done in a targeted and co-ordinated way. I would not for a moment suggest that it is the responsibility of one Minister, but we need to get something going because this area will sink and slide very quickly if we do not get our act together there in a coherent way. In my opinion, better support needs to be provided to Belvoir Park Primary School to sustain the many enlightened initiatives that were taken by Billy Tate and, indeed, are continued under the present principal. However, they are being starved financially and will gradually be lost.

There is a need to replace the lost community infrastructure, such as the post office and the library, that provided vital services and allowed the community to connect and communicate, particularly the more isolated elder members of that community. Even though people are living in an urbanised situation, for many of the elderly, social isolation can be severe. We need to look at re-

opening some sort of a post office or similar facility, and we need that local library back, even on a reduced scale.

There are opportunities to provide investment in the form of the social investment fund, and I understand that the south Belfast steering group is consulting with interested groups. For me, the social investment fund can provide a temporary sticking plaster. There is a need for an overall government investment based on the severe needs in that community. Otherwise, we will fail to provide the people in Belvoir with their rights, and, in turn, that will lead to a decline in that community.

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):

I welcome the opportunity to respond to the motion on multiple deprivation in Belvoir and, indeed, to clarify some of the issues that have been raised this evening. I will try to address all the points that Members raised, but I assure you that I will study Hansard, and if I leave any questions unanswered, I will write directly to the Member concerned.

I was somewhat surprised that the issue was raised in the form of an Adjournment debate, because it has not previously been raised with me or my officials in the first instance as would normally be the case. No approach has been made to officials about deprivation issues, and, from what I know, Belvoir has many positive attributes as well as some of the issues raised in the debate. I wonder whether an Adjournment debate is the best context in which to consider the issues. There may be a more suitable approach.

8.00 pm

As Minister for Social Development, I am very much aware of the scale of the challenge that we face in tackling disadvantage and building sustainable communities, especially in times of economic hardship and instability. The coming years will require a great deal of work to lay the foundations of growth; support individuals and communities in tackling unemployment and worklessness; and ensure that our most vulnerable citizens are supported and protected.

Although I am very sympathetic to the concerns raised about the Belvoir area, it is like many other areas that do not quite fulfil the criteria for inclusion in my Department's main programmes that seek to address deprivation. These are area-based interventions and are designed to target substantive concentrations of deprivation in areas over a particular population threshold. Belvoir and Milltown are located in the Minnowburn super output area and are, therefore, outside any neighbourhood renewal area or existing area at risk in south Belfast.

I am committed to addressing the issues of deprivation, and I recently announced details of 10 new areas at risk that will receive funding under the areas at risk programme, which has already supported 27 areas across towns and cities in Northern Ireland. That programme provides assistance to communities at risk of social, economic or environmental decline and is targeted at areas that fall outside the 10% most disadvantaged areas but are at risk of falling further into decline. Belvoir is a predominantly residential area, which, as was pointed out, is surrounded by more affluent areas such as Upper Malone, Malone, Drumbo and Beechill. No doubt, Belvoir has been affected by the current economic downturn.

The benefits system, which is administered by my Department, aims to provide a safety net for people who, through no fault of their own, find themselves needing financial support. Statistics indicate that approximately 26% of people in the Belvoir area are in receipt of retirement pension, and approximately 38% receive jobseeker's allowance, income support, incapacity benefit and/or disability benefit.

Housing demand in this area of Castlereagh has increased over the past year, and there is now a projected need for 60 units, which is an indication that it is a popular area that people want to move to. The district housing plan and local housing strategy for Castlereagh states that, as of March 2010, there were 727 Housing Executive-owned properties in Belvoir estate, and the remainder were owner-occupied. Effectively, 55% of the overall stock, therefore, is owner-occupied. In 2011-12, a housing resource of approximately £572,000 was allocated to improvements in over 350 homes in the Belvoir area, and a further £1.53 million is expected to be spent over the next three years.

Mr McDonnell referred to the age of the housing and the need for some refurbishment and double glazing. I have just quoted the figures that we have currently. One of the things that I have done since coming into the Department is to recognise that the concentration was almost exclusively on the building of new houses but that we need also to have regard for those living in older properties that need to be refurbished, because such an area can contribute to the whole downward spiral of a community. That is why we committed to, are still committed to and are delivering on, having every one of the social housing stock double glazed during the term of this Assembly. We have also put an additional focus on refurbishment, which we believe is important. Belvoir is the sort of area that will benefit from that refurbishment, which includes double glazing.

Good work is also going on in the area to address deprivation through the work of volunteers and local churches. I emphasise the importance of volunteering and the role of the Churches and the faith-based sector in that regard. That is not to say that there is not a need for other things, but it is important that we recognise their good work. A very active church network in that area seeks to promote community activities and youth outreach in the estate. In addition, a range of community groups serve the Belvoir and Milltown areas, each with their own objectives but ultimately aiming to benefit local people. Again, we should not underestimate their contribution.

As well as specifically dealing with the problems of the most disadvantaged areas through targeted programmes, my Department provides a wide range of support to individuals, families, households and communities through good affordable housing, addressing fuel poverty, social security provisions and support for the voluntary and community sector. Those things benefit not only Belvoir but the rest of Northern Ireland.

I presented a paper on poverty to my colleagues on the Executive subcommittee on welfare reform. The paper reflected our changed and difficult times, which, in my view, can be addressed only by complementary social and economic policies that are relevant to Northern Ireland's needs. I have also established four key principles that now shape my Department's work on addressing poverty and deprivation. Those principles recognise that new social policies must complement economic policies. They

recognise the responsibilities of government, communities, families and individuals, tackle intergenerational problems and make the best possible use of increasingly limited resources, which should be focused on outcomes that are shared across government.

I will pick up on some of the points that were made. Michael McGimpsey made the point about comparisons. In a sense, he was saying that comparisons are invidious. The difficulty is that someone will look at something as a comparison but someone else will say that it is a set of criteria. Clearly, we need criteria to determine whether an area is a neighbourhood renewal area and, likewise, an area at risk. I must point out that those criteria have been there for a long time. We are certainly looking at them as part of a wider review of neighbourhood renewal to see how we can make neighbourhood renewal more effective. We are looking at all those things.

However, it is true to say that, just because an area scores highly — you always meet the question of what is high and what is low — on, for example, the Noble indices and shows up in that way as an area of high deprivation, that does not mean that it will not have problems with educational attainment and other issues. We are seeing how we can drill down into the information so that we can identify an area's particular needs. Those needs will vary from place to place; they are not all the same.

Ms Lo raised the issue of a community centre or hub. The provision of community centres is primarily a matter that resides with local government. I am sure that she will be aware of the range of creative centres that local authorities provide across the Province. That is something that we should remember: in addition to central government, local government also has a role to play. I am afraid that I cannot be held accountable for the library and the health centre, so her comments on those will have to be directed elsewhere.

However, mention has been made of Belvoir Park Primary School, which is based on the estate and which has a youth club for local children. It is quite clear that we should not be duplicating facilities, and, if things can be done in the context of school to make it more usable by the wider community, that is good for the school. It draws in the community, identifies it with the school, benefits it and does so in a very economical way. So, there are possibilities there that might be explored.

I will comment again on deprivation. The Northern Ireland multiple deprivation measure for 2010 ranked Minnowburn super-output area as the 166th most deprived area of 890 in Northern Ireland. In 2005, Minnowburn was ranked 251st. That could suggest that levels of relative deprivation have increased in the area in a number of ways, but it unfortunately means that the area falls outside the neighbourhood renewal limits.

As regards areas at risk, as I pointed out, public representatives from across Northern Ireland have made representation to me about having areas included as areas at risk. I have looked at those and asked my officials to assess the situation, and I have responded to a number of them. It is very much a case of whether people come forward and comment, because people raise many potential areas at risk. This area has not been raised as such for me so far. I have just checked whether suggestions have come forward, and as yet, it has not

been raised. However, I am happy to sit down with local representatives to consider the matter.

A shared neighbourhood programme survey of Belvoir and Milltown community was carried out in the autumn of 2010 through the Housing Executive, the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and Supporting Communities NI. The aim of the survey was to identify community needs and to gather information that could be used to improve the quality of life in the community, maintain a safe and stable area and promote respect and understanding of the diversity of residents in the area.

On analysis, the report highlighted that the majority considered Belvoir to be a friendly area with good community spirit, and most felt that there were adequate services and facilities. As I said, that was the outcome of a survey that was done independently through the Housing Executive, the IFI and Supporting Communities NI. It was a community-focused survey of that area.

People's expectations will vary from place to place. Sometimes people have low expectations and, therefore, do not make such great demands. However, the main concerns seem to be around youth, antisocial behaviour and crime.

I am happy to talk to local representatives about what might be possible in the area within the constraints that I mentioned, and I welcome the opportunity to discuss that. I have areas in my constituency that are very similar. I thought that they would fall within the areas at risk programme, but when officials looked at them, they did not. We are very much bound by criteria. Again, the areas at risk programme is simply for two years — very rigidly and strictly for two years. A lot of folk come along at the end of the two years and ask whether it can be extended in their area. The answer is no, because if we did that, others would lose out, and it really is a fixed-term intervention.

Although neighbourhood renewal is the Government's main vehicle in the drive to tackle disadvantage, I am determined to focus funds on actions that will help to deal with the causes of deprivation as well as the symptoms. If I had an unlimited budget, of course I would like to invest in many more areas, and Belvoir would obviously be one of them. Although it is not in the top 10 of the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland, it might benefit from investment. However, my available budget and commitment has to be focused on those areas identified as having most disadvantage, and Belvoir falls outside that.

I encourage the local representatives to see what they can do to provide some additional leadership to see what funding can be drawn down, because funding is available from sources other than through neighbourhood renewal or areas at risk, and many areas do draw that funding down. However, you need to have some support to have the capacity to make the applications, and so on. I therefore encourage the local representatives to work with the local community to see what can be done. I am happy to speak to any of the representatives on the issues. That would probably be a better vehicle and a better context for looking at the issue.

Adjourned at 8.13 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 26 November 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Flanagan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. At the weekend, we had the DUP party conference, and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment took the opportunity to announce a review in —

Mr Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order. I advise the Member to follow it through other channels, rather than through a point of order.

Extension of Sitting

Mr Speaker: I have been given notice by members of the Business Committee of a motion to extend today's sitting beyond 7.00 pm. Under Standing Order 10(3A), the Question on the motion will be put without debate.

Resolved:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 26 November be extended to no later than 8.30 pm. — [Mr Swann.]

Ministerial Statements

Agriculture: European Commission Financial Corrections

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 to update Members on the work that my Department has carried out to tackle the problem of financial corrections, which are commonly known as disallowance, applied by the European Commission. In doing so, I will provide an update on the levels of disallowance and the degree to which, I think, we are making progress on these issues. I also want to give Members some detail on the changes that are taking place and the implications of those for farmers. In particular, I want to tell Members about the developments with regard to our legal challenge to the Commission and about the issue of new maps to farmers for 2013.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) is one of over 80 accredited paying agencies in the European Union. Each year, we pay out around €300 million to the agriculture industry under the single farm payment scheme in addition to moneys expended under the rural development programme. We are accountable to the European Commission for that spend. We have to be able to provide an assurance that there are sufficient controls in place to guarantee that accurate and timely payments are made to those who are eligible for the aid.

As Members know, Commission auditors raised concerns that our mapping system was not good enough, the inspections were not good enough and our approach to sanctions and penalties was too lenient. It also took the view that our approach to allowing different farmers to use the same field to support different schemes did not meet the requirements of EU legislation. There were other audit recommendations, but these represent the most significant sources of disallowance. It is important to note that many other member states face sizeable disallowances, and the position on that has become clearer since I last addressed the Assembly on the matter. The latest Commission announcement on disallowance confirmed that, in total, €215 million will be recovered across a number of member states, including Sweden, Spain, Italy and the South of Ireland. It is clear that, although the Commission raised concerns here, it has also identified shortcomings across many other member states, including some regarding mapping and inspection controls. It is important, therefore, that paying agencies seek to learn from one another in

improving our systems, even though the systems operated vary across the member states.

I have an update on the financial corrections imposed so far. When I spoke to the House last November, I outlined the financial corrections that we expected and had accrued. I focused on the area aids corrections, as those constituted the largest sums of disallowance. There has been no significant change to the figures, but some confirmation of figures already proposed has been received. In September this year, the Commission confirmed its position on area aids for the 2007 and 2008 scheme years and entitlements for the 2008 and 2009 scheme years. At that time, I wrote to the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee about the issue. As I said in my statement on 21 November last year, DARD had already accrued £33.18 million to meet the disallowance. For the 2009 scheme year, the Commission has accepted our assessment of the risk to the fund for single farm payments and proposed a disallowance of €17.69 million. We are waiting for the audit to clear all the processes and expect the Commission to confirm that amount in the coming months. Again, the money to cover that has already been accrued.

Of course, the potential for disallowance for other scheme years still exists, and I turn now to the situation for the 2010 and 2011 scheme years. The Commission has written to the Department about the corrective action that we have taken in the 2010 and 2011 years. Given that the Commission has accepted our assessment of the risk to the fund for the single farm payment scheme for 2009, we have undertaken risk assessments for the 2010 and 2011 scheme years. Work on those is under way, and we are confident that they will show that the risk to the fund in those years is reduced. In addition, I expect that the changes we have introduced will enhance the Commission's confidence in our paying agency controls when considering those years and, indeed, into the future.

Other audits involving smaller sums of money are also outstanding. They relate to cross-compliance, pre-2005 bovine and ovine payments and rural development. They continue to progress through the Commission processes, and we await final proposals from the Commission on all three. Again, those issues and the related provisions have already been discussed.

Ensuring good compliance is an important component of the way forward. I will speak about that shortly. However, we have also challenged Commission decisions, most notably in the case that the Department has taken to the European Court of Justice. There has been a significant development in that matter. The initial challenge regarding the calculation of penalties in the 2006 scheme year has encountered problems around the standing of the Department to take such a case. Members will recall that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) was not prepared to take the case at that time. I have now asked DEFRA to take a separate case on the decision in regard to the 2007 and 2008 scheme years. I am pleased to tell the House that I have been successful in persuading the British Government to take that new case. That removes the difficult issue of standing and allows the court to focus on the substantive issues of the case. The case has now been lodged with the European Court. That means that, if the original case is ultimately ruled inadmissible on standing, the second case will still

ensure that the issue of the calculation of penalties is challenged. Although that is good news, the outworking of the challenge is likely to take years to work through the legal processes.

In addition to the challenge, I am focused on compliance. I have in place a comprehensive programme of work to address concerns raised by the Commission, and this is already bearing fruit.

In looking at the on-the-spot inspections, my Department has enhanced the training and guidance for our inspectors through the provision of improved guidance and more detailed protocols. The electronic system used to process inspection results has been further refined to deliver a more consistent and repeatable control and facilitate a more accurate flow of information from the claim to the on-the-spot check and through to payment.

With improved management information, managers are better equipped to manage and monitor the flow of inspection cases through the system. Quality assurance measures have been integrated into inspection activities to maintain and improve the accuracy and quality of the process. I recognise that the consequence of the improvements had a knock-on effect on the processing of many 2011 payments and created unacceptable delays in some. However, the enhancements have now enabled us to process more 2012 inspection cases than was the position at the same date in 2011.

In addition, as part of our ongoing work to improve control arrangements, the Department has, this year, introduced remote sensing technology as a method of completing 250 on-the-spot checks. This technology allows inspections to be carried out using satellite imagery. It will also enable us to check claimed parcels remotely and provides a facility to compare the measured area parcel with the area declared on the single application form.

In cases in which it is not possible to fully interpret the agricultural parcel using the satellite image, a rapid field visit will be performed by our inspection staff to inspect those areas of discrepancy. The combination of remote sensing and rapid field visits has the potential to reduce the burden of on-farm inspections on farm businesses in the future. Also, this approach will help to ensure the increased consistency and standardisation of on-the-spot checks, seen as a critical factor by the Commission when applying the scheme rules.

I intend to significantly increase the number of on-the-spot inspections carried out by remote sensing in 2013 because this has the potential to speed up the inspection process and payments in future years. I am reviewing the success of the process as deployed in 2012, in light of which I will make a further announcement in coming months. I am determined that we use modern technology to accelerate payments to farmers at the earliest opportunity.

Another action that we took to address the auditors' concerns was to participate in an extremely demanding legality and regularity audit, as set out in the Commission's guidelines. Under this, the Audit Office undertook an in-depth examination of DARD's procedures and control framework in 2011. That involved repeating a large number of inspections in that year to see whether they were correct.

The Audit Office submitted its report to the Commission by the deadline of 1 September this year. The Commission is

considering the report, and, although I am not in a position to announce the outcome of the audit at this stage, I can say that we intend to deploy the encouraging findings in further discussions with the Commission in coming weeks. This development has the potential to lead to a reduced disallowance.

I am confident that, by engaging in this audit, the Department has demonstrated the confidence to put its control system to the test and that this, combined with a further audit of legality and regularity planned for the 2012 scheme year, will provide further assurance to the Commission on the corrective actions that the Department has taken to improve controls.

With your permission, Mr Speaker, I now want to turn to the issue of maps. The Commission was critical of the fact that our mapping system did not identify a maximum eligible area, which is an assessment of the eligible land in a field that can be claimed for single farm payment. A key objective of the mapping project that I have undertaken is to identify this area for each field.

The Department is about to issue maps with revised field boundaries to farmers to support them in the 2013 single application process. The maps will be issued in three batches. Farmers in the south-east will be the first to receive their maps, which should arrive with them in December and January. That will be followed by the north and, finally, the south-west. The order of map production reflects the order in which the data was received from our data partners, Land and Property Services, given the significant work involved in having all the data available, and the desire to see maps provided as early as possible. The new maps will be much more detailed than the previous ones. Boundaries will have been moved to where physical features such as hedges, walls or fences are present. So, for example, if no boundary was visible, fields will have been merged.

Given that the information contained in the maps will also be used to prepopulate the 2013 single application form, it is essential that farmers look at their map early and report necessary changes to avoid potential delays in processing their claim. It is essential that farmers examine the information that we send to them and report any changes necessary, as they and they alone know the current situation on their land.

If farmers come to us late with changes that need to be made, it cannot be guaranteed that they will be included in time on a new map or used to populate their single application form. This, in turn, may delay the processing of their 2013 claim. I cannot stress enough how important it is that farmers follow the guidance that we issue with the maps. As well as the guidance, staff will be available in DARD Direct offices to assist. I know that many farmers find all the information that they receive very bureaucratic, but, if they ignore the advice that we send them and claim more than the maximum eligible area, they could end up with penalties in 2013.

12.15 pm

I am also investing in a new corporate geographical information system that will underpin the maps to ensure that we have a better platform on which to build future maps and to improve the information that we, as a Department, have for decision-making. One of the

benefits for farmers of that investment should be better opportunities not just to look at their maps online but, in the future, to make changes to them and to send those changes directly to the Department for verification.

I am aware that many farmers and public representatives have an expectation that DARD's maps will be 100% accurate when they are issued. That is a mistaken expectation. As I said before, that cannot be the case due to the changes that happen daily on land and because photographs may not show up every feature clearly. Maps will be correct only when farmers have checked them against what they know to be the current situation on their farm. Members should be under no illusion about the challenges involved in doing that work, and they should encourage co-operation from their constituents. It is only by working together that DARD and the farming community can make and keep the maps fit for purpose. Farmers who share parts of a single field with other farmers will have a particular problem to resolve, and they will need to contact their local office quickly to work out the best way forward.

One of the Commission's other criticisms was that we allowed dual-use claims; that is, different farmers might use the same field to claim under different schemes. That is most common when one farmer claims a field for a single farm payment and another for less-favoured area compensatory allowances. We have looked at ways to address the Commission's concerns by introducing a new set of controls that would be in keeping with its stance that a legitimate dual-use claim is technically possible but requires adequate controls. We launched a consultation exercise setting out our preferred approach for managing those dual-use claims in the short term. The consultation closed earlier this month, and, when the responses have been considered fully, I will decide on the best way forward.

Another issue that has arisen is the need to make sure that the controls applied to agrienvironment schemes are also improved. Disallowance was not restricted to the single farm payment but was applied to land-based schemes in the second pillar. It is therefore important that we ensure that the new maps are aligned with the schedules for the agrienvironment schemes. Work will commence on that as soon as the maps are available.

Members will be aware that I have decided not to proceed with a third tranche of the countryside management scheme agreements. In the light of the experience of that scheme, it is important that the Department prepares itself for the early introduction of a new scheme that is attractive to farmers while striking a balance between achieving real environmental outcomes and compliance. It is important for me to add that the Commission will look to see that we have a scheme in place that rewards farmers for being active on the land to achieve real outcomes for the environment.

I am determined to accelerate payment turnaround for farmers, but farmers themselves have a key role to play in that. One important way that I have already mentioned is to take care to claim correctly. Another is to make their single applications online. This year, over 8,000 applications were submitted online, which represents just over 21% of the total received for the 2012 scheme year. That is an increase of over 2,000 from the previous year. That is great progress, and I hope that it will continue because it can speed up payments to farmers overall. This year,

because of the introduction of new maps, there may be some challenges for farmers who have to introduce new information to the single application form online to ensure that their claim is correct. However, despite that, I intend over coming years to continue to develop and promote online applications to facilitate more accurate and faster payments. When uptake is sufficient, it will be possible to move to a mandatory arrangement. However, I recognise that that may take time in the context of all the other ongoing changes.

I will announce the payment target for the 2012 single farm payment shortly. I know that many farmers depend on getting their single farm payment early. In line with previous years, I hope to be able to pay at least 80% of claims in December. It should be noted that there are five times as many inspection cases as there were last year.

I changed our systems to start land eligibility inspections for the 2012 applications four weeks earlier this year than in the 2011 scheme year. That provided a longer window of opportunity to complete inspections before payment processing commences, increasing the potential to make timely payments for inspection cases. However, it is important to manage expectations. The 2012 scheme year should be the final year that we have very large numbers of payments that require recalculation back to 2005. That cumbersome process remains for this year and will inevitably delay some payments. For example, when I sent farmers maps to inform their claims in 2012, the maps contained marked ineligible areas. A proportion of farmers claimed areas that appeared to include some of that ineligible area or claimed fields that had not been claimed for some years. So, it is necessary for us to carry out administrative checks on those to ensure that the Department protects the fund. That means that some non-inspection cases may take longer to process this year. In many cases, farmers wrote to explain why the claim was for more than the eligible area, but they did not in many other cases. These are the cases that are likely to take longest to complete and may run into the early months of 2013 before a payment can be made. That again illustrates the importance of engaging with farmers and making sure that there is a two-way process to ensure that the maps are correct.

That brings me to 2013, and it is important for me to say that 2013 is not going to be an easy year for either DARD or farmers. The new maps that we are issuing will have a significant impact on the 2013 single application process. We anticipate that around 70% of fields will have some change affecting their area. That will mean changes to the area for which the farmer can claim.

Because of the significant number of changes to fields, we will not be able to preprint the 2012 claim information on the single application form, as we usually do, and farmers will need to take great care when completing their 2013 claims to make sure that they get them right. We are actively looking at ways to minimise the impact that that will have on farmers, and we are also reviewing the advice that we give to farmers. I appreciate that sometimes that may be complicated, and I emphasise that, if farmers do not understand what they need to do, they need to ask for help from my Department, from agents, form fillers or the farming unions. The more accurate claims are when they are submitted, the fewer queries and problems arise, and that in turn should help speed up payment processing. I

want to ensure that payment targets in 2013 are at least comparable to those for this year, but I need farmers' help to achieve that.

We have made many improvements to our processes, and they should help to reduce the risk of disallowance in future. However, in the short term, it inevitably means that farmers must be proactive in managing their claims as the regulations require.

I reiterate that, if ever there was a year for farmers to check their maps carefully, this is that year. Farmers and elected representatives should not assume that the maps are correct. There are likely to be many areas where changes can be identified only by the farmer. We need to work in partnership to ensure that the maps, which will form the baseline going forward, are correct and continue to be corrected. Farmers must be proactive and tell us about changes to their fields. In turn, DARD must have a more stable and secure mapping platform to help make the transition from the current scheme to those being developed under CAP reform. Many farmers have already worked with us to that end, and I am confident that, in partnership, we are close to success in tackling the current scale of disallowance that we have had to endure. I am confident that, because we have recognised and addressed the issues together, we will be able to show the Commission that we now have effective systems that are compliant with regulatory requirements.

I know that that was a lengthy statement, Mr Speaker, but it was important to get all the detail out.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I welcome the Minister's statement and update to the Assembly. I think that we will all agree that it is a wide-ranging statement, and I thank her for it. I welcome the improvements to the Department's processes that she outlined, and I am sure that she will agree that her Department can do much, much more in future.

The Minister mentioned that DEFRA had agreed to take the European auditors' decision on the 2007-08 financial year to the European courts. I understand from previous statements that other countries and paying agencies have had concerns similar to DARD's regarding the calculation of penalties. Will the Minister outline whether any other country or paying agency has challenged or is in the process of challenging the decision of the auditors in the courts? If so, what are the implications for the standing of the DARD cases?

Mrs O'Neill: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As the Member will be aware, when we originally asked DEFRA to take the case, it would not do so. Therefore, I think that it is a positive development that we have been able to convince it to do so. It means that we have a twofold approach to the legal challenge. We are proceeding with the original application, but that is stuck on the issue of standing and whether we, as a devolved area, have the standing to take a case. Even if that fails, we have the second case coming behind it. It is very positive that we will have two cracks at it. If, out of all that, we are able to reduce the amounts by which we have been penalised to date, that is obviously what we are trying to do.

To date, the focus has always been on challenge. At the start of the process, when Europe first notified us

of the potential fines, there was a lot of emphasis on challenge. However, we have now become much more focused on improving systems and compliance. There are three fundamental issues: challenge, compliance and communication. Obviously, you have to inform Europe of what you are doing along the way.

I referred to other countries facing disallowance at this time. I can provide the Member with more detail, but certainly other legal challenges are ongoing. We were at the start of the queue to be audited, so we are a bit further down the line than other member states. We were practically one of the first areas to be audited, which is maybe why we are further on. I am happy to provide the Member with more detail on the ins and outs of the other challenges.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her comprehensive statement. How important is the introduction of the new maps? What impact will the payment process have on farmers in 2013?

Mrs O'Neill: The new maps will obviously help farmers to complete their claim more accurately, but, as I said consistently in the statement, there has to be a partnership approach. I really encourage farmers to proactively walk their fields to make sure that the maps are correct and to talk to DARD about that. I also really encourage farmers to follow the guidance issued with their application packs. If they ignore the changes, it may cause delays in their payments, and the whole system will be slowed up. So, we really encourage farmers to be proactive and to talk to DARD if they are in any doubt. There is no escaping the need for farmers to walk their fields, take their map with them and make sure that everything that should be on the map is on it and anything that should not be on it is not. There is the potential to speed up the whole process if farmers proactively engage with improving the maps.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her statement. Minister, I think that we are all in agreement that the Department's handling of disallowance and the fines has been a bit of an omnishambles since the very beginning. In your statement — I know that this is the third time this has come to the House before it has actually been presented — you said at point 31:

“Given that the information contained in the maps will also be used to pre-populate the 2013 single application form”

However, at point 45, you tell farmers to be diligent because:

“we will not be able to pre-print”

the forms. Will you clarify the difference between those two points? What is the exact guidance to farmers?

Mrs O'Neill: We will send out a whole new pack to farmers, which will include a new improved map and a table reflecting their fields. We have asked farmers to use that, as opposed to what they normally get, which is an application form with the information that they would seek to correct. This way, farmers will receive a map and a table, and the table can be used to assist them in completing the map. So, the maps will not be completed in the normal way, but that is just for next year until we get everything improved. Once the farmers respond, our maps will not be 100% right — we will never get to 100% — but we should get as close to that as possible. The

Commission expects 99.5%, and that is the target we hope to reach.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for her timely statement. However, I am not so sure that its contents are very gratifying or appealing to farmers at the moment, given that about £50 million worth of fines have been indicated. Is the Minister confident that the Department's senior management are fit and competent to make sure that the situation is rectified and that the Commission's concerns about mapping and wrongful claims on some farm applications can be addressed? What can be done to reassure farmers that they will not be the fall guys in the system?

Mrs O'Neill: It is my role as Minister of Agriculture to represent farmers and protect their interests. That is very much to the fore of everything I am involved in.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing. First, I want to point out that the way Europe conducts its audits makes it difficult, because they come so many years after the fact. It was only in 2009 that DARD was informed of the actual amount that it was to be fined for the 2005-06 scheme year. So the way in which the audits are conducted makes it very difficult.

With hindsight, I think that a lot of focus was put on challenge and not enough on taking action more quickly to make some of the improvements that we are now involved in, such as the maps and the inspection process. Those were the two key issues that Europe highlighted as problem areas. As I say, at the start, a lot of the focus was on challenge. We now have challenge, compliance issues and ongoing communication with Brussels. Those are the three key areas that will be very important to us in the time ahead.

I assure the Member that this is a priority for me. We are actively working towards ending disallowance, and all the measures I outlined today have been welcomed by the Commission.

So, hopefully, we will be in a position to stamp out that disallowance and get into a better position.

12.30 pm

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her statement. I declare an interest as a recipient of single farm payment. In relation to E-SAF, will the Minister advise the House whether, out of the 8,000 people who completed their application online, any have been returned? The whole idea of online is for a quick payment to the farmers. Have there been any errors, or have a number of them been returned to farmers for further information?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have that type of detail in terms of the numbers that have been returned, but anything that is submitted online can have a quicker turnaround process. It is very quick if the farmer receives a map and is able to respond online to the Department. Things can be changed very quickly online on the system. By and large, we want to get to a position where we have a lot more farmers claiming online. I am very pleased that 2,000 more farmers claimed online this year. That in itself is very positive. As the Member will be aware, however, we have issues of large rural areas across the North not having access to broadband, or slow connection.

So, there are a number of issues that we need to challenge. I will not move to make claiming online mandatory at this moment in time because that would not be fair; there would be an equality issue there. I hope that we keep improving and continue to attract more farmers to do it this way, because that will speed up the entire process for not just that individual farmer. More people applying online will speed up the entire process, so we look forward to more of that.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for her statement. She touched on the fact that 80% of single farm payments will be made again in December. I am sure that the Minister realises that that still leaves upwards of 8,000 farmers not receiving their payments in December. Will the Minister inform the House as to the situation with inspections this year, given the desperate situation last year in relation to late inspections? What way is the Department on with the inspection process?

Mrs O'Neill: I assure the Member that the target is 80% in December but, obviously, we always want to exceed our targets. We want to make sure that the largest number of farmers possible will receive their payments. One issue that the Commission identified was the whole area of inspections, and we are constantly working to try to improve that. We have a lot of training for our inspectors. We also this year, I am pleased to be able to say, started our inspections four weeks earlier, which really assists the whole process and speeds things up.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy] in the Chair)

As I said in the statement, this year five times more inspection cases will be paid out in December compared with last year. There are improvements; a lot more is still to be done. Ideally, you would love to be in a position where you could pay all farmers in December. We are constantly working our way towards that. I want to exceed the target of 80%. That is just the target that we set out, but I hope to be able to exceed that. As I said, there is certainly an improvement compared with last year's inspection cases.

Lord Morrow: My question is not dissimilar from what Mr Irwin asked. It is in relation to:

"at least 80% of all claims in December".

Eighty per cent is not that high a target. You seem to be starting from a very low base. Surely, your target should be 95%-plus. Can you give the House any assurance that you will far outstretch the 80% and that it is merely a target that can be easily met?

Mrs O'Neill: We are constantly striving to make sure that we get the maximum amount of farmers paid in December. We have all those issues that I identified and spoke about in the statement. It is about improving the practice and what we are doing in speeding up the inspections. I want to see all inspections being taken forward by remote sensing because that will speed everything up and reduce the amount of time that inspectors have to spend out visiting farms. That is also something that farmers will welcome.

So, we will constantly be striving to make sure that we pay the maximum number of people. Under Commission rules, you cannot pay a penny of single farm payment until all inspection cases are completed. So, the target and priority for me is to make sure that we improve those inspection times, get them done quicker and in the most effective

way, and then we pay the maximum number of people as a result of that.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for that comprehensive statement. I also declare an interest as being a recipient of single farm payment. The Minister has indicated that not as much information will be on the single application form this year as in previous years. Will there be any flexibility from the Department if any forms come in with minor mistakes in them? As opposed to imposing a penalty on the farmers, will there be some flexibility to allow them to remedy those mistakes?

Mrs O'Neill: I encourage farmers to check their maps very quickly once they receive them. The longer they leave it, the more difficult it will be and the less likely it is that things can be changed in time for the 2013 payment. The first run of maps will be issued very shortly. We encourage people to check their maps immediately they receive them and then inform the Department. That will take away the potential for any errors. The sooner that they do that, the better. As I said, I take this opportunity to encourage farmers to check the maps as soon as possible.

Mr McAleer: Minister, I welcome the paragraph in your statement about the rolling out of modern technology for remote sensing. We heard in Committee some of the benefits of that from Wales and other parts of the world. Will the introduction of remote sensing mean that farmers will be able to avail themselves of advance payments?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, under the EU rules, payments can be made only when all the administrative and land eligibility checks are completed. This year, as I said, field inspections have started earlier. The successful introduction of remote sensing is likely to contribute to a move towards advanced payments in the future. Because of CAP reform uncertainty at the moment and the ongoing work on the controls, it is too soon to say whether that might be possible. However, my first priority is to improve the number of farmers whom we can quickly pay in December. We should absolutely look towards advance payments in the future when we have all the systems correct and proper.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for her statement. Her statement says that the new maps will have a significant impact on the 2013 applications. How much does the new mapping system cost? What extra steps are being put in by DARD to ensure that there is relevant support for farmers to make the whole process as smooth as possible?

Mrs O'Neill: In the Budget, £23.6 million was set aside for the whole remapping process. To date, we have spent just over £16 million of that. That has been a very worthwhile investment in improving the system and giving Europe the confidence that the paying agency is acting without any risk to the fund.

As for ongoing support and advice for farmers, DARD Direct offices have been very successful in reaching people. They do not all have to come to a central location; we have them right across the North. I encourage farmers who have any doubt on any issue, particularly around the new claim process and the new mapping system, to go to DARD Direct offices, seek advice or give us a call.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for her statement. I declare an interest as a recipient of single farm payments. Is the Minister happy that dual claims can be managed

in the new CAP system? Will she reply to my colleague's query about whether there will be some flexibility in the fining system this year?

Mrs O'Neill: As I informed the Member as part of the original statement, the dual claims process is a difficult one that we need to manage. We went out for consultation; that closed last week. I am looking through that very carefully to find a manageable solution for the way forward that does not present a risk to the fund, because, obviously, that is what Europe is very concerned about. I hope that we will be able to find a way forward. I encourage anybody who is in that situation and is worried about that to speak to an adviser. It is important that we get those issues ironed out as quickly as possible.

We are always very keen to work with farmers. I reiterate the point that we encourage farmers to make sure that they check the maps as soon as they receive them. They should not leave that to the last minute. For us to be able to successfully change things, make the payments more accurately and make them on time, we need to do that work as early as possible. We will continue to work with farmers. Nobody has any interest in trying to make life difficult for our farmers. The Department will always have that attitude.

Mr Allister: Last November, the Minister told us that the running total of penalty at that stage was £80.6 million. Now that she has more information, including for 2009, can she tell us today what the running total of penalty for the Department's mismanagement is?

Mrs O'Neill: The figure has not changed. I told the House about those figures last year, and that same figure of £80.6 million has been accrued to date. That includes 2009. A lot of figures have been floated, but £80.6 million is the confirmed figure, and that takes us up into the 2009 financial year.

Mr Dallat: I also thank the Minister for her statement. I am sure that, despite the comments that were made at the weekend, we would all agree that she is looking absolutely splendid today.

The Minister will agree that it is a long time since maps showed the world as being flat. It is even a long time since Lady Dixon Park was mapped in for a grant. Will she assure us that the money that is being spent on mapping will mean that this is the end of the story?

Mrs O'Neill: That is my priority and target. I am working towards ensuring that our maps are fit for purpose. I very much think that we can get there if we have the partnership approach and farmers work with the Department. We have improved the imagery and the type of aerial photography that we use in the maps, and all those things are improving the situation. We want fit-for-purpose maps for the future that are acceptable to the Commission. That will allow us to avoid potential disallowance.

Mr Clarke: Following on from the mismanagement that my colleague from North Antrim referred to, Minister, there is nearly an admission in the statement that the case your Department took, which was refused by DEFRA, will be lost. Do you believe that your Department was foolhardy in taking that case, and that that was a further mismanagement of funds?

Mrs O'Neill: If the Member is suggesting that we should just sit back, roll over and accept what Europe dictates to us —

Mr Clarke: You have.

Mrs O'Neill: The Member should let me answer the question. To date, we have had a very strong focus on challenging that issue with Europe. You cannot just accept it. We do not think that the fine that Europe has set out is proportionate to the risk to the fund. The Member may think that you should just accept it and do nothing, but I do not think that that is the approach we should take.

We took the case because the British Government, through DEFRA, would not take it on our behalf. We very strongly put our case and believe that we have good grounds to challenge what the Commission has set out. When it comes to standing — that is what the court is looking at at the moment — the problem is whether we, as a devolved Assembly, have the ability to take a case. Are we going to roll over and accept that, unless the British Government decide to take a case for us, we will not bother fighting it?

We need to challenge those decisions. We need to look at compliance and what we can do to improve the systems for our maps and inspections. However, we also have to continue to really strongly put our case that the fines are disproportionate and that they have to be challenged. Although it is a long process, I believe that we may have some success in the future.

Prison Service: Outline Estate Strategy

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the prison estate strategy.

The future of our prison estate is a key element of our wider prisons reform programme, through which we plan to deliver greater efficiency and effectiveness and improved public safety through the rehabilitation of prisoners and reductions in reoffending. Reflecting this, the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) launched a public consultation exercise on an outline estate strategy in June of this year. The outline strategy set out a range of proposals aimed at meeting our requirements in respect of each prisoner population group in order to create a prison estate that would support the rehabilitation of offenders.

The written consultation formally closed on 28 September. Since then, my officials have continued to engage with stakeholders on a range of issues relating to the future of the prison estate. Although some stakeholder engagement continues on a range of issues, I am now in a position to make an interim statement on the Prison Service outline estate strategy.

Throughout the consultation exercise, I have been impressed by the quality of engagement with stakeholders. A number of the issues that have been raised have been valuable and have helped to inform our thinking. I have previously made it clear that the estate strategy cannot be driven by a single issue. Rather, it needs to recognise and respond to the complex challenges presented by the prison population as a whole, as well as the specific elements of detaining and rehabilitating the differing groups within our prison population.

I am pleased to be able to update the House on a number of key decisions in respect of facilities for women, young offenders and adult males. I am confident that these developments will contribute to the rehabilitation of offenders and so to the creation of a safer Northern Ireland.

I am pleased that, as of 1 November, all juvenile offenders requiring custody are being accommodated at Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre. That is an important development. It ensures that juvenile offenders are being accommodated in the most appropriate environment for them. It also delivers positive benefits for the prison estate and has opened up an opportunity to provide specific tailored regimes for young offenders at Hydebank Wood.

12.45 pm

The prison review team (PRT) recommended that Hydebank Wood should be reconfigured around learning and skills training. I believe that that represents an opportunity for us to put in place a better and more supportive environment in which to equip young offenders for rehabilitation. Young offenders at Hydebank Wood present a particularly stark portrait of need. More than 50% of the population are below level 1 in numeracy skills; 35% are below level 1 in literacy skills; 30% are dyslexic; and 40% present with ADHD.

We know how important learning, skills and employability are to reducing the risk of young offenders reoffending on release, so we need to address better any issues around poor educational attainment and low skills in this offender group. Therefore, I confirm today our commitment to the

reconfiguration of Hydebank Wood as a secure college that will offer a full programme of skills-based activities and support.

As a first step, I have asked my officials, with support from the Department for Employment and Learning, to bring forward a concept development paper on how that can best be achieved. The paper will include consideration of the associated changes that will be needed to the physical environment at Hydebank Wood.

However, the youth justice review and the prison review made clear that more needed to be done to provide effective support in the community as an alternative to, or after, custody. Although it recognised the provision that exists, the PRT suggested that the young offender population offers us an opportunity to work innovatively to provide support as well as appropriate alternatives to custody. My officials, therefore, are continuing to explore what additional support and services might be put in place to manage young offenders, including looking at community disposals and at whether it might be possible and beneficial to roll out an Inspire-style project to young adult offenders. Such a project would deliver a range of specific services in the community, aimed at reducing offending through targeted community-based interventions.

A relatively small number of women in Northern Ireland offend, but the impact on their families can be huge, particularly when a custodial sentence is given. The Department's 2010 strategy to manage women offenders and those vulnerable to offending behaviour informed the development of the outline estate strategy. This acknowledges the complex challenges presented by the female prison population and emphasises that the prison estate needs to be considered in the wider context of other interventions and alternatives to custody for women offenders. The prison review recommended that the Inspire model should be the norm for dealing with women offenders. I fully endorse that approach, and work is already under way to roll out the Inspire model across Northern Ireland.

However, the review also pointed out that, for some women, secure custody will be the proportionate response, so the prison estate needs to be configured to ensure appropriate provision for that group of female offenders. I have previously made clear my view that the existing arrangements for women who are currently located with young offenders at Hydebank Wood are not appropriate, a view that is supported by stakeholders' responses to the consultation. I am therefore confirming my commitment to the development of a new, separate secure custodial facility for women.

Over the coming months, we will consider options for how that can best be delivered in terms of location, shape and size, although my expectation is that the size of the female offender population requiring secure custody will be smaller than at present. The prison review report envisaged a small custodial facility located within a complex of buildings providing other services that could be accessed by all women offenders, whether in custody, under supervision or subject to court orders. That proposal highlights the need to ensure that work to develop a new secure facility for women prisoners is aligned with, and informed by, that being taken forward elsewhere across

the criminal justice system for sentencing, alternatives to custody and effective pathways away from crime.

The outline estate strategy also identified a number of priorities for the development of the adult male estate. Alongside the aim of creating an environment that would encourage positive change by offenders, the strategy recognised that there was a priority need to respond to and address issues of overcrowding at Maghaberry prison. I am pleased to report that a new accommodation block, Quoile House, was opened at Maghaberry last month and is now providing accommodation for 160 prisoners. Good progress is also being made towards the development of a new 240-cell accommodation block at Maghaberry.

The outline estate strategy also set out proposals to zone Maghaberry prison into three areas, reflecting the recommendations of the prison review team. Following consultation, I have decided to proceed with the proposal to reconfigure Maghaberry into three mini-prisons — for remand prisoners, low- to medium-security prisoners and prisoners requiring high security — as suggested by the prison review team. Not only will this create operational efficiencies, it will allow NIPS to deliver better-tailored regimes to specific groups of prisoners in Maghaberry and help to underpin and reinforce work to rehabilitate offenders. On the basis of further consideration of this aspect of the proposals, however, it is no longer my view that Mourne House will be practicable for use as a high-security facility. Instead, my intention is to create a discrete high-security facility within the main prison at Maghaberry, which would include provision both for separated prisoners and prisoners from the integrated population requiring high security. Further thought is now being given to how Mourne House might best be used, including consideration of whether it might be reconfigured as a remand prison.

The prisons review observed that the closure of the prisoner assessment unit in April 2011 left an important gap in custodial provision. If we are to achieve effective rehabilitation and reduce the risk of reoffending, there is a need to manage the difficult transition between prison and community, particularly for prisoners who have received long sentences. In line with the review team's report, I intend to redevelop the prisoner assessment unit located on the Crumlin Road as a working out unit for prisoners approaching the end of their sentence. This will allow prisoners to benefit from being located within the community and able to access employment opportunities, while providing appropriate support and supervision.

Finally, the outline estate strategy proposed, again in line with the prison review recommendations, that Magilligan prison be decommissioned from 2018 and a new prison built in a more central location. The review team rightly observed the challenges of providing prisoners accommodated in Magilligan with adequate employment and rehabilitation opportunities. I also accept the review team's assessment that the prison's remote location poses a significant challenge to maintaining effective family links, which is another key factor in helping to rehabilitate offenders.

I have stressed on a number of occasions that my decision on the future of Magilligan needs to be based primarily on what is best for the people of Northern Ireland in terms of enhancing public safety through reducing offending. I have also stressed that the consultation on the outline estate strategy was genuine and the question of Magilligan prison was at no point pre-determined.

Although I recognise and have been guided by the importance of the observations made by the prison review team, a number of other factors influenced my thinking. Sue McAllister took up post as director general of NIPS on 3 July and has brought fresh thinking and perspective. Prison Service officials have also continued their further consideration and exploration of the issue.

A number of responses to the consultation challenged earlier assumptions by emphasising Magilligan's existing strengths and suggesting that more could be done to reinforce and build on these strengths. That was also reflected in the encouraging positive approach to partnership working shown by local councils and business representatives in the north-west.

Taking all of those factors into account, I am now of the opinion that a convincing case might be made for the retention of a prison in the north-west on the Magilligan site, and, of course, I would welcome the positive impact that this could have for Magilligan staff and the local economy. I want to stress that further work is needed before a definitive decision can be made, both to ensure that adequate rehabilitation opportunities can be identified and provided and to look creatively at how family links could be better facilitated and sustained to reduce barriers to the effective rehabilitation of prisoners.

I am now inclined towards retaining a prison on the Magilligan site, subject to evidence being provided that issues concerning rehabilitation and family links can be adequately addressed. Over the coming months, I believe that the focus for debate on the future of Magilligan needs to shift from whether it should be decommissioned to actively exploring whether and how we can make it work better to improve the rehabilitation of prisoners. I accept that some of these issues will take time to explore and consider, and I acknowledge that staff and local stakeholders have lived for some time with the impact of uncertainty, but it is important that we take the time to make the right decisions.

As I have previously said, the estate strategy presents us with an opportunity to do things better, to create an effective prison estate that will encourage and promote rehabilitation and help to reduce reoffending. Reflecting its importance for the strategic reform of our Prison Service, NIPS has appointed a director of estates, which is a new position, to provide leadership and momentum in taking it forward.

The next phase of work is critical, and I am committed to returning to the House in the new year to update Members on my final decisions on the development of the prison estate; the shape of the female estate and how that will interplay with community provision; provision for young offenders; and the adult male estate, including a definitive statement on the future of Magilligan prison.

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): I thank the Minister for his statement. I know that, for many, the headline story will be that Magilligan is to be retained. I think that we will need a definitive, final confirmation that that is the case, because for many years there has been uncertainty about Magilligan. At last, that will now hopefully be resolved. I commend my party colleagues who campaigned tirelessly for this in the north-west.

I will turn to some of the other areas. Will the Minister outline the capital resources that will be needed to make all the changes to the prison estate a reality? With the creation of three mini-prisons at Maghaberry to deal with remand, low-security and high-security prisoners, will the Minister assure the House that any changes to the high-security regime will not create a Maze-style prison, that prisoners in the separated regime will be treated exactly the same as other high-risk prisoners in the new high-security facility at Maghaberry and that no political status will be given to those republican prisoners?

Finally, will he assure us that appropriate governance arrangements will be in place for the prisoner assessment unit (PAU) so that we do not have a repeat of what happened previously?

Mr Ford: It is always good to be able to welcome a positive contribution and welcome for a statement from the Chair of my Committee. I agree with him that it was stressed that this was an interim statement and that there needs to be a definitive, final statement, particularly on the future of Magilligan.

He commended his party colleagues for their campaign on Magilligan, so I also commend those who have looked at the practical ways in which local councils and businesses in the north-west could support the rehabilitation process in Magilligan and justify its retention. To me, that is the key point that still needs to be worked through.

I cannot give any specific answer on capital resources because, clearly, a number of different factors are still being considered. Obviously, however, as we move forward to more definitive proposals for the different aspects of the statement that I made today, it will be possible to identify the necessary capital resources.

Given his speech to his party conference, I am not sure whether the Chairperson of the Committee really wants or will accept it, but I assure him that there is no movement towards the Maze, that prisons will continue to be run in line with best practice and that we are not talking about going back 30 or 40 years to conditions that existed in the Maze and in the management of separated prisoners in particular. Appropriate governance mechanisms will be in place for the PAU as, indeed, they will be for all the other institutions as we look to the future.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle, agus cuirim fáilte roimh an ráiteas seo. Thank you very much, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle, and I thank the Minister for his statement. Indeed, I will give a broad welcome to that statement.

In particular, a lot of the decisions seem to have been guided by Anne Owers's prison review team, which is to be welcomed. As we take this forward, I look forward to more detailed briefings being given to the Committee for Justice, where some of the issues can be teased out. Will he reassure us that whatever is done with the prison estate will be very much part of the wider, much-needed prison reform package?

Mr Ford: Again, I thank the Deputy Chair of the Committee for joining with the welcome that the Chair gave. He is absolutely right to say that the proposals that I put forward today have been very much guided by what Anne Owers and her team did on the prison review work. However, I

have not slavishly followed them because, as I stressed earlier, certain issues have been re-examined.

I can give a commitment that, as we develop the detail of these proposals, if necessary, I and officials will be at the Committee to discuss them with members and to seek their opinions as we move forward. The Member correctly identified that there is a wider reform agenda. I think that it is fair to say that the estate strategy is about ensuring that we provide the services that rehabilitate people rather than being about the buildings in which they are provided.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for his interim statement. I want to return to the issue of the Magilligan site. He indicated that a convincing case might be made for the retention of a prison in the north-west on that site.

Can the Minister elaborate on that, even in this interim period? Will that mean a newbuild on that site or a reconfiguration of the current prison structure?

1.00 pm

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Elliott for that level of support. The only thing that I can say, as an interim statement, is that it is clear that, if Magilligan is to be retained, some of the accommodation will need to be replaced. The elderly H-blocks and some of the other buildings are not fit for purpose. On the other hand, the likes of Halward House, which is a relatively modern building, are fit for purpose. There will be an issue of rebuilding elements. Part of the question that may have to be taken into account is how much some of the supportive buildings — workshops, for example — need to be replaced with modern buildings at a time when we face capital spend issues related to young offenders, women and the needs of Maghaberry. It will be a difficult act for the Prison Service to live within its budget. There will certainly be a lesser capital requirement if we are to retain a prison at Magilligan than there would be if the entire prison were to be rebuilt elsewhere. It will be a considerable requirement nonetheless.

Mr Dallat: I also thank the Minister for his statement and join the chorus of welcomes for the apparent retention of Magilligan prison. Does he agree with me that, at the end of the day, it is the inmates there who really matter? What immediate steps will the Minister take to ensure that the excellent educational work being done there is not only continued but stepped up in the interests of addressing the defects that he identified in literacy, numeracy, basic skills and so on?

Mr Ford: I also thank Mr Dallat for his welcome. The problems with literacy and numeracy relate more to young offenders in Hydebank Wood than to adults in Magilligan. There is no doubt from the recent inspection report from both CJINI and HMIP that Magilligan does good work despite the facilities. The important thing is that we continue to encourage that good work in all the prison institutions and do our best to improve the facilities to provide even better opportunities for the good work being done by staff.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Minister for his statement. This has clearly been a genuine consultation process. I recently visited Magilligan prison and was impressed by the rehabilitation work being done both internally and externally. Can the Minister tell us that that work will continue to be supported and further enhanced by Prison

Service staff? How will today's statement impact on the management of women prisoners?

Mr Ford: I thank my colleague for his welcome. A lot of good work is clearly being done on education, skills and job training in all the institutions. However, there is significantly more work to be done if we are to get the best rehabilitation opportunities for our prisoners.

It seems clear to me that Ash House on the Hydebank Wood site is not suitable for the accommodation of women prisoners among young offenders and that there is a general recognition that, in this society, too many women are in custody who do not require to be in custody, who should be dealt with by a community method and who, in many cases, have serious health issues, including mental health issues.

As has been said, the Inspire project and the community work that it does, both as a follow-up for those who have been in custody and as an alternative to putting people into custody, is an example of good, direct engagement with women offenders who need to be managed in a different way from male offenders. The Inspire project has shown its success by the very low recidivism rate and the constructive engagement of a range of NGOs, probation and others in the work being done at the project in central Belfast, building on the work being done at Ash House. I believe that it is possible for that work to be done in dedicated facilities — somewhere other than within the Hydebank Wood YOC boundary — in a way that improves opportunities for rehabilitation. Those of us who wish to see addressed our concerns about women in custody and the effects that that has on family life will surely welcome that.

Mr Wells: Like other Members, I strongly welcome the decision to retain Magilligan. I was in east Londonderry recently, and the very clear message that I got was that there would be blood on the ceiling if anything happened to Magilligan.

I welcome the potential new construction project, which will give much-needed employment to builders in the area. Will there be the same level of employment in the new facility? One of the main reasons for the opposition to possible closure was the devastating impact that would have on the economy of the area. Will the newbuild have the same economic impact when it comes to employment?

Mr Ford: It is too early to say anything about expectations of the precise economic effects. Different figures have been given for the economic effects of closure. The opportunities for construction work should not be underestimated at this stage. There will be a significant benefit if we do any construction, as there could be from the construction work being done at Maghaberry and if we do some of the things we could do at Hydebank Wood.

Some of the points made about the economic effect were somewhat exaggerated. I am not sure that as much of the household spend of the staff at Magilligan took place in Limavady as was sometimes claimed by supporters of the prison. However, the important thing is to see the way in which local businesses and local statutory and voluntary bodies engage with the work at the prison to aid and support rehabilitation. That will have a continuing positive effect on the economy of the Limavady and Coleraine area, if the prison is to be retained.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. I thank the Minister for his statement. The news about the new women's facility is welcome. Is there a timeline for it?

Mr Ford: I thank Ms McCorley for her welcome, but I am afraid that, at this stage in an interim statement, I cannot give any timeline. The only time indication I have given is the intention to return early in the new year with a definitive statement. There are issues around running a number of different projects together and around the total capital requirement, but Ash House in Hydebank Wood is not the proper place for women prisoners to be, and a new facility has to be regarded as a priority. With due respect to those who represent East Londonderry or East Derry, depending on the side of the House I hear from, it is a little bit sad that so much of the discussion on the estate strategy has concentrated on Magilligan rather than on the vital issue of how we manage women offenders better.

Mr G Robinson: As someone who has campaigned vigorously with my DUP colleagues, I welcome the Minister's statement and emphasise how important the retention of Magilligan is, considering that it employs 400 to 500 people and provides millions of pounds to the north-west economy. Would follow-up meetings with Limavady, Coleraine and Ballymoney councils that included business representatives be useful? Every avenue could be explored, so that the retention of Magilligan prison, including the rebuild, which would benefit the construction industry, could be given the utmost priority.

Mr Ford: Again, I thank the Member for the welcome. My understanding is that there are discussions ongoing between council and business representatives. Those discussions could include Derry City Council as well as the three that I met: Limavady, Coleraine and Ballymoney. Those discussions with local councils and local businesses are a vital part of assessing the role that Magilligan can perform.

Mr Allister: I note that it has been a weekend of movement of positions by some Alliance Party elected representatives. Although the direction of travel of one Alliance councillor may be a little dubious, I welcome the direction of travel of the Minister with respect to his move to retain Magilligan. I encourage him to keep going in that direction and commend the Prison Officers' Association, the local councils and others who campaigned so vigorously towards that end.

In the retention of Magilligan, can prison officers be assured that that which was removed from them, namely the officers' messes, will be restored so that they might have the facilities that they expect and should have in Magilligan prison?

Mr Ford: The discussion on the precise provision of messes is being considered by management, and I do not think that there is a benefit in going into any great detail.

I am slightly surprised that Mr Allister, in an uncharacteristically generous welcome for decisions, praised the councillors from the north-west and the POA but failed to include Department of Justice officials, who have been looking at the real detail and the real issues of how the prison estate can best be used to rehabilitate prisoners. It was a matter not simply of those who gathered signatures on a petition but of real, detailed work

being done by my officials. If Mr Allister is not prepared to praise them, I would like to.

Lord Morrow: I am sure that it is not lost on the Minister that, when he makes good and right decisions, the House unites around him. I am sure that he will set out to do that more often.

In relation to the future of Hydebank, the Minister said that there were very few women in prison and that it was his intention to provide new facilities, as he did not see custody as the way forward. He must have a very small unit in his mind. Can he give us some indication about when he sees that happening? Surely it can happen quite quickly.

Mr Ford: I assure Lord Morrow that I always do my best to ensure that I take the right decisions, but other people may not agree with me all the time.

On the specific issue of women prisoners, I highlighted the potential for developing an Inspire model, as I described it, to look at the issue of the small number of women who require to be in custody and the larger number who require a variety of services being managed in a new facility. In that sense, it is a matter not simply of talking about a small number of women in custody but of seeing how we best provide for the rehabilitation of women offenders. I cannot outline that immediately this morning, but it is under active consideration by my Department.

Mr Easton: I thank the Minister for his statement on the estate strategy, especially the part about Magilligan, which is welcome news. I notice that the Minister did not mention Lisnevin in Millisle. Can he give us an update on that? Will the estate strategy lead to more jobs, or will there be job losses as a result?

Mr Ford: The estate strategy is not about jobs but about providing rehabilitation facilities. The issue of jobs and the changing configuration is being considered elsewhere. I was slightly surprised that Mr Easton chose to welcome the news that Magilligan was being kept, given that most of the correspondence that I have received from him in recent time has been demanding that we do not put any prisoners in Millisle. The plans for the college are quite clear. When the new integrated public services college goes ahead at Desertcreat, the Prison Service college will move as part of that, along with colleges from fire and police, and the site will then be surplus to requirements.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas sin. I welcome the Minister's statement, particularly the part about developing Hydebank Wood as a secure college. Does he have a time frame for that to be up and running?

Mr Ford: It is a little bit disappointing that I have to rise on every occasion and thank the Member for asking the question but point out that, as this is merely an interim statement, I cannot give Members the timetables, details of cost or whatever they require. The best comment that I can make is that the issues will be discussed with the Committee as they develop, and I will be back to the House as early as possible in the new year with a detailed statement on that.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for his statement and welcome how he is driving forward prison reform, particularly in relation to young people and women.

How important is skills training to rehabilitating young offenders, and how will he work with other Departments and community-based organisations to deliver improved outcomes on the issue?

1.15 pm

Mr Ford: The issue of skills training, both education and skills more directly related to work, is a vital part of rehabilitating prisoners, particularly young offenders. I gave the statistics on the low level of educational attainment that so many of the residents of Hydebank Wood have, and it is clear that people who have such low levels of attainment will have significant difficulty finding jobs outside. That is why I am pleased that my officials are already engaging with those from DEL on developing the concept of a secure college. Indeed, a couple of weeks ago, I had a very positive meeting with representatives from Business in the Community, who were looking at the contribution that businesses could make to the rehabilitation of offenders. There was an inspiring visitor, James Timpson, the chief executive of Timpson, which does shoe bars, key cutting and so on in a number of places in different parts of the country. I believe that around 10% of the employees of Timpson are recruited directly from prisons. It has four units in prisons providing opportunities for people to develop work and skills that may lead to employment with Timpson or with someone else afterwards. It is a vital part of the work that needs to be done. I certainly appreciate the contribution being made by DEL, but, as I have been saying in the context of Magilligan as well as Hydebank Wood, the additional contribution that can be made by other stakeholders, including businesses and local councils, will be vital to the joined-up approach that my Department is keen to see.

Mr Campbell: I join others in welcoming the Minister's statement. I remember that, five years ago, there were those who said to me that I could write the obituary column for Magilligan prison. They were wrong then, and the defeatists who, in the past few months, said that the prison would be lost, thankfully, seem to have been proven wrong now. We welcome the statement, and, thankfully, it is the right statement. The Minister gets criticised when he makes the wrongs ones, correctly, and he gets commended when he makes the right one. We commend him today. Can the Minister ensure that, when he comes back to the House in the new year, he will outline precisely the scale of the rebuild and the rehabilitation requirements that will be needed to make the new prison a success and, most important, the timeline to put to bed once and for all any notion that Magilligan prison will close?

Mr Ford: At least Mr Campbell was listening when I said that I could not give the detail today. It is certainly my hope that, by early in the new year, I will at least be able to give an outline of the points that he has raised. He is sitting beside the Finance Minister, and I am not sure whether I could necessarily give a firm commitment to spending even by January or February. I repeat the point that a large part of ensuring that we overcame the concept of what he described as defeatism about closure at Magilligan is that people brought forward serious and realistic suggestions on how the site, which is not necessarily in the ideal place, could be used to best effect rehabilitation, whether for those who live in the north-west or for those who have particular skills that may be used in a particular way if we develop the learning and skills agenda for Magilligan. A

lot of work is still to be done, but I have no doubt from the remarks that he and others from the north-west have made that we will get such a positive community response that it will be easy to justify retention.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. I welcome the Minister's statement, which has removed a degree of the uncertainty around Magilligan. Indeed, it was that uncertainty that prompted many in the East Derry constituency to fear that we might have on our hands another Seagate or, indeed, Shackleton, until the recent announcement by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. In the Minister's statement, he admitted that challenges exist. Can he expand on how family links could be better facilitated, given that this was central to the thoughts on whether or not Magilligan should be relocated?

Mr Ford: I appreciate the serious point that Mr Ó hOisín makes about family links. I do not think that anyone would seriously suggest that Magilligan Point is the best place in Northern Ireland for the bulk of the population to visit. That issue was raised by a number of commentators, and, indeed, Mr Campbell made the point at a public meeting in Limavady that there were prisoners who come from, however you define it, the north-west for whom Magilligan is as accessible as Maghaberry is. There are, indeed, prisoners who do not necessarily require family contact, and that may well mean that there will be opportunities for them at Magilligan. The issue is to see whether it is possible to get the necessary opportunities for rehabilitation for the prisoners who require it, using the facilities that exist in the community and business in that north-west area and to see how that can ensure that we promote rehabilitation in a way that, it was originally suggested, could best be done by locating all our facilities closer to the larger element of population but recognising that Northern Ireland does not stop as you pass Sprucefield. There are people who need to be accommodated in every part of the region.

Mr Storey: I join the chorus of Members who welcome the positive nature of the statement in relation to the Magilligan site, albeit that some Members come late to the issue. On the day that we went to the prison and met prison officers, one party was absent, namely the party opposite. Sinn Féin decided that it was not worthwhile to go. Maybe its members had a particular issue about Her Majesty's prison.

Given the fact that we have this positive statement, huge emphasis has been placed on prisoners and their rehabilitation and education. Will the Minister give an assurance that the prison officers, who have been at the front line — I say this in the context of recent events and the murder of a prison officer — will be provided for in terms of their security in travelling to the prison and the way in which they are treated when they are working in it? That regime must change drastically, particularly with regard to Magilligan.

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Storey for those comments. I am not sure that we need to say that prison officers need to be treated particularly well with regard to Magilligan. I made statements over the last couple of weeks about the work being done to ensure that the security of prison officers was provided for, and I entirely agree with Mr Storey on the vital necessity of that.

I also recognise that there are difficult issues around the way in which prison officers work. Those have been addressed constructively by the management of the Prison Service and the POA and have been seen in changes in the operating model. Clearly, much work has been done, and much more needs to be done. We have seen that a number of those who served in the Prison Service for a long time have already availed themselves of the voluntary early redundancy scheme. New recruits are coming through the college at present. So, there is a great deal of change. However, I am determined that we continue to work constructively with our workforce and ensure that they are provided with the best possible security in any way that can be done.

Rates: Support for Business

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I would like to make a statement outlining my plans to build on the rates package that I introduced in April of this year. I trust that, since this is a statement that is laden with good news, those in the press who report on the Assembly will take the opportunity to spread some early Christmas festive joy around people in the economy of Northern Ireland.

The new measures are mainly about extending and improving the support provided to businesses in Northern Ireland through the rates system. At the outset, however, allow me to reiterate a point that I have made on several occasions since I took over responsibility for rating policy: every £1 that we allow in relief is £1 less to spend on health, education, roads and council services. So, when we make these decisions, we are making a choice and, despite the fact that some people argue that the Assembly does not do so, we are prioritising the building of the economy at micro level, as far as small businesses are concerned. Another point I want to make is that the erosion of the rates system will not save the economy. However, I believe that, where it is sensible, we should direct reliefs to where they are most needed. That can help to create the right conditions for business success when it is combined with other initiatives. I hope that Members recognise, therefore, in considering the points in the statement, that the Executive are not passive in their attitude to business but are prepared to do something about it. It will never be enough in many people's eyes, but we are prepared to take steps that usually go well beyond what is available in the rest of the United Kingdom.

I will remind Members of what we did earlier this year. April saw the introduction of the large retail levy, which, on average, equalled 15% of the rates bills of the largest retailers. That helped to fund the enhancement of the small business rate relief scheme. That enhancement brought 8,300 extra ratepayers into the scheme, which provided them with a 20% reduction in their rates. It also saw the introduction of an empty shops rates concession, which allowed a 50% exemption for the first year for a new business moving into a long-term unoccupied property. April also saw the continuance of the Executive's freeze of non-domestic regional rates in real terms.

The statement highlights a range of measures that I aim to implement for next April that will supplement and complement that package. I will outline those in more detail in a moment. Briefly, the package will see the retention of the empty shops rates concession for the Budget period; a further expansion of the small business rate relief scheme; the extension of the rural ATM exemption for the remainder of the Budget period; a continuance of the non-domestic regional rates freeze agreed in the Budget settlement; and an extension of aspects of the developer exclusion as it applies to the rating of empty homes.

I start with the extension of the empty shops rates concession. We are all aware of shop closures and the effect that that then has on the vitality of towns and cities. I have seen that in my constituency and in towns and cities that I visit in my ministerial role. For that reason, I have decided to put forward proposals to the Assembly on the continuation of the empty shops rates concession for the remainder of the Budget period. That will allow Land and Property Services (LPS) to continue to receive

applications for the scheme up to 31 March 2015. I have already written to ministerial colleagues on the matter to allow the measure to be implemented swiftly, and, as expected, I have received no views to the contrary. The scheme is very good, and so far it has seen 52 new businesses get up and running across the Province. I have visited a range of businesses availing themselves of the scheme, including a fish market in Enniskillen, a children's shop in Larne, a gift shop in Londonderry, a retro scooter shop in Carrickfergus and, indeed, just this morning, a restaurant in Belfast that has seen the creation of 28 jobs.

The policy makes a real difference to new business and, importantly, is a sensible cost measure because the Executive would not have got any money in from those units through rates if they had continued to be empty. It is, effectively, cost-neutral. There is no evidence of displacement, and it is entirely sensible to continue with it to help to reduce the number of empty units on our high streets. I am not alone in that assessment: Scotland has already announced that it is replicating our policy from next April. It is nice to be copied by the Scots. As Members may already be aware, shortly after I announced the policy last year, it featured in the final recommendations of the Mary Portas report on high streets. I hope that Members across the Chamber will support the measure when the statutory rule comes up for debate in the new year.

As I recently announced in the Assembly, the Executive have agreed to extend the small business rate relief scheme to include properties with a net annual value (NAV) of up to £15,000, rising from the previous figure of £10,000. That extension is part of the jobs and economy initiative and will provide much-needed support to an additional 3,500 business ratepayers. It builds on the enhancement already planned in the in-year review. The 20% rate relief will automatically be awarded to all eligible small business ratepayers with a net annual value of £5,001 to £15,000. However, ratepayers who occupy multiple premises that are more than three properties in total will not be eligible for relief under the scheme.

Another measure that I wish to take to ensure that we target assistance is to remove entitlement to double relief and, instead, recycle the savings into raising the valuation thresholds. That will maximise the number of businesses that get support of one kind or another. Since the small business rate relief scheme was introduced a couple of years ago, some ratepayers had the good fortune to benefit from 70% or 80% derating and also got small business rate relief.

I want to redistribute this support and bring more people who get no form of support within the reach of the small business rate relief. This would apply to ratepayers already entitled to derating for industrial or sporting and recreational use. The newly expanded scheme will last for a further two years, from April 2013 through to 31 March 2015.

1.30 pm

I know that the relief is not a panacea, but it is one of the measures that the Executive are using to try to help businesses in these difficult times. We listened to what businesses and business organisations had to say. I fully accept that rates form a larger proportion of small businesses' profits or turnover than is the case for larger businesses. Therefore a 20% reduction in this important

overhead will make a difference during these difficult economic times.

Over the next two years, under the proposed newly expanded scheme, eligible ratepayers will benefit from a reduction of, on average, £1,600 and it could be as much as around £3,000. Around £36 million will be awarded over the next two years to all eligible ratepayers, of which £26 million will be awarded to those currently eligible and £10 million to those who will be brought in under the extended scheme. Some £12.8 million has been awarded so far in the current year.

As stated, I am already taking steps to continue support for rural ATMs for the remainder of the Budget period. The findings from the most recent evaluation of the policy are that the most isolated rural areas continue to benefit from the scheme, with the location of 12 new ATMs in the three most rural wards since 2010. Research shows that cash withdrawn in rural areas is usually spent locally, so the scheme has its part to play in sustaining services in rural communities.

During the 2009 evaluation process, consultation with the banks revealed that the exemption was not necessarily a consideration when selecting a location for a new ATM, but they said that it influenced their decision to keep an existing ATM in a rural area. I am of the view that retaining ATMs in those areas remains an important issue in helping to ensure the financial inclusion of rural communities, especially given the loss of other financial services in rural areas in recent years, such as bank branch and post office closures, etc.

I move now to regional rates. It is well known already to Members that people in Northern Ireland enjoy the lowest household taxes in the whole of the United Kingdom. The Executive have pursued policies aimed at keeping more of people's money in their pockets. What is not always fully appreciated, however, is how competitive our business rates are compared with those in England, Scotland and Wales. A major factor in this is that the regional rate is being held constant in real terms throughout the Budget period.

As part of the overall four-year Budget, the Executive have agreed that rates should be held at the rate of inflation through to the 2014-15 rating year, providing certainty and stability for ratepayers in their financial planning. This means a planned increase of 2.7% in the regional rate for business ratepayers for the 2013-14 rating year, which is a continued freeze in real terms. That is lower than it would have been had we used the retail price index or the consumer price index as the measure of inflation. That builds on the regional rate freeze over a period of five years. It keeps rates as low as possible and means that, unlike anywhere else in the United Kingdom, business rates in Northern Ireland will have been frozen, in real terms, for eight straight years. We have adopted the lowest inflationary index, which is the GDP deflator.

In addition, the Executive, of course, continue to hold manufacturing rates at 30%, which helps around 4,300 manufacturing businesses with about £60 million in relief this year alone. That economic support is unique to Northern Ireland.

We have also retained empty property relief at 50%. That relief was removed in England and Wales, and I understand that Scotland is heading in the same direction. I feel that our policy is the right one, as borne out by my

Department's evaluation in that area, particularly given the growing number of empty shops. Of course, freezing domestic rates, in real terms, and deferring water charges have bolstered spending power. That is in marked contrast to the year before devolution, when there was a 19% increase in the domestic regional rate, the absence of a cap on domestic rate bills and looming water bills.

I do not think that we can emphasise enough, or keep emphasising enough, that those decisions have saved households hundreds, if not thousands, of pounds in the process. Of course, as I pointed out, that has been at a cost to public expenditure. However, I believe that the money has been of real benefit to the retail sector and has helped people in difficult economic circumstances.

I would like to touch on the non-domestic revaluation in 2015. As Members will be aware, the Executive have already agreed to LPS starting work immediately on the general revaluation of 72,000 non-domestic properties in Northern Ireland. From April 2015, that will redistribute the rating burden based on more up-to-date valuations. Unfortunately, that process cannot be rushed or brought forward more quickly. However, it will mean that sectors and trading locations that have not fared as well since the previous revaluation in 2003 will pay less and that those that have fared better will pay more, even if rental values overall have gone down. Just because a property has halved in value over recent years, that does not mean that rates bills will halve. When rental prices doubled, in some instances it did not result in a doubling of rates bills.

Members will be aware that, earlier this month, the UK Government announced that the non-domestic revaluation in England, which was originally planned for 2015, has now been postponed until 2017. However, the circumstances in England are markedly different from those in Northern Ireland in that they have completed two full revaluations since we last did ours, in 2003. Charging businesses a local tax that is based on old rental values is not fair, even though, as I said, some bills will go up and some will go down after the job is done in 2015. So, the exercise will go ahead in Northern Ireland.

As a final point, I would like to touch on a policy that affects domestic properties but that has ramifications for business and, in particular, the construction sector. That relates to the accumulated stock of new houses, which means those that were planned and built in better economic times. There are over 5,000 of those. Spec builders were granted an initial exemption of 18 months when the rating of empty homes was introduced in October 2011. That exemption is due to run out. I think that we need to extend it further, given the state of the market and the fact that it has not picked up significantly.

Over the coming weeks and months, I will be presenting new regulations to the Assembly to give effect to those various enhancements, extensions and improvements. I trust that I can rely on Members to support them, alongside the Finance and Personnel Committee, which deserves much credit for the work that it does by informing and scrutinising my Department's work in making the rating system more responsive to the needs of business. Let us not forget that devolution has allowed us to do that and to do things differently in Northern Ireland. For that reason, I commend the statement to the Assembly.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. I am nearly tempted to ask why he was in the retro scooter shop in Carrickfergus and whether he made any purchases, but however.

I particularly welcome the extension of the empty shops rates concession. That is very positive for town centres. What is the Department doing to highlight that and to ensure that more businesses, particularly more new businesses, avail themselves of that?

Mr Wilson: I thank the Chairman for his question. I did not buy a retro scooter. At the risk of annoying all the mods as well as the other people who I annoyed this weekend, let me say that I want a real bike. Now I have annoyed more of the population of Northern Ireland, but so what.

The Chairman asked an important question. I believe that the empty properties policy is very important to setting up new businesses and revitalising those properties. Very often, that increases the footfall in particular parts of towns. We have done a number of things. First, I have mentioned the policy on every possible occasion here in the Assembly. Secondly, I have now been to about nine locations across Northern Ireland and visited premises and got local papers to report on that to try to highlight its benefits and, indeed, to show that businesses have benefited from it. A lot of the owners have been very complimentary and indicated that it was part of what influenced them to take on the business. Thirdly, we have worked with the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association and other business organisations and chambers of trade to try to get them to publicise and sell the benefits of the scheme to their members.

Therefore, we have done a range of things. Although it has been in place only for a short time, there is already an uptake, but we wanted to capitalise on that. For that reason, we have decided to extend support for another two years. As people see the successes, I believe that the groundswell will build.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his statement. There are many good points in it. The large-stores levy was brought in during this current financial year, and it was used to increase the rate levy support from £5,000 to £10,000. How are we going to fund the increase in rate relief to include small businesses with a net annual value of up to £15,000, as proposed in the statement?

Mr Wilson: We are going to do it in two ways. First, the Executive have already made a commitment that, under the jobs and economy initiative, moneys that we had from Barnett consequentials, from departmental savings, from reprofiling spending, and so on, will go into a range of measures, and one of those measures is the extension of the small business rate relief scheme. The other way is taking those double reliefs from sports clubs and manufacturing businesses, which were getting relief on top of the relief that they were already receiving. That will release some money, which we have then been able to put into the extension of the scheme. As I said in the statement, the whole purpose is to try to encompass as many businesses as we can in the various relief schemes that we have, and we are succeeding in doing that.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his timely statement. My question follows on from Mr Girvan's. Is the whole

package really cost-neutral — if I can use that term — to the Executive? Do any moneys need to be added to it to fund the scheme?

Mr Wilson: The whole package is not cost-neutral. The part that I indicated was cost-neutral was the 50% rates relief on empty shops that had been vacant for more than a year. We were not going to get any rates from those shops if they did not come back into use, so, by deferring the rates for one year, we are not losing any money. In fact, in the longer run, if the business survives for more than one year, it becomes a cost-benefit to the Executive, because we get the rates in the second, third and fourth year, and so on, if the business succeeds. To a certain extent, therefore, it is a bit of an investment. It is not really costing us any money in the first year, but it gets us money later on.

Part of the extension of the small business rate relief scheme is cost-neutral, in so far as we are moving funds from those who are getting double relief to those to whom we are now giving relief for the first time. However, there is an ongoing cost to the Executive, and I have made it quite clear that the economy and jobs initiative, which will fund part of this, has involved taking money from Barnett consequentials, which could have been used elsewhere, or taking money from departmental savings, which could have been used elsewhere, or reprofiling spending, which could have been used elsewhere, and putting it into small business rate relief, so that element is not cost-neutral. There is a cost, even if it is only the opportunity, which is foregone, to spend the money in some different direction.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his statement. He has quite rightly indicated that using rates relief can do only so much. What, if any, other measures are available to the Executive and the Minister to address small businesses? In particular, what steps are being taken to address the burden of regulation that many small businesses face at this time?

Mr Wilson: Rates are the responsibility of my Department. We can look at what has been done across the Executive, whether it be in town-centre regeneration and the money that has been spent on town-centre infrastructure, or individual grants that are available to small businesses through the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, for example, such as the voucher scheme, which is now available and offers small amounts of money to businesses that are setting up and need consultancy or whatever. There are other reliefs such as that. Arlene Foster has also got the small business loan scheme, and the Department for Learning and Employment provides training grants for small businesses. Indeed, some small businesses that I have visited have actually availed of that training help and are looking at how they can avail of further help.

1.45 pm

Departments are therefore doing a whole range of things, all of which are important micro-economic interventions to help businesses that tend to be fairly labour-intensive anyway; that tends to be locally based and, therefore, have a commitment to the area; and tend to keep money in Northern Ireland. For that reason, we should not underplay the importance of the Executive's interventions in promoting small business at a difficult time.

Mr Weir: I join other Members in thanking the Minister for his statement. I welcome the initiatives that he mentioned in it.

With regard to the removal of entitlement to double relief and the fact that that will free up resources, which can then be re-targeted at helping small businesses, is the Department, at this stage, in a position to estimate the value of resources that can be freed up as a result of the removal of the double relief?

Mr Wilson: At present, I cannot give the Member a figure for the total amount of money that will be freed up as a result of the removal of double relief. However, I will explain the impact that it is likely to have on some businesses. Around 2,700 businesses will be affected by this. The average amount will move from £164 for some smaller clubs to £1,688 for some larger manufacturing firms. I should have the total figure. I am sure that it is somewhere in this big black book of answers. However, I cannot turn it up at the minute. If the Member wishes to have that information, I will write to him with it.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for his statement. He talked about promoting new businesses, and so on, and the rate relief for one year. Has he any plans to phase in some rate relief in the second and third years as well? For businesses to bed in, they need rate relief for more than one year.

Mr Wilson: No: I have not done so, and I will tell the Member why I have not done so. It has been as a result of consultation that the Department has had with business organisations. The Member makes a good point. Indeed, some businesses that received the relief for one year raised that point with me. However, the difficulty is this: we do not want to distort the market whereby we give one business an advantage over another and simply displace an existing business that does not have the benefit of the 50% rate relief with one that does. We restricted relief to one year to avoid that happening to small businesses.

The Member is quite right: start-up costs are usually one impediment to a new business. We felt that a year was the correct time by which to extend relief in order to give new businesses the start that they need without, in the longer run, giving them an advantage over competitors that are already established in the market. It came through very clearly in the consultation from, for example, chambers of commerce and, even, some small-business organisations, that although they wanted to see help being given, they did not want to see it being applied in a way that was unfair to their existing members.

Mr McQuillan: I welcome the Minister's statement, especially his announcement that rural areas will benefit from 12 new ATMs. Will he assure the House that this policy will continue?

Mr Wilson: The fact is that the policy is being extended and will stay in place until the end of the current Budget period. Obviously, I cannot make judgements about decisions that will be made by the Assembly or a new Minister after the current Budget period, or anything like that. However, I can give that assurance for the rest of the current Budget period. One of the reasons was, as I said, that we want to see the financial inclusion of people who live in remote rural areas. Also, the survey showed that 70% of the money that was taken out of rural ATMs was spent locally; very often, if it was in a garage or whatever,

it was spent in the garage where it was taken out. So it is a way of sustaining other local services, and that is one of the reasons why we thought that it was quite important.

Lord Morrow: This is a good news story all right. I welcome it, as I suspect that the rest of the House does. I see a plea in it from the Minister that, when the statutory rules come up for debate in the new year, we will not see the irresponsibility from the two parties opposite that we have had recently. That will depend on them having a change of heart.

Minister, you tell us that this is effectively a freeze on rates for some eight years. Do you not feel that councils could be doing much more around rates? For example, Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council has had no rate increase for the past three years. Do you not think that councils could play a greater part in driving this scheme forward?

Mr Wilson: I have absolutely no doubt that Dungannon council has been greatly influenced by the wisdom of the Member who asked the question. Of course he is right; there is no point in us freezing the regional rate if councils simply use that as an excuse to raise revenue by putting rates up by more than the level of inflation. While there are still some exceptions, councils now seem to understand that it is not in their interests to increase rates by more than the rate of inflation.

The Member made the point, and a number of councils — I will not name them, but I will do so some day — have criticised the Executive for not doing enough for small businesses in their areas. When I examine their district rate increases, I find that, although we have frozen our rates, they have put them up, sometimes by multiples of inflation. One of these days, I will lose patience with them and will name and shame them. I hope that the threat of naming and shaming will force councils to look at the rate increases that they impose every year to make sure that they are kept in line with the rate that we set.

Mr Allister: I am sure that we are all concerned about the fate of businesses in our constituencies. Indeed, in Ballymena town, in the past year, we have seen a staggering 10% increase in the number of empty business premises, to now just under 500 in the borough. The Minister intends to extend the empty shops rates concession. What measures will there be to ensure that there simply is not relocation by those currently benefiting for one year from taking up an empty shop? In order to make the scheme more attractive and more impactful in our country towns, will the Minister agree that it is time to look again at the possibility of extending it to empty offices as well, so as to provide a greater ambit to try to challenge the spiralling direction in which towns such as Ballymena have been moving?

Mr Wilson: First, the measure that we have taken today and the announcement that it will still remain for only one year is our attempt to do exactly what the Member suggests. I do not want to find that people simply move from one premises to another to get the benefit of the scheme. I suppose that this relates to the question asked by Mr Rogers. There will be capital costs in moving from one premises to another, and those capital costs are less likely to be covered entirely if the rate exemption lasts for only one year than if it were an indefinite exemption or one lasting three or four years. I think that, by limiting it to one

year, you cut down the likelihood of people moving from one place to another.

As far as the office issue is concerned, of course some offices are included. Offices where the general public have face-to-face interaction with the people who work there, selling or providing services, are covered. We took the view at the time that if we covered offices generally, there would be a greater chance of displacement, so we decided not to go down that route.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a ráitis. Tá ceist agam air. I thank the Minister for his statement. He will remember that the Committee agreed to his proposal to proceed with non-domestic revaluation in 2015 despite the decision to postpone that elsewhere. Is it the Minister's view that rebalancing the rating burden, based on more up-to-date values, will readjust that burden and negate the need for measures in the future, such as the ones he outlined here today?

Mr Wilson: Let us be quite clear about this: all the relief measures that we have talked about today will expire at the end of this Budget period, as is required by the legislation. If the next Assembly decides to renew any of those measures, it will have to start again from scratch.

When we introduced the regulations a year and a half ago, I explained that we believed the measures were necessary — this was only part of the reason — to deal with the disparity that has arisen due to different trading patterns since the last revaluation took place in 2003. So, the revaluation itself should help to even out some of those disparities. I do not know whether it will even out all of them, and I do not want to make an assumption about the outcome. We introduced the measures to at least reflect some of the changes over the intervening period that gave an unfair advantage to some businesses and penalised others. By and large, it was an out-of-town/town centre and large business/small business disparity.

Once we have seen the outcome of the revaluation, the Executive, or the next Executive during the next Assembly mandate, will, of course, want to look at whether all the issues have been addressed. However, I believe that most of the issues should be addressed in the revaluation exercise. That is one of the reasons why we decided to go ahead with the 2015 exercise, although that has been delayed in England and Wales and there may have been an argument for saying, "Let us keep in line and in step, so that we have revaluations at the same time right across the United Kingdom".

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I particularly welcome the rural aspect of the scheme. Are all those rural ATMs external so that they can be accessed 24 hours a day? Are there any incentives for shops and other organisations to externalise their ATMs?

Mr Wilson: They are all stand-alone ATMs. Incentives will really depend on whether businesses and banks believe there is a demand locally. All we can do is ensure that there is no cost disadvantage in doing so. One of the reasons we have kept the relief, which, as I say, is worth over £2,000, is that we want to keep ATMs in those areas. However, as I pointed out in the statement, banks have made it quite clear that that is not a big factor for them in deciding whether to put new ATMs in certain areas. There will be other factors, and I suppose it really depends on their assessment of the kind of usage and the feedback they get about potential usage from local communities.

Public Service Pensions

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Finance and Personnel wishes to make another statement, copies of which are in the Foyer for anyone who does not have one at this point in time.

Mr Wilson: I do not know that this statement provides the good news that the last one did. Nevertheless, I believe that it is a very necessary statement to inform the House of an Executive decision last Thursday, which, I believe, will have fairly massive implications for Northern Ireland.

As part of their programme of pension reform, the coalition Government are introducing major changes to the public service pension schemes from April 2015. I want to update Members on the position in Northern Ireland and how the matter will be dealt with now.

2.00 pm

The background is that proposals for reform of the UK public pension schemes were recommended in the final report of the Independent Public Service Pensions Commission on public service pension provision in the United Kingdom, which was published on 10 March 2011. Lord Hutton recommended that final salary pension arrangements in the public sector were unsustainable and recommended their replacement with alternative models that shared the cost of pension provision more equitably between public service employees and the taxpayer whilst continuing to protect the accrued pension rights of current employees — a conclusion that most of us in the Assembly must endorse. Given the simple fact that we all live longer, we have to examine how to pay for that and who pays for it. We must get the balance right between employer and employee in dealing with our finite resources and the status quo that has existed for years in areas such as pensions. We do not have infinite financial resources, and I, as Finance Minister, have made that clear to the Assembly on more than one occasion.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

The Executive recognised that change had to happen in Northern Ireland. As a result, the Executive decided, way back on 8 March this year, to adopt these pension reform proposals for Northern Ireland and, in particular — this is important — to commit to the policy for a career average revalued earnings pension scheme with pension age linked to the state pension age being adopted for general use in Northern Ireland public service pension schemes and to adopt that approach consistently for each of the different public service pension schemes in line with their equivalent scheme in Great Britain and not to adopt a different approach for Northern Ireland. That is an important decision, and I hope that Members will realise its significance as I go through the rest of the statement.

I sought immediately to persuade my Executive colleagues the very next month, April of this year, that my preferred option — indeed, the most sensible option — would be to table a legislative consent motion in the Assembly. That would allow the necessary legislative provisions for the reform of public sector pensions in Northern Ireland to be taken forward in the Westminster Public Service Pensions Bill. The alternative option would be to introduce our own public service pensions Bill in the Assembly, but that could

only be done once the Westminster Bill had completed its passage in Parliament and the final content was known.

I wanted to use the legislative consent motion for two key reasons: first, because it made sense, in that our policy on pensions was to keep parity with Great Britain, and, secondly and more importantly, because of the financial consequence of any slippage from the April 2015 deadline set by HM Treasury. The costs of delay, as I have already explained and highlighted in this House, are estimated to be in the region of £262 million a year. The only sure way to meet the deadline and avoid that would have been to use a legislative consent motion. I consistently made it clear to Executive colleagues that, if we did not use a legislative consent motion, we simply would not have our primary legislation, secondary legislation and system changes made in time to meet the HM Treasury deadline of April 2015 for the implementation of the required pension reforms in most schemes. Local government pension schemes will be reformed from April 2014.

I am very disappointed to announce that the Executive failed to agree to my recommendation for a legislative consent motion in this instance. Therefore, the Executive have effectively determined the legislative route to be undertaken to implement these reforms. In order to implement the binding decision of 8 March 2012, a public service pensions Bill for Northern Ireland will need to be introduced in the Northern Ireland Assembly, subject to Executive approval, and then to make its way through the Assembly process. That required process cannot commence until HM Treasury's Public Service Pensions Bill has completed its passage through Westminster. That is expected to be May 2013, when the final content will be known. Officials have estimated that a Northern Ireland public service pensions Bill may not receive Royal Assent until as late as January 2015. Every effort will be made to advance the legislative process when possible, but I point out that, in my view, we have potentially squandered our limited resources on an unnecessary process. We need to use those resources wisely in the current economic times.

Following Royal Assent to the proposed Northern Ireland Bill, secondary legislation will be required to amend the rules of each of the individual public service pension schemes in Northern Ireland. That may take up to an additional 10 months, which will result in an implementation date for the reforms of late 2015. The failure to agree to use a legislative consent motion means simply that we will not have our primary legislation, secondary legislation and systems changes in place by 2015. The introduction of our own Bill will merely take us to the position that we agreed in March but with a much longer timescale and a significant cost impact.

In introducing our Northern Ireland public service pensions Bill, I have given full account to the financial consequences of any delay because of slippage to the introduction of changes here and the timescale set out in Great Britain. I now have an estimate of the potential cost of a delay on an annual basis from the Government Actuary's Department. It worked out in detail the estimate of the health and social care scheme in Northern Ireland, which was chosen because it was the largest. A delay of one year from 2015-16 would result in savings forgone or additional liability in Northern Ireland of £100 million. That is 7% of the pensionable bill, and it would be for each and every year. My officials then conducted a similar exercise for the other

schemes using the methods that were used to arrive at that figure. The estimates were as follows: £62 million for teachers; £18 million for the police; £60 million for the Civil Service; £23 million for firefighters; and, as I stated, £100 million for health. That gives a grand total of over £260 million a year.

Although those figures do not represent a direct cash saving, it is likely that HM Treasury will seek to use a similar type of calculation method and recoup the amounts directly from Northern Ireland funding in the event that the reforms are not implemented. The scale of the £260 million is simply too much for us to manage. It will seriously impact on the delivery of public services here. Let me put it into terms that perhaps the general public will understand. Sometimes, we talk in global figures, and we may as well talk in Chinese for all that they mean to people. Let us just see what it means. It is more than Arlene Foster's entire budget in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. That would mean that the money that she has to support businesses, tourism, energy policy and so on would not be available. It is more than the entire Department of Agriculture and Rural Development budget, so it would mean entirely stopping support for the rural economy, the provision of veterinary services and closing down the Rivers Agency and the Forest Service. It is the cost of employing 5,000 full-time schoolteachers, which means that we would need to cut around one quarter of the schoolteaching workforce to address that financial cost. It is also the average salary costs of more than 8,000 full-time nurses, which is the equivalent to cutting around half of the total qualified nursing workforce.

I emphasise to the Assembly that the cost of pensions is rising. We have to control it now. We need to show leadership to our electorate and to the public in Northern Ireland. However, choosing legislative routes that add undue costs and delay the potential savings to be gained from implementing the pension reforms agreed to in March is not an efficient use of resources. The best that we can do now is expedite our legislative process and ensure that we proceed as quickly as possible. I expect all Members to lend their support to the smooth passage of the pensions Bill to minimise, as far as possible, the financial penalty. The electorate will find it difficult to comprehend why we decided to take the legislative route and wasted time and money that we can ill afford to lose. Therefore, the very best that we can do is get as close as possible to meeting the April 2015 deadline and not procrastinate and deliberate, as we are often inclined to, over the legislative process.

It is regrettable that I had to bring this statement to the Assembly. I know that I made a joke about it, but I hope that it does not overshadow the good news that I was able to announce earlier. I also hope that, during the debate on the statement, we will get a commitment to at least make the best of a bad job and get the legislation through as quickly as possible to avoid what, I believe, would be the disastrous economic consequences of delay.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. The Finance and Personnel Committee will not be found wanting in ensuring that the Bill proceeds promptly. We will work constructively with the Minister to ensure that changes are made before the deadline in two and half

years' time. I agree with the Minister that we cannot procrastinate on this matter. We need to get it right.

Will the Minister explain why the Department has been unable to prepare a Bill or associated regulations in tandem with or closely following developments across the water to allow for local considerations specific to here?

Mr Wilson: I thank the Chairman for that commitment, and I trust that we will not see a repeat of what happened previously. Committees want to do their job properly. However, as I have pointed out, last week, I completed the progress of the Superannuation Bill. It was a two-clause Bill, as opposed to the 35-clause Bill that we will have to go through for pensions. It took over a year to get that Bill through the Assembly, and the Committee looked for extended time. I welcome the Chairman's assurance that that will not happen again this time, because any extended time at Committee Stage will delay things even further. In fact, I have asked my officials whether they were too optimistic in the time that they laid down for Committee Stage.

The Chairman asked why we had not prepared legislation and regulations ahead of the Bill that is going through Westminster. The reason is that the Bill is going through Committee at Westminster and will then go to the House of Lords. Already, considerable amendments have been made in Committee, and I suspect that, as with any other Bill, amendments will also be made in the House of Lords. The OLC has made it clear to us that, as five Departments are involved, preparing legislation here as the Bill is being amended in Westminster would involve quite a lot of nugatory work. It might also require more and more consultation with Departments to make sure that every change that was made at Westminster and then built into whatever was being drafted here was discussed with all five Departments with pension schemes. Therefore, to make the best use of resources and time and to avoid the duplication of work, nugatory work and having to change the Bill continually, it made more sense to do it when the Bill had gone through Westminster and we had seen its final state.

Of course, the other point is that such work would delay the OLC's current work on other Departments' legislation, which people are already complaining about and asking why it has not come through. If the pensions Bill was given priority, the Department of Education, for example, may have to sacrifice its Bill on special needs education, which is at a fairly advanced stage. Losing that Bill might have had repercussions, and there might have been repercussions from losing planning legislation. So, it is not a cost-free option. Of course, it can always be argued that those Bills are ready to go and we know what Departments want them to include, so why not progress with them rather than with a Bill that may be changed two or three times while the OLC works at it?

2.15 pm

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his statement. He has done a good job of hiding his annoyance and frustration over the way that this is going. It seems that there is a dispute about who legislates for this. Have parties in the Executive agreed the principles of pension reform? How will those who voted for setting it up fund the £260 million?

Mr Wilson: They agreed not only the principles but, it is worth reiterating, the outcome of the process that the

Assembly will go through. That has already been decided. The Executive have adopted a position on it that all the main parties support. Indeed, although the Minister of the Environment, who is from the SDLP, did not agree on the legislative consent motion, he is taking through a pension scheme — ahead of all of this — that will reflect the principles of the pension legislation. So, everybody has agreed to not only the principles but the detail that:

“the policy for Career Average Revalued Earnings pension schemes with pension age linked to State Pension Age to be adopted for general use in the Northern Ireland public service schemes; and, to adopt this approach consistently for each of the different public service pension schemes in line with their equivalent scheme in Great Britain and not to adopt a different approach for Northern Ireland”.

So, we will go through a legislative process of which the outcome is already known. However, there will be considerable delay and the danger of a financial penalty.

Mr Cree: It is difficult to understand, but I suppose no more so than it is to understand the delay in the review of the financial process, which is currently bogged down, in which any right-thinking person can see the logic. For clarification for others who may not be aware of the point, is the £100 million that the Minister quotes as savings forgone merely employers' contributions?

Mr Wilson: That will be the additional cost or liability to the public sector for the pension schemes. If there is additional liability, the Treasury has made it clear that Westminster will not pay for it for public sector employers. You can see the logic of that. I know how unpopular this pension measure is. I get letters about it all the time. I have had, as I am sure has every Member, representations from trade unions and individual constituents. It is not a popular measure. Now, do we really think that Westminster is likely to adopt an unpopular measure, for which MPs and Ministers in England are getting it in the neck, and say, “By the way, if Northern Ireland doesn't want to do it, it is all right. We will pay the difference”? You would have to live in fantasy land to believe that. So, a penalty will be involved in this.

All that I can say is that I want to be proved wrong. I can tell Members that I will not drag my heels just to say, “I told you so”. This is too important for that. My officials and I will make sure that we do everything that we can to get this pension legislation through. I will be happy to be proved wrong at the end of the day. All that I know is that, when I look at past legislation and present posturing, I am not convinced that we will not finish up paying some penalty in 2015.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. The Minister will have read in the recent report on the Superannuation Bill that the Committee recommended that, on parity issues, the Department should undertake local consultation with Civil Service trade unions:

“at the formative stage of policy development and in tandem with, rather than subsequent to, the timetable followed by the respective Whitehall department”.

Has DFP already fully consulted on the pension reforms locally to identify any local issues and considerations, and, if so, what has been the outcome of that exercise?

Mr Wilson: There is a pensions forum anyway, and all these things are discussed regularly. However, we do not have legislation that we can consult on at present. Again, to try to shorten the period as much as we can, where we can do consultation ahead of, for example, Committee Stage, we will do that. We have already had discussions with the OLC. Where we can get some of the existing legislation displaced to allow the pensions legislation to be drawn up — albeit that there may well be three or four variations before we get it finalised — we will do that as well. We will try to shave off as much time as we can by advance consultation and advance preparation of legislation and so on. Even with that, optimistically, we will still be over the deadline.

Mr Weir: I thank the Minister for his statement, albeit one that is reluctantly given today. What implications will there be for us if there is any slippage in the timetable for the legislation to get through Westminster?

Mr Wilson: If there is slippage in the legislation getting through Westminster, that may well have an implication on the start date. However, Westminster has kept to the timetable to date. The legislation is coming out of Committee, I think, this week, which is exactly as planned. It will go to the House of Lords, and I do not see any reason why there will be any slippage there. Westminster is not anticipating any slippage on it. If there were slippage, of course, it would give us an argument to go to Westminster and say that it cannot impose the date of April 2015 on us if the final Bill was not agreed at the time when it was estimated that it would be. However, I do not see that that is likely to be an outcome, not since, to date, the timetable has been kept to.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his statement. Will not agreeing the legislative consent motion and the cost impact put jobs at risk?

Mr Wilson: I have given some illustrations of what £260 million would purchase: 8,000 nurses; 5,000 teachers; the whole of the DARD budget; the whole of the DETI budget. Of course, if we get the financial penalty, it will mean that we will not have the resources to spend on some of those things, and jobs will be put at risk. It is a bit ironic that, in wanting to exercise the role of the Assembly on something that the Executive have already agreed, we will create that degree of uncertainty. We have agreed what we will do with pensions at the end of the day.

I emphasise again that I am now focused and want everyone else to be focused on making sure that that penalty is minimised, if not eradicated, by swift action — swifter action than we have ever seen before. That means that Ministers have to clear papers quickly and not have them sitting there for two, three or four months. The parties that have brought this about need to bear responsibility. Secondly, when the legislation gets to the Chamber and Committee Stage, there must be no grandstanding, as there has been. I have to say, when I look at the performance on welfare reform, I get worried that the kind of grandstanding that some Members and some parties in the Assembly feel that they have to engage in could delay the pensions Bill. I welcome the assurance from the Chairman this morning — I will keep reminding him of it — that his Committee will not be involved in that kind of grandstanding and that he will stamp on it if it happens. I only hope that all Ministers are listening to what I am

saying and that papers will be cleared at a rate that has been unprecedented in the Executive.

Mr A Maginness: I listened with great interest to what the Minister said. However, is he not aware that there are many dedicated people in the public sector such as teachers, policemen and people who work in the health service who are very concerned that the legislation will result in the erosion of their pension and that they are right to defend their proper interests?

Mr Wilson: I do not understand where the Member is coming from for two reasons. First, his party's Minister's stated position is that, even ahead of this House making any decision, he will introduce pension reform for local government workers, which reflects what will happen in the rest of the United Kingdom. So, his own party's stance seems to be schizophrenic on this issue. Secondly, the Executive have already made a commitment on what the outcome of this will be. Whether we like it or not, we know that we cannot sustain a break with parity.

If the Member is really saying to me and the Assembly that he believes that the protection of pensions to keep them as they are currently are is worth a £260 million hit to the Executive's Budget, I want him to tell me and the House where that £260 million will come from. Is he happy for 8,000 nurses to go on the dole or for 5,000 teachers to be out of work? Is he happy for DETI not to have an economic development budget or for farmers not to have a penny spent on them by DARD? If he is saying that that is the cost and that is what the SDLP is prepared to pay for keeping pensions in their current form, much as people may be angry about it, then we know why it is a small party and will remain one: it is totally irresponsible.

Mr Speaker: As Question Time begins at 2.30 pm, I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. Questions on the statement will continue after Question Time.

The business stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Finance and Personnel

Mr Speaker: Questions 3 and 13 have been withdrawn.

Rates: Welfare Reform

1. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the impact of welfare reform on domestic rates. (AQO 2931/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Welfare reform has implications for the rating system. Those implications are being actively pursued by the Executive subgroup on welfare reform. The main reason why there are implications is because some of the money that would previously have been paid directly from the Exchequer through annually managed expenditure (AME) for rates relief has now been transferred to the departmental expenditure limit (DEL). There has been a 10% reduction in the amount of money that will be transferred. Of course, there will be no annual uplift in that, so the cost of the difference will increase as years go by. For that reason, we are looking at the implications in three phases.

The first and immediate phase is a holding operation. The Executive have already agreed that, at least for the first year and possibly for the second year — although the second year will be difficult, as I will explain in a minute — we will pay the difference, which will cost £13 million. We will keep the current level of rate relief available to single pensioners, etc, in place.

We will then need to look at an interim solution and decide what changes can be made to the scheme to keep it within cost and to reflect the changes that there will be with the introduction of universal credit. Once universal credit comes in, we will not even have the means of identifying who might qualify under some of the rate relief schemes. The passport benefits will all have disappeared, so we have to look for a solution. I hope to bring forward a consultation document that will be presented to the Executive and then go out for wider consultation. As a result of the Social Development Minister's achievement in getting some changes to universal credit, we now have until April 2014 for universal credit to kick in. That may allow the current scheme to roll on for some time.

In the longer run, we will have to make changes on the basis of affordability and of how to identify people, because we will no longer have the passported benefits due to the introduction of universal credit.

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

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for that extended answer. Given the pressure that councils will be under because of local government reform, have any discussions been held concerning any changes to future assumptions brought about, in particular, by changes to housing benefit?

Mr Wilson: This is really an issue of how we administer housing benefit and rates relief. It should not have any impact on what councils do. This is more for central government Departments and the policy that we adopt. For

that reason, there will have to be an Executive consultation document on what changes we need to make to the scheme.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat. The Minister said that the Executive's support is assured for one year and possibly two years. He seemed to indicate that the second year is in some doubt. Can he clarify the situation with the second year?

Mr Wilson: The Executive have said that they will be prepared to finance it for two years. The only reason why I say that the second year is in doubt is this: how do we choose the people who are eligible for the relief? If the passported benefits have disappeared because of universal credit, do we have to set up a separate administrative system to identify those who should be eligible for relief? That is why I have my worries about extending the scheme beyond April 2014. We may well have to do it. If we do have to do it, we will have to set up our own administrative arrangements, and, of course, there are costs involved in that as well.

Mr Campbell: Can the Minister outline the extent of that additional cost, given the problems that the Assembly is facing in respect of welfare reform, as it would particularly apply within the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP)?

Mr Wilson: The cost will be £13 million in the first year. We know that because there is a 10% reduction on the £130 million allowance we have. In the second year, it is estimated that the cost could be as high as £20 million. Members may ask why it would increase from £13 million to £20 million, and there are two reasons for that. First, many of the allowances are age-related so, as the population ages, more people become eligible. Also, some of the allowances are related to income and family circumstances, and the recession is likely to push more people into it. Secondly, even with just an inflationary increase in rates, the amount of the rates bill will go up by inflation, and we expect a normal inflationary increase in the sum.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Will he indicate whether there have been preliminary discussions on anticipated pressures on other relevant departmental budgets in the aftermath of welfare reform, particularly in terms of anti-poverty interventions?

Mr Wilson: That is one of the things that we have been looking at. The Minister for Social Development takes the lead on this through the welfare reform group, but one of the things that we have been looking at is whether all of the money that we spend on passported benefits — there is a range of them, and I am not going to go into them all now — could be pooled and spent in a different way that targets the people who are most affected by welfare reform. That would require some very hard political decisions: Ministers would have to give up some money, and they would have to stop some current schemes, which would not be popular. That is one of the discussions that the welfare reform group has been looking at.

Budget: Review of Financial Processes

2. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the benefits of progressing the review of financial processes. (AQO 2932/11-15)

15. **Mr I McCrea** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the review of the Budget process. (AQO 2945/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will take questions 2 and 15 together.

In February 2011, the Executive commissioned a review by my officials of the financial process in Northern Ireland. On 9 March 2012, following consultation with the key stakeholders, including this Assembly, I circulated a paper to the Executive, reporting the outcome of the review. To date, that report has not been tabled for discussion by the Executive.

Mr Easton: I thank the Minister for his answer. What is delaying the Executive discussions on the review report's action plan?

Mr Wilson: I have said this before in the House, so I am not giving any new news. The stated aims of the paper were to: increase transparency and accountability to the Assembly, which would give it clearer information on how money was being spent and delivered by each Department; align the Budget Estimates, the Budget and the accounts with the same set of figures so that Members could understand the financial information being presented; and strengthen at an early stage the strategic Budget process, which would have allowed for earlier engagement by the Assembly and its Committees.

Those aims were supported by all of the parties. In the last Budget period, I remember the lack of those things being one of the criticisms, especially from Members opposite. Despite all of that, the Education Minister, for some reason or other, does not want any transparency in his budget and does not want that degree of accountability. He held the process up by refusing to agree the paper. Therefore, Sinn Féin has not allowed the paper to be brought forward, and, at this stage, we are still left without the changes to the financial process.

Mr I McCrea: Will the Minister outline what disaggregated information the Department of Education provides for input into publications by Her Majesty's Treasury and national publications?

Mr Wilson: Here is the ultimate irony in all of this: the Minister who is holding this up because he does not want to divulge the information and wants to have flexibility to move money from his budget around without that degree of accountability, provides the very detail that we seek to have to the Treasury in England. He provides to the Treasury information on the amount that is spent on preschool and primary education, post-primary education, other educational services, youth services and community relations. If you look at the Treasury publications, you will find that information. However, it will not be made freely available and presented by the Department of Education and the Minister of Education to the Assembly. I cannot understand it; the Brits get more information than people here do.

Mr Kinahan: I look forward to the financial process being more intelligible. What scope does the Minister have to break the logjam in the Executive so that we have a more accountable system that we can all understand?

Mr Wilson: I have the same scope as with the pensions Bill in that, once papers have been delayed by the Executive for three meetings, as a result of reforms that we

introduced, I can bring the paper forward myself. I did that with the pensions Bill, and I think that I will have to do that with the financial processes Bill. I hope that it does not get the same treatment as the pensions Bill, where a cross-community vote is demanded and, therefore, it becomes stuck regardless of the fact that the majority of Executive members may wish it to come forward. I hope that that will not be the case. That is one way of breaking the logjam and a route that I have to consider.

Mr Allister: I am reluctant to intervene when the Executive are doing such a good job of flagging up their own dysfunctionality, but I want to ask about the resistance of the Department of Education and the Minister to transparency in the Budget. So as people might understand, does that mean that, at the moment, we have a global line in the Budget with no breakdown of where the money goes in the various sectors in education? Is it the case, in consequence, that the Minister of Education can shift money from the controlled sector to the maintained sector and Irish-medium sector without anyone ever knowing anything about it because it was never in anything but the most general terms in the Budget in the first place?

Mr Wilson: The Member is right that the headings are very broad and cover schools mainstream, schools infrastructure, and youth and community expenditure. Money can be moved within that.

I do not seek the degree of control whereby every minute line is outlined in the budget process because, of course, Ministers need some flexibility. I do not believe that any Minister should fear the changes that we are asking for. After all, the Assembly votes money on the basis of bids that are made by Ministers, and there are discussions about the budget and an anticipation that money will be spent in a particular way. If it will not be spent in that way, the Assembly and the Committee should at least be aware of that, and no Minister should fear that. All that it means is that you have to argue your case for changing the pattern of expenditure, and that is good for openness, transparency and accountability.

Mr Speaker: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Prompt Payment: Subcontractors

4. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how he will safeguard subcontractors to ensure that they receive prompt payment for both private and public sector work. (AQO 2934/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As far as we are concerned, the main control for prompt payment to subcontractors is to be found in public sector contracts. We have tried to do certain things to make it easier for subcontractors in the private sector who feel aggrieved to go to arbitration — that arbitration can be cheaper, etc.

The Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) guidance for public sector contracts says that, first, payments by main contractors have to be made within 30 days of a valid invoice. Secondly, there should be monthly reporting by the main contractors on subcontractor payments and the progress that has been made. Thirdly, payment issues should be regarded as a standing item at project meetings. Fourthly, there has to be validation by project managers, for example, by conducting random checks, that subcontractors have received payments. Lastly, where

main contractors fail in their obligations, we can exclude them from applying for public sector contracts for a one-year period.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I met the Construction Employers Federation (CEF) in recent weeks, and contractors and subcontractors are appreciative of the measures that have been taken by the Department to try to deal with the issue. They are very strongly of the opinion that this works better in England. In Germany, for example, there is a much more radical and efficient system that protects subcontractors. We need to move ahead from what we currently have here. Do you agree, Minister, that we need to consider more radical measures and changes to the system to ensure that what is currently happening with the ripple effect from Patton is not repeated?

2.45 pm

Mr Wilson: I do. The Chairman and the Finance Committee have raised the issue with me on a number of occasions, and they are quite right to do so.

We are considering the fairly radical step of introducing project bank accounts. Through that, when a contractor submits a bill with invoices for the work that has been done, the money would go not to the main contractor's account but into a project bank account and then be paid directly to the subcontractors on the basis of invoices that they have submitted and which have been agreed by the main contractor. On some occasions, the main contractor has held on to money. Rather than having that middle man, if a valid claim were issued and the main contractor were to say that it is a valid claim, the money would go directly to a subcontractor. CPD is considering that, and it would be a fairly radical step forward.

Mr Frew: I welcome the Minister's comments on project bank accounts, which are badly needed in our construction industry. Another big issue for the construction industry is the practice of subeconomic tendering. What steps are being taken to prevent subeconomic tendering in the future?

Mr Wilson: Public procurement regulations enable contracting authorities to set aside a tender that they regard as being abnormally low. Of course, that is after offering the tenderer the opportunity to explain and clarify why it has offered such a low tender because there could be very good reasons why someone believes that they could do a job at a rate that even the client believes is below the economic rate. We are now considering guidance to the centres of procurement expertise (COPEs) that will enable them to exclude bids that are below the economic rate.

We have to be very clear that there will be implications. You will find that there will be judicial reviews and challenges to some of those decisions. People always ask what the Government are doing on the issue, and I am outlining some of the things that we can do. Ultimately, however, the industry and members of the industry submit the tenders. If they drive prices down, which in turn drives firms to the walls or drives main contractors to put the burden on subcontractors, the industry also needs to address that. Although we have some responsibility, the CEF and all the other construction employers and organisations also need to do things to sort out their industry. I say that to them all the time. You might think

it odd to hear it coming from a Finance Minister, but subeconomic prices are not to anyone's advantage.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I want to ask the Minister a couple of things. First, as part of the Pre-qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) process, some firms have tendered for work and received work when, on the face of it, they have absolutely no history and no experience whatsoever in that work, constituted as that firm. Secondly, in the prompt payments report from the Audit Office, we saw that, beyond Departments, there were education and library boards, health trusts and local authorities that were being more than dilatory in their payments —

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to finish.

Mr McGlone: Will the Minister advise what he has done to accelerate that process of prompt payment?

Mr Speaker: There should be only one enquiry in a question.

Mr Wilson: The Programme for Government has a target for payments within a 10-day period and a 30-day period. Some Departments have succeeded in achieving that more than others. My Department has a 99% rate of payment within 30 days. Other Departments, sometimes brought down by their arm's-length bodies, do not have such a good record.

We can do a number of things. The Finance Minister and the Committees must keep emphasising to Ministers that, if there are bodies that are associated with Departments that are not engaging in prompt payment, they have to do something about it and start leaning on them. In times when businesses find it hard to get money from the banks, we cannot afford to put them under even greater pressure as far as working capital is concerned. That pressure will come from ministerial level right down to the ones who are failing to do it.

As to the question about firms that have no record of doing similar work, it is not always possible to say exactly what similar work is. You do not want to close the market to new entrants. However, I think that the Member was alluding to firms that go bankrupt and set up another company. I am pleased to tell him — because, Mr Speaker, the Member first brought it to my attention — that, as a result of his bringing it to my attention, the procurement board has now agreed that, if a firm becomes insolvent before or during a tender process, it will be excluded from the contract.

Road Projects: Finance

5. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the financial consequences for other road projects, such as the A26, should there be any further delay in the progression of the A5 project. (AQO 2935/11-15)

Mr Wilson: When I announced the outcome of the Executive's October monitoring round and the 2013-14 and 2014-15 Budget realignment, I explained that, as far as the delay on the A5 and A8 road schemes was concerned, there was money that would not be spent in this year.

Two things have been done. The first is that, in the monitoring round, the Department for Regional Development was allocated £31 million, which could be spent mostly on water projects that could be brought forward to this year. That money has to go back into the roads budget next year. So, this year, we will get some

construction work done, albeit by Northern Ireland Water rather than Roads Service.

Secondly, where there was money that could not be spent this year and would have to be carried over, I am pleased to tell the Assembly that the Treasury has now agreed with the proposal that I put to them, which enables us to carry over £50 million into the final year of the Budget period. That means that there should be no impact on other spending decisions and projects. Therefore, other road schemes should not be affected by the delay in either of these two projects.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for clarifying the situation for me. I am disappointed by a letter that the Minister sent to me, in which he referred to the fact that he had not received any representation from Minister Kennedy on the A26 road scheme, particularly in relation to finance. Given that the scheme covers a Budget period beyond this Budget period of 2011-15, will the Finance Minister explain to the House what carry-over mechanisms are in place to ensure that a project identified in one Budget period is delivered in the next?

Mr Wilson: It is up to the Minister for Regional Development to decide which projects he wants to carry forward and prioritise. The A26 road scheme was identified as one for the next Budget period.

We do not know what the capital budget will be for the next Budget period or what other measures we might undertake. We are looking, for example, at resource-financed investment, whereby we switch some resource into financing loans for capital expenditure. However, that decision will have to be made when we come to discuss the next Budget. As we really do not know what resources will be available, it is difficult to say at this stage whether even some of the things that have been set as priorities now can be done in the next Budget period. On the other hand, if there were to be a relaxing by the Government of restrictions on infrastructure and capital spending, or new ways that would enable us to borrow, some schemes that we think do not have a hope of getting started might get started.

Mrs Overend: Will the Minister advise us of the costs to date of the delay to the A5 project?

Mr Wilson: It is estimated that the cost is about £10 million per month. However, it is not actually cost; it is simply unspent money that we have to look for ways of spending. As I said, to ensure that money is spent this year, we are bringing forward some Northern Ireland Water projects, which would have been done next year, and they will give work to the construction industry. The money for those projects will then be transferred from the Northern Ireland Water budget to road infrastructure. There will be some delay in the rest of the spend on the A5. However, at least that money will not be lost, because the Treasury has given us the ability to carry it over right into the final year of the Budget.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his answer, and I wish him good luck in the conclusion of his discussions with the Treasury on the funding mechanism going forward. Will he confirm that everyone concerned still intends the A5 to proceed as envisaged?

Mr Wilson: Yes. The reason why we have gone to such lengths to secure the money and to make sure that,

although we cannot spend it this year, it will be available next year or the year after, is an indication of the good intent on the Executive's part. We have gone to great lengths to secure it, because the great fear was that the Treasury, which, for obvious reasons, is very hard on carrying money over, has acceded to our request. We have been able to tailor it in such a way to make sure that the Treasury does not compromise its position on the Administrations in Wales or Scotland.

Chambers of Commerce

6. Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions he has had with the chambers of commerce regarding the acute economic and financial difficulties currently facing traders. (AQO 2936/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As part of the consultation, my proposal is to rebalance the rating system. I have had extensive engagement with local chambers of commerce, and I have also spoken to bodies such as the Federation of Small Businesses and NIIRTA. I have visited a number of locations across Northern Ireland, including Ballyclare, Belfast, Newry, Limavady, Londonderry, Newcastle, Lisburn, Fermanagh and Banbridge — and Carrickfergus and Larne, which I am in every week anyway. I have done a grand tour of Northern Ireland, and I have spoken to traders, councils and traders' organisations. I have had feedback on what is and what is not working and on what needs to be done. I have tried to be as realistic as possible with the workload.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his answer. I concur with what he said, because in conversations that I have had with the Belfast Chamber of Commerce and the traders whom I know, they said that they are very appreciative of the work that he and his colleagues continue to do. So, I commend him in the House for doing that. Given the feedback that I have received and that he mentioned, will he continue, through this very difficult period for traders, to work with those locally and with chambers of commerce across Northern Ireland not just in the run-up to Christmas but as we go into the new year?

Mr Wilson: Not only will I do that but other Ministers will do the same. We should consider the amount of money that has gone into the jobs and economy initiative and at the ongoing work that the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Minister for Social Development are carrying out and at what the high street task force is doing by looking at what can be done to help small businesses.

We should also look at all the work that DETI is doing with the retail business, including the small business loans fund, which will give loans of up to £50,000 unsecured for five years — many small businesses cannot get that from the banks — and at other training initiatives that have been undertaken. If we consider those, we will see that it is not just the Department of Finance that is engaged in this; the whole Executive are engaged in looking at ways in which we can help small businesses in Northern Ireland. As I said earlier, those microeconomic interventions can be as important as some of the headline macrointerventions that tend to get most of the news coverage.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. I hope that he enjoyed his tour. I was going to ask him where he has not been, rather than where he has. Does he have any assessment of the overall percentage of our retail

outlets that have shut down? Equally, how many of those may have re-opened on a charitable basis or as charity shops and may not be obliged to pay rates as a result?

Mr Wilson: I am sure that that information is available, although it is not available in the big black book of answers that I have here today. Therefore, I cannot give the Member that information, but I will. I will say to the Member that, on a day when we have announced a whole lot of positive things, I would prefer to see Members emphasise the positive things that are happening, rather than wanting me to give all the figures that illustrate the bad or the gloomy news about Northern Ireland.

This year, 52 businesses have opened as a result of the empty shops relief; half the businesses in Northern Ireland are getting a 20% reduction in their rates as a result of actions that the Assembly has taken; and businesses in the manufacturing sector will have £60 million available to them that they would not have if they did not have the rate relief. Over the next two years, as a result of the small business rate relief, businesses will have £36 million in their pockets that they did not have previously. Those are the good things. Perhaps we should talk about the good things rather than always look for the bad news. The journalists do that. This is an Assembly. We, as Members, should at least try to get some optimism into the economy.

3.00 pm

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

Termination of Pregnancy Guidelines

1. **Mr A Maginness** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will publish guidelines on the medical termination of pregnancy in light of the tragedy reported in Galway. (AQO 2946/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): It would be inappropriate for me to comment on the tragedy in Galway, but I do wish to extend my deepest sympathy to the family of Savita Halappanavar.

As to the publication of guidance, as I have stated before, I will take my time to explore fully all the issues involved and to ensure that any document produced for health professionals is compatible with the requirements of the law. I will not, nor should I, given the gravity of the issue, rush to produce guidelines to an artificial timeline.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his answer. This is a difficult task facing the Minister, and one respects his position. When compiling such guidelines, will he remember that there is intense public feeling around the abortion issue? Will he do all in his power to protect the life of the unborn child?

Mr Poots: The position of the Department of Health is that we are seeking to save lives and protect life. That is the first and foremost rule in the Department on the provision of healthcare: it is about saving lives, not taking life. I believe that that applies to those who are born and to the

unborn, because we seek to save and protect life. We are very clear that the life of the mother has a priority here, but that is purely in those instances in which the life of the mother is under threat. Some form of social abortion is not something that I will ever be bringing before the House or seeking the support of Members for, and I do not believe that if I were inclined to do so, it would receive the support of the House because it is not something that is publicly supported.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for his response. Has he had any recent discussions with the Royal College of Midwives or other health professionals about their concerns around the delay in publishing the guidelines? Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Poots: I was with the Royal College of Midwives recently on the development of a maternity strategy. We have not discussed the issue to which the Member refers. I know that there are people from the Royal College of Midwives who are advisers to Marie Stopes. I am of the opinion that the role of midwives is largely to ensure quality care for expectant mothers and the babies whom those expectant mothers are carrying; to ensure that they receive the best possible support throughout that pregnancy; to ensure the safe delivery of that baby; and to provide considerable support thereafter to ensure that the baby gets the best start in life, as opposed to being involved with something that is, in fact, taking the life of the unborn child.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister will be more than aware that there are a lot of calls for guidance for professionals. Does he consider the law on abortion in Northern Ireland to be clear?

Mr Poots: The law is clear here. Abortion in Northern Ireland is regulated by criminal law, and termination of pregnancy in Northern Ireland is illegal, unless there is a real and serious threat to the life of the woman, or if there is a real and serious threat to the physical or mental health of the woman that is either long term or permanent in its nature. In any other circumstances, it would be unlawful to perform a procedure that terminates a pregnancy. We can produce guidelines that will, perhaps, help to provide clarity for obstetricians in particular situations, but that will not change the law. This House is the only thing that can change the law, and, as I indicated, I will not be bringing anything before the House to change that law.

Mrs Overend: Will the Minister be following closely the investigation of the Galway tragedy so that any lessons relevant to Northern Ireland could be quickly applied?

Mr Poots: I am not exactly sure what the Ulster Unionists' position might happen to be. I am very clear that we set the rules here on abortion. It is not something that has been kept at Westminster, and I am glad that it is not with Westminster. A previous Secretary of State indicated that it was their deepest regret that they had not introduced abortion to Northern Ireland. Some people who maybe advocate direct rule are, on the other hand, opposed to abortion. The two things are not compatible. Perhaps they can learn that that is the case.

Mr Allister: Despite such help as guidance might give to some, does the Minister agree that to bring certainty and quell the controversy that has arisen from the opening of the Marie Stopes abortion clinic, an option he might consider would be to provide that such termination of

pregnancy as may be lawful in certain circumstances could only lawfully be carried out in a National Health Service facility? That would bring that certainty. Would the Minister consider that as a way forward?

Mr Poots: We are considering all options and are seeking legal advice on all of them with respect to what can be applied in Northern Ireland. The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) is continuing with its course of work. There is different governance for Northern Ireland than for the rest of the UK in that respect. It may be something that can be done simply by giving RQIA all the responsibility for monitoring all bodies.

Alternatively, it may be that we only permit abortions to be carried out in a health service facility. All those things are open for discussion. All those things are being looked at. When we have received all the advice, I will bring this matter to the Assembly. Thankfully, you have a Minister who does have this particular position. Had you a direct rule Minister, the position may be completely different; they may have welcomed Marie Stopes to Northern Ireland and supported abortion in Northern Ireland. I am thankful that the Assembly is not in that position.

Mr Speaker: Mr Lunn is not in place to ask question 2.

Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Services

3. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the future of paediatric congenital cardiac services following the recent announcement by the Secretary of State for Health that he would be following the Independent Reconfiguration Panel's recommendation that the Safe and Sustainable review of paediatric congenital cardiac services in England and Wales should be reviewed. (AQO 2948/11-15)

6. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the consultation on paediatric congenital cardiac care following the fresh review announced in England by the Secretary of State for Health. (AQO 2951/11-15)

9. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will suspend the current consultation on paediatric congenital cardiac services in light of the decision to review Sir Ian Kennedy's recommendations. (AQO 2954/11-15)

Mr Poots: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will answer questions 3, 6 and 9 together.

The review announced by the Secretary of State for Health in England has no immediate relevance to the review being undertaken by the Health and Social Care Board on paediatric cardiac surgical services in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland public consultation is, therefore, continuing as planned. I expect to reach a decision on the provision of that service for the population of Northern Ireland in early 2013.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Minister for his response. Does he accept that the fact that the recommendations of the Safe and Sustainable team have been called into question by the Independent Reconfiguration Panel has caused significant concern for the public in Northern Ireland? Will he update the Assembly on his work with the Irish Minister for Health with regards the feasibility of a joint all-island children's heart surgery service?

Mr Poots: Clearly, Jeremy Hunt has rolled back from what was proposed in the work that has been done in England. We are engaged in a consultation process. I have to say that a lot of people, who are very well qualified medically, support the report's recommendations. I do not think that we can ignore that, because those people have particular expertise, but I think that there will be a lot of problems with the implementation of such a report for Northern Ireland, not least the fact that a lot of people would end up being separated from their children at a time when they want to be with them most. There is also a huge potential for children's lives to be lost when their parents are not with them, which is something that I would be appalled by. So, we will look at all the options. I had a very useful meeting with Minister Reilly and his most senior civil servant last week, and that course of work is continuing. I hope that that will lead to a fruitful outcome, but we have to wait and see.

Mr Nesbitt: Should the Minister go ahead with downgrading the existing facilities in the Clark Clinic, what sort of knock-on effects would there be in retaining specialism and other treatments for young people in the broad area?

Mr Poots: I have not taken any decision to downgrade anything, but, at this moment in time, if you were to lose cardiac paediatric care, it would have an impact in respect of the requirement for anaesthetists, and, consequently, that might put further stress on the hospital. Members need to realise that our children's hospital is relatively small, and for a lot of the more difficult and complex procedures, care is not available in Northern Ireland. Indeed, care will come under greater pressure to be available in Northern Ireland, as we do not have the scale to have the support surgeons and consultants in place. So, this is going to be a continuing challenge to us, and, hopefully, we will get over this hurdle and find a progressive means through it. Members should recognise that given the nature of it and given the population that we have, it may not be possible to provide everything in respect of care for children directly here in Northern Ireland, and we need to operate in other networks.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht as a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. Will the Minister suspend the current consultation on paediatric congenital heart services in light of the decision to review Sir Ian Kennedy's recommendations?

Mr Poots: We operate under different legislation to the rest of GB. Therefore, if we are to make decisions of significance, it is incumbent on us to engage in consultative processes. I am not going to break the law and then make a decision, only for it to be challenged by judicial review. I will allow the consultation process to run its course and will make a decision based on best advice available. We will get a lot of advice coming from the health side and from the parents and families who have had children treated in the Clark Clinic and have gone through surgical procedures here in Northern Ireland.

I want to ensure that we have the best possible treatment paths and the best possible care for these young children who need the best possible care and do not need second-class treatment. I want to ensure that they only get the best possible care, whether it is here in Northern Ireland, whether it is in Dublin, or whether it is across in mainland Britain.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his honest answers on this issue. The Minister is well aware that the Health Committee was in the hospital last week and took evidence on this issue, which is important to children and families. It is also a very emotive issue. We made a proposal that the Minister suspends the current consultation process. Taking on board the answer that the Minister gave previously, if the Minister is willing and is looking to make a decision early in the new year, where does the review of the review that has taken place in England fit in? Is there a time frame for when that report is due to come out?

Mr Poots: Clearly, we had the Kennedy review, which gave its recommendations, and it does not sit in isolation from other courses of work that were carried out in 2011. Indeed, there will be close scrutiny of the success rate of operations that have taken place in the Royal Victoria Hospital over the course of time; 2012, and so forth. It is absolutely critical that all of that is taken into account. We engaged in the consultation process, and we will come to a decision.

3.15 pm

We do not believe that the review in England has immediate relevance to our review. We are going about our course of work and will arrive at our decision based on the information that we have received at that point.

Mr Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn.

Chronic Condition Management Programme

5. **Mr Dallat** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the uptake of the chronic condition management programme to which he committed in the Programme for Government. (AQO 2950/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Programme for Government (PFG) commitment is to enrol people with a long-term condition who want to be enrolled on a dedicated chronic condition management programme. There is currently no comprehensive picture of what patient education and self-management programmes are available across Northern Ireland. Under that PFG commitment, the year 1 milestone for 2012-13 is, therefore, to identify patient education and self-management programmes for long-term conditions that are in place in each trust area, including information about the number and type of programmes, provider organisations and number of attendees.

My Department is working with the Public Health Agency (PHA) to establish a data set of such programmes for the baseline year 2011-12. Once that is in place, it will help to inform priorities for commissioning of patient education and self-management programmes in the future. Arrangements will be put in place to monitor progress over time with regard to the number and type of patient education and self-management programmes that are available and the number of attendees.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his answer. I listened carefully to what he said. Can he give some indication of what additional resources have been designated to meet the targets that he has just told us about?

Mr Poots: As regards resources, obviously, in our role with telemedicine, for example, we have identified that we will put an additional £18 million into people's engagement in greater self-management and home care. People with

chronic conditions will be able to have information sent to the central database and will, therefore, get a much quicker response when vital signs demonstrate stress because that is updated by the individual daily. We have decided to make that very significant investment, which will impact on the lives of some 20,000 people.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Minister for outlining the work that has been done so far. Is he in a position to outline the distinctions in the programmes in the various trust areas? If it is too early for that, will it be the case that, eventually, in the longer run, resources will follow the greater prevalence in the various trust areas?

Mr Poots: Certainly, some trusts have been much quicker in their responses than others. I would like to see all trusts respond in a way that ensures that we can roll things out as quickly as possible and impact on as many people as possible, because it is evident to us that the more that we engage people in self-care, the more early interventions we will have. Early intervention generally leads to better management of a chronic condition, which does not allow it to become an acute condition. That is all beneficial. We have evidence of some really good work being done by some trusts. Others are falling behind. They need to look at that, identify why they are falling behind, and pick up speed.

Mr Beggs: Can the Minister advise when the health service in Northern Ireland began such closer management of chronic conditions and when significant improvements in the quality of care and the resultant reduction in hospital bed days can be expected and are, in fact, already being achieved in Northern Ireland?

Mr Poots: I launched the Department's policy framework 'Living With Long Term Conditions' in April 2012. The framework provides a strategic direction and driver for commissioning, planning and delivery of services for adults with long-term conditions in Northern Ireland. A key feature of the policy framework is that people with long-term conditions should be supported to self-manage their conditions and have the knowledge and skills that they need to be able to do so effectively in order to maintain or enhance their health and well-being, as well as their clinical, emotional and social outcomes. A long-term conditions regional implementation steering group is to be established to drive forward the framework. It will include representation from the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), the PHA, health and social care trusts, and the Long Term Conditions Alliance NI. The terms of reference are being finalised. It is anticipated that the implementation group will be in place shortly, and a key outcome for the regional implementation steering group will be the development of an action plan to progress the good practice set out in the policy framework.

Mr Speaker: Question 6 has already been answered.

Domiciliary Care: Private Firms

7. **Mr McKay** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the governance and accountability arrangements which exist for firms offering private domiciliary care on behalf of the health trusts. (AQO 2952/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority, as the independent regulator of health and social care providers, has responsibility, under the Domiciliary

Care Agencies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007, made under the Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, to regulate — that is to register and inspect — domiciliary care agencies against minimal standards, which are published on the Department's website. Inspections are carried out annually.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Will the Minister confirm that there will be no change in the governance and accountability arrangements?

Mr Poots: If any change takes place, it will be a further tightening of governance. We cannot slacken or reduce in any way the governance and regulation of those who provide care to people who are vulnerable. It is absolutely critical that we do not drop our guard when it comes to providing care for people who are in a vulnerable condition.

Mr Dunne: Will the Minister provide an update on the provision of remote telemonitoring in older people's homes, as managed by Fold TeleCare centre in Holywood, in my constituency?

Mr Poots: Up to the middle of November, approximately 2,500 people in Northern Ireland have benefited from remote telemonitoring since its introduction. A further 124 have been referred and are awaiting its installation. The service will allow those with chronic conditions to be monitored regularly from home and will ensure that changes in their condition are identified at the earliest point.

Mr Gardiner: Does the Minister accept that with the increasing reliance on domiciliary care, there is increased need for respite care to support the families?

Mr Poots: I think that that point has a lot of validity, particularly where we are seeking the support of voluntary carers. A lot of those carers operate under a huge amount of pressure, and if they crack, the system ends up having to deal with both individuals involved. So, it is essential that we provide good support for carers, and one way of doing that is to have adequate respite care.

Mr McDevitt: Does the Minister know how much was paid last year to private providers?

Mr Poots: I do not have a figure for the amount paid to private providers, but I do know that we spend £265 million on nursing home care; £203 million on domiciliary care; £160 million on residential care; £78 million on day care; and £59 million on social work.

In all of that, we need to ensure that we get value for money. We are spending huge amounts of government money. In the financial year 2010-11, the hourly cost of providing domiciliary care in the statutory sector was £16.76, while in the private sector it was £12.77. So, if we can ensure that the care provided by the private sector is of equal standing to that in the statutory sector, there is an obvious saving to be made, and it would be inappropriate for anybody in the House, including me, to stand in the way of this House saving the healthcare system money, which can then be dispensed and used in better ways throughout the system or to provide better care for others.

Health Service: Accountability

8. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to enhance accountability within the health service. (AQO 2953/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am building on existing accountability arrangements to ensure that we hold all our arm's-length bodies (ALBs) to account on all aspects of their expected performance. This includes the operation of their governance arrangements; their use of resources, covering money, people, estate and information; the quality and safety of the services; and their overall service delivery against agreed targets and priorities. The role of the chair and the board of each ALB is being reinforced. Chairs now play a prominent role in twice-yearly accountability meetings held by the permanent secretary individually with each body. My Department has also issued revised codes of conduct and accountability to the board of each body and will shortly issue a board-effectiveness assessment tool, which is to be completed by each body over the coming months. I am considering the potential to facilitate more direct involvement by the general public and other stakeholders in the accountability arrangements.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Minister for his answer. Minister, are you content that hospital managers react quickly enough, particularly those in A&E, in extremely busy periods?

Mr Poots: This year, I have asked for an escalation plan to ensure that we are well prepared. If a hospital is used to having, for example, 240 attendances at an emergency department but gets over 300 people every day for a solid week, it is absolutely essential that it can cope with the additional numbers who will inevitably be admitted and that the department itself can cope with those additional numbers.

Over recent months, the number of people who breached the 12-hour standard has fallen from 986 in March to 301 in October. The percentage of people seen within four hours has also improved, albeit not as much as I would have liked. In March, 75.9% were seen within four hours, and by October, that had increased to 80.7%, which is a welcome improvement. It is important that that performance is sustained and is built on through the winter months, which can always prove challenging for us. I will look to the HSCB to continue to work with trusts to ensure that the focus remains on the performance of emergency departments and, indeed, that managers respond very quickly to needs.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for his responses so far. What measures has the Minister put in place at the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service to ensure accountability and transparency at all levels?

Mr Poots: The Member may be aware that considerably greater accountability measures have been applied to the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service over the past year than might previously have been the case. The Department's attendance at board meetings and the fact that, for many areas, procurement has to be cleared through the Department mean that there is considerably greater watchfulness when it comes to the governance of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. Of course, there is a reason for that: some people did not seem to apply the governance rules as well as they should have. We are looking to turn the ship around and are making progress with the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. The focus needs to be on ensuring that the bad practice of the past does not continue into the future, and that is where my focus is. I cannot undo the things that happened in the past, but I can hopefully set the Northern

Ireland Fire and Rescue Service on a route that leads to that type of behaviour not forming part of the future.

Mr Speaker: Question 9 has already been answered. Chris Hazzard is not in his place for question 10. Dolores Kelly is not in her place for question 11. I call Raymond McCartney.

Mr McCartney: Question 10; thank you.

Mr Poots: I will respond to question 12, unless Mr McCartney has become Mr Hazzard.

Health Service: Consultancy Fees

12. **Mr McCartney** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline how the £3.2 million spent on consultancy fees represents good value for money when front line services are under pressure.

(AQO 2957/11-15)

Mr Poots: The £3.2 million approved by the Executive for Transforming Your Care (TYC) implementation support is not just for external consultancy. It provides for internal project support, such as a central project team, and for the backfilling of posts to allow day-to-day management to continue while others are engaged in the strategic reform process.

Some £661,000 has been spent to date on external consultancy for TYC. I will expect the HSCB to make a robust case to me for any further expenditure beyond that amount and to demonstrate how the transitional investment will help in the delivery of fundamentally improved outcomes for patients.

Notwithstanding that, I am clear that to plan, design and implement the scale of reform envisaged by TYC, across a budget of well over £4 billion, will require some external support.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answer. There was public outcry about the amount of money spent. Although the Minister, to some extent, costed some of the consultancy fees, does he feel that that was value for money?

Mr Poots: For the money spent, I think that we got much better value for money than the company, in many ways, would have liked to provide.

3.30 pm

It was a very tight bidding process, and we received from the company substantial work and support in driving things forward, particularly in bringing the trusts to the point at which they provided to us the qualitative information and draft population plans that they had produced. We now have a draft strategic implementation plan and moved from what was a vision to reality. The consultation is taking place. Rolling on from that, we will move into the new year with that consultation coming to a close and able to make decisions that should save the health service considerable money and, at the same time, provide a better quality of care, which is what is most important to the people whom we serve.

Question for Urgent Oral Answer

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Speaker: Ms Maeve McLaughlin has given notice of a question for urgent oral answer to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

I remind the House that I wrote to all Members on Friday to say that, from now on, if they wish to ask a supplementary to a question for urgent oral answer, to avoid further confusion they should rise continually in their places, as they do at Question Time. I have noticed at Question Time that some Members still have a problem rising continually — continually is the word — in their place. The Member who tabled the question will be called automatically to ask a supplementary. I will then call Members who are on their feet to ask a supplementary, taking account of the same issues that I have at Question Time, including getting the right balance of parties in the House and many others. I expect the majority of questions for urgent oral answer to be finished within 15 or 20 minutes.

Altnagelvin Area Hospital: Fire

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the fire at Altnagelvin hospital on Friday night.

Mr Poots: Although we await the formal report from the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) on the cause of the fire, all indications suggest that the cause was accidental and not related to the fabric of the building. The seat of the fire was in a small plant room, and at no time did the fire penetrate the roof into areas accommodating patients or staff.

The majority of the disruption was caused by very significant water ingress, emanating from pipes adjacent to the fire in the plant room that had melted with the heat of the fire. The emergency plans of the trust, when tested, proved hugely effective, and the evacuation of patients and staff was managed in a very professional manner, without injury to anyone involved.

This was a truly integrated response by the three emergency services working in close collaboration with the staff of the trust. All who participated should be thoroughly congratulated on their sterling efforts. I spent some time on Saturday meeting many of them and was inspired by the dedication and commitment that they demonstrated in seeking to protect the safety and well-being of patients.

The vast majority of areas in the hospital affected by water ingress have already been brought back into operational use. Minor work is ongoing on two wards, and I expect that to be completed shortly. Patients from these wards have been relocated to suitable accommodation elsewhere in the hospital. In light of this experience, the trust is considering the reallocation of patients to wards, with a view to better accommodating orthopaedic patients with heavy casts in lower floors of the building.

Over the past three years, my Department allocated approximately £5 million of capital investment for

measures to update and enhance safety standards in the building. My Department's officials will continue to work closely with the Western Trust in ensuring that the Altnagelvin hospital provides a safe environment for the care of patients. Should, a need ever be identified for additional resources to maintain patient safety and service provision in the Altnagelvin hospital site, I can assure you that these will be made available. As part of a wider redevelopment of the hospital, plans and funding are in place to relocate the inpatient accommodation from the tower to a newbuild ward block with an estimated capital cost of £50 million.

We will carry out a comprehensive incident review to ensure that any lessons to be learned are adopted across Health and Social Care (HSC). The impact of the fire on patient services is that 33 planned surgical procedures due to have taken place today were cancelled by the trust. However, the hospital's emergency services continue to operate as normal.

Again, I commend all of those involved in managing the incident and in the evacuation process on demonstrating the utmost professionalism and dedication.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for that. I also acknowledge the role that the emergency services and the health professionals played on Friday and over the weekend. I have no doubt that they assisted in preventing what could have been an awful tragedy.

There is a public concern about reports on the health and safety issues in the block, and the fact is that the building is one of the oldest in the health estate. If the investigation finds that the building is unfit, will the Minister assure the House that he will move to ensure that investment is made in Altnagelvin, given its role in the community?

Mr Poots: I think that I gave that assurance in the initial response. If anything to do with patient safety were compromised as a result of the fabric of the building, we would ensure that funding were made available to rectify that at a very early point.

We have invested approximately £5 million on the site over the past few years to maintain health and safety. That money has provided a new fire evacuation lift and has upgraded the fire alarm system and, indeed, the electrical installations. In all that, we have recognised that the age of the building — it is a 1960's building — is such that work needs to be done. Importantly, we have recognised that we want to build a new facility and to replace the building altogether. In the meantime, however, we will ensure that it is a safe environment.

I make it very clear that there is no evidence whatsoever that anything to do with the fabric of the building caused the fire. I believe that something else caused it, and I trust that the Fire Service will be in a position to indicate the source of the problem, hopefully quite soon. We do not need to cause alarm among the public by saying that our hospitals are dangerous or that they are susceptible to fires or anything else. I believe that there were particular circumstances why the fire happened.

The staff's response was absolutely magnificent. Nonetheless, our hospitals need to be safe environments, and the people who go into them need to be aware that they are safe. The press, other media and some politicians may wish to cause concern and alarm, because that grabs

a headline. I am not interested in grabbing headlines; I am interested in dealing with facts. The fact is that nothing to do with the fabric of the building caused the fire. Therefore, people should not relate it to previous reports, given that considerable work has already been carried out to ensure that such an incident would not happen.

Mr Campbell: I join the Minister in highly commending the nursing and medical staff and the emergency services, who responded magnificently on Friday night as a result of the incident.

The Minister indicated that there would be a comprehensive incident review. Will he ensure that each and every acute hospital comes under the terms of that review? That will determine how they would cope if an incident like that were to occur at any of our major hospitals, with dozens, perhaps scores, of patients having to be moved out of a site.

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for the question. Each hospital is expected to have an emergency plan to deal with such circumstances. The Western Trust's emergency plan stood up to the test. It was a real-life emergency: 120 people were evacuated in less than two hours. I had the privilege of meeting many of the staff on Saturday. When the ward sister first noticed the fire alarm going off, she went down the ward to see what the problem was. She identified that an ingress of smoke was coming through the ventilation system. She had the patients moved to a safe part of that floor within seven minutes, which is absolutely magnificent.

The PSNI gave us huge support, as did the Fire Service and the Ambulance Service. The administration and management staff were in there really quickly. Our porters and ancillary staff were identifying where other beds could go. Our pharmacists were involved in ensuring that the people still kept their drugs. All the records had to be moved, because the patient beds were staying in the same place. People were going up and down 10 floors, carrying individuals with broken bones or other orthopaedic problems on stretchers. A huge effort was involved, and we should all commend and recognise the way that staff pulled together and did their work. They performed the role that was asked of them admirably.

How that incident was responded to and dealt with will be a learning experience for all our hospital facilities, as will how we ensured that nobody's care was compromised as a result of the quality of staff in Altnagelvin Area Hospital.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. I want to echo the praise that the Minister and others gave to the emergency services and hospital staff. I was on the scene on Friday night with my colleague Pat Ramsey, and it was humbling to witness, at first hand, the heroic efforts of staff to ensure the safety of their patients.

Given that the need for a new hospital building to replace the tower block has been identified and accepted, will the Minister please give the House details of when work on that building is due to be commenced and completed, and whether, given the major safety concerns that exist, it is possible to expedite that work?

Mr Poots: As the Minister who identified that that development should go ahead, I welcome the fact that we have made that commitment. My Department is working with the Western Health and Social Care Trust to finalise the business case, so, the developmental work has

commenced. We had to develop the business cases, and the planning phase as the hospital architects and so forth would see it has commenced. We hope to start that work in the 2013-14 financial year and complete it in 2016.

That is a different and separate investment from the satellite radiotherapy unit, but both facilities should be finished in 2016. That is a demonstration of our commitment to Altnagelvin Area Hospital as a key hospital in our network. We want the best services for the people in the west of Province. We also want a high-quality hospital to support that community.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, Mr Speaker. I thank the Minister. It is important that others have praised the efforts and work of the staff, local people and the emergency services. This was a major incident, and the Minister has outlined some of the stuff that took place. Staff went above and beyond the call of duty, and it is important that we recognise that.

Minister, I appreciate what you said, and it was useful to say that we should not add to the speculation or to any of the stories that are out there, but, in your answer, you mentioned that the fire was nothing to do with the fabric of the building. I assume that you have an idea or have been advised that there is an idea of what caused the fire. Will you indicate what that is? If it was not the fabric of the building, what were the circumstances? When will we get the final formal report on the fire?

Mr Poots: Although it would not be right for me to predetermine the outcome of an investigation that is being carried out by the Fire Service into the source of the fire, I know that it is following a particular line of inquiry about how the fire might have started. Thankfully, it was not a major fire, but the ingress of water as a result of it was major. Indeed, the pungency of smoke spreads very quickly, and when I was there late on Saturday afternoon, I could still smell the smoke right down on the second floor. It does not take a lot of fire to cause a lot of harm and a lot of problems.

As soon as the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service has identified the source of the problem to its satisfaction, I encourage it to publish its findings. That will give the public greater confidence in the facility and may provide a warning to others about how they might avoid fires in the future.

Mr Beggs: I also want to put on record my thanks to hospital staff and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service for their speedy and safe evacuation of patients and for addressing the fire. What actions are being taken to minimise disruption, including perhaps the cancellation of planned surgery, and when does he expect the hospital to return fully to normal?

3.45 pm

Mr Poots: Staff worked through the weekend. Until now, I had not mentioned the estates staff who came from all over the trust area, including Fermanagh and Tyrone, to provide support in areas of the hospital where work needed to be done. They moved quickly and effectively, so we hope to have most of the hospital occupied again today. Some of today's operations were cancelled. No emergency procedures will be affected by the fire. By later this week — in fact, I hope that it will be earlier — the hospital will be operating as normal. We want the hospital

normalised very quickly, which I trust will be the case by tomorrow or Wednesday.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí sin. I thank the Minister for his answers and add my words of commendation to those of everyone else for the work done by staff and the emergency services on Friday night and throughout the weekend.

The Minister said in strident terms that this had nothing to do with the fabric of the building, but, unfortunately, the notion has crept into public commentary that it perhaps was, and I note what the Minister has said today. It is important that the Fire Service report is put in the public domain as quickly as possible, because although this will go off the news agenda, it will linger in the public perception. I hope that the Minister will ensure that the report is done as speedily as possible.

Mr Poots: I have had the conversation with my permanent secretary that once the Fire Service is satisfied, the cause of the fire needs to be made public as soon as possible. I believe that doing that will assist us in providing confidence and warn others how simply a fire can start.

Mr McCarthy: Like others, I pay tribute to the excellent work of the services over the weekend. Is the Minister convinced that a proper and fit for purpose maintenance regime operates throughout the health estates to prevent such a situation happening again?

Mr Poots: Yes.

Mr Wells: I am sure that the Minister agrees that the staff performed magnificently over the weekend. I also mention the offer of help from Letterkenny General Hospital. The offer was very welcome, although I understand that help was not required. When everything is settled and the hospital is back to full working order, it may be worth issuing a report, not of condemnation but from which to learn from the textbook response of Western Trust staff to what could have been an awful disaster. Other hospitals may learn from how well staff dealt with this incident through spreading best practice throughout Northern Ireland.

Mr Poots: I absolutely agree. People test emergency procedures, but this was a real-time trial in which an incident happened and people had to respond, and they did so remarkably well. Staff acted above and beyond the call of duty. Many of those who were there until the early hours had already worked all day. They were supposed to have signed off duty that evening and gone home to enjoy an evening's relaxation with their family, but they were there into the early hours of the morning sorting out all these issues.

I was impressed by the whole-system approach. This was not just about the porters, the nurses and the doctors; but about the system coming together in its entirety. Even Translink was involved in ensuring that people were transported within the hospital grounds. It all worked remarkably well. I think that other hospitals in Northern Ireland and beyond have a lot to learn about how these things are handled.

When we come to look at a new ward block for Altnagelvin, I suspect that you, Mr Speaker, will be glad to hear that it will not be a 10-floor block. It will probably be around three floors, from which, should the situation arise, it will be easier to evacuate people.

Ministerial Statement

Public Service Pensions

Business resumed:

Mr Allister: I ask the Minister: what sort of an Executive agree and commit to pension reform then drag their feet for eight months before deadlocking on taking the obvious, necessary step of a legislative consent motion? What example does that set to the public, to whom Ministers tell their responsibilities from time to time?

As regards the specifics of the legislation, will the Minister assure me that it will extend to the quangos and arm's-length bodies, including Northern Ireland Water whose senior staff still benefit from a contribution of 26.9% of their salary towards their pension and pay less than 3% themselves? Will that be tackled in the legislation and brought to an end?

Mr Wilson: First, in relation to the second part of the question, the policy intention is that the provisions will apply to all public sector schemes. That includes some of the smaller bespoke schemes that make pension provision for employees in public bodies that are not captured in the above categories. It will also include the pension schemes in North/South bodies, although the time for that has been extended beyond 2015.

As far as the Executive are concerned, let us make it quite clear. Most parties in the Executive have behaved in a totally responsible manner on this matter. The people who really need to answer the hard questions are those in the SDLP, whose Minister is actually going to introduce the changes ahead of the rest of the changes in the Assembly — his local government scheme will be introduced by 2014 — and those in Sinn Féin, who signed up to it and then, whether as a result of fear of criticism by the SDLP or by some of the trade unions bodies, then decided to go down this route.

However, let us make it quite clear that they are still bound by the Executive commitment. Let me just remind them again, and I will keep reminding them, that they will abide by the policy of career average and the policy of linking to the state pension age, and they will not adopt a different approach for pension schemes for Northern Ireland than those proposed for the rest of GB. That is, and remains, the Executive policy.

This is purely an issue of process, and I guarantee that if the process is not completed by April 2015, and we get hit with a bill for tens of millions of pounds, the people of Northern Ireland will not understand, least of all those who Sinn Féin claim to be looking to help; people who are disadvantaged, who need jobs and who need support in times of hardship. However, at the same time, Sinn Féin is quite happy to hand tens of millions of pounds back to the British Exchequer.

Mr Agnew: Where does the £260 million cost that the Minister referred to go? Will he confirm that it goes, in fact, towards paying the pensions of retired teachers, police persons, and Civil Service workers? If that is the case, Minister, you said earlier, when you referred to freezing the regional rate, that it is better that the money is in people's pockets than in government coffers. Why is that money different? You also referred to the thousands of teachers

and nurses who could end up in the dole queue at a cost of £260 million. Is that not equally the case with the cost of corporation tax, which will also cost hundreds of millions?

Mr Wilson: I have to say that the Member's grasp of economics is as good as his grasp of changes in the climate and the things that have to be done to deal with them. He believes that not only can he overturn the laws of nature by changing what happens in the sun but he can also overturn the laws of economics. We all know why there is only one of him in the House when we hear a question like that.

The fact of the matter is that if the liability for pensions is reduced in other parts of the United Kingdom we will have to fill that increased liability here. I do not know whether he has ever heard of the term "opportunity cost". If we spend resources on one thing, we cannot spend those same resources on something else.

I have outlined the stark choices that are before us. People are living longer and pension schemes are under-capitalised and, therefore, the money has to come from some other area of government expenditure. I have given some examples of that. It means that you spend less money on teachers, nurses, economic development, agriculture and a whole range of other things. That is the stark reality of it.

He mentioned the comparison with corporation tax. There is no comparison. The difference is that the only reason for looking at the devolution of corporation tax is that, by having that tax power here and giving up some resources by reducing the corporation tax rate, we will create jobs in the private sector by encouraging firms to invest. If the Member went and did a wee bit of economics first before standing up in this House, he would not ask such stupid questions.

Mr Lunn: I apologise for not being in my place when the Minister started his statement. Perhaps the previous questioner learned his economics at Grosvenor High School.

Mr Wilson: He did not learn it from me. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Lunn: The Minister said that this would be an unpopular measure, which it is obviously is. Does he agree with me that, out there in the private sector, final salary schemes are being discontinued wholesale and replaced by career average schemes? Will he also confirm that the indexation of pensions in payment will still apply when the dust settles?

Mr Wilson: First, even those who are going to be hurt by this recognise that there have to be changes in the pension schemes as they are at present. However, after these changes have been made, pension schemes will still provide good pensions for people in the public sector, though they will not be as generous as they are now. Some people will not be affected at all because those who are within 10 years of retiring will still have the same conditions attached to their pensions.

People who have paid to date will still have those contributions frozen for the kind of pension which they receive at present. The changes that will apply will still leave pension schemes generous, in terms of some of the pension schemes in the private sector, albeit not as generous as they were in the past.

I can understand why people are reluctant to see those kinds of changes, but most sensible people realise that they have to come. The important thing, as far as I am concerned, is that we have to make the best of a bad job. We have to make sure that there is no grandstanding on this. I fear that we will, and that is why I welcome the assurances that have been given today that there will not be grandstanding on it, but only time will tell if that is the case.

I assure this House that if there is grandstanding there will be a very heavy price to pay, because people across Northern Ireland in different parts of the public sector — and the people who receive public sector services — will suffer.

Mr D McIlveen: I, too, apologise for not being in my place when the Minister started his statement. He is, obviously, aware that there are parties around the Executive table that have supported legislative consent motions when their Ministers have been in danger of missing a particular deadline that has been imposed on them.

Does the Minister agree with me that some parties in the Executive are playing politics with the pensions of people in the public sector, the very people who they claim to champion?

4.00 pm

Mr Wilson: I am glad that the Member raised that point. It is a point that I should have raised, and it is a very good point. Maybe I should get him to do some briefing for me on these things in future. He is quite right: there is not a party in the Assembly whose Ministers have not used legislative consent motions at some stage or other. I hear the argument, "This is all about process. We have a devolved Administration, and, therefore, we should deal with these matters in the devolved Assembly. In fact, devolution requires us to deal with these things locally." Yet, as the Member quite rightly pointed out, when it suits Ministers to get something through quickly or if they have a particular interest or a particular embarrassment, they are quite happy to use legislative consent motions.

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

All that I can say is that if the principle of legislative consent motions has been accepted, the public will find it very difficult to understand why a legislative consent motion that could have been used to save Northern Ireland tens, if not hundreds, of millions of pounds was rejected.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister. As has been acknowledged, this is an important but contentious issue. Although the general principles can be agreed, it is not clear from the Minister's comments thus far why the principle of respecting the role and function of the Assembly was not addressed in his approach over the past number of months. Perhaps the Minister should question his approach, given that, at times, he has upset not only ministerial colleagues but the normally docile, constructive and co-operative Finance and Personnel Committee. Perhaps he should examine his own approach in addressing the issue of why the other parties have adopted this approach. It may have more to do with his style of ministerial jurisdiction than any lack of logic on behalf of the other parties.

Mr Wilson: I do not understand the question that the Member is asking. First of all, the matter was introduced to the Executive. The Executive, including Ministers from his own party, agreed what the approach should be: we will follow faithfully what happens in the rest of the United Kingdom. The matter was not brought back to the Executive for eight months because one party in particular refused to allow it to come back. There was nothing that I could have done during that period.

Some people may ask why we did not prepare legislation here in Northern Ireland. First of all, no Executive decision had been made on what the process should be. Secondly, we could not prepare legislation while the legislation was not even finalised, let alone introduced, at Westminster. Since the legislation has still not been finalised at Westminster, there is great difficulty in preparing it here.

The Member can say what he wishes about my responsibility in this. My responsibility was to bring forward the proposals, which was done; present the paper to Ministers, which was done; and have meetings with Ministers to remind them that this is a matter of urgency, which I did regularly. However, I cannot force people to co-operate if they do not wish to co-operate. I still do not know why they do not want to co-operate because they are not against legislative consent motions in principle. They are not against the proposals of the Bill at all, and they know the full consequences of the actions that they have taken, yet they are still prepared to go ahead with those actions. I think that the examination should be of those who made that decision rather than of the person who tried to get a sensible decision made.

Committee Business

Education Bill: Extension of Committee Stage

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): I beg to move

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 8 April 2013 in relation to the Committee Stage of the Education Bill [NIA 14/11-1].

The Education Bill underwent its Second Stage on 15 October 2012. As part of the Committee Stage, the Committee for Education sought and recently received a relatively large number of substantive written responses. This week, the Committee will begin its oral evidence sessions, involving key stakeholder organisations.

To allow sufficient time for the Committee to consider the evidence and any proposed amendments, an extension to the Committee Stage of the Education Bill is being sought. I assure the House that the Committee will endeavour to conclude its work well in advance of the proposed extended deadline. On behalf of the Committee, I ask the House to support the extension of the Committee Stage of the Education Bill until 8 April 2013.

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 8 April 2013 in relation to the Committee Stage of the Education Bill [NIA 14/11-15].

Small Business Research Initiative

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 15 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to wind. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I beg to move

That this Assembly calls upon the Executive to actively promote and raise awareness and understanding of the small business research initiative (SBRI) across the public sector; and further calls upon the Executive to put in place appropriate measures to increase uptake of the SBRI by Departments and the wider public sector to help stimulate and drive innovation, especially in local microbusinesses and small and medium-sized enterprises.

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The aim of this debate is not to criticise or condemn any Department or the Executive for not availing themselves of the small business research initiative (SBRI). The aim is to highlight the potential of the initiative and to encourage and obtain assurances from the House that every effort will be made to raise awareness of it among all Departments and gain a commitment from them to look at options and, where appropriate, bring forward proposals to avail themselves of the opportunities that the SBRI provides for businesses.

SBRI uses public sector procurement to drive innovation. The Technology Strategy Board (TSB), which promotes the initiative, informed the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee that the purpose of SBRI is two-fold: first, to find solutions to the challenges faced by government through innovative technology; and secondly, to drive economic growth through innovation in industry.

The process starts with a public sector body, such as a government Department, identifying a specific challenge: a problem to which it needs to find a solution. That becomes an open competition to which any business can apply, and because the initiative funds R&D, there are some exemptions from the EU procurement rules. Of course, because SBRI is procurement rather than financial assistance, it is not governed by the constraints of EU state-aid rules.

Phase 1 of a contract can result in funding being allocated to a number of successful applicants to work on the feasibility of a project proposal. At phase 2, successful applicants will be offered contracts that can be aimed, for example, at developing a well-defined prototype solution. Contracts for phase 1 are typically in the region of £20,000 to £100,000. Contracts for phase 2 can be in the region of £1 million or more. To date, the highest value contract awarded under SBRI is in the region of £17 million. The Technology Strategy Board informed the Committee that it is particularly keen to promote SBRI in Northern Ireland as it offers real opportunities to microbusinesses and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and is ideally suited to the local economy and the business base. In the experience of the Technology Strategy Board, locally developed SBRI competitions attract more bids from local businesses. In that case, why has there been only one Northern Ireland-led and sponsored SBRI competition?

One of the main barriers to government participation in the SBRI is risk aversion. Mechanisms are needed to help to overcome risk aversion among procurement professionals and to get them engaged with the initiative. A second barrier is the assumption among policymakers that SBRI is just about procurement. That assumption needs to change, and policymakers need to see it as a strategic tool to drive innovation. We need a change of thinking or, perhaps, a change of culture. We need to move away from the traditional ways of thinking about procurement, whereby we procure only products and services. We need to start to think about the problems faced by Departments to which solutions have yet to be found. We need to consider whether there may be businesses that are in a position to undertake research and development in an attempt to devise and develop innovative solutions to those problems. We need to think about procuring solutions.

A quick scan of the Technology Strategy Board website shows that there are potential opportunities in a variety of fields, including health, agrifood, social welfare, energy use, energy efficiency, green technologies, environment, construction, transport, tourism, communications and information management. There is potential in each of the 12 Departments here, and in the wider public sector, to identify problems and to propose competitions under SBRI to come up with innovative solutions.

When the Committee undertook its inquiry into research and development, it was found that government was doing a lot to promote and encourage R&D. Funding has been allocated to R&D through a variety of programmes and funding streams. SBRI provides a real opportunity for the Executive to say that they are committed to R&D and will provide direct and much-needed support to our small business sector. The Executive could say that they believe in the potential of our SMEs and microbusinesses to provide good, innovative solutions to the problems we face. It is an opportunity for government to put its money where its mouth is.

Of course, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment has been engaged in some of that. The only Northern Ireland-led and sponsored SBRI competition to date has been in the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB), which is sponsored by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI). The Committee has learned that a new competition is soon to be advertised through SBRI. That will be to address the phosphate and nitrate problems associated with chicken litter and will involve DETI, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and the Central Procurement Directorate. It is anticipated that that will be signed off by 10 December. Ministers and their Departments are to be commended for their efforts in that regard.

We can do some maths. If one Department leads an SBRI competition in which three local small businesses receive contracts averaging £50,000, £150,000 will go to local small businesses. If one of those local businesses is successful and gets a contract under phase 2 at £500,000, a total of £650,000 will go to local small businesses. If all 12 Departments undertake similar-sized competitions, a total of £7.8 million will be pumped into our private sector small business economy before any company has sold a product or service.

Our best chance of encouraging our local technology-based SMEs and microbusinesses to apply to SBRI

competitions is to provide more local competitions for them to apply for. If they can achieve some measure of success locally, that can only encourage those same companies to apply for SBRI competitions in other regions and, therefore, bring new funding into the local economy.

The Radox case study, to which Members have had access, is a good example of the potential of SBRI. Radox is now set to play a significant role in the global marketplace, which is predicted to reach \$2.6 billion by 2014. That has come from an initial six-month phase 1 proof-of-principle contract of £90,000. It has also provided the company with insights into a much wider range of markets for its existing and future products. The SBRI provides the potential for many more of our small businesses to achieve similar levels of success.

4.15 pm

Early-stage funding, usually in the form of venture capital, is essential to exploit the economic value of research. There has never been a greater demand for venture capital in Northern Ireland, but there has never been so little available. During the Committee's inquiry into R&D, Northern Ireland Science Park representatives informed members that if this problem is not fixed, it will be the number one constraint to growing the types of businesses that we need in the knowledge economy. SBRI provides an opportunity for government to provide direct support to help to fix the problem. In the United States, an initiative similar to SBRI is called the small business innovation research (SBIR) programme. That programme is now considered the single most important source of early-stage funding in the US. We can make SBRI an equally important source of early-stage funding for companies in Northern Ireland.

We need to promote SBRI in the public sector, but the other side of that coin is that we need to promote SBRI to our local small business sector. Only companies with the appropriate level of sophistication to drive R&D will consider the initiative. We need to promote it to those companies, and we need to work to increase the level of R&D awareness and readiness in our small business sector to provide it with the capacity and capability to apply for competitions under initiatives such as this.

The research and development statistics for 2011 were released last week. Total expenditure on R&D is up, total business expenditure on R&D is up, and expenditure on R&D by SMEs is up. These figures are to be welcomed. However, Northern Ireland still lags behind most other regions. The 10 biggest spending companies accounted for 62% of the total R&D spend, up 3% from the previous year.

Not only do we need to keep increasing the expenditure by SMEs on R&D, we need to increase the percentage contribution that SMEs and microbusinesses make to the overall figure for business expenditure on R&D. The small business research initiative is one tool, and we have heard from the Technology Strategy Board about how effective that tool can be. Indeed, the need for increased awareness of its effectiveness and of the very fact that it even exists needs to be promoted by the Department and, indeed, all other Departments. It is one tool to help to achieve that business expenditure, and I seriously encourage every Department and every Minister to take a long hard look at its potential and to seek to promulgate that through their respective Departments. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr Newton: I welcome the debate. Research and development has been at the forefront of the thinking of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment since the start of this mandate. We produced a report on R&D, and that was recognised as a very positive step forward. The report was welcomed by the Minister, and the response from across the board, including from universities and industry, has been very favourable. There is a recognised need for us to explore all avenues of support. We need to up our game, especially in the area of innovation and R&D, and the Technology Strategy Board gives us another avenue to pursue. Launched in 2007, it plays a significant supporting and encouraging role in stimulating the levels of innovation activity. This support is for practical activity, helping businesses from a wide range of activities to develop their concepts, ideas, products or services into saleable business advantages. We all know that western economies need to innovate to succeed and that standing still is not an option. If it were, it would bring only business failure.

In Northern Ireland, we have tended to work towards seeking support from Invest NI, MATRIX and others, and the big Northern Ireland business names already work successfully with the Technology Strategy Board. TSB has established and is developing links with our universities and, indeed, the Northern Ireland Science Park and the Advanced Composites and Engineering Centre, which is located in the East Belfast constituency. There is, then, a strong base on which we can build, but we cannot be seen to be content with the level of activity. We need to increase and develop the level of activity to include many, many more SMEs.

Bringing increased numbers of SMEs into contact with innovation and R&D activity and helping them to succeed in this area, which, as the Chairman said, is often alien to them, will bring dividends to the participating firms, enhance the level of added-value products or services to their portfolio and give increased margins on products or services that are developed through an innovative approach.

Turning specifically to the small business research initiative, I can only welcome the approach that this sector of TSB is undertaking. The Committee's innovation and research report notes that members agreed that new structures are required to give that level of activity a lift. The Committee recommended a number of strands, and they have already been published. The SBRI approach is helping to address some aspects of the report.

At this stage, I thank the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), which introduced me several months ago to the small business research initiative. FSB has championed the initiative by making introductions and opening doors for staff from SBRI to enable them to talk with interested bodies. Again, I thank it for that. Through the power of government and public sector procurement, the initiative offers to drive innovation. It provides new and innovative solutions to public sector challenges, as it helps to create business opportunities for technology companies, especially for SMEs and those that are regarded as microbusinesses. The process is simple and straightforward. It encourages government Departments and other public bodies that are looking for new approaches and solutions to problems to think outside the box and about how they may be able to work with industry and the

private sector towards a solution. Companies are invited to make the provision of a solution.

The benefits are obvious. Northern Ireland's level of innovation will go up, SMEs will be encouraged to develop their thinking in the provision of solutions to government bodies, and the real benefits will flow by helping to rebalance our economy towards the private sector. I welcome SBRI. It will work through existing channels to stretch out to SMEs via local organisations and networks. Creating additional or new approaches would further confuse the situation. That is a complaint that we often hear from SMEs, particularly that the bureaucracy —

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

Mr Newton: I support the motion.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. As a member of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, I welcome this opportunity to speak on the issue. I firmly believe that any programme that exists for our small business sector must be explored and, indeed, exploited.

As we heard, this programme has two phases. First, if applicants are successful, they are awarded a grant of over £100,000 for two six-month periods. Applicants who then enter the second phase, and I think that it is important to point this out, will be offered contracts with a maximum value of £1 million and for a maximum of two years.

As we heard through the Committee, a range of businesses have availed themselves of the programme in a number of sectors, such as energy and climate, tourism, health, transport and policing. NITB, for example, had one competition to procure a number of mobile apps to promote tourist numbers and spend. The programme seeks to enable Departments and, critically, other public sector bodies to meet challenges by procuring innovative solutions to those challenges from technology organisations.

It is, therefore, the public sector body's responsibility to identify the specific challenge, and the programme then operates under EU pre-commercial procurement guidelines, as would be expected. Examples of such a programme have been highlighted. For example, the Retrofit for the Future competition was launched in England. It is important to point out that that was launched to save 80% of CO₂ emissions, and a total of 87 housing projects will benefit from the scheme, receiving a share of £17 million. Each retrofit prototype received an average of £142,000 to demonstrate how technology can cut carbon emissions. However, it has been pointed out that although 6,000 businesses have availed themselves of that in England, we are told that only 2% or 3% of funding has gone to businesses in the North of Ireland. Therefore, it poses several questions. Are the networks working? Is there a developed departmental understanding of the initiative? Is there duplication with other existing Invest NI-delivered programmes?

There are many aspects, particularly relating to healthcare, that could be addressed through SBRI in areas such as increased efficiency and improved patient care. In the life and health sciences sector, SMEs in the North of Ireland are at a complete disadvantage owing to their disconnect geographically from the complete supply chain. In consultation with local and regional organisations, such

as the Clinical Translational Research and Innovation Centre — quite a mouthful, but C-TRIC for short — there is a view that if that programme were targeted at healthcare, it would certainly improve opportunities for SMEs here. It would play a strong role in projects of that nature; in idea creation, owing to our unique mix of academics, business and clinicians; and in our ability to evaluate the effectiveness of novel healthcare technologies. I thank the proposer for tabling the motion on behalf of the Committee, and I support it.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Chairperson of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee for proposing the motion on its behalf. A focus on research and development is vital as we seek to support our indigenous businesses and navigate our way to economic recovery. The topic of the debate is timely, given that the Committee received a briefing on 8 November from Mr Stephen Browning and Mr Brian McCarthy from the Technology Strategy Board on the small business research initiative. I do not believe that there will be any major differences of opinion today, given the merits of the initiative, and the Ulster Unionist Party certainly is supportive of attempts to promote and raise awareness and understanding of it.

TSB is a UK-wide body that works closely with the existing structures in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and Invest NI, as well as with universities and other organisations, such as the Northern Ireland Science Park. In its submission to the Committee, the board described itself as the UK's national innovation agency, and its broad remit is to promote innovation and support innovative business. In carrying out that function, it provides a series of grants to businesses of all sizes, with 60% to 70% going to small and medium-sized enterprises. That is a welcome shift in focus from TSB, given the hardship faced by many small businesses in the current economic climate. The funding has operated in a range of areas, such as energy, construction, agrifood and healthcare. I am sure that Members will agree that investment of that nature must be maximised.

One particular scheme run by the Technology Strategy Board is the small business research initiative, which is the subject of the motion. To quote from the Assembly's research paper, SBRI:

“seeks to enable government departments and other public sector bodies to meet challenges by procuring innovative solutions to those challenges from technology organisations.”

As the Committee Chair said, available grants range from £100,000 in the first phase of application to a maximum of £1 million in the second phase. Timescales range from two months to two years over the whole of the phased competition. Therefore, it is clear that the fund can amount to a substantial contribution to firms that are successful.

Another aspect of the initiative is that applicants retain the intellectual property associated with the project, and that is an important point. Despite the increase in patented technologies and innovative products since 1998, Northern Ireland still lags well behind the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland when it comes to intellectual property protection for those products. The number of patents gained in any region serves as an indicator of innovation and research and development. More importantly, however, without intellectual property protection, the

high-value innovative technologies produced here are vulnerable to being copied. We need a greater emphasis on education on intellectual property for our innovators and producers. SBRI offers that protection.

It is clear that there is potential for our Northern Ireland SMEs to come into their own in research and development that may become available from all 12 Departments when they require such services. Colleagues have given examples of R&D opportunities, and I look forward to hearing whether there are government plans to engage further on those.

4.30 pm

It is worth noting that the SBRI was something that the Committee looked at during its inquiry into research and development. It was mentioned specifically in recommendation 4, which stated that a mechanism should be put in place to engage with the TSB to gain an understanding of the initiatives and support available for R&D. In response to that, the Department has formed bilateral agreements with the TSB, and Northern Ireland was the first devolved Administration to win a TSB SBRI procurement competition. That proactive approach is something that the House should welcome.

In conclusion, I refer again to the wording of the motion, which calls for:

“appropriate measures to increase uptake of the SBRI by Departments and the wider public sector to help stimulate and drive innovation, especially in local microbusinesses and small and medium-sized enterprises.”

I fully agree with that sentiment, and I look forward to hearing how the Minister intends to achieve that.

Only last week, my colleague Leslie Cree questioned the Minister during Question Time on how much assistance Northern Ireland companies have received from the SBRI, to date. Although the Minister did not have those figures available at that time, I trust that she can give more of an indication today.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): On behalf of the Environment Committee, I commend the ETI Committee for bringing the motion forward. It seems obvious to me that all of us should be behind the motion, doing what we can to raise awareness of this research initiative across the public sector.

The specific reason for the Environment Committee's interest may not be immediately apparent, so I will explain. Among the research papers that were distributed to Members in relation to the motion was a case study that described a research project taking place here in Northern Ireland by Randox. Randox is a world-renowned clinical diagnostic company, which was established here 20 years ago. It is the only British manufacturer of clinical diagnostic products and is ranked the sixth largest manufacturer of clinical chemistry re-agents in the world. Clearly, it is a company that we should be very proud to have on our doorstep, but, unfortunately, it was not our government that tapped into its skills through the small business research initiative; it was Whitehall. The project I am referring to is jointly funded by the Home Office, the Technology Strategy Board and the Department for Transport. Was that, perhaps, because we did not need the expertise

that those departments were looking for? Far from it, Mr Deputy Speaker.

That jointly funded project is developing a practical device that is capable of detecting when drivers have been using drugs. That is a hugely important issue and one which the Environment Committee raises with the Department of the Environment (DOE) at every opportunity when discussing ways to improve road safety. In its road safety strategy, DOE is committed to investigating new technologies to better detect and collect evidence from drivers who are suspected of being impaired through drugs. What a shame that it was not a DOE initiative that offered the funding to a local company to come with a workable solution. It is important to note that that project did not require vast amounts of funding. A relatively small amount of £90,000 over six months allowed Randox to develop an oral fluid screening device. That will be followed by a £250,000 second phase to reduce the analysis time to eight minutes.

The small business research initiative promises to enable government to engage with industry and act as a lead customer through which it will provide innovative solutions to public sector challenges and business opportunities for technology companies.

Addressing the increasing problems being faced as a result of people driving under the influence of drugs is a prime example of where the Northern Ireland Government could have engaged with an industry on their doorstep to come up with a solution. It would have been a win-win. Instead, DOE seems to focus on other non-technological ways to address the problem, such as detecting impaired driving as a result of drugs.

I suspect that the resources it has taken for the PSNI to train an additional 200 officers in field impairment testing over the past two years would have gone a considerable way to developing the technology that would make this crime much easier to detect and, thereby, deter. A missed opportunity, possibly; but certainly a prime example of how the small business research initiative can benefit both government and industry. As Chairperson of the Environment Committee, I urge DOE to look at its potential and take opportunities where they arise. Mr Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Committee, I support the motion.

Mr Moutray: I am glad of the opportunity to take part in the debate brought to the House by the ETI Committee to raise awareness of the small business research initiative.

The SBRI programme uses the power of government procurement to drive innovation, and provides opportunities for companies to engage with the public sector to solve problems specific to both. The SBRI is keen that there is engagement with a broad range of organisations and industries, and encourages that through its competitions for new technologies. The competitions are structured in a two-phased process open to any organisation, although it should be particularly attractive to SMEs, which currently get 60% to 70% of the funding.

The SBRI is aimed at the development of an innovative process, material, device, product or service. Universities are eligible to apply, as are registered charities, providing that they use their trading company limited by guarantee. The competition base is broad-ranging, from energy and climate change to policing, tourism, health, communication, transport and education. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has utilised the SBRI to purchase the

development of innovative apps to help increase the flow of visitors to Northern Ireland and, indeed, encourage the greater spend of visitors when they are here, something that we would all support.

On 8 November, the ETI Committee was briefed by officials from the Technology Strategy Board on the SBRI in Northern Ireland. They indicated that they would like to see more SBRI competitions run here and that 2% to 3% of their funding goes to businesses locally. I think we all believe that that is too low. DETI officials have indicated that the SBRI will be looked at intensively. The Executive have committed to channelling funds into generating more SBRI projects.

I believe that, while there may have been a slow start, the contacts have now been built and working relationships are good between DETI, Invest NI and other stakeholders. Hopefully, that will bear a lot of fruit in the short term. We all realise that the challenge is raising awareness of the SBRI in Northern Ireland. I hope that the debate goes a little way to helping in that respect.

Mr A Maginness: I welcome the debate. It is appropriate and timely. I thank the Chair for his initiative, together with the Committee, in bringing the motion before the Assembly.

The small business research initiative is a happy marriage between public procurement and the private sector, and the whole concept of innovation in industry, particularly in the private sector. From our point of view, that happy marriage is very important, particularly as we are a small-business economy, because it is directed, as it says in its title, at small business research initiative. Therefore, it is particularly appropriate to our economic circumstances and the structure of our businesses here in Northern Ireland.

In some ways, this initiative was highlighted in the report by the ETI Committee in relation to research and development. During the course of discussions between the technology strategy board and the Committee examining the function and use of the small business research initiative, it became quite clear that the technology strategy board was more than anxious to spread the word among business and the public sector here in Northern Ireland.

The initiative depends very much on the creation of competitions in relation to challenges that affect the procurement process within government. Therefore, it is important to remember that small businesses have a very real opportunity of not just participating, but benefiting manifold from being involved in such competitions, and the more competitions within government, the better. Through this motion here today, it is up to us, it is up to the Executive and individual Departments to highlight the existence of the small business research initiative and to encourage Departments to involve small businesses in the solutions to procurement problems.

This initiative is bespoke for businesses in Northern Ireland, and I know that the technology strategy board is more than anxious to promote it. I believe that it is now a good opportunity for the Government, the Executive and all Departments to get involved. I believe that innovation, research and development is essential to our economy here. It will help us to move out of recession and into greater business activity.

Therefore, I believe that this is the tonic that is required for business and the public service here in Northern Ireland. By bringing this motion here this afternoon, we are serving the interests of all in business and in government here in Northern Ireland, and I hope that the Government and the public and private sectors become much more sensitive and aware of the small business research initiative because it will benefit all of us, and I believe that it will better our economy.

Mr Dunne: I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak on this matter today. Any attempt to help stimulate growth and innovation in our economy must be welcomed and taken seriously. I feel that this initiative has the potential to bring real benefits locally.

The small business research initiative is an exciting and novel way to try and help companies, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises that often struggle to find real benefit from funding opportunities. One of the key findings of the ETI Committee's recent report into research and development highlighted the fact that many of our local SMEs struggle to benefit from research and development opportunities. They often do not have the resources available. They are too busy doing the day job to dedicate resources towards research and development. Therefore, ultimately, they often lose out on funding opportunities.

The many case studies from companies around the UK that have experienced real benefit through participation in the SBRI scheme highlight the very valuable contribution it can make to business. It can often open up new avenues for SMEs, build contacts that otherwise never would have existed, and allow them an opportunity to develop an innovative product to address a real problem which exists, while helping the company to grow and sustain much-needed jobs in today's harsh economic climate.

4.45 pm

The scheme helps businesses to grow and gain confidence, particularly those that are cautious about developing products and understanding risk-taking. We have a rich history of being innovative, imaginative and progressive. The SBRI could be very well matched to many small local companies. The local economy, combined with its rich abundance of SMEs, shows real potential for developing a strong relationship between the local business sector and the TSB through that initiative. There is the added benefit of its being a UK-wide company. It has allowed local companies to make bids in many competitions for a whole range of problems that needed a solution. One such case study is Radox Laboratories, which has developed a drug-drivers detection system for the Home Office. It is an example of how a local company has taken that opportunity with both hands. It now has the opportunity to bring forward a product that could potentially be in demand throughout the world.

In the Committee's evidence session, which was very useful and from which we gathered a lot of information from representatives of the Technology Strategy Board, we found that they are very keen to build on initial work in Northern Ireland. I would like to see much greater awareness of that initiative locally. There is real potential to improve awareness of the SBRI scheme among local businesses. The fact that the Technology Strategy Board, which heads up that programme, is based in Swindon in England, with 200 employees, is a disadvantage. The

fact that there is no permanent presence here in Northern Ireland needs to be looked at. A permanent presence would go a long way to improve awareness and uptake.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board competition, which has been mentioned quite a lot previously, was also interesting. It was certainly encouraging to see such high interest among local companies in developing an application that would bring real benefit to the local tourist sector. I would like to see even more local input from companies and more local contracts being brought forward.

Finally, I would like to commend the ongoing work of the Minister, Arlene Foster, and her Department in helping to stimulate growth in the economy, and the work of Invest NI, particularly through its Boosting Business campaign and other initiatives. I trust that we will continue to see progress on the matter in the near future and much greater awareness of that positive initiative. I support the motion.

Mr Agnew: As you can see, Mr Deputy Speaker, there is no disagreement as to the benefits of the SBRI. We have heard various Members describe the benefits and the particular programmes that it has initiated. I do not intend to repeat what has already been said. However, the focus needs to be on how we better promote the use of the SBRI and how we can further raise awareness of the scheme's potential.

Although the motion was brought forward by the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and the Minister is present to hear the debate, the motion seeks greater awareness across all Departments. Indeed, for that reason, I am delighted to see the Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment choosing to speak in the debate. It is a cross-departmental issue.

At our Committee meeting on Thursday 22 November 2012, I raised the potential use of the SBRI to solve some problems in telecommunications. I asked the officials in a genuine way whether that was a possible avenue. They had to state their ignorance of the SBRI. It was not my intention to try to catch them out. I admit my own ignorance of the SBRI until quite recently. Indeed, Robin Newton mentioned that it was the FSB that brought it to his attention. I raised the lack of knowledge among those departmental officials to highlight the problem that there is not sufficient awareness in Departments.

For that reason, I think that we in the Committee and in our other duties as MLAs need to champion and raise awareness of the SBRI. By the mere asking of that question in Committee, I am pretty sure that those officials will, by now, be well aware of its existence and will, I hope, investigate its potential use in solving some of the problems faced by the Department. As I say, we all need to act as champions for the SBRI, be it in our role as Committee members or in our constituencies, by engaging with local businesses.

Again, Members mentioned the benefits that have already come to Northern Ireland through local businesses competing in SBRI for projects that are headed up in GB. I ask that the Minister act as a champion for SBRI in her Department and at the Executive and to ensure that awareness of the scheme is raised in each Department.

New problems require innovative solutions, and the SBRI offers Northern Ireland businesses the opportunity to

provide those solutions. That is why I welcome today's debate and support the motion.

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I very much welcome the Committee's motion and the debate. Members will recall that at the heart of our economic strategy is the imperative to stimulate more innovation, research and development, and creativity. We say that not because "innovation" is the buzz word, which, of course, it is at present, but because we believe that it is the key driver of productivity and economic growth. It is only through greater innovation that we will see our economy return to strong sustained growth in the years ahead.

As we in the House know by now, the economic strategy sets out the two key priorities of rebuilding and rebalancing our economy. Innovation is important to both those priorities. Through rebuilding, we know that innovating companies are more likely to survive the stresses of the downturn and to grow even in difficult conditions. Of course, if we are to rebalance our economy from one that, we all accept, is overly dependent on the public sector to one that is high value-added and export focused, we need to encourage more companies to become more innovative. To support that, we in government need to become much smarter. I think it is accepted that we really need to push the boundaries in using our public sector in order to help our economy to grow. We need to work harder to commercialise the knowledge we generate in the public sector through, for example, research and development in our health service.

The recently signed memorandum of understanding between Invest Northern Ireland and the Health Department, I think, now creates an environment where we can make better use of our health sector as a lever for economic growth. I think that it was Ms Lo who mentioned the health sector and the need to be more innovative there, and I think we all accept that. I believe that we can make more use of what is available to us, particularly in the area of Connected Health. However, we must recognise that all areas of our public sector have the potential to make a positive economic impact. What we have struggled with is finding ways of leveraging that in a way that adds real value and really drives innovation.

My colleague Sammy Wilson recently updated the House on the work being undertaken to make sure that public procurement adds real value to the local economy. The facts speak for themselves: in 2010-11, 77% of contracts managed by centres of procurement expertise were awarded to Northern Ireland-based companies, and 67% of those contracts were awarded to SMEs.

Turning specifically to SBRI, Members will know that that is a key programme run by the Technology Strategy Board across the UK. SBRI is a structured process aimed at driving innovation through the procurement of research and development. It should not be seen as a replacement for more traditional forms of procurement; rather, it very much adds value to that. It is designed to encourage companies to innovate and to develop new products knowing that they are doing so in response to a customer's need.

It is primarily aimed at addressing public sector needs where there is no readily available solution in the market. Colleagues mentioned the two-phased approach that is adopted, therefore there is no need for me to rehearse that.

Some of the benefits of using SBRI are that it allows the public sector to gain a much better understanding of potential solutions and to harness the skills and knowledge of the private sector to meet its needs. One of the frustrations of government is that you often find that procurement exercises are looking at ways to answer questions that have long been answered and we have moved on by that stage to answer different questions. So, it allows for engagement with non-traditional suppliers and to create greater competition and value for money.

I frequently hear Members referring to risk aversion in our public services. By facilitating the development of multiple solutions, SBRI ensures that the public sector can take a portfolio approach to risk at a scale that is proportionate.

SBRI has run in the UK for only a relatively short period. However, we can look to the United States of America, where a similar programme, the SBIR, has run since 1982. The outputs of that programme are impressive. It has been a key factor in stimulating the growth of companies such as the semiconductor manufacturer Qualcomm, which last year had a \$15 billion turnover. Recent research on the US programme found that 80% of research and development undertaken under the programme was additional and unlikely to have happened otherwise. In addition, participating firms found it much easier to access venture capital funding and, on average, 25 jobs have been created per winning firm.

We heard about some of the closer-to-home examples. We have very positive examples. Among the winners of the SBRI competition for tourism apps, which was the first run by any devolved Administration, two were from Northern Ireland companies. One, 'Take a Hike', was a start-up less than one year old, and the other, 'My Tour Talk', was less than five years old. Those are not the sort of companies that would normally find it easy to sell to government, yet 'My Tour Talk' is now winning business outside Northern Ireland and negotiating franchise agreements internationally. That is a clear example of the public sector, through SBRI, stimulating an export opportunity for a Northern Ireland company.

Another exciting company is Drumbo-based start-up Repknight. By winning a national SBRI competition, that tiny company, with just three people employed, was able to develop its social media monitoring product to sell initially to a Whitehall Department. It is now making significant progress in international markets. It is telling that that company has expanded from three to 11 staff directly as a result of products developed under SBRI.

However, SBRI, despite its name, is not limited to just small businesses. It is excellent to see Randox succeed in the national SBRI competition to develop mobile drug testing technology to identify drug drivers, which has a global market estimated at \$2.6 billion by 2014. According to the company, the SBRI competition was central to the development of its technology. As Anna Lo rightly said, we should be very proud of Randox being successful in that competition. I know she said that it was not one run by this devolved Administration but I take considerable pride in the fact that it was a national competition that Randox was successful in. I hope that other companies will not confine themselves to just Northern Ireland-run competitions but will also look at the national competitions.

Mr Dunne, I think, made the comment that the Technology Strategy Board does not base itself here in Northern Ireland, and that is absolutely right. It does not base itself on a regional basis but works across the UK on a programme basis. Invest Northern Ireland and DETI have a very close working relationship with the Technology Strategy Board, so I do not have any concerns on that issue. Of course, we always welcome the setting up of companies here, not least from national Government, but I do not have any concerns in relation to its commitment to working with Invest Northern Ireland and DETI.

5.00 pm

We need to recognise that we can do more. My Department and Central Procurement Directorate have been working closely to encourage more Departments and the wider public sector to commission SBRI-type products. I welcome the fact that the motion does not talk about central government and regional government but just talks about the public sector, because councils could also have a role in this. We encourage councils to think about innovative ways of dealing with some of their procurement.

I was very pleased that the Technology Strategy Board's chief executive, Iain Gray, was here earlier this year. Iain was clear that he sees SBRI as a key opportunity for Northern Ireland to lead the innovation agenda across the UK. The board's team of experts has undertaken outreach events with Northern Ireland Departments and has provided significant support to officials. Mr Agnew made the point about needing to raise awareness across government. We accept that. That is the reason for appointing the four innovative procurement executives. We hope that they will make a difference in getting the message out, but it is also up to us, as Assembly Members — I think that this point was made by Mr Agnew — to evangelise about SBRI.

I am sure that Members will be aware that the European Commission proposes to run a SBRI-style competition as part of Horizon 2020. To incentivise Departments to commence SBRI projects, we are exploring the potential to establish a central fund that will be used to co-fund projects. I want to see many more SBRI competitions run locally. That is why I am particularly pleased to inform Members that on 10 December, with the help of the Technology Strategy Board, we will launch our second Northern Ireland SBRI competition, which is a joint DETI/DARD project that is designed to develop solutions for the sustainable utilisation of poultry litter. That, of course, as everybody in the House knows, is a major issue facing Northern Ireland's agrifood industry. We want to have that brought to a conclusion very soon because we need it to grow the poultry sector here in Northern Ireland. That is a very important sector to the agrifood industry.

Mrs Overend asked me a direct question about statistics. SBRI is run across government and some competitions are in national security areas, and, therefore, detailed stats are not readily available. However, after the question from her colleague Mr Cree, we went to the Technology Strategy Board about figures. The board is working on a Northern Ireland breakdown, and it hopes to have those figures with us later this week.

I thank the Committee and Members who have contributed to the debate this afternoon. I once again emphasise that we wish to see significantly greater use made of SBRI

by Northern Ireland Departments. We also want to see many more of our local companies winning contracts and growing jobs and exports through what we believe is a really excellent scheme.

Mr Flanagan (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment):

Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank Members who have participated in what has been a very useful debate. I think that most people in here will welcome it. The role of all Committees is to advise and assist Ministers. The decision by the Committee to bring the motion to the House is a good example of the work that Committees can and should undertake.

Most Members highlighted what SBRI is for and how it has been used in the past. A number of Members alluded to the fact that as traditional sources of funding are cut, it is vital that businesses and the public sector look elsewhere and use innovative measures to try to attract funding. According to the evidence that the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has taken so far, very little is known about the existence of SBRI funding, let alone the work that can be carried out. As Mr Agnew mentioned, that was particularly the case last week, when officials from DETI were unsure about its existence. That really confirmed to us the need for the motion to be brought forward to increase awareness of its existence. The sole purpose of the motion is to increase awareness of the SBRI among public sector officials and businesses. It follows nicely from the Committee's inquiry into research and development.

It is particularly difficult for small, medium and microenterprises to avail themselves of funding streams, and it is important that other avenues are opened up and explored. SBRI provides a substantial opportunity to grow our indigenous small and microbusiness base, which, as the Enterprise Minister frequently states, is the backbone of our economy.

The recently announced job losses at Patton demonstrate the need to increase the number of small and microbusinesses in our economy so as to lessen the impact of such large-scale redundancies. The recently announced job losses at FG Wilson and Thales highlight the need to develop and grow indigenous businesses in the technology and engineering sectors. Businesses that are committed to the local economy here will not relocate based on short-term economic advantage but will have some loyalty to the place where they were started.

SBRI provides the opportunity to increase the number of indigenous businesses and to grow and develop the small and microbusiness sector. As demonstrated by what a number of Members have said, increasing the uptake of SBRI is not the sole responsibility of one Department; it is the responsibility of all Departments and, indeed, the wider public sector.

SBRI is about getting our public sector to think outside the conventional parameters and constraints on the way that they work. It is about providing businesses with the chance to realise that light-bulb moment when the germination of an innovative idea can lead to a more concrete concept and, eventually, to a product that can generate financial returns to our economy. Those returns are made through manufacturing, sales and exports, which, in turn, generate jobs for our people. The Chair of the Environment

Committee described one such prime example. Randox has worked with the Home Office and the Department for Transport in England to come up with a system that tests drivers on their fitness to drive based on the potential consumption of drugs. The poultry litter example that was referred to by Patsy McGlone and the Minister is a problem that the Department of Agriculture has grappled with for years. Most of us would be hopeful that with the help of SBRI, that problem could be sorted out, and I suppose that we are all glad to hear that applications for that competition will open in December. Those two examples demonstrate the potential that exists for more competitions. I am sure that if Members and people in the wider community were to think about their everyday work, they could come up with two or three issues or problems that Departments face that just might be appropriate for SBRI.

I now turn briefly to some of the comments that Members made. Patsy McGlone highlighted the role and rationale of SBRI and the opportunities that are presented by it. Robin Newton spoke about how the SBRI could help in addressing many aspects and recommendations of the Committee's R&D inquiry. Mr Newton said that there was an opportunity to drive innovation in SMEs and microbusinesses and that it could help to encourage Departments to think outside the box.

Maeve McLaughlin outlined the various categories that were eligible for funding and said that it was the responsibility of public sector bodies to identify specific challenges. She also said that without the support of the public sector here, SBRI will have only limited success.

Sandra Overend said that SBRI offers surety for organisations in intellectual property protection. That is a very important aspect for anybody who is getting involved in R&D and innovation.

Stephen Moutray mentioned that universities and charitable organisations can apply to SBRI. That, of course, broadens the potential of SBRI to the higher education and social economy sectors.

The former Chair of the Committee, Alban Maginness, said that SBRI was appropriate and relevant to the nature and structure of businesses here.

Gordon Dunne said that SBRI was an exciting and novel way to help businesses, particularly SMEs, which often struggle to find finance. He also said that he would like to see a permanent presence for SBRI here, and I presume that he has somewhere lined up in Bangor or the Hollywood hills for that. However, I also presume that they would need to fix the mobile phone coverage in the Hollywood hills for that to happen.

Steven Agnew spoke about the need to promote the scheme. He said that increased awareness among officials in all Departments was key, particularly given the findings of the Committee's meeting last Thursday.

I will leave it there. There is not really much point in drawing this out any longer. There seems to be consensus among all MLAs, and I suppose that that is a very good thing for a motion that is about raising the awareness of a scheme.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls upon the Executive to actively promote and raise awareness and understanding of the small business research initiative (SBRI) across the public sector; and further calls upon the Executive to put in place appropriate measures to increase uptake of the SBRI by Departments and the wider public sector to help stimulate and drive innovation, especially in local microbusinesses and small and medium-sized enterprises.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members should take their ease for a few moments while we change the people at the Speaker's Table.

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

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 15 minutes in which to propose the motion and 15 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development's report on its review into bovine tuberculosis; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to bring forward a timetable for implementing the recommendations contained in the report.

I begin by outlining why the Committee felt that it was vital that it undertook this work on bovine tuberculosis (TB), a disease that is a serious problem for herd health in Northern Ireland. Although, since 2002, there has been a downward trend in herd and animal incidence rates, there has been a recent and rapid upsurge. The rate fell to an all-time low of 4.99% in August 2011. However, it rose to 6.99% on 30 June 2012. That represents a comparative increase of 40%. From figures published up to August 2012, the incidence rate still appears to be moving upward. There is concern that that may signify that the disease is taking a much firmer hold in Northern Ireland. That cannot be allowed to happen because it would make it much more difficult to eradicate and get Northern Ireland to the point at which it is free from bovine TB.

In evidence to the Committee, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) officials admitted that they have no explanation for the increase, and I am hopeful that the Minister in her response today may be able to shine some light on the matter. One of the main issues that the Committee tackled in the review was the role of wildlife in acting as a reservoir and a spreader of TB to cattle. The role of wildlife, particularly badgers, in TB is highly emotive and incredibly divisive. The science behind it is hotly and publicly disputed, as well demonstrated by the situation in England, where a new programme that was proposed to tackle the disease was to include increased testing, a renewed emphasis on biosecurity and a badger cull plus badger vaccination. The badger cull aspect has been the focus of all attention, including a number of judicial reviews, intense media coverage, a public petition, a Westminster debate and action by protest groups.

Regardless of the situation in England, the Committee examined scientific evidence that shows that the badger plays a role in the persistence of the disease in Northern Ireland. Badgers are susceptible to TB, and it appears that many have died from the disease. Research provided to the Committee also made it clear that no other country in the world has managed to eradicate bovine TB without first tackling any reservoir of the disease in wildlife. In no uncertain terms, industry stakeholders and the farming and rural community also expressed to the Committee their concerns that the DARD approach was not addressing the wildlife issue. There was a programme based on testing and more testing. There were proposals

for various research projects into the role of the badger, but little or no action on the ground.

It was with considerable interest that the Committee listened to what the Minister had to say in July 2012, when she indicated that DARD would be undertaking a wildlife intervention study. The study was to be based around the key themes of capturing badgers, testing them for TB, vaccinating those who test negative and removing or culling diseased animals. That new approach was the subject of much Committee discussion. Some members remain to be convinced that this approach is the correct one. No doubt, those members will speak about that later. However, in the end, the Committee gave a broad, but cautious, welcome to the proposals for the wildlife intervention programme.

5.15 pm

Although we were very glad to see at least some movement on the wildlife issue, and I am in no doubt that the intense scrutiny of the Committee was the direct cause of that movement, the Committee still has some concerns about the programme as proposed. The programme is innovative and has not been attempted elsewhere in the UK or in the Republic of Ireland. Consequently, DARD, in conjunction with the Food and Environment Research Agency (Fera) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in England, has to develop the programme from scratch. Information on costs, methodology, timescales for the pilot, where that pilot may be held and how the programme might be rolled out across Northern Ireland if successful was not made available to the Committee before its report was published. I hope that the Minister will be able to fill in some of those blanks and unknowns for us today.

Of major concern was the issue of the testing kit used to check whether a badger has TB. The badger has to be captured, anaesthetised and a blood sample taken and analysed. Then, depending on the results, the badger will be vaccinated or removed. All this will happen in the dark or coming up to dawn, as the badger is a nocturnal animal. To date, the only test available for use in the field is Brock Stat-Pak, which has an estimated sensitivity of 49.2% and a specificity of 93.1%. A more detailed explanation of what that means is in the Committee report, but, in layperson's terms, it means that the test may not pick up nearly 50% of infected animals. Of course, this is of concern. DARD officials have responded to Committee concerns about this, all of which are laid out in the report. I expect that the Minister will address these concerns when responding to the debate. Although the research programme is welcome, we in the Committee feel that it could have come much sooner. I emphasise that we need to see the detail so that we can assess it as soon as possible.

I will now pick up on some other key issues worth mentioning. For me, one of the starkest things to emerge during the inquiry was the lack of information and knowledge about this complex disease and, at the same time, the wealth of available information that was not being properly used or widely shared. There is, for example, very detailed data available on the various strains of bovine TB, but very little appears to be done with that information. Are certain strains, for example, more virulent than others? Can some strains evade skin testing to a degree? Another example is that bovine TB displays a distinct pattern,

which is that 70% to 80% of reactors are in 20% to 30% of herds. It is clustered, but no one seems able to identify why this happens. Is it a concurrent infection? Is it the same 20% or 30% of herds over time? There are other risk factors. Finding out why that clustering happens and developing methods of addressing it has the potential to make a serious difference to incidence in Northern Ireland. The Committee knows that DARD has been considering commissioning a study of this and recommends that it should happen as soon as possible. It should be a detailed study of the epidemiology of herds exhibiting this pattern, with a clear focus on understanding how the cycle of repeat breakdowns and/or concurrent infections or large breakdowns can be broken. However, to have a proper focus, DARD needs to develop a better definition of what is meant by 20% or 30% of herds. That definition needs to be worked up in conjunction with the industry.

We heard from many stakeholders during our inquiry, and nearly all said that the current testing and surveillance regime was one of the most robust in Europe. However, at the heart of that regime is a reliance on what is commonly known as the skin test to identify whether the disease is present in cattle. The Committee was concerned by some of the evidence that indicated that the skin test had limitations and could miss up to one in four infected animals. Other witnesses said that its failure rate could be even higher, and emerging research may indicate that the effects of liver fluke and Johne's disease could be masking bovine TB even further. It is, therefore, vital that research into such issues is sustained and continued.

The gamma interferon test is a blood test that can be used to complement, but not replace, the skin test. It has some limitations, which are fully discussed in the report, and it is substantially dearer than the skin test. The Committee is aware that an evaluation of the blood test is under way, but results are not expected until 2014. There are, apparently, opportunities to improve its performance and reduce its cost. The Committee urged DARD to explore those opportunities.

Improvements need to be made. The disease cost Northern Ireland around £317 million over the 15 years up to March 2011. That is a substantial amount of money, the bulk of which has been spent on the testing regime and on compensation payments for the slaughter of infected cattle. However, that has to be put in context: it allows our export trade in livestock and livestock products, which is valued at over £1,000 million a year, to take place.

That is the purely financial cost of the disease. Recognition must also be given to the personal and emotional distress that a herd breakdown brings to many farming families. Compensation arrangements were not explored in the inquiry, but it is worth noting that compensation is paid out at 100% of the market value for every animal that is slaughtered. Some external bodies have criticised that arrangement, and, as a result, the Department is looking at alternatives. The Committee remains to be convinced that such alternatives will aid in the plan to eradicate bovine TB, which is the ultimate aim.

It would be remiss of me not to say something about the possibility of a cattle vaccine. DEFRA has developed a cattle vaccine and an associated test to differentiate infected from vaccinated animals, known as the DIVA test, but a number of outstanding issues mean that they cannot yet be used.

EU legislation would have to be amended, and the issuing of international validations, as well as acceptance in the marketplace, would be required. Experts' best estimate is that it could take years to achieve that, and even if and when all that happens, the vaccine is not the final solution. Infection can still happen, so other solutions will always be needed, including cattle controls and ways to tackle wildlife.

In outlining the key components of the Committee report, I look forward to hearing the Minister's response, as well as fellow MLAs' comments. I thank all those who took the time and made the effort to write to the Committee during its inquiry and who provided oral evidence, particularly the Northern Ireland Audit Office, which gave us a detailed analysis of the work that the Public Accounts Committee did in the previous mandate. The outcome of that work provided the Committee with a solid foundation from which to move forward during the inquiry.

I will now take the remaining time to make some remarks as the DUP agriculture spokesman. I was very disappointed that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development saw fit not to push this matter at the Executive and to have it included as a Programme for Government target, even when some DUP Ministers made it clear that it should be and that they would have supported such an action.

I plead with the Minister to reconsider that and to try to add it to the Programme for Government in some way. It is an important factor that affects our farming community, and it must be tackled. It is very clear that we need to see action from the Department, as that has been lacking for many years.

Do not get me wrong: we test and test and we pay out compensation, and then we test and test again, but all that we are doing is measuring the disease, not eradicating it. We are not even measuring the disease that well if we are missing one in every four infected cattle. More research must be done, and it must be shared better between DARD's veterinary division, the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), vets on the ground and the farming community.

The Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development is still awaiting the publication of the TB biosecurity study and is keen to scrutinise the results. That is another example of information not being shared. Why has it not?

The Minister puts great stock in the fact that she works well on her all-island strategies and with the Republic of Ireland Government. I suggest to her that she should look across the border and assess the actions that have already been taken in the Republic of Ireland to try to eradicate bovine TB. The productivity of their work means that there has been a fall in the disease from 7.5% in 2000 to 3.94% in the first nine months of 2012.

Minister Coveney could not be accused of a lack of action, no matter what you think of that action. His Department is confident that much of the improvement in the TB situation in recent years is due to the badger removal programme. Sinn Féin must look across the border with the Republic of Ireland with complete embarrassment, considering its lack of action on the subject for many years.

This party and the Committee of which I am Chairman picked up the gauntlet of bovine TB and have run with it ever since, forcing the Minister into action. I hope that she will respond to the report and its recommendations and publish a timetable for implementation of those very

recommendations, which the Committee sought and worked hard on over the past few months.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I commend the report to you. I hope that the Assembly will see its great merit. We are here to scrutinise the Department, but we are also here to assist and advise. I hope that the report goes some way to doing that.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. On 13 March 2012, the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development agreed to conduct an inquiry into bovine tuberculosis. The Committee agreed to write to key stakeholders to request submissions on the matters included in the terms of reference. Some of the highly relevant points raised centred around biosecurity, vaccinations, dealing with TB in wildlife, testing for bovine TB, cattle movements, and research. The Committee received 19 written submissions and 13 oral submissions, commissioned five research papers and undertook a study visit to England.

Bovine TB is a respiratory disease. In infected cattle, it is found in the throat and lungs. Therefore, the infected animal spreads the bacteria from its breath or in discharges from its nose or mouth. We have had a TB programme here since the 1950s, but it was not really until 1959 that we had compulsory testing. Test results have never come close to the 0.2% for three consecutive years that is required before bovine TB-free status is obtained. It is worth noting that in all that time, the lowest that we have ever got to is 4.99% in August 2011. Worryingly, on 30 June 2012, the figure was 6.99%.

At present, the EU-recognised test is the skin test. According to DARD, it has a one-in-four failure rate. However, some witnesses, such as Queen's University and AFBI, have indicated that the rate of reliability could be lower, perhaps only 50% or 60%. Even given those figures, it is still the best test available. Animals that fail the test are known as reactors. If such an animal is found in a herd, the herd is placed on TB breakdown. The reactor should be isolated before being taken for slaughter. Breakdown herds must have two clear tests before movement restrictions are lifted. A further test occurs four to six months later to make sure that no other animal is affected.

There was discussion around the difference in test results between private vets and DARD officials. On the back of evidence from VetNI, the Committee commissioned its own research. Although that showed that there was a difference in the TB-testing results of private vets and DARD vets, the differences may not be as large when other factors outside DARD analysis are taken into account.

In 2011-12, the total amount of compensation paid to two or more claims per herd accounted for 70% of total compensation in the entire year. That total was almost £13 million. Single payment claims per herd totalled almost £4 million, which accounted for 30% of that 70%. Two or more claims totalled almost £9 million, which accounted for the other 70%. In October 2008, the EU bovine TB subgroup of the task force for monitoring disease eradication specifically commented that DARD's compensation scheme did not encourage farmers to implement biosecurity measures and could encourage fraud. In its 2009 report on bovine TB, the Public Accounts Committee recommended that as an added incentive to prevent bovine TB, the Department should consider:

"introducing a system whereby the rate of compensation would be progressively reduced in cases of multiple claims by the same herd keeper".

The Veterinary Service's forecast for 2012-13 is a figure of 12,201 cattle, which is up from the June figure of 11,039. The TB figure for 2012-13 is estimated to be £16.811 million. As the Chair of the Committee said, the cost over the past 15 years has been £317 million. What has not been said is that, of that £317 million, £132 million has been paid in compensation. Although those figures are huge, we must at all times protect our £1 billion livestock and livestock products sector, which is hugely export-dependent.

5.30 pm

We must now support the Minister's plan for the test and vaccinate or remove wildlife intervention research. That programme will entail trapping the live badgers and testing them. If the test is negative, they will be vaccinated and released, but they will be removed if the test is positive. The £4 million set aside in the Programme for Government for TB in wildlife research —

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

Mr McMullan: Research is ongoing. A model will be designed, which will be tested in a pilot area before it is successfully rolled out.

Mr Beggs: I declare an interest as my parents run a suckling cow family enterprise.

I notice that the Northern Ireland Audit Office has updated the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee on public expenditure on bovine TB over the past 15 years. It is some £317 million, which is a huge sum of public money. Some £132 million was spent on compensation to farmers, some £86 million was spent on payments to private vets for herd testing, £71 million was spent on DARD staff costs and other costs beyond that. However, the cost to the industry is even more. A further £200 million per year is the estimated cost to farmers of the disruption involved in testing. For example, a farmer may have to transport cattle to a central test point, and there could be a cost for the labour involved, etc.

Farmers caught up in the disease with "doubtful" or "positive" reactors can face significant additional costs to their businesses. They cannot sell their animals at market, which can result in them being forced to purchase expensive additional forage. This year, winter forage is at uneconomical prices because of a scarcity. The alternative is to sell breeding stock to abattoirs. Later, after a herd has been tested as "clear", the farmer will face the cost of rearing replacement stock.

Stress on the family farm must be one of the greatest costs omitted from the published figures. It is simply impossible to quantify the cost to personal health. A farmer's livelihood and years of selective breeding are at huge risk until two successive "clear" tests are achieved. During that period of uncertainty, farmers do not know if one more of their precious animals will be removed from the herd or whether the entire herd will be condemned. So, there is huge pressure on the family.

DARD maintains that the purpose of the programme is to eradicate TB. It spent some £23 million in 2011-12,

but the absence of a strategy to achieve that purpose is evident. Thankfully, DARD has finally utilised European Commission funding of some €5 million a year to try to improve the situation and develop an eradication plan. However, what must be of particular concern is that, despite all this investment to date, the incidence of TB in Northern Ireland has increased by some 40% over the past 12 to 18 months. The general consensus is that, to date, the programme has failed, especially given that in some areas of Northern Ireland bovine TB is rife and that the overall rates remain far higher than they were in 1996, despite hundreds of millions of pounds being spent.

The Minister and, indeed, her predecessor have spent much time campaigning for reduced compensation fees, and I recall a figure of 75% being mentioned. That figure will potentially put many farmers out of business. Not only that, but many farmers may be doing everything right and the problems may be outside their control, yet such a proposal would have innocent farmers penalised because the problem may be in the local environment and local wildlife population.

The Department's data indicate that 70% of compensation claims were for two or more claims, but I note that the Committee report questions the usefulness of the data without further contextual information. What exactly does the 70% represent? Is it ongoing claims as a herd develops other infections, or is it that the herd has gone clear and, a year later, there has been a second infection? It is important that there is a clear understanding of what the figures are and whether it represents a problem in the area or not. I certainly have no clarity on that issue.

The RSPCA indicates that 12% of badgers are infected with TB and that it can cause them wheeziness, loss of weight and even skin alterations but that others display no symptoms. It is important that all aspects are examined and progressed, but it is of great concern that the epidemiology on farms — what is the cause? — has not been pursued.

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

Mr Beggs: I understand that a report into farm biosecurity has been delayed. There appears to be a lack of urgency and a lack of action, and it is important that we take action to address the disease.

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

Mr McCarthy: I support the motion. As has been said, this is a very serious issue, and, as a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, I fully concur with the comments of our Chair and other members who have spoken.

Bovine TB is a highly infectious disease that simply has to be tackled and eradicated as soon as possible. Unfortunately, that is easier said than done. Throughout these islands, the problems are the same, and everyone is working for a solution. We have, in Northern Ireland, an export trade in livestock and livestock products to the value of £1,000 million per annum, and it is imperative that we work to eradicate the disease sooner rather than later.

It is disappointing that, in the past 18 months, incidences of bovine TB in Northern Ireland have shown a sharp and unexplained rise after a number of years of a real downward trend in infection rates. The scourge of TB over the past 15 years has cost us nearly £320 million,

and the money has gone on testing for the disease and compensation for the slaughter of infected animals. I express regret that, in my constituency of Strangford, compensation was paid for 224 herds to the value of over £2.25 million, which is extremely high, for 2011-12. We must also have sympathy for the farmers who find the disease among their herd. The stress, worry and anxiety must be enormous and have a devastating effect on the quality of family farming.

I want to put on record my appreciation of all the groups and individuals who submitted written and oral responses to our review. That information was vital to our Committee and certainly assisted us in making our conclusions and recommendations. We also had good responses from the Department and our own research officers.

Other members of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development have spoken on this very complicated and baffling disease and the difficulties in putting an end to it once and for all. Our Committee has come up with 17 recommendations that we feel, when implemented, would go some way to ending, or at least to vastly reducing, cases of bovine TB throughout Northern Ireland.

I fully support the contents of the review document and encourage everyone interested to read and study its comments. As the Committee motion states, let the Minister, who I welcome in the Chamber this afternoon, and her Department study and implement our recommendations and, hopefully, announce a time frame for the work to be done. I also thank our Committee staff for the valuable work that they all put in to helping the Committee to produce our report and, more importantly, its recommendations.

Finally, a variety of reasons have been given for the origins of the disease, including creatures from the wildlife fraternity, particularly badgers. Some people are convinced that, if the badger were wiped out, we would see an end to this scourge. Others are not so sure, and others are totally opposed to that theory. I am far from convinced that the badger is solely to blame. I am relieved that no one in authority has ordered a wholesale cull of the badger at this time. Vaccination is perhaps the solution. More work needs to be done on the issue, and I note the U-turn by the authorities in England and Wales. Until we prove conclusively that the badger or other wildlife —

Mr Clarke: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCarthy: Yes.

Mr Clarke: I note the Member's caution about an outright cull of the animals, but it is interesting that, a few minutes ago, you referred to the amount of money that has been spent on TB, which is almost £320 million. Will you not accept that it is because of the Department's inaction that we have spent £320 million and that the very line that you are now taking is encouraging the Department to continue with that inaction?

Mr McCarthy: Perhaps you have misunderstood or were not listening attentively. I understand the enormous value of the money that has been spent in trying to eradicate TB, but I still say that we are not convinced that the badger is 100% and solely to blame for the scourge that we are talking about.

I said that the authorities in England and Wales had intended to have a wholesale cull and that, for some

reason, they performed a U-turn so that cull will not happen now. I welcome that. I could not support a wholesale cull in Northern Ireland, and I appeal to the Minister to implement our recommendations as soon as possible.

Mr Irwin: I declare an interest as a farmer who has cattle tested annually.

This issue never seems to leave the headlines of our local papers and is regularly on the agenda of the Agriculture Committee in Parliament Buildings. That shows just how important the eradication of TB is to farmers in Northern Ireland. As an MLA who serves a largely rural constituency, I get scores of calls from farmers who have deep concerns about how bovine TB is being tackled in Northern Ireland. Indeed, I have relayed those concerns to the Agriculture Committee in Stormont and directly to the Minister. TB testing is a stressful and worrying time for farmers, and a closed herd places a huge financial and physical strain on farmers and their families. It is a farmer's worst nightmare.

The disease has a significant impact on taxpayers, and figures compiled by the Northern Ireland Audit Office show that TB has cost the public purse well in excess of £317 million since 1997. That is a staggering amount of money, and it is more concerning when you consider that incidences of the disease have risen sharply by some 40% this year alone. That is concerning, considering Northern Ireland recorded its lowest-ever incidence rate last August. This large spike in detections that has been reported right across the Province is alarming, and all the more so when, in the Republic of Ireland, a newspaper headline on 17 November stated:

"TB reactor levels lowest since 1950s".

Therefore, we need to take a leaf out of the Republic's book in regard to TB.

As I said, the disease has a significant impact on taxpayers. Farmers have told me that the Department, by its perceived inaction on new control measures, is not really interested in a total eradication policy and appears to be more content to try to contain the disease through the current testing and removal programme. In my opinion and the opinion of the Committee, that is an unsustainable position, and I share farmers' concerns. The testing programme is an important element of disease control in the sector, and such programmes are vital to ensure that we can continue to export our produce, which is a significant contributor to the local economy. However, the fact that disease incidences appear to be escalating rather than remaining level or, ultimately, reducing gives serious cause for concern.

5.45 pm

I have spoken many times about the plans, currently on hold in England, for a controlled badger cull in response to the evidence of significant disease transfer from wildlife to cattle, and I remain of the opinion that the Department should be moving much faster on the wildlife issue.

Although the current wildlife intervention study is welcome, I do not believe that it will yield findings within an acceptable time frame that would allow it to have any significant effect on disease incidence in the shorter term. Cattle vaccination is an interesting area and one that is beginning to look like a possible additional tool in the fight

against TB. However, much more work is required to get this to a deliverable stage. Vaccinations will, no doubt, also carry an additional cost. Given the evidence that the Committee heard and the fact that vaccination will not prevent infection, I feel that it cannot be relied on as a one-dose answer to the TB problem, especially in the short term.

The Minister has much more to do. She needs to get a firmer grip on the issue and seek to move forward with a number of approaches. This work should include effective wildlife control, vaccination development and, importantly, thorough evaluation of the available data on the strains of TB present in infected herds.

Eradication must be the main aim of the Department and industry as we go forward. We cannot afford simply to contain the disease at some acceptable level. That would be detrimental in the longer term. As the statistics show, containment comes at a very high price to the farmer and the taxpayer.

For the industry to see any significant reduction in the incidence of TB, the Minister must come forward with a solid time frame for the implementation of the recommendations made in the report. We cannot sustain a situation in which the incidence keeps increasing and herds continue to be closed down. That is bad for farmers and bad for farming.

I support the Committee's report and the recommendations contained therein.

Mr McAleer: I would like to take the opportunity to speak on the motion tabled by the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development. I appreciate that the work that went into compiling this report preceded my time on the Committee, so I commend members and officials on their work thus far.

I support the comments made by my colleague Oliver McMullan and those of other Members around the House. I share their concerns about the cost of the disease. Until March 2011, the disease had cost us approximately £317 million, with compensation in the region of £13 million per annum. I accept that this has enabled us to maintain an export trade valued at £1,000 million per year, which counterbalances that slightly.

The report is comprehensive and wide-ranging, and I wish to draw on a few parts of it that require additional consideration. The Committee noted that biosecurity methods vary from country to country and that, in combating bovine TB, good biosecurity:

"has an important role to play alongside other measures".

The Committee recognised that working in partnership with the farming community, while drawing on the expertise of local veterinary practice, is necessary to achieve that.

I share the view that biosecurity training and advice must be tailored to an individual farmer and given at a pace that suits him or her. I also recognise that farming here is dominated by the conacre system, meaning that a farmer may have several neighbours, which increases the risk of cattle-to-cattle spread of the disease across fences and other boundaries.

The importance of good biosecurity was raised at the Committee by the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) and NIAPA, and it is accepted that getting the message through to the farming community is crucial. To that end, I was surprised to note that, between 2004 and 2012, only 1,394 of 26,000 herd keepers had taken up the biosecurity training provided by DARD. In fact, in oral evidence, VetNI noted that most cattle farmers here take few precautions when introducing purchased animals to their herd or at farm boundaries. The low uptake was also noted by the Ulster Wildlife Trust.

I was interested to note in evidence from the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) in May that the disease exhibits clustering, with 80% of reactors coming from 20% of herds. In September, however, DARD officials told us that 70% of reactors come from 30% of herds. In addition, it is worth noting that, although the disease is prevalent throughout the North, the incidence is substantially higher in some divisional veterinary office areas than others. It is crucial that we glean a better understanding of exactly why that is the case.

In conclusion, although I fully appreciate that biosecurity training alone will not eliminate the very complex issue of bovine tuberculosis, I strongly believe that it can play a central role. In supporting the motion, I call on the Department to look carefully at farmers' attitudes and at their understanding of the steps that are necessary to prevent and/or deal with bovine TB, and to ensure that consideration of them is written into any future eradication programme.

Mr Clarke: I support and welcome the report. There are probably 317 million reasons why anyone could support it, given the amount of money that the Department has spent over the past 15 years. I am not going to rehearse what Members said, but it is interesting to note that the Department has, at long last, considered some form of badger testing. Although one Member said that that did not necessarily mean that there would be a cull, which the report is not necessarily suggesting, some form of testing was one of the things that we talked about with the Department.

Consideration was given to looking at the compensation that is given to farmers, and the suggestion was almost made that farmers were deliberately infecting, which was an awful indictment on the farming community, as it would mean that the Department would be in some way saying that we had to get away from 100% compensation. I believe that if the Department had done more, we would not have paid out so much in compensation.

A few months ago, the Chairperson and I had the opportunity to visit a large farm that has been continually down on testing. To say that the farmer was emotional in the way that he approached the subject would be an understatement. We went to his farm to see the process and to see how those premium cattle were valued. The farmer was upset. He had suggested to the Department on many occasions that, as his whole farm is bounded by the county road, he obviously has some problem with wildlife in the area. At no time did the Department take him up on his offer to look at his farm and to use it as a sample. I think that that is awful, because that farmer worked with pedigree cattle and was visibly upset by seeing most of his herd go to slaughter, yet he offered the Department the opportunity to look at his farm to see

whether it could be used as a test case. It is disappointing to hear the language that other Members sometimes use about compensation and wildlife. At the end of the day, that farm is a family business, and it has given the farmer a livelihood for many years.

I welcome the report, and I will not rehearse what others said. However, I would like to pull up on a remark that the Member who spoke previously made when he talked about biosecurity training. It is interesting that departmental officials will go out and teach farmers how to do biosecurity. Most of our farmers are responsible, and there is the possibility that some of them could teach the Department something. It is interesting that the Department has strayed away from what many of us believe about wildlife, which is that it has been a problem for many years. That is certainly what those of us on this side of the Chamber believe about it. There have been years of inaction by the Department. However, I welcome the direction that it is taking in considering a pilot.

Mr Swann: As a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, I commend and thank the Committee staff for the sterling work that they did in compiling the report. It was hard to bring not only all the evidence holders together but all the Committee members. To get all the information into one report was quite a task on its own. It was also difficult to get the same agreement between all the parties, because there is a wide difference of opinion in the House about how to tackle TB.

We have already rehearsed the problems with TB and the findings of the report. I ask you to take time to look not just at the reflections in the report but at a solution that could help farmers with herds that are restricted or infected by TB at this time and who are finding it difficult to move on and finish calves. I know that a call has been made for improved finishing units, where farmers can put their young calves, even if they are under restricted herds, so that they can finally get them to a processor or a retailer. That call has been made by unions, finishers, farmers, producers and retailers, and it follows on from something that my colleague Roy Beggs said about the price of feed at this time. We have farms out there, used to rearing 20 or 30 calves, that cannot get them off-farm at the minute. They are limited to restricted herds, with neither the facilities, the food nor the finance to make those calves into finished beef products.

Something needs to be done. I have had representation from all stakeholders in that area. They seem to be implying that the impasse at the minute is in the Department, because there are similar approved finishing units in GB and the Republic of Ireland. I know that the Minister is keen on making sure that we have an all-Ireland approach. The Republic of Ireland is there, and, from what I have heard, there are Fine Gael cheerleaders and Minister Coveney supporters on this side of the House as well who would be keen to make sure that we replicate what happens in the Republic of Ireland.

Minister, let me point out one thing: paragraph 69 is about research on the testing of badger faeces and whether they are actually TB positive. That has been done in our own university, Queen's in Belfast, and is funded by DEFRA across the water rather than by us. The Committee has recommended that the Department keep an eye on what that research produces and how it progresses. It would provide another tool to identify TB in infected badgers. I

understand that the research project is due to complete late next year. In comparing that timeline with those of the pilot programme and the wildlife intervention programme, I think that that might be a more viable option. It would enable full setts to be tested for TB infection, rather than have to go through the process of trapping, testing, vaccinating and releasing. It would mean that, if there were an infected sett, the entire sett of badgers could be culled at that stage, rather than go through a process of killing off one or two and possibly leaving infected ones.

I am sure that the Minister is fully aware of my critique of the wildlife intervention programme in the past. That is something that the Committee Chair referred to. Look at the Brock TB Stat-Pak test, with a 49.2% accuracy. I know that she will get into the 93% specificity and all the rest of it, but when I asked the Minister about the research going on in Queen's, her written response was:

"I have asked my officials to monitor all relevant research so that we may benefit from appropriate application of new tests and methods. While there is no need to duplicate expensive TB research commissioned by other government funders, we must ensure that we draw on the results of such research where appropriate."

As I pointed out to the Minister before, the wildlife intervention programme was trialled and looked at by the Welsh Government using the same process that the Department is going through at the minute. In March 2012, in paragraph 5.4.2 of their report, under "Veterinary Opinion", they stated:

"In conclusion, there is no evidence to suggest that this is a suitable or viable approach to deal with a reservoir of infection in badgers in endemic areas such as the IAA."

In July 2012, you, Minister, came to the Committee to announce the wildlife intervention programme. I am now asking that we focus that £4 million on an approach that is far better targeted so that we get action to tackle the TB that is in the wildlife population. I am interested to hear, when the Minister does respond, how she intends spending the £4 million that has been earmarked in the Programme for Government. I know that it is not there as a specific target, but it was detailed as to how that £4 million was going to be used. I am keen to know whether she has —

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

Mr Swann: — a programme for how that will be spent.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the review and would like to put on record my appreciation to the Committee Clerk and all the staff, who have been very professional and studious in their support to the Committee throughout the review.

Although in recent years we have enjoyed a downward trend in infection rates, the recent increase in herd incidence of bovine TB is a pertinent reminder of the somewhat intractable nature of eradicating that infectious disease. It is fair to say that the review does not identify any unexpected problems or isolate any unfamiliar nuances in the current TB debate. That is, in itself, reflective of the very complex nature of the disease and the difficulties in establishing a programme of effective and total eradication. There can be little doubt that bovine TB remains one of the most impregnable animal health issues

facing not just the Assembly but various jurisdictions across the world.

I am keen not to repeat the various arguments that have been heard this evening. I want to make what are, I hope, a few salient points and suggestions.

Recommendation 8 argues on behalf of setting a specific target date for eradication. I believe that there is a danger that that would be little more than a futile exercise. I do not think that it would aid those involved in the eradication process.

Instead, I think we should continue to increase our knowledge of the disease and move forward with timely strategies for eradication.

6.00 pm

The complex nature of the disease and the absence of a silver bullet lead me to believe that the Minister's approach to the issue remains the best way forward, and the continued Programme for Government commitment to TB and wildlife research is reflective of a common-sense approach by the Minister and her Department. This is not to suggest that we do not have to seriously work towards eradicating the disease, and I am confident that the Department will continue to build upon the good work that has taken place to date. Indeed, any disease that costs this Assembly the best part of £300 million to tackle deserves every bit of departmental focus. Moreover, bearing in mind that we have an export trade in livestock and livestock products valued at around £1 billion a year, it is vital that we continue to protect this industry and do all in our power to nurture the incredible success of our local farmers within EU guidelines for tackling bovine TB.

Some Members outlined their views on current compensation arrangements, and I would like to touch upon what I consider to be a very important facet of this discussion. Key finding 9 of the review states:

"the Committee agreed that it was opposed to a proposal for a system of table valuations for compensation as it was unconvinced about the effectiveness of this as an eradication tool."

While I recognise that there may be some issues with the system of table valuations, surely it is imperative that we look again at our compensation arrangements as we go forward from here today. We currently pay out compensation for slaughtered animals at 100% of market value. Going forward, I think we seriously have to examine ways in which compensation arrangements can be balanced between the need to compensate a farmer's loss with the need to incentivise reducing herd incidence.

This is a debate taking place in various forums; indeed, the failure of the English Government to establish an effective strategy to deal with the disease has led to a move by the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England and the new Bovine TB Eradication Advisory Group to launch what they term a conversation with farmers to find new ways of working to tackle bovine TB. The changes, which are designed to make the system more effective and efficient, could see farmers organising and paying for their own routine TB tests, and, by giving farmers more responsibility, it is thought that a workable balance can be established that will see farmers and the various agencies working in tandem to eradicate bovine TB.

Focusing on TB service delivery rather than policies like badger culling or TB vaccination, the conversation will broadly cover four areas: TB testing; reactor removal; compensation; and advice and insurance.

It is thought that there will be a move for farmers to take responsibility for organising routine TB tests themselves, possibly with government support in the form of money and administration. This concept of supportive responsibility — a balance between the industry and the Government — has proven to be quite effective in the South of Ireland, where producers pay for routine TB testing and contribute to TB compensation via a levy. Some Members touched upon that. As she takes stock of this review in the weeks ahead, I call on the Minister to examine ways in which this notion of supportive responsibility could help move our TB eradication programme forward.

Bearing in mind that few believe in a quick-fix solution to the ongoing problem, there can be little doubt that a focus on improving biosecurity practices must also be at the heart of any suite of preventative measures. Limiting opportunities for infection to be transmitted between cattle and between wildlife and cattle is essential in protecting cattle herds against bovine TB.

I know that, in Wales recently, a biosecurity scheme that involved engagements between farmers and their vets had a 100% take-up on the offer of visits, with cattle farmers keen to consider the practical steps they can take to protect their herd and business. I am not suggesting that biosecurity on its own is a guarantee of keeping TB out of the herd, but enhancing measures to keep the —

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

Mr Hazzard: — disease out does improve the farmers' chances of becoming and remaining disease free.

I welcome the review and look forward to hearing from the Minister in due course.

Mr Allister: When you consider that for 63 years we have had cattle control measures relating to bovine TB in place in Northern Ireland, yet tonight, we still have the prevalent high levels of that disease costing huge amounts of money, it is hard to escape the conclusion that that has been six decades of failure in regard to tackling this matter. We seem to have reached a mindset whereby, within the Department, it almost appears as if there is an acceptable level of bovine TB in our herds. It is almost as if there is an onset of complacency in regard to tackling it, and that, I think, has been manifest in the approach, most particularly to the wildlife issue.

As this report points out — I think that it is at paragraph 62 — there has not been a single country in the world that has managed to tackle bovine TB without first tackling the reservoir of the disease in wildlife. Yet, I do have to ask the question: in our 60-plus years of attempting to deal with this, how, if at all, have we seriously addressed the issue of wildlife carrying TB? It seems that the attempt has been pretty pathetic at every turn throughout those years.

I empathise with what the Ulster Farmers' Union said in its evidence to the Committee:

"The farmers have done a lot on the cattle side, but we feel that there has been no, or very little movement, on trying to address the problem in wildlife. We feel that the Department...should recognise that attacking the

reservoir of TB disease in wildlife is an essential part of the disease eradication programme."

I must say that I came to this report hoping and expecting that it would have been more robust. I think that the report is at its weakest as regards addressing the wildlife issue. Recommendations 9 and 10 are pretty limp with respect to that, and I think that they could, and should, have been a lot tougher in that regard.

As we read into the report, we find a lot of lip service being paid to dealing with this issue. However, we find that very often it is no more than that. From 2004, there has been a badger stakeholder group, which, frankly, has not taken us anywhere. Then, in this report, when we come to paragraph 72, it says that we are now going to move to specific wildlife intervention research. So, after six decades, we are going to have some research. In the next paragraph, it says that one of the first things that we have to do is design a model for the research. Then, we will have to test it in a pilot area. In paragraph 75, it says that we will then have to design the study itself. Where is the urgency? Where is the compulsion to get on and do something about this issue? Where is the desire to really face down the problem of bovine TB?

Mr Elliott: I thank the Member for giving way. I apologise as I did not hear the Chairman's introductory remarks. Maybe he dealt with this point, however, I have not heard anybody else dealing with it. I do not disagree with the Member's issue regarding wildlife, but I cannot understand why, for those 60 years during which we have been using the skin test, we cannot get a positive means of testing for bovine TB. Even this report states:

"Other witnesses put its sensitivity at around 50 - 60%."

The point I am trying to make is this: what good is that? Mr Hazzard tried to impress that farmers would have to pay for it. If they are going to pay for it, they will want something that is positive and accurate.

Mr Allister: I agree. The whole testing regime seems to be in the context of mere containment. When you have a test that is as inefficient as the one you describe — the skin test is patently inefficient — and we have not moved beyond that, I think that that speaks to the lack of urgency in the Department to address this issue.

I say to the Committee and the Department that, fine as it is, this report needs to move forward with great expedition to address an issue on which the Department has dragged its heels for far too long. We cannot go on like this or we will be back here in another 10 years still discussing the processes; still talking about designing models to do this and that —

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am afraid the Member's time is up.

Mr Allister: — and still paying out huge amounts of compensation for something that could, and should, have been tackled. One of the ways it should have been tackled, I believe, is in a proper, focused cull of badgers.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is now well up.

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the Committee's report on the review of bovine TB. I am grateful for today's comments by the Chair of the Committee and others, and I assure

you that the report will be considered thoroughly. In due course, I will provide a formal response.

Like other Members, I congratulate the Committee on the work that it has done to produce the report. I am sure that it was no mean feat to distil some 700 pages of evidence in all the submissions into a succinct 25-page report. As I said, you will appreciate that I need to take time to consider in detail all the report's content and recommendations, but I shall take the opportunity today to respond to some of the issues that have been raised in the debate as well as making some general comments.

I share the widely held aspiration to achieve a progressive reduction towards the ultimate eradication of bovine TB, and by as early a date as possible. It is important to take stock regularly of the current position and refocus our efforts so that we can make further progress towards eradication. The Committee's review, therefore, is timely and appropriate. It secured the engagement of, and input from, a wide range of organisations and individuals with an interest in TB, and it has encouraged what I believe to be a mature discussion of TB eradication, which is very welcome.

The evidence presented during the review by DARD and AFBI staff, other research providers and the farming, veterinary and environmental stakeholders has shown, as Members are aware, that TB is a complex disease, with many factors known to influence its spread, and also with many unknowns. That is acknowledged in the report. TB continues to be our most challenging and costly animal health problem. I regret that there has been a general and as yet unexplained rise in TB levels here in the past 12 months. Our TB herd incidence was down to 4.99% at 31 August last year, the lowest since 1996-97. Since then, we have seen a steady increase to 7.26% at 30 September this year.

I reiterate that I am committed to the eradication of TB in cattle, and tackling the disease is a key priority for me. My Department will continue to strive to drive down the level of bovine TB. We have a robust TB eradication programme in place that is based on testing to detect infected cattle, removing infected animals and reducing the risk of disease spread through movement controls and other biosecurity measures. We have secured European Commission approval for our TB eradication programme for 2010, 2011, 2012 and, just last week, 2013. EU approval is vital in safeguarding our annual £1 billion-plus export-dependent trade in livestock and livestock products. Protecting our export status is a fundamental priority for me.

EU approval enables DARD to draw down around £5 million of co-funding from Europe each year towards a proportion of the cost of the TB eradication programme, which amounted to just over £26 million last year. Some £12.9 million of that cost was animal compensation payments; £6.5 million was for tests by private vets; £5.8 million was DARD's Veterinary Service costs; and £1 million was for AFBI costs.

I want the imposed TB control measures to be reduced, for taxpayers and for farmers. However, we have to be realistic. TB eradication cannot be achieved in the immediate future, for all of the reasons presented to the Committee during its review. The recent unexplained rise in TB clearly demonstrates that there is still so much that is not known about the spread of TB and how it can

be diagnosed more accurately, and what can be done to prevent its spread among cattle and between wildlife and cattle. Clearly, more needs to be done.

In May 2012, my Department hosted an international vaccination experts' scientific symposium on badger vaccination to consider all the relevant issues associated with vaccinating badgers to achieve a reduction in TB in cattle. As I advised the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee on 3 July, following that symposium, I have asked officials to start work on the design of a cost-specific test and vaccinate or remove wildlife intervention research. I note that the Committee's report recommends that we progress that work, and I can assure Members that that is still my objective. That approach will involve testing live badgers, vaccinating and releasing test-negative badgers and removing test-positive ones. That balanced approach would focus on the removal of diseased badgers and the protection of uninfected ones. It would avoid the removal of uninfected badgers and could lead, in time, to a reduction of TB in badgers and reduced transmission of TB from that source to cattle.

6.15 pm

I have been very encouraged by the wide spectrum of stakeholder support for, and engagement in, this wildlife intervention research. Farmer, environmental and private veterinary representative organisations are participating fully through the newly constituted TB stakeholder working group on the development of this research approach.

A number of other TB and wildlife studies have already been commissioned to help to establish local evidence, and we expect to have the results of the TB biosecurity study in the next few months. An evaluation is under way of the use that my Department currently makes of the gamma interferon blood test to detect TB in cattle. The results will better inform the way the test is used in the TB programme.

A badger-cattle proximity study, which aims to assess the interactions between cattle and badgers in farm buildings and at pasture, is being carried out in a TB high-incidence area. An assessment of farmers' attitudes to, and understanding of, biosecurity measures when dealing with diseases is also under way. AFBI has been requested to put forward further research proposals across a range of aspects of TB, including a literature review to establish the TB transmission risk from the spreading of slurry; an investigation of the reasons why greater numbers of reactor cattle come from chronic or repeat breakdown herds and what could be done to address that; and an assessment of how strain typing information could best be deployed to give maximum practical benefit to the TB programme.

In addition, earlier this month, DARD published a call to AFBI for proposals for the 2013-14 research work programme, including a further two TB research projects. The first of these is to evaluate the range of commercial and near application serological tests for bovine TB that could, ultimately, be undertaken as alternatives to, or in conjunction with, existing tests as part of the TB eradication programme. The second project is to investigate the role that endemic diseases, such as liver fluke and Johne's disease, as well as nutritional/ vitamin deficiencies, may have on TB occurrence and control.

Although we have identified an extensive programme of research and studies to build the evidence to inform our policy development, we will not have the outcomes of that research for some time. Therefore, my Department will also consider what else we need to do through the implementation of the TB eradication programme to, first, halt this upward rise in TB herd and animal incidence, then reduce TB levels and then continue to bear down further on this disease.

The Chair asked for possible reasons for this unexplained rise in TB levels. I think that the possible reasons for the recent unexplained rise have been examined extensively by DARD and AFBI officials. The possible reasons for the increase in TB incidence and the potential remedial actions have been investigated, but, to date, no specific causes have been identified. Although it may not be possible to identify the specific causes of the rise, it is important that we deal effectively with the increased spread of the disease. Having investigated possible reasons for the recent rise in bovine TB and examined the recent changes made to the TB programme in the South and in Britain, my officials identified a number of additional measures that can now be considered further to strengthen our TB eradication programme. Indeed, the EU Commission may require us to tighten further our programme measures to facilitate our export-dependent trade and secure the continuation of current EU funding.

Although additional measures may not be welcomed by industry stakeholders, the rise in TB incidence, the Committee's report and anticipated pressure from the EU Commission require further consideration and, maybe, further tightening of our TB programme. Careful assessment of the merits, costs and likely impact of any additional measures will be required.

As I said, the Committee's report on the review of TB comes at an opportune time and has facilitated a discussion on the important issue. Further action must be taken, and my Department will consider the Committee's report in detail before providing substantive responses. We may not agree on every detail or on every recommendation, but I assure the House that this is an important subject for our agriculture industry, and I concur with many of the comments and aspirations expressed here today.

Bovine TB, like many other diseases, has proved to be an intractable and expensive problem, and, as I said earlier and say repeatedly, there is no simple solution or quick fix that will eradicate TB. We have to be realistic in that regard, but it is important that we seek to halt and reverse the rising trend and drive disease levels down. I am fully committed to reducing and, ultimately, eradicating TB in cattle here. I want to continue to work with the Committee and stakeholders as we develop and enhance a long-term strategy for the eradication of TB in cattle and implement cost-effective disease control measures to reduce and eradicate the disease.

In conclusion, I repeat that I welcome the Committee's report. Its content will be considered in some detail, and a full response and action plan will be formulated. I look forward to working constructively with the Committee in the time ahead.

In the remaining few minutes, I will take the opportunity to address some of the issues that Members raised in the course of the debate. I very much welcome the interest

of Paul Frew, the DUP's agriculture spokesperson, in all-Ireland working on TB. I think that it is obviously fair to say that what the South has achieved is good news for people there. We will continue to work very closely with the Department in the South. The officials regularly engage with their counterparts in Dublin, and they will continue to monitor closely any changes to the TB programme that they bring forward. However, we need to have a policy that is effective and that stands up to legal challenge. That is very important. If we are going to take forward any measures, we have to make sure that we do not get bogged down in the courts with them and that we actually move forward. So, we will continue to do that.

Where the Programme for Government commitment is concerned, the fact that we made the announcement earlier this year on the TVR approach shows that this matter is a priority for me and that I want the Department to tackle it. However, we have to be realistic. I think that the actions that we take in trying to drive out and eradicate this disease are the more important piece of work. That having been said, I will take note of the Committee's recommendation, and I will respond further in due course.

Roy Beggs discussed compensation, and he will be aware that I deferred the decision about any changes to TB compensation. I know that that is not something that the Committee got into in this review, but, on the back of the consultation and of the Committee's views, I will take a further look at the situation.

A Member discussed cattle vaccination. Currently, TB vaccination of cattle is prohibited in EU member states. It will not be allowed in the short to medium term, so we have to continue to keep in close contact with DEFRA and with Europe on that while driving forward with the TVR approach that we are taking.

I totally agree with Declan McAleer about the need for focus on biosecurity measures. Trevor Clarke referred to the fact that farmers already have good biosecurity measures. That may be the case in many instances, but it is good to keep up to date with changes and to refresh your mind about biosecurity. We will continue to work very closely with stakeholders, and we are going to produce a core TB message and biosecurity advice for farmers that will be disseminated right across the industry. So, it is important that we keep our focus on that.

Robin Swann discussed the Queen's University research into badger faeces. Publication of that research is probably still about a year away, but we will continue to watch it to see how it develops.

I will respond in more detail within the time frame that the Committee has asked for, but I hope that I have given a flavour of the type of work that we are involved in. This is a priority for me, and, regardless of whether it is a Programme for Government commitment, it is a priority piece of work. It is the last remaining major disease that we need to drive out, and I am committed to doing everything that we can to make sure that we can deliver on that. Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle

Mr Byrne (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I thank the Minister for being present for the debate, and I thank all those who took part in it.

Earlier this year, the Committee set out to try to tackle this issue in a comprehensive way and to seek as much advice and help and as many views as possible. This saga has been going on for over 50 years. As we heard, bovine TB incidents fell for a number of years, but, unfortunately, they have gone up again to a rate of over 7% in the past 18 months. It has been a very costly exercise, as £317 million has been spent in the past 15 years. Money has been spent on testing and compensation. Private vets, DARD vets and farmers are all involved, but no real control management has yet been exercised. There has been a lack of determination and co-ordination when it comes to tackling this problem. I greatly echo the sentiments of those Members who demonstrated their frustration about this exercise.

Leadership is required to tackle this problem. That leadership has to come from DARD. The Committee inquiry is helping to raise awareness of the issue, and that is why it is important and timely that we have embarked on this exercise.

A culture of tolerance has existed for too long. All concerned have maybe even tolerated an acceptable level of disease. Disease-free status has to be the priority for DARD, the Assembly and the agriculture industry. Farming unions and, certainly, farming families desire that. A defined plan of action is needed. There has to be a timetable and benchmarking to tackle the issue seriously. Private veterinary practices have to accept that the status quo cannot continue to be the order of the day. The EU Commission is querying our methods and approach to the problem. It is questioning the value-for-money exercise. The time has come for the issue to be tackled seriously. In July 2012, the Minister outlined a wildlife-research programme. As of yet, we have not had a clearly defined programme of work, parameters or objectives for how the outworkings will affect the farming industry.

In June, I said that I thought that there was an acceptable level of tolerance. Vets from all over the place started ringing me. Last week, I was at a dinner in Parliament Buildings, at which the previous president of the British Veterinary Association told me that he got phone calls from vets all over Northern Ireland who were asking what sort of madman was the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee. He told me that when he read my statement, he totally agreed with me, but he could not say so in public. Therefore, there has been, if you like, a shadow of suspicion surrounding the issue for a long time. I am glad, however, that the issue has now begun to be examined and tackled seriously.

Throughout the debate, many issues were raised. Although some were repeated, new angles were developed by many contributors. The Chairman outlined the entire scenario that pertains to the subject of the debate. Towards the end of his speech, he referred to the Republic of Ireland's experience. We know that in the South, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has tackled the bovine tuberculosis in wildlife issue successfully in Donegal, Kildare and Wexford. We have to draw on the experience there.

Oliver McMullan emphasised the way in which the issue has to be tackled. He talked about the increase. He also talked about biosecurity and compensation. Compensation is a thorny issue. However, if you are a farmer, and your herd has become a reactor herd and has gone down, you need compensation. Recently, a vet whom I know came to me and said that he had had to put down a herd of

pedigree cattle. The angst and pain of the family involved was unbelievable. They dealt with it by saying that at least they might get some compensation.

Roy Beggs raised concerns about the impact on farmers. He spoke about the uncertainty and the pressure — the same issue. He said that the DARD programme is failing despite the millions of pounds that have been spent. He said that the Minister's campaign to reduce compensation will put farmers out of business. To be fair to the Minister, I do not think that that issue has been concluded yet.

Kieran McCarthy spoke about the role of the badger. He said that he is not convinced that the badger is widely to blame for the spread of bovine tuberculosis. I think, however, that there is fairly conclusive evidence that the wildlife issue is a major factor in the spread of bovine tuberculosis. It is a hot issue and one that we will have to face if we are to tackle the problem seriously. Do we want to tinker with the problem and allow it to grow or do we want to tackle it seriously?

William Irwin talked about a 40% increase in bovine TB, which he said was quite alarming. As a farmer himself, he is very aware of the pain that many farmers are experiencing. He talked about the Republic of Ireland's levels being at their lowest, now down to 3%. What lessons can we learn from there? He said that thorough evaluation of available data is required. There is a need to move faster with the wildlife programme. According to Mr Irwin, eradication, not containment, is the answer. I agree with him.

Declan McAleer concentrated on the biosecurity aspect. He noted his disappointment in the low number of farmers who are taking biosecurity training. I think biosecurity is an issue that has to be more highly appreciated by the farming community, more of whom have to partake in biosecurity training.

6.30 pm

Trevor Clarke welcomed the report. Again, he was concerned about the Department's efforts in tackling the issue. I do not think that he is convinced either that the research programme has all the answers or solutions.

Robin Swann asked what the Department must do to really tackle the issue. I think that, at the end of this debate, that is where we are really at. How will it face up to issues such as compensation and achieve disease-free status, which should be our objective? If we want to protect and preserve our beef export industry, worth £1 billion a year, we will have to move towards the objective of having disease-free status. In the long term, tinkering with the problem will no longer be useful, as housewives across Europe become more discerning in their attitude to purchasing beef products.

Chris Hazzard talked about the disease being very technical, which, I think, we all appreciate and agree with. We know that, as yet, no country in the world has successfully tackled the problem. He said that we need a timely strategy for eradication. He also talked about the need for a balance between compensation and awareness. Farmers need to find ways of dealing with TB. He also talked about how the Republic of Ireland has tackled the issue. Again, he mentioned biosecurity.

Mr Jim Allister, as is his wont, was quite analytical and critical of the report, but he is right to be critical. We cannot be passive about the issue any more. Mr Allister posed

questions subsequent to our report, and I think that we as a Committee are big enough to accept that the report is not the be all and end all in finding a solution to bovine TB, but I think that it greatly adds to the debate about how the issue could be tackled in the future. Again, he mentioned the high levels of compensation. He also said that the recommendations were a bit tame. Well, at least the Committee had the nerve to tackle the issue.

I pay tribute to the Committee officials who worked extremely hard, as quite a few Members mentioned. I pay tribute to the Chairman for the way he conducted the entire process, including the oral hearings and the written submissions.

The Minister very much addressed the issue. I think, however, that DARD has to be more radical and more determined to face the issue and tackle it head on. I think that we have to be careful, because if a research project takes more and more time, the worry is that the problem will grow. Will the incidence of disease increase? When does it get to a dangerous level for our beef exports? That is the challenge: how will we protect our beef export industry? How will we make sure that farmers accept that the Department, as the lead body, is seriously tackling the issue and dealing with it?

The Minister referred to biosecurity, and I think we all agree with her point. She also talked about AFBI. I think that it is very important that AFBI is given finance for research projects to try to find an overall, collective approach to tackling the problem. Earlier, Robin Swann, I think, referred to Queen's University and spoke about its good work in bringing forward a badger faeces research project, which may prove beneficial in the long term.

In summary, the Committee is seeking support for the report. I am not saying that the report is absolutely sacrosanct, but it is a serious attempt to deal with the issue and to raise public awareness among all stakeholders. For too long, there has been a comfort zone between private vets, departmental vets and farmers who got compensation. DARD, as the responsible body, has to initiate a solution or at least a serious attempt to devise a solution. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development's report on its review into bovine tuberculosis; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to bring forward a timetable for implementing the recommendations contained in the report.

Adjourned at 6.35 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 27 November 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statement

North/South Ministerial Council: Agriculture

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. With your permission, a Cheann Comhairle, I wish to make a statement in compliance with section 52 of the 1998 Act regarding the seventeenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in agriculture sectoral format, which was held in Armagh on Wednesday 31 October.

The Executive were represented by Minister Jonathan Bell MLA and me. The Irish Government were represented by Simon Coveney TD, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and Phil Hogan TD, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government. I chaired the meeting. This statement has been agreed with Minister Bell, and I am making it on behalf of both of us.

Ministers discussed the measures that were being taken in their respective jurisdictions to deal with the outbreak of ash dieback and agreed to maintain contact to facilitate a co-ordinated approach to the problem. We also exchanged views on farm safety and expressed our sympathies to the bereaved families following recent tragic incidents.

The Council discussed and noted the most recent developments with regard to negotiations on CAP reform and the next steps in the reform process, including that negotiations will continue at technical and political levels between the European Council and the European Parliament. As the negotiations progress, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine officials will continue to monitor developments and maintain close contact.

We agreed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for protecting the island of Ireland from exotic animal disease incursion. The MOU underlines the commitment to key principles in the all-island animal health and welfare strategy. It sets out the principles to be followed throughout the island to help to prevent the entry and spread of exotic animal diseases through either jurisdiction and to provide assurance regarding the controls applied throughout the island.

The Council welcomed an update on the delivery of the all-island animal health and welfare strategy action plan since the last agriculture sectoral meeting. The achievements included getting Aujeszky's disease-free status throughout the island of Ireland, which will obviously open us up further to export opportunities for the pig sector; the ongoing co-operation between officials on industry-led

initiatives on production diseases that are not subject to control programmes, such as bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD); the setting up of an industry-led organisation Animal Health and Welfare NI, which will take forward initiatives to deal with such diseases; and agreement on reciprocal arrangements between industry bodies, North and South, which was signed by Animal Health Ireland and Animal Health and Welfare NI.

We also welcomed progress on the INTERREG IVA funding for strategic cross-border rural development projects, including the launch of the Regeneration in Villages, Emergency Rescue and Social Farming Across Borders projects. It was agreed that DARD, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and their respective rural networks would organise an event to specifically encourage further co-operation between local action groups on a North/South basis.

The Council also agreed that Department officials would engage to identify common priority issues that could be addressed on a cross-border basis through European territorial co-operation programmes and that the steering committee for cross-border rural development would collaborate to propose a mechanism for the co-ordination and targeting of support for cross-border areas.

The meeting concluded with Ministers noting the forthcoming EU presidency in the first half of the new year. The date of the next sectoral meeting is June 2013. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I welcome the statement and the Minister's comments. The statement refers to a co-ordinated approach to ash dieback. The Committee agreed the emergency legislation that is now in place. Will the Minister outline whether the co-ordinated approach goes beyond the legislative processes? What implements or tools are being used apart from the emergency legislation?

Mrs O'Neill: Obviously, ash dieback is a very serious disease with devastating consequences. The Chairperson is aware of that. I was grateful for the Committee's support for the emergency legislation that we brought forward. It is very important that we apply the fortress Ireland approach when dealing with disease outbreaks, whether in plant health or animal health. In this instance, we have co-ordinated our legislation on both occasions. I am also regularly in contact with Shane McEntee TD, who is the Minister responsible for that area of work. We are in contact every other day by phone, and officials are continuing engagement — they actually have another

meeting this evening. It is very important that we continue to work together.

By way of an update, five recently planted ash premises in counties Antrim, Down and Derry were confirmed cases. A number of other sites are being followed up as part of the trace exercise. To date, we have destroyed around 4,500 ash saplings, which shows the scale of the work that we are involved in. As part of the trace forward exercise, a further six premises have been confirmed as having the fungus. That brings the total number of confirmed positive premises to 11 across counties Antrim, Down and Derry. I stress that these are all recently planted and relatively young sites. We will continue that engagement and continue to operate the fortress Ireland approach. We will also continue to engage with our colleagues in Britain because they are in a far worse situation than we currently are. We will have to continue all of that co-ordination as we make our way through the disease path and see how it develops.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. I congratulate her and her officials on helping to get Aujeszky's disease clearance here, which will really help the beleaguered pig industry. Will the Minister update us on the present situation with the all-island animal health and welfare strategy action plan?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said in the statement, we welcomed a lot more progress on the all-island animal health and welfare plan. The Aujeszky's-free status was obviously a very welcome development. We have also had a lot of progress on BVD, and we are looking at tackling production diseases.

The all-island animal health and welfare strategy is bringing us to a place where we are able to seek agreement with Europe on free movement and trade right across the island. These are all very positive developments that we will continue to monitor and provide updates on. A lot of positive work is ongoing. It is important that we encourage and nurture that work and continue to drive it forward because, as I said, the endgame will be the free movement of animals right across the island, which opens up a lot more trade opportunities for all those involved in production.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her statement. Minister, you referred in your statement to a memorandum of understanding for an:

"All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy."

Following on from yesterday's debate and the fact that the Republic of Ireland is TB free, did you have any discussions about TB when you discussed that all-island animal health and welfare strategy?

Mrs O'Neill: That issue regularly comes up at NSMC meetings. As I said yesterday, the South is, fortunately, in a different position. However, it was able to reach that point without legal challenge. Any measures that we take will have to have a sound evidence base, and we have to be able to withstand any legal challenge. As I said, that issue is regularly discussed, and we regularly engage and share information on it at a ministerial and an official level.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the Minister's statement. I note, in particular, the reference to animal diseases and the pig sector. Was the future of the Vion factory in Cookstown

discussed, given its particular strategic interest in Northern Ireland to the export of pig meat and bacon?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. The NSMC meeting was held before last week's announcement on the Vion factory. By way of an update, I have spoken to the managing director of Vion, who has assured me that the jobs in the Cookstown plant are secure. That was obviously a matter of concern for the people who work for that company.

During my recent visit to China, I raised with the Shanghai Ministry of Agriculture the potential trade barriers that exist for companies such as Vion. Indeed, I mentioned Vion in particular. It has agreed to a further exchange of information in that area to see whether we can address those barriers. That is a particular problem for companies such as Vion, which cannot buy pigs in, for example, Monaghan or Cavan and sell them to China, as the animals have to be reared and slaughtered in the same area. Those are the barriers that we need to remove. I will be grateful for the opportunity to meet with the director of trade and economics from the Shanghai Municipal Agricultural Commission, who is visiting Ireland in December. I will be able to explore that issue further at that time.

I think that there is a lot of potential in that area for us to move forward. Shanghai can produce only 25% of the pork that it needs, so it needs to import the other 75%. We want to be part of that trade, which has potential for our local industry.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her statement. She mentioned the outbreak of ash dieback disease. The Agriculture Committee had a presentation from officials from the Minister's Department at its meeting last week. There will be financial repercussions for a number of private operators as a result of that disease. Was there any discussion at the NSMC meeting about possible compensation for those who have suffered or who will suffer as a result of that disease?

Mrs O'Neill: Compensation was not discussed. As I said in an earlier answer, this is obviously a very serious disease, and, at the moment, we are very much involved in a process of eradication. We are fortunate in that, to date, the sites where the disease has been confirmed have trees that all come from one import. If that remains the case, it will be very good. However, at this stage I cannot say whether that will be the case.

I am not concerned with compensation at the moment. I am concerned with eradicating the disease and making sure that we apply the fortress Ireland approach, keep the disease out and minimise the impact that it has on the industry. From the presentations that were made to the Agriculture Committee, you will be aware of the devastating impact that the disease will have not just for people who are involved in forestry and planting but for the hurling industry, for example.

Mr McAleer: Thank you, Minister. Minister, I note that your statement referred to the CAP reform, and it also referred to the forthcoming Irish presidency of the EU. Will the Minister advise us whether she thinks the forthcoming Irish presidency of the EU will be a positive development, particularly for the negotiations on the CAP reform? Is she working with the Irish Government to take an island-wide approach to those negotiations?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. Absolutely; we are very much going to Europe with a team Ireland approach, and we are talking to our 15 Irish MEPs and Minister Simon Coveney. The fact that the Irish Government have the presidency of the EU for the first six months of next year will obviously be a very good opportunity for us to make sure that we feed in our views very strongly.

10.45 am

The Taoiseach offered to have officials from here come in and be part of their work team during the term of the presidency, which we welcome. Unfortunately, last week there was a failure to reach financial agreement. Therefore, the likelihood of being able to do a deal in the first six months of next year, when the Dublin Government have the presidency, is looking a lot more bleak.

We will continue to monitor the situation. We hope that there will be some efforts to reach an agreement, because without the financial framework being agreed, there is no chance of movement on the details around greening, the definition of "active farmer" and all the other issues that we are dealing with. However, I assure the Member that we have a strong relationship with the Dublin Government in ensuring that we push a team Ireland approach, because, at the end of the day, we have many areas of common interest. We differ little on the detail of CAP reform, so we will continue to do more.

Mr Rogers: My thanks to the Minister for her statement. I particularly welcome her comments on cross-border initiatives. Are there any opportunities for Louth and south Down to work together on social farming and village renewal for places such as Greencastle and Rostrevor?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his question. I was at the launch of the social farming project, which I must tell the Member is fantastic. People who may have mental health problems can go out and work on a farm, and for them to be out working away in the fresh air is very therapeutic. I heard some fantastic examples of that, and I would like to see more of that rolled out.

The project is in its early stages, and we will continue to monitor it, but I think that everybody, including the health service, should look to social farming's therapeutic potential. It is also fantastic for farmers to be able to open up their farm to people, take them in and give them the opportunity to work. I want to see a lot more of that work happening. We agreed to scope the potential for a lot more collaborative working and to look at how we can exploit EU funds for the border counties. I will be happy to report back to the Member on further discussions and developments.

Mr Allister: The Ministers discussed CAP reform. Since the EU Budget dictates the shape and the extent of CAP, what view did the Northern Ireland delegation express as to the adequacy of the EU Budget? What is the Executive's stance on the need to reduce the EU Budget? Do the Executive think that the Commission's extravagant proposals are worthy of support? Where do the Executive stand? Do they support our national Government's stand on cutting the EU Budget?

Mrs O'Neill: I certainly do not support the stand on cutting the EU Budget. I think that it is unfortunate that some DUP MPs voted at Westminster with the British Treasury position to cut the CAP budget. Even freezing the EU

Budget in real terms is not a good position to adopt. It was perhaps the best position from which to start, but last week's discussions are a worrying development. If we see any further cuts to the overall EU Budget, where will those cuts leave our farmers? Therefore, cutting the EU Budget is something that we will continue to resist.

We have always said that we have had an inadequate share of pillar 2 support, so we need to continue to push for an increased share. The impact that a cut will have, not to mention the difficult climate faced by our farmers, means that it is unfortunate that some parties have taken the stance of voting for a reduction in the overall CAP budget.

My position is clear: I do not support a reduction in the CAP budget. I will continue to fight for a strong and adequate budget. That is the position that I take in Europe and with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). I have been successful in convincing the agriculture commission to leave the budget discussions aside and let us deal with the agricultural issues. However, when it comes to discussions with DEFRA and the British Treasury, we need to fight strongly for our local farmers, and I encourage all parties to look again at their position and get on board with that.

Executive Committee Business

Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill: Second Stage

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development):
I beg to move

That the Second Stage of the Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill [NIA 16/11-15] be agreed.

The Bill amends the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 in order to extend by three years the period in which my Department will pay a subsidy to NI Water (NIW) in lieu of household water charges. Were the amendment not to be made, the existing legislative basis for paying that subsidy would expire at the end of the current financial year. Members will be aware that the Executive have given a commitment in the Programme for Government 2011-15 not to introduce any additional household water charges. Members will also be aware that this was voted for in the Assembly and was supported by all parties in the Executive. The Bill will implement that commitment and ensure financial stability for NI Water.

I am aware that the Chairperson of the Regional Development Committee, Mr Spratt, is not in his usual place this morning. On behalf of myself and the entire House, I wish Mr Spratt a very speedy and full recovery, and hope that he can resume his rightful place in the Assembly at the earliest opportunity.

I appreciate that there are wider questions about the future funding and governance arrangements for water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland. Given the Executive's commitment, I put a paper to Executive colleagues to assess the implications of the commitment in the Programme for Government, which the Executive recently agreed. However, the Bill places no constraint on a broad debate on the long-term governance of NI Water, nor does it need to await resolution of those issues. It simply implements the Executive's agreed existing commitment.

The Bill will make a further technical amendment to the Land Registration Act (Northern Ireland) 1970. The effect will be to cause a water and sewerage undertaker's notification to lay certain pipes and sewers on private land to be registered at Land Registers NI. This will make that information publicly available, particularly, and importantly, to prospective property purchasers.

This is a short Bill, and I think that the rationale is understood by all. Indeed, it makes good a commitment by all. With that background, I may expect a surge of support that may lead to a high watermark for the Assembly.

Mr Lynch (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Labhraim inniu mar LeasChathaoirleach an Choiste Forbartha Réigiúnaí. I speak today as the Deputy Chairperson of the Regional Development Committee. First, I echo what the Minister said in relation to the Chairperson, Jimmy. On behalf of the Committee, I send him our best wishes and hope for his speedy return as Chairperson.

The Committee received a presentation on the proposed Bill at its meeting of 21 November 2012. The Committee

is agreed that the scope of the Bill is narrow, and does not intend revisiting the question as to whether there should or should not be water charges, although members may wish to do so in their capacity as individual members. The Committee accepts, as the Minister indicated, that it was an Executive decision to extend the period of subsidy payments to NI Water rather than introduce household water charges. On that basis, the Committee looks forward to receiving the Bill in Committee Stage and will endeavour to co-operate with the Minister and his officials to ensure that it passes through the Assembly procedures in a timely manner.

However, I wish to use this opportunity to again advise the Minister of the Committee's concern about the governance of NIW, particularly as we seek to extend the period of subsidy. As the Minister will appreciate, NIW was established as a Go-co but is also classified as a non-departmental public body, attaching it to the departmental accounting processes. This classification severely restricts the strategic direction of the company and its ability to plan long-term investment programmes. The Committee is aware that the Minister will soon present a paper to his colleagues in the Executive on governance within NIW and calls on that to be progressed as urgently as is practicable.

As I indicated, the Committee for Regional Development looks forward to receiving the Bill in Committee Stage. Go raibh mile maith agat.

Mr Easton: I welcome the Second Stage of the Bill. In my constituency, I have been contacted by a large number of people who are concerned about the impact of possible water charges, which will affect their already stretched budgets if introduced next year. Many people have expressed concerns to me that their finances will be stretched to breaking point as they struggle to ensure that they have the basics, such as water, heat, shelter and housing, if such charges were to be introduced. I feel that, by stopping their introduction for three years until 2016, we can ease the worry for our constituents and ensure that, in a time of economic pressures for families, the working poor and other vulnerable groups such as those on fixed incomes, they will not be subject to undue financial pressure and stress from this source.

Although this move will cost the Assembly £282 million in subsidies, I feel that, when weighed up against the potential suffering of those in society who can least afford it, the benefits outweigh the costs.

I also welcome clause 2, which is a minor technicality that allows water and sewerage undertakers to record their intention to carry out certain works on private land on the statutory charge register, which is held by Land Registry. This clause will allow potential buyers of land to be informed if the land is affected by certain statutory restrictions. This is a worthwhile clause to help protect people when purchasing land. I support the Bill.

Mr Kinahan: I also wish Jimmy all the best. I stand here in place of my colleague, Ross Hussey, who is unavoidably absent from today's debate. However, from one Ulster Unionist to another, I would like to warmly welcome the Bill, and I congratulate the Minister and my party colleague, Danny Kennedy, for introducing yet another Ulster Unionist commitment; one which, again, will greatly benefit the people of Northern Ireland.

If only all the business that came through the House was as concise as this, I am sure that we would get through an awful lot more than we do at present. Nevertheless, just because the Bill is modest in length does not mean that its consequences are any less significant. This Bill will protect households up and down the country from charges which they, quite rightly, will feel that they have no reason to be paying.

My party's official position on water charges, now and for a number of elections, has been that we recognise the difficulties around the current arrangement and we accept the overall unsustainability of the situation. However, we also recognise that this is not the time to bring in universal water charges — charges that would apply equally to those who are most vulnerable in society as it would to those who are most able to pay.

We must also remember that we already pay for a considerable element of our water and sewerage services through the domestic regional rate each year. This accounts for an average £160 per household. Therefore, people who claim that households here are getting free water are not actually correct.

Although I support the Bill, which will maintain the status quo until March 2016, that does not mean to say that my party would not be open to an all-encompassing review that brings into consideration charges that people are already paying.

Northern Ireland Water and every respective Regional Development Minister to date have inherited a problem of chronic underinvestment in our water infrastructure over a period spanning decades. Therefore, some parties in this Chamber may hold even more of the responsibility than others for our poor infrastructure.

Nevertheless, it is vital that Northern Ireland Water does not become complacent with the money that it is getting through the subsidy. It must remain conscious of the fact that there are things that it could and should be doing better. Northern Ireland Water must, and I expect that it does, acknowledge that it is responsible for too many water pollution incidents across the Province. There are other issues, such as the ongoing problem of leaks in supply pipes. Although the Bill may not directly relate to such issues, it will, inevitably, feed into a wider discussion.

Although the detractors, no doubt to my right, may criticise the Bill, I look forward to hearing how they would justify putting such a new charge on people in the current economic climate. I remind them of a commitment in the Programme for Government — a document which, of course, we know they sold their purported principles to be part of — which was that households will endure no additional water charges during this Programme for Government term. The Alliance Party signed up to the Programme for Government, did it not?

Although it may not be ideal, we will continue to support the current situation of Northern Ireland Water being awarded adequate funding through the annual subsidy within the memorandum of understanding, based on whatever the Utility Regulator recommends.

It is a short-term fix for a long-term problem, but it remains clear to me that, at this moment in time, it is the best way to proceed.

In conclusion, I congratulate Danny Kennedy once again on introducing a policy that is reflective of the pressures that people find themselves under. Maybe other choices will have to be made in the future, but, for right now, one thing is for sure: no Ulster Unionist Minister will be forcing water charges on anyone. I support the Bill.

11.00 am

Mr Dallat: I preface my remarks by extending our good wishes to Jimmy Spratt, the Chairperson of the Committee. We look forward to having Jimmy back very soon to resume the important role that he plays in the Committee's work.

The Minister is right to expect a deluge of support this morning. I was deeply touched by the modesty of his party colleague Danny Kinahan, who never misses a political opportunity. Anyone suggesting the introduction of water charges in the present economic climate would be behaving rather like a turkey voting for Christmas. It is certainly not on. I am not sure if Danny was indicating that he will not run for election after 2016 by suggesting that there might be water charges then.

We, in the SDLP, certainly believe that there are more intelligent ways of managing the water service than separate water charges. Having said that, I think that it is important to emphasise that the fact that there will be no separate water charges for the next few years does not mean that we should, in any way, give up on our determination to ensure that the water delivered to our homes and industries is of the highest quality and, equally, that the infrastructure that carries sewage to the disposal plants is continually upgraded and improved. We are a tourist region, and it is important that our beaches continue to have blue flags and are not contaminated by raw sewage.

There is, of course, another aspect, namely our need to comply with European regulations and the fear of infraction. I am particularly aware that, in rural areas, there are many small sewage works that are no longer fit for purpose. They need to be either replaced or connected to major projects to give people in rural areas the same rights as people in urban areas and to manifestly give our support to the environment.

Other issues have been referred to. Members know that Northern Ireland Water has not had a happy history in recent years. Let us hope that that is all water under the bridge. I know that the Minister takes this very seriously, and I am not about to attack him in any way for his endeavours. However, we must constantly assess and review the governance of Northern Ireland Water and ensure that it is fit for purpose, compares in every way with modern water services anywhere in the world and is prepared for the kind of emergencies that are happening in England and Wales at the moment. Good luck to those people. We have had samples of such things in Northern Ireland. We must have a water service that is able to cope with such emergencies and have in place the procedures, machinery and mechanisms to deal with them. It is only two years since the freeze, when Northern Ireland Water virtually collapsed in its duty and responsibility to deliver water to the homes of our people, particularly the elderly, the vulnerable and families with children. Those issues will continue to be priorities for the Assembly. I am sure that no Member would suggest that those priorities should

diminish in some way because we do not have separate water charges.

The Bill also allows for work to be carried out on private property. That will appear in a statutory register. That is important. When the Water Service moves onto private property, it must endeavour to ensure that it leaves the place as it was found. A failure to do so has been a complaint in the past.

Otherwise, like everyone else in the Assembly, I totally support the Bill.

Mr Dickson: I also wish the Chair of our Committee, Jim Spratt, well.

I support the Bill. That might be a surprise to some who have already spoken. The detailed scrutiny will begin soon at the Committee Stage. However, the Alliance Party has some concerns. We respect the fact that the Assembly and the Executive have agreed a Programme for Government that rules out the introduction of domestic water charges through to April 2015. Nevertheless, we think that that approach must be reconsidered for the immediate post-2015 period, and so we question the wisdom of legislation that defers water charges until as far away as 2016. Indeed, there is a strong case for the introduction of water charges. Those who wish to stick their head in the sand are free to do so, but some of us are realists.

The current subsidy diverts millions of pounds from other essential services, such as schools and hospitals, which affects the most vulnerable in our society disproportionately. It also limits investment in our water and sewerage infrastructure. That is key to this debate, and it cannot be separated from the recent flooding, which has highlighted the need for additional funding. The discussion should therefore be focused on the nature of a future charging regime to ensure that it is fair and linked to the ability to pay. A system of fair charging would ensure that services did not suffer and the most vulnerable did not have to foot the bill.

There is also an issue regarding the future of the governance of Northern Ireland Water. The Go-co model has essentially been defaulted to an NDPB and is not self-financing. Indeed, experts have warned that extra costs are incurred due to the accounting treatment under those arrangements. Moreover, the current governance arrangements do not afford maximum management flexibility to plan for future improvements. Management of a water system should be a long-term and strategic planning process. Our current charging system allows only year-on-year planning. We need to allow for managing our water service for 25 to 30 years in advance instead of in one-year periods.

At a conference in April, representatives of Scottish Water explained how their company's governance model, facilitated by separate charging systems, allowed for long-term strategic planning, and they detailed the many benefits that that brings. It is clear that the management of Northern Ireland Water desires the same freedom to plan ahead, but our current model results from the refusal of most parties to face up to the necessity of charging and makes the financial arrangements totally inflexible. How is Northern Ireland Water meant to plan ahead when it depends on a subsidy payment that may vary and has to be spent within one year? A steady and more reliable funding source would allow Northern Ireland Water to

borrow on favourable terms and provide additional revenue for investment in the infrastructure. We need a model that is majority self-financing, with charging that is fair and based on the ability to pay. Only then will Northern Ireland Water have the financial flexibility needed to plan ahead to deal with floods and leaks, invest in much needed new infrastructure and deal with pollution. That will deliver for Northern Ireland the world-class water service that we desire and Northern Ireland deserves.

The Bill is, regrettably, short-sighted in that it defers charging to a future date but contains no provision for the immediate period thereafter. We have an opportunity to plan ahead post 2015, which is particularly important given the significant lead-in time for any change to charging. That is an opportunity that we should not cast aside. We should grasp the opportunity, lest we spiral into further years of deferral and neglect of our water system.

Mr McNarry: I am sure that the best wishes of the House will be conveyed to our Chairman, Jimmy Spratt, and I add my good wishes to those that have been genuinely made. It is also nice to hear the party that was busting last week to go into opposition demonstrate how convenient it is to have an Executive Minister in place today.

This is a welcome amendment Bill, which will, in the short term, give cover and financial easement to many households and consumers. Of course, it also illustrates that a looming, unsuspected hardship could be forced on to the family bill in a few years' time. Clearly, the long-term issue of the potential spiralling of water and sewerage costs and, indeed, the unfair proportionality of such costs is far from being settled. The Minister's message is popular today, but what will be the Minister of the day's conclusion in 2016? Some may well wallow in this good news announcement, but this question remains: is this a "live today, pay tomorrow" Bill? It looks increasingly like it, in which case some may say that they do not know what the water situation will be in four years' time. I say that the withdrawal from the Budget to pay for water in four years' time should have been calculated already, and we should at least have a projection of how much water will cost either the taxpayer or the bill payer in 2016. It will certainly not cost less, so how much more will it cost?

Is it not the case that the longer the taxpayer's money is used to prioritise and support the water subsidy, the less Northern Ireland Water will feel any pressure or compulsion to reduce its costs by increasing its efficiencies? With the relaxation equated to the Bill, which is how it is equated, why would the company exert itself to perform better and be more cost-effective when it gets money handed to it for performing inefficiently? The fact that the public pay for water means that no one is fooled by this subsidy extension, and the public are concerned with the question not of if but of when direct charges will be pressed on them in the form of a water bill. When those charges come, how cost-effective will they be, given that we have been operating an inefficient subsidy for an inefficient company? Will those charges in that form or even in their current disguised taxation form be value for money? I think that the public demand to know from us whether we are getting the best economies of scale from Northern Ireland Water and whether its charges are competitive.

It seems that that performance is now being challenged. The facts are that the company feels immune to pressure,

and it admits that neither the Minister nor the departmental officials are engaged in the wrangle between the company and the regulator. They are out of the picture. That worries me, because I then wonder, "If the company is at war with the regulator and the regulator's facts and figures prove correct, at what stage will this or the next Assembly be told who has won the war between the company and the regulator?". I know that, in two to three weeks' time, we will know what efficiencies the regulator wants, because he will have finalised his determination. The question is this: will the Minister back him? We hear the company say that the regulator's draft determination is undeliverable. The next question is this: will the Minister back the company? Yes; both are correct, assuming that an extended time for continuing the subsidy will be adopted. So, when is the crunch on the unsuspecting paying public? Where will Northern Ireland Water, the regulator, the Department and the public be when the dispute over efficiencies, based as it is in the comfort zone of an overgenerous subsidy, is resolved, only to then move us into another phase preparing for 2016? Where are we now, and where will we be then? Will the water subsidy be sustained after 2016 and for how long? Is the amendment in the Bill set at a rigid subsidy figure until 2016? Should the regulator succeed in his arguments over efficiencies, what impact will that have on Northern Ireland Water's performances? As I suspect, after the Bill has been enacted, when the company knocks on the Minister's door wanting more money, how can he refuse it? Will he refuse it?

11.15 am

The key element that legislation brought to the House should contain is forward thinking. We need to meet and regulate the situations most likely to arise in the next few years so that the legislation that we pass is fit for purpose and we do not find ourselves having to regulate the system all over again. Effectively, the Bill means extending the multimillion-pound subsidy to Northern Ireland Water until March 2016 while freezing charges for domestic water usage. A serious number of issues arise that are not being addressed in the Bill, and it seems that they are not even being considered for the future. It is clear that the ratepayer will continue to pay for water, either through subsidies or rates or, as it is, through both. To my mind, the issues that are not being addressed concern what happens after March 2016. Will the ratepayer's contribution be increased over the next three years? Conversely, will the subsidy be increased?

Compounding those unanswered issues is a report due from the Utility Regulator on 14 December detailing his final determination, following his draft determination on PC13. The Utility Regulator is insisting on Northern Ireland Water meeting efficiency targets. For its part, Northern Ireland Water contends that those efficiency targets are undeliverable and that 76% of its revenue comes from public expenditure. That has resulted in Northern Ireland Water being reclassified as a non-departmental public body. That is where it sits. "Undeliverable", it says; "We can't do it", it says. It says that it will not enter into the argument on deliverability or extension. By extension, it says that it cannot therefore meet the efficiency targets likely to be imposed on it by the regulator. What is the point of a regulator if companies do not enter into the discussion? The bottom line is that, should the company and the regulator end up in stalemate, which looks to be

the case, the issue will end up with something like the competition body.

This kind of Mexican stand-off is no way to do business and no way of using public money. It seems clear to me that ratepayers and taxpayers, as people, are fed up listening to highly paid company executives tell them that they cannot run the business and it cannot be sustained without inflated subsidies from public money. It is a cry that we hear too often in the House from people who are not answerable to the House. It seems that Northern Ireland Water cannot perform adequately within the regulator's definition of "proposed efficiency levels".

I do not know, because no one in the Northern Ireland Water company can tell me, whether, in this amendment Bill, domestic rates will be increased with respect to water charges or whether the multimillion-pound subsidy, paid for out of our taxes, will be increased to offset them. No one is detailing anything, except the purposes we know of. What I do know is what is not being addressed. Come 2016, a Stormont Executive could well find themselves in the position of launching a water charge Exocet at the heretofore unsuspecting public of Northern Ireland.

Popularity is fine, but it is no substitute for good government. By pushing aside a decision on the long-term financing of Northern Ireland Water, the Bill does not serve the public well. The public may be content, for now, to go along with the Bill, as they are content with so many other fictions. However, ultimately, Members must think about whether the Bill is in the public interest. Public finance, I contend, is always better when it is planned and when action is not forced on us by one crisis or another.

So, I believe that, in line with the Bill and as we take it through the various stages, the public will demand answers, because they will want to know the details on water charges. After all, we are paying for them. We all welcome the Bill, because that is the route that we have taken with it. Contained in the Bill are the pledges that most if not all of us have given to the electorate, which is that there will be no water charges. This extension is to 2016. The error that is now being made and what we need to know, as the Bill goes through the House and the Committee, is where it will take us to in 2016 with this extension. There is a real possibility in my mind and in the mind of many economists that water charges will be introduced and will plunge some people into poverty. That is the human end of the equation.

Austerity has kicked in on many other fronts. Benefits are being reassessed on an ongoing basis, and unemployment remains stubbornly high, in stark contrast to the rest of the United Kingdom. People may well have the good feeling of Christmas, overspend and choose to pay later. Imagine if, on top of all that spending and the feel-good factor of Christmas — not this Christmas, not the next but maybe the following Christmas — a whopping great bill for water charges eventually drops through the letter box. That may be where we are heading.

So, what do we do? The reality is that there is no escape route to prevent the charges. That is what the Bill says. What is the cost of the extension that the Minister asks for? What are the public paying for and, in doing so, what options are open to them? What is likely to be more popular: being taxed for payment, as is the case, or

receiving a bill, which is the additional method of payment through the domestic rate that it does not produce?

On the one hand, the water company is defiant in its stand over meeting what is likely to be the Utility Regulator's requirement for efficiencies. On the other hand, Minister Kennedy is pushing ahead with extending the subsidy on water. I do not fault him for that, but my concern is that the challenge of paying for water needs to be faced. We cannot somehow store this for future consideration. I do not think that the Executive are keen on the idea of storing it or fudging it; I think that they do not know how to deal with it. They have attached themselves to something like a limpet, and they really do not know how to work this through. They do not know how to take away — if that is the case — and redirect the Bill, because the public are not fooled. They know that we pay for this in taxes, but nobody wants to give them a bill. What will be the difference? The difference will be that you get your bill but you will get no tax rebate. You can rest assured that that will be the case.

The earlier we deal with the problem, the easier it will be to deal with it. The challenge of paying for water needs to be thoroughly researched, and the public need to be engaged throughout that process. I trust that Minister Kennedy will proceed to initiate a process between now and 2016. If we come back or somebody comes back here three months before 2016 and says, "Let us talk about water", we will not be prepared, and we will not stand a chance. Sometimes the cynic may say, "Well, if only Peter Robinson would tell us when the election will be. Will it be in 2015 or 2016? How long do we need to keep an extension for water charges?". The answer is this: we all need to take it if we want to be popular, and we all need to keep it until after that election and then see what is doing it. Mark my words: you will be going in front of the electorate having to answer them about your position on the introduction of water charges or having the taxman — you and I and them — pay for it. Therefore, we need to know the proportion of the rates that goes towards water charges. What will it be in 2016? We need to know the amount of the subsidy paid for by taxpayers. We have an idea of it, but what will it be in 2016?

The Bill will continue its passage today. We will watch its process and progress until adoption. The question that I pose is this: what will the House do? Adopt it? Then what? I trust that the Minister will ensure that we leave this place today better informed.

Mr Allister: Like the Bill itself, I will be brief. I have just a couple of points that I invite the Minister to elaborate on.

Mr McNarry touched on the duration of the further extension of three years that is in the Bill. My mind turns to this issue: why three years? Even under the dreaded, dreadful direct rule, they managed to come up with an extension of six years for the avoidance of water charges. The Executive, through the Minister, have come up with an extension of a further three years. Why is it three years? What is the logic, the thinking and the compulsion relating to three years? Is it simply that that takes us past or close to the next Assembly election? Is it because opposition to water charging is seen by all as a good campaigning issue and the Minister and others want to keep it as something that is there before the electorate so that politicians can beat their chest and say, "Vote for us and we will save

you from water charges, because, if you do not, come the spring of 2016, you will be saddled with them"?

Is it as cynical as that in terms of timing? If we are more magnanimous and more thoughtful of the needs of our constituents than direct rule Ministers were, why are we putting up only 50% of the period that they guaranteed in the 2006 order to protect us from water charges? Perhaps the Minister could explain why he is reining this in in three years' time? What is the logic and thinking behind that? If the political consensus is against water charging, as it seems to be, and properly so, why is he not simply saying, "I am going to put this issue to bed for the foreseeable future, and I am going to say that there will be no water charging because we are going to have this mechanism for the foreseeable future, way beyond the next election." I am interested to know why that is not the thinking.

11.30 am

There have been some references to the operation of Northern Ireland Water, and Mr McNarry quite fully referred to issues about the efficiencies in NIW. I would press the Minister on how he thinks efficiencies in NIW are going. Does he think it is living up to expectations in these current financial circumstances? Is it doing what it ought to in respect of efficiencies? For example, something topical that was mentioned yesterday is the matter of the pension scheme in Northern Ireland Water. How is it progressing in bringing itself into line with the Hutton proposals? I ask that because we have the quite amazing situation in Northern Ireland Water in which senior executives have a pension scheme with a contribution of 26.9% of salary.

Mr Speaker: Order. As the Member will know, I allow some latitude, even at the Second Stage of a Bill, which is specifically about the principles of the Bill. This is a very narrow and focused Bill. I am listening to the Member very carefully, and I detect that he may be going slightly outside of the Second Stage of the Bill. Would I be correct in saying what I am saying?

Mr Allister: That would not be my perception, Mr Speaker. *[Laughter.]* The point I was making was that we are discussing a Bill in the context of the financing of Northern Ireland Water, so I think, as others have thought, that this is a legitimate question to raise: how are the efficiencies of Northern Ireland Water measuring up to what we would expect in the expending of public money? I am using by way of one illustration the amount of money that is, perhaps, squandered within the pension scheme. I am asking, in consequence, whether the Minister thinks that NIW is doing all it should in that specific regard as an example of what the public expectation would be in respect of efficiencies?

I think Northern Ireland Water's credibility has suffered considerably over recent times, and the appointment and non-appointment of chairmen is something that, naturally, has stirred up a lot of controversy. To add to that by discovering that it is far from efficient and very generous to itself with, for example, its pension scheme is a problem that further strains its credibility. I hope that the Minister is able to reassure us on the efficiency drive within Northern Ireland Water.

With regard to clause 2, I think it is right and proper that such matters should be registered with Land Registry, so that the unsuspecting purchaser can, undoubtedly, see

what it is he is buying and is not taken by surprise with plans for the laying of pipes, etc, on land that he might be considering purchasing. I think that that is a sensible proposition and one that will be of assistance in that regard, and I entirely support it. I support the general principles of the Bill, but I would like to hear the Minister answer some of those points, if he would.

Mr Kennedy: I thank all Members who contributed to the debate, particularly those members of the Regional Development Committee, including the Deputy Chairperson. I thank Members for the widespread support that they have shown for the Bill today. I am pleased to acknowledge that support, because it will ensure that the Executive's Programme for Government 2011-15 commitment not to introduce any additional household water charges is implemented.

Some have expressed perhaps misgivings or concerns that the Bill does not address long-term questions about the funding and governance arrangements for water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland. As I explained in my opening remarks, the Bill is not meant to deal with those broader issues of policy.

The current legislation, which enables a subsidy to be paid to Northern Ireland Water, will expire on 31 March 2013. If the Executive's decision not to introduce additional water charges is to be implemented, we need this new legislation. It is important to stress that the Bill does not constrain debate by the Executive, or indeed the Assembly, on the broader longer-term issues facing the water industry in Northern Ireland. It does, however, ensure that, until there is broad agreement on a sensible way forward, a proper mechanism to pay for water and sewerage services is in place.

There has been some comment about the proposal to require notices in respect of the laying of certain pipes and sewers on private land to be registered in the Statutory Charges Register. In my view, that is a common sense measure to make information about intended works by NI Water on private property publicly available on the NI Land Registry.

While there may be questions about the future of the water industry in Northern Ireland, there is no question, in my mind, that the legislation is the right thing to do now. It makes good a commitment not to introduce additional household water charges in the current Programme for Government (PFG) and provides space and opportunity for a mature, thoughtful and sensible future debate on options and approaches that may be taken in the next Assembly.

I will now comment on Members' contributions.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee, Mr Lynch, joined me in my good wishes to Mr Spratt, as Members unanimously have done. We trust and pray that he is restored to full health as quickly as possible. We send good wishes to his wife Lynda and his family.

Mr Lynch welcomed the broad concepts of the Bill and indicated that the Committee would co-operate with me and officials as we go forward. He did raise the issue of governance, but I can now tell him that the Executive paper on how we move forward, which I presented to colleagues, was agreed at the recent Executive meeting. That paper will now begin to be the subject of discussion at the Budget review group. I very much look forward to that.

That will give all parties — certainly all Executive parties — the opportunity to contribute. I am sure that other Members will find ways of contributing, and the Committee may well find ways of contributing, as we move forward.

Mr Easton welcomed the PFG commitment being honoured.

Mr Kinahan had some very kind, and indeed true, comments of a personal note. I thought that his was an excellent contribution about the current situation. I assure him that the wider discussion will be helpful as we move forward. There are issues about governance, funding and infrastructure, and I very much hope that we can make early progress on them all.

Mr Dallat gave the Bill a broad welcome. His contribution included some very bad puns, but we are prepared to overlook those. He raised issues about the quality of water and the infrastructural improvements, which are important, and he also said that local wastewater treatment plants need to be upgraded. As the Member will know, there is a rolling programme for that, and some significant progress has been made, including in areas in his constituency. I very much agree with his assertion that Northern Ireland Water must be fit for purpose as we look to the future and that it has to be in a position to respond to the challenges that it faces.

Mr Beggs: Would the Minister care to comment on the implications for Northern Ireland Water following the Finance Minister's recent statement of 12 November, in which he indicated the Budget realignment for 2013-14 and the subsequent year? In particular, he commented that some Departments would have their funding reduced, and he specifically mentioned that the Department for Regional Development would have its funding reduced.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for his contribution. I was, and am, concerned that the Minister of Finance proposed that there will be a reduction in the NIW revenue budget of £10 million in 2013-14 and 2014-15 before the regulatory process has run its course. However, I have no doubt that the Executive will wish to respect the outcome of that regulatory process. As water funding is a cross-cutting issue that directly affects the lives of all our citizens, all Ministers have a duty to ensure that those vital services are properly funded.

Mr Dickson promised a detailed scrutiny at Committee Stage. I was somewhat disappointed, because he started off positively but then referred to this as a "short-sighted" Bill. I remind him of a quotation from Sherlock Holmes:

"When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

That is the situation that I find myself in, and I want to see progress being made at the Budget review group.

We had a substantial contribution from Mr McNarry. In some ways, he and Mr Allister are not quite harbingers of doom or weeping Jeremiahs, but they certainly cast some concern about what is a straightforward Bill that is consistent with the Programme for Government and supported by the Executive as a whole.

Before I go into some of the detail of the issues that Mr McNarry in particular raised, I will say that it may represent a change of policy for UKIP, which Members will want to know about. He appeared to indicate that his party was at least looking at the prospect of water charges. That will

conflict with the views of an existing UKIP representative in Northern Ireland, Councillor Henry Reilly, who strenuously attacked the Alliance Party for having the temerity to propose the introduction of water charges. So, whether that is the first sign of a split in UKIP, I do not know, but no doubt things will emerge in the future.

Mr McNarry: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Kennedy: No, I have progress to make, and the Member made a substantial contribution.

Mr McNarry: So, you just want to say —

11.45 am

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member should not persist.

Mr Kennedy: The Member spoke about the subsidy to NI Water and the legislation that is before him. Lest there be any confusion, the subsidy that the Executive are providing is a customer subsidy. It is not a subsidy for NI Water. The subsidy means that households do not have to pay water charges; rather, the Executive pay them on their behalf. NI Water is regulated by an independent regulator. It sets the company challenging efficiency targets that are well above the public sector norm. In the past, NI Water has delivered such efficiencies.

Mr McNarry also asked what the cost of the Bill will be. The subsidy in 2012-13 is £282 million. Over the next two years, it will be of similar magnitude. NIW will remain majority-funded from public expenditure, so the Executive will continue to meet the majority of its costs. The Member will already know, as will other Members, that householders' current contribution is around £160 for an average house through the regional rate. That covers less than half the costs of providing water and sewerage services. Non-domestic customers pay direct charges, which are partly subsidised.

Mr Allister asked why the subsidy is to be extended for three years. The reason is simply that it meets the Executive's commitment not to introduce water charges in the current budgetary period. Inevitably, a subsidy will be required in the following year. Beyond that, the Executive have yet to agree their position. The Member will know that it is not possible or, indeed, wise for the Executive or the Assembly to mandate Executives long into the future.

Those are most of the points that Members raised. If there are others that have not been addressed, I will, of course, study Hansard and correspond directly with individual Members. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill [NIA 16/11-15] be agreed.

Private Members' Business

Transport: EU Funding for 2014-2020

Mr Speaker: Two amendments have been selected, so up to one hour and 45 minutes will be allowed for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. 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, Members should note that if amendment No 1 is made, amendment No 2 cannot be made.

Mr Lynch (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Regional Development to work in partnership with the Irish Government to advance the "pre-identified" projects list for inclusion in the next round of EU funding for 2014-2020.

I obviously support the motion, and I agree with both amendments. My two colleagues will speak in more detail on the amendments later.

In the past, European funding has paid dividends and brought advantages to the island of Ireland, particularly the South of Ireland. Only for that European funding, I do not think that the state would have been as competitive as it has been. I know that there has been a downturn in the economy there, but if people or states are to be ready when the economy comes back around, they need to deal with infrastructure across the region.

We know that the Trans-European Transport Network, known to most of us as TEN-T, sets out the policy framework for the development of transport infrastructure across the EU. TEN-T comprises infrastructure such as roads, railways, waterways, ports, airports, navigation aids and freight terminals across Europe. TEN-T has an EU budget of around €49 million for the 2007-2013 programme period. The next round of EU funding for 2014-2020 is currently being decided based on a list of pre-identified projects. However, Ireland does not feature on that list. It is important to identify funding now, as Ireland will assume the presidency in January, and we hope that a decision is made and agreed during that period.

As somebody who travelled to Brussels as part of the Committee for Regional Development, I know that — and other members can confirm this — there are those in Europe who have difficulty envisioning where Ireland is situated. They actually thought that we were connected to mainland Europe, so we had to take out a map and show them that the blue stripe represented water between us. Those rapporteurs are the ones who will make the decisions about the next tranche of funding.

Quite a bit of the large tranche of TEN-T moneys is earmarked for new eastern states of the European Union. They cover vast areas, and the EU wants to make them more competitive in a European context. The difficulty is that such decisions could result in Ireland becoming peripheral, particularly as we are the most westerly country on the flank of Europe. If European decision-

makers take their eye off the ball and instead spend money on those new states, the island of Ireland could be left on the periphery and become less competitive in the new markets that will rise when the economy comes back around. That is one of the things that we are afraid may happen.

The island of Ireland needs to become a vital part of the new EU core transport network. That is why we are saying to the Minister that he should work innovatively and imaginatively with his counterparts in Dublin and push very hard so that we are not left out of decision-making when —

Mr McMullan: I thank the Member for giving way. Does he agree that we should maximise the amount of EU funding available for projects? Does he also agree that the Irish Government have a good track record in that regard and that we could benefit from that?

Mr Lynch: I thank the Member for his intervention. I certainly agree with him. The Assembly, the Executive and Departments should maximise funding, particularly the Department for Regional Development (DRD), because it covers roads and transport networks.

I agree with the Member that the Southern Government have made huge advances in their networks in the Twenty-six Counties over the past 10 years. When we were in Brussels, we found that a huge number — approximately 140 people — from the Dublin Government were working in Europe. I know that the Executive have now opened up an office there, albeit with a small number of staff, whom we met when we were there, and that is to be welcomed. I think that what they need to do is start working together and identifying particular projects on the island of Ireland.

TEN-T is very focused on moving freight and goods by train.

That is fine across large sections of Europe, most of which has no water borders and is all land. We should not forget that we must have road infrastructure. They are trying to get away from road infrastructure for environmental reasons and move as many goods as possible by rail. We have a small population, and we are very dispersed on the island of Ireland. But, again, we should not allow moneys that we believe can be sought from Europe over the next period to go to eastern Europe. We are not saying that eastern Europe should not get its fair share of the money.

I believe that, if we stay in the context of the North of Ireland, it is too narrow. It will become even more peripheral and less competitive, and the Minister, as the motion says, needs to work with his counterparts in Dublin over the next number of months and, hopefully, push for as much funding as possible from the European tranche that is coming up.

Mr Dickson: I beg to move amendment No 1:

Leave out all after "Development" and insert

"to work with his counterparts in the Irish, Scottish, Welsh and British Governments in seeking the maximum amount of EU funding available for transport; and further calls on the European Commission to recognise Northern Ireland's variance in terms of transport needs and existing infrastructure."

We find ourselves in an increasingly competitive global arena, which is shaped by growing interconnectedness. In such a competitive international environment, transport is vital for providing access to markets, increasing the

availability of skilled labour and improving our quality of life. These are all key factors in promoting business and growth. Putting in place good transport infrastructure and services is, therefore, essential in providing for Northern Ireland's economic and social well-being.

In recent years, we have benefited from approximately £18 million in TEN-T funding. However, looking forward, the proposed regulations will limit our ability to benefit from the programme in the next funding period. TEN-T is being transformed from what is essentially a funding programme to a transport infrastructure policy within the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), as its main funding instrument.

Alarming, regulations for this new network could deny us the opportunity to benefit from EU funding and even steer us towards having to implement infrastructure standards that could not be afforded and, indeed, would not be appropriate for Northern Ireland. The Commission is simply failing to recognise that what works on the continent may not work on an island such as ours, which is on the periphery and is historically one of the most underdeveloped regions of the EU.

(Mr Principal Deputy Speaker [Mr Molloy] in the Chair)

They want us to focus investment on high-speed, long-distance and/or electrified rail, but our railway network is one of the smallest and most isolated in the European Union. They want us to invest in projects that shift freight from road to rail while, geographically and economically, the reality is that most freight cannot be transported in that way on the island of Ireland, North or South.

They exclude all areas from the core network except the eastern seaboard transport corridor and our eastern ports. This means that CEF funding, which is directed exclusively at the core network, will not be available for transport between Belfast and Londonderry, our second city. Failing to influence policy in this area will be detrimental to our transport system, our connectivity and our economy. Added to the likely effect of the current proposed regulations is the reality that the European Union is expanding to the east, and we will face increasing competition from other countries for investment.

The Regional Development Committee, of which I am a member, visited Brussels in April to argue our case, and the vice-Chair has already referred to that. It was somewhat horrifying to discover that officials in Brussels believed that Northern Ireland was connected to Scotland by a tunnel. I am not sure what our MEPs have been doing for the past 30 years, but there you are.

The Minister has since visited Strasbourg and hosted Mr Brian Simpson, chair of the European Parliament's Transport and Tourism Committee. We have been working hard collectively to stress the need for the European Commission to recognise Northern Ireland's variance in this area. It is now time for us, as an Assembly, to speak out with one voice on this matter, and, on that front, I welcome the support from all parties for this amendment.

That is the first reason why I ask Members to support amendment No 1. The second is that I believe that this amendment effectively widens the scope of the motion to recognise the importance of working with all the Governments of these islands and pursuing all avenues for EU funding for transport.

12.00 noon

The proposers of the original motion are right to stress the importance of working with the Irish Government to advance pre-identified projects under the CEF. Likewise, the proposers of the second amendment are right to stress the important role played by the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in that regard. As the two Administrations on a small and geographically peripheral island, it is imperative that we work together, and we have done so effectively thus far. Together, we have demonstrated the importance of the network from Cork through Dublin to Belfast and on to Larne. We must continue to attract investment into that essential transport corridor but we must also work together, bringing investment into other corridors and areas, such as the north-west, which has the highest rate of economic dependency in both jurisdictions.

The amendment brought by us recognises the importance of this partnership with the Irish Government but also points to the value of co-operation with other Governments. TEN-T priority project 13, for example, shows a road network that connects Cork, Dublin and Belfast with Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and London via Scottish and Welsh ports. So, it matters to us whether passengers and freight can access our shores easily from London and further afield.

We need to lobby with the Scottish Government about the A75 being a major route for freight and passengers yet remaining single carriageway, not included in the core network. We have to have an interest in the road that connects the eastern Scottish ports with the M6. Likewise, we have an interest in the connectedness of Liverpool, Holyhead and Fishguard. We need to think beyond our shores about the infrastructure and services provided by our neighbours and how those affect our connectivity and, thus, our economic well-being.

Our amendment calls on the Minister to pursue all available avenues of EU funding. The proposers are right to stress the importance of pre-identified projects under CEF, and as the proposed central funding mechanism for the new TEN-T policy, we need to extract as much as we can from that fund.

Negotiations in Brussels are still ongoing. I commend the work that the Minister has done and is continuing to do. However, we do not know what the outcome of those negotiations will be in terms of this new policy or the overall EU budget. The Minister has lobbied for the inclusion of Derry/Londonderry in the core network, and we await the results of those efforts. We should, however, have the opportunity to apply for other funding streams for investment in our comprehensive network, such as the upcoming INTERREG V. So, we should ask the Minister to do his best to mine such funds and resources.

Our amendment effectively widens the scope of the original motion in ways that should be acceptable to all Members. It demands that we pursue co-operation and investment, and it gives us the opportunity to send a united message to the European Commission. I urge Members to support the amendment.

Mr Dallat: I beg to move amendment No 2:

At end insert

“; and, under the auspices of the NSMC transport sector which has responsibility for reviewing and updating the transport policy for the island, to co-ordinate the transport aspects of EU cross-border programmes and develop plans for specific cross-border transport projects.”

I welcome the motion and hope that the proposers and the Assembly as a whole will support the SDLP amendment.

I am sure that anyone who has had the opportunity to examine the list of pre-identified projects submitted by other member states will realise immediately that there is much to be gained from having a clear focus on the transport projects that qualify under European funding for 2014-2020. Indeed, as a much younger person, one of my memories of the European Union when it came into being was a leading news item that a train could travel from one end of Europe to the other without the difficulties of customs and so on. We are still trying to achieve that objective. That was breaking news then but, unfortunately, our infrastructure has not allowed us to replicate that in the way that we should have been able to.

In the meantime, much has been done to address a complex issue but much more needs to be done and, hopefully, will be done here in this part of the European Union if we can benefit from that European grant money, which is used specifically to address bottlenecks or corridors, call them what you will. The European Commission, in its policy document TEN-T, addressed the complexity of the issue in a very detailed way. As a result, Derry was deemed fit to be part of an overall objective of the TEN-T, which was, in essence, to provide a framework for the development of infrastructure for the smooth running of the internal market and for ensuring economic, social and territorial cohesion and improved accessibility across the European Union.

Members who served in a previous mandate will recall that a great deal of work was done by the Northern Corridor Railways Group, which was made up of seven councils between Derry and Belfast. It made submissions to the Assembly and Dáil Éireann. I hope that that document is still available, because it charts a very intelligent way towards qualifying for European funding. It is not simply the argument that Derry or the north-west should have a railway; in fact, it takes into account the other arguments about population clusters and so on. In the meantime, my colleagues Colum Eastwood and Pat Ramsey have, on several occasions, submitted questions to the Minister for Regional Development that were pertinent to the future funding of road and rail projects that are designed to reduce congestion and emissions, as detailed in 'European Priorities 2011-12: Winning in Europe'. As recently as January this year, they were told that officials intended to submit applications for a number of projects that would help to achieve the objectives set out by the European Union.

Since then, the Regional Development Committee has been to Brussels. I hasten to add that that was just before I joined the Committee; I missed that trip. However, I believe that it was a very useful trip that uncovered some misunderstandings in Europe about our infrastructure,

including the one that was just mentioned: the notion that there was a tunnel between here and Scotland. Perhaps those MEPs are suffering from tunnel vision and have not quite corrected that.

I have to acknowledge that the present Minister for Regional Development was in hot pursuit. He has certainly not neglected to follow up the excellent work that was done by the Committee. My only regret is that the previous Minister for Regional Development was not a great deal more proactive in pursuing EU funding designed to address serious issues that arose out of what I thought he would have acknowledged as the legacy of partition and neglect during the dark days of the Troubles. Mr Murphy was engaged in studying for his doctorate and keeping fit for the triathlon and all those important things, and I do not suggest for one moment that all work and no play does not make Jack a dull boy or anything like that.

Our amendment is essential if we are not to rely on one Minister — sorry, Minister; we do not trust you all that much — to pursue the objectives that have been identified. In the short time available, it is critical that continuous attention is paid to delivering the key objectives if Ireland as a whole is to benefit in the same way as many other European states will benefit from the financial aid available to drive forward a transport infrastructure that is fit for purpose in a modern Europe, capable of competing in a world market where time and accessibility are of the essence.

Whatever our political differences, there should be no difference when it comes to driving forward a transport infrastructure that is fit for purpose.

Without wanting to appear parochial, I say that there is a crying need to begin in the north-west, where road and rail need massive investment on a scale that cannot be done without EU assistance. It would be totally remiss of me not to acknowledge the endeavours of the current Minister, who found the money to at least be able to say that although the Derry-Coleraine section of the railway is currently closed, there are expectations that, in the future, it will play a major role in delivering what, I think, we all want.

There is no good reason why we should not have a rail transport system that is capable of operating between Cork and Derry. Many people ask why that is not further up the agenda. From my research, I know that the European investment in the Cork to Dublin section of the line was based on the expectation that it would continue as part of the TEN-T project. There has been a focus on making improvements to the Dublin to Belfast line, but regrettably, that has not resulted in a dedicated line for the Enterprise service or in any serious attempt to transfer goods from road to rail. I do not accept that it is not possible for us to seriously consider transferring much of the freight that is moved by road to rail over long distances. I think that it is 300 miles from Cork to Belfast.

Returning to the north-west, Members know that the Knockmore line between Antrim and Lisburn remains mothballed. That has been a serious impediment to the development of a rail service between Derry and Dublin. That does not present an image of a modern state in the European Union, and I suggest that, if that situation existed in any other part of the European Union, it would be a priority to be tackled without delay. Those bottlenecks, or corridors, as I call them, are serious impediments to the economic and social development of the areas that are

affected. They need to be addressed with a synergy that I believe has, sadly, been lacking in the past.

Several times in the past year, the SDLP discussed with the Dublin Government the need for co-operation and the building of cross-border transport infrastructure. That would deal with road, rail and air transport links and, indeed Minister, dare I suggest, the vexed question of the Foyle ferry service, which is currently tied up in dock. We believe that there is a willingness to face up to those challenges, if only we could maintain the momentum that is needed to drive it forward. It is not simply a question of yes or no. It is essential that we play our part in improving our environment, and one of the main causes of bad environmental conditions is the failure to address our transport needs in a modern and efficient way.

We believe that the North/South Ministerial Council transport sector, which has a responsibility for reviewing and updating the transport policy for the island, is the most appropriate body for the Minister for Regional Development to work with. Working in that way would give us a better chance of co-ordinating the transport aspects of EU cross-border programmes and developing plans for specific cross-border projects.

We are now part of a bigger European community —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Dallat: — where economic strength is measured by the speed at which we can move people and goods. I urge the Minister to go for it.

Mr I McCrea: From the outset, I apologise if I cough and splutter through any part of my contribution. I have tried my best to get rid of this cold. I believe that I was able to pass it on to Mr Dickson, a member of the Regional Development Committee, after last week's Committee meeting, but, so far, I have not been able to get rid of all of it. Nonetheless —

Mr Kennedy: Power sharing.

Mr I McCrea: Indeed; it is power sharing at its best. I am happy to share it with any other Member.

When I read the motion, my initial reaction was that it was very short-sighted, as were the Members who proposed it. I welcome the Alliance Party amendment, which would see the benefit of the Minister working with his counterparts in the Scottish, Welsh and British Governments and, indeed, in the Government in the Irish Republic. I think that we should also add to that the need to work alongside our MEPs to try to get the necessary investment in Northern Ireland.

I suppose I find it somewhat difficult to understand the benefits that the proposal might bring to my constituency. As you know, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, Mid Ulster does not benefit from having great public transport, and we certainly do not have a rail network, the need for which was referred to by Mr Dallat. I will be happy to work with the Minister and encourage him to seek investment for that much-needed rail network.

12.15 pm

As part of the regional development strategy that the Minister launched, Cookstown was upgraded to a main hub, as was Dungannon. Unfortunately, Magherafelt did not make it,

but we will work on that. The benefits that those upgrades brought to the constituency were welcomed. However, the transport network has to follow that. In that respect, I believe that the work that the Minister is doing and the TEN-T proposals can benefit my constituency.

On reading some of the paperwork related to the debate, I took note of a memo dated 19 October that deals with connecting Europe and the new EU core transport network. Key facts and figures in that include:

"The core network will connect: 83 main European ports with rail and road links; 37 key airports with rail connections into major cities; 15,000 km of railway line upgraded to high speed; and 35 cross border projects to reduce bottlenecks."

Before anyone gets too excited, I must say that the cross-border element that I am considering is between east and west and how we improve the links that are there. It is important that we do what we can to transform the existing patchwork of roads, railways, airports and canals across Europe, as intended by TEN-T, and I wish the Minister well as he continues to fight for funding from Europe.

This is also important for tourism. We have a great product in Northern Ireland, but we strive to utilise the benefits of our public transport to help tourism.

I recall that someone referred to —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr I McCrea: — freight travel. I am not sure that that is too likely or that I can imagine a herd of cows in the back of one of our new trains. Nonetheless, it is something that we should strive to get to grips with.

Mrs Overend: I believe the motion to be extremely premature, as negotiations around pre-identified projects are ongoing and the list that is referred to is, as of now, only in draft form. The items on the list make broad reference to indicative projects and not to definitive projects. Indeed, I believe that the Members who tabled the motion know that it is premature, because it was tabled a number of weeks ago and subsequently withdrawn until such a time as the list of projects was to become finalised. I understand that the signatories to the motion accepted that point at the time. They were even told when the draft list would be finalised and, as such, the appropriate time to table the motion.

Therefore, yet again, farcically, a motion comes before the House at a most unsatisfactory time. The pre-identified list still does not include any actual projects in Northern Ireland, and those that it does include are only indicative. Until TEN-T regulations are settled, there will not be a definitive list of projects.

My party will support only the Alliance Party amendment, which moves the debate away from the draft pre-identified list and is therefore capable of support. Although that particular amendment may not be ideal, we accept that Northern Ireland needs to utilise all avenues possible in order to influence policy and ensure that we are not left behind as the budget negotiations continue. As such, we support the call for the Minister to work with his counterparts in the Irish, Scottish, Welsh and British Governments in seeking the maximum amount of EU funding available for transport, which is what he has been doing to date.

Mr Easton: Having an effective infrastructure is vital to allow Northern Ireland to recover from the current economic climate, develop potential investment and tourist opportunities and ensure the economic future of our devolved administration. The EU offers the potential to develop key infrastructure, not just in Northern Ireland but throughout Europe, which will aid the movement of freight and, ultimately, people across the region. We must continue to work to ensure that there is more competition in the transport system and that the network becomes integrated to link different transport modes.

So much of our transport system is fragmented. For example, if a person wants to get the ferry to Liverpool, the most frequent bus service drops them at the Mount Vernon estate in north Belfast, leaving a walk of approximately two miles, or the person has to get a taxi or have their own form of transport. The regeneration of the roads in Belfast city centre used data showing that public transport is vital to Northern Ireland as a high proportion of households do not have access to a car and are therefore reliant on public transport.

Northern Ireland is unique, in that most of our freight travels by road and not rail. Our rail infrastructure is lagging behind that in other parts of the United Kingdom, and the amount of capital required to bring it up to speed could be better spent by working with road networks as opposed to rail networks. We also, like the Republic of Ireland, have a large rural population, which needs to have jobs, schools, and access to goods and services. Again, a rail network may not be the best way to address its needs and issues.

We must ensure that, through our work, we bring attention to our major unique selling point in accessing funds, which is that we do not have any immediate land borders with mainland European countries. It is therefore imperative that we work hand in hand with other Administrations —

Mr McMullan: I thank the Member for giving way. He talks about transport in rural areas, and I agree with him. Does he agree that the rural White Paper could be a template for driving that forward and making good examples? We need better transport to link rural areas with urban areas for jobs, tourism and creating the wealth that we so greatly need at the present time.

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

Mr Easton: I thank the Member for his intervention. It is certainly something that we need to have a closer look at.

It is imperative that we work hand in hand with other Administrations and Governments in the same position in order to bring a loud voice to the opportunities and challenges that those differences bring to our countries. By working together and providing a cohesive force, we can ensure that the regional variations that exist in our region can be heard and accounted for.

It is vital that regional variations are taken into account in European policy. Our differences make us unique and give each region its own strengths and weaknesses. This is not about making a patchwork of how the policy is developed and delivered, it is about allowing each region to invest the funds in such a way that value-added outcomes and outputs are achieved. To ignore regional variations would be reckless and would not deliver as many benefits to

either the EU, the region, business or the citizens who reside in this region.

I support the Alliance Party's amendment, as the motion by Sinn Féin is the usual all-Ireland agenda. The motion needs to include the rest of the United Kingdom, from east to west and from north to south, which identifies the importance of regions. We have similar issues and profiles working together in partnership to ensure that their region benefits from the maximum amount of EU funding. That is why I feel that politics is about building relationships and social capital, not just across the UK but with other nations, to receive the best outcomes for all concerned. I also support the uniqueness of Northern Ireland, and call on the European Commissioner to embrace and recognise the variation that we in Northern Ireland experience in terms of transport needs and existing infrastructure. I support the Alliance Party's amendment.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion, and I also want to say a few words on the two amendments. The mission statement of the Trans-European Network says that

"The future prosperity of our continent will depend on the ability of all its regions to remain fully and competitively integrated in the world economy. Efficient transport is vital in making this happen."

Like Mr Dallat, except, perhaps, a few years later, I travelled extensively in western and eastern Europe, and I always marvelled that Europe as it was then, particularly the eastern part, having suffered what it did during two world wars and especially in the Second World War, had the infrastructure that it did.

The island of Ireland did not suffer the same effects during World War II, but unfortunately this has not been the case, particularly in terms of the rail network. If we look back in history to 100 years ago, every village on the island was no more than a mere five miles away from a railway track. It takes very little imagination to see what the implications for trade and tourism would have been had that situation been maintained.

Instead, the roads system received priority, and now it groans at the seams. Two minor collisions this morning added an extra half an hour to my journey here. All the while, that is costing commuters in the form of fuel increases. As circumstances are now substantially different, I believe that that must change.

As the motion states, the pre-identified projects list must seek to address the outstanding issues, including rail transport, on this island. As my colleague Martina Anderson MEP said on 16 October, there are a number of spurs and lines but no real network on the island outside of the Belfast, Dublin and Cork axis. The tabling of over 1,000 amendments to the TEN-T draft report was met with dismay and derision earlier this month, with a dismissal of "purely regional" concerns.

That is one of the reasons why I had a concern about the Alliance Party amendment. However, having listened to Stewart Dickson, I take on board what he said about the A75 and the Welsh ports as part of an integrated transport system on this island as well. I have to say that he has won me over on that one.

This, I believe, presents a unique opportunity for the implementation of a strategic transport plan that falls under the remit of the all-Ireland Ministerial Council. I believe that the main tenet of any strategy should include a western arc project that would entail a western rail network extending from Belfast through Derry, Sligo, Knock and Galway to Shannon — and that includes the new deep-water spur at Foynes — and on to Limerick. That would, for the first time in many years, link in with the existing railways, connect with Cork and Dublin and go back to Belfast.

The tourism and commerce opportunities that would be provided by this network could form the basis of an all-Ireland means of redressing the effects of the economic downturn and, in particular, help the construction sector. It would undoubtedly help the fight against climate change, and would be the first real attempt to reinstate freight and passenger transport and traffic for the 21st century and beyond. It would also connect all the major airports on the island — Derry, Knock, Shannon, Cork, Dublin and Belfast City Airport — with the exception of Aldergrove. Imagine the benefits that that would have for our tourism product.

For the first time, the infrastructural deficiencies that are so often quoted as a bar to sustainable investment outside the Belfast/Dublin east coast axis will no longer be a deterrent. During the summer we met representatives of the Mayo and Sligo Chambers of Commerce to tease out some of the issues that they have with importation. We must remember that 30% of the world's Coca-Cola comes from Mayo, which is not exactly the centre of the universe.

The Executive and the Irish Government should prioritise and develop proposals jointly for the deployment of EU structural funds. In the past, the lack of a co-ordinated approach meant a disparity of delivery North and South.

We should not labour under the illusion that this would not be a huge financial investment. However, years of underinvestment have left a bitter legacy. If the political will exists, projects such as the western arc could be delivered under the Trans-European Network and the vastly untapped financial assistance contained therein. All MEPs on this island, and Members of the Assembly and the Dáil, should be actively lobbying for this in the next round of European funding, particularly during the upcoming European presidency.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Ó hOisín: I believe that this debate is timely. The Committee will vote on the matter today and it will be in plenary in January. The House should support the motion.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to meet immediately upon the lunchtime suspension. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when we return will be Question Time. This debate will continue at 3.00 pm, when the next contributor will be Mr Jim Allister.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.29 pm.

On resuming —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer. As Mr McGlone is not in his place to ask question 1, I call Ross Hussey.

Programme for Government: Targets

2. **Mr Hussey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of how their Department monitors and reports on delivery against Programme for Government targets. (AQO 2962/11-15)

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): Since the inception of this Programme for Government (PFG), Executive Ministers have repeatedly made it clear that our focus is on delivering substantial and tangible outcomes that will positively affect the lives of people in Northern Ireland, both in the short and long term. Our Programme for Government sets challenging targets in these difficult economic times. We need to show resourcefulness in the way that we tackle the problems presented to us and a determination to make the changes necessary to deliver economic growth, create opportunities, tackle disadvantage and improve health and well-being.

In developing our Programme for Government, we carefully considered how delivery would be managed. I believe that we have developed a strong and effective framework for doing so. The responsibility for monitoring progress against targets lies with a central team from within the Office of the first Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and the Department of Finance and Personnel, which acts independently in collecting evidence from Departments for objective analysis.

The Programme for Government delivery oversight group, which is headed by the head of the Civil Service, meets regularly to assess reports prepared by the central team with the purpose of driving programme delivery and providing assurance to the Executive programme board. That board is chaired by the deputy First Minister and myself, supported by the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

We have also taken steps to modernise the overall approach to monitoring and reporting by making much greater use of online systems. That will provide us with a much greater ability to access and consider data in real time and share information electronically, securely and more effectively than we could have done previously. The arrangements that we have introduced have been positively received and have helped considerably in focusing activities and strengthening accountability, both of which will support us in our endeavours to deliver, through the Programme for Government, the real and lasting change that people here deserve.

Mr Hussey: I thank the First Minister for his answer. Can he outline why there has been a slippage in how his

Department is monitoring and reporting on delivery against the Programme for Government compared with other Departments? When will the relevant Committee have sight of the most up-to-date information?

Mr P Robinson: There is no delay. There is ongoing monitoring of Programme for Government targets in the Department. As I understand it, the delivery plan has been given, in its initial form, to the Committee. I understand that our officials are meeting with the Committee tomorrow, I think, and will provide a more up-to-date copy of the delivery plan.

As far as the overall assessment of where we stand against Programme for Government targets is concerned, I believe that a meeting is being scheduled, probably for later this week, at which the copy that will go to all of the Committees will be signed off, depending, of course, on the position of each of the Ministers.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the First Minister for the correspondence that his Department has exchanged with me in relation to this issue. Can he give the House a bit more detail on why he thinks that forwarding the departmental official quarterly reports presented to Ministers to each relevant Committee is a matter for the Committees to decide rather than part of a formal process for overall monitoring of the PFG?

Mr P Robinson: Let us be clear: there is a formal process that will be undertaken and that will be consistent across all Departments in respect of how we make the assessments. The deputy First Minister and I, in our position, obviously have an overall responsibility, in conjunction with the Finance Minister, to have all the assessments monitored continually. We will do that. We have put in place a much more rigorous system on this occasion than was the case for the previous Programme for Government. I believe that the new process that we have in place will be more helpful to Committees in letting them see more precisely where each of the commitment targets stand. I hope that he will find the new process much more useful than before.

We are absolutely determined. The heart of this is about delivery. The deputy First Minister and I have committed to doing our absolute best to deliver, as far as we can, the 82 commitments in the Programme for Government. I suppose that I have just made an eighty-third commitment. To do that, we require the most up-to-date and accurate data possible. We have put in place, through the senior responsible officers (SROs) and so forth in each of the Departments, mechanisms by which we can get that information. We are starting to use online technology to access that information, and we are using it in a way that suits our needs. We have other mechanisms to ensure that, if we fall behind on any of the commitments, there are mechanisms in place whereby we can pull people up to the appropriate speed.

Mr D McIlveen: Will the First Minister indicate how he believes the Executive are performing against their Programme for Government targets?

Mr P Robinson: I do not want to give a detailed response to that, because it is right that each of the Departments gets the assessment on the foot of the report that has been prepared by officials and, I hope, will be signed-off on within days. As I look at that report, I can give him a general opinion. There has been very considerable improvement on the delivery against targets compared

with that in the last Programme for Government. None of the targets that we have set are out of reach, but I would not expect any of them to be out of reach so early in the cycle.

Mr McDevitt: I am sure that the House was very encouraged to hear that the First and deputy First Minister receive real-time data on the performance against the Programme for Government targets. The First Minister will, of course, be able to confirm to the House in real-time terms that youth unemployment has risen every month for the past 12 months and is at a historically high level. Maybe, he could tell the House what steps, specifically in the Programme for Government, have been taken to address that?

Mr P Robinson: I can confirm that, around the world, youth unemployment has risen considerably over the past number of months. We are in what is known as "a worldwide recession". A global downturn impacts everywhere, which is why we have tailored a number of the proposals that we have brought out: emergency proposals, you might say. I do not know what he is pointing to the sky for: if he is looking for divine intervention, I am happy to pray with him.

We brought forward proposals that recognised that there was a need to increase the skills that were available so that people would be able to move into jobs when they became available. I am absolutely convinced that the economic strategy that the Assembly and Executive have endorsed is the right one, but I recognise that, because of the particular problems with the downturn, there are immediate steps that we can take to try to alleviate some of the hardship that is being felt. That is why we have taken the immediate decision to bring those interventions forward. It is far better that there are people acting instead of carping.

Active Ageing Strategy

3. **Mr I McCrea** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Active Ageing strategy. (AQO 2963/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, with your permission, I ask junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer this question.

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): In developing the Active Ageing strategy, officials have benefited enormously from working closely with the Ageing Strategy Advisory Group, chaired by Claire Keatinge, the Commissioner for Older People. Junior Minister McCann and I met with Claire Keatinge and discussed the development of the strategy. We also met with representatives from Age Sector Platform on that issue and related matters.

One matter we discussed was the fact that in order to support the objectives of this year, which is the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, we are currently managing a small grants scheme, with £200,000 available to support suitable small projects across Northern Ireland.

The focus of our work with the Ageing Strategy Advisory Group is on the draft early actions plan, which will have clear and ambitious targets to implement the strategy through the Delivering Social Change framework. To develop the early action plan, officials are meeting with relevant Departments to discuss how OFMDFM can

add to the ongoing work on a number of key issues for older people. Those issues include the fear of crime; fuel poverty, including the question of social-energy tariffs; and adult social care. In addition, officials are working with the World Health Organization's age-friendly cities initiative. Following Belfast's success in becoming an age-friendly city, officials will meet with representatives from the council and from the Belfast Healthy Ageing Strategic Partnership on 11 December to consider whether the age-friendly cities initiative can be rolled out more widely across Northern Ireland. We have also commissioned advice from the Public Health Agency on how OFMDFM can contribute to the active ageing agenda.

Mr I McCrea: The junior Minister referred to the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. Could he update the House on what the Department is doing as part of that?

Mr Bell: To support the objectives, we launched an EY 2012 small grants scheme, and £200,000 is available for projects under that scheme. A total of 77 funding applications were received, and the total amount that was being claimed in the applications was just over £900,000. A further four applications were received for managing a micromanagement scheme. An independent panel has reviewed and assessed the applications, and the top 16 were considered for funding. Verification checks have been completed, and letters of offer have now been issued. The successful projects will be published on the website once all necessary checks are completed.

To give an understanding of the projects, I can tell the House that they range from those involving older people working with local primary schools to inspire new generations; older people working with their peers to encourage them to take an active part in society; increasing the physical and mental well-being of older people with disabilities; inspiring younger people to become more involved in what may have been presumed to be traditional crafts; young people helping older people to tackle rural social exclusion; promoting the use of information computer technology to older people with mentoring from younger people; and generations gardening together to promote intergenerational issues and healthy lifestyles.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister outline whether any signature projects, similar to those for children and young people, will be associated with the emerging early actions paper in the Active Ageing strategy under the Delivering Social Change framework?

Mr Bell: As I said, a number of projects are under way. They are specifically designed to bring older and younger people together. Where active ageing is concerned, junior Minister McCann and I will meet the Age Sector Platform. We do that on a regular basis, usually at least quarterly, and we take guidance from it on its steer about what older people need and want. As I said, we will tie together as comprehensive a package as we can that is tailor-fit to meet the needs of the older people in our society.

Mr Rogers: Will the Minister lend his support to the silver saver campaign, which is led by the Age Sector Platform?

Mr Bell: Not only can I say that I will but I already did at the DUP party conference on Saturday. I give my full endorsement to the work that it is undertaking. In many

cases, our older people have paid in to this society throughout their working lives, and they deserve respect and to get something back from society in their later years. We will certainly endorse that project.

Mr Kinahan: It is good to see to actions rather than strategies. Given that a lot of this work is cross-departmental and that he touched on health issues, what advice did the Department of Health give to him, particularly given the changing demographics?

Mr Bell: In this strategy and in Delivering Social Change, we look at what we can do to benefit all people in our society. We have a co-ordinating role across the Executive; obviously the specifics are for my colleague Edwin Poots. I and my colleagues from Strangford recently met the chief executive of the South Eastern Trust, and we are preparing for a town of the approximate size of Ballynahinch, given the good news story, which we should celebrate, that our older people are living longer.

We are also seeing a number of measures in the health service for people to be monitored at home so that they do not have to go into hospital. Their vital signs can be monitored at home through a whole range of information and computer technology and can be transmitted in real time to the consultants and doctors responsible for them. That allows for more effective monitoring and allows people the independence to live in their own home, which they wish to do. The feedback from older people whom I have spoken to who have benefited has been that it is a great success.

However, we need to reframe the debate. In the past, it has been that our older people are getting older and living longer and that that is a burden. We need to reframe the debate to say that our older people are getting older and that we should celebrate that.

2.15 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Questions 4 and 5 have been withdrawn.

FM/DFM: Visit to Fermanagh

6. **Mr Lynch** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update following their most recent joint visit to Fermanagh. (AQO 2966/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I hope that we will come back to the subject of Members withdrawing questions without any notice being given to us before we rise to our feet. That is three questions that have been withdrawn today.

We attended a meeting with Mr Lynch, six other MLAs and the MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone. Fermanagh District Council was present, as was the South West College in Enniskillen. The meeting took place on 5 September, and we were given a presentation on the issues surrounding rates convergence and proposals from Fermanagh District Council for the creation of a public sector hub to provide central services on the old Erne Hospital site.

At the meeting, we indicated that we would reflect on the discussions. We responded to Mr Lynch on 21 September to highlight the fact that the issue of future rates bills in the new council model was to be considered by the

Department of the Environment as part of the work of the finance working group of the regional transition committee. We also wrote to Departments on 24 October for their views on the public sector hub.

The Strategic Investment Board is now working to explore how the project could be progressed and is liaising with the Department for Social Development, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department for Employment and Learning on the proposed project. We are now waiting on the results of their deliberations.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the First and deputy First Ministers for coming to Enniskillen for that productive meeting. Does the First Minister think that some of the issues that are blocking progress on the public sector hub site can be resolved?

Mr P Robinson: The deputy First Minister and I were impressed with the council's proposal. We felt that it was very sound and exactly the kind of development that we want to encourage. However, there were some difficulties, particularly with having a survey carried out to determine whether there was any requirement on the site as a result of any past toxic use. There were issues relating to the role of any accounting officer in taking on risk with that subject. The clerk of Fermanagh District Council, as an accounting officer, felt that it would be beyond his responsibility to take that risk. I suspect that, if it were left to each of the accounting officers in Departments, each might come up with the same answer, so we have to try to unlock all of that.

We are up against a time restriction, because the money that the college can put into the hub will probably only sit there until the end of the year. So, we are very keen to try to unlock it. We are waiting for the responses from the Ministers, although I understand that, for instance, there will be a requirement from some Departments to find capital funding for some of the elements of the project, and that funding may not be immediately available. That would not stop us from being able to clinch the overall deal relating to the site, if we can find a way of unlocking it.

Mr Campbell: Having viewed what appears to be a successful public sector hub in Fermanagh, does the First Minister feel that similar exercises could be replicated in other parts of Northern Ireland in an attempt to draw together the various aspects of the public sector to the public good?

Mr P Robinson: The proposal from Fermanagh is a very good template that could be used elsewhere in the Province.

My guess is that the Member has a particular location and site in mind. On that site, a good many buildings are available without our having to worry about decontamination issues, although some parts of the site may well have decontamination issues attached to them. However, it would not stop the other parts of the site being used. It would depend largely on the enthusiasm shown by the council, because the council's involvement obviously has a financial consequence.

Mr McClarty: I congratulate all those involved on attracting the G8 conference to Fermanagh. What role will the First Minister and the deputy First Minister play, if any, at the G8 conference when it comes to Fermanagh?

Mr P Robinson: Like the Member, I am very glad that the G8 conference will be coming to Northern Ireland.

Fermanagh is an ideal place for it to be based. Given the beauty of the countryside around there and its rural aspect, it lends itself very considerably to the kind of atmosphere that they will want to create. Of course, Northern Ireland will want to showcase itself to the world when the attention of the world is on the conference. We have discussed the issue with the Prime Minister, and there will be a role for Northern Ireland to play. Do not forget that it is possible that some of the G8 leaders may decide to do something outside the conference, and we would certainly encourage them to do so.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Raymond McCartney is not in place. Joe Byrne is not in his place. I call Mr Alban Maginness.

Mr A Maginness: Question 9, Principal Deputy Speaker.

Mr P Robinson: I understand that question 9 has been transferred to Finance and Personnel, because it is that Department's responsibility.

Mr A Maginness: I was unaware of that.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I was also unaware of it. We will move to the next question. Tom Elliott is not in his place, and David McNarry is not in his place. I call Steven Agnew.

Children's Issues

12. **Mr Agnew** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the level of departmental collaboration on children's issues. (AQO 2972/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: With your permission, I will ask my colleague junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer that question.

Mr Bell: We recognise that many issues that children and young people face are cross-cutting and require co-operation across Executive Departments. We have introduced a new Delivering Social Change framework to ensure that all Departments work together to deal with these issues. The framework seeks to build and extend existing departmental co-operation to deliver improvements in the health, well-being and life opportunities of children and young people and a sustained reduction in poverty and the associated issues across all ages. It is led by the Executive's ministerial subcommittee on poverty and social inclusion and its ministerial subcommittee on children and young people. Both subcommittees are chaired by junior Minister McCann and me, with all the Executive's Ministers as members. The subcommittees are then supported by the Delivering Social Change programme board, which is also chaired by junior Minister McCann and me, and the members are senior officials from across Departments and our own special advisers. We meet every eight weeks to ensure that the key milestones and targets that we have are achieved. You will also be aware that the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is responsible for the co-ordination of the planning and delivery of children's services.

Mr Agnew: I thank the junior Minister for his answer. I am sure that neither he nor I expected to get to question 12. Does he believe that giving Departments the ability to pool budgets in commissioning children's services would be an advantage and, indeed, could improve the efficiency of how we deliver children's services?

Mr Bell: I think the best model is the one that we are using for Delivering Social Change. When you look at improving children's health, education and life opportunities, who is to say that health delivers a better educational opportunity or that education delivers a better health opportunity? That is why we need to focus on the areas that particularly matter. We know that early intervention with children makes a significant difference. Junior Minister Anderson and junior Minister McCann had a series of bilaterals with each individual Minister where we raised those specific issues, and we intend to continue with that. I also know that the Executive are working in a joined-up way, particularly around health, education and early years, to see what we can deliver.

The other big issue, as we know, is childcare, and we have ring-fenced £12 million to deliver that. We spent several hundred thousand pounds of that last year, we have bids in at the minute, and we are probably looking at several million pounds being spent this year. We are confident that we will spend the fulfilment of that throughout. OFMDFM has taken on the role of co-ordinating that across all Departments. We need to remain focused on what we can do to raise young people and families out of poverty. To take children out of poverty, we have to take the family out of poverty. You saw the Executive's initiative and the associated £200 million, and you saw an earlier initiative involving tens of millions of pounds to focus on literacy and numeracy and how we nurtured children through the school experience that has been so successful already. The Executive have already acted in a joined-up way on those measures and are delivering for children.

Mr Storey: I thank the junior Minister for his answers thus far and for his commitment to the importance of early intervention. The junior Minister will be aware that Employers for Childcare has recently produced its report, which outlines the high costs for the provision of childcare. How will that very prevalent issue be taken into account?

Mr Bell: I thank the Member for his point. Along with junior Minister McCann, I had the privilege of helping to launch that report yesterday. I commend the work that Employers for Childcare has done, not just this year but over the past three years. OFMDFM also commissioned work from McClure Watters so that we had a firm evidence base, and that informs all of our practice. When we talk about childcare, it is important that we constantly look to research to develop the areas and gaps that exist. We are focused on ensuring that childcare is affordable, accessible and flexible. When I was in a studio talking about childcare on Thursday night, my 80-year-old father was at home looking after my children, and I pay tribute to all the grandparents out there who provide childcare. We also do a lot of work with the early years-led organisations to make sure that there is a standard across the board and that children get childcare of an adequate standard.

I also pay tribute to many organisations. My colleague William Humphrey brought me to the Shankill Women's Centre. One of the things that most impressed me out of several things that impressed me when visiting that women's centre was that none of the women who went for support, whether that was educational support, job training, counselling services or parenting classes, was put off going to the centre, because it had on-site quality crèche facilities. That is the type of childcare-led initiative

that delivers real answers and solutions to problems that exist on the ground.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the junior Minister for his answers so far. We had an important debate in the Senate Chamber this morning. One of the main things to come out of that was the lack of joined-up departmental working on children and people with learning disabilities. Will the junior Minister assure the Assembly that his Department will make every effort to ensure that there is a joined-up government approach on learning for children with learning disabilities?

Mr Bell: You raise an important matter. We aim to issue our childcare strategy before Christmas, and we hope to have it to the Executive shortly. When that is issued, you will see where we have also looked at research into the specific area of the people who care for those with a learning disability. That raises bespoke issues. Employers for Childcare also did some work around the matter with regard to physical and learning difficulties and the needs of parents and caregivers in accessing that service. We are aware of that, and I certainly give you the assurance that we will do all in our power, across Departments, to ensure that we can deliver the best service to children with learning difficulties.

2.30 pm

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions to the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. We have just witnessed an OFMDFM Question Time at which seven questions that were tabled for response were not asked. I understand that two were withdrawn, but five Members were not present to ask their question. Given the effort and time that is put into the work required to respond to those questions, particularly by civil servants, not to mention the work of the First Minister, who has to stand up and answer them along with the junior Minister in the Department, and given the workload with being in China and Cardiff and all the other responsibilities that Ministers have at that level of government, I have to say that it is an absolute disgrace that so many Members were not present to ask their question. I think that it is time for the Speaker to consider very seriously penalising the Members who did not turn up.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Certainly, it is a serious concern, and I will draw it to the Speaker's attention.

Mr A Maginness: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I am not taking any further points of order on it at this time. We move on to the questions to the Minister of Justice. I call Dr Alasdair McDonnell.

Mr A Maginness: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

Mr McNarry: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I am not taking any points of order at this time.

Mr A Maginness: Principal Deputy Speaker, the deputy First Minister —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to resume his seat. I have said that I am not taking any further points of order at this time. We can deal with the issue after Question Time if there are any other points of order.

We move on to the questions to the Minister of Justice. I call Dr Alasdair McDonnell.

Justice

Prison Service Staff: Security

1. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on security for prison officers and prison staff, following the murder of David Black and recent media reports of photographic and recording devices being found on a prisoner in Maghaberry Prison. (AQO 2976/11-15)

4. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister of Justice what action he has taken to improve the personal security of prison officers. (AQO 2979/11-15)

12. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Justice what security arrangements are in place for prison officers. (AQO 2987/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): With permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 1, 4 and 12 together.

As I have previously made clear, my Department and the Prison Service regard the safety and the personal security of prison staff as a high priority. The director general has, therefore, already arranged for all prison staff to be issued with advice on personal security and a reminder of the need for vigilance on and off duty. My Department and the Prison Service will continue to work closely with the appropriate authorities to consider any security concerns and the implications for staff safety. Indeed, I met the Chief Constable and the Northern Ireland Office Minister of State recently to discuss the current security situation and to consider what measures are in place to protect prison staff.

Since I last reported to the Assembly on the matter, a number of changes have been made to the Prison Service protection scheme and to the processes for officers leaving the Prison Service who wish to apply to have a personal protection weapon. However, I trust that Members will agree that it is not in the best interests of prison staff to provide specific details of the other changes made or under consideration in relation to the personal security arrangements for prison staff. A number of meetings have taken place between the PSNI and Prison Service senior managers, and I am confident that appropriate and up-to-date advice on personal security will continue to be provided to Prison Service staff.

Finally, I can also confirm that a watch with an inbuilt camera and recording facility was found on a prisoner during a routine search at Maghaberry prison on 8 October this year. The prisoner concerned was charged under prison rules for the possession of a prohibited article.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for his answer so far. I endorse all his efforts and urge him to take every step necessary to ensure that prison staff are safe.

Recently, I heard the Minister on the radio discussing the BOSS chair. Can he give us some information on progress

on that? That might de-escalate some of the tensions in the prisons.

Mr Ford: I thank Dr McDonnell for the compliments that he made at the start of his comments. He asked specifically about the BOSS chair. A BOSS chair is currently in use in Maghaberry prison for the searching of prisoners in separated accommodation moving within the prison. There is different work ongoing with regard to the searching of prisoners that would relate to all three institutions for people coming and going.

I was tempted to say that Mr McElduff might complain if I intruded on his question and went too far on that, but it appears that he has joined the group of absentees and may have to have a written answer.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for this answer so far. Given the device that detached itself on the Ballygomartin Road, yesterday's attack on the police in west Belfast and the general security situation, can the Minister assure the House that his Department is working with the Northern Ireland Office, hand in glove, as closely as possible, to protect prison officers, police officers and security personnel across Northern Ireland at what is a very difficult time in the security situation?

Mr Ford: I can certainly give Mr Humphrey that assurance. There have, as I said, been meetings between Prison Service staff and the PSNI. I have had meetings with the Northern Ireland Office and the Chief Constable. I know that there are obviously issues of concern for army personnel around some of the other concerns that have been raised recently. I believe that all that is being done is necessary, appropriate and proportionate. That work will continue, to ensure the protection of all who are seen to be at particular risk at this stage.

Mr Nesbitt: Without going into the fine detail, will the Minister assure the House that interim arrangements for firearm licensing will ensure that past delays are no longer an issue in the issuing and granting of personal protection weapons?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Nesbitt for that point. I have received assurances from the PSNI, from the Deputy Chief Constable, about speeding up the issue of the application for approval for PPWs for those retiring from the Prison Service and that that will be done in the timescale of the notice that individuals have when they are leaving. That is probably as far as I need to go in this forum.

Mr Allister: In his review, touching on the serious issue of security, has the Minister reviewed the arrangements for home security for prison officers, particularly in respect of those who were removed from the home security scheme and told that it was their responsibility to pay for and maintain such facilities as had been provided? Will he reinstate the facilities for those members, so that they might have the comfort of believing that they have some level of security at home?

Mr Ford: I have previously advised the House but am certainly happy to repeat today that the Prison Service protection scheme for officers' homes has been re-examined in recent weeks. It has been decided that, where equipment has been supplied, it will continue to be maintained, contrary to the position a short time ago. I believe that the issue he raises is already being addressed.

Counterfeit Cigarettes

2. **Mr Ross** asked the Minister of Justice how many prosecutions and convictions there have been for the selling of counterfeit cigarettes in the last five years. (AQO 2977/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested is not available in the format desired, as court conviction and sentencing data do not distinguish counterfeit cigarettes from other evasion of duty or intent to defraud offences. However, I can advise that, between 2005 and 2009, there were 64 prosecutions and 31 people were convicted of offences relating to evasion of duty under the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979. In the 2011-12 financial year, over 23 million counterfeit cigarettes were seized in Northern Ireland by HMRC and the UK Border Agency. At an operational level, the police and HMRC are working with the industry to tackle this crime. Operations are mounted on a proactive and intelligence-led basis against those involved in the sale of counterfeit cigarettes.

As chair of the Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF), I can advise that intellectual property crime, which includes this crime, is a key threat. The OCTF has a dedicated intellectual property crime subgroup, which acts as a forum for law enforcement agencies and a number of business partners to develop strategies to deal with issues associated with intellectual property crime, including the sale of counterfeit tobacco.

It should be said that, while enforcement is important in addressing the supply side of the counterfeit tobacco problem, work must continue to tackle the demand side and the support given by the public, knowingly or otherwise, which allows tobacco fraud to operate.

Mr Ross: I am sure that the whole House will find it disturbing that one in five packets of cigarettes sold in Northern Ireland is sourced illegally. Those counterfeit cigarettes are not subject to controls or regulations, and Treasury cannot collect any tax on them.

The Minister will be aware, I am sure, that there is a push nationally and locally, by some, to introduce plain packaging for tobacco products on health grounds. Does he share my concern that one of the unintended consequences of that could be that it makes it much easier for criminal gangs or organisations to produce and distribute counterfeit tobacco across Northern Ireland?

Mr Ford: I stress that plain packaging for tobacco is a matter for the Member's colleague, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and I do not wish to intrude in that area. However, from what I saw at an event that the OCTF ran for business groups last week, the quality of printing on counterfeit goods is of sufficient quality that I am not sure whether it is a significant deterrent at this stage.

Mr McDevitt: Can the Minister, in his capacity as the chair of the Organised Crime Task Force, confirm which paramilitary groups he believes are involved in the sale and distribution of counterfeit cigarettes and other illicit material?

Mr Ford: I do not suspect that Mr McDevitt expects that I have access to all the available intelligence in the same detail as he asked the question. However, it is certainly the case that a number of gangs involved in tobacco

smuggling and counterfeit cigarette production have links with paramilitary groups, both republican and loyalist. That level of ongoing criminality and its involvement with those who pose a threat to the state in many different ways is clearly an issue of concern to this society.

Community Safety College

3. **Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the steps he has taken to ensure that local quarrying and construction companies have a fair opportunity to tender for building the Northern Ireland Community Safety College at Desertcreat. (AQO 2978/11-15)

Mr Ford: The investment of £139 million to build the Northern Ireland Community Safety College at Desertcreat represents a major investment and demonstrates the importance that the Northern Ireland Executive place on ensuring the safety of the whole community. For that reason, the Executive have included development of the college as part of their Programme for Government. The programme board and I have placed great importance on maximising the opportunities for local suppliers of materials and businesses providing services, as for employment.

The programme board asked the designers to partner with a local design team to ensure that the local focus remained a high priority. They have done that, appointing Ostick and Williams of Belfast. All five teams competing for the main contractor role include major Northern Irish construction companies. The programme team is doing all that it can, within European procurement regulations, to ensure that local suppliers are positioned as favourably as possible in benefiting from the contract once it is let. The key is that local suppliers and potential subcontractors gear up to sell themselves to the winning main contractor.

It should be noted that, due to procurement rules, we cannot hold contractors to a specific Northern Ireland supplier if they can show that they can meet the same specification through another supplier. However, through factors such as sustainability obligations and cost of delivery, the winning main contractor should look at local suppliers in the first instance.

Mr Wells: The Justice Minister makes it all sound wonderful. The construction trade in mid-Ulster is on its knees, as it is throughout Northern Ireland. When the contract details stipulate that the stone must be either Donegal quartz or Kilkenny limestone, that hardly enables local quarriers or stonemasons in Northern Ireland to tender for the work. Why on earth have they been so specific? You are simply ruling out every quarrier and stonemason in Northern Ireland by stipulating a particular form of stone. Why not change the tender to read "any form of suitable stone", so that everyone can be on a level playing field?

Mr Ford: I appreciate that the Member has a particular interest in an area with certain quarries, and it is an issue that I have also followed through on. As I understand it, the relevant stone to provide the style of the buildings is not obtainable in Northern Ireland. Certain other stone, which he correctly named, is available in Northern Ireland, but there was, for example, significant difficulty in obtaining the basalt for the recent construction of the Giant's Causeway visitor centre, even to tie in with something as iconic as the Giant's Causeway. I also believe that the

stone that has been specified for this contract, which is a very small part of the contract, is exactly the same as that which DHSSPS specified for the South West Acute Hospital.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. My apologies for missing my question. I was chairing the all-party working group on construction, which a number of Members attended. As a Member for Mid Ulster, I have a particular interest in this matter. The issue of subcontractors and suppliers comes up time and again. Can the Minister give me some indication about of the Department of Justice, in collaboration with Invest NI and local councils, can provide additional information on the tendering process to local suppliers and subbies, many of whom have been deeply hit by the Patton crisis?

2.45 pm

Mr Ford: I certainly appreciate the point about employment, which Mr McGlone has made previously. My understanding is that the programme board has organised or attended four meet-the-buyer events to allow local suppliers to have information about the project. It has provided various information via the college's website, desertcreatcollege.org; various other sites, such as Facebook; and the investment strategy portal, isni.gov.uk.

Details on the five teams that are competing for the main contractor role are also available on the website so that local suppliers and subcontractors can contact them. Information and assistance has been provided through Cookstown District Council to give local people the opportunity to engage. Of course, work has also been done to specify that there should be apprenticeships and people taken from the unemployment register to be employed on the contract. Significant work has been done, and it is now up to local businesses to take up the opportunities. I know that the programme board will be willing to assist in any way in which it can in getting that information out.

Mrs Overend: Can the Minister clarify whether any of the tenders that are going out from the college are available to smaller contractors or are all for large tenders?

Mr Ford: Tenders will not be put out in a way that will individually create opportunity for small local subcontractors. However, that is the whole point of ensuring that people are put in touch with the five teams that are currently in competition for the main contract. That will give local subcontractors the opportunity to engage their particular areas of expertise in line with normal policy.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far and his references to, for instance, the social clauses for apprentices. Can he give some detail on what his Department's policy would be on capital contracts for, for instance, the long-term unemployed?

Mr Ford: I may have to write to Mr McLaughlin with the full details. However, the key issue, as far as I am concerned, is that we use the opportunities that we have to the maximum in order to specify that those who obtain contracts should provide apprenticeships and take people from the unemployment register. That input is relatively limited. However, given the economic conditions that pertain in Cookstown and mid-Ulster generally, the House would expect that we do all that we can to maximise it.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 4 has already been grouped.

Prison Service: Sickness Absences

5. **Mr Rogers** asked the Minister of Justice what plans he has to improve the level of sickness absence within the Prison Service. (AQO 2980/11-15)

Mr Ford: In the past year, 2011-12, absence in the Prison Service totalled 14.4 days per member of staff. At present, the projected figure for 2012-13 is 12.3 days per member of staff against a Department target of 10.3 days. That having been said, I am not complacent about the progress that has been made to date. Every effort is being made to reduce the levels of absence further. Management is committed to continuing to work with staff and their trade unions to address the issue.

There is a variety of support mechanisms to assist staff who return to work after sickness.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for his response. Does he find the current absence levels acceptable?

Mr Ford: I do not think that anybody finds those absence levels acceptable. That is why significant work is being done. However, if we look at the particular issues that are addressed by prison officers and the particular difficulties that they have, and compare those levels with Civil Service averages, we see that they are not particularly higher. I think that it is accepted in the House that we wish to bring down the level of absence generally.

A number of different initiatives have been taken to reduce the figure. However, the fact is that prison officers get assaulted on duty. Prison officers have a particular task to do, which may make it more difficult for them to work in particular circumstances than civil servants, who are regarded in the same way in the statistics but have a more conventional, predominantly desk-bound job.

We have to be realistic. We need to recognise the work that prison officers do, the tasks that they have to perform and the difficulties under which they sometimes work, while continuing to provide the necessary support and every incentive to get the figures down. As I said, they are above the Civil Service average. However, the key issue is to ensure that they go down in line with reductions in the Civil Service average, to which all Departments are committed.

Mr Campbell: The Minister referred to the Prison Service's target of 10.3 days. Does he accept that higher levels of sickness absence quite often have a domestic origin and can be affected by the threat level to prison officers and their families? Will he take that into account when looking at targets in the future, particularly given the very sad and unfortunate circumstances of the past six weeks?

Mr Ford: Clearly, Mr Campbell is absolutely right when he identifies the kinds of issues that can add to the problems people have at work, including stress from external threats. That is why management, I trust, is continuing to deal with matters sensitively. It is also why the work to ensure the best possible security arrangements are in place for prison officers, police officers and others, which we discussed earlier, is important.

We have to be realistic and accept that such levels of stress will exist because of the nature of that work as

opposed to the work of, for example, sitting behind a desk and formulating policy. We somehow have to square the circle between recognising that difficulty and ensuring that we drive down stress and provide the maximum possible support for staff doing that difficult job.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí go dtí seo. The Minister will be aware that part of the reform package was about a new culture, new work practices, etc. Are the new recruiting procedures designed to in any way combat the level of sickness absence in the Prison Service?

Mr Ford: I do not think that Mr Lynch's point is being addressed as such; this notion that there are specific procedures to address sickness absence among new recruits. The issue is to ensure that we deal with the problems affecting sickness absence among staff at all levels in whichever part of my Department they operate or, in this particular context, in whichever part of the Prison Service they are located. Obviously, the introduction of new members of staff, many of whom are younger, is likely to have a positive effect on sickness absence, if only because, as we all know, we tend to get sicker as we age.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Mr Lunn is not in his position.

Victims of Crime

7. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Justice to outline any proposals to ensure that the representative or executor of a deceased victim of crime has the same rights as the victim had when alive. (AQO 2982/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am planning to bring forward a major programme of work to address the needs of victims and bereaved families, through a new five-year victim and witness strategy. Last month, I launched a public consultation on a draft strategy, which takes on board the findings of the Justice Committee's inquiry into services for victims and witnesses and recent inspection reports by Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland, as well as direct feedback from victims and their representatives.

The death of a victim does not diminish the need for timely information and support to help a bereaved family or their representative deal with the consequences of a crime. The criminal justice process should not add to their distress unnecessarily. At present, when a victim dies, criminal justice agencies often work with a family representative, who may be the executor, to ensure that the victim's interests continue to be represented. The new strategy will ensure that there is greater parity between the entitlements of victims and those representing a bereaved family.

The code of practice for victims will be amended to ensure that the entitlements of bereaved families reflect those of other victims. Those entitlements will also be included in a victim charter, which will be legislated for in the faster, fairer justice Bill. I intend that the new entitlements will go further than those in some other jurisdictions and apply not only where the victim has died as a result of the crime but also when the victim subsequently passes away.

In addition, the new victim and witness care unit model that is currently being piloted will establish a single point of contact for victims and witnesses of crime and provide a more seamless service. That will include providing

information for those attending court and updates on how a case is progressing. Improvements are also planned for the use of victim impact statements, including by bereaved families.

My Department will also undertake research on the criminal justice experience of those bereaved through murder, manslaughter or culpable road death.

Mr G Robinson: Does the Minister agree it is essential that justice be done for a deceased victim of crime in the same way that it would be for a living victim in our society?

Mr Ford: I agree with Mr Robinson that justice needs to be seen to be done for victims, including those who pass away either as a result of the crime or subsequent to that. That is why I highlighted the work done to engage with bereaved families, executors and others. I believe that we will make significant improvements by ensuring that the five-year victim and witness strategy is carried through.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí sin.

Will the Minister take this opportunity to provide an update on the victim care unit in Belfast's Laganside Courts and tell us whether he has plans to roll out such units in other court buildings throughout the North?

Mr Ford: I think that Mr McCartney may find that, in a question directed at the needs of the representatives of victims who are deceased, it is perhaps a little bit difficult to include the work of the care unit, which deals with those who are currently there. I will certainly write to him to give him an update on the current position because, clearly, the good work being done in Laganside Courts needs to be extended to other courts, but I am not in a position to give him the detail of that at this point.

Prisons: Body Scanners

8. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the body scanner pilot schemes at Magilligan and Hydebank Wood. (AQO 2983/11-15)

Mr Ford: As I have previously announced, Prison Service officials have been taking forward work to implement recommendation 8 of the prison review team's final report. Two millimetre wave scanner pilots commenced in Magilligan prison and Hydebank Wood young offenders centre on 26 September and 24 October respectively. Both pilots will run for three months.

During this three-month evaluation period, the effectiveness and appropriateness of this technology will be measured against our existing search procedures. Until these pilots have been completed, it will not be possible to provide an assessment of the suitability of this technology for use in the prison environment or a timescale for their potential introduction to Maghaberry prison.

I can, however, report today that the Prison Service has progressed its own application to seek approval for the use of transmission X-ray scanners in prison establishments in Northern Ireland, and Members may wish to know that, as the justifying authority, I expect to receive the Prison Service's application by the end of this week. It will be submitted and registered for consideration through the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC). In the interim, my officials have commenced the required

consultation process, and they met representatives of the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) on 22 November.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister will note, of course, that I was in my place when called to ask the question. Nonetheless, can I press him for a more specific timeline for the installation of the body scanner in Maghaberry prison? Will he guarantee that it will happen as soon as possible, because it has been talked about for months now, and I would like him to be more specific about the timeline?

Mr Ford: I was going to say that I was delighted to see that Mr McElduff had made it to his place in time to ask his question. However, given that, in my statement yesterday, I answered a very similar question, which he may not have heard, I am not sure that I welcome the opportunity to repeat it.

The position with regard to the transmission X-ray process, which is being considered for use at Maghaberry, is that it is something that has not been used in any prison in the United Kingdom. Therefore, it has to go through a full justification process under the Justification of Practices Involving Ionising Radiation Regulations 2004. No other Department in any of the four nations of the UK has experience of doing that, and, therefore, we cannot give any conceivable timescale for how long that justification process will take after we engage with DECC.

What I can say is that, in the context of the work that has been done by the Prison Service in recent weeks, there has been a considerable speeding up of the process, both in running the pilots with the millimetre wave scanners in the other two institutions and in putting together the paperwork to look at the use of transmission X-rays. I believe that that is an indication of good faith on the part of the Prison Service, which I am committed to supporting and continuing to push to see that we get the best possible system that will provide better arrangements for prisoners and prison staff than the current arrangements for full-body searching. However, what is absolutely necessary is that we ensure that we get it right and that we continue to provide safety and security for prisoners and prison staff and the wider society. We have to get it right rather than get it quickly.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his detailed answer in relation to the scanning equipment. Given that the no-wash dispute involving a substantial number of prisoners has come to an end, does that not give you, Minister, the opportunity to expedite all the operational matters that need to be attended to in order to bring this dispute, finally, to an end?

3.00 pm

Mr Ford: I appreciate the fact that Mr Maginness highlighted the ending of the dirty protest by a majority of the separated republican prisoners in Roe House. As I understand it, the number of prisoners still on protest is now in single figures.

A key recommendation from the prison review team was that we ensured that we provided an alternative to full-body searching for all prisoners in all three institutions. It was not an issue only for Roe House or for the separated loyalists in Bush House. On that basis, we continue to make progress for the benefit of all prisoners.

The Member hints at other issues about the regime that applies to the separated republicans who were on protest and, therefore, did not benefit from the full opportunities they would have had had they conformed to prison rules. Maghaberry management is taking those issues into account to ensure that we normalise the situation as best we can.

A lot of physical work remains to be done to repair the infrastructure in Roe House, where damage was done. That is being attended to. Although it is important and necessary to do that, it is a different issue to providing alternatives to full-body searching. We should not focus too much on the issue of separated prisoners, although that is important in a different context.

Assembly Business

Mr A Maginness: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. As you know, I rose for a point of order earlier, and you ruled me out of order at that point in time. However, the same issue arises, and I bring to your attention the fact that, during questions to the First and deputy First Minister, the First Minister said that the question that I had tabled had been transferred to the Department of Finance and Personnel.

That came as a surprise to me, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, and you indicated that it also came as a surprise to the Chair. I would like the Chair to investigate the matter because it is a topical question about EU funding. EU funding is being determined at this time, and the question related to Peace IV. The question is of the moment, and it is important that it be answered. It seems to me that the First Minister was ill-informed in relation to the transfer. I cannot prejudge, but the matter should be properly investigated.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I give you an assurance that we will investigate why the question was transferred and when it will be answered. However, we had no indication at all at the Table that the question had been transferred.

Mr McNarry: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. On a similar subject, I apologise to the House for my absence during Question Time. I accept the rebuke. I do not think that it is anybody's place to rebuke me or anybody else if they are the deputy First Minister, but I want to make that position clear. I did not think that question 11 would be reached, and I was absent with a reason but not an excuse. I trust that I will be indulged with a written answer to my question.

Mr Nesbitt: On a point of order, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. Two Ulster Unionist Members were not in their places during Question Time. They were serving on the newly formed Ad Hoc Committee for the Welfare Reform Bill. The party took all reasonable steps to inform the Business Office that those Members would be absent. As the Members requested written answers in lieu of oral questioning, I believe that the deputy First Minister was wrong to allege that preparatory work by officials will be wasted. It will not be wasted.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Again, we had no indication at the Table that the questions had been withdrawn or that the Members would not be in their places. As for preparatory work, during Question Time, all Ministers have a list of questions and answers. If something happens, that can become disjointed and create problems.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Further to the first point of order, it is interesting that the Minister of Finance was on his feet at Question Time yesterday. If the question was transferred, was there a missed opportunity on the ministerial side?

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: We have to investigate exactly where that sits at present. It is not on the list for today.

Private Members' Business

Transport: EU Funding for 2014-2020

Debate resumed on amendments to motion:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Regional Development to work in partnership with the Irish Government to advance the "pre-identified" projects list for inclusion in the next round of EU funding for 2014-2020. — [Mr Lynch.]

Which amendments were:

No 1: Leave out all after "Development" and insert

"to work with his counterparts in the Irish, Scottish, Welsh and British Governments in seeking the maximum amount of EU funding available for transport; and further calls on the European Commission to recognise Northern Ireland's variance in terms of transport needs and existing infrastructure." — [Mr Dickson.]

No 2: At end insert

“; and, under the auspices of the NSMC transport sector, which has responsibility for reviewing and updating the transport policy for the island, to co-ordinate the transport aspects of EU cross-border programmes and develop plans for specific cross-border transport projects.” — [Mr Dallat.]

Mr Allister: It will probably not come as a surprise to the House that I have a rather different take on the motion from most of those who have spoken to date.

We, as citizens of the United Kingdom, should examine regional funding in the EU very carefully. The reality is that it is our money that we are looking to recover. That flows from the fact that the United Kingdom is a huge net contributor to the EU budget. There are limited portions of that budget from which we are entitled to recover funding. One of those relates to regional funding. However, when that funding comes back, it is not Europe's money or money that someone else has given to subsidise the United Kingdom — far from it — it is our own money that is returned, but with all sorts of constraints on it. We pay in that money, and Europe takes it upon itself to put conditions on how it can be spent, where it can be spent, where it will go and all sorts of other burdens. We are meant to be grateful and to speak about the largesse of the European Union in being so gracious as to give us back some, but only some, of our money. At the end of that budgetary process, we are still a huge net loser because our net contribution runs to billions of pounds. So I am not one of those who fawn over the generosity of the European Union. It is a fake generosity; it is a generosity with someone else's money. In most cases, it is with our money.

The transport strategy is, by and large, an ill-conceived strategy from our perspective in the European Union. It is premised on a grand design that does not fit, suit or accommodate whatsoever the needs of a small community such as Northern Ireland. It is premised on notions of accentuating to the ultimate degree the removal of freight from the road and on to rail. That is patently unsuitable for Northern Ireland. It is premised on European highways, which, patently, are largely unsuited to part of an island.

I am one of those who very strongly say that rather than chasing, with some sort of begging bowl, funds of a regional nature from the European Union, we should front up and say that regional policy is one of those policies that should be repatriated from the European Union to the member states. That would allow us to take of our own volition our own money and spend it as suits our needs rather than it being siphoned through a process in which much of it is diverted elsewhere, and the money that comes back does so laden with conditions such that it is largely useless to us.

The motion is particularly futile. It does not grasp the nettle of the real detriment to a nation such as the United Kingdom in terms of regional aid. It would be far better addressing the basics. Instead of chasing around and lamenting the fact that the make-up of the policy means that it could not contain the sorts of things that some look for, we should face the bigger issue and recognise that regional policy should be repatriated from the EU. Indeed, our whole membership should be repatriated out of the EU. We would be far better out and standing on our own feet.

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development):

I thank Members for their contributions and note the comments and points that they made. I welcome the opportunity to provide some clarification on the motion and to address the proposed amendments. In addition, I will do my best to address the points raised by Members. However, I may need to revert to Members on some points with correspondence after the debate.

I think that, at the outset, it would be useful to provide some background. The pre-identified projects list is included in the European Commission's draft regulation on the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF). That regulation and the Commission's regulation on the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) are currently going through ordinary legislative procedure, otherwise known as the co-decision process. That is a process whereby the European Parliament and Council will debate and consider the Commission's proposals and arrive at an agreed position.

Members will be aware that I have taken a very keen interest in the ongoing negotiations on these regulations. Although I am supportive of the UK's negotiating position on the regulations, there are also regional concerns and issues that need to be addressed. In order to address those issues, I and my officials have been engaging with our own UK Government, the Dublin Government, the European Commission and the European Parliament.

In response to Mr Dickson's comments, I would like to inform the House that we have, in fact, secured a number of amendments to the regulations at European Council level. Those include an exemption for isolated networks from rail infrastructure standards. That exemption will save significant unnecessary expenditure. However, we now need those amendments, and more, to be reflected in the European Parliament's consideration of the regulations. It is for that reason that I have been lobbying the European Parliament on these issues. I have worked with Northern Ireland MEPs — I thank them for that — to table amendments for consideration by the Parliament's Transport Committee.

I will return to the original motion. As the negotiations on the Connecting Europe Facility are ongoing and

the regulation is in draft form, I cannot currently take a definitive view on the original motion's call:

"to work in partnership with the Irish Government to advance the 'pre-identified' projects list for inclusion in the next round of EU funding for 2014-2020."

Furthermore, the projects list does not currently identify any specific projects for our TEN-T network. Instead, it refers to the upgrading of the rail network on the pre-identified section of the core corridor from Dublin to Belfast. In addition, I wish to see opportunities for road projects to be included on the list. However, I must caveat that by stating that, until there is more clarity around national and regional capital budgets moving into the next Budget period, definitive assurance that specific projects will proceed cannot be provided. In short, the regulations are still in draft form and the projects list is not yet final.

In response to the comments of Mr Dallat, who is no longer in his place, let me make it clear, as my party colleague Sandra Overend reflected, that the regulation is in draft form and that, at this stage, the projects identified are only indicative. In fact, member states, including the UK and the Republic of Ireland, were keen to stress to the Commission, when asked to identify projects, that definitive assurance on the projects list could not be provided until the TEN-T and CEF regulations were finalised. Therefore, at this time, my focus is on trying to secure the best possible outcome for Northern Ireland by influencing the negotiations and pressing home the need for regional variances to be accounted for. I can assure the House that I will continue to work on that with our MEPs, our UK Government and the Irish Government.

While I agree with Mr Lynch, the Deputy Chair of the Regional Development Committee, that the Irish have been very successful in securing funding from Europe for transport projects, I must point out that my Department, the Department for Regional Development (DRD), has also been successful in attracting European funding. Indeed, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) recognised that fact and recently wrote to my Department to highlight DRD's commitment and approach to competitive EU funding as an example for other Departments to follow.

3.15 pm

To date, we have secured over €18 million of funding from the TEN-T programme and nearly €9 million from the INTERREG IV programme. In addition, my officials recently submitted three applications for TEN-T funding. Those applications were for funding towards a feasibility study as part of the development of the design of a grade-separated junction at the York Street interchange; funding towards the Coleraine to Londonderry rail line relay project; and funding, as part of a joint application with the Electricity Supply Board from the Republic of Ireland, for the Plugged-In Places initiative. A further multi-annual call for TEN-T funding is expected later this year, and, if the call criteria are suitable, my officials will submit further funding applications.

As I have reassured the House already, I will not, and nor should the Executive, overlook the importance of engaging with Europe to influence policy. In that regard, we could work with and learn from both the UK and Irish Governments and make best use of the opportunity

provided by the Barroso task force. The work that the Executive have initiated with regard to the task force and improving our engagement in Europe will help us to succeed in that regard.

In relation to Mr Dickson and Mr McCarthy's proposed amendment to the motion, as I have stated, I have been working with my counterparts from the UK Government and the Irish Government to secure the best possible outcome for Northern Ireland from the ongoing negotiations. In addition, my officials have been liaising with officials from the other devolved Administrations on areas of shared interest, such as the inclusion of the A75 from Stranraer to Carlisle on the TEN-T core network.

Although policy concerning the EU budget is a reserved matter, as a devolved Administration, we have an interest in EU budget expenditure and the UK's receipts. The points made by the last Member to speak in the debate, Mr Allister, were largely political and concentrated on the major issue being reviewed — the UK's membership of the EU — whilst stressing regional variation.

I am mindful of the UK's position and the concerns regarding the Commission's proposals on the budget size for 2014 to 2020. However, I am supportive of the concept of a Connecting Europe Facility and the level of funding proposed for it. It is therefore important that, whilst seeking to limit the impact of the overall EU budget, every effort is made to ensure that any increased budgetary contribution is countered by increased opportunities to avail of the Connecting Europe Facility budget, particularly for transport, which is the most significant element in that budget.

I have lobbied extensively, and I will continue to lobby, for regional variances being taken into account by the TEN-T proposals when it comes to existing infrastructure systems and transport needs. I have met the European Commission and the European Transport Commissioner, and I welcome the proposed amendment for the House to support my efforts in that regard. In fact, as some Members know, I am planning to travel to Brussels immediately after this debate to attend a TEN-T Connect to Compete event, which will also be attended by the Transport Commissioner, Mr Kallas, MPs, ministerial counterparts in the Republic of Ireland and other Ministers and key stakeholders. I am grateful that the House has made progress in the timing of the debate. It would have been deeply ironic if I had been stuck in Belfast talking about Europe instead of being in Brussels actively pursuing opportunities for Northern Ireland in Europe.

In regard to Mr Dallat and Mr Eastwood's proposed amendment to the motion, the issues concerning TEN-T and the Connecting Europe Facility were discussed during the North/South Ministerial Council transport sectoral meeting in October this year. Furthermore, we agreed at the meeting to continue to liaise on relevant issues in the coming months. I can also advise that my Department has engaged with the Special EU Programmes Body on the development of the next EU cross-border programme, INTERREG V.

Mr Ó hOisín raised the issue of connectivity in the north-west, specifically the possibility of a western arc route. From a TEN-T perspective, we need to try to negotiate the inclusion of Londonderry on the core network in the first instance, as that will improve the opportunity for TEN-T

funding to be secured for projects on all connecting routes to Londonderry.

In summary, I welcome the debate and thank Members for their contributions. I note that, if amendment No 1 succeeds, amendment No 2 will fall. I restate my commitment to ensuring that the maximum contribution is gained from Europe for the benefit of our transport system and our people generally.

Mr Eastwood: The debate has been largely positive, which is welcome. European funding, particularly for infrastructure, is a very important issue for the House, especially for the Members from the north-west.

Quite fortuitously, 'The Irish Times' published a poll today on people's impression of Ireland's continuing involvement in the EU. A total of 74%, which is the vast majority, said that they were very happy for Ireland to remain a member of the European Union. I think that that says it all. Ireland has gone through immense economic turmoil, and Europe is going through very difficult times, yet the people of Ireland still want to be part of the European Union and still recognise its value. That is illustrated nowhere better than in the infrastructure across this island, particularly on the southern side of the border. All that you have to do is drive down any one of the brand spanking new roads in the Republic of Ireland where you will see the European Union's flag on the signs beside it. I think that we can learn about that from the Republic of Ireland, but we have just not been very good at doing that.

If you look at any map of Ireland, you will see that two things are missing from the north-west corner: a motorway and a railway line. We in the north-west have been greatly disadvantaged when you consider that, 100 or more years ago, Ireland had the most extensive rail network per capita in the world. Unfortunately, that was ripped up due to a very ill-advised government policy. We need to redress that imbalance and ensure that the north-west of this country is no longer disadvantaged because of our lack of infrastructure.

I thank the Minister for all his work to date. It is clear that he is committed to increasing the levels of European funding for this part of the world. The Executive have not been good at doing that, and I think that everybody needs to be much more focused on drawing down EU funding. The Minister has done good work on the infrastructure side of things. He has a lot more to do, and that is why we have asked him to further engage with the North/South Ministerial Council transport sector.

Like other Members who spoke, we believe that the western corridor of this country needs to be serviced by a rail network. We are very much disadvantaged by the fact that tourists cannot get a train further up the west coast to Derry. That is not a good thing. So, I encourage not only the Minister for Regional Development but all Ministers to continue the work of engaging with Europe and to learn the lessons from the Irish Republic and from all the work that has been done there thus far.

I take this opportunity to congratulate John Dallat and those who are involved in the Into the West railway group for the effort that they have put into securing the Derry to Belfast railway line, which was under threat a number of years ago. We need to move that debate even further and bring it to a point where we are not just securing the

railway line but are enhancing it and increasing the number of tracks going to different areas and more places.

I am grateful for the positive nature of the debate. It is strange to have so many pro-Europeans in the Northern Ireland Assembly. I think that some parties in the House have a bit of a schizophrenic relationship with the European Union. Along with the British Prime Minister, the DUP is calling for a smaller European budget, but the First Minister is calling for an increase in our drawdown of European funds. Sinn Féin has voted against every major piece of integration on this island with the European Union, but it is very proud, and rightly so, of the money that has been drawn down for community groups and other projects.

Therefore, I hope that the debate and the positive experiences that the South and many community groups in the North have had in engaging with the European Union will encourage political parties in the House to continue on their path —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Eastwood: — towards a pro-European stance like that which the SDLP has had for many years. Hopefully, we can then engage more positively with Europe to ensure that our infrastructure and other parts of our economy can be better serviced.

Mr Lyttle: I welcome the opportunity to speak to amendment No 1 and the motion, which look at how the Executive, and the Minister for Regional Development in particular, can best secure EU funding to improve transport investment in Northern Ireland.

In proposing the motion for Sinn Féin, Seán Lynch stressed the need for the Minister to work in partnership with his counterpart in the Irish Government, and he advised the Assembly of the ongoing need to raise awareness among EU officials of the geographical location of the island of Ireland. I had not realised that we were still at that stage, so, as well as raising the need for European investment, that served as a helpful reminder.

In proposing the SDLP amendment, John Dallat spoke of the need for cross-border co-operation, particularly with the North/South Ministerial Council, to improve road, rail and air transport provision on the island, as well as the need to deliver the vision of transport spanning from one end of Europe to the other. We have also just heard Colum Eastwood speak about that vision, particularly the need for that to extend right to the north-west of Ireland.

In proposing the Alliance amendment, my colleague Stewart Dickson broadened the approach to the issue to one of ensuring that all major Governments on these islands work together to pursue all EU funding to improve transport connectivity and provision in Britain and Ireland. I welcome the support that was voiced for the amendment.

He also spoke about the particular focus that we need to have on connected transport to ensure that we are competitive on a global scale so that we can access markets and the movement of skilled labour to create territorial social cohesion. He said that achieving that was a key factor in economic growth and improved quality of life for people in Northern Ireland. Mr Dickson also agreed with Seán Lynch on the need to ensure that European officials comprehend Northern Ireland's unique circumstances. Indeed, he spoke of the work that the

Regional Development Committee and the Minister are doing to make sure that that is achieved.

In relation to the Irish Government and the North/South Ministerial Council, this issue may be worth putting on the agenda of the North/South Inter-Parliamentary Association. The Alliance Party certainly recognises that close co-operation of that nature is needed to deliver on the issue. Indeed, my colleague Stewart Dickson spoke of the many transport corridors in the UK and Ireland, including Cork-Dublin-Belfast and Liverpool-Manchester-Birmingham-London. He also spoke of the need to be aware of the importance of Scottish and Welsh ports to people in Northern Ireland.

Sandra Overend of the Ulster Unionist Party supported the Alliance Party amendment and recognised the need for co-operation across the Governments in these islands, as did Alex Easton, who also spoke of the need to balance rail and road investment, particularly given the rural nature of the population in Northern Ireland. Jim Allister actually made the same point, after saying that the motion was pointless. Nevertheless, he made a useful point in his contribution.

Cathal Ó hOisín spoke about transport being extremely relevant to the future prosperity of the continent. He said that the argument articulated by my colleague Stewart Dickson had persuaded him to support the Alliance position. He also advised us of the significance of County Mayo to those of us who enjoy Coca Cola in the North. I am very grateful for the transportation of that particular product from that part of the country.

3.30 pm

The Minister, who we have recognised is working to influence the UK negotiating position on this issue, advised us that he is working with the Dublin Government as well and has secured amendments in relation to regional variants in Northern Ireland. I also welcome the fact that he has accessed EU funding that has had direct benefit for citizens in Belfast, Coleraine and Derry, and that he has done cross-border work in relation to electricity. We wish him well on his travels today to Europe to ensure that we secure even further funding for transport in Northern Ireland.

In conclusion, it is clear from the debate today that the quality of our and our neighbours' transport services matter significantly to Northern Ireland's economic and social well-being and that all Governments on these islands need to speak with a united voice —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Bring your remarks to a close.

Mr Lyttle: — if European officials are to understand our unique position and we are to maximise European investment in our transport services.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. In concluding the debate, I remind Members that we are talking about a funding package for TEN-T in the region of €49 billion, which my colleague Sean Lynch referred to. He also referred to the benefits of TEN-T for the island of Ireland. He made the point that the island of Ireland does not feature on the pre-identified lists that are currently in draft form in the EU. He conveyed his own personal experience of going to Brussels and the fact that

they had very little knowledge of this part of the world. In fact, they thought it was connected to mainland Europe. He expressed his fear that, if the island of Ireland, particularly the most westerly part of Ireland — which is the most westerly area of the EU — is not part of the core network then the country as a whole will suffer and we will be left behind, particularly as the new accession states come into the EU and expand it.

The motion called for the Minister to work with counterparts in Dublin to maximise opportunity for the EU structure funds. There is a golden opportunity coming up now, with the fact that Ireland is about to assume the EU presidency, so this is the time that we should maximise those opportunities and any influence that we might be able to bring to bear.

Stewart Dickson, speaking on amendment No 1, referred to the fact that there is a very competitive environment and that it is important that we in the North have access to markets. He expressed a fear that TEN-T could force us to implement a transport infrastructure that may not be suitable for this part of the island. He also referred to the fact that EU expansion will increase competition. Again, like Sean, he mentioned the lack of knowledge that he experienced when he went to Brussels as well.

Stewart called on the House to speak with one voice. One of the things that he called for was east-west connectivity as well as within the island. We do not have an issue with that. As Cathal rightly said, he was taken over by Stewart's comments and he is all for that amendment. In fact, one of the things that provoked the motion was that our colleague Martina Anderson proposed an amendment to the pre-identified projects in the EU. Part of that proposition makes reference not only to the western arc but to the Galway-Edinburgh rail upgrade, the Dublin-Cork-Southampton and the Cardiff-Bristol-London rail studies. We have no issues with the east-west dimension.

John Dallat spoke on amendment No 2. He is one of the MLAs here who is old enough to remember the golden era of rail travel throughout the island of Ireland. He welcomed the motion and said that there is a lot to be gained, especially the elimination of bottlenecks. He said that there is great work carried out by the Northern Corridor Railways Group, which indicated a very intelligent way forward. Of course, he flagged up the benefits of that and the all-Ireland benefits of getting a transport infrastructure that would enable us to compete in the world market.

He criticised the previous Minister for Regional Development for not doing enough to secure EU funds, but it is important to point out that Mr Dallat was a member of the DRD scrutiny Committee in the previous mandate. Obviously, there was not a great deal of work done by the Regional Development Committee, that let the Minister, allegedly, to slip up on EU funds.

Ian McCrea spoke next, and he said that the Sinn Féin motion was short-sighted. He went on to say that he could not support it because the train would not go through Cookstown and Mid Ulster but then welcomed the Alliance Party amendment. He deviated into the regional development strategy and questioned the benefits of TEN-T for Mid Ulster, but he did mention the importance of tourism and investment. I could say that the train will not go through Omagh or Loughmacrory, but we need to look at the big picture, which is that such a core network would

lift everybody's boat and benefit the entire country, North and South.

Mrs Overend said that, while negotiations were ongoing, the motion was premature. She said that it was important to ensure that the North was not left behind. Surely this is the time to debate such a motion. If the negotiations are ongoing and there is a draft list out to invite projects, this is the time to debate the motion and get them on.

Alex Easton referred to the importance of proper infrastructure for economic development. He referred to the multitransport modes and said that the current transport infrastructure in the North was very fractured. He said that the rail infrastructure was very poor but there should be more investment in roads. He referred to the work with other Governments to reduce regional variations. Interestingly, he said that this was the usual Sinn Féin all-Ireland agenda, but we have no problem with east-west connections. He should have spoken to Simon Coveney, who addressed the DUP and fheis at the weekend. If we had a proper rail network, Simon could have come from his constituency in Cork and up the western arc to the conference, handier than having to negotiate his way up through the bad road infrastructure.

Cathal Ó hOisín, like John Dallat, remembered the golden era of the rail network throughout the country and, indeed, throughout Europe. He spoke of the benefits of the western arc for commerce, tourism, economic revival, climate change and many other reasons. Jim Allister, as the Minister said, made a political point about withdrawing from the EU. He said that funding for roads should be handled locally and that we should repatriate everything from the EU.

The Minister made particular reference to regional concerns and the fact that he had been working with other Governments and the EU. He said that the regulations were in draft form and the projects were only indicative at this stage. Again, that feeds into the point that, if the propositions are indicative at this stage — there are as many as 400 proposed amendments to the pre-identified projects — this is the time for us to work hard to make sure that we are included.

The Minister pledged to work to do his best for the North and was very mindful of the need for an acknowledgement of regional variation. He referred to the projects that they have successfully achieved TEN-T funding for and noted that a call will be made later this year for TEN-T funds. He supported the Connecting Europe Facility and has met the Commission and others to talk about regional variations. Indeed, it features in the North/South Ministerial Council's discussions as well.

Colum Eastwood made the winding-up speech on amendment No 2. He referred to the poll in 'The Irish Times', which said that 74% of people wanted to stay in the EU. He talked about the fact that the north-west had no decent motorway or railway and said that we must improve our ability to draw down EU funds, just as the South of Ireland has been successful — more successful, perhaps, than we are — in drawing down transport funds. He said that the Minister was broadly doing a good job.

Chris Lyttle reiterated the views of his colleague Stewart Dickson. He proposed that the matter should be put on the North/South Inter-Parliamentary Association's agenda and said that all the Governments must speak with a united

voice. As I said, we have no issue with everyone speaking with a united voice on this issue. He drew back on a comment that Seán Lynch made at the outset, which was that 30% of Coca-Cola in the world comes from County Mayo. One of the things that we picked up in a meeting that we had with some of the chambers of commerce in that western part of the world was that 100% of Botox comes from there as well.

We hope that our motion will gain as much support as possible across the House. It is about taking a golden opportunity that exists to tap into a €49 billion pot to improve rail infrastructure. We deliberately timed the motion for when the issue was ongoing, with the Irish Government due to hold the EU presidency from January until June next year, which will maximise our leverage over there.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before I put the Question on amendment No 1, I remind Members that, if that amendment is made, I will not put the Question on amendment No 2, as the wording of the original motion will have been changed to such an extent that it would not be in order for the House to vote on it as well.

Question, That amendment No 1 be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Regional Development to work with his counterparts in the Irish, Scottish, Welsh and British Governments in seeking the maximum amount of EU funding available for transport; and further calls on the European Commission to recognise Northern Ireland's variance in terms of transport needs and existing infrastructure.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Principal Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

St Lucia Site, Omagh

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes. There will be no ministerial response.

Mr Hussey: I thank Members for their presence this afternoon for the debate on St Lucia Barracks in Omagh. As a West Tyrone representative and a very proud son of Omagh, I am delighted to have secured a debate on the town I love so well — apologies to Phil Coulter. My family association with St Lucia Barracks goes back to 1923, when my grandfather, a soldier with the Royal Irish Fusiliers, was sent on his last posting to St Lucia Barracks in Omagh, when he was attached to the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. From there, was discharged with 21 years' service in 1926. So my family connection with Omagh began with St Lucia Barracks. Perhaps that is why Members have abandoned the Chamber.

The story of St Lucia Barracks starts in 1875 with the leasing of the lands from the Archdale family on a 999-year lease as a military barracks. Barracks have been positioned on the site since the early 1880s. The site is one of the most impressive Victorian structures anywhere in the British Isles, and, as it was occupied by the army in various guises over its history, the historic buildings were well maintained until the withdrawal of the Royal Irish Regiment in 2007. Since then, the barracks have been closed to the public, and only limited maintenance has been undertaken.

I visited the barracks recently, and the site is as impressive as ever. Without a doubt, the impressive walled barracks are an asset to Omagh, with a strong link to many families who reside in Omagh to this day. The memorial in the barracks walls to those who died during their tour of foreign service lists the names of those whose last military posting before going overseas was St Lucia Barracks, and their last sight of Ireland before departing would have been within the walled barracks. Those names — Roman Catholic and Protestant — have helped to make Omagh, the county town of Tyrone, what it is today.

My reason for securing a debate now is simple: I do not want to see West Tyrone — Omagh, specifically — lose the jewel in the crown. St Lucia Barracks is one of the military sites that was to be gifted to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). There have been legal complications with the covenant on the lease, but I understand from the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and from the Minister, the Rt Hon Andrew Robathan MP, that negotiations are nearing completion and that the MoD will soon be in a position to offer the site to OFMDFM. There is no if, but or maybe, but in correspondence to me, the Minister stated:

“My department is currently negotiating with the freeholders on the retained part of St Lucia and once a resolution is found, the site will be offered to the OFMDFM under the Good Friday Agreement.”

I have concerns that OFMDFM might not be as keen for the site to be in public ownership as I am. I refer Members to responses that my party leader, Mike Nesbitt, and I have received in written answers to questions on St Lucia Barracks. Mike Nesbitt asked:

“(i) whether ownership of St Lucia Barracks, Omagh is to be passed from the Ministry of Defence; (ii) whether they are planning for the Ministry of Defence to gift the site to their Department; and (iii) what future use do they envisage for the former military site.”

OFMDFM responded:

“On 15 April 2012, part of St Lucia Barracks was gifted to OFMDFM under the Hillsborough Castle Agreement. The listed buildings and parade ground at St Lucia remain the property of the Ministry of Defence (MOD). It has not been possible for the MOD to transfer that part of the site to OFMDFM for legal reasons, although we understand that discussions are ongoing in relation to this and that MOD hopes to resolve the difficulties.

OFMDFM officials will maintain contact with the owners of the listed part of the site, so that any options which involve both portions of the site can be explored.

The purpose of the gifting sites under the Hillsborough Castle Agreement is to raise capital revenue to meet Executive pressures. Officials are currently considering options for disposal of the site to maximise yield and in the short to medium term are looking at ways to minimise costs and achieve some financial or social return. OFMDFM has established a Strategic Sites Oversight Board to undertake strategic management of the former military sites owned by the department and this will make recommendations to the Departmental Board and Ministers in due course in relation to the future of the sites.”

3.45 pm

I asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister:

“(i) to detail the current status in relation to the gifting of the St Lucia Barracks in Omagh; (ii) whether they have been involved in discussions with the Ministry of Defence in relation to the gifting of this site to the Executive; and (iii) the expected date that the negotiations between the leaseholders and Ministry of Defence will be completed.”

I was advised:

“OFMDFM currently owns a portion of the St Lucia Barracks site consisting of open ground, workshops and former military housing, which was gifted by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) in 2011 under the Hillsborough Castle Agreement. The remainder of the site was not gifted because of legal impediments.

OFMDFM officials have maintained contact with MOD in relation to the legal discussions on the remainder of the site, and possible future scenarios, but without any commitment on either side.

The legal negotiations are a matter for MOD rather than OFMDFM and we understand these are still a matter for due process.”

My last question was:

“whether departmental officials have undertaken any preliminary discussions with officials from Omagh District Council in relation to the potential use of St Lucia Barracks; and whether officials have been in discussion with the Department for Social Development, since the completion of the Omagh Town Centre Masterplan in 2009, in relation to the development of this site.”

I was advised:

“OFMDFM officials have undertaken discussions with Omagh District Council and the Department for Social Development in relation to St Lucia Barracks. These discussions have included consideration of the St Lucia site itself, the links to the neighbouring Lisanelly site and the context of St Lucia in the wider development of Omagh Town Centre.

Officials will continue to liaise with the Council, DSD and any other stakeholders on the future of the site.”

Unfortunately, we do not seem to have a clear vision of what will happen.

My concerns relate specifically to the walled barracks, on which, I understand, negotiations are almost complete. We must ensure that the barracks are taken into public ownership, and we must lobby hard to ensure that we support the master plan put forward by Omagh District Council. Of the six West Tyrone MLAs, five of us have been councillors on Omagh District Council, and Councillor Buchanan remains in that role. Councillor Buchanan MLA is not here this evening, but he has asked me to make it clear to the Assembly that he supports my proposals for the retention of St Lucia Barracks in public ownership and as part of the Omagh District Council plan.

The master plan clearly envisages St Lucia Barracks as essential to the development of Omagh, and I quote directly from the document:

“The Churches area dominates the high ground in Omagh with the distinctive skyline of the courthouse and spires and a network of narrow streets. It is proposed that the masterplan builds upon this unique character incorporating the former barracks of St Lucia and encouraging a cultural part of Omagh to develop, becoming an ideal location for restaurants, specialist retail, tourist attractions and accommodation.

The Churches area and the former barracks at St Lucia are two of the most historically significant parts of Omagh and have an important role to play in the vision for the future of Omagh.

Cultural uses such as small museums and galleries should be encouraged to the area, benefiting from its rich history and architectural legacy, whilst adding increased levels of physical and socio-economic activity to the area. These would complement existing attractions such as the churches themselves, whilst helping to create increased footfall for cafes, restaurants and bars.”

We have seen what can be done in Londonderry, where Ebrington Barracks, with great support from the Executive, became the open site it is today. Omagh needs the support

of the Executive and a no-quibble guarantee that the site will be gifted to the people of Omagh. The development of the site in Omagh should be a priority to ensure that Omagh will continue to be a major town in the south-west. The site cannot be sold to the highest bidder; it must be developed by Omagh District Council in co-operation with various Departments. The blueprint is in place from Ebrington, and the Omagh master plan can be developed further. I urge OFMDFM to ensure that Omagh gets the same support as was given to our second city.

I refer Members to the position of Omagh District Council, which is clearly documented, and I will quote directly its position:

“The council remains united as to the strategic importance of the St Lucia site for the future growth and development of Omagh town and the wider subregion. Its regeneration potential is unrivalled and the site’s proximity to Omagh town will enable real and meaningful linkages to the town centre to be established and developed. There has been no meaningful progress on the status of the restrictive use covenant for at least two years. The master plan remains unpublished, and there appears to be no central government interest in progressing the development of the site. The council is concerned at the absence of any real strategic direction in relation to St Lucia. The timescale for agreeing a new civic headquarters is slipping and there is now a need for urgent decisions to be taken. Presumably, if the restrictive covenant is removed, there is a risk that the site could be disposed to a developer or consortium which is unsympathetic to the site and its importance for Omagh and Tyrone. Clearly this would be an unfavourable outcome. The council remains committed to the development of the site and is willing, with appropriate central government guidance and support, to take a lead role in ensuring that the site is developed for the social, economic and regeneration benefit of the people of Omagh and the wider subregion.”

Earlier, we heard the First Minister refer to Fermanagh and other sites in Northern Ireland. It is clear that Omagh and this site have the potential to be developed, and we, as an Assembly, must push this issue as hard as we can to ensure that we do not lose this asset. The solution is simple. We call on OFMDFM to bring the matter to a swift conclusion, once the covenant issue is resolved, by stating unequivocally that St Lucia Barracks will be brought into the ownership of OFMDFM and, in conjunction with Omagh District Council, those buildings will be brought back to life as a major facility and attraction for the benefit of the people of Omagh.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. My comments follow what Ross said. Members are aware that the St Lucia site in Omagh is a 45-acre site. It is a gem right in the heart of Omagh, with a lot of cultural and historical significance. It is one of the sites which, unfortunately, was not gifted as part of the package when the Lisanelly site, which adjoins it, was gifted to the Executive. It is now being developed as a shared education campus.

There is some housing on the site, which is not in the best of shape. Some of it is on a floodplain and cannot be used for future development. As Ross says, the stumbling

block is the military covenant. There is a restriction in it governing use, particularly for the listed buildings, which are on a six-acre plot on the site. I understand that the covenant requires that the site must be used solely for military purposes; should that not be the case, the site defaults to its original owners. I am glad to note that, even though we have this logjam, the NI Environment Agency has taken steps in recent times to preserve the listed buildings on the site.

Mr Hussey: Will the Member give way?

Mr McAleer: Go ahead.

Mr Hussey: I will clarify the specific point in relation to the military covenant: it is that that the MoD is buying out, and it has got to the stage where it has nearly completed its negotiations. It is the covenant that is the problem at this time. The MoD is coming to the end of its negotiations in relation to that specific issue and, once they are completed, it is the intention, as I stated, of the Ministry of Defence to gift the site to OFMDFM, if it will take it.

Mr McAleer: Thank you, Ross, for that information.

As I said before the intervention, the St Lucia site is critical to the town. It complements the education campus, and it complements all the other work carried out in the town, including the environmental improvement scheme and the riverside walk that will go through the site. Much of that work has been led by the district council, including the Strule Arts Centre.

As has been said, DSD rolled out a master plan, which was the result of comprehensive consultation with the local community, the council, the chamber of commerce, DEL, DSD, Planning Service and others. It developed a shared vision for the site. Unfortunately, because of the logjam that we have been in, the master plan has been put on hold. There were good ideas in the master plan. It looked at the cultural aspect, the possibility for niche retail catering and hospitality and, of course, of fundamental importance was the fact that it would be for public use. The negotiations have been ongoing for some time, and that seems to have caused the logjam.

The council has been working diligently on this over the past number of years. As I was a councillor until a number of weeks ago, I am across much of the detail. Phase 1 of the riverside walk, for example, is a live project that will continue into 2014. That will bring people into the heart of St Lucia and increase local interest. Therefore, it is very important to have clarity on the future of the site. The community is united. It sees the strategic importance of the site, and it sees it as hugely important for the future growth and development of the town. If it is not managed properly and, as the last Member said, it ends up in the hands of a private developer or a consortium or is land-banked, that would not be a good outcome for Omagh. That is not what we want to see.

I welcome the fact that the debate has come to the House. It took the debate to put focus on the site and its regeneration potential for our town, our district and the wider subregion. Although MLAs from different parties will disagree on many issues, I think that we will agree that we want to see the site in public ownership and secured and used to its maximum potential for the people of Omagh, the wider district and future generations.

Mr Byrne: I thank Mr Hussey for securing the debate. It is crucial that the issue is dealt with sooner rather than later. I will not repeat all that has been said about the historic significance of the site, but it has been crucial to the overall development of Omagh for over 100 years. In the future development of the site, it is crucial that it become a focal point for the rich heritage and for the historic nature of the buildings.

It is crucial that the MoD conclude its negotiations as soon as possible. Hopefully, the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister will then willingly accept the site on behalf of the people at large. It is crucial that the site remain in public ownership to make the greatest utilisation of the site for the benefit of the people of Omagh and the surrounding district.

With regard to the work by DSD, RPS carried out a master plan and a range of consultations. It is a bit concerning that the master plan has never been published, and the sooner that happens the better, so that all stakeholders, particularly the district council, will have sight of it and some indication of what might or might not happen. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister has a public duty to the people of Omagh to clarify its thinking on the proposals that might emerge for the site.

The gifting of the site is crucial, and we expect to be treated in the same way as other towns that have military sites that were gifted to the Executive. I fully support the arguments outlined by Mr Hussey and supported by Declan McAleer. My party representatives on Omagh District Council have supported the development in the past, and I hope that it can be realised for the future. Finally, it is crucial that the Executive show a commitment to Omagh with regard to the site, that a meaningful use can be made of the site for the wider benefit of the people and that the historical legacy will be protected into the future.

Adjourned at 4.00 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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Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Fire and Rescue Service

Published on Thursday 1 November 2012

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I wish to make a Statement to the Assembly about the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS).

Following my Statement on 16 October, a number of further allegations have been sent to me about potential fraud, theft or other irregularities in NIFRS, some recent and some dating back over many years. I understand that other MLAs may also have received some such allegations. Some of these have already received media coverage.

I want to assure the Assembly that where appropriate, all material allegations and any others that may come to light over the weeks and months ahead will be investigated rigorously and proportionately, to ensure that our commitment to restoring full public confidence in NIFRS is fulfilled. I am tasking the Departmental Accounting Officer with the responsibility of ensuring a satisfactory and independent investigation of the material specific allegations that have been made. I am also looking to the NIFRS leadership team of Board Chair, Interim Chief Executive and Interim CFO to ensure that proper and effective control systems are in place in relation to the basics of the management of finance, HR, procurement, stock and equipment, and that these systems are operating effectively. I want DHSSPS to continue to provide strong support for the NIFRS team in this task.

It is appropriate and important that where anyone has information about abuse of public money or the assets or equipment of NIFRS as a public body, this is brought to light so that the specific issues can be resolved, appropriate lessons learned, and public confidence restored. Where wrongdoing has occurred it must be addressed, with a proportionate and appropriate response. I also want to emphasise that by far the majority in NIFRS continue to work faithfully and conscientiously as public servants and we should all work together to ensure that the negative factors in the culture of the organisation are dealt with fully at this time.

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Executive's Economy and Jobs Initiative

Published at 12.30 pm on Thursday 8 November 2012

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister) and Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister):We wish to make a Statement to the Assembly about a new initiative to boost jobs and the economy. When the Executive published its Programme for Government and Economic Strategy in March, we set out how we planned to grow the economy and tackle disadvantage.

Departments across the Executive are making significant progress in implementing their Programme for Government and Economic Strategy commitments. This activity will improve the competitiveness of the local economy and deliver higher levels of sustainable growth and employment.

However, we recognised that our Economic Strategy needed to be flexible. Low growth in our key markets is continuing to dampen our economic recovery and we have therefore concluded it is necessary to take further action to support the local labour market.

We have made resources available over the remainder of this budget period to implement a range of additional short-term measures and we have supplemented this activity by diverting further resources to projects which will boost employment in the construction sector in the short-term. The measures within this Economy and Jobs Initiative are set out in the attached paper.

We remain committed to growing a sustainable economy and tackling disadvantage. We will take a close interest in seeing that these measures are effectively delivered alongside the existing Programme for Government and Economic Strategy targets. We are also continuing to examine other ideas that may help us deliver our goals.

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 2 November 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington DC

Mr Storey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington DC.

(AQO 2567/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Bureau continues to represent the interests of the Executive throughout North America. Since its creation, the Bureau has successfully developed political, academic, cultural and economic relationships in key markets such as Washington, DC, Boston and New York. In recent years, the Bureau has expanded its outreach efforts to markets with growing interest and opportunities.

In Los Angeles, and Silicon Valley, the Bureau has promoted our emerging prowess in the creative industries sector through highlighting our ability to host major TV series such as Game of Thrones. It has also worked with InvestNI to promote local expertise in state-of-the-art sectors such as mobile and web application technologies.

In Chicago, the Bureau worked hard with the diaspora and business community that had historical reservations and pre-conceived views about what it is like to live and work here. In relation to business outreach, the Bureau has worked closely with InvestNI and ourselves to create an environment that facilitated the preservation of the United-Continental flight between Belfast and Newark. It also helped secure the investment by the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, a global leader in the financial services sector.

This year, the Bureau has, for the first time, ventured north of the US border into Canada where there is a significant diaspora community from Northern Ireland. That link has served as a catalyst for the Bureau's emerging strategy for engagement in Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal.

In terms of ongoing initiatives, the Bureau has extended its outreach to include the US Agri-Food and Bio Science communities, through the appointment of a Marketing Officer who is fully funded by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute. The newly appointed officer is already making headway into a lucrative US market by promoting the scientific excellence of AFBI in animal health and crop management.

While the Bureau continues to explore new opportunities, it continues to provide a level of access for visiting Ministers and MLAs that advances both the agendas of the incoming visitors and the reputation of Northern Ireland in the United States and Canada. Since devolution was reintroduced in May 2007, the Bureau has facilitated 47 incoming VIP visits for 180 visitors and hosted more than 90 events, which were attended by over 6,600 people. The key thread running through all these activities is the promotion of the very best that we have to offer across a wide range of sectors.

It should also be noted that the Bureau is the primary conduit for the Executive with the White House and Capitol Hill. The importance of this relationship was underscored this year as the Bureau worked with Congressional members on both sides of the political divide, the White House, State Department, and diplomatic colleagues at the Irish Embassy to ensure that the United States honoured its commitment to contribute \$2.5 million to the International Fund for Ireland.

Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister in relation to the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry (i) whether the term 'witnesses' includes victims and survivors; (ii) why witnesses will be represented by the Statutory Inquiry legal team and not be entitled to their own legal representation; and (iii) whether there will be a complete ban on involvement from lawyers not included in the Statutory Inquiry legal team at the public hearings.

(AQW 15413/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill does not exclude any person from being a witness. The Bill allows OFMDFM to award expenses to a person incurred in attending, or in relation to, the Inquiry. The detail of this will be set out in Rules.

The proceedings and conduct of the Inquiry will be a matter for the Inquiry Chair, within the confines of both the Terms of Reference and the legislative authority.

Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry: Statutory Inquiry Legal Team

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to the Statutory Inquiry legal team associated with the Historical Abuse Inquiry, (i) how the members of the Statutory Inquiry legal team were selected; (ii) whether the victims and survivors were consulted about the selection; and (iii) how many people are on the Statutory Inquiry legal team.

(AQW 15471/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:

- (i) An Inquiry solicitor has been appointed on merit following a competitive, competency-based selection process advertised throughout the Northern Ireland Government Legal Service and in accordance with relevant guidance.
- (ii) No. In this context consultation would not be appropriate.
- (iii) The legal team will include both solicitors and counsel. The precise size will be determined by the number of cases to be handled.

Belfast North Social Investment Zone Steering Group

Mr A Maginness asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to explain the reason for the gender imbalance in the appointment of members to the Belfast North Social Investment Zone Steering Group.

(AQW 15523/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The initial membership of the Steering Groups consist of four voluntary/community and four political representatives. The statutory and business members have still to be appointed.

The Steering Group membership is not therefore complete and there remains scope to promote a gender balance, as far as possible, with the remaining six places. However, our priority is to ensure that those best placed, with the relevant experience and expertise, are involved in the Steering Groups.

We expect to finalise full membership during the area planning process.

Social Investment Zone Steering Groups: Appointment Process

Mr A Maginness asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the appointment process for members of the Social Investment Zone Steering Groups.

(AQW 15524/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Steering Group members are not public appointments. The process for selecting membership in each Social Investment Zone was agreed by the Executive on 17 May 2012.

In relation to the voluntary/community representatives, individuals were invited, through an open call, to express an interest in being on the group. We considered all nominations received and decisions were made based on the nominee's level of previous programme experience. Other factors such as evidence of community endorsement for the nomination and geographical spread were also considered.

To determine the political membership, the D'Hondt methodology was applied to the relevant 2011 election results and party leaders were invited to nominate based on their allocation across the zones.

This makes up the initial membership of the Steering Groups, who are now commencing the area planning stage.

Statutory and business representatives will be confirmed over the next month once the priorities begin to emerge and those best placed can be identified by the initial Steering Group.

Sexual Orientation Strategy

Mr Molloy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Sexual Orientation Strategy, including when it will be published.

(AQO 2650/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are committed to the development and publication of a Sexual Orientation Strategy.

A draft public consultation document is currently under consideration within the Department and will be published in the near future.

A finalised strategy will be published as soon as possible after the conclusion of the public consultation exercise.

Government Structures Post-2015

Miss M McIlveen asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Programme for Government commitment to agree changes to post-2015 structures of government in 2012.

(AQO 2651/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We are currently working with the leaders of the other parties in the Executive to examine options for future structures of government and to develop the principles on which final decisions should be based. To inform these decisions we will also wish to take account of the forthcoming report of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee on the number of departments.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the Social Investment Fund could be used in such a way to change or influence the attitude of a community on a proposed planning development; and whether this is in line with Government guidelines on spending public money.

(AQW 15884/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Social Investment Fund is aimed at addressing issues associated with poverty, unemployment and dereliction. The allocation of funding will be based on objective, evidenced need and in line with relevant guidelines associated with spending public money.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Auctioned Items

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the items which her Department has disposed of at auctions in (i) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12, including the auction value of each item.

(AQW 15574/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The following tables detail the items my Department has auctioned in the last two financial years:

2010/2011

Details of Items	Auction Value £
(S432) Stihl 023 Chainsaw	70.50
(S430) Stihl 023 Chainsaw	58.75
Stihl Leaf Blower Parts	2.35
(S442) Stihl MS440 Chain Saw	94.00
(S431) Stihl 023 Chainsaw	70.50
(S435) Stihl Chain Saw MS440	94.00
(S462) Stihl MS440 Chain Saw	199.75
(S402) Stihl 023 Chian Saw for Parts	5.88
Stihl saw for Parts	29.38
(S414) Stihl Blower for Parts	2.35
Robin Water Pump	47.00
Crypton 240v Battery Charger	47.00
(UB74) Petrol Driven Concrete Poker Unit	35.25
(P307) 2" Petrol Water Pump	29.38
(UB75) Petrol Poker Unit	58.75
(Ub72) Petrol Concrete Poker Unit	58.75
Ldv 400 Convoy D Lwb D/Cab Tipper	1,410.00
Ford Fiesta Courier 50 1.8Td	675.63
Ldv 400 Convoy D Lwb D/Cab Tipper	998.75

Details of Items	Auction Value £
Ldv 400 Convoy D Lwb D/Cab Tipper	705.00
Ldv 400 Convoy D Lwb D/Cab Tipper	705.00
Ldv 400 Convoy D Lwb D/Cab Tipper	881.25
Ldv 400 Convoy D Lwb D/Cab Tipper	940.00
Ldv 400 Convoy D Lwb D/Cab Tipper	1,292.50
Ldv 400 Convoy D Lwb D/Cab Tipper	1,351.25
Ldv 400 Convoy D Lwb D/Cab Tipper	1,057.50
Ldv 400 Convoy D Lwb D/Cab Tipper	705.00
Ldv 400 Convoy D Lwb D/Cab Tipper	763.75
Ldv 400 Convoy D Lwb D/Cab Tipper	1,116.25
Large Boat	293.75
Wylie 6Ft Grass Topper	235.00
5Ft Tractor Linkbox	70.50
No 4 Small Boat	223.25
(P304) Pegson 3" Diesel Electric Start Water Pump	129.25
(AT 85) Tractor Link Box	82.25
Howard Leeford Hydraulic Driven Roadbush	264.38
Electric Powered Pallet Truck	105.75
Wiedenmann Petrol Driven Chipper/Shredder	235.00
1985 NCK Rapier 406 Crawler Drag Line c/w Accessories	5,640.00
Vauxhall Combo 1.7 1700 Di Van Diesel	700.00
Vauxhall Combo Epic 775 1.7d - Van Diesel	350.00
Vauxhall Combo 1.7 Epic 775 D - 2 Dr Van	450.00
Ldv 400 Convoy 2.4 D LWB - Tipper Diesel	1,400.00
Ldv 400 Convoy 2.5 Td LWB - Diesel	750.00
Land Rover 110 Defender 2.5 Tdi - Van	2,300.00
Land Rover Defender 110 2.5 TD5 - Van	2,900.00
Land Rover Defender 110 2.5 TD5 - 4x4	2,900.00
Land Rover Defender 110 2.5 TD5 - Van	4,850.00
Vauxhall Combo Epic 775 1.7d - 5924 Van Diesel	500.00
Leyland Daf Fa 45.130 3dr Tipper Diesel	1,550.00
Kelly Trailer	200.00
Trailed Plough	675.00
Liner Saw	70.00
McConnel Bench Saw	140.00
Roll Along Shelter	125.00
Roll Along Shelter	225.00
Roll Along Shelter	200.00
Roll Along Shelter	160.00
Roll Along Shelter	125.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	35.00

Details of Items	Auction Value £
Husqvarna Chainsaw	30.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	65.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	40.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	40.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	40.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	55.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	60.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	70.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw - No Blade	50.00
Hathaway Water Pump	15.00
Al Flask	90.00
Honda 150 quad	1,450.00
Q Mac Feeding Parts	45.00
AZA Feed System 3 Phase Motor	150.00
Rauch Fertsower	410.00
3 Feed Borrows	170.00
Pig Feeders	65.00
Slurry Separator	5.00
Auger S/Phase	12.00
Boar Pen Doors	180.00
12 Farr Crates	140.00
Pen Divisions	70.00
Ferg Weeder	420.00
3 Galv divisions	25.00
Pig Heater Pads	520.00
6 Farr Crates with Feeders	140.00
5 crates	170.00
5 crates with feeders	270.00
Daihatsu Fourtrak	1,800.00
Defender County	2,000.00
Breathing Apparatus	1.00
Tool Cabinet	6.00
Trolley Jack	2.00
Large Oil Tank	150.00
Large Oil Tank (Rusty)	60.00
Small Oil Tank	70.00
Work Bench	55.00
Work Bench	55.00
Small Work Bench	40.00
Ifor Williams Canopy	60.00
Radial Armsaw Dewalt	80.00

Details of Items	Auction Value £
Power Hacksaw Rapador	115.00
240 amp welder Oil Cooled	100.00
Wooden Car Trailer	200.00
LDV 400 Convoy 2500cc	474.41
Calf/Dog Trailer	40.00
Tool Chest Draper	90.00
Draper Tool Chest Drawers	105.00
Draper Tool Chest Drawers	100.00
Draper Tool Chest Drawers	100.00
Tool Box	65.00
Super Mig Welder	100.00
2 pallets wooden hurdles	15.00
Sheep Rollover crate	60.00
PTO Water Pump	70.00
Railing & Posts for Garden Fence	70.00
3 wooden crates	2.00
Calf Dehorning Crate	20.00
2 Galv races with gate at end	65.00
Pedestal Grinder	55.00
Ramp	1,700.00
Total	£54,112.01

2011/2012

Details of Items	Auction Value £
Iveco Daily 2.8 Van.	500.00
Ford Transit Connect 1.8 200 D	1,450.00
Vauxhall Combo1.7 1700 Van	750.00
Vauxhall Combo 1700 1.7 Di Van	750.00
Vauxhall Combo Epic 775 1.70D	275.00
Vauxhall Combo E 775 1.70D	150.00
Ford County Highland Bear	3,750.00
Ford New Holland Tractor Diesel	2,850.00
Augi Dumper	500.00
Etesia Attila Mower	525.00
Major 8400 Mower	300.00
Ifor Williams Trailer GD85G	375.00
Fire Trailer	170.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw -	28.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	42.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	30.00
Husqvana Chainsaw	70.00
Husqvana Chainsaw.	67.00

Details of Items	Auction Value £
Husqvarna Chainsaw	75.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	40.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	60.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	67.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	67.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	75.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	30.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	37.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	55.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	65.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	45.00
Husqvarna Chainsaw	75.00
Stihl Brush Cutter	45.00
Godiva Fire Pump	30.00
Rover 20" Lawnmower.	50.00
Garden Rotavator	55.00
Husqvarna Lawnmower	40.00
Vauxhall Combo 1.7	250.00
Mobile Crush	480.00
16 steel lockers	70.00
Barn Fans	10.00
29 Pig slats	680.00
9 Steel lockers	35.00
Calf Hutch	50.00
Tyre fitting machine	150.00
3 Phase hacksaw	45.00
1 steel workbench	40.00
3 phase electric welder	120.00
1 Kneverland Rev Plough	3,200.00
1 Kneverland 3 Furrow plough	2,000.00
1 Jones MK 12 Baler	1,250.00
1 Tarrup double Chop	2,200.00
1 Lamb creep feeder	50.00
1 Galv gate & Frame	55.00
1 Calf creep feeder	100.00
1 steel gate	10.00
1 automatic crush gate	70.00
Tractor mudguards	100.00
Sprayer parts	45.00
Forklift parts	15.00
Boxes of filter	35.00
Boxes of filter	10.00

Details of Items	Auction Value £
1 tyre	15.00
Shaft bearings	20.00
PTO shaft	40.00
Frame	5.00
Binder Canvass	15.00
4 Steel doors	110.00
Extractor fan and hood	20.00
1 Bale lifter	100.00
Gang mower parts and guard	20.00
Galv & plastic pipe	10.00
5 Galv hurdles & posts	150.00
Wooden parts	6.00
Selection tubes	25.00
Hydraulic hose crimper	660.00
Spare parts	5.00
Drill plough	30.00
Nuts & bolts	95.00
Nuts & bolts	60.00
Dynamo parts	35.00
Grinder	20.00
Spreader chains	20.00
Plough parts	2.00
hand lamp & wheels	10.00
PTO shaft wheels	25.00
Hose reel	5.00
Break Back plat & spare parts	40.00
Spot welder	150.00
Small bandsaw	28.00
Gas Bottle trolley	45.00
Tube valcaniser	5.00
Tool trolley	10.00
PZ Greenland Hay tedder	700.00
Hardi Sprayer	2,750.00
Rolling road brake testing trailer	180.00
Dorman sprayer on wheels	55.00
3 phase horz band saw	550.00
3 phase corn mill	200.00
Calf creep feeder	200.00
Landrover defender	4,650.00
LDV Convoy 2.5 D	600.00
Renault Master 2.5	1,300.00
Ladders	2.00

Details of Items	Auction Value £
Dewault saw	320.00
Grease gun	180.00
Generator	140.00
Sheep decks	60.00
Power washer	110.00
John Deere Mower	80.00
Atco mower	45.00
Turf lifter	60.00
Lawnmower	65.00
salt spreader	30.00
Lawnmower	190.00
Leaf blower	72.00
Hedge trimmer	45.00
Hedge trimmer	60.00
Pitch line winder	15.00
Lawnmower	45.00
Path sweeper	10.00
Leaf blower	8.00
Lawnmower	35.00
Hand operated winch	20.00
Saw	35.00
Bale spike	80.00
Johnston sheargrab	530.00
Sisis autospred	240.00
Portable workshop hydr crane	140.00
Roller door	300.00
Crush gate	130.00
Steele doors	60.00
Dust extractor fan	60.00
Pioneer shear grab	130.00
Wooden workbench	70.00
Air compressor & gas bottle	160.00
9 Galv hay racks	140.00
Mchale sheargrab	270.00
MF 6265	15,300.00
CASE 5120 with loader	9,800.00
Grain trailer	980.00
Tipping trailer	520.00
Tipping trailer	500.00
Rotavator	470.00
Total	£69,036.00

Tuberculosis

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is taking to eradicate tuberculosis.

(AQW 15587/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: It is my aim to reduce and ultimately eradicate bovine TB in cattle here and I will continue to work towards this end. My Department has a rigorous EU Commission approved bovine TB Eradication Plan, which is vital in safeguarding our export dependent trade in livestock and livestock products valued at over £1,000 million each year.

The bovine TB Eradication Programme involves the compulsory annual testing of all cattle herds using the Single Comparative Intradermal Tuberculin Test in line with EU Directive 64/432; the compulsory removal of animals that give a positive reaction to the tuberculin test with compensation payable to the herdkeeper; the restriction of cattle movements from TB breakdown herds until those herds test clear of TB, with the exception of moves direct to slaughter; and tracing and testing of at risk contact herds or animals. Controls also involve the routine abattoir post mortem surveillance of all slaughtered bovines. The gamma interferon blood test may also be used as a complementary test in certain circumstances.

Another key component of the TB Eradication Programme is the commissioning of 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.

On 3 July 2012, I announced to the Assembly Agriculture and Rural Development Committee that I had asked my officials to design specific wildlife intervention research. This approach would involve testing live badgers; vaccinating and releasing the test negative badgers; and removing the test positive ones.

The purpose of this wildlife intervention research is to assess the impact of this approach on the level of TB in badgers and in cattle in the field study area. This balanced approach would focus on removing diseased badgers and protecting uninfected ones. It would avoid removal of uninfected badgers and could lead in time to a reduction of TB in badgers and in reduced transmission of TB from this source to cattle. The design of the study will be complex and we want to make sure that we get it right. Subject to the completion of the necessary preparatory steps, I would wish this study to proceed as soon as possible next year.

I am very encouraged by the wide spectrum of stakeholder support and engagement for this test and vaccinate or remove wildlife intervention research. Farmer, environmental and private veterinary representative organisations are participating fully through the newly constituted TB stakeholder working group on the development of this research approach.

Shooting Leases

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the rationale for mentioning grey squirrels in a shooting lease and having to seek prior permission from her Department before shooting them; and (ii) what other species are mentioned on the shooting lease.

(AQW 15595/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (1) Grey squirrels are a threat to the economic and biodiversity value of our woodlands. They cause damage to broadleaved crops and are a threat to our indigenous red squirrel populations. Prior permission is a requirement of the shooting licence to ensure that Forest Service is satisfied that the control methods proposed cause no risk to any local red squirrel populations that are present.
- (2) The shooting rights permitted under the licence agreement includes the right to kill and take game and ground game (pheasant, partridge, snipe, woodcock), wildfowl (Mallard only) and other quarry species (wood pigeon, rabbits, grey squirrels), as well as the right to shoot and trap vermin (foxes, mink, rats, stoats, and permitted corvids (rook, hooded crow, magpie, jackdaw).

Shooting Leases

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) what points or weighting system is applied when granting shooting leases; and (ii) what points or weightings exist between, price, management plans and risk assessment when issuing shooting leases.

(AQW 15596/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The procedure for assessing tenders for shooting licences has two stages.

The first stage evaluates management plans received from tenderers and these are deemed either acceptable or unacceptable on the basis of timeliness and completeness of information supplied. Applicants are asked to provide information on a range of management proposals including safety, usage, game release plans, shooting methods, recording and other supporting information.

The second stage evaluates tenders where management plans are considered acceptable. This stage considers the financial value of individual tenders taking account of the preferences for forests listed by individual tenderer.

Badger Setts

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQO 2661/11-15, in relation to the survey of badger setts, whether she has taken into account the proposed methodology, put forward by Queen's University, on the use of a badger faeces testing model to detect tuberculosis infected badgers.

(AQW 15648/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As you are aware, I have asked my officials to design specific wildlife intervention research that would involve testing live badgers; vaccinating and releasing the test negative badgers; and removing the test positive ones.

It is proposed that badgers will be captured and blood samples will be taken to test for the presence of TB. The test being considered is highly likely to identify the most highly infected and infectious badgers so that we can remove that source of infection. This test is also highly unlikely to give false positive results, which is beneficial as we wish to avoid removing uninfected badgers.

I am aware that Queen's University Belfast is currently undertaking Defra funded research to seek to develop a rapid diagnostic method using badger faeces to identify TB infection in badgers and/or to identify setts which contain infected badgers.

I welcome this research, which may provide another tool to identify TB infected badgers. While I understand that this research project is not due to be completed until late next year, nevertheless I shall be very interested to see its outcome and the evaluation of its potential application in field conditions.

I have asked my officials to monitor all relevant research so that we may benefit from appropriate application of new tests and methods. While there is no need to duplicate expensive TB research commissioned by other government funders, we must ensure that we draw on the results of such research where appropriate.

Land No Longer of Agricultural Use

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much land, in each of the last three years, is no longer of agricultural use; and to detail the reasons why.

(AQW 15681/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In 2012, for the first time, ineligible features have been digitised on DARD's mapping system. This shows that 69,924 ha of land is not in agricultural use. The areas considered to be ineligible comprised hard features such as buildings, yards and rock, as well as vegetative features such as scrub and trees.

While DARD does not hold similar information regarding land not in agricultural use in previous years, it is unlikely that the position in 2010 and 2011 would be dramatically different to that in 2012.

The above figures do not include built up areas such as those occupied by towns and villages.

Tourist Information Centre in Bushmills

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what objections her Department has to the Rural Development Programme supporting the application for a Tourist Information Centre in Bushmills.

(AQW 15689/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As this project is already in the competitive assessment process I cannot comment on it and in any event it is subject to data protection legislation. I would however say that all applications are subject to rigorous assessment, including economic appraisal to ensure appropriate and efficient use of public money. Under Axis 3 delivery arrangements assessment of projects and completion of economic appraisals are delegated to delivery partnerships. For projects over £250k a full green book appraisal is completed and the Department is required to quality assure the economic appraisal for completeness and robustness prior to the local Action group making a decision on an application. As a further quality assurance the department scrutinises a percentage basis of those examined at local level.

DARD Headquarters: Relocation of

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why Ballykelly is the only site being used for developing the business case for the relocation of her Department's headquarters.

(AQW 15699/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: It is an Executive commitment to advance the relocation of DARD HQ to a rural location. My decision to locate my Department's headquarters at Ballykelly came at the end of a structured process which involved an assessment of 23 potential locations against a defined set of criteria.

Having reached my decision on location, my direction that the Business Case should consider only those options relating to the Ballykelly site ensures that the Business Case will have as its starting point those options which address the Executive's policy objective.

DARD Headquarters: Relocation of

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the relocation of her Department's headquarters, whether she can confirm that Strabane was the preferred location under a range of criteria, but political considerations were the determining factor in choosing the site in Ballykelly.

(AQW 15700/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My decision to locate my Department's headquarters at Ballykelly came at the end of a structured process which involved an assessment of 23 potential locations against a defined set of criteria. The criteria included socio-economic factors such as unemployment levels, deprivation and earnings levels. Furthermore, given that one of the objectives of relocating the Headquarters of DARD is to ensure a more equitable distribution of jobs across the north the shortlisting criteria also included the number of public service and civil service posts in each location. Following that assessment, which resulted in the top two locations being in the north-west, namely Strabane and Limavady, the availability of the Executive-owned site at Shackleton Barracks and the potential that some of the buildings on that site could be converted to civil service office accommodation was the determining factor that led to my decision that Ballykelly should be the site for the relocation. Using that site and the buildings available therefore has the potential to reduce the cost of relocating the Headquarters.

In my view the relocation of the DARD headquarters represents an important first step to relocate a significant share of public sector jobs and could pave the way for a much larger programme of relocation in the public sector. It would naturally greatly enhance the economic and social development of rural communities and bring a greater realisation of the outcomes envisaged by Bain.

UK National Ecosystem Assessment

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) whether she is aware of the recommendations contained in the Northern Ireland chapter of the UK National Ecosystem Assessment; and (ii) how the findings in the document have been utilised by her Department.

(AQW 15704/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) I am aware of the NI chapter of the UK National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA), and that officials from my Department and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) contributed to the report.
- (ii) My Department has commissioned AFBI to carry out research on the interpretation of the findings of the NEA for the north, and their implications for future DARD policy. The results of this study will be available next year, and will contribute to the Department's policy development process.

Poultry House Planning Applications

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions her Department has had with the Department of the Environment on reducing the length of time it takes to process poultry house planning applications.

(AQW 15736/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There have been no discussions between my Department and the Department of the Environment relating specifically to the length of time taken to process poultry house planning applications. However, more broadly, my Department is aware of certain planning concerns raised by businesses within the agri-food and rural sectors and has highlighted the need for the timely processing of planning applications. For example, as long ago as 2009, the Agriculture Sub-Group of the Cross Sector Advisory Forum created to address the economic downturn (chaired by my predecessor, Michelle Gildernew MP MLA) made three planning-related recommendations, including calling for a planning regime that is generally sympathetic to farm diversification and micro-business proposals, is simplified as far as possible in terms of the application and approvals processes, and which has a fast track approvals mechanism for on-farm developments required to ensure compliance with EU legislation. Moreover, within the Rural White Paper Action Plan, there is a commitment both to ensure that planning policy and rural development policy are joined up and to find ways of reducing the time taken to consider rural development programme planning applications.

Ash Tree Population

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she intends to take to protect the ash tree population.

(AQW 15750/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Ash is one of the commonest native species on this island so we must do all we can to minimise the risk of Chalara Dieback of Ash (*Chalara fraxinea*) becoming established here. My Department is currently carrying out monitoring of ash plants at nursery and retail premises and at sites of recent planting in both amenity and woodland areas for any signs of this damaging disease, and so far we have not found any evidence of the disease.

It is regrettable that it has been discovered in the South in a young ash plantation and in view of the serious situation that is now becoming clear I have introduced emergency legislation, in tandem with similar legislation in the South, restricting the

importation or movement of ash trees for planting unless they are known to come from a disease-free area. This is consistent with my obligations under the EU Plant health legislation.

I am also concerned that untreated ash wood may be a possible pathway for the disease to enter Ireland, and I am minded to extend the ban to cover that also, although I acknowledge that the movement in plants presents the greatest risk. I will work closely with Minister Simon Coveney, as we need to make sure that we have a consistent fortress-Ireland approach.

Animal Cruelty

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in light of the recent unprovoked and deliberate severe animal cruelty incident, whether she will expedite the procedures to enhance sentencing for such incidents.
(AQW 15754/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I believe that all acts of deliberate animal cruelty are abhorrent and cannot be tolerated in today's society. The Welfare of Animals Act 2011 recognises that causing unnecessary suffering to any animal is a very serious offence and the penalties contained within the Act reflect this.

During the recent Assembly Debate on the Motion regarding the penalties in the 2011 Act, I made my position very clear and stated that I strongly support tough penalties for animal welfare offences and the full use of the newly extended sentences introduced by the Welfare of Animals Act 2011.

The extended penalties that we have here in the north are stiffer than those in Britain. The maximum penalty for committing a serious welfare offence in the north is 2 years' imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine. In addition, the Court can deprive a person convicted of a serious animal welfare offence of ownership of the animal to which the offence related, should they be the owner. The Court can also disqualify a person, convicted of a serious animal welfare offence, for such a period as it sees fit, from owning, keeping, participating in the keeping, control or influencing the way an animal is kept. This disqualification could be for life and for one or more species of animal.

As I said during the Assembly Debate, I want the new Welfare of Animals Act to be given sufficient time to bed down before any modifications are made to it. I believe that this is important not only for DARD but also for the Councils and the PSNI who also have enforcement powers under the Act. The Courts must also be afforded the opportunity to apply the Act as it is a matter for the Judiciary to decide the penalties applicable in each case.

Until the Welfare of Animals Act 2011 has been fully tested in the Courts and has been given the opportunity to be fully implemented, I remain firmly of the view that the penalties contained within the Act should not be amended at this time.

I have arranged to meet the Minister of Justice to ensure that the Courts are encouraged to make full use of the range of penalties available for animal welfare offences and to apply the maximum penalties possible in very serious cases.

Meat Processors

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what contact she has had with meat processors in an effort to obtain a more equitable price for producers; and what was the outcome.
(AQW 15778/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I would point out that the price paid to producers and the establishment of a pricing structure is a commercial matter and outside the remit of DARD. You will therefore appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to be in contact with meat processors in relation to commercial pricing matters, however I regularly meet with processors to discuss a wide range of issues.

However, I do share concerns that have been expressed recently regarding the price paid to producers. I appreciate that farmers, like everyone else, are operating in difficult times and I would hope that prices will recover in the coming months. I would encourage producers and processors to work together to help ensure that all those in the supply chain have a profitable and sustainable future in the industry.

My Department will continue to do what it can to support the industry and I am pleased to report that a Red Meat Sub-Group, comprising processor and producer representatives, has been established under the Agri-Food Strategy Board. The aim of the sub-group is to develop a strategic plan for the red meat sector which will produce a successful and sustainable local red meat industry.

Derelict Buildings

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what grants or funding are available to assist property owners with the re-development of derelict buildings in town centres, particularly in rural areas.
(AQW 15804/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Rural Development Programme (RDP) administered by my Department aims to improve the economic, social and environmental conditions in rural areas.

Rural is defined as all those areas outside the statutory development limits of those towns and settlements with a population in excess of 4,500 inhabitants. Axis 3 of the RDP, Measure 3.5, Village Renewal and Development aims to support and encourage residents of villages and surrounding areas to create a vision and an integrated action plan to ensure the full

potential of the village is achieved and to support integrated village initiatives which promote cross community development and regeneration.

This measure may assist property owners in town centres with a population of 4500 or less with the re-development of derelict buildings where the re-development is part of a village initiative deemed eligible for funding under the measure. Additional measures such as 'Creation and development of micro businesses', Tourism and Cultural heritage may also assist in the redevelopment of town centres with a population of 4500 or less.

Research Challenge Fund

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the operation of the Agri-Food Research Fund, including how her Department has promoted and advertised the availability of the fund.

(AQW 15817/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Research Challenge Fund opened for applications for the third time on 8 October 2012. It will close on 18 January 2013, which allows applicants 15 weeks to prepare applications. There is £1,000,000 available in 2013 and we hope to build on the success of the second competition in 2012 when we awarded grants of around £870,000 to 7 successful applicants.

We advertised the re-opening of the fund, as in previous years, in the Belfast Telegraph, Newsletter, Irish News, Farm Week, Farming Life, Irish Farmers Journal and on the NI BusinessInfo website. In addition, we promoted the Fund at the Balmoral Show and have held an information briefing for potential applicants.

Culvert Scheme in Killeaton, Dunmurry

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the installation of a new culvert scheme in Killeaton, Dunmurry, following flooding in June 2012.

(AQW 15968/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There are currently no plans for a new culvert scheme at Killeaton. However, the inspection regime for the grille at Killeaton (Queensway) has been increased from a minimum of monthly to a minimum of weekly. In advance of weather warnings and during extreme rainfall events this grille is prioritised for inspection. The upgrading of the grille is programmed for this financial year and will be completed as quickly as possible in line with existing available resources.

Countryside Management Scheme

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given that the NI Countryside Management Scheme is a seven year scheme, whether her Department would consider paying the 2011 and 2012 claims immediately, even though the inspections are incomplete, as there is a further four years to prosecute anyone who deliberately does not comply.

(AQW 16057/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The rules governing how my Department, as a Paying Agency of the EU, makes payments for the NI Countryside Management Scheme, are laid down in the European Commission Regulation (EU) No. 65/2011. Even though NICMS is a seven year scheme, participants must claim their payments annually and this Regulation states that payments cannot proceed until administrative checks and inspections have been completed. In-line with EU requirements we must carry out a minimum of 5% On-The-Spot Checks (inspections) and 100% administrative checks. Therefore my Department cannot pay 2011 and 2012 claims for NICMS until the required inspections and checks are complete.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Sport NI: Board Members

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to provide a breakdown of the community background of the Board members of Sport NI.

(AQW 15359/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The Board of Sport NI currently has 8 individuals with a Roman Catholic Community background, 3 individuals with a Protestant Community background and 1 individual whose community background is not known.

Sport NI: Board Members

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to provide a breakdown of the community background of the Board members of Sport NI whom the Minister has she appointed since taking up office.

(AQW 15360/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Since taking up office as the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure I have appointed 10 individuals with a Roman Catholic Community background, 4 individuals with a Protestant Community background and 1 individual whose community background is not known to the Board of Sport NI.

Arm's-length Bodies: Media Protocol

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the media protocol that she issued to her arm's-length bodies.

(AQW 15403/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The objective of the media communications protocol is to share and promote best practice in communications between DCAL and its ALBs.

The protocol has led to the creation of a Communications Forum which is attended by Marketing/Communications professionals from DCAL and its ALBs.

The first meeting of the Communications Forum has been held (in June) and included a presentation on social media. Minutes of the Forum have been published on the DCAL website.

Auctioned Items

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the items which her Department has disposed of at auctions in (i) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12, including the auction value of each item.

(AQW 15576/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department disposed of 2 items at auction in 2010/11:

Ford Ranger 4x4 Turbo Diesel Auction proceeds of £1,457.00

Volvo Dropside Lorry Auction proceeds of £2,395.19

There were no disposals at auction in 2011/12.

Marching Bands: Funding

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the level of funding each marching band in the (i) North Antrim; and (ii) East Antrim areas received from (a) the Arts Council; (b) the Ulster Scots Agency; and (c) the Community Festivals Fund, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 15639/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The tables below detail the funding awarded by my department to each Marching Band in the (i) North Antrim; and (ii) East Antrim areas:

(i) North Antrim

(a) Arts Council

Year	Marching Band	Amount
2007/08	Ballymacconnelly Sons of Conquerors	£4,525.00
2007/08	Cullybackey Pipe Band	£5,000.00
2007/08	Killycoogan Accordion Band	£5,000.00
2007/08	Pride of the Maine	£3,690.00
2007/08	Pride of The Park Flute Band Armoy	£4,013.00
2008/09	Ballymena and Harryville Young Conqueror	£5,000.00
2008/09	Drumaheagles Young Defenders Flute Band	£5,000.00
2009/10	Castlegore Amateur Flute Band	£5,000.00
2010/11	Crown Defenders Flute Band	£5,000.00
2010/11	Dunloy Accordion Band	£4,462.00
2010/11	Milltown Accordion Band	£5,000.00
2010/11	Pollee Temperance Accordion Band	£4,667.00
2011/12	Ballintoy Accordion Band	£4,500.00
2011/12	Ballymena Corps of Drums	£5,000.00

Year	Marching Band	Amount
2011/12	Bushside Accordion Band	£5,000.00
2011/12	Kells Flute Band	£3,405.00
2011/12	Kellswater Flute Band	£4,875.00
2011/12	Pride of the Valley Flute Band Teenies	£4,950.00
2011/12	Seven Towers Pipe Band	£4,883.00
2011/12	Tullaghans Sons of Liberty Flute Band	£4,890.00

(b) Ulster-Scots Agency*

Year	Marching Band	Amount
2007	Dunloy Accordion Band	£2,250.00
2007	Cullybackey Pipe Band	£3,500.00
2008	Dunloy Accordion Band	£2,430.00
2008	Cullybackey Pipe Band	£2,160.00
2008	Craiganeer Accordion Band	£1,125.00
2008	Craiganeer Accordion Band	£1,237.50
2008	Craiganeer Accordion Band	£250.00
2009	Cullybackey District LOL No 20	£2,390.00
2009	Dunloy Accordion Band	£2,390.00
2009	Craiganeer Accordion Band	£693.00
2009	Dunloy Accordion Band	£2,250.00
2009	Garryduff Flute Band	£1,200.00
2009	Ballywillan Flute Band	£2,200.00
2009	Castlegore Amateur Flute Band	£2,100.00
2009	Crown Defenders Flute Band	£720.00
2009	Pride of the Park Flute Band	£1,200.00
2009	Tullaghans Sons of Liberty Flute Band	£2,100.00
2009	Vow Accordion Band	£1,800.00
2009	Dunloy Accordion Band	£250.00
2010	Garryduff Flute Band	£1,400.00
2010	Dunloy Accordion Band	£2,085.00
2010	Ballinagarvey Flute Band	£2,520.00
2010	Ballymacconnelly Sons of Conquerors Flute Band	£3,402.00
2010	Ballymena & Harryville Young Conquerors Flute Band	£2,100.00
2010	Ballymena Corps of Drums	£2,520.00
2010	Ballywillan Flute Band	£3,150.00
2010	Bushside Independent Flute Band	£1,680.00
2010	Castlegore Flute Band	£3,080.00
2010	Craiganeer Accordion Band	£1,890.00
2010	Crown Defenders Flute Band	£2,835.00
2010	Cullybackey Maine Defenders	£3,255.00
2010	Cullybackey Pipe Band	£1,960.00
2010	Dunaghy Flute Band	£2,240.00
2010	Dunloy Accordion Band	£2,240.00

Year	Marching Band	Amount
2010	Eden Accordion Band	£2,520.00
2010	Major FN Crawford Memorial Flute Band	£3,517.50
2010	Mosside Rising Sons of Ulster Accordion Band	£2,184.00
2010	Pride of the Park Flute Band	£1,680.00
2010	Seven Towers Pipe Band	£1,960.00
2010	Sons of Ulster Flute Band, Portrush	£3,517.50
2010	Tullaghans Sons of Liberty Flute Band	£2,240.00
2010	Vow Accordion Band	£2,100.00
2010	Bushside Independent Flute Band	£250.00
2010	Dunaghy Flute Band	£250.00
2010	Garryduff Flute Band	£250.00
2010	Pride of the Park Flute Band	£250.00
2011	Garryduff Flute Band	£900.00
2011	Craiganeer Accordion Band	£1,050.00
2011	Ballintoy Accordion Band	£1,650.00
2011	Ballymacconelly Sons of Conquerors Flute Band	£1,650.00
2011	Ballymena & Harryville Young Conquerors Flute Band	£1,200.00
2011	Ballymena Corps of Drums	£1,305.00
2011	Ballywillan Flute Band	£1,650.00
2011	Broughshane & District Pipe Band	£1,650.00
2011	Bushside Independent Flute Band	£900.00
2011	Craiganeer Accordion Band	£1,500.00
2011	Crown Defenders Flute Band	£1,650.00
2011	Dunaghy Flute Band	£1,650.00
2011	Dunloy Accordion Band	£1,650.00
2011	Eden Accordion Band	£1,050.00
2011	Garryduff Flute Band	£1,500.00
2011	Kellswater Flute Band	£800.00
2011	Lily of the North Flute Band	£1,485.00
2011	McNEillstown Pipe Band	£1,500.00
2011	Milltown Accordion Band	£1,500.00
2011	Mosside Independent Accordion Band	£450.00
2011	Mosside Rising Sons of Ulster	£1,650.00
2011	Pollee Temperance Accordion Band	£1,650.00
2011	Pride of the Maine Flute Band	£1,650.00
2011	Pride of the Park Flute Band	£1,650.00
2011	Pride of the Valley Flute Band, Teenies	£1,350.00
2011	Sir George White Memorial Flute Band	£1,650.00
2011	Star of the North Pipe Band	£1,650.00
2011	Vow Accordion Band	£1,650.00
2011	Dunaghy Flute Band	£250.00
2011	Garryduff Flute Band	£250.00

Year	Marching Band	Amount
2011	Pride of the Park Flute Band	£250.00
2011	Pride of the Park Flute Band	£250.00
2011	Pride of the Park Flute Band	£250.00
2011	Pride of the Park Flute Band	£250.00

* Ulster-Scots Agency operate in calendar years.

(c) Community Festivals Fund (CFF)

Prior to 2008 CFF was administered by the NI Events Company and the information we hold does not identify whether or not an event involved a Marching Band.

Year	Marching Band	Amount Awarded
2008/09	Dunloy Accordion Band	£1,470
2008/09	Pride of the Park Flute Band, Armoy	£300
2009/10	Cullybackey Maine Defenders Day	£471
2009/10	Sir George White Memorial Flute Band Remembrance	£968
2009/10	Dunloy Accordion Band	£860
2009/10	Lisnagaver Flute Band	£400
2010/11	Sir George White Memorial Flute Band Remembrance	£1590.88
2010/11	Pride of the Park Flute Band, Armoy	£771.74
2010/11	Dunloy accordion Band	£830
2010/11	Garryduff Flute Band	£600
2011/12	Pride of the Park Flute Band, Armoy	£1,089
2011/12	Dunloy Accordion Band	£850

* These figures include matched funding from district councils

(ii) East Antrim

(a) Arts Council

Year	Marching Band	Amount
2007/08	George A Dummigan Accordion Band	£4,000.00
2009/10	Ulster Grenadiers Flute Band	£4,266.00
2010/11	Magheramore Silver Band	£5,000.00

(b) Ulster-Scots Agency*

Year	Marching Band	Amount
2009	Sir Edward Carson True Blues Flute Band	£2,575.00
2010	Ballyboley Pipe Band	£2,100.00
2010	Cairnalbana True Blues Flute Band	£2,520.00
2010	Cairncastle Flute Band	£2,940.00
2011	Ballyboley Pipe Band	£1,200
2011	Cairncastle Flute Band	£1,650.00
2012	Ballyboley Pipe Band	£1,200.00
2012	Carnlough Flute Band	£1,642.50

* Ulster-Scots Agency operate in calendar years.

(c) CFF

There was no funding awarded through CFF to Marching Bands in the East Antrim area.

First World War Battlefields Visits

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in light of the Prime Minister's announcement last week, what plans her Department has to assist post-primary schools that wish to attend First World War battlefields to commemorate the centenary of the Great War.

(AQW 15663/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The First World War is one of several major events from the 1912-22 period with social, cultural and political impact and consequences which reverberate to this day. This 'Decade of Centenaries' includes other significant anniversaries such as the signing of the Ulster Covenant, the Easter Rising, Universal Male and Limited Women's Suffrage, rise of the Labour Movement, Civil War in Ireland and Partition.

The creative and cultural infrastructure and programmes already funded and supported by my Department will play a key role in telling the stories and different interpretations of the First World War and other events from this important decade in our history.

Marching Bands: Funding

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the level of funding each marching band in the Greater Belfast area that received from (i) the Arts Council; (ii) the Ulster Scots Agency; and (iii) the Community Festivals Fund, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 15692/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Funding awarded by my department to Marching Bands in the Greater Belfast area was as follows:

(i) Arts Council

Year	Marching Band	Amount
2007/08	Gilnahirk Pipe Band	£3,438.00
2007/08	Hounds of Ulster	£5,000.00
2007/08	Pride of Ardoyne	£4,605.00
2008/09	First Old Boys Association Silver Band	£4,900.00
2009/10	Ulster Volunteer Flute Band	£4,583.00
2009/10	Fifes and Drums Historical and Musical Society	£4,878.00
2009/10	Upper Falls Protestant Boys	£4,658.00
2010/11	Gertrude Star Flute Band	£5,000.00
2010/11	Ballycoan Flute Band	£4,253.00
2011/12	Dundonald Community Concert Band	£4,095.00
2011/12	Rathcoole Protestant Boys Flute Band	£5,000.00
2011/12	Belfast Martyrs Republican Flute Band (B.M.R.F.B)	£4,500.00

(ii) Ulster-Scots Agency*

The Ulster-Scots Agency has confirmed that no bands in the Greater Belfast Area were funded in 2007 & 2008.

Year	Marching Band	Amount
2009	Gertrude Star Flute Band	£ 3,600.00
2010	Ballymacarett Defenders Flute Band	£ 1,960.00
2010	Fifes & Drums Musical & Historical Society	£ 1,960.00
2010	Millar Memorial Flute Band	£ 2,100.00
2010	Queensway Flute Band	£ 2,520.00
2010	Lower Woodstock Ulster-Scots Flute Band	£ 2,100.00
2010	The Regiment Band	£ 1,960.00
2010	Pride of Lagan Valley Flute Band	£ 1,960.00

Year	Marching Band	Amount
2010	Britannia Flute Band	£ 315.00
2010	Pride of the Raven	£ 1,960.00
2010	South Belfast Young Conquerors	£ 1,680.00
2010	Gertrude Star Flute Band	£ 1,820.00
2011	Fifes & Drums Musical & Historical Society	£ 1,650.00
2011	Pride of Lagan Valley Flute Band	£ 1,650.00
2011	Gertrude Star Flute Band	£ 1,650.00
2011	The Regiment Band	£ 1,650.00
2012	Fifes & Drums Musical & Historical Society	£ 1,642.50
2012	Pride of Ardoyne Flute Band	£ 1,650.00
2012	Gertrude Star Flute Band	£ 1,650.00
2012	Finaghy True Blues	£ 1,650.00
2012	Ballymacarett Defenders Flute Band	£ 1,650.00
2012	Laganvalley Flute Band	£ 1,650.00

* Ulster-Scots Agency operate in calendar years.

(iii) **Community Festivals Fund (CFF)**

Prior to 2008 CFF was administered by the NI Events Company and the information we hold does not identify whether or not an event involved a Marching Band.

Year	Marching Band	Amount
2008/09	Laganvalley Heritage and Cultural Society	£1,700
2008/09	Tullycarnet Flute Band	£3,000
2008/09	Creagh Community Association	£2,000
2009/10	Laganvalley Flute Band	£1,525
2009/10	Belvoir & Miltown Action Group	£1,452
2011/12	Creagh Community Association – Tutoring of Lambeg Drumming	£2,500

* These figures include matched funding from district councils

Community Playgrounds: Funding

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding streams are available to community groups for playgrounds.

(AQW 15752/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Under the Recreation and Youth Service (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, responsibility for the provision of adequate facilities for recreational activities including playgrounds lies with district councils. District Councils are therefore best placed to advise local community groups on support available for playgrounds.

British Amateur Boxing Association

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 14407/11-15, how boxing clubs can join the British Amateur Boxing Association.

(AQW 15779/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Affiliation arrangements for sports clubs are not a matter for me but wholly a matter for individual clubs and governing bodies of sport. Any boxing club wishing to join the British Amateur Boxing Association should contact the Association directly to obtain details about membership.

British Amateur Boxing Association

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 14407/11-15, how boxing clubs in Northern Ireland can join the British Amateur Boxing Association.

(AQW 15819/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Affiliation arrangements for sports clubs are not a matter for me but wholly a matter for individual clubs and governing bodies of sport. Any boxing club from the north of Ireland wishing to join the British Amateur Boxing Association should contact the Association directly to obtain details about membership.

Irish Amateur Boxing Association

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the Irish Amateur Boxing Association responded to the letter from the Head of Sport in her Department dated 26 January 2012; and whether she will publish the response and any subsequent correspondence.

(AQW 15820/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Irish Amateur Boxing Association responded on 6 February 2012 to the Department's letter of 26 January 2012. The Department does not routinely publish correspondence it receives, however it does consider providing information in response to requests made under the right of access given by the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations and through its Publication Scheme.

UK City of Culture 2013

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans she has to ensure that the Derry-Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 embraces all communities.

(AQW 15932/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Derry-Londonderry 2013 Culture Company has been working closely with all communities across the City and has undertaken consultation at community level with over 100 organisations.

This engagement has involved discussions around the events, organisation and legacy of the project to ensure that 2013 Derry City of Culture is owned and enjoyed by all communities in the City.

A Cultural Programme has been developed by the Culture Company. It includes 140 events and activities, ranging from major international events to community based activities, and has been specifically designed to appeal to all members of the local community and particularly those who would not normally attend arts and cultural events.

A number of particular events are specifically aimed at engaging all communities – for example the Portrait of a City photography project, the Schools Programme and the Spotlight on Communities project – however members of all communities are welcome at all City of Culture events.

UK City of Culture 2013

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps are being taken to ensure that the Derry-Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 events, organisation and legacy will include and reflect the Protestant minority community and culture in the city.

(AQW 15935/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Derry-Londonderry 2013 Culture Company has been working closely with all communities across the City and has undertaken consultation at community level with over 100 organisations.

This engagement has involved discussions around the events, organisation and legacy of the project to ensure that 2013 Derry City of Culture is owned and enjoyed by all communities in the City.

A Cultural Programme has been developed by the Culture Company. It includes 140 events and activities, ranging from major international events to community based activities, and has been specifically designed to appeal to all members of the local community and particularly those who would not normally attend arts and cultural events.

A number of particular events are aimed specifically at the Protestant community – for example the Plantation Exhibition in the Guildhall, the Siege pageant and the All Ireland Pipe Band Championships and European Highland Dance Championships – however members of all communities are welcome at all City of Culture events.

Department of Education

Western Education and Library Board: Religious Breakdown of Maintenance Staff

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education what is the religious breakdown of the maintenance workforce of the Western Education and Library Board.

(AQW 15863/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Western Education & Library Board is unable to provide the information requested as, given the small data sample in the areas requested, the releasing of this information may inadvertently identify an individual's religion and therefore place the Board in breach of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Area Planning Consultations

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education to detail the proposed action points and timescales resulting from the responses to the area planning consultations.

(AQW 15865/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The consultation on the Post-primary area plans ended on 26 October. This afforded all interested parties the opportunity to present their views. The Education & Library Boards and CCMS, which have statutory roles in relation to planning, developed the Area Plans and conducted the consultation. The Boards will now analyse the consultation responses and refine the plans to take account of comments received. The Central Management Support Unit, based in the Southern Education and Library Board, will assist the planning teams in analysing the responses to ensure consistency of approach across the five Boards.

The Area Plans, appropriately revised by the Boards to take account of the responses to the public consultations, will be submitted to my Department in early December for scrutiny and approval. They will be assessed on the basis of how they satisfy the Terms of Reference.

Classroom Assistants: Contracts

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education how many classroom assistants employed by each Education and Library Board are working within schools and have not as yet been issued with a contract of employment.

(AQW 15866/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not hold the information requested.

All staff employed by the Education and Library Boards following a formal recruitment process for either permanent, temporary, secondment or fixed term contracts will be furnished with a written statement of particulars of employment (contract of employment) no later than two months after the beginning of their employment in accordance with the Employment Rights (NI) Order 1996.

Contracts will issue on the completion of all formal recruitment processes including the necessary checks such as AccessNI disclosures, health declarations and references. Therefore, on occasions, there may be a short delay before the employee is in receipt of the contract.

Classroom Assistants: Uniforms

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education to detail the guidance provided to Education and Library Boards and individual schools on classroom assistants purchasing their own uniforms; and what other staff within schools are required to purchase uniforms.

(AQW 15867/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department has not issued any guidance about uniforms for school staff. In respect of classroom assistants, the wearing of uniforms is a matter of individual school policy.

Where Board staff are required to wear uniforms, such as catering staff and school crossing patrols, uniforms are provided by the Board as the employer.

Classroom Assistants: Contracts

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education to detail the process for issuing a contract of employment to classroom assistants, including the guidance provided by his Department to Education and Library Boards and schools.

(AQW 15868/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department has not issued guidance to Education & Library Boards or schools on the process for issuing contracts of employment.

Classroom assistants employed by a school or an Education and Library Board must be furnished with a written statement of particulars of employment (contract of employment) no later than two months after the beginning of their employment in accordance with the Employment Rights (NI) Order 1996.

To employ new staff, Boards of Governors make recommendations on candidates to be appointed following formal recruitment processes such as short-listing and interviews. The Education & Library Boards are responsible for issuing letters to successful candidates that detail the checks to be undertaken prior to contracts being issued such as AccessNI disclosures, health declarations and references. When checks have been completed and cleared, contracts of employment will be issued.

Post-primary Education

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children in post-primary education in the (i) controlled sector; (ii) integrated sector; (iii) maintained sector; and (iv) Irish medium sector in each of the last five years.

(AQW 15878/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Pupils at post-primary schools by management type 2007/08 – 2011/12

Management type	2007/08		2008/09		2009/10	
	Non Irish Medium	Irish Medium	Non Irish Medium	Irish Medium	Non Irish Medium	Irish Medium
Controlled excluding integrated	47,996	-	47,679	-	46,586	-
Voluntary grammar	47,430	-	47,497	-	47,559	-
Catholic maintained ¹	40,763	-	40,833	-	40,954	-
Other maintained	-	506	-	513	-	561
Controlled integrated	2,304	-	2,095	-	2,754	-
Grant Maintained Integrated	8,943	-	9,369	-	9,345	-
Total	147,436	506	147,473	513	147,198	561

Management type	2010/11		2011/12	
	Non Irish Medium	Irish Medium	Non Irish Medium	Irish Medium
Controlled excluding integrated	46,307	-	45,543	-
Voluntary grammar	47,230	-	47,369	-
Catholic maintained ¹	41,679	-	41,154	-
Other maintained	-	553	-	550
Controlled integrated	2,703	-	2,713	-
Grant Maintained Integrated	9,430	-	9,418	-
Total	147,349	553	146,197	550

Source: School census

Note:

- In addition to the Irish Medium figures above there are also pupils enrolled in Irish Medium units in English speaking Catholic maintained schools. In 2007/08 there were 126 pupils enrolled in Irish Medium units, in 2008/09 this figure was 132, in 2009/10 it was 145, in 2010/11 it was 159 and in 2011/12 it was 212.

Primary Education

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of children in primary education in the (i) controlled sector; (ii) integrated sector; (iii) maintained sector; and (iv) Irish medium sector in each of the last five years.

(AQW 15879/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Pupils at primary schools¹ by management type, 2007/08 – 2011/12

Management type	2007/08		2008/09		2009/10	
	Non Irish Medium	Irish Medium	Non Irish Medium	Irish Medium	Non Irish Medium	Irish Medium
Controlled excluding integrated	78,037	71	76,609	69	75,666	58
Voluntary grammar prep. depts.	2,127	-	2,111	-	2,064	-
Catholic maintained ²	76,321	159	75,566	161	74,789	148
Other maintained	402	1,902	386	1,987	384	2,047

Management type	2007/08		2008/09		2009/10	
	Non Irish Medium	Irish Medium	Non Irish Medium	Irish Medium	Non Irish Medium	Irish Medium
Controlled integrated	2,259	-	2,427	-	3,020	-
Grant Maintained Integrated	5,361	-	5,495	-	5,595	-
Total	164,507	2,132	162,594	2,217	161,518	2,253

Management type	2010/11		2011/12	
	Non Irish Medium	Irish Medium	Non Irish Medium	Irish Medium
Controlled excluding integrated	75,159	61	75,787	61
Voluntary grammar prep. depts.	1,891	-	1,771	-
Catholic maintained ²	74,705	142	75,382	126
Other maintained	383	2,192	384	2,262
Controlled integrated	3,242	-	3,303	-
Grant Maintained Integrated	5,676	-	5,736	-
Total	161,056	2,395	162,363	2,449

Source: School census

Notes:

1. Figures include pupils in nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
2. In addition to the Irish Medium figures above there are also pupils enrolled in Irish Medium units in Catholic maintained English language schools. In 2007/08 there were 614 pupils enrolled in Irish Medium units, in 2008/09 this figure was 634, in 2009/10 it was 681, in 2010/11 it was 696 and in 2011/12 it was 708.

Irish-medium Education

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education to detail the total departmental spend on Irish Medium Education in each of the last five years.

(AQW 15882/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In each of the last five years, my Department has spent the following on Irish Medium Education:

	2007/08 £'000	2008/09 £'000	2009/10 £'000	2010/11 £'000	2011/12 £'000
Recurrent	11,394	13,216	13,088	14,126	14,859
Capital	520	843	1,524	2,135	1,940

Note: Information in relation to Irish-medium Units, attached to English-medium host schools has not been provided as it is not possible to disaggregate the funding of the Unit from the host school.

Education and Training Inspectorate

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education how many members of the Education and Training Inspectorate have had school management experience in the last (i) three; (ii) five; (iii) seven; and (iv) ten years.

(AQW 15912/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The school management experience of the Education and Training Inspectorate is individual and personal to each inspector and therefore it would not be appropriate to disclose it in this forum.

Education and Training Inspectorate

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education how many current members of the Education and Training Inspectorate have had taught in a classroom in the last (i) three; (ii) five; (iii) seven; and (iv) ten years.

(AQW 15913/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The classroom experience of the Education and Training Inspectorate is individual and personal to each inspector and therefore it would not be appropriate to disclose it in this forum.

Education and Training Inspectorate

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education how many members of the Education and Training Inspectorate have been appointed to (i) their present post; and (ii) any post within HM Inspectorate of Schools, in the last five years
(AQW 15914/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The five-year period has been calculated from the date the question was asked, i.e. 23 October 2012. Therefore the answer spans the period 23 October 2012 to 23 October 2007.

21 members of the Education and Training Inspectorate have been appointed to their present post in the last five years.

The organisation, HM Inspectorate of Schools, does not exist.

Education and Training Inspectorate

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of people employed the Education and Training Inspectorate, broken by grade.
(AQW 15915/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

Chief Inspector	1
Assistant Chief Inspector	3
Managing Inspector	7
Inspector	47
Seconded Inspector	1
Deputy Principal	1
Staff Officer	1
Senior Personal Secretary	1
Personal Secretary	3
Executive Officer II	3
Typist	1
Administrative Officer	5
Administrative Assistant	3

Education and Training Inspectorate

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education what was the total annual budget for the Education and Training Inspectorate in each of the last five years.
(AQW 15918/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

2007/2008	£5,162,676
2008/2009	£5,262,173
2009/2010	£5,711,778
2010/2011	£5,781,333
2011/2012	£5,408,697

Education and Library Boards: Company Cars

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education whether any staff in the Education and Library Boards use 'company' cars.
(AQW 15941/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been advised by the Education and Library Boards that company cars are not used by Education & Library Board staff.

Education and Library Boards: Staff Bonuses

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education whether any bonus payments have been made to Education and Library Board staff members over the last three years.

(AQW 15944/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been advised by the Education and Library Boards that no bonus payments have been paid to staff over the last three years.

Curriculum and Advisory Support Service

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 15272/11-15, for a breakdown of the number of staff in each Education and Library Board by (i) grade; and (ii) type of post.

(AQW 15958/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: CASS Staff broken down by grade:

	BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	Total
Senior Education Officer	-	*	-	-	-	*
Assistant Senior Education Officer	*	*	*	*	*	#
Senior Adviser	-	*	*	-	-	*
Adviser	#	7	6	#	6	31
Assistant Advisory Officer	21	10	8	11	11	61
Advisory Teacher	-	#	-	-	*	8
Assistant Principal Officer	-	*	-	-	-	*
Administrative Officer	-	#	*	*	*	9
Senior Executive Officer	*	*	-	*	*	9
Executive Officer	*	6	*	5	*	17
Senior Clerical Officer	*	11	12	*	6	35
Clerical Officer	*	-	-	-	-	*
Project Officer	-	-	-	-	*	*
Principal Technician	-	-	*	-	-	*
Senior Technician	-	-	-	-	*	*
Technician	-	-	*	*	*	8
Building Supervisor	-	-	-	-	*	*
Catering Assistant	-	-	-	-	*	*
Other	-	-	*	-	-	*
Total	37	53	40	32	37	199

CASS Staff broken down by type of post:

	BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	Total
Advisory staff	28	25	16	18	21	108
Administrative staff	9	28	16	#	#	68
Technical staff	-	-	*	*	*	17
Ancillary staff	-	-	-	-	*	*
Other	-	-	*	-	-	*
Total	37	53	40	32	37	199

Notes:

* denotes figures less than 5. Small numbers are suppressed to prevent identification of an individual in line with the confidentiality principle of the Statistics Authority's Code of Practice on Official Statistics.

denotes a figure which has been treated to prevent disclosure of small numbers elsewhere.

Educational Underachievement

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how the initiatives announced by the First Minister and deputy First Minister will be used to tackle the issue of educational underachievement by working class Protestant boys.

(AQW 15961/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have in place a coherent set of policies designed to improve educational outcomes for young people and to address the root causes when pupils are not achieving to their full potential. I am determined to take action to break the link between social disadvantage and educational underachievement wherever it exists by encouraging schools to set high expectations for their pupils and supporting and, where necessary, challenging schools to improve.

The evidence shows that the policies that I have in place to raise educational standards have been working. These include the Every School a Good School policy for school improvement, and Count, read: succeed, the strategy for improving literacy and numeracy. However, more needs to be done, especially in areas of social deprivation, and the key now is to step up the pace of implementation and delivery of these policies and to maintain the focus on raising standards to ensure that every pupil is able to achieve to their full potential.

I warmly welcome the announcement by the First and deputy First Ministers of investment in the employment of 230 graduate teachers not currently in employment, on a two year contract, to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of our young people. Not only does this provide employment opportunities for graduate teachers, it should also have a positive impact on my raising standards agenda by improving the educational outcomes of pupils who are most at risk of under achieving.

My Department has been tasked with taking forward this project and my officials are currently working to establish arrangements for the development and implementation of this project including details of which schools will benefit from this additional funding, how schools and teachers will be matched and how teachers will be recruited to these posts. I have asked my officials to work through the finer details of the project as quickly as possible, however it is not possible at present to give exact details on the timescales and costs.

There is also an important role to be played by Unionist political leaders in raising educational awareness and aspiration in socially deprived communities. Continued academic selection in the interests of selective schools does not benefit the education or the needs of Protestant pupils from deprived backgrounds.

Teaching Graduates: Posts

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what mechanisms he proposes to put in place to create and allocate the 230 posts that were announced by the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

(AQW 16032/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have in place a coherent set of policies designed to improve educational outcomes for young people and to address the root causes when pupils are not achieving to their full potential. I am determined to take action to break the link between social disadvantage and educational underachievement wherever it exists by encouraging schools to set high expectations for their pupils and supporting and, where necessary, challenging schools to improve.

The evidence shows that the policies that I have in place to raise educational standards have been working. These include the Every School a Good School policy for school improvement, and Count, read: succeed, the strategy for improving literacy and numeracy. However, more needs to be done, especially in areas of social deprivation, and the key now is to step up the pace of implementation and delivery of these policies and to maintain the focus on raising standards to ensure that every pupil is able to achieve to their full potential.

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There is also an important role to be played by Unionist political leaders in raising educational awareness and aspiration in socially deprived communities. Continued academic selection in the interests of selective schools does not benefit the education or the needs of Protestant pupils from deprived backgrounds.

Statemented Status

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education whether a pupil can keep their statemented status until they are 19 years old.

(AQW 16043/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: If a pupil has a statement of special educational needs, an Education and Library Board may maintain the statement until the pupil is 19 years old.

Sustainable Schools

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how he will ensure that larger, sustainable schools, as proposed under the Education and Library Board's area plans, will lead to improved educational outcomes.

(AQW 16078/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Sustainable Schools Policy is a key driver for the Area Planning process and provides the rationale for moving towards an estate of fewer, larger schools. The policy specifies a set of six criteria, including minimum enrolment thresholds, for educationally sustainable schools. It also sets out the challenges small schools face in providing a full and broad curriculum and an appropriate range of extra-curricular activities and, for Post-primary schools, in meeting the demands of the Entitlement Framework. This does not mean that schools will necessarily close because they fall below the enrolment thresholds. Each school will be considered against the criteria on the basis of its individual circumstances.

The Sustainable Schools Policy and the Terms of Reference for Area Planning are both available on the Department of Education website, www.deni.gov.uk.

The Terms of Reference for the Area Planning process, published on 15 December 2011, set out roles and responsibilities. The Education & Library Boards and CCMS, which have statutory roles in relation to planning, will develop the Area Plans. The Department has a scrutiny and approval role. The Education and Training Inspectorate will have no role in drafting the area plans but will be asked to provide input to the Department's assessment of the draft plans.

The area plans, appropriately revised by the Boards to take account of the responses to the public consultations, will be submitted to my Department in early December. They will be assessed on the basis of how they satisfy the Terms of Reference which include identifying solutions to address need "including opportunities for shared schooling on a cross sectoral basis".

Education and Training Inspectorate: Area Plans

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the role played by the Education and Training Inspectorate in the drafting and planning process of the Education and Library Board's area plans.

(AQW 16079/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Sustainable Schools Policy is a key driver for the Area Planning process and provides the rationale for moving towards an estate of fewer, larger schools. The policy specifies a set of six criteria, including minimum enrolment thresholds, for educationally sustainable schools. It also sets out the challenges small schools face in providing a full and broad curriculum and an appropriate range of extra-curricular activities and, for Post-primary schools, in meeting the demands of the Entitlement Framework. This does not mean that schools will necessarily close because they fall below the enrolment thresholds. Each school will be considered against the criteria on the basis of its individual circumstances.

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Area Planning Process

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact of the draft area plans on the further integration of the education system.

(AQW 16082/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Sustainable Schools Policy is a key driver for the Area Planning process and provides the rationale for moving towards an estate of fewer, larger schools. The policy specifies a set of six criteria, including minimum enrolment thresholds, for educationally sustainable schools. It also sets out the challenges small schools face in providing a full and broad curriculum and an appropriate range of extra-curricular activities and, for Post-primary schools, in meeting the demands of the Entitlement Framework. This does not mean that schools will necessarily close because they fall below the enrolment thresholds. Each school will be considered against the criteria on the basis of its individual circumstances.

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Extra-curricular Activities: Funding Criteria

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education to detail the criteria for primary schools to access funding for extra-curricular activities outside normal school hours.

(AQW 16160/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department's Extended Schools programme targets additional financial support on schools serving areas of the highest social deprivation to help improve educational outcomes and the life chances of disadvantaged children and young people. Extended schools resources enable those schools to provide for a range of activities and services outside of the normal school day in response to the identified needs of pupils, their parents, families and the wider community.

To qualify for extended schools funding, schools must meet set criteria which are indicators of disadvantage. The following eligibility criteria applied for primary schools in the 2012/13 financial year:-

- 51% or more of pupils drawn from a Neighbourhood Renewal Area and/or the 30% most disadvantaged wards/Super Output Areas; and/or
- 37% or more of pupils with a Free School Meal Entitlement.

Department for Employment and Learning

Apprenticeships

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many apprentices have been employed through departmental contracts in this financial year; and what percentage this number represents of the total posts allocated.

(AQW 15331/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): My Department supports apprenticeship training under its ApprenticeshipsNI programme with apprentices being in employment on commencement of their training. The occupancy at 23 October 2012 on ApprenticeshipsNI is 11,833 apprentices. We do not hold information on the percentage these posts represent.

Magee Campus: Expansion of

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) to outline the proposed expansion of the Magee campus, in the context of the Foyle lands becoming vacant by 2015/16; (ii) what support his Department will provide for this expansion; and (iii) whether his Department will support additional increases in the maximum allocation of student numbers (MaSN) for the University of Ulster.

(AQW 15446/11-15)

Dr Farry: I understand that the University plans to construct two new institutes on the land that will be vacated by Foyle and Londonderry College. The University has not requested any capital funding for this from my department. I have already allocated 322 additional undergraduate places to the University of Ulster which it has deployed at the Magee campus. I remain committed to monitoring student flows particularly in light of the differing tuition fee regimes within the UK and the impact that this may have on Northern Ireland students. I am prepared to go back to the Executive to seek funding for more student places if there is evidence to suggest that more places are required in Northern Ireland to facilitate the needs of Northern Ireland domiciled students. The higher education strategy, Graduating to Success, has given a commitment that the maximum student number will be reviewed. However, where a university deploys additional student places is wholly a matter for it.

Programme-led Apprenticeships

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people who are also employed are currently participating in the Programme-Led Apprenticeships.

(AQW 15505/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Programme-Led Apprenticeship programme aims to assist young school leavers who have been unable to find the requisite employed status to train as an apprentice through the Department's ApprenticeshipsNI programme during the economic downturn. All participants on a programme-led apprenticeship are not employed as apprentices.

Access to Success Strategy

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how his Department's Access to Success strategy will benefit young people in the South Down area.

(AQW 15589/11-15)

Dr Farry: The main aim of the Access to Success strategy is to widen participation in higher education among those groups which are currently under-represented.

Access to Success outlines the challenge, articulates a vision for the future and maps the actions required to deliver continued success in widening participation in higher education across all of Northern Ireland.

The strategy includes a new centralised programme to help raise awareness of the benefits of higher education among school leavers, those in the workplace and in the wider community. In addition, my Department will make available increased funding, on a competitive basis, to encourage all institutions offering higher education courses to offer additional "outreach" programmes in schools, colleges, workplaces and communities across Northern Ireland. These programmes will be designed to raise both aspirations and educational attainment levels in order to facilitate entry to higher education by students from disadvantaged backgrounds in both urban and rural disadvantaged communities.

Improved targeting of resources at individual student level where possible will ensure that all students receive the appropriate level of financial and pastoral support to successfully progress through their chosen course of study.

I believe that the Further Education Regional Colleges will be ideally placed to play a key role in helping to deliver Access to Success. Local colleges can increase the opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate in higher education by delivering close to home provision which meets local and regional needs.

I can advise that the South Eastern Regional College received an additional allocation of £193,800 for the provision of up to 120 additional part-time higher education places in academic year 2012/13. In December 2011, I announced that an additional 70 full-time higher education places would be allocated across the regional college network over the next three years. However, I would point out that it is for each of the colleges, using its local knowledge of demand, to determine its own distribution of higher education places across its campuses.

Assistance into Employment

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what arrangements are in place between further education colleges and councils to ensure that people in areas of high deprivation/unemployment take advantage of courses designed to assist them to get into employment.

(AQW 15610/11-15)

Dr Farry: Further Education Colleges work closely with councils to encourage local communities, particularly the unemployed, from areas of high deprivation, to access provision.

Arrangements include, but are not restricted to:

- bespoke courses developed and delivered in partnership with councils, specifically tailored to meet demand locally;
- representation/ participation on appropriate council committees; and
- regular engagement with council officials to promote colleges' various programmes.

Colleges have a strong record of engaging participants from the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland. During the 2010/11 academic year, colleges across Northern Ireland had 33,000 professional technical enrolments from the 20% most deprived areas of Northern Ireland.

Programme-led Apprenticeships

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) what action he has taken to address the concerns that current levels of Programme-Led Apprenticeships will lead to an over-supply of partially qualified individuals for whom the plumbing and electrical installation industry will have no need or role; and (ii) how he intends to prevent such work being undertaken in the black economy to the detriment of legitimate business and consumers.

(AQW 15691/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Programme-Led Apprenticeship programme aims to assist young school leavers who have been unable to find the requisite employed status to train as an apprentice through the Department's ApprenticeshipsNI programme during the economic downturn. They were put in place at the time as an exceptional response to the recession.

I believe that the social consequences of not doing so were unacceptable as my Department has a policy responsibility of a guaranteed training place to all eligible unemployed 16-17 year-olds. To deny that guarantee could mean that many more young people end up part of those in the Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) statistics.

Young people are still finding it particularly difficult to secure employment in the current economic climate. The significant numbers of programme-led apprenticeships underpin the need for such a demand led intervention.

Programme-led apprenticeships provide opportunities for young people to follow their chosen career, acquire relevant qualifications and be exposed to the world of work.

It is hoped that programme-led apprenticeships will facilitate the provision of experienced and qualified young people who will be ready to meet the needs of employers when the eventual upturn in the economy comes.

Whilst this programme may lead to over-training in certain occupational areas, more importantly, it meets a social and economic need, in going a long way to meet the needs of employers and to protect the Northern Ireland skills base for when we emerge from the recession.

In order to meet the needs of employers, young people will be well on track to attain a higher skill level once they are in employment, and the employer-led ApprenticeshipsNI programme is there to help in that regard.

Further Education Colleges: Community Outreach

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of (i) the community outreach carried out by each further education college; and (ii) the levels of engagement in lifelong learning of people who live in areas of multiple deprivation.

(AQW 15701/11-15)

Dr Farry: As the main providers of adult education in communities throughout Northern Ireland, Further Education (FE) colleges continue to encourage all people to access their provision. Colleges deliver a wide and varied curriculum, tailored to meet local needs, through their main campuses and extensive network of community outreach centres.

All six further education colleges have fostered effective relationships with a number of third parties, including the voluntary and community sector, to widen access and increase participation in further education. While by no means exhaustive, colleges collaborate with local women's, disability and ethnic organisations, and other key groups locally, to promote and develop their outreach activities.

Colleges have a strong record of engaging participants from the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland. During the 2010/11 academic year, colleges across Northern Ireland had over 33,000 professional and technical enrolments from the 20% most deprived areas of Northern Ireland. This represented 22% of all such enrolments.

In addition, my Department also supported the Learner Access and Engagement Pilot Programme, for which 46% of its enrolments were drawn from the 20% most deprived areas of Northern Ireland in 2010/11. In light of its success, the programme is to be mainstreamed across Northern Ireland in the coming months.

First4Skills: Employees

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the outcome of any discussions he has had with employees of First4Skills in relation to the organisation maintaining direct contact with apprentices; and (ii) whether procedures were followed in relation to the forty former employees who lost their jobs.

(AQW 15930/11-15)

Dr Farry: As an Administrator has been appointed to act on behalf of the company, it would not be appropriate for me, or my officials, to engage directly with First4Skills. However, my Department is working closely with the Administrator, Deloitte, to ensure an effective resolution to the situation.

My primary concern is to ensure that all apprentices are able to continue with their training without unnecessary delay to allow them to complete their apprenticeships. I would stress that none of the apprentices have lost their jobs as a result of First4Skills going into administration.

(ii) An employer proposing to dismiss as redundant between 20 and 99 employees must notify the Department at least 30 days before the first of those dismissals takes place. First4skills Ltd was placed in Administration with the appointment of Deloitte on 21 September 2012. Formal notification (HR1) of 38 Northern Ireland redundancies was not received until 1 October 2012.

An employer who fails to notify the Department can be liable to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale (currently £5,000). The Department considered on this occasion that punitive action was not appropriate as the company is legally insolvent.

Employers proposing to dismiss between 20 and 99 employees are also required by law to consult with employee representatives at least 30 days before redundancy notices take effect. Employees are entitled to a statutory or contractual notice period which takes effect from the date consultation is complete.

Employees who do not feel they have been properly consulted or received adequate notice may make a complaint to an Industrial Tribunal.

The Department has received 38 claims for Redundancy/Insolvency payments from 38 former employees of the Northern Ireland operation. The claims are currently being assessed, verified and validated with the Administrator.

First4Skills: Closure of

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the impact of the closure of First4Skills on the 989 apprentices, including whether they will all be able to complete their apprenticeships.

(AQW 15931/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department is working closely with the Administrator for First4Skills to ensure an effective resolution to the situation. As a result, Deloitte has commenced a process of identifying a preferred bidder or bidders for the Department to consider who would be interested in taking on the First4Skills Northern Ireland contract .

We will work with Deloitte to ensure that this process is brought to a conclusion as soon as possible. If the contract cannot be assigned, the Department will make arrangements for the apprentices to transfer to alternative ApprenticeshipsNI suppliers.

My primary concern is to ensure that all apprentices are able to continue with their training to allow them to complete their apprenticeships. I would stress that none of the apprentices have lost their jobs as a result of First4Skills going into administration.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Offshore Renewable Energy Sites in Coastal Waters

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the business supply chain opportunities for local companies following the announcement of the successful bidders for the development rights from the three offshore renewable energy sites in coastal waters.

(AQW 15546/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): The supply chain opportunities associated with the development of offshore energy projects in Northern Ireland coastal waters will evolve through the various stages of consenting, design, manufacture, installation and deployment over the next 8 years.

Invest NI has met with all of the successful developers to present the capability of Northern Ireland companies to be part of their supply chains as they take forward these projects. In addition Invest NI took a trade mission to the International Conference in Ocean Energy which was held in Dublin recently to showcase our capability in the marine sector. Both tidal developers attended this conference and Invest NI were proactive in arranging meetings with local companies such as McLaughlin & Harvey, RPS, Harland & Wolff and with representatives from our research centres. I was speaking at this event and was able to meet with some of the Northern Ireland companies and developers who were present.

Invest NI will be encouraging companies to engage with the developers as early as possible to understand the opportunities and how they can access the various contracts that are available. As part of the process each developer will also be undertaking public consultation with local communities and Invest NI will work with each consortium to highlight the supply chain opportunities.

Business Start-up Scheme

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many business start-ups have been supported by her Department between the start of the legal challenge to the business start-up scheme and the award of the tender to Enterprise NI, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 15547/11-15)

Mrs Foster: During the period when Invest NI was legally prevented from delivering a full start-up business support programme, an 'Interim Service' began on 1st October 2011 and was operational until 19th October 2012.

Invest NI's Regional Start programme will become operational on 22nd October 2012 and will be delivered on a 2-year contract by Enterprise Northern Ireland following a tender process carried out by CPD.

The total number of business starts supported by Invest NI between the start of the legal challenge to the award of the tender to ENI is 1290. The breakdown by constituency is detailed in the table below.

Invest NI Indigenous Starts (From 1st October 2011)

PCA	Total
Belfast East	54
Belfast North	50
Belfast South	58
Belfast West	61
East Antrim	60
East Londonderry	71

PCA	Total
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	93
Foyle	142
Lagan Valley	45
Mid Ulster	103
Newry and Armagh	82
North Antrim	93
North Down	50
South Antrim	41
South Down	68
Strangford	42
Upper Bann	75
West Tyrone	102
Total	1290

Business Start-up Scheme

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, between the start of the legal challenge to the business start-up scheme and the award of tender to Enterprise NI, to detail (i) the number of enquiries received about business start-ups, broken down by constituency; (ii) how they were handled; and (iii) to where the enquires were sign-posted.

(AQW 15548/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Between the start of the legal challenge to the business start-up scheme and the award of the Regional Start contract to Enterprise NI, Invest NI received a total of 5649 enquiries. 708 individuals received 1:1 advisory support and almost 2000 individuals attended business clinics. A breakdown of this activity by constituency is detailed in the table below.

Invest NI Interim Service 1St Oct 2011 - 17th Oct 2012

PCA	Enquiries	1:1 Meetings	Clinics Attended	Business Plans Approved
Belfast East	246	16	72	39
Belfast North	302	21	89	41
Belfast South	321	46	112	41
Belfast West	275	24	92	60
East Antrim	238	17	112	56
East Londonderry	310	58	98	60
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	304	40	134	83
Foyle	396	162	28	136
Lagan Valley	305	21	89	37
Mid Ulster	346	43	130	86
Newry and Armagh	357	31	150	73
North Antrim	311	29	117	76
North Down	294	32	79	44
South Antrim	261	24	97	33
South Down	346	35	140	57
Strangford	267	25	62	38
Upper Bann	397	28	141	66
West Tyrone	373	56	185	92
Total	5649	708	1927	1118

Business Start-up Scheme

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline (i) the process of the tender for the new business start-up programme; (ii) the five companies that bid for the tender; and (iii) the criteria used to determine the successful bidder.

(AQW 15550/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The process

This was a Regulated Competition and was conducted in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 (as amended). The procurement process was conducted using the Open Procedure.

The Contract Notice was issued to the Official Journal of the EU through eSourcing NI on 31 May 2012.

Documents were uploaded onto eSourcing NI on 31 May 2012.

The competition was advertised on the eSourcing NI portal and in the Local Press.

The Closing date for the competition was 11 July 2012.

The deadline for clarification questions was 2 July 2012.

In total 74 suppliers expressed an interest by downloading tender documentation from the eSourcing NI portal.

Five tenders were received by the deadline of 3.00 pm on 11 July 2012. Tenderers had the opportunity to submit proposals for the 5 contract areas available – Eastern, North Eastern, North Western, Western and Southern.

The 5 tenders submitted proposals for the following contract areas:

- **Eastern Contract Area:**
Enterprise Northern Ireland, Fast Track into Information Technology, Full Circle, RSM McClure Watters.
- **North Eastern Contract Area**
Enterprise Northern Ireland, Fast Track into Information Technology, Full Circle, RSM McClure Watters.
- **North Western Contract Area**
Enterprise Northern Ireland, Fast Track into Information Technology and RSM McClure Watters.
- **Western Contract Area**
Enterprise Northern Ireland, Fast Track into Information Technology and Full Circle.
- **Southern Contract Area**
Brilliant Red, Enterprise Northern Ireland and Fast Track into Information Technology

Criteria

The assessment process comprised of two stages:

Stage 1

- **Financial Ability**
Invest NI assessed the financial viability on one key criterion: financial solvency as defined by the net worth of the tender organisation based on the information provided.
- **Individual Experience**
The tenders were required to demonstrate previous relevant experience of facilitating the development of business plans for start up businesses.

Stage 2

Invest NI assessed Stage 2 against the award criteria as detailed below:

- | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| ■ Proposed approach to the delivery of Business Plans | 10% |
| ■ Attaining Performance Targets | 15% |
| ■ Accessibility of the Initiative | 10% |
| ■ Interaction with Enterprise and Community Stakeholders | 10% |
| ■ Quality Assurance System | 10% |
| ■ Marketing | 5% |
| ■ Project Management | 10% |
| ■ Cost | 30% |

Following the above evaluation the tenders received from Enterprise NI for each of the contract areas attained the highest overall score. They were therefore recommended for Award of Contract.

Regional Start Initiative

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) to outline the aim of the Regional Start Initiative; (ii) for an estimate of the number of business start-ups that will be involved in the initiative over the next five years, broken down by each of the regional offices; and (iii) the annual costs of running the initiative within each of the regional offices.

(AQW 15554/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Regional Start Initiative (RSI) is focussed on encouraging potential entrepreneurs to produce a business plan as one of the key early steps to starting a business and moving into self employment. RSI will contribute to the objectives identified in the Northern Ireland Executive's Draft Economic strategy "Priorities for Sustainable Growth and Prosperity". It will also complement other key enterprise initiatives, such as the work undertaken by Councils through the Local Economic Development (LED) Measure, and Invest NI's work through the Jobs Fund and Boosting Business.

The key aims of RSI are:

- To raise the overall number and quality of business starts per annum in Northern Ireland;
- To deliver an accessible service that delivers on Invest NIs equality and diversity agenda, including females, young people who are NEETS and individuals living in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRA's), and thereby contribute to Invest NIs Job Fund scheme;
- To ensure the full integration of Invest NIs "NI Business Information Portal.

The initial contract period is a period of 2 years and over this period the target for Business Plan Approvals (BPAs) is 6,500. This target includes a requirement to deliver to disadvantaged and under-represented groups, in particular, individuals from NRA's and young people who are not in Education, Employment or Training. There is a potential for 1 further annual extension at Invest NI's discretion subject to an evaluation of the Regional Start, an assessment of business need and subsequent approvals being granted.

The delivery of Regional Start will be through 5 contracts, one for each Contract area. The geographical scope of these contracts are defined by Invest NI's current Regional Office boundaries.

Each of the 5 contracts has specific annual targets and these are shown for this 2 year period along with the associated budget:

	BPA's	Budget
Eastern Regional Office	1993	£560k
North Eastern Regional Office	790	£220k
Western Regional Office	1456	£408k
North Western Regional Office	981	£275k
Southern Regional Office	1280	£358k

Civil Servants: Suspensions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many members of staff in her Department are currently (i) suspended due to internal investigations, and (ii) not suspended whilst facing internal investigations.

(AQW 15634/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI has currently (i) One member of staff suspended due to internal investigations and (ii) One member of staff not suspended whilst facing internal investigations.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises: Investment

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on her Department's investment in high value small and medium-sized enterprises.

(AQW 15652/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Programme for Government and Northern Ireland Economic Strategy strongly emphasise the importance of driving the rebalancing and rebuilding of our economy by boosting productivity and employment to increase the overall standard of living.

Given that SMEs form over 99% of the Northern Ireland business base, my Department's activity, through Invest NI, is inevitably targeted at businesses in this category, particularly those high-value businesses with the potential to make the greatest difference to our economic performance. To such businesses, Invest NI can offer its full range of support including financial assistance, skills development, leadership and coaching, marketing and sales, and trade development. During the 2011-2012 financial year, over 73% of all offers made by Invest NI towards employment related projects were directed at high-value SMEs, i.e. those generating jobs paying average salaries above the Northern Ireland Private Sector Median.

Invest NI continues to encourage all SMEs to move up the value chain by assisting them to embrace and embed innovation throughout their business. During 2011-2012, for example, 58% of the assistance offered to businesses in support of Research and Development was targeted at SMEs.

Finally, Invest NI also works with key stakeholders to provide direct support to high-value start-ups with immediate export potential. In addition, the Invest NI Board has setup a sub-committee to consider options for boosting and strengthening the agency's support in this area, in order to further increase the number of high-value start-ups generated within the Northern Ireland business base. These businesses will have the capability to quickly accelerate growth in external markets, ultimately creating the high-value SMEs of tomorrow.

Natural Gas Network

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on her Department's plans to extend the natural gas network to towns in South Down.

(AQW 15655/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Natural gas is already available in some areas of South Down, in towns such as Banbridge, Newry and Warrenpoint. My Department has recently completed a detailed economic appraisal on gas network extension to additional towns in the West and North-West and to towns in East Down such as Ballynahinch, Downpatrick, Saintfield and Crossgar. My Department will be considering the next steps in respect of East Down in co-operation with the Utility Regulator, including which towns should form part of any new or extended gas licensed areas.

Tourism Opportunities: South Down

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the tourism opportunities that could arise in the South Down area following the recent success of filming productions in the area.

(AQW 15656/11-15)

Mrs Foster: NITB has been working closely with Northern Ireland Screen to develop tourism products and experiences which focus on key locations and screen productions since the success of the recent filming. They are also developing a new web section on discovernorthernireland.com which will showcase screen locations.

Tourism Ireland has also taken the opportunity to develop an online and social media campaign to promote Co Down as the location where much of the TV series Game of Thrones is shot.

Tourism Opportunities: South Down

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what tourism opportunities, to date, have arisen following the success of filming productions at locations in South Down.

(AQW 15658/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Screen Commission, Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland are all actively engaged in a number of activities to develop marketing and press opportunities to boost the tourism potential, as a result of the success of productions made in Northern Ireland.

Tourism Ireland and Northern Ireland Screen both supported the production of 'The Shore' which was shot in South Down. Following on from the Oscar success Terry and Orlagh George agreed to feature in footage filmed at the St Patrick's Centre and Down Cathedral for inclusion in Tourism Ireland's promotional activity overseas.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board is currently liaising with Northern Ireland Screen, Tourism Ireland and production companies to develop marketing and press opportunities. To date this has included hosting an international familiarisation (FAM) trip based on Game of Thrones in filming locations which concentrated on County Down and included visits to Tollymore Forest Park, Castle Ward, Inch Abbey and Saintfield.

Caleb Foundation

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to list all (i) correspondence; and (ii) meetings between her Department and the Caleb Foundation in each of the last five years.

(AQW 15673/11-15)

Mrs Foster: A letter from the Caleb Foundation dated September 2009 and a reply dated October 2009.

A meeting with the Caleb Foundation on 2 March 2010.

Internet Connection: Lurgan, Portadown and Banbridge

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment which areas within (i) Lurgan; (ii) Portadown; and (iii) Banbridge do not have internet connection.

(AQW 15695/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department does not routinely gather data on internet connection and, while it is aware of a number of sources through which such data is available, none of these would provide information to the level of detail requested. This includes the NISRA Omnibus Survey which gathers data on internet access on a generic basis. The latest survey (May 2012) shows that 71% of households in Northern Ireland have an internet connection, 95% of which are through a broadband service.

WhiteRock Capital Partners

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 15607/11-15, whether Whiterock Capital Partners are authorised by the Financial Services Authority.

(AQW 15721/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Growth Loan Fund is managed by Braveheart Ventures Limited which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority (FRN 228345).

The three partners in the WhiteRock Capital Partners LLP consortium are all authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority.

Music Tourism: South Down

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department has plans to develop music tourism in South Down.

(AQW 15723/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board promotes a range of music festivals which take place across Northern Ireland, specifically in South Down this has included the Celtic Fusion Festival in Castlewellan, Blues on the Bay and Fiddlers Green in Warrenpoint/Rostrevor and One Cool Day in Newcastle. This has entailed inclusion in print and online advertising across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, as well as NITB printed materials. NITB's event listings on discovernorthernireland.com showcases events and regular music programming across Northern Ireland and NITB welcomes further submissions to the events listings.

In 2011/2012, the One Cool Day Concert in Newcastle received funding from the NITB Events Fund and the Blues on the Bay festival received funding in 2012/2013.

In 2013, NITB will continue to work with organisations, festivals, music businesses, promoters, and artists across Northern Ireland to build on the international reputation of Northern Ireland as a music tourism destination.

Tourism: South Down

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the tourist attractions and events in South Down that her Department has identified as motivating key customer segments.

(AQW 15724/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Mourne and Strangford areas have in general featured regularly in NITB's campaigns.

Many of the key tourist attractions and events in the South Down constituency have also been featured and these include Castle Ward, Seaford Gardens and Tropical Butterfly House, Murlough National Nature Reserve and The Saint Patrick Centre amongst others.

Information on these tourist attractions, along with 231 tourist attractions and events in the South Down constituency are also currently published and appear on NITB's consumer website www.discovernorthernireland.com.

Cultural Tourism: South Down

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had with organisations, such as the GAA, to encourage the growth of cultural tourism in South Down.

(AQW 15725/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Discussions are on-going with a range of sporting organisations, including the GAA, regarding working together for tourism.

NITB has met the GAA Ulster branch on several occasions.

Gaeltacht Area: South Down

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what consideration her Department has given to developing the potential of a Gaeltacht area in South Down.

(AQW 15727/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has given no consideration to developing a gaeltacht area in South Down.

Tourism: South Down

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department has taken to promote and develop the South Down tourism product.

(AQW 15729/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Mourne and Strangford Lough area have been designated as two of the nine Destination areas identified in DETI's Draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020.

In terms of South Down, Down District Council has been pro-active with Newry and Mourne District Council, Banbridge District Council and Ards Borough Council in developing Destination Area Plans for both Mourne and Strangford Lough respectively. To support the delivery of these plans, each has established a Destination Forum comprising a mix of public and private sector tourism bodies and businesses from each area. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) is represented at both Destination Forums.

Since 2008 NITB has contributed £6,819,238.85 to develop capital projects in the South Down area. This has been provided through financial assistance under the Tourism Development Scheme. A further £121,538.00 has also been provided under the Tourism Innovation Fund.

Further support totalling £1,031,615.38 has also been given to the South Down area for additional project support and predevelopment work for both the Saint Patrick and Mourne Signature Projects.

Projects have included the development of sites along the Saint Patrick's Trail, a 92 mile driving route from Bangor, through Downpatrick, Newry, and ending in Armagh, connecting key Patrician sites and the wider Christian Heritage product in the region. The majority of the project work relates to visitor access, physical improvements, upgrade and improvement of visitor information and the installation of bespoke interpretation panels at 15 key sites along the Saint Patrick's Trail.

Other Projects include the development and improvements of various amenity sites and view points along the Mourne Coastal Route, the redevelopment of the Nautilus Centre, Kilkeel and the £1.4 million to implement two world class mountain bike trails at Kilbroney and Castlewellan.

NITB's Tourism Event Funding programme funded two events in the South Down area totalling £38,000 for 2011/12 and one event totalling £15,000 in 2012/13 programme.

NITB promotes the Saint Patrick's Trail and the South Down region through its marketing campaigns, familiarisation trips for journalists and writers, and press and PR opportunities. Currently NITB is developing a new web section on www.discovernorthernireland.com for each of the Destination areas identified. A series of marketing workshops have been arranged in November 2012 in the South Down area to highlight existing marketing promotional opportunities through NITB, to the local industry.

Caleb Foundation

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail any meetings that she, or her predecessor, has had with the Caleb Foundation since 8 May 2007.

(AQW 15757/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I met with the Caleb Foundation on 2 March 2010.

Moyle Interconnector

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, since the Moyle interconnector became operational, to detail the liabilities met by energy customers in (i) Northern Ireland; (ii) Scotland; and (iii) the Republic of Ireland in relation to its operation.

(AQW 15759/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The majority of the network in Northern Ireland is covered by a regulated Use of System tariff which is collected annually from supply companies. This is the approach taken in many jurisdictions for the payment of electricity infrastructure including interconnectors. By agreement with the Moyle Interconnector Ltd the company forgoes the automatic recovery through the tariff system and only requests collection through the Use of System charge should it be required.

For the 2012/13 tariff year the Use of System charge requested in respect of the Moyle Interconnector is £14.5million, the collection of this cost commenced in October 2012.

Moyle Interconnector

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the contingent liabilities for electricity consumers if the Moyle interconnector should cease to operate.

(AQW 15760/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Moyle interconnector was purchased with cash borrowed by way of bonds listed in the London Stock Exchange. The interconnector is operated under a licence agreement with the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation. Revenues are earned from the sale of transmission capacity on the interconnector. In the event that revenues are

not sufficient to cover operating expenses, interest on borrowings and repayment of borrowings, the company's licence allows it to make a call on customers for any shortfall.

Biomass Heating Systems

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assessment has been made of the benefits to the indigenous renewable energy industry from Government buildings switching to biomass heating systems
(AQW 15798/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department is committed to developing opportunities for renewable energy in Northern Ireland as evidenced, for example, by the introduction of the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) which will support the generation of renewable heat. The growth of the renewable heat industry has the potential to significantly contribute to increased fuel security, reduced carbon emissions and new green jobs.

A 2009 study into the potential development of the Northern Ireland renewable heat market assessed that the public estate (not including housing or large hospitals) made up less than 5% of total heat demand. Therefore, the potential contribution, of this sector, to overall renewable heat targets is somewhat limited.

My Department chairs a cross-departmental group that considers cross-cutting issues relating to renewable heat, this has included raising awareness of the potential support under the RHI. It is, of course, not within my Department's remit to advise on energy use within Government buildings. It will be for individual Departments to assess whether renewable heating is a viable option and, if so, how the RHI could be accessed to support the required investment.

Mutual Energy Ltd

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why the consumer, rather than insurance, is paying for the losses from the breakdown in the electricity interconnector; and why Mutual Energy is immune from such losses.
(AQW 15821/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The latest accounts of Mutual Energy Ltd indicate that, as a result of the faults in the interconnector, revenues were reduced by approximately £12m and a business insurance claim has been submitted in relation to this. The cash costs of the actual repairs were made from the company's reserves and a formal claim was lodged with insurers in respect of the faults.

UK City of Culture 2013: Marketing Campaign

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on, and the timeline for, the Tourist Board's bespoke marketing campaign for Derry 2013.
(AQW 15843/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Bearing in mind the potential of the 2013 programme to drive significant numbers and spend from both the Republic and Northern Ireland markets, NITB is working with partners in Londonderry to develop an agreed marketing strategy so that the huge potential of the UK City of Culture can be realised.

Businesses in Downpatrick and Newcastle: Financial Aid

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the total value of financial aid awarded to businesses in the (i) Downpatrick; and (ii) Newcastle areas, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 15848/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI does not "award financial aid" to specific areas. All support is demand-led by businesses bringing forward viable projects to improve their competitiveness and gain a larger share of international markets.

Table 1 shows the amount of assistance, or funding, that Invest NI has offered to businesses in the (i) Downpatrick and (ii) Newcastle District Electoral Areas (DEAs) in each of the last five financial years.

Table 1: Invest NI Assistance Offered in Downpatrick & Newcastle DEAs (2007-08 to 2011-12)

Year	Downpatrick	Newcastle
2007-08	£253,645	£12,507
2008-09	£167,616	£40,950
2009-10	£209,916	£349,447
2010-11	£86,621	£272,753
2011-12	£401,417	£337,677
Total	£1,119,215	£1,013,334

Notes:

- (i) 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.
- (i) DEAs are amalgams of 5, 6, or 7 wards, and are used for the election of councillors in Proportional Representation elections. Their boundaries are determined by the District Electoral Areas Commissioner, and reviewed every 8-10 years.

Businesses in Downpatrick and Newcastle: Promotion of

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what her Department is doing to promote businesses in (i) Downpatrick; and (ii) Newcastle.

(AQW 15849/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI continues to offer a wide range of support to encourage the start up and growth of businesses in Downpatrick and Newcastle within the Down District Council area.

In the last year (from October 2011 to October 2012) there have been 65 potential entrepreneurs from the Down District Council Area who have attended an advisory session delivered by the Invest NI Southern Office. In addition, there were 14 other potential entrepreneurs who received 1:1 support. This culminated in 31 business start up plans being completed during the period. The new Regional Start Initiative has commenced in the last month to assist with the development of new start-up businesses.

Invest NI's Boosting Business initiative, encompassing support under five themes: Jobs, R&D, Exports, Technology and Skills, is available to local businesses in the area. In the Down District Council area, Invest NI's Business Support Team has handled 118 queries this year to date.

Under the Local Economic Development (LED) measure Invest NI has worked closely with the Down District Council and the South Eastern Economic Development (SEED) group to progress 9 initiatives to support business in the Down area. These initiatives have a total value of £1.9 million.

Invest NI: Businesses in the South Down Area

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how Invest NI intends to promote its services to new and existing businesses in the South Down area, given that in the last three years its officials have not made any visits to people seeking assistance in that area.

(AQW 15850/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The products, services and support available to both new and existing businesses of all sizes is extensively promoted through a range of channels, including advertising campaigns such as Boosting Business and Go For It, direct marketing, social media, events, workshops and seminars which cover all regions of Northern Ireland.

Businesses located in the South Down area predominantly fall within Invest Northern Ireland's Southern Regional Office remit. Executive's from that regional office, and from Invest NI's headquarters in Belfast, regularly visit new and existing businesses located in the area to help them identify and bring forward viable projects to improve their competitiveness and gain a larger share of international markets.

Flight Connectivity to India and China

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the flight connectivity to India and China; and how this compares with Dublin.

(AQW 15972/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are no direct flights from Northern Ireland to India and China, however Northern Ireland is well connected to these important markets via the British Airways (BA) service which operates between George Best Belfast City Airport and Heathrow, the United Kingdom's hub airport. This service, which operates seven flights per day, provides inbound, and outbound, business and leisure travellers with excellent onward connectivity with BA to a range of destinations in India and China.

Connectivity from Dublin to India and China is also provided by onward travel via hub airports rather than by direct access. For example, Emirates Airlines and Etihad Airways provide connectivity via hub airports in Dubai and Abu Dhabi respectively, and Lufthansa provides connectivity via the hub airport at Frankfurt.

EU Funded Programmes

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many EU funded programmes are currently operated by her Department; and how many of them will continue beyond 2013.

(AQW 16095/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department currently acts as Managing Authority for the EU Sustainable Competitiveness Programme for Northern Ireland 2007-2013.

In addition, DETI acts as Northern Ireland Accountable Department for tourism, enterprise, energy and telecoms elements of the Interreg IVA Programme.

Both Programmes run from 2007–2013 and require all funding to be contractually committed by 31 December 2013 and spent by 31 December 2015.

Department of the Environment

Wind Farms: Decommissioning

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 8556/11-15, and given that there is legislation in place in Great Britain requiring any company, which is planning to develop a wind farm, to create a bond to decommission the wind farm when it is no longer in use and when the company enters into receivership before the end of the project, for his assessment of the risk of Government being called upon to meet the cost of turbine decommissioning in the absence of such a requirement in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 12773/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): Legislation in Great Britain does not require wind farm companies to create a bond to decommission wind farms when they are no longer in use. However planning policy in Great Britain advocates that when granting planning permission, authorities should include conditions for the decommissioning of developments. Policy guidance advises that authorities should also ensure that sufficient finance is set aside to enable operators to meet their obligations and should consider financial guarantees through legal agreements.

Historically the approach here has been to lay down planning conditions in relation to decommissioning with non-use or after 25 years or if no longer accessing the grid: in relation to site restoration and aftercare.

As with other cases around development with conditions, this may not protect inadverse circumstances such as downturn, administration or developer non-co-operation. Therefore I propose to engage in discussions with the relevant stakeholders involved in the renewable energy sector about the appropriate use of bonds or other form of financial guarantee.

Environmental Enforcement

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what additional measures he is taking to improve environmental enforcement, following the planning breaches at Cavanacaw Goldmine; (ii) how public finances can be protected when private companies defy regulation; and (iii) what options are available for the reclaim the £30,000 paid out to local residents from the company which breached the planning regulations.

(AQW 14244/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have been fully briefed on the issues in relation to a number of planning applications relating to the Gold Mine at Cavanacaw near Omagh.

These issues relate to delay in taking enforcement action against a breach of condition on the original approval and to the adequacy of determinations made under the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations for two subsequent planning applications relating to the reinstatement of the site and the provision of passing bays on local roads. These latter permissions have now been quashed by the courts.

I do not consider the history of events in relation to this case to be acceptable, however, the Department has acknowledged its mistakes and I am determined to ensure that lessons are learnt and there is no repeat of the failings noted above.

I have therefore instructed officials in Strategic Planning Division to undertake the following:

- Urgently review the staff resources available to the Enforcement Team within Strategic Projects Division and to make greater use of Area Office Enforcement Staff to carry out initial site visits in relation to complaints received;
- Move to a pro-active regime where in terms of specialist applications such as mineral extraction compliance with planning conditions is monitored to identify any breaches at an early stage, this will include engaging with applicants and the relevant industry bodies where appropriate;
- Ensure all staff has access to the most up to date technology to monitor sites – for example Strategic Planning Division Compliance Teams are now able to access real time high quality aerial photographs to deliver accurate mapping and analysis of topography, boundaries, levels which is ideal for monitoring quarries and landfill sites.
- Immediately review all current and recently approved minerals applications as well as a range of enforcement cases (minerals and unauthorised waste) to ensure compliance with the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations;
- Organise refresher training for staff on the requirements of the new Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations;
- Provide updated guidance to staff on the processing of Enforcement Cases.

I have asked to be regularly updated on progress in respect of the above actions.

In terms of the compensatory payments made to local residents public finances can only be protected by the Department taking timely and effective enforcement action where it is appropriate to do so. This is clearly one of the lessons of this particular case.

The Departmental Solicitor has advised me that the Department cannot recover the monies paid to local residents on foot of the Ombudsman's report. Neither the Ombudsman's recommendations nor the Department's acceptance thereof impose liability on any third party. Only the Courts can impose penalties on foot of enforcement action and I am determined that in future those companies or individuals that ignore planning regulations are subject to effective enforcement action including summons if appropriate.

Quarrying

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment (i) to list the locations where illegal or unauthorised quarrying has occurred over each of the last 5 years; (ii) to detail the owners of the sites; and (iii) what penalties were incurred.

(AQW 14638/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Over the last 5 years the Department has opened approximately 178 enforcement cases to investigate unauthorised winning and working of minerals (quarrying) across Northern Ireland.

Of those cases, 25 have been the subject of an Enforcement Notice, a Submission Notice or a Temporary Stop Notice. (See Annex A which provides the locations and offenders of those subject to Notices.)

Of the 25 Notices issued, 5 are either currently or have been subject to prosecution for non compliance. Of those already convicted, the Department has secured fines of £13,500 and court costs of £950 awarded. I have requested details of each case where a notice has been served currently stands, including cases that go back some time. I will forward details to the member in due course.

Case Reference	Offender/ Owner Name	Location of Breach	District	Penalty
A/2008/0094CA	Mr Anthony Harley	Kildoag Quarry 60m NW of No. 77 Kildoag Road, Killaloo, Co. Derry.	Derry	Enforcement Notice
A/2010/0198CA	Mr Paul Doherty	Approx 550m North Of No. 70 Mobuoy Road, Campsie.	Derry	Enforcement Notice
A/2012/0016/CA	Mr George Colin Craig	To The Rear Of 341 Longland Road, Gilky Hill, Claudy, Londonderry, BT47 4AJ	Derry	Temporary Stop Notice
E/2009/0054CA	Mr Daniel William Derek Kane	100m north east of no. 50 Moycraig Road, Dunseverick	Moyle	Enforcement Notice
E/2011/0038/CA	Mr Gordon Ross	Ross's Quarry, Maghermore Road, Ballycastle	Moyle	Submission Notice
H/2007/0113CA	Mr John Paul McNally	Lands opposite No. 3 Moyard Road, Draperstown, Magherafelt, Co. Londonderry.	Magherafelt	Enforcement Notice £5,000 Fine
I/2008/0037CA	Mr Gerard Donnelly	Land adj. to Warren Wood and Bonn Plantation, Cavanacaw, Pomeroy	Cookstown	Enforcement Notice
I/2008/0060CA	Mr Michael McCann	Feegarran Road, Cookstown	Cookstown	Submission Notice
I/2009/0065CA	Mr Joseph Mullin	Lands adj. to and north of 38 Murnells Road, Pomeroy, Cookstown	Cookstown	Submission Notice
J/2011/0005/CA	Alfred Lindsay Woods	38A Moyagh Road, Donemana.	Strabane	Enforcement Notice
J/2012/0045/CA	Mr George Kelly	Old Bridge Road, Victoria Bridge, Urbalreagh, Strabane, Tyrone BT82 9JP	Strabane	Temporary Stop Notice
K/2007/0007CA	Mr N Fox	Land 90m North of Mulnafye Road, Mountfield, Omagh	Omagh	Enforcement Notice
K/2010/0092CA	Mr Seamus McAnenly	Approx 310m west of 98 Spring Road, Drumnakilly, Omagh	Omagh	Submission Notice Currently adjourned
L/2009/0053CA	Mr Gareth Michael Timoney	150m South East Of 86 Manger Road, Belleek	Fermanagh	Submission Notice £250 fine + £75 costs

Case Reference	Offender/ Owner Name	Location of Breach	District	Penalty
L/2009/0054CA	F.A. Leonard & Sons	280m NW of 68 Doagh Road, Derrygonnelly	Fermanagh	Submission Notice
M/2007/0116CA	Mr Patrick Nugent	Altaglushan, towards Aughnagar, Upper Cappagh, Dungannon	Dungannon	Enforcement Notice
O/2008/0042CA	Mr Malachy Murphy	Land To The Rear Of No. 11 Barr Road, Belleeks, Co. Armagh.	Armagh	Submission Notice
P/2007/0056CA	J Patterson & Son Ltd	Due east of 27 Ballynahatten Road, Kilkeel	Newry and Mourne	Enforcement Notice £7,500 Fine + £300 costs
P/2007/0078CA	Mr Robert Baird	1 mile North of Sandy Brae, Mourne Mts Middle, Kilkeel, Northern Ireland, BT34	Newry and Mourne	Enforcement Notice £750 Fine + £575 costs
P/2008/0114CA	Mr B Vallely	Bigwood Quarry, Warrenpoint.	Newry and Mourne	Submission Notice
P/2009/0033CA	Mr Thomas Doran	100m North And Northeast Of No. 24 Sandy Brae, Attical, Kilkeel	Newry and Mourne	Enforcement Notice
P/2009/0061CA	Mr F McGeown	Rear Of No. 120 Rathfriland Road.	Newry and Mourne	Submission Notice
P/2009/0129CA	Mr Robert Newell	Land west and adjacent to 109 Longstone Road, Annalong, Kilkeel (adj to Moneydarragh Primary School)	Newry and Mourne	Submission Notice
R/2009/0195CA	Mr James Mc Keating	Land at Junction of Black Causeway Road and Glebe Road, Strangford, Downpatrick	Down	Enforcement Notice
S/2007/0195CA	R Heatrick & Co	Trummery Lane, Moira, BT67 0JN.	Lisburn	Enforcement Notice

Quarrying

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment what licences are required before a quarry becomes authorised; and what penalties are in place if such licences are not obtained before quarrying commences.

(AQW 14643/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Any quarrying operation requires planning permission, as set out in the Planning (NI) Order 1991, as amended. In addition under the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulation (NI) 2003 a Part B permit is required prior to operation for any crushing and screening activities at a quarry where there is a potential release of dust to the air. Under the Water Order (NI) 1999 a consent to discharge is required where there is a release to a waterway.

Operating without any of these permissions is an offence under the relevant legislation and on conviction is punishable by a fine of up to £30,000 or in certain circumstances up to 6 months in prison. However sentencing is a matter for the courts.

Strategic Waste Management Infrastructure Projects

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment what is the current position of the strategic waste management infrastructure projects for (i) Arc21; (ii) Southern Waste Management Partnership; and (iii) North West Region Waste Management Group; and when he expects these projects to progress.

(AQW 15188/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As the Member will understand, much of the detailed information pertaining to the procurements is subject to restrictions imposed by public procurement law and commercial confidentiality requirements. However, I can provide the following summary of each procurement's current position:

Arc21 is in the latter stages of dialogue with its remaining bidder and is working through a range of procurement issues. It advised the Waste Infrastructure Programme Board in June of this year that it expected to appoint a Preferred Bidder in February 2013. This figure has subsequently slipped by at least 6 months.

The SWaMP2008 Joint Committee has accepted a recommendation to abandon its procurement as a result of a challenge to the legality of the composition of its bid consortium.

North West Region Waste Management Group has finalised its Appointment Business Case and has submitted it to DOE/DFP for approval. If approved, this will allow the NWRWMG to consider appointing a Preferred Bidder. NWRWMG expects to reach financial close in March 2013.

As I have advised previously, I have been highly vigilant in relation to this project, have pressed each group on issues of affordability and deliverability, have made it very clear that there is a major need to create certainty, have worked to ensure best practice and will continue to ensure robust accountability, with appropriate regard to waste needs, European requirements and the changing waste picture.

Narrow Water, Warrenpoint: Visit

Ms Ruane asked the Minister of the Environment whether he was on official business at Narrow Water in Warrenpoint on Friday 5 October 2012.

(AQW 15207/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As far as I can I visit article 31 application sites. I did so on 5th October 2012 at Narrow Water. The visit was arranged at short notice on 4th October 2012, as I was in Armagh the morning of 5/10/2012 and was unable to travel onto Enniskillen as originally planned.

The behaviour of one MLA at Narrow Water was plain embarrassing for I and other Political Representatives in attendance.

Strategic Waste Management Infrastructure Projects

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment what has been the total consultancy spend on the (i) Arc21; (ii) Southern Waste Management Partnership; and (iii) North West Region Waste Management Group projects, including the costs associated with Strategic Investment Board advice.

(AQW 15281/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The total spend to 30 September 2012 on each of the three Waste Management Group projects is as follows: (i) arc21 project £3,596,776; (ii) Southern Waste Management Partnership is £3,053,505 and (iii) North West Region Waste Management Group is £2,684,651.

The figures above include pure consultancy costs, planning and environmental costs, Strategic Investment Board advice, project management costs and other non-consultancy costs such as insurance, gateway reviews and venues.

I have requested an item by item breakdown of the 'consultancy spread' as I believe this is a proper request and it is information that needs to be properly disclosed.

Strategic Waste Management Infrastructure Projects

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment for a breakdown of the cost allocated to each local council for the (i) Arc21; (ii) Southern Waste Management Partnership; and (iii) North West Region Waste Management Group projects.

(AQW 15283/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The financial support approved by the Executive and paid by my Department to alleviate the impact on councils of the costs associated with waste infrastructure procurements is allocated directly to the Waste Management Groups which have delegated authority to act on behalf of their constituent councils in this regard.

The waste infrastructure programme does not therefore allocate funding directly to individual councils. It issues letters of offer on an annual basis to each of the Waste Management Groups, with release of funding under letters of offer controlled via associated Budget Letters for specific phases of the procurements and specific areas of activity. As advised in my response to your related query regarding consultancy spend (AQW 15281 11-15), the total spend incurred in pursuit of each of the procurements up to 30 September 2012 is as follows: arc21, £3,596,776; Southern Waste Management Partnership, £3,053,505; and North West Regional Waste Management Group, £3,053,505.

Since becoming Minister, I have made it clear that the procurement process must lead to certainty not doubt and that the issues of deliverability and affordability must be conclusively addressed. This is how I will judge myself and the procurements.

Apprentices: Departmental Contracts

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment how many apprentices have been employed through departmental contracts in this financial year; and what percentage this number represents of the total posts allocated.

(AQW 15332/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I recognise the many barriers faced by those currently unemployed, and I have therefore substantially increased the scope for training opportunities within DOE on a number of fronts, including provision of 180 Steps to Work placements. I have urged executive colleagues to adopt the same approach. As a further measure the Department is facilitating 9 Programme-Led Apprenticeships placements and has made provision for 14 placements in the Graduate Acceleration Programme, six undergraduate placements and three specialist skills bursary placements. To date, 106 people have taken up the Steps to Work opportunity and I continue to press for the full roll out of the initiative.

In addition, the Department is currently working with the Gerry Rogan Initiative Trust and Opportunity Youth to develop opportunities for young people who are not in education, employment or training.

In relation to departmental contracts, I have introduced new arrangements which require provision of social clauses for all construction contracts with a labour value of over £500k. Large capital related projects are more suitable to facilitate employment of apprentices.

Moreover, in July I introduced the Local Government Best Value (Exclusion of Non-commercial Considerations) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012, removing certain restrictions which have previously prevented district councils from including social clauses in their public supply and works contracts. In bringing this amended legislation to the Assembly, I encouraged all councils to embed the use of social clauses in their contracts to enhance the number of work opportunities. In addition, to embed wider local economic, social and environmental benefits into procurement strategies the Department recently delivered a procurement workshop for council staff. The purpose of the work shop was to examine best practice on social clauses, local labour clauses and enabling the SME sector through local government procurement. Leaders in this field addressed the seminar as part of my ambition to remodel local government in the procurement in the above terms.

Demolished Buildings

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of the Environment what powers his Department has to force companies that demolish buildings in town centres, to reconstruct or redevelop the site within the agreed timescale.

(AQW 15432/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Most day to day demolition does not require planning consent. However, in certain circumstances legislative powers and policies do place requirements on individuals in relation to the demolition of buildings (e.g. in Conservation Areas, in Areas of Townscape Character, where the works for demolition is likely to have significant effects on the environment or for listed buildings). These are not specific to town centres.

Redevelopment proposals for cleared sites do, however, require planning permission and these are usually conditioned to the effect that the development must be started within a specific timescale, ordinarily within five years of the date of grant of permission.

Where development has been commenced in line with the grant of planning permission the Department has powers under Article 37 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 to terminate the unused portion of the permission where it believes development will not be completed within a reasonable period.

Where demolition is not authorised the Department has a range of enforcement tools at its disposal, including in certain circumstances, the requirement to replace a demolished building.

While the Department's legislative powers and policy requirements may place requirements or conditions on development which are time limited and may impose a range of sanctions they cannot force an individual or company to complete a reconstruction or redevelopment.

Domestic Planning Applications: Craigavon

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of the Environment what is the current average decision making time for domestic planning applications within the Craigavon Borough Council area.

(AQW 15433/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In 2011/2012 the average processing time for domestic alterations and extensions in the Craigavon Borough Council Area was 73 working days. For the same period DOE Planning's average processing time was 71 working days.

MOT

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how much money has been raised through MOTs over the last two financial years.

(AQW 15442/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The amount of revenue raised through MOTs for all vehicles over the last two financial years is as follows:

- 2010/11 £28,000,049
- 2011/12 £29,334,419

Rural Bus Routes

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the potential long-term damage to rural bus routes as a result of the granting of licences to private coach companies to operate on potentially lucrative routes.

(AQW 15445/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The process for the granting of licences for PSV bus services is designed primarily to meet the needs of passengers but also to reflect the interests of operators. The relevant legislation is The Transport Act (NI) 1967. When an application is made by an operator, the Department's guidelines, which have been agreed with the industry through the Bus Forum, states that there will be a presumption that a route is adequately served if there is already a licensed stage carriage

service for the route, or a very similar route, unless the applicant can prove that demand exists for the additional service or that the proposed service will run at least 30 minutes before or after the existing service.

There are currently 52 stage carriage services licensed to bus operators other than Translink. These have been granted in accordance with the existing licensing regime. The Department does not enter into any financial arrangement with such operators. However, in accordance with the relevant European legislation, any applicant for a bus operator's licence must meet certain financial criteria, as set out in the Transport Act.

The Department for Regional Development is responsible for transportation strategy and transport policy and from April 2014 responsibility for considering the route element of all licences for public passenger transport services will transfer to that Department.

Under these new licensing arrangements it is intended that DRD will directly award a contract (in compliance with EU Regulation 1370/2007) to Translink to deliver most public passenger transport services. These new arrangements were legislated for in the Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

The 2011 Act also provides for a new permit system which will allow private operators to run public passenger transport services which are in the interests of passenger and which complement the contracted network.

Carcasses: Illegal Dumping of

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 14741/11-15, to detail the costs to each council of (i) collecting; and (ii) disposing of the illegally dumped carcasses.

(AQW 15485/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The figures in the attached table have been supplied by each District Council. Overall totals have been quoted where the collection and disposal costs are not recorded separately.

I will write to you with a further update following receipt of any additional data.

AQW 15485 - the costs of i) collecting and ii) disposing of illegally dumped agricultural and equestrian animal carcasses in each council area in each of the last three years.

	2010 i)	2010 ii)	2011 i)	2011 ii)	2012 i)	2012 ii)
Antrim		£12		£6		£24
Ards	0	0	0	0	0	0
Armagh		£458.75		£625.00		£305.00
Ballymena		£179		£420		£540
Ballymoney	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Banbridge						
Belfast	0	0	0	0	0	0
Carrickfergus		£20		£0		£20
Castlereagh	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cookstown		£385.82		£373.54		£655.91
Coleraine		£450		£300		£450
Craigavon						
Derry		£579		£750		£870
Down		£547.76		£505.93		£568.80
Dungannon						£980 (nominal costs)
Fermanagh		£5,592		£5,220.35		£4,461
Larne	£638.75	£145	£0	£25	£0	£120
Limavady						
Lisburn						£175
Magherafelt1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Moyle		£1,334.15		£744.81		£1,255.44
Newry and Mourne	£10,640	£1,125.28	£4,900	£1,088.92	£4,380	£973.50

	2010 i)	2010 ii)	2011 i)	2011 ii)	2012 i)	2012 ii)
Newtownabbey	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Down	0	0	0	0	0	0
Omagh	£340		£1645		£893	
Strabane	£164.50		£102.00		£138.00	

1 Relevant land owners were instructed to collect and dispose of the carcasses, therefore no direct cost to Council.

Private Coach Companies

Mrs Dobson asked Minister of the Environment when the law was changed to enable his Department to issue private coach companies with licences to operate on potentially lucrative routes.

(AQW 15486/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The process for the granting of licences for PSV bus services is designed primarily to meet the needs of passengers but also to reflect the interests of operators. The relevant legislation is The Transport Act (NI) 1967. When an application is made by an operator, the Department's guidelines, which have been agreed with the industry through the Bus Forum, states that there will be a presumption that a route is adequately served if there is already a licensed stage carriage service for the route, or a very similar route, unless the applicant can prove that demand exists for the additional service or that the proposed service will run at least 30 minutes before or after the existing service.

There are currently 52 stage carriage services licensed to bus operators other than Translink. These have been granted in accordance with the existing licensing regime. The Department does not enter into any financial arrangement with such operators. However, in accordance with the relevant European legislation, any applicant for a bus operator's licence must meet certain financial criteria, as set out in the Transport Act.

The Department for Regional Development is responsible for transportation strategy and transport policy and from April 2014 responsibility for considering the route element of all licences for public passenger transport services will transfer to that Department.

Under these new licensing arrangements it is intended that DRD will directly award a contract (in compliance with EU Regulation 1370/2007) to Translink to deliver most public passenger transport services. These new arrangements were legislated for in the Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

The 2011 Act also provides for a new permit system which will allow private operators to run public passenger transport services which are in the interests of passenger and which complement the contracted network.

Private Coach Operators

Mrs Dobson asked Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the process by which private coach operators are issued with a licence to operate on lucrative routes; (ii) the number of such licences in operation; and (iii) the financial arrangements which private companies enter into with his Department to obtain and maintain such licences.

(AQW 15487/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The process for the granting of licences for PSV bus services is designed primarily to meet the needs of passengers but also to reflect the interests of operators. The relevant legislation is The Transport Act (NI) 1967. When an application is made by an operator, the Department's guidelines, which have been agreed with the industry through the Bus Forum, states that there will be a presumption that a route is adequately served if there is already a licensed stage carriage service for the route, or a very similar route, unless the applicant can prove that demand exists for the additional service or that the proposed service will run at least 30 minutes before or after the existing service.

There are currently 52 stage carriage services licensed to bus operators other than Translink. These have been granted in accordance with the existing licensing regime. The Department does not enter into any financial arrangement with such operators. However, in accordance with the relevant European legislation, any applicant for a bus operator's licence must meet certain financial criteria, as set out in the Transport Act.

The Department for Regional Development is responsible for transportation strategy and transport policy and from April 2014 responsibility for considering the route element of all licences for public passenger transport services will transfer to that Department.

Under these new licensing arrangements it is intended that DRD will directly award a contract (in compliance with EU Regulation 1370/2007) to Translink to deliver most public passenger transport services. These new arrangements were legislated for in the Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

The 2011 Act also provides for a new permit system which will allow private operators to run public passenger transport services which are in the interests of passenger and which complement the contracted network.

Beaches: Pollution

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many incidents of pollution on beaches have been recorded over the last two years.

(AQW 15499/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In Northern Ireland, 23 beaches are formally identified under the 1976 EC Bathing Waters Directive. Table 1 below sets out the number of substantiated pollution incidents that have occurred, within the geographical boundary of those 23 beaches, in 2010 and 2011, including the level of severity.

Table 1

Year	High	Medium	Low	Total
2010	0	1	2	3
2011	0	2	2	4

The environmental impacts of water pollution incidents are classified by their 'Severity' i.e. High, Medium or Low Severity. The definition of each severity class is detailed in Annex A.

ANNEX A

Water Pollution Incident - Severity Criteria.

High Severity

A major incident involving one or more of the following:

- potential or actual persistent effect on water quality or aquatic life;
- closure of potable water, industrial or agricultural abstraction if necessary;
- extensive fish kill;
- excessive breaches of consent conditions;
- extensive remedial measures necessary;
- major effect on amenity value.

Medium Severity

A significant pollution incident involving one or more of the following:

- notification to abstractors necessary;
- significant fish kill;
- measurable effect on invertebrate life;
- water unfit for stock;
- bed of watercourse contaminated;
- amenity value to the public, owners or users reduced by odour or appearance.

Low Severity

A minor incident resulting in localised environmental impact only. Some of the following may apply:

- notification to abstractors not necessary;
- fish kill of fewer than 10 fish (species of no particular importance to the affected water);
- no readily observable effect on invertebrate life;
- water unfit for stock;
- bed of watercourse only locally contaminated;
- minimal environmental impact and amenity only marginally affected.

Derry Retail Study

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will consider implementing statutory planning guidance on the Derry Retail study.

(AQW 15534/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The purpose of the Derry Retail Study was to provide an analysis of existing patterns in the City's retail catchment. It is research, I commissioned from my officials to inform the decision making process and provide a consistent and up to date analysis, against which relevant applications within the study area could be properly assessed.

Red Squirrels

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department can take to help protect the red squirrels at Glenlyon Park, Holywood.

(AQW 15551/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Red squirrels have been in steady decline across the UK and Ireland for the last century due to habitat loss and introduction of the American grey squirrel. In Northern Ireland the Red squirrel has also declined and has become localised to a relatively small number of predominately conifer woodlands.

My Department chairs the Northern Ireland Squirrel Forum, which brings together statutory and non-statutory organisations as well as representatives of country parks and local volunteer organisations dedicated to protecting the red squirrel in Northern Ireland. The NISF also provides advice and best practise to landowners on grey squirrel control which is published on the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's website.

Glen Lyon Park is owned and managed by North Down Borough Council. The Council does not currently have a Biodiversity Officer and hence, unfortunately, does not have any direct representation on the Forum. My officials met with North Down Borough Council parks staff in September 2011 to discuss a proposal to support red squirrel conservation in the Borough. Unfortunately, because of concerns regarding public opinion on grey squirrel control, which is a central theme of red squirrel conservation, the council decided not to embark on this proposal.

Despite this, the Department is currently planning to undertake a programme of grey squirrel control within its Redburn Country Park which extends to within a few hundred metres of the Glen Lyon Park. This will hopefully provide assistance to the remaining red squirrels in the Craigtanlet area. This work will coincide with other efforts ongoing within the Stormont Estate as well those of the Ards Red Squirrel Group on the Ards Peninsula. The Department would support the formation of a 'Holywood Hills red squirrel group' if there was interest to develop one within the community.

Rural Villages: Overdevelopment

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what his Department can do to protect rural villages from over development.

(AQW 15553/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department has a range of measures aimed at protecting rural villages from over development.

PPS7 'Quality Residential Environments' states that in established residential areas proposals for housing development will not be permitted where they would cause unacceptable damage to the local character and environmental quality or residential amenity of these areas.

Development Control Advice Note (DCAN 8) 'Housing in Existing Urban Areas' (published June 2002) makes clear that "town cramming" or other inappropriate developments which would adversely affect established residential character and amenity will be resisted.

An addendum to PPS 7 (August 2010) reinforces existing planning policy on housing within urban areas by introducing additional provisions to protect areas of established residential character, environmental quality and local amenity. The key consideration is to continue to ensure that new residential schemes are sensitive in design terms to people living in existing neighbourhoods and are in harmony with the local character of established residential areas, villages and smaller settlements.

Furthermore, my Department brings forward bespoke local policies for villages and towns in Development Plans, including key design requirements and designating areas of village and townscape character.

Moravian Settlement at Gracehill

Mr Storey asked the Minister of the Environment what assistance, financial or otherwise, her Department has given to the preservation of the Moravian Settlement at Gracehill.

(AQW 15566/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department has assisted the preservation of the Moravian Settlement at Gracehill through its designation as a Conservation Area from March 1975 and by listing 28 of its buildings. These controls have helped to ensure that changes to the area, and to these structures, have been managed in a positive way through the planning and listed building consent processes.

Grant assistance totalling £217,210.00 has been provided to 6 listed buildings since 1997. £120,000.00 of this is associated with funding to help the Gracehill Old School Trust purchase a former school at the heart of the village and give it a sustainable new use.

The Department has also promoted the importance of the settlement through its publication of a Conservation Area Guide (updated in 2003).

Over the years, officers from the Department have also worked closely with owners and in particular with the Old School Trust, as they have sought to conserve their structures, and to increase awareness of the significance of the village. Events have been advertised as part of the European Heritage Open Days which the Department organises and co-ordinates. Advice has been given on the potential of the settlement to become designated as a Transnational World Heritage Site, and the case carried through to the positive outcome of inclusion as an adjunct to the latest – ten year – UK Tentative List.

Landfill Allowance Scheme

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment whether the Landfill Allowance Scheme targets could be met should either of the two remaining companies falter.

(AQW 15570/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The updated “Analysis of 2020 Residual Waste Infrastructure Requirements in Northern Ireland to meet EU Obligations”, which was prepared in support of the business case originally approved by the Executive for funding support for local government’s major waste infrastructure procurement costs in 2008, confirms that the overall amount of waste required to be diverted to achieve compliance with the Landfill Directive has dropped substantially as result of changes that have taken place in the intervening period, including changes to the definition of BMW (Biodegradable Municipal Waste), a marked fall in waste arisings, and a corresponding increase in levels of council recycling.

While this means that the scale of facilities required to provide assurance of compliance at NI-level has reduced, the Analysis nonetheless demonstrates that a minimum of one new suite of facilities is still required. The focus of the Waste Infrastructure Programme in the immediate future will be to take such steps as are necessary to manage the risks associated with securing the necessary level of assurance of NI-wide compliance.

Each of the Waste Management Groups has developed contingency arrangements for meeting its constituent councils’ statutory NILAS (Northern Ireland Landfill Allowance Scheme) obligations as an element of project planning. In the event of any major infrastructure project not proceeding, it will be up to the relevant Waste Management Group and its constituent councils to agree the pursuit of those contingency arrangements.

Southern Waste Management Partnership

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment whether penalties will be levied on the councils within the Southern Waste Management Partnership area in order to clawback the £3.1 million of pre-procurement financial support.

(AQW 15571/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The primary aim of the Programme is to ensure that Northern Ireland meets its 2020 targets under the EU Landfill Directive targets to divert biodegradable municipal waste (BMW) from landfill. In support of the programme the Department has provided funding to meet the pre-contract costs incurred by the three Waste Management Groups on behalf of their constituent councils.

The funding allocations to each Waste Management Group are set out in Letters of Offer specifying the terms and conditions attached to the release of funding and the circumstances in which the Department would seek to recover costs for any breach of those terms and conditions. Only in circumstances where any such breach had occurred would the Department seek to recover costs. Provided that a Waste Management Group has complied with the terms and conditions of its letter of offer, it would not be the intention to require clawback of payments already made. This is the basis of which I will proceed and will adhere to this approach.

Landfill: Tonnage of Rubble

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment for an estimate of the approximate tonnage of rubble which is disposed of in landfill on an annual basis.

(AQW 15603/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Waste legally disposed of in landfill requires a Pollution Prevention and Control (PPC) Permit from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). The permit holder will be required to submit quarterly monitoring returns to the Agency.

Rubble disposed of in illegal landfills or used for the purposes of recovery, for example, engineering materials, is not included in the estimate.

NIEA has determined what constitutes ‘rubble’ which is disposed to permitted landfills and has collated the data. There was approximately 37,000 tonnes of rubble (which excludes waste described as soil and stones) disposed of in permitted landfills in Northern Ireland during the financial year 2011/12.

Rubble-crushing Facilities

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment which councils provide rubble crushing facilities to promote the crushing and reuse of rubble as landfill.

(AQW 15604/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department does not hold any authorisations for councils to operate waste ‘rubble’ crushing facilities. There are however a number of councils who provide rubble collection facilities at their civic amenity sites.

In 2010/11 fifteen councils operated rubble collection facilities. These councils were:

Antrim, Armagh, Ballymena, Ballymoney, Banbridge, Carrickfergus, Castlereagh, Coleraine, Cookstown, Derry, Larne, Lisburn, Magherafelt, North Down, and Omagh.

Altogether approximately 17,000 tonnes of rubble was sent for recovery from these council facilities in the financial year 2010/11. The rubble is usually collected by contractors and taken to licensed waste facilities to be reused without further processing, or recycled by undergoing further processing. This type of processing could include, sorting, grading and/or crushing.

The councils providing rubble collection in their Districts would promote this facility to householders. This data also helps increase the councils recycling percentages and the Northern Ireland recycling figure overall.

The Department is not aware of any councils who promote the crushing and reuse of rubble as landfill.

Recycling Facilities

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment which council run leisure centres do not have comprehensive recycling facilities.

(AQW 15605/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The degree of recycling that takes place in council run leisure centres varies between each of the Councils.

Information on recycling facilities at council leisure centres is at Annex A.

Annex A

The breakdown of recycling facilities present at Council run leisure centres

Council	Recycling facilities
Antrim	One leisure centre with recycling facilities.
Ards	All the leisure centres have a recycling policy. A blue bin service for separating out cans and plastic bottles, cardboard and paper is available for staff. There is some provision for recycling by the public.
Armagh	One leisure centre and a number of recreation centres have recycling facilities available to the public.
Ballymena	One leisure centre which currently only recycles paper.
Ballymoney	One leisure centre with only paper recycling for paper.
Banbridge	All Banbridge Council properties including all leisure centres have a full range of recycling facilities at each site.
Belfast	All 10 Leisure Centres have a dry recyclable service and are in the process of arranging the introduction of separate food waste collections and, potentially, glass collections.
Carrickfergus	Some recycling facilities; however they are not comprehensive.
Castlereagh	Castlereagh Leisure Centres have recycling provisions in place.
Coleraine	One leisure centre using the blue bin system - glass bottles and jars, paper, cardboard, small waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE), food tins, textiles, drink cans, aerosols, plastic bottles, plastic food containers and drink cartons.
Cookstown	One leisure centre which has comprehensive recycling facilities for use by both public and staff.
Craigavon	Leisure Service facilities have internal recycling programmes in place. All the Centres receive a fortnightly dry recycling collection which coincides with the nearest household collection route. This collection is only done when it is the specific 'recycling week'. Each facility separates waste, usually with a dual bin operation in all rooms around the buildings, and normally they designate individuals to make sure that the waste is separated at the skips outside. In terms of external recycling at these facilities, none has any glass or clothing banks placed outside them. The latter has been left at the discretion of the leisure facilities themselves, as all clothing banks are private/charity based organisations and can be placed on their premises at relatively short notice.

Council	Recycling facilities
Derry	Although Derry City Council leisure centres do not have comprehensive recycling facilities, waste collected internally at the leisure centres are serviced on behalf of council by a contractor who segregates and recycles a percentage of the total waste collected.
Down	All the leisure centres and community centres in the district, have the ability to recycle paper, cans, cardboard, aerosols and foil. At this stage they do not offer a food waste recycling scheme.
Dungannon and S.Tyrone	One leisure centre with a bring site in the car park for cans and glass. There are internal recycling bins at pool side and at reception for cans and bottles. There is also a battery box at reception.
Fermanagh	All of the council run leisure centres have comprehensive recycling facilities.
Larne	One leisure centre which has comprehensive recycling facilities.
Limavady	One leisure centre in Limavady and a smaller sports centre in Dungiven. Both of these facilities have comprehensive recycling facilities.
Lisburn	<p>Lagan Valley LeisurePlex</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Between April 2011 to March 2012 a total of 33.23 tonnes of municipal waste was recycled from the building. ■ Recycling bins for cardboard / paper, plastic bottles and aluminium cans at a number of locations throughout the facility. ■ Office materials such as paper and cardboard is collected and recycled. ■ Bottle and clothes banks located in both exterior car parks. <p>Glenmore Activity Centre</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Recycling bins in foyer and fitness suite for plastic bottles. ■ Cardboard and paper used in the centre is collected and re-cycled. ■ Recycling units / banks for glass and clothing located in the car park. <p>Kilmakee Activity Centre</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Recycling units / banks for glass and clothing located in the car park. ■ Recycling bins x 2 for paper and plastic bottles located within centre. ■ Office cardboard and paper re-cycled. <p>Grove Activity Centre</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Recycling bins for paper and plastic bottles are sited at outdoor pitch. ■ Paper and cardboard from the centre is recycled <p>Brook Activity Centre</p> <p>There are a number of recycling bins in the centre for recycling tin cans, cardboard, and plastic bottles</p>
Magherafelt	There are recycling facilities for mixed dry recyclables at both of leisure centres in Maghera and Magherafelt.
Moyle	Recycling provided for by using the blue recycling bins.
Newry and Mourne	Newry and Kilkeel leisure centres as well as Newry Sports Centre all have comprehensive recycling facilities both for staff and public.
Newtownabbey	All three leisure centres have recycling systems in place.
N.Down	North Down has recycling collections that feed into household blue bin collections.
Omagh	One leisure centre with dry recyclables collected in the blue bins. Indoor recycling bins are located throughout the premises and in the offices. Food waste is collected from the cafeteria - brown bin collection.
Strabane	All their leisure centres have recycling facilities in place.

Carcasses: Illegal Dumping of

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 14741/11-15, why some councils have not provided the data, particularly those councils in which illegal dumping of animal carcasses is a recognised problem; and whether he intends to obtain these figures.

(AQW 15612/11-15)

Mr Attwood: We have received the updated figures attached from all but one District Council. Banbridge District Council did not reply. I have again asked Banbridge District Council to provide the figures.

Blue figures indicate figures provided since previous question was published

Number of incidents reported and dealt with

Number of animals collected

	2010 i)	2010 ii)	2011 i)	2011 ii)	2012 i)	2012 ii)
Antrim	2	3	1	1	1	2
Ards	0	0	0	0	0	0
Armagh	34	49	59	76	31	31
Ballymena	11	not recorded	8	not recorded	4	not recorded
Ballymoney	5	7	4	6	3	6
Banbridge	No information received					
Belfast	0	0	0	0	0	0
Carrickfergus	0	0	2	5	0	0
Castlereagh	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cookstown	8	7	5	7	3	3
Coleraine	3	3	2	2	3	3
Craigavon	1	1	2	1	0	0
Derry	N/R	11	N/R	11	N/R	16
Down	4	6	1	1	1	1
Dungannon	No records held		6	8	3	5
Fermanagh	39	48	50	61	35	39
Larne	5	6	1	2	4	7
Limavady	4	6	10	13	9	11
Lisburn	2	3	2	2	0	0
Magherafelt	10	10	9	9	6	6
Moyle	9	24	12	39	13	28
Newry and Mourne	Total of 158 carcasses dumped in the last three years					
Newtownabbey	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Down	0	0	0	0	0	0
Omagh	17	17	17	17	10	10
Strabane	2	2	2	2	2	2

N/R = not recorded

Bus Operator Licensing

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the progress of the Review of Bus Operator Licensing; and to outline the impact assessments that his Department has completed to ensure that the proposed changes affecting community transport will not harm or restrict the movement of vulnerable and isolated people and communities.

(AQW 15659/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Since 2009 my Department has been reviewing the current bus operator licensing regime with a view to bringing forward proposals for to create a more modern framework for the delivery of bus passenger transport. In 2010,

the Department consulted on proposals to introduce a new more modern licensing regime for those seeking to provide bus passenger transport services in Northern Ireland. In February 2011 a synopsis of the consultation responses on the future of bus operator licensing in Northern Ireland was published. At that time Minister Poots undertook to carry out further data gathering and stakeholder engagement as part of the process of developing more detailed proposals for change.

Since that time my Department has continued a process of engagement with all bus transport providers. Early this year officials met with DRD and the Community Transport Partnerships to discuss how the provision of rural and community transport could be accommodated within proposals. In February a series of stakeholder meetings took place across Northern Ireland to gather information and feedback from licensed bus operators. All the data gathered were used to develop a discussion paper aimed at generating focused stakeholder engagement.

In June the resulting discussion paper was brought to the newly constituted Bus Forum for consideration and advice. The Bus Forum consists of representatives from all sectors of the bus passenger transport industry. In parallel with the Bus Forum engagement, the Department has met with specific groups including the Federation of Passenger Transport (FPTNI), the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC) and the Community Transport Association (CTA). This focused engagement is still taking place, and the discussion paper has received general support from all stakeholders with no major issues regarding its potential effectiveness having been identified. The Department still has a number of important stakeholders to meet to ensure that the views of all have been heard and the proposed changes support the whole of the bus industry. Some stakeholders have expressed concerns around the proposal to replace the Section 10b permit scheme with a restricted licence and further discussions are to take place to consider their views and address their concerns.

The review process has been focused on developing a set of minimum standards to be met by all those who provide bus passenger services with a view to creating a fair and transparent licensing regime which promotes road and passenger safety. I am aware that the 2010 consultation identified a number of concerns in relation to the provision of rural and community transport, therefore my Department continues to work closely with DRD and the Community Transport Partnerships to ensure that any changes will facilitate the provision of this type of transport.

It is intended that, once this process is completed, the Department will set out its detailed proposals for a new licensing regime and will consider the next steps with regards to making the changes identified during the stakeholder engagement process. At that stage regulatory and equality impact assessments of the proposals to identify and mitigate any adverse impacts will be undertaken. However, I anticipate that the extensive stakeholder engagement currently being undertaken should ensure that any final proposal will take account of all the bus passenger transport needs in Northern Ireland.

I anticipate that that the stakeholder engagement process and detailed proposal will be finalised within the next few months. Once the proposals are finalised I will be working to ensure that the changes identified create a modern fit for purpose licensing regime which promotes fair competition and road and passenger safety.

Planning Applications: Consultation Process

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions have taken place with statutory agencies, such as Roads Service, district councils and the Rivers Agency, concerning the time it takes them to respond to the Planning Service's consultation process on planning applications.

(AQW 15676/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Regular liaison meetings are held with key consultees including, DRD Roads Service, Chief Environmental Health Officers and DARD Rivers Agency and the necessity to provide early complete advice and guidance on planning applications is emphasised. In addition Service Level Agreements (SLAs) have been agreed with DRD Roads Service and NIEA. These set out the nature and quality of required outputs to be delivered by that consultee and defines associated performance targets.

District Councils are a key stakeholder partner in the planning process. Departmental officials are currently working with councils to extend the streamlined consultation scheme, which will improve processing times for all minor, and intermediate and some major applications.

The Planning Act (NI) 2011 ("the 2011 Act") reforms the planning system and transfers the majority of planning functions to the new district councils with the implementation of RPA. Section 229 of the Act empowers the Department to prescribe in subordinate legislation a time period within which a statutory consultee is required to provide a substantive response to a consultation request in relation to an application. Such provisions will deal with consultation requests issued either by the Department or the district council, whichever is acting as the planning authority.

In advance of the transfer of planning functions to councils the Department intends to bring forward a Planning Bill which will give effect to a range of reforms to be applied by the Department. Executive agreement is currently being sought to introduce the Bill in this Assembly session. The Bill will include provisions similar to Section 229 of the 2011 Act.

Subordinate legislation, either under the 2011 Act or the proposed Planning Bill, will detail the list of statutory consultees, the timeframe for response and the criteria as to what would constitute a substantive response. Any legislation will be subject to public consultation and the scrutiny of the Assembly.

Discussions with key stakeholders on these proposals have been ongoing during the progress of the primary legislation and will continue as the detail of subordinate legislation is further developed.

UK National Ecosystem Assessment

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of the Environment whether he is aware of the recommendations and findings of the Northern Ireland chapter of the UK National Ecosystem Assessment; and if so, how his Department has utilised them.

(AQW 15687/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am aware of the recommendations and findings of the Northern Ireland chapter of the UK National Ecosystem Assessment and launched the same at Hillsborough last October. The launch event aimed to provide an important stimulus for integration of the report's findings. The report is complex, reflecting its production by 70 or so scientists in Northern Ireland.

Since completion and launch of the report, the Department has been working on a number of strands to integrate the findings into strategy and policy, and also a number of smaller additional projects to further develop the evidence-base. These include incorporation of ecosystem approaches into the recently published NIEA Strategic Priorities 2012-2022 and the Natural Heritage Vision and Strategic Plan 2020; integration of Convention on Biological Diversity and EU Biodiversity Strategy targets into the development of a revised cross cutting Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy; partnership with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in the review of the Common Agricultural Policy and at an operational level the undertaking of a number of studies to further understand the importance of ecosystem services.

Civil Servants: Suspensions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment how many members of staff in his Department are currently (i) suspended due to internal investigations, and (ii) not suspended whilst facing internal investigations.

(AQW 15733/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As part of the disciplinary process outlined in the NICS Handbook the Department is required to carry out internal investigations to determine if an officer has breached NICS/Departmental policy.

At present 19 officers are the subject of internal investigation, of this total 4 officers are suspended pending the outcome of the Departments' investigation process.

Suspension as a necessary precaution in the public interest is to enable the Department to conduct an open and thorough investigation and does not imply that any decision about the case has been taken.

I have requested a breakdown of these figures.

Southern Waste Management Partnership: Contract

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the terms and conditions associated with the £3.1m in funding provided to local councils involved in the Southern Waste Management Project contract; (ii) whether the local councils were in full control of this funding; and (iii) in light of the failure to meet the objectives, whether his Department has any power to recoup this funding and any plans to take the necessary steps to do so.

(AQW 15742/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Given the scale of financial commitment and the length of the contract period I have been acting with high vigilance in relation to the waste procurements. In meeting with the groups, in directing officials, in taking best advice from a gateway review, insisting that the issues of affordability and deliverability are robustly interrogated, in undertaking the review as to need (etc). I believe the approach has been decisive, strongly managed and appropriate.

The Strategic Waste Infrastructure Programme was approved by the Executive in 2008 for the purposes of promoting more sustainable waste management practices and ensuring that the North made a proportionate contribution to meeting EU landfill diversion targets. This approval made a revenue stream available to reduce the financial burden the procurement of major new waste infrastructure facilities would have imposed on Councils and ratepayers. On this basis the Department has funded the pre-procurement costs associated with each of the waste infrastructure projects being taken forward by the Waste Management Groups (WMGs) under the auspices of their Joint Committees of Councils. The offers of funding made to the individual WMGs in each financial year are set out in Letters of Offer specifying the terms and conditions attached to the release of that funding and the circumstances in which the Department would seek to recover costs for any breach of those terms and conditions. The terms and conditions set out the need for the WMG to demonstrate that they have effective financial management and procurement processes in place; their maintenance of up to date project management documentation; and the provision of a clear audit trail with regard to project expenditure.

Funding for the SWaMP2008 procurement project is thus allocated directly to the WMG and not to individual Councils. The responsibility for liaison with its constituent councils on funding matters through its Joint Committee rests with SWaMP2008.

The Department will be conducting a Post Project Evaluation which will involve rigorous scrutiny and review of the procurement exercise.

Provided that SWaMP2008 has complied with the terms and conditions of its letters of offer, it would not be my intention either to withhold payments for any outstanding expenditure or to clawback payments already made.

Southern Waste Management Partnership: Contract

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment why no conditions were attached to the bid for the Southern Waste Management Partnership contract that would have made a bid void in the event that any bidder or consortium changed their status.

(AQW 15743/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The three local government procurements have all followed the Competitive Dialogue Process (CDP), a relatively new procurement procedure introduced by the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 and intended to replace the use of the negotiated procedure for the procurement of complex projects where the specifics of the required solution cannot be defined at the outset of the process. It is permissible under the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 for new members to be introduced to bidder consortia, and such developments are not unprecedented nor uncommon in major procurements. It would have been illegal for SWaMP2008, or any procuring authority, to render a bid void solely on the basis of a change in the membership of the bid consortium.

Southern Waste Management Partnership: Contract

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what changes he will make to ensure that no further public money is lost in a similar manner to the £3.1m lost as a result of the failure of the Southern Waste Management Partnership contract.

(AQW 15744/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Given the scale of financial commitment and the length of the contract period I have been acting with high vigilance in relation to the waste procurements. In meeting with the groups, in directing officials, in taking best advice from a gateway review, insisting that the issues of affordability and deliverability are robustly interrogated, in undertaking the review as to need (etc). I believe the approach has been decisive, strongly managed and appropriate.

The abandonment of the SWaMP2008 procurement, demonstrates the risk, difficulty and potential for legal challenge attaching to all such major waste infrastructure procurements. No public authority would undertake to enter into a procurement worth in the region of £500 million without undertaking the necessarily costly preparatory work required to deliver a project on that scale. It has cost the public purse £3.1 million to reach this point, it is also the case that not to have incurred that level of expenditure would have left SWaMP2008 at risk of delivering a badly flawed contract. SWaMP2008 has applied the necessary due diligence to establish that it was not in the public interest for it to contest the legal challenge it received, given the uncertainty of the outcome.

Local government has statutory responsibility for achieving landfill diversion targets through compliance with individual councils' NILAS (Northern Ireland Landfill Allowance Scheme) obligations. The three Waste Management Group-led projects represent local government's clearly stated preferred option for procuring the new infrastructure necessary to achieve compliance, with each Waste Management Group scaling its proposed facilities on the basis of achieving Best Value for its constituent councils.

I can assure you that I remain committed to delivering assurance of NI-wide compliance at minimal cost to the public purse and in line with the revised waste hierarchy. To that end, I have instituted a fundamental review of the future direction and viability of the Waste Management Group projects and the overarching Waste Infrastructure Programme, including an assessment of the quantum of infrastructure required to provide an assurance that we in the North will be able to make our proportionate contribution to meeting EU waste diversion targets by 2020.

We now know, on the basis of the updated Analysis of 2020 Residual Waste Requirements in Northern Ireland to meet EU Obligations, that while overall infrastructure requirements have reduced, waste infrastructure facilities are still required to enable us in the North to meet our obligation to contribute proportionately to overall landfill diversion targets.

Given the high degree of risk associated with such procurements, and the need to allow for a degree of project failure, as things stand my Department will continue to fund the two remaining procurements up to but not beyond 31 March 2013, but only provided that they continue to provide satisfactory assurance to the Department as to their deliverability and affordability and that they continue to meet agreed project milestones for key stages in their delivery. I have already taken steps to increase the degree of assurance required by the Department, with the release of further Departmental funding conditional on achieving these approved milestones, and I will not hesitate to curtail that support should the level of assurance and/or slippage become unacceptable. At the same time, I will continue to intervene positively to assist delivery where it is clearly in the interests of the North as a whole.

National Parks

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to list the groups he has met regarding the national parks proposals.

(AQW 15747/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have met with representatives of the following groups to discuss national parks: the Ulster Farmers' Union; the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside; the Ulster Society for the Protection of the Countryside; the National Beef Association; the Institute of Directors; Mourne Heritage Trust; the Northern Ireland Tourist Board; various political representatives and written to members of the Executive.

Arc21

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the procurement of waste management infrastructure by ARC21; and whether the councils aligned to ARC 21 will avoid European Union infraction fines without resorting to exporting black bin waste to landfills in other jurisdictions.

(AQW 15766/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As the Member will understand, much of the detailed information pertaining to the arc21 procurement is subject to restrictions imposed by public procurement law and commercial confidentiality requirements. However, I can confirm that arc21 is in the latter stages of dialogue with its remaining bidder and is working through a range of procurement issues. It advised the Waste Infrastructure Programme Board in June of this year that it expected to appoint a Preferred Bidder in February 2013. This figure has subsequently slipped by approximately six months.

arc21, in keeping with each of the Waste Management Groups, has developed contingency arrangements for meeting its constituent councils' statutory NILAS (Northern Ireland Landfill Allowance Scheme) obligations as an element of project planning. In the event of its major infrastructure project not proceeding, it will be up to arc21 and its constituent councils to agree the pursuit of those contingency arrangements.

Vacant Departmental Properties

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment what properties owned by his Department and valued in excess of £100,000 are currently vacant.

(AQW 15774/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department does not own any vacant properties valued in excess of £100,000.

Residual Waste Treatment Projects

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment whether the Residual Waste Treatment Projects will continue given the current financial status of Biffa.

(AQW 15787/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Biffa is not a bidder for any of the waste infrastructure projects. It had been a participant in each of the Waste Management Groups' procurement competitions but subsequently withdrew, for different corporate reasons in each case. It currently provides some services to arc21 but these are not such as to impact on arc21's major waste infrastructure procurement.

Biffa

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment whether he can confirm that the relevant councils are aware of the present financial difficulties facing Biffa.

(AQW 15788/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Under the Strategic Waste Infrastructure Programme (SWIP) the Department provides financial support to the Waste Management Groups (WMGs) to alleviate the impact on councils of the costs associated with the major waste infrastructure projects being taken forward by the Waste Management Groups on their behalf. As BIFFA is not a party to either of the bidding consortia for the two remaining waste infrastructure projects, the Department has no reason to monitor the financial position of this private company or engage with local government on it.

Individual councils or Waste Management Groups are likely to have current contracts in place with a range of merchant sector operators for the movement, treatment or disposal of waste. All of these contracts fall outside the Waste Infrastructure Programme and indeed the outside the direct jurisdiction of the Department.

Waste Treatment Projects

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the current waste treatment projects, what quantities are being used for the commercial assessment; and what is their contractual status.

(AQW 15789/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The impact of changes resulting from successful recycling initiatives, reduced waste arisings and reduced economic activity are documented in the updated Analysis of 2020 Residual Waste Infrastructure Requirements in Northern Ireland to meet EU Obligations which I oversaw the production of earlier this year. The updated Analysis confirms that the quantum of new infrastructure required to provide assurance of compliance at NI level with those obligations to divert waste from landfill has reduced significantly.

Each of the Waste Management Groups has kept the proposed scale of their facilities under constant review since their procurements commenced, and reduced the scale of their proposals accordingly. In arc21's case this has led to its estimate of the most economically advantageous size of its proposed energy from waste plant reducing from up to 370,000 tonnes in 2008 to 210,000 tonnes and its mechanical biological treatment (MBT) plant reducing from 400,000 tonnes to 240,000 tonnes. In the case of the North West Region Waste Management Group, the estimate for its proposed energy from waste

plant has increased slightly from 70,000 tonnes to 80,000 tonnes and its MBT plant has reduced slightly from 142,000 tonnes to 140,000 tonnes.

None of the Waste Management Groups has yet reached Contract Award in the procurement of major waste infrastructure.

Municipal Waste: Disposal of

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment, in the event of Biffa being unable to continue in the waste treatment competitions, what contingency plans are in place to provide for the disposal of municipal waste.

(AQW 15790/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Biffa is not a bidder for any of the waste infrastructure projects. It had been a participant in each of the Waste Management Groups' procurement competitions but subsequently withdrew, for different corporate reasons in each case. It currently provides some services to arc21 but these are not such as to impact on arc21's major waste infrastructure procurement.

Councils: Part-time Managers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 14899/11-15 and for each council that employs part-time managers, to detail (i) the number of part-time senior management posts; (ii) the total number of staff in question; and (iii) the corresponding job titles.

(AQW 15794/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The information requested is set out in the table below. Four of the councils considered that providing job title details could breach Data Protection principles. Due to the sensitive nature of the subject, if you have an interest in a particular area you may wish to contact the appropriate council to ask for this information directly.

Council	No. of part-time posts at senior management level	No. of staff in question	Corresponding job titles
Antrim Borough Council	None at senior level	-	-
Armagh City & District Council	5	5	Information not given due to data protection considerations
Banbridge District Council	2	2	Information not given due to data protection considerations
Belfast City Council	2	2	Principal HR Advisor (Employee Relations); Media Relations Officer
Cookstown District Council	1	1	Director
Craigavon Borough Council	12	12	Good Relations Officer Administrative Supervisor Rural Development Manager Neighbourhood Renewal Officer Duty Officer Lurgan Park Development Officer District Policing Partnership Manager Peace III Programme Co-ordinator Community Sport Active Inclusion Officer Licensing Officer Senior Environmental Health Officer Community Centre Manager
Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	2	2	Information not given due to data protection considerations
Larne Borough Council	2	2	Financial Controller; Senior Environmental Health Officer
Lisburn City Council	1	2	Assistant Director

Council	No. of part-time posts at senior management level	No. of staff in question	Corresponding job titles
Magherafelt District Council	1	2	Senior Environmental Health Officer
Newry & Mourne District Council	1	2	Assistant Director of Administration (General Services)
Newtownabbey Borough Council	1	2	Principal Environmental Health Officer
North Down Borough Council	4	4	Information not given due to data protection considerations
Omagh District Council	None at senior level	-	-

Derelict Buildings

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of the Environment what grants or funding are available from his Department to assist property owners with the re-development of derelict buildings in town centres, particularly in rural areas.

(AQW 15806/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Listed Buildings Grant-aid Scheme, administered by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, provides funding to owners of all types of secular listed buildings and for churches at Grade B+ and above to assist with the repair and maintenance of the historic fabric. Research by NIEA has shown that investment in its listed building grant scheme leverages £7.60 of investment for every £1 of grant it deploys. This is an important catalyst in encouraging others to make investment decisions.

In addition to this formal grant scheme, I have been piloting a dereliction scheme which seeks to provide financial support local councils to realise the full economic potential of the historic environment as a way of stimulating the wider economy. Following on from the success of positive intervention in Portrush and Portstewart when I was able to provide £405k funding for the local council to address dereliction in advance of the hosting of the Irish Open, I have recently announced a further £493k for Derry City council to tackle dereliction in the run up to the city's year as UK City of Culture 2013.

This reflects my commitment to address this issue which I see as an important opportunity to attract investment and tourists to the North. This sort of intervention is extremely effective. I am currently looking at ways of establishing a sustainable scheme which extends this approach to other towns and cities and have made my case at a recent Executive meeting and circulated a paper to Ministerial colleagues. Moreover I have made argument for significant funds to be allocated for heritage led development and extra funds for the grant schemes detailed above.

That said, there is a need or greater enforcement through urgent works notices (listed buildings) and Council use of various legislative weapons to take action against those who do not maintain their properties.

Wood Burners

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what legislation exists to protect residents from poor air quality caused by smoke from wood burners; and what action can an individual take if their health is being affected by smoke from a wood burner.

(AQW 15886/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Where smoke is emitted from a chimney of any building within a smoke control area, the occupier of that building is guilty of an offence under Article 17(2) of the Clean Air (Northern Ireland) Order 1981. District councils may take enforcement action through the courts in such cases.

The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 makes provision for smoke emitted from a chimney of a private dwelling which is not within a smoke control area. Section 63(1) (b) of the Act provides that smoke emitted from premises that could be regarded as prejudicial to health or a nuisance is regarded as a statutory nuisance. A resident may inform his district council which has a duty to investigate complaints of statutory nuisance, and this could result in the issue of an abatement notice.

Section 70 of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, makes provision for a person who is aggrieved by the existence of a statutory nuisance to make a complaint directly to a court of summary jurisdiction. The court may act on the person's behalf, if it is satisfied that the alleged nuisance exists and it may make an order specifying the remedial action required.

Carrick Footbridge at Roe Valley Country Park, Limavady and Martello Tower, Magilligan

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment what was the total amount spent on maintenance, and other associated costs, of the (i) Carrick Footbridge, Roe Valley Country Park, Limavady; and (ii) Martello Tower, Magilligan, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 15904/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The spend on Carrick Footbridge, Roe Valley Country Park, is as follows:

- 2009/10 – 0
- 2010/11 – 0
- 2011/12 – £2.2k
- Current year 2012/13 – £1.5k projected
- Staff time costs of regular inspections is approximately £330 annually.

The spend on Martello Tower is as follows:

- 2009/10 – 0
- 2010/11 – 0
- 2011/12 – £0.5k
- Current year 2012/13 – 0 projected
- Staff time costs of regular inspections is approximately £120 annually.

Marie Stopes Clinic

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment why the change of use application to facilitate the Marie Stopes clinic was not deemed contentious and was processed by way of the streamlined procedure, with minimal opportunity for consultation.

(AQW 15966/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The application (reference: Z/2012/0244/F) was advertised and the necessary neighbour notifications and consultations were undertaken in the normal manner further to requirements of Planning Legislation and procedures.

Following this process, the change of use application from office accommodation (class B1(a)) to medical and health facility (class D1(a)) was processed under the Streamlined Consultation arrangements which were agreed on 18 March 2010 with Belfast City Council's Town Planning Committee

The application was approved on 18 May 2012 and the approval permits any medical or health facility to operate from the premises at 8th Floor,

14-16 Great Victoria Street, Belfast.

I requested and received legal advice confirming that the Department has fulfilled its statutory duties for determination of a Planning Application.

Littering Convictions

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how many littering convictions have been secured in each constituency in each of the last five years.

(AQW 16068/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The figures obtained by the Department from councils in respect of successful prosecutions in the courts for littering offences are set out in the table below. The Department does not hold information on prosecutions for the years prior to the 2008/09 year.

Council	2008/09 Year	2009/10 Year	2010/11 Year	2011/12 Year
Antrim	1	2	0	0
Ballymena	2	0	2	1
Belfast	30	31	91	15
Castlereagh	2	-	1	4
Coleraine	7	2	1	2
Cookstown	2	0	2	0
Craigavon	1	30	25	11
Down	3	2	0	0

Council	2008/09 Year	2009/10 Year	2010/11 Year	2011/12 Year
Larne	7	2	3	0
Limavady	0	1	0	0
Magherafelt	0	1	0	1
Newtownabbey	7	5	7	7
Omagh	1	3	1	2
All Other Councils	0	0	0	0
Total	63	79	133	43

Planning Process

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of the Environment what action he is taking to speed up the planning process which, in many cases, is holding back the creation of jobs.

(AQO 2739/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The evidence is that, following a range of interventions, the planning process is speeding up. There is more work to do to make the Planning System fully fit for its purpose of managing applications for sustainable development. Where we are today is better than a year or two ago and where we will be a year from now will be better than today. I detail below some of the initiatives I have commenced.

I have recently introduced legislation which provides new permitted development rights for extensions, alterations and other small scale development for shops, financial and professional services establishments, office premises and schools, colleges, universities and hospitals. The legislation also provides revised permitted development rights for industrial buildings and warehouses. Increasing the range of development that no longer needs planning permission will make it easier for owners of shops and offices to undertake minor building works such as small extensions to their property. I am assessing if the above Permitted Development Rights can be further revised.

A consultation is issuing on Permitted Development Rights for Agricultural Development. This is of importance as the proposals would permit development up to 500sqm for both new builds or extensions, for chicken sheds, anaerobic digesters and other farm accommodation.

I have also introduced an enhanced streamlined scheme, to which 20 councils have now agreed. This enhanced scheme incorporates all minor and intermediate applications, housing developments up to 25 units and office accommodation up to a maximum of 200 square metres. This will mean approximately 75% of all applications could be streamlined. Processing times for these applications will be significantly reduced and this will have a positive impact on business in Northern Ireland.

I have set ambitious targets for 2012-13 to speed up the planning process, and these measures are resulting in improved performance compared to the same period last year. The figures for the 1st quarter of 2012/13 confirm timescales of 26 weeks for Major, 21 weeks for Intermediate and 12 weeks for Minor applications, which represent an improvement of 2 weeks for Major applications and one week for both Intermediate and Minor applications when compared to the same period last year. That said I am determined to reduce these figures further.

I have taken a keen interest to ensure greater emphasis is placed on processing major applications particularly those with job creating potential in a timely manner. This has seen significant progress in the determination of Article 31 applications. This calendar year to date, 20 Article 31 applications have been decided and I have recently announced my decision on another 2. There are now 38 outstanding and I hope that up to half of these will be concluded by Christmas.

I am also working on a number of fronts to reform and remodel the planning system so that it supports the future economic and social development needs of all users in Northern Ireland, including local businesses. I also intend to bring forward various reforms designed to speed up the processing of applications (including major applications) such as statutory measures to ensure quicker responses from consultees and on a voluntary basis pre-application community consultation on key developments. This will form part of the Planning Bill which I hope to bring to the Assembly before the Christmas recess.

However, the Department's experience to date is that improved performance can only be achieved through working inclusively with all key stakeholders in the overall planning system. I would encourage applicants to engage with the local community and to enter into pre-application discussions with my Department prior to the submission of major planning applications.

I will continue to work with key stakeholders to ensure that planning delivers benefits to the economy in an efficient and timely manner and continue to monitor performance. That means nearly weekly meetings with relevant groups and organisations, to deepen accountability, for me as a Minister and Planning generally.

Review of Public Administration: PricewaterhouseCoopers Economic Appraisal

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on his proposed review of the PricewaterhouseCoopers Economic Appraisal on the Reform of Public Administration.

(AQO 2740/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The economic appraisal of local government service delivery, published by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in October 2009, indicated that under the preferred option (i.e. Transformation with Regional Collaboration) implementation of the local government reform programme could involve expenditure of up to £118 million over five years and achieve savings of £438 million over twenty-five years.

The Regional Transition Committee, which I chair, has commissioned the senior local and central government officers in the Finance Working Group to re-examine the costs and benefits of reform taking account of a range of key factors. These include the 2015 timescale for reform set out in the Programme for Government 2011-2015, the sector's Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency proposals and the changed economic climate in which reform is now being taken forward.

The funding of local government reform will need to come from a number of sources including, in my view, the Executive.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Contracts: Extension of

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, for the last five years, to detail the number and value of the contracts awarded, as an extension of existing contracts, by each Department without a new tendering process being undertaken.

(AQW 15291/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The information requested is not readily available and to provide it for all Departments could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Civil Servants: Suspensions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many members of staff in his Department are currently (i) suspended due to internal investigations, and (ii) not suspended whilst facing internal investigations.

(AQW 15483/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Department does not have any staff currently suspended due to internal investigations.

The Department has 1 member of staff currently not suspended whilst facing internal investigation.

Special Advisers

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what arrangements are in place for declarations of interest by Special Advisers.

(AQW 15561/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Special Advisers are contractually required to abide by the conduct provisions in the NICS HR Handbook with the exception of the rules on political activities. As for all other civil servants, this requires declarations of interest if there is the potential for furthering private interests or the interests of others, both financial and otherwise, because of their official position or information acquired in the course of their official duties.

Whilst free to engage in local political activities, including serving on a local authority, Special Advisers must beware of conflicts of interest and must adhere to certain provisions as set out in their Code of Conduct at Schedule 2 of their model contract, which I arranged to be placed in the Assembly library in April 2012.

Suicide: East Belfast

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people have died by suicide in east Belfast since August 2012.

(AQW 15578/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Suicide statistics are derived from the General Register Office death registration system, and are based on either a medical or coroner's certificate. Suicides are referred to the coroner and take time to be investigated. On average it is up to two years after the suicide has occurred that it is registered, therefore there are no official statistics on the number of suicides in East Belfast since August 2012.

The latest available figures are for the first six months of 2012P, where there were seven deaths registered due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury'¹ or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'², where the deceased was resident in East Belfast. It is important to note that only two of these actually occurred in 2012, and the remainder occurred in 2011.

1 International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes X60-X84, Y87.0

2 International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes Y10-Y34, Y87.2

P 2012 data is provisional

Suicide: Mid Ulster

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the suicide rate in the Mid-Ulster constituency, for each of the last three years, broken down by (i) council district; (ii) age; (iii) gender; and (iv) religious background.

(AQW 15614/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The attached tables give the number and rate of deaths registered due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury'¹ or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'² in Mid Ulster Constituency by (i) the councils within the Mid Ulster Constituency (ii) age-group and (iii) gender.

Figures by religious background are not available as religion of the deceased is not collected within the death registration process.

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 1: Registered deaths due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted', 2009-2011.

Registered deaths due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'	2009	2010	2011P	2009-2011
Mid Ulster	14	9	14	37
Under 25	2	1	2	5
25-34	6	3	4	13
35-44	2	3	3	8
45+	4	2	5	11
Male	14	5	10	29
Female	0	4	4	8
Within Cookstown LGD2	4	4	8	16
Within Magherafelt LGD2	8	4	2	14
Within Dungannon LGD2	2	1	4	7

Table 2: Death rate per 100,000 population due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted', 2009-2011.

Death rate per 100,000 population due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'	2009	2010	20113P	2009-2011
Mid Ulster	14	9	14	13
Under 25	5	3	5	5
25-34	43	21	28	30
35-44	15	23	23	20
45+	12	6	15	11
Male	29	10	20	20
Female	0	8	8	5
Within Cookstown LGD2	11	11	22	15
Within Magherafelt LGD2	18	9	4	10
Within Dungannon LGD2	12	6	24	14

1 In the UK, in considering suicide events it is conventional to include cases where the cause of death is classified as either 'Suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'Undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'. Death statistics are based on the year of registration of the event rather than the year of occurrence. Events such as suicide

are likely to be referred to the coroner. This can take some time, therefore deaths registered in any year may have occurred in previous years.

- 2 Figures relate only to the parts of Cookstown, Magherafelt and Dungannon Local Government Districts (LGDs) which fall within the Mid Ulster constituency.
 - 3 Death rates for 2011 are based on 2010 population estimates.
- P Data for 2011 remains provisional until the publication of the Annual Report of the Registrar General which is due to be published in November 2012

Government Contracts

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what controls are in place to ensure that the main contractors on Government contracts use approved sub-contractors.

(AQW 15632/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) does not maintain lists of approved subcontractors. The selection of subcontractors is the responsibility of the contractor.

The construction contract conditions used by CPD require contractors to seek acceptance of proposed subcontractors from the Project Manager, prior to the subcontractors' appointments.

The substitution of an alternative subcontractor, to replace one whose assessment contributed to the selection of the contractor, will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. In such cases, the alternative subcontractor must be assessed as being of a satisfactory standard using the criteria applied to the original subcontractor at prequalification stage.

Contractors are also required to provide the Project Manager with a monthly summary report detailing the subcontracts which exceed 1% of the total contract value or £10,000. This monthly report is used by the Project Manager to monitor and control the acceptance of subcontractors in accordance with the contract conditions.

Typically, in Supplies and Services contracts, the assessed subcontractors named in the contract award cannot be changed without the Contracting Authority's consent; this is a condition of the contract.

Government Contracts

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he is aware of contractors who have secured Government contracts by submitting tenders with named sub-contractors and who then invite further tenders from other sub-contractors after the contract has been awarded.

(AQW 15633/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The selection of subcontractors is the responsibility of the contractor. My Department does not hold information relating to contractors inviting further tenders for subcontracts after a contract is awarded.

Simply naming a subcontractor at tender stage will have no impact on the procurement process or the award of a contract. However, if a subcontractor is actually evaluated as part of the procurement process, then the relevant works or services should be completed by that subcontractor.

Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) is not aware of any contracts awarded after April 2010, which were funded directly by departments and managed by CPD, where a contractor appointed a different subcontractor to the one evaluated during the procurement process.

As part of its contract conditions, CPD requires contractors, after contract award, to seek acceptance from the Project Manager before appointing subcontractors.

Where a contractor subsequently seeks to appoint an alternative subcontractor, to the one whose evaluation contributed to the selection of the contractor, this will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. In such cases, the alternative subcontractor must be assessed as being of a satisfactory standard using the same criteria applied to the original subcontractor at prequalification stage.

Non-domestic Rates Initiatives: Lurgan and Portadown

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many businesses in (i) Lurgan; and (ii) Portadown town centres have benefited from the recent non-domestic rates initiatives.

(AQW 15675/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Information on the number of businesses that have benefited from the recent non-domestic rates initiatives in (i) Lurgan and (ii) Portadown centres is not available as data is collated at District Council and Ward levels only. Information is available for the Craigavon Borough Council area.

As at 21st October 2012, there were 360 businesses in Craigavon Borough Council which have benefitted from the recently introduced 20% rate of Small Business Rate Relief. To date no properties in Craigavon Borough Council have benefitted from either the Empty Premises Relief or the Shop Window Display relief which also commenced on 1st April 2012.

Suicide: Belfast

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people have died by suicide in each of the four Belfast constituencies, in each of the last four quarters, broken down by (i) age; and (ii) gender.

(AQW 15728/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The following tables give the number of deaths registered due to either 'suicide and self-inflicted injury'¹ or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'² by age and gender and constituency area of the deceased within Belfast constituencies. The latest available figures are for Quarter 3 2011 to Quarter 2 2012.

All suicides are referred to the coroner and can take time to be fully investigated. Therefore there is often a period of time between when the suicide occurs and when it is registered. Figures below will subsequently include deaths that occurred before the period of interest, and exclude those that occurred in the quarter but have yet to be registered.

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 1: Registered deaths due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted' by age, gender and Belfast Constituency within Quarter 3 2011,P.

Registered deaths due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'	Belfast East	Belfast North	Belfast South	Belfast West	All Belfast Constituencies
Quarter 3 2011	1	4	1	6	12
Under 25	0	1	0	2	3
25-34	0	2	0	2	4
35-44	0	0	1	0	1
45+	1	1	0	2	4
Male	1	3	1	3	8
Female	0	1	0	3	4

Table 2: Registered deaths due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted' by age, gender and Belfast Constituency within Quarter 4 2011,P.

Registered deaths due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'	Belfast East	Belfast North	Belfast South	Belfast West	All Belfast Constituencies
Quarter 4 2011	4	11	6	5	26
Under 25	1	2	1	3	7
25-34	1	3	1	0	5
35-44	0	2	1	0	3
45+	2	4	3	2	11
Male	3	7	5	3	18
Female	1	4	1	2	8

Table 3: Registered deaths due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted' by age, gender and Belfast Constituency within Quarter 1 2012,P.

Registered deaths due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'	Belfast East	Belfast North	Belfast South	Belfast West	All Belfast Constituencies
Quarter 1 2012	3	7	7	5	22
Under 25	0	1	0	1	2

Registered deaths due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'	Belfast East	Belfast North	Belfast South	Belfast West	All Belfast Constituencies
25-34	0	2	2	2	6
35-44	2	1	1	1	5
45+	1	3	4	1	9
Male	3	7	5	4	19
Female	0	0	2	1	3

Table 4: Registered deaths due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted' by age, gender and Belfast Constituency within Quarter 2 20121,P.

Registered deaths due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'	Belfast East	Belfast North	Belfast South	Belfast West	All Belfast Constituencies
Quarter 2 2012	4	8	5	12	29
Under 25	0	2	3	1	6
25-34	1	3	0	5	9
35-44	1	1	1	3	6
45+	2	2	1	3	8
Male	3	5	3	11	22
Female	1	3	2	1	7

1 In the UK, in considering suicide events it is conventional to include cases where the cause of death is classified as either 'Suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'Undetermined injury'.

P Data remains provisional until the publication of the relevant Annual Report of the Registrar General.

Civil Servants: Criminal Charges

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people employed in his Department are (i) suspended from work pending criminal charges or investigations; and (ii) continuing in their duties whilst facing criminal charges or investigations.

(AQW 15734/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Department is not aware of having any staff facing criminal charges or investigations.

Biomass Heating Systems

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether feasibility studies have been conducted to assess the potential savings that could be achieved by switching Government buildings to biomass heating systems.

(AQW 15785/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Pilot projects to assess the suitability of biomass projects have been installed at three sites within the NICS Office Estate.

Biomass Heating Systems

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what assessment has been made of the benefits to the indigenous renewable energy industry of Government buildings switching to biomass heating systems.

(AQW 15797/11-15)

Mr Wilson: DFP has not undertaken any assessments of biomass heating system conversions from an industry perspective.

Non-domestic Rates Initiatives: Bangor and Holywood

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many businesses in (i) Bangor; and (ii) Holywood town centres have benefitted from the recent non-domestic rates initiatives.

(AQW 15813/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Information on the number of businesses that have benefitted from the recent non-domestic rates initiatives in (i) Bangor and (ii) Holywood town centres is not available as data is collated at District Council and Ward levels only. Information is available for the North Down Borough Council Area.

As at 21st October 2012, there were 392 businesses in North Down Borough Council which have benefitted from the recently introduced 20% rate of Small Business Rate Relief. To date a single business in North Down Borough Council has benefitted from Empty Premises Relief, whilst no businesses have taken advantage of the Shop Window Display relief. All of these reliefs commenced on 1st April 2012.

Public Expenditure Out-turn and Forecast Out-turn Returns

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether each Department has been submitting public expenditure outturn and forecast outturn information to his Department on a monthly basis; (ii) which Departments are in default; and (iii) what is the effect of such default, both in terms of returns to HM Treasury and the informing of in-year monitoring.

(AQW 15823/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Northern Ireland departments routinely submit monthly outturn and forecast outturn data to my officials. No departments are currently in default in this respect. These submissions form the basis of the Executive's monthly return to HM Treasury.

The Northern Ireland Executive is obliged to provide HM Treasury with a monthly outturn / forecast outturn return. This information feeds into various HM Treasury and Office for National Statistics publications such as the Monthly Public Sector Finances Bulletin; Quarterly National Accounts and GDP estimates; and biannual economic and fiscal forecasts.

The departmental returns are also used to inform the local monitoring rounds, in particular early identification of potential departmental easements to be declared.

In the event that a department fail to submit its monthly outturn and forecast outturn return to DFP, the Executive's return to HM Treasury would be less accurate than it should be. The Northern Ireland departments are fully aware of the importance of meeting the monthly deadlines for return of outturn and forecast outturn information.

Treasury Publication 'Improving Spending Control'

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether all Departments are operating in compliance with the Treasury publication 'Improving Spending Control'.

(AQW 15861/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The HM Treasury 'Improving Spending Control' publication applies primarily to Whitehall departments. For example, the requirement to identify an 'Unallocated Provision' does not apply to the Devolved Administrations. The key document setting out the financial relationship between HM Treasury and the Devolved Administrations remains the 'Statement of Funding Policy'.

However, some aspects of the 'Improving Spending Control' document are relevant to the Devolved Administrations. For example, the document highlights the requirement to submit accurate and timely outturn and forecast outturn information to HM Treasury. The Northern Ireland Executive complies fully with this requirement.

Anticipated Expenditure

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the accuracy of forecasting by Departments on anticipated expenditure and the usefulness of the exercise given the pattern of substantial disparity between forecasts and outturns.

(AQW 15862/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Northern Ireland Executive is obliged to provide monthly outturn and forecast outturn information to HM Treasury. This information provides outturn expenditure to date and profiles spend for the remaining months of the financial year. HM Treasury's main concern is the expenditure to date and forecast total expenditure to the year end since this information feeds into key publications and fiscal forecasts.

My officials have separately carried out an analysis of the Northern Ireland departments forecasting accuracy. This analysis focused on the ability to accurately forecast expenditure as measured against the outturn reported two months later. This analysis showed that there was considerable variation between the Northern Ireland departments in this respect. Improving departmental monthly forecasting should ultimately lead to better financial management and spending outcomes.

Suicide

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people in (i) North Down; and (ii) Northern Ireland as a whole, have died by suicide in each of the last five years.

(AQW 15869/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The following table gives the number of deaths registered due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury'¹ or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'² in (i) the North Down constituency; and (ii) Northern Ireland as a whole, in each of the last five years.

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 1: Registered deaths due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted', in North Down Constituency and NI, from 2007-2011^P.

Registration Year	North Down	Northern Ireland
2007	8	242
2008	10	282
2009	9	260
2010	13	313
2011 ^P	8	289

1 In the UK, in considering suicide events it is conventional to include cases where the cause of death is classified as either 'Suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'Undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'.

^P Data for 2011 remains provisional until the publication of the Annual Report of the Registrar General which is due to be published in November 2012.

Sure Start and Extended Schools Programme

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much Northern Ireland receives per child in the block grant to (i) spend on the children's Sure Start initiative; and (ii) pay for the Extended Schools programmes initiative.

(AQW 15947/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Northern Ireland receives a block allocation based on the outcome of the United Kingdom Government Spending Review – this is not usually hypothecated to particular spending programmes.

Corporation Tax: Manufacturing and Engineering Sectors

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much Corporation Tax has been paid by the manufacturing and engineering sector, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16025/11-15)

Mr Wilson: HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) has responsibility for collecting corporation tax revenue across the UK and does not separately record the level of liabilities for each region.

Although information on the total amount of UK corporation tax liabilities by industry is available on the HMRC website, this does not provide information on manufacturing and engineering as a specific sector.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Hospitals: Western Health and Social Care Trust Area

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of his statement of 9 October 2012, (i) for an estimate of the number of patients that are currently treated by the Causeway Hospital that will be treated by the Western Health and Social Care Trust at Altnagelvin Hospital; (ii) what knock on effect is anticipated on waiting lists for people from the Western Trust area; (iii) for a breakdown of the anticipated increase in patient numbers attending Altnagelvin Hospital following the introduction of a wider range of services, including cancer services, enhanced orthopaedics and cardiology services; and (iv) for his assessment of the staffing levels at Altnagelvin Hospital.

(AQW 15490/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): On 9 October 2012 I launched a three-month consultation "Transforming Your Care: From Vision to Action" which outlines my proposals for change in Health and Social Care services in response to the report "Transforming Your Care: A Review of Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland" (published December 2011).

The document invites people to indicate if they agree with the proposals or whether they believe there are better alternatives. The Health and Social Care Board is carrying out the consultation on my behalf. The consultation document, together with the Draft local Population Plans and Strategic Implementation Plan, are available on the HSCB's website at www.tyccconsultation.hscni.net; an information leaflet will be issued to every household in Northern Ireland; and there will be a series of public and stakeholder meetings. The consultation will run until 15 January 2013.

There will also be further consultation on significant service changes which will provide the opportunity in the future for service users and the wider public to have their say on more specific service changes as they emerge over time.

Until the public consultation is completed and final decisions taken on the proposals, it would be premature to speculate in detail about changes in patient flows and numbers at individual hospitals.

Marie Stopes Clinic

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether he will ensure that the number of abortions carried out each year in the Marie Stopes clinic in Belfast is made public; (ii) how the basis for each abortion will be recorded and monitored; and (iii) how it will be publicly demonstrated that the clinic is operating within the law.

(AQW 15556/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department is developing a system to collect comprehensive statistics on terminations taking place in Northern Ireland, regardless of setting. I intend for this information to be made public, while ensuring that patient confidentiality is fully respected.

Marie Stopes has confirmed that they intend to fully comply with all laws and regulatory systems in Northern Ireland. All organisations delivering health and social care are expected to operate within the existing legal framework. I am currently exploring legislative options to help ensure public confidence.

Investigation of potential criminal offences is a matter for the police and, if a prosecution is taken, ultimately for the courts.

Locum Staff and Middle Grade Doctors in A&E Departments

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the amount each Health and Social Care Trust has spent on employing locum staff and middle grade doctors in Accident and Emergency departments in each of the last three years; and whether each Trust plans to employ permanent staff and reduce the spend on locums.

(AQW 15623/11-15)

Mr Poots: Expenditure by each of the Health and Social Care Trusts on Locum and Middle Grade Doctors in Emergency Departments in each of the last 3 years is set out in the table below*

Trust	Belfast		Western		South Eastern	
	Locum staff	Middle Grade doctors	Locum staff	Middle Grade doctors	Locum staff	Middle Grade doctors
2009/10	£662,000	£1,247,000	£984,820	£1,374,598	£405,426	£1,238,713
2010/11	£535,000	£1,659,000	£1,114,831	£1,310,637	£1,056,452	£1,137,766
2011/12	£1,022,000	£1,255,000	£1,062,333	£1,166,348	£1,211,508	£1,088,211

Trust	Southern		Northern	
	Locum staff	Middle Grade doctors	Locum staff	Middle Grade doctors
2009/10	£848,935	£1,321,944	£740,000	£500,000
2010/11	£790,588	£1,315,982	£321,000	£386,000
2011/12	£905,546	£1,228,669	£230,000	£353,000

Locum appointments help maintain safe and effective service. Cover is required to fill gaps which emerge for a variety of reasons including maternity leave, sick leave and difficulties in attracting junior doctors into emergency medicine as a career.

***Notes:**

- Does not include Local Appointments for Training (LATs) or Local Appointments for Service (LASs) who are paid nationally agreed rates. The costs in the above table refer to the cost of external locums and those internal locums who are not paid nationally agreed rates.
- Middle Grade doctors are defined as St3 and above, Staff Grade, Specialty Doctor and Associate Specialist.

Skin Cancer Specialists

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many skin cancer specialists currently work for the Health Service.

(AQW 15624/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information in the table below has been provided by HSC Trusts and relates to the number of consultants involved in the diagnosis and treatment of skin cancer and/or who have a special interest in skin cancer.

Table: Consultants involved in the diagnosis or treatment of skin cancer at October 2012 by HSC Trust

HSC Trust	Medical Specialty	Headcount
Belfast	Oncology	2
	Dermatology	1
Northern	Dermatology	4
Southern	Dermatology	2
South-Eastern	Plastics	7
	Dermatology	5
Western	Dermatology	1
	Ear, Nose & Throat	6

Source: HSC Trusts

Notes:

1. Whole-time equivalent has not been provided as treatment and diagnosis of skin cancer will only form part of the consultants' post.
2. The above information has not been validated by DHSSPS. Trust responses are based on their own interpretation of the question.

Cancer Drugs Fund

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to introduce a Cancer Drug Fund, similar to the one in place in England.

(AQW 15625/11-15)

Mr Poots: No decision has been taken regarding the establishment of a Cancer Drugs Fund for Northern Ireland. Patients in Northern Ireland may access unapproved cancer drugs through the process of individual funding requests (IFR). IFRs are made on behalf of patients by their clinicians. The Health and Social Care Board has a process for considering those requests, details of which may be found at the following link:

<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/Protocol ECR and IFR arrangements.pdf>

Abortifacient Medications

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will consider introducing legislation regarding the monitoring of abortifacient medications, including a provision that only hospitals with access to neonatal units may use such medications and that all medical indications and gestations, where these medications are prescribed, be reported.

(AQW 15640/11-15)

Mr Poots: These drugs have a number of uses related to the care of pregnant women and it would not be medically appropriate to restrict their use to the facilities set out in the question.

I can confirm that I intend to introduce a system to record all terminations of pregnancy carried out in Northern Ireland.

Pregnancy-related, Life-saving Medical Treatment

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures he plans to put in place to ensure that only medical establishments with gynaecological and obstetric expertise, and maternity facilities, including access to a neonatal unit, may operate as places where pregnancy related, life saving, medical treatment is undertaken.

(AQW 15642/11-15)

Mr Poots: Pregnant women requiring life saving treatment or with a life threatening problem should be treated in facilities appropriate to the level of care they require. This treatment could be required at any time during their pregnancy and could be required as a result of a physical or mental health problem.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust: Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Team

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what are the working hours of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust's Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Team; (ii) which grade within the team makes the assessment on patient discharge; and (iii) what percentage of patients have their condition followed up by the Home Treatment team.

(AQW 15661/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is not possible to provide an Answer to the Question, since the Belfast Trust operates a number of Psychiatric Teams.

Hospital in Omagh: Mental Health Unit

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his position on the provision of a modern Mental Health Unit at the proposed new hospital in Omagh.

(AQW 15678/11-15)

Mr Poots: The proposals for service change arising from Transforming Your Care are set out in the public consultation document 'Transforming Your Care: Vision to Action'. No decisions have been taken yet and the Health and Social Care Board is seeking views and comments on the proposals contained in the document to inform the way forward.

Liverpool Care Pathway

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether hospitals are officially using the Liverpool Care Pathway; and, if so, whether they are doing so with both patient and family knowledge and with official consent.

(AQW 15705/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department published 'Living Matters:Dying Matters' a Strategy for Palliative and End of Life Care in Northern Ireland in March 2010. The Strategy recommends the use of improvement tools to improve the quality of care in the last few days of life. The Liverpool Care Pathway (LCP) which was developed by Marie Curie Cancer Care is such a tool. It is an established and respected tool that is recommended by NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) and it has been used in hospital care in Northern Ireland for a number of years.

The LCP is initiated by clinicians who are trained and competent to do so. The use of the LCP is discussed with patients, if appropriate, and with relatives/carers before use.

Liverpool Care Pathway

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there are guidelines governing the instigation of the Liverpool Care Pathway; and how instigation is being regulated and monitored.

(AQW 15706/11-15)

Mr Poots: 'Living Matters:Dying Matters' a Palliative and End of Life Care Strategy for adults in Northern Ireland which was launched in March 2010 recommends the use of validated improvement tools to improve the quality of care for people who are identified as being in the dying phase of their life.

The Liverpool Care Pathway (LCP) is a validated End of Life Improvement Tool developed by Marie Curie Cancer Care which has been adapted for implementation in Northern Ireland.

Quality Criteria have been defined for the uptake and use of the LCP in Northern Ireland following a series of clinical engagement workshops. These were disseminated to all HSC Trusts earlier this year by the Health & Social Care Board (HSCB)/Public Health Agency (PHA).

Monitoring is subject to bi-annual National Audit to demonstrate improvement in the Quality of Care at the end of a person's life. Audits were carried out in 2009 and 2011.

Dementia: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people in the North Down constituency have been diagnosed with dementia in each of the last five years.

(AQW 15746/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of patients newly diagnosed with dementia each year is not available; however, under the Quality & Outcomes Framework (QOF) of the General Medical Services contract, the total number of GP registered patients with dementia is recorded.

The number of patients on the dementia register of practices located in North Down constituency in each of the last five years is shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: QOF dementia register counts, North Down constituency, 2008 – 2012

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Number of GP registered patients with dementia in North Down constituency	714	715	768	832	887

Data Source: Payment Calculation and Analysis System (PCAS) as at National Prevalence Day. National Prevalence Day was changed from 14 February to 31 March from 2009 onwards to bring it into line with National QOF Achievement Day.

The number of patients on the dementia register in North Down constituency has been determined based on the location of the GP practices (GP postcodes) using Westminster Parliamentary Constituency 2008 boundaries. It should be noted that patients on the register may not reside in the constituency in which their practice is located.

Bangor Community Hospital: X-ray Department

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the x-ray department at Bangor Hospital will be opened again for weekend work.

(AQW 15749/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has no plans to change the current opening hours for X-ray services at Bangor Community Hospital.

Age UK Publication ‘Access all Ages’

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the findings in the Access All Ages report by Age UK that states that patients between 70 and 90 years old are victims of age discrimination and have disproportionate restrictions imposed on their care; and what assurances he can give that older people in Northern Ireland are not subject to age discrimination.

(AQW 15762/11-15)

Mr Poots: A patient's age will not disqualify them from receiving the healthcare they require.

Decisions taken by doctors in relation to medical treatment are clinical decisions and are determined by clinical factors which take account of an individual patient's condition and circumstances and consider the risks and benefits of particular treatments.

Diabetes

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what follow-up research is carried out on the information collected from patients who present at GP surgeries with diabetes and also report that they are feeling depressed.

(AQW 15763/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Research & Development (R&D) division of the Public Health Agency assists in setting research priorities through grant funding and commissioned research.

There has been no specific follow-up research carried out by the Department, the HSC Board or the Public Health Agency in relation to information collected from patients who present at GP surgeries with diabetes and also report that they are feeling depressed. The Public Health Agency have, however, funded a substantial number of research studies in diabetes.

The HSC Board performs a contract management role with GP Practices, as independent providers of General Medical Services, through a nationally agreed framework contract. Under this process, the HSCB quality assures practice based governance activity, through which, individual practices conduct analysis of their clinical practice based on clinical risk. As part of a clinical improvement model, all practices in NI receive feedback in relation to their achievement, relative to their peers. Where achievement levels are lowest, the HSCB visits relevant practices, assisting them with advice, and sharing examples of best practice, aimed at improving the overall quality of care delivered to patients.

European Working Time Directive

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what data exists that may allay fears that the European Time Directive, which restricts doctors' working hours, is having a disruptive effect on patient care.

(AQW 15764/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is the responsibility of each Trust to ensure that patient care is not disrupted through effective implementation of European Working Time Directive (EWTD) Legislation. This is achieved by designing appropriate work schedules and rotas for doctors, especially junior doctors, where compliance issues had previously existed.

Data and information is collected on Junior doctor hours worked and is reported on by Trusts to the HSC Board Liaison Group twice yearly to ensure compliance with EWTD. Latest data indicates that 82% of junior doctors are EWTD compliant (out of approximately 1800 junior doctors). The Health and Social Care Board continues to work closely with Trusts to take forward the targets for the Working Time Directive. It should be noted that while junior doctor hours have reduced, the number of

junior doctors in Northern Ireland has increased significantly over the past number of years, from 1200 in 1997 to more than 1800 in 2012, (a 52% increase over the period).

Soy Additives in Food

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that soya additives in food are recognised as allergens, what research has been carried out to identify the harmful effects on (i) infants; and (ii) adults.

(AQW 15765/11-15)

Mr Poots: Soy allergy is of particular public health importance because soy protein is widely used in processed foods and so is a source of hidden allergens and extreme vigilance is required to avoid them. These foods include processed meats, desserts, gravy and other pre-cooked meals.

Soy protein is an allergen, meaning that it can cause allergic reactions in sensitive people. This occurs more frequently in children than in adults. Approximately 0.4% of children are allergic to soy, making soy allergy about half as common as peanut allergy or some six times less common than allergy to cows' milk. By age ten, 70% of children have outgrown their allergy to soy and it is very rare in adults. Symptoms of the allergy can vary from very mild to severe.

As breast milk provides infants with all of the nutrients and immune factors they need for healthy growth and development, my Department recommends exclusive breastfeeding up to 6 months of age; with continued breastfeeding along with appropriate complementary foods up to two years of age or beyond. For infants diagnosed with allergy to cow's milk an alternative source of protein is required however soy protein formula should not be used for the first 6 months of life, primarily because of the risk that children who are allergic to cow's milk may also be allergic to soy. After 6 months of age, soy should only be used if clinical tests show that the child is not allergic to it even though soy protein formula may present a cheaper alternative than other replacements for cow's milk. While it may take some children several years to overcome their soy allergy, their general health expectation is favourable.

Further research into the impact of soy allergy is underway in many countries. Work is focussing on the patterns of occurrence of soy allergy particularly where dietary habits may be changing, into improving the accuracy of tests for diagnosing soy allergy and distinguishing it from allergy to other proteins, and into how best to manage the health of children with allergy.

The Food Standards Agency has commissioned research on Soya (although not allergen related) and its possible oestrogenic effects in humans. This research will improve the assessment of human health implications to enable the Agency to provide information to consumers. The research is due for completion in 2014.

The Government is very aware of the need to protect the health of consumers with food allergies. That is why the 14 food allergens of greatest public health concern, including Soya, are already required to be clearly declared on the labels of pre-packed foods

In addition, there will be a new requirement to provide allergy information for foods sold non pre-packed, including food supplied by the catering sector, coming into force in December 2014.

Adoption Applications

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many applications for approval to adopt were considered by the adoption panel of each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last five years; and how many were (i) approved; (ii) rejected; and (iii) remain outstanding.

(AQW 15768/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Figures regarding the numbers of completed adoption assessments and the outcomes over the previous two years are detailed in the table below.

Table 1: The Number of Approved and Rejected Adoption Assessments at Year Ending 31 March

	2011	2012
Approved Applications	88	113
Rejected Applications	4	4

Note: These figures have been obtained for Health and Social Care Board Delegated Statutory Functions/Corporate Parenting Returns and have not been validated by Community Information Branch of the DHSSPS.

Adoption Applications

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many applications have been deferred by the adoption panel of each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last five years.

(AQW 15769/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not centrally available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Fire and Rescue Service

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given what has now emerged about the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, whether his Department plans to apologise to the person who highlighted these issues in the first instance for his or her resultant sacking from the Northern Ireland Fire Authority in 2003.

(AQW 15782/11-15)

Mr Poots: Although some of the issues identified in the reports published on 16 October 2012 are clearly historic, I am not aware of any direct connection between the issues raised in the reports and the dismissal of a member of the Fire Authority Board in 2003. In the circumstances, therefore, I do not consider that an apology would be appropriate.

Biomass Heating Systems

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether feasibility studies have been conducted to assess the potential savings that could be achieved by switching buildings in his Department to biomass heating.

(AQW 15799/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) will be providing this information in relation to the accommodation occupied by my Department in Castle Buildings.

In regard to the Health, Social Care and Public Safety estate, feasibility studies for the use of biomass heating are undertaken for new buildings in line with the Departments policy for Sustainable Development and a number of biomass systems have been installed such as at the new South West Acute Hospital in Enniskillen and the Downe Hospital in Downpatrick.

For the existing estate, Health, Social Care and Public Safety organisations are encouraged as part of the Departments' carbon emission reduction initiative to consider the feasibility of the installation of biomass heating whenever the replacement of heating systems are being planned.

Bangor Health Centre

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans there are to expand Bangor Health Centre; and what is the timescale for such an expansion.

(AQW 15810/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust currently has no plans to expand Bangor Health Centre.

Car-clamping: Hospital Car Parks

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much revenue has been raised through car-clamping at (i) Antrim Area Hospital; and (ii) the Causeway Hospital, in each year since parking charges were introduced.

(AQW 15824/11-15)

Mr Poots: At Northern Health and Social Care Trust hospitals where vehicles are required to be clamped, this is carried out by a third party supplier. The Trust does not receive any income from fines collected and does not therefore benefit from any revenue from vehicle clamping. Clamping is used as a traffic management tool.

Car-clamping: Hospital Car Parks

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to where the proceeds from car-clamping at the (i) Antrim Area Hospital; and (ii) Causeway Hospital are distributed.

(AQW 15825/11-15)

Mr Poots: At Northern Health and Social Care Trust hospitals where vehicles are required to be clamped, this is carried out by a third party supplier. The Trust does not receive any income from fines collected and does not therefore benefit from any revenue from vehicle clamping. Clamping is used as a traffic management tool.

Car-clamping: Hospital Car Parks

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which front-line services have benefitted from the revenue raised from car-clamping at the (i) Antrim Area Hospital; and (ii) Causeway Hospital sites; and how much each service has received from this revenue in each year since parking charges were introduced.

(AQW 15826/11-15)

Mr Poots: At Northern Health and Social Care Trust hospitals where vehicles are required to be clamped, this is carried out by a third party supplier. The Trust does not receive any income from fines collected and does not therefore benefit from any revenue from vehicle clamping. Clamping is used as a traffic management tool.

Fire and Rescue Service

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will attempt to claw back the money paid to Fire and Rescue Service staff that was found to be outside the current pay structure.

(AQW 15827/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has been pursuing the issue of recovery of irregular payments made to senior non-uniformed staff in the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service in 2008. However, this is currently the subject of High Court proceedings in the case of one of the individuals concerned. The outcome of these proceedings will also inform the way forward regarding the potential for the recovery of the bonuses paid to uniformed officers, also in 2008, that were outside the current pay structure and also found to be irregular in a recent investigation prompted by whistle-blowing allegations.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust: Integrated Care Partnerships

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much transition money was allocated to the Northern Health and Social Care Trust for the setting up of integrated care partnerships; and whether this amount was re-negotiated to allow the funding to be used for purposes not directly connected to its original intent.

(AQW 15828/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department submitted an Invest to Save bid in respect of implementation costs of Transforming Your Care proposals in 2012/13. The bid included funding for the proposed development of Integrated Care Partnerships. The Minister of Finance and Personnel will be informing the Assembly of the outcome of the Invest to Save bids as part of his October monitoring round Statement. It is not appropriate to pre-empt my Executive colleague's statement to the Assembly.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust: Integrated Care Partnerships

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the transition money awarded to the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, for the setting up of integrated care partnerships, has been used to date.

(AQW 15829/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department submitted an Invest to Save bid in respect of implementation costs of Transforming Your Care proposals in 2012/13. The bid included funding for the proposed development of Integrated Care Partnerships. The Minister of Finance and Personnel will be informing the Assembly of the outcome of the Invest to Save bids as part of his October monitoring round Statement. It is not appropriate to pre-empt my Executive colleague's statement to the Assembly.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust: Integrated Care Partnerships

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that integrated care partnerships (ICP) are autonomous and in light of the fact that the Northern Health and Social Care Trust launched its ICP prior to the completion of his consultation period, what assurances can be given that ICPs will not be controlled or managed centrally by the Health Trusts.

(AQW 15830/11-15)

Mr Poots: Pending the outcome of the public consultation on the proposals emerging from Transforming Your Care, Integrated Care Partnerships (ICPs) are proposed to be collaborative networks of clinical professionals, care professionals and representatives from the independent, voluntary and community sector, responding to the needs of patients and clients, working to better coordinate care across specific care pathways. It is not intended that ICPs would be established as either autonomous or separate legal entities but that they would operate as a collaborative network of service providers within the existing HSC structures. It is possible that this role may evolve over the longer term.

I understand that no integrated care partnerships are as yet active in the Northern Trust area. However, pending the outcome of the consultation, the Northern Local Commissioning Group intends to work with GPs and the Northern Health & Social Care Trust to develop a number of ICPs in the locality.

Integrated Care Partnerships

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what arrangements are in place to ensure that the membership of integrated care partnerships include, at strategic level, the representatives of voluntary agencies, local government and community groups in addition to Health and Social Care professionals.

(AQW 15831/11-15)

Mr Poots: In line with the proposals in Transforming Your Care and subject to the outcome of the consultation process, it is envisaged that Integrated Care Partnerships (ICPs) will be established as collaborative networks, joining together the full range of health and social care services including family practitioners, community health and social care providers, hospital specialists and representatives from the independent and voluntary sectors. It is envisaged that an Integrated Care Partnership Committee, involving all participating organisations, would be established for each ICP. The precise composition of the Committee would be determined locally but it is envisaged that it would be multi-professional. It is anticipated that such strategic cross-sectoral co-ordination would help to facilitate the provision of high quality and sustainable services for all health and social care service users.

Primary and Secondary Care Sectors

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the transfer of some services from secondary to primary care, what arrangements are in place to ensure that both the care sectors work together as a team to provide a seamless service.

(AQW 15840/11-15)

Mr Poots: In my Statement to the Assembly on 9th October announcing the launch of the consultation on the proposals emerging from Transforming Your Care, I highlighted that a fundamental principle within TYC is the shift of service provision, moving treatment and care out of the hospital sector and into the community closer to people's homes. It will be important that health care professionals work together collaboratively to enable this shift to take place.

Pending the outcome of the consultation, a key proposed mechanism for ensuring that health and care professionals are able to work together to provide seamless care is the development of integrated care partnerships (ICPs). One key aim of ICPs would be to bring together health and social care professionals across the secondary, primary and community sectors to work together in collaborative networks to deliver a more completed range of services for people in their local communities. It is envisaged that ICPs would also offer opportunities for closer integration between the statutory sector and counterparts in the voluntary, community and independent sectors. Co-ordination between all these sectors of the health and social care system would help to support the provision of a seamless service for all health and social care service users.

Adoption Rights for Gay Couples

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much funding he has set aside to appeal the court decision on adoption rights for gay couples.

(AQW 15844/11-15)

Mr Poots: Costs associated with an appeal would be met from the central Departmental legal budget.

Winter Fuel Payments: Cancer Patients

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many cancer patients benefited from the Winter Fuel Payments in 2011/12.

(AQW 15872/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Business Services Organisation made 6,900 payments on behalf of my Department to eligible cancer patients during the winter of 2011/12. These patients benefitted from a one-off NI Executive funded Fuel Allowance Initiative under the Social Protection Fund.

Dental Contracts

Mrs Dobson asked Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 15051/11-15, to detail the timescale for a new dental contract; and to explain the initial proposals to change the system for patient charges.

(AQW 15909/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department and the Health and Social Care Board are working to finalise the legislative framework which would allow the new dental contract arrangements to be piloted. Officials from my Department and the Health and Social Care Board continue to engage with local representatives of the British Dental Association on the development of the new contracts for General Dental Services, Oral Surgery and Orthodontics. I anticipate that the pilot of the new oral surgery contract would begin in spring 2013. Once completed, the pilots of the new contract arrangements would be reviewed and following this, my Department would bring forward the regulations necessary to implement new dental contracts.

It is proposed that under the new contracts, patients would be charged depending on which band their treatment falls into. We will learn from the experiences in England and Wales of using a banded system to develop the most appropriate model for Northern Ireland. The impact of any new charging mechanism would be tested during the pilots.

Health Service Treatment: Eligibility

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether a UK citizen, who is residing in the Republic of Ireland, can avail of free Health Service treatment if they continue to pay National Insurance contributions.

(AQW 16037/11-15)

Mr Poots: As the Health Service is primarily for the benefit of people who live in Northern Ireland eligibility to publicly funded health care services is dependent on whether a person can demonstrate that they are resident here legally and on a settled basis. Entitlement is not based upon a person's nationality or the payment of insurance contributions or taxes.

Entitlement to publicly funded health care services for a person who is residing in the Republic of Ireland (RoI) and visiting Northern Ireland is considered on an individual basis as each case can present some unique and complex issues. For example persons from the RoI on a temporary visit can avail of free "immediately necessary" treatment under the European Health Insurance Card scheme. There are also additional categories of person who may be exempt from charges because

they satisfy one of the exemptions laid down in legislation. Separate rules apply to cross border workers who are entitled automatically to access health services here similar to Northern Ireland residents.

The Business Services Organization and HSC Trusts should consider in accordance with the current legislation whether someone can satisfy an exemption from charges. Anyone from the RoI or indeed outside NI who does not satisfy an exemption from health charges under current legislation will be expected to pay for their treatment.

Altnagelvin Area Hospital

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which services, currently delivered in Altnagelvin Hospital, are expected to move to Belfast within the next ten years.

(AQW 16102/11-15)

Mr Poots: The decision on where services are most appropriately delivered to meet the needs of any population is taken by the Health and Social Care Board in its role as Commissioner of health services. It is not possible to identify, at this time, what future proposals the Board may make concerning the movement and location of services.

Department of Justice

Patricia Young

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the cost, to date, of the first and second listings of the case involving Patricia Young at Lisburn Magistrates Court, including Legal Aid, broken down by (a) law firm/solicitor; and (b) counsel; and (ii) the estimated cost of the case involving Patricia Young at the Court of Appeal on 21 September 2012.

(AQW 15344/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The estimated cost of the initial proceedings involving Patricia Young at Lisburn Magistrates' Court is outlined in the table below.

Cost Type	Estimated Cost
Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) Prosecution	£1,037
Public Prosecution Service of Northern Ireland (PPS) Prosecution	£150
Probation Board for Northern Ireland	£208
Defence (Legal Aid Costs Initial Case) Law Firm/Solicitor	£708
Defence (Legal Aid Costs Initial Case) Counsel	£550
Court (Judiciary and Staff Costs)	£233
Facilities (e.g. Courtroom Accommodation)	£90
Total	£2,976

The second case at Lisburn Magistrates' Court has not yet concluded. The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission (NILSC) has confirmed that it is not possible to provide an estimate of legal aid costs as these are dependant on case outcome.

The PPS has identified billed costs to date of approximately £180 although the invoice for Junior Counsel has not yet been received. Adjournment hearings have been attended by PPS prosecutors and there has not been any cost over and above their PPS salary costs.

The PSNI and the Probation Board have confirmed that there are no additional costs associated with the second set of proceedings. The estimated court and judicial costs to date associated with the second case at Lisburn Magistrates Court are £1,638.

The total estimated costs for the judicial review and appeal proceedings are not yet available. The court and judicial costs of both sets of proceedings are estimated to be £5,173.

The PPS has identified billed costs and fees to date of approximately £10,600 in respect of the judicial review proceedings. Costs are not yet available for the appeal.

Sex Offenders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of registered sex offenders, including those serving a custodial sentence, broken down by category of sex offender; and (ii) whether each sex offender is in (a) custody; (b) residing in the community; (c) residing in alternative and/or supervised accommodation; or (d) unlawfully at large.

(AQW 15472/11-15)

Mr Ford: On 18 October 2012 there were 1247 offenders subject to notification under Section 80 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Under the PPANI arrangements, 121 were risk managed on a multi agency basis, 109 at category 2 level of risk and 12 at category 3. The remainder were assessed as not requiring multi agency risk management (category 1), or were awaiting assessment.

- (ii) (a) 271 of these were in custody on that date
- (b) 976 were residing in the community
- (c) 41 were in approved premises
- (d) 1 is wanted for offences of non compliance with notification and breach of probation.

Prisons: CCTV Surveillance

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 14270/11-15, (i) why his answer does not align with the statement of the Prisoner Ombudsman contained in the report into the death in custody of Colin Bell 'that all monitoring equipment is subject to the Regulation of the Investigatory Powers Act 2000 in relation to maintaining records of surveillance'; and (ii) which sections of the Act permit (a) the Ombudsman and the Northern Ireland Prison Service to access CCTV and examine CCTV footage prior to the date of the suicide of prisoners; (b) the Northern Ireland Prison Service to use such footage in disciplinary investigations; and (c) the release of any such recorded material to the media.

(AQW 15476/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) CCTV equipment in a prisoner's cell for the purpose of constant monitoring for his own safety is specifically mentioned in RIPA as not being covert and therefore not covered under the act. The monitoring equipment is therefore compliant with RIPA.
- (ii) (a) The access of CCTV footage by the Ombudsman in relation to a death in custody is not incompatible with the purposes for which the DOJ is registered for the processing of personal information under the Data Protection Act. NIPS and its staff have an obligation under Prison Rules to provide assistance to the Ombudsman in relation to investigations.
- (b) The use of such footage in disciplinary proceedings is also compatible with the Department's registration under the Data Protection Act.
- (c) NIPS does not release CCTV footage to the media unless there is a substantial public interest to do so and any such release would be rigorously tested for compliance with the Data Protection Act.

Local Community Groups: Funding

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what financial assistance is available from his Department for local community groups. **(AQW 15510/11-15)**

Mr Ford: Across the Department of Justice a wide range of work is being undertaken with community groups to address criminal justice and community safety related issues.

In particular the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships in each of the 26 Council areas will have a pivotal role in developing partnership working at a local level and in supporting communities in identifying solutions to issues of local concern.

In conjunction with the Northern Ireland Policing Board, £5.2 million has been made available to the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships for this financial year to address local community safety issues. In addition, the Priority Youth Intervention programme, which also addresses anti-social behaviour, allocates £200,000 per year to the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships.

The Youth Justice Agency Small Grants Scheme offers local community groups the chance to apply for one off funding. The funding is capped at £1,500 and must be spent on items such as equipment or furniture.

Legal Aid: Case Number 12/079775

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the level of Legal Aid granted to (a) Seamus Finucane; (b) Agnes McCrory; (c) Martin Morris; (d) Padraic Wilson; and (e) Briege Wright in case no. 12/079775 at Belfast Magistrates Court, broken down by legal firm and counsel; and (ii) for estimate of the total cost of Legal Aid that will be granted to each defendant.

(AQW 15562/11-15)

Mr Ford: With the exception of Padraic Wilson, who is not legally aided, all the defendants have had legal aid granted for representation by solicitor in the Magistrates' Court. Martin Morris' case has also been certified for representation by counsel.

No bills have been submitted at this stage and it is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of the total cost at this early stage in proceedings.

Preliminary Enquiries

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 14447/41-15, given the low statistics provided, whether he intends to abolish the need for preliminary inquiries and replace them with a more effective procedure in respect of time and cost. (AQW 15563/11-15)

Mr Ford: I advised Ministerial colleagues at the Executive meeting on 4 October that I intend to legislate in the “Faster, Fairer Justice” Bill to reform the committal process. The Bill will abolish the use of oral evidence and the cross-examination of witnesses at committal and provide for the direct transfer of certain cases to the Crown Court, without the need for a preliminary inquiry.

Thomas Ward

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice when he intends to publish the findings of the serious case review into the handling of sex offender Thomas Ward. (AQW 15564/11-15)

Mr Ford: I understand that agency reviews of this case were presented to the September meeting of the PPANI Strategic Management Board (SMB) and decisions on publication are under consideration by the agencies, with due regard to data protection and other sensitivities.

Prostitution

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 12907/11-15, to detail the number of convictions for the offence, broken down by court division, since the law was changed making it an offence to engage the services of a prostitute who has been coerced or forced. (AQW 15565/11-15)

Mr Ford: The offence referred to is “paying for sexual services of a prostitute subjected to force etc” under Article 64A of the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 and came into force in 2009. There were no convictions for the offence in 2009 (the latest year for which figures are currently available).

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Prisoners: Home Addresses

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice what are the next two urban areas of population, beyond the 12 mile radius of Belfast, for which the highest number of prisoners provided their home address. (AQW 15611/11-15)

Mr Ford: Londonderry and Craigavon are the two urban areas of population outside a 12 mile radius of Belfast which the greatest number of prisoners have provided as their home address.

Auctioned Items

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Justice to detail the items which his Department has disposed of at auctions in (i) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12, including the auction value of each item. (AQW 15619/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice (DOJ) has disposed of items at auctions within the 2010/11 and 2011/12 financial year. The DOJ has taken receipt of £837,619.00 and £218,090.10 respectively.

The detail of the items disposed of at auctions is outlined in the attached Annex.

Annex

PSNI Response

Sum of £k Financial Year	Type	Total
2010/11	Clothing & Textiles	53
2010/11	Other Misc Items	0
	Sale of Property	675
	Vehicles	68
2010/11 Total		797

Sum of £k Financial Year	Type	Total
2011/12	Clothing & Textiles	14
	Other Misc Items	9
	Sale of Property	54
	Vehicles	110
2011/12 Total		187
Grand Total		984

Northern Ireland Prison Service

Fleet Items For Auction on 10/4/2010

Reg No	Date Reg	Description	Mileage	Asset No	Location	Price
DNZ2210	1/7/02	LDV 400 Convoy TD Minibus		01074	Magilligan	£763.75
ENZ1427	1/3/03	Ford Transit Minibus		01131	Magilligan	£1,703.75
P290PBA	16/6/97	LDV 400 Convoy Box Van & T/lift		01184	Magilligan	£470.00
BKZ3594	23/3/99	Vauxhall Combo Merit 1.7D		1193/ 1194	Millisle	£705.00
DCZ1607	7/1/00	Renault Master T35 2.8TDI MWB		01206	Maghaberry	£587.50
CKZ9578	11/1/00	Iveco 75E15 Custodial Vehicle		01285	Maghaberry	£822.50
W668CHJ	25/4/00	Iveco 65E15 Custodial Vehicle		01299	Maghaberry	£940.00
WDZ7819	23/6/97	Iveco Box Lorry & T/lift		02240	Maghaberry	£940.00
YBZ9735	2/10/00	Renault Master T35 2.5D LWB		06876	Magilligan	£176.25
TCZ5168	4/9/03	Ford Mondeo 2.0LX TD Estate	103,000	07379	Hydebank	£1,300.00
N/A	N/A	Mulcher		01012	Hydebank	£235.00
N/A	N/A	Hayter 324 ride on mower			Maghaberry	£1,997.50
N/A	N/A	Vicon Fertiliser spreader		01191	Hydebank	£146.88
N/A	N/A	Vicon Fertiliser spreader		07319	Hydebank	£58.75
N/A	N/A	Engine Driven Sweeper			Hydebank	£47.00
N/A	N/A	Cement Mixer			Hydebank	£205.63
N/A	N/A	Gang Mower			Hydebank	£176.25
N/A	N/A	Bertoud Sprayer			Hydebank	£352.50
N/A	N/A	Cement Mixer			Hydebank	£264.38
N/A	N/A	Condor Mower			Magilligan	£205.63
N/A	N/A	Kubota G3 ride on mower			Magilligan	£528.75
					Sub Total	£12,627.02
					Less Fees	£493.50
					Auction Total	£12,133.52

Fleet Items For Auction on 19/3/2011

Reg No	Date Reg	Description	Mileage	Asset No	Location	Price
DCZ6806	9/2/00	Iveco 75E15 custodial		01293	Maghaberry	£1,200.00
DCZ6807	9/2/00	Iveco 75E15 custodial		01297	Maghaberry	£1,920.00
FJZ4814	1/4/03	LDV 400 Convoy LWB TD Cell van		01150	Maghaberry	£840.00
FJZ4815	1/4/03	LDV 400 Convoy LWB TD Cell van		01151	Maghaberry	£870.00
HCZ2973	30/11/00	Citroen Relay		01172	Maghaberry	£1,200.00
MCZ7993	19/3/02	Citroen Berlingo 1.9d 600		01030	Millisle	£1,680.00
VBZ5726	1/4/99	Mercedes Minibus		01168	Maghaberry	£3,960.00
W252DAR	19/7/00	Iveco 65E Custodial		01230	Maghaberry	£1,080.00
W604BPU	1/3/00	Iveco 65E Custodial		01298	Maghaberry	£900.00
N/A		Kawasaki KVF360 Quad		4925	Maghaberry	£840.00
N/A		Compact 100/10 power wash		04832	Maghaberry	£66.00
N/A		John Deere 355D		01009	Hydebank	£1,560.00
N/A		John Deere 355D		01010	Maghaberry	£600.00
N/A		Etesia		01145	Hydebank	£510.00
					Sub Total	£17,226.00
					Less Fees	£374.40
					Auction Total	£16,851.60
					Total for Year	£28,985.12

Fleet Items For Auction on 25/6/2011

Reg No	Date Reg	Description	Mileage	Asset No	Location	Price
CEZ3743	14/3/05	Ford Mondeo 2.0 LX TD Estate	85,300	01257	Maghaberry	£1,700.00
CHZ9686	1/5/02	Isuzu NQR70 Library Van	64,000	-	Magilligan	£1,800.00
CKZ9586	11/10/00	Iveco 75E15 Custodial	270,000Km	01294	Maghaberry	£930.00
ENZ1428	1/3/03	Ford Transit 15 Seat Minibus	157,211	01130	Maghaberry	£1,560.00
FCZ7159	12/9/00	LDV 400 Convoy TD LWB	11,310	06864	Magilligan	£480.00
FJZ4813	1/4/03	LDV 400 Convoy TD LWB Minibus	83,510	01147	Magilligan	£840.00
HKZ4812	26/4/02	Iveco 75E17 Custodial	225,000Km	01029	Maghaberry	£1,710.00
JKZ3416	25/3/03	Iveco 50C13 Custodial	94,000Km	01146	Maghaberry	£1,800.00
SCZ3379	1/4/03	Vauxhall Movano DTI 3500 MWB	140,000	01142	Maghaberry	£360.00
UCZ3028	24/9/03	Ford Transit 15 Seat Minibus	65,000	04979	Maghaberry	£1,800.00
YJ04UAU	20/5/04	LDV 400 Convoy TD LWB Minibus	86,575	06818	Magilligan	£1,200.00
N/A		Hyster Forklift		-	Maghaberry	£600.00
N/A		Kalmar Diesel Forklift		06670	Magilligan	£2,200.00
N/A		Matbro electric forklift		-	Magilligan	£720.00
N/A		Tractor Trailer		01313	Maghaberry	£216.00

Reg No	Date Reg	Description	Mileage	Asset No	Location	Price
N/A		Tractor Trailer		-	Maghaberry	£240.00
N/A		Sisis Turf Spike		-	Maghaberry	£108.00
N/A		Ransomes Rotasport Mower		-	Maghaberry	£216.00
N/A		Surface Rake		-	Maghaberry	£70.00
						£18,550.00

Date	Item	Price	Auction House	Comments
10.4.2010	Condor Mower	£ 175.00	Carryduff Auctions	
10.4.2010	Kubota G3 Ride on Mower	£ 450.00	Carryduff Auctions	
10.4.2010	Gang Mower	£ 150.00	Carryduff Auctions	
10.4.2010	Hayter Ride On Mower	£1,700.00	Carryduff Auctions	
10.4.2010	Mulcher	£ 200.00	Carryduff Auctions	
10.4.2010	Fertiliser Spreader	£ 125.00	Carryduff Auctions	
10.4.2010	Fertiliser Spreader	£ 50.00	Carryduff Auctions	
10.4.2010	Engine Driven Sweeper	£ 40.00	Carryduff Auctions	
10.4.2010	Bertoud Sprayer	£ 300.00	Carryduff Auctions	
10.4.2010	Green Cement Mixer	£ 175.00	Carryduff Auctions	
10.4.2010	Yellow Cement Mixer	£ 225.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	Red Electric Mixer	£ 20.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	Yellow Diesel Mixer	£ 100.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	Pallet of Scaffolding	£ 25.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	Blast Furnace	£ 15.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	Petrol Driven Compactor	£ 10.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	Transtig Welder	£ 50.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	Evenwood Morticer	£ 20.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	Murex Trades mig Welder	£ 80.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	Alico Compactor	£ 20.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	Volt Transformer	£ 5.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	Strartrite Pillar Drill	£ 70.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	Quasi Arc Welder	£ 10.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	Cold Cut off Saw	£ 375.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	Planer Thicnesser	£ 300.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	Wadkin Double Spindle Buffer	£ 10.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	Cupper Concrete Saw	£ 40.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	Cloth Bandsaw	£ 20.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	2 Singer Sewing Machines	£ 17.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	2 Brother Sewing Machines	£ 18.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	Garment Material	£ 20.00	Carryduff Auctions	

Date	Item	Price	Auction House	Comments
6.6.2010	Crefco Unifold Pan Folder	£ 700.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	Edwards True Cut Guillotine	£ 525.00	Carryduff Auctions	
6.6.2010	6- Concrete Vibrating Plate	£ 20.00	Carryduff Auctions	
19.6.2010	Wadkin Mortiser	£ 30.00	Carryduff Auctions	
19.6.2010	Large Dust Extractor	£ 20.00	Carryduff Auctions	
19.6.2010	Chubb Safe	£ 20.00	Carryduff Auctions	
19.6.2010	Smith Belt Sander	£ 10.00	Carryduff Auctions	
19.6.2010	Wilson Band Saw	£ 10.00	Carryduff Auctions	
19.6.2010	Small Dust Extractor	£ 10.00	Carryduff Auctions	
19.6.2010	Dominion Double Grinder	£incl. in above	Carryduff Auctions	
19.6.2010	Wadkin Table Saw	£ 20.00	Carryduff Auctions	
19.6.2010	2 Green Gates	£ 65.00	Carryduff Auctions	
19.6.2010	Murex Tradesmig Welder	£ 95.00	Carryduff Auctions	
19.6.2010	Murex Tradesmig Welder	£ 95.00	Carryduff Auctions	
2.10.2010	Bell and Howell Reel Projector	£ 6.00	Carryduff Auctions	
2.10.2010	Pradolux Carousel Projector	£ 12.00	Carryduff Auctions	
2.10.2010	Polaroid ID-4 System	£ 10.00	Carryduff Auctions	
2.10.2010	Power Pack	£ incl above	Carryduff Auctions	
2.10.2010	Panasonic Portable Video Cassette Recorder	£ 3.00	Carryduff Auctions	
2.10.2010	Sony Portable Video Cassette Recorder	£incl. above	Carryduff Auctions	
19 March 2011	Compact Power Washer	£ 55.00	Wilsons Auctions	
19 March 2011	Kawasaki Quad	£ 700.00	Wilsons Auctions	
19 March 2011	John Deere Ride On Mower	£ 500.00	Wilsons Auctions	
19 March 2011	John Deere Ride On Mower	£1300.00	Wilsons Auctions	
19 March 2011	Etesia gas powered Ride on Mower	£ 425.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Panasonic Movie Camera	£ 8.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Seaward LT 1000	£ 22.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Triple Pole Test Probe	£ 1.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Food Mixer	£ 10.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Food Mixer	£ 10.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Food Mixer	£ 10.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Food Slicer	£ 22.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Food Slicer	£ 22.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Food Slicer	£ 22.00	Wilsons Auctions	

Date	Item	Price	Auction House	Comments
9 July 2011	Floor Machine	£ 40.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Dental Equipment	£ 5.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Avenger 1hp Spray Finder	£ 45.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Pallet Truck	£ 10.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Welder (541)	£ 18.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Welder (542)	£ 18.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Generator Engine Clarke Markon	£ 15.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Harness	£ 15.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Harness	£ 15.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	2 Caulking Guns	£ 2.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Pop Rivet Gun	£ 1.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	2 Fast Brolly Guns and 4 Screwdrivers	£ 6.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Extension Lead	£ 10.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Extension Lead	£ 10.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	2 lb Hammer	£ 1.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Wood Lathe	£ 140.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	110 Litre Compressor	£ 100.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Waste Bailer	£ 60.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Soot Atlas Mini Crane	£ 40.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Bench Drill	£ 100.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Generator (Briggs and Stratton)	£ 20.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Clarke Battery Charger	£ 55.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Oil Drainer	£ 210.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Drying Oven	£ 10.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Spindle Moulder	£ 120.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Air Compressor	£ 90.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Air Compressor	£ 90.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Air Compressor	£ 90.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Metal Shaper	£ 280.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Exel Lathe	£ 900.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Surface Grinder	£ 900.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Wooden Ladders x 16	£ 128.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Wooden Treasles	£ 8.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Scaffolding	£ 60.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Aluminium Scaffold Tower	£ 170.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Treadmill 2112 X 4	£ 40.00	Wilsons Auctions	
9 July 2011	Treadmill 2113 x 2	£ 20.00	Wilsons Auctions	

Date	Item	Price	Auction House	Comments
6 Aug 2011	Makita Drill and Batteriesx 3	£ 12.00	Wilson's Auctions	
6 Aug 2011	Kane May Temperature Recorder (96)	£ 12.00	Wilson's Auctions	
6 Aug 2011	Sealey 210 Welder	£ 8.00	Wilson's Auctions	
6 Aug 2011	Sprint 140 Arc Welder	£ 8.00	Wilson's Auctions	
6 Aug 2011	Oxford Oil Filled Welder	£ 10.00	Wilson's Auctions	
6 Aug 2011	Manual Shear	£ 4.00	Wilson's Auctions	
6 Aug 2011	D5 Baddeley Welder Generator	£ 135.00	Wilson's Auctions	
6 Aug 2011	Slingsby Manual Pallet Stacker	£ 25.00	Wilson's Auctions	
6 Aug 2011	Wadkin Burscreen Table Saw	£ 55.00	Wilson's Auctions	
6 Aug 2011	Access Zipper FM 30 Access Boom	£ 500.00	Wilson's Auctions	
6 Aug 2011	Slingsby Caged Trolley Trailer	£ 30.00	Wilson's Auctions	
6 Aug 2011	Universal Low Pull Down Machine	£ 80.00	Wilson's Auctions	
6 Aug 2011	Universal Low Pull Down Machine	£ 70.00	Wilson's Auctions	
6 Aug 2011	Universal Bench Press Machine	£ 60.00	Wilson's Auctions	
6 Aug 2011	Singer Professional Sewing Machine	£ 25.00	Wilson's Auctions	
10 Sept 2011	Jet 700 Running Machine	£ 110.00	Wilson's Auctions	
10 Sept 2011	Shovels	£ 1.00	Wilson's Auctions	
1 Oct 2011	D5 Baddeley Welder Generator	£ 40.00	Wilson's Auctions	
1 Oct 2011	Dentist Chair	£ 15.00	Wilson's Auctions	
3 Dec 2011	Bertos Emersion Boiler	£ 225.00	Wilson's Auctions	
Total for 2010/11 (Financial Year)		£ 9446.00		
Total for 2011/12 (Financial Year)		£ 5394.00		
Total For Both 2010/11 & 2011/12		£14,840.00		

Probation Board

Date	Item	Price	Auction House	Comments
10/04/10	Filing Cabinet	2.00	Carryduff Auctions	
10/04/10	Filing Cabinet	2.00	Carryduff Auctions	
24/04/10	2 operators chairs	7.00	Carryduff Auctions	
24/04/10	2 office table (right hand)	2.00	Carryduff Auctions	
24/04/10	4 x filing cabinets	28.00	Carryduff Auctions	
08/05/10	2 x fax machines	4.00	Carryduff Auctions	
05/06/10	2x filing Cabinets	20.00	Carryduff Auctions	
05/06/10	Electric Cooker/ dish washer	2.00	Carryduff Auctions	
05/06/10	Paper shredder/ 2 operators chairs	2.00	Carryduff Auctions	
05/06/10	Pair framed prints	2.00	Carryduff Auctions	
05/06/10	Shredder	2.00	Carryduff Auctions	
19/06/10	2x pedestals	4.00	Carryduff Auctions	
19/06/10	2 x chairs + desk with extention	4.00	Carryduff Auctions	

Date	Item	Price	Auction House	Comments
19/06/10	Lateral cupboard	14.00	Carryduff Auctions	
19/06/10	Shredder	4.00	Carryduff Auctions	
19/06/10	5 x shredder	5.00	Carryduff Auctions	
19/06/10	Lateral cupboard	17.00	Carryduff Auctions	
19/06/10	Filing cabinet x 3	15.00	Carryduff Auctions	
19/06/10	Filing cabinet x 1	7.00	Carryduff Auctions	
03/07/10	Fax machine	1.00	Carryduff Auctions	
03/07/10	TV (Video combie)	1.00	Carryduff Auctions	
03/07/10	Shredder	3.00	Carryduff Auctions	
03/07/10	2 x filing cabinet	10.00	Carryduff Auctions	
03/07/10	1 x filing cabinet	12.00	Carryduff Auctions	
03/07/10	2 x filing cabinet	20.00	Carryduff Auctions	
03/07/10	1 x filing cabinet	12.00	Carryduff Auctions	
24/07/10	Genicom printer on stand	5.00	Carryduff Auctions	
24/07/10	3 x Rexel shredder	15.00	Carryduff Auctions	
24/07/10	2 x 4drawer filing cabinet	40.00	Carryduff Auctions	
24/07/10	Fellows C120c shredder	27.00	Carryduff Auctions	
24/07/10	Intimus 390 shredder	14.00	Carryduff Auctions	
24/07/10	Shredder	7.00	Carryduff Auctions	
21/08/10	2 x box of leads	20.00	Carryduff Auctions	
21/08/10	Dell Power Edge, black diamond TV, 2 x security boxes	5.00	Carryduff Auctions	
21/08/10	UPS rack mounted item, box of computer parts, TV Stand, Compaq K VM	5.00	Carryduff Auctions	
21/08/10	CCTV Monitor	2.00	Carryduff Auctions	
21/08/10	DVD player	6.00	Carryduff Auctions	
21/08/10	4 x printers	8.00	Carryduff Auctions	
21/08/10	Panasonic Hoover	15.00	Carryduff Auctions	
21/08/10	4 no Compaq DC 380's servers	10.00	Carryduff Auctions	
21/08/10	3 no Compaq NL370 Servers	10.00	Carryduff Auctions	
21/08/10	3 x Panasonic M7 Cameras	92.00	Carryduff Auctions	
21/08/10	Elite Principal Projector	10.00	Carryduff Auctions	
21/08/10	2 x food warmers	4.00	Carryduff Auctions	
18/09/10	Rexel 3000 Auto shredder	16.00	Carryduff Auctions	
18/09/10	Rexel 1350 shredder	32.00	Carryduff Auctions	
18/09/10	Rexel 4000 shredder	32.00	Carryduff Auctions	
18/09/10	Rexel 4000 shredder	32.00	Carryduff Auctions	
18/09/10	3 drive units	1.00	Carryduff Auctions	

Date	Item	Price	Auction House	Comments
18/09/10	2 x Compaq server cabinets	40.00	Carryduff Auctions	
04/09/10	Tape player	4.00	Carryduff Auctions	
04/09/10	Box of hard drive cartridges	2.00	Carryduff Auctions	
04/09/10	2 x battery APC	16.00	Carryduff Auctions	
04/09/10	2 x printers	1.00	Carryduff Auctions	
13/11/10	Suite of office furniture	12.00	Carryduff Auctions	
13/11/10	3 x 15 drawer card/index cabinet	78.00	Carryduff Auctions	
27/11/10	Compaq server cabinet	5.00	Carryduff Auctions	
11/12/10	Pedestal	12.00	Carryduff Auctions	
11/12/10	Phones etc	2.00	Carryduff Auctions	
11/12/10	2 x DVD players	12.00	Carryduff Auctions	
11/12/10	2 drawer filing cabinet	5.00	Carryduff Auctions	
11/12/10	Cupboard	10.00	Carryduff Auctions	
11/12/10	3 x filing cabinets	15.00	Carryduff Auctions	
11/12/10	2 x bookcase	4.00	Carryduff Auctions	
11/12/10	Pedestal	12.00	Carryduff Auctions	
15/01/11	Shredder	2.00	Belfast City Auctions	
15/01/11	Compaq server unit	2.00	Belfast City Auctions	
29/01/11	Fax machine	2.00	Belfast City Auctions	
12/02/11	Shredder	2.00	Belfast City Auctions	
12/02/11	3 foot rests. 2 screens	1.00	Belfast City Auctions	
12/02/11	3 desk boxes and binders, keyboard	4.00	Belfast City Auctions	
12/02/11	A4 cutter	1.00	Belfast City Auctions	
12/02/11	Electric Heater	2.00	Belfast City Auctions	
12/02/11	PC Mouse	1.00	Belfast City Auctions	
12/02/11	TCM 939 Tape Recorder	1.00	Belfast City Auctions	
12/02/11	Rexel Compact	2.00	Belfast City Auctions	
12/02/11	Paper Holder	1.00	Belfast City Auctions	
12/02/11	Shelf of Stationery x4	8.00	Belfast City Auctions	
12/02/11	Cabinet	12.00	Belfast City Auctions	
12/02/11	6 office tables	5.00	Belfast City Auctions	
12/02/11	Cabinet of stationery	2.00	Belfast City Auctions	
12/02/11	3 tripods	15.00	Belfast City Auctions	
12/02/11	2 desk fans	12.00	Belfast City Auctions	
12/02/11	2delux coffee tables plus other lots	6.00	Belfast City Auctions	
12/02/11	2 x filing cabinets	24.00	Belfast City Auctions	
12/02/11	Swivel chair	2.00	Belfast City Auctions	
12/02/11	Box lot printer cartridges	10.00	Belfast City Auctions	

Date	Item	Price	Auction House	Comments
Total for 2010/11 FY		957.00 gross	Charges 216.44	740.56 net
28/05/11	25 x laptop bags	10.00	Belfast City Auctions	
28/05/11	Qty of cards and toasty maker plus 2 fire blankets	1.00	Belfast City Auctions	
28/05/11	Copy holder and cash box plus cartridges etc	1.00	Belfast City Auctions	
28/05/11	Trolley and sound system	90.00	Belfast City Auctions	
28/05/11	Set of ladders	30.00	Belfast City Auctions	
28/05/11	Stationery cabinet	7.00	Belfast City Auctions	
28/05/11	3 flower pots	40.00	Belfast City Auctions	
28/05/11	Qty of paper etc plus 2 sleeping bags	2.00	Belfast City Auctions	
28/05/11	Projector in case	2.00	Belfast City Auctions	
28/05/11	Shelf in bag	1.00	Belfast City Auctions	
28/05/11	5 x Pair of boots	20.00	Belfast City Auctions	
28/05/11	Camcorder	2.00	Belfast City Auctions	
28/05/11	Hat and coat stand	2.00	Belfast City Auctions	
Total 2011/12		208.00 gross	Charges 37.90	170.10 net
Total for 2010/11 (Financial Year)	£957.00 gross	Less charges of £216.44	Total £740.56 net	
Total for 2011/12 (Financial Year)	£208.00 gross	Less charges of £37.90	Total £170.10 net	
TOTAL FOR BOTH 2010/11 & 2011/12	£1165.00	£254.34	Total £910.66 net	

Youth Justice Agency

Reg No	Reg Date	Description	Disposal Date	Price
MCZ 3809	1/4/02	Ford Transit Mini Bus	January 11	£1,428
SCZ 3487	1/4/03	Ford Transit	June 11	£1,512
MKZ 1135	1/3/04	Ford Galaxy	October 11	£2,204
MKZ 1136	1/3/04	Ford Galaxy	October 11	£2,204
RCZ 5419	1/3/04	Renault Master Van	January 12	£1,056

Drugs: Mandatory Testing

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 14744/11-15, in light of the level of aggression and violence of intoxicated people arrested and charged for public order offences, for his assessment of the benefits of introducing mandatory drugs testing as illegal drug use could affect sentencing.

(AQW 15627/11-15)

Mr Ford: As there are currently no plans to introduce mandatory drug testing, no assessment of the benefits of such an approach has been undertaken.

Prison Service: Professional Standards Unit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 8725/11-15, (i) for an update on the status of the Professional Standards Unit; (ii) how, in practical terms, he intends to improve fairness, transparency and efficiency in processing disciplinary investigations, hearings and appeals; (iii) whether he can offer an assurance that the Unit will operate confidentially and independently of other branches and departments within the prison estate to ensure that there is no perception or likelihood of undue influence or interference being exerted in the discipline process.

(AQW 15631/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) is currently in consultations with Trade Union partners regarding how the proposed new disciplinary system for prison grade staff will function. It is planned that the new Professional Standards Unit will become operational as soon as possible after this consultation process is finished.

Until the consultation process has been completed it is not possible to comment in detail on how the new disciplinary system will work in practice. I can however assure the Member that the Unit will operate confidentially and that interference or undue influence will not be exercised on those working within the Unit.

Offender Levy

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 14311/11-15, (i) whether any difficulties have been identified in the payment of the Offender Levy, including offender refusal or reluctance to make payment; unknown whereabouts of the offender and the offender appealing the conviction; and (ii) the level of Offender Levy outstanding.

(AQW 15637/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Offender Levy was introduced on 6 June 2012 and is not applied to cases retrospectively. This means that it will take a period of time before sufficient qualifying cases can progress through the system, to allow significant data in these areas to be obtained.

A formal evaluation to assess the operation of the Levy will be undertaken once the system has had adequate time to bed in, to ensure that the evaluation is as meaningful as possible. In the interim period, relevant criminal justice agencies will continue to monitor the operation of the levy and address any implementation issues that may arise.

Abortion: Allegations of Illegality

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department intends to have dedicated specialised personnel, with the appropriate powers, to deal with allegations of illegal abortion.

(AQW 15666/11-15)

Mr Ford: I do not intend to have dedicated specialised personnel as the investigation of allegations of illegal abortion is not a matter for my Department.

Civil Servants: Bonuses

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice whether any bonus payments have been paid to staff in his Department and its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 15708/11-15)

Mr Ford: In line with the Northern Ireland Civil Service policy, the total amounts paid in special bonus payments to staff in the Department of Justice and its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last three financial years, is as follows:

Year	Amount
2009/2010	£76,516
2010/2011	£91,340
2011/2012	£108,470

Arm's-length Bodies and Departmental Staff: Company Cars

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice whether any members of staff in his Department and its arm's length bodies use a company car.

(AQW 15711/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice and its arms length bodies do not provide a company car to specific members of staff.

Courts: Contempt of Court

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) how many people have been convicted of wilfully insulting and/or contempt of court in each of the last three years, broken down by court division; and (ii) the outcome in each case.

(AQW 15720/11-15)

Mr Ford: Contempt of Court and Misbehaviour in Court may be prosecuted under Article 160 of the Magistrates' Courts (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 and the Contempt of Court Act 1981. ("Wilfully insulting" is a colloquial term and would be prosecuted as Contempt of Court.)

The table below gives the number of convictions for Contempt of Court and Misbehaviour in Court for the calendar years 2007 to 2009 (the latest year for which figures are currently available).

Number of convictions and disposal for Contempt of Court and Misbehaviour in Court, 2007-2009

Court Division	2007	2008	2009
Antrim	4	4	3
Ards	4	1	0
Belfast	0	1	0
Craigavon and Lisburn	2	0	0
Fermanagh and Tyrone	2	0	3
Londonderry	7	5	1
Total	19	11	7

Disposal	2007	2008	2009
Imprisonment	7	3	3
Fine	12	8	3
Bound over	0	0	1
Total	19	11	7

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Legal Aid: Refusal to Recognise the Court

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, given that both the courts and legal aid are funded through his Department, whether he plans to review the granting of legal aid to defendants who refuse to recognise the courts.
(AQW 15791/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have no plans to review the granting of legal aid to defendants who refuse to recognise the courts.

Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders: Funding

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department provides funding to the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders; and how much has been provided in each of the last two years.
(AQW 15793/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice does provide funding to the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders. For the last two full financial years the Department of Justice paid £1.4 million in 2010-11 and £1.4 million in 2011-12.

DNA Database

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice to provide a breakdown of the cost of maintaining the DNA database.
(AQW 15963/11-15)

Mr Ford: The cost to Forensic Science Northern Ireland in maintaining the Northern Ireland DNA database for the 2011/12 financial year was approximately £ 190,000, the breakdown of which is as follows:-

Staff costs	-	£171,000
Infrastructure and software	-	£ 19,000

Victims of Crime: European Directive

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice what consideration he has given to the implementation of the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing minimum standards for the rights, support and protection of victims of crime.
(AQW 16013/11-15)

Mr Ford: In August 2011, I confirmed my agreement to a recommendation from the Justice Secretary for the UK to opt into the Directive and, in doing so, signalled my support for the aims of the proposed Directive. These are to ensure that all victims of crime:-

- receive the appropriate protection and support,
- are able to participate in criminal proceedings, and
- are recognised and treated in a respectful, sensitive and professional manner without discrimination of any kind in all contacts with any public authority, victim support or restorative justice service.

While Northern Ireland is already thought to be largely compliant with the Directive, the position of victims, in terms of service provision and rights, will be strengthened following its implementation. My Department will shortly, in conjunction with counterparts in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, begin progressing work to give effect to the Directive. It is due to be formally published in November and must then be transposed within three years.

My Department has also proposed two commitments, in the draft five-year strategy for Victims and Witnesses of Crime, relating to the new Directive. These are that we will amend the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime to ensure that it is in compliance with the provisions in the Directive and that we will routinely consider, and keep under review, wider national and European developments in relation to the treatment of victims and witnesses.

Underage Drinking

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of under-age drinkers (i) prosecuted; and (ii) convicted, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16063/11-15)

Mr Ford: Under-age drinking may be prosecuted under Article 60(2)(b) and (6)(b) of the Licensing (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, which prohibits the consumption of intoxicating liquor in any place or premises except premises used only as a private residence.

The table below gives the number prosecuted and convicted for the calendar years 2004 - 2006 and the number convicted for the calendar years 2007 - 2009 (the latest year for which figures are currently available). It is not possible to provide prosecution data for 2007 - 2009.

Number of prosecutions and convictions for underage drinking, 2004-2009

Year	Prosecutions	Convictions
2004	10	8
2005	8	7
2006	12	9
2007	N/A	19
2008	N/A	13
2009	N/A	10

Data is collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Drug Dealing

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of (i) prosecutions; and (ii) convictions for selling illegal drugs, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16065/11-15)

Mr Ford: The selling of illegal drugs may be prosecuted under section 5(3) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

The table below gives the number prosecuted and convicted for the calendar years 2004 -2006 and the number convicted for the calendar years 2007 - 2009 (the latest year for which figures are currently available). It is not possible to provide prosecution data for 2007 to 2009.

Number of prosecutions and convictions for selling of illegal drugs, 2004-2009

Year	Prosecutions	Convictions
2004	163	136
2005	134	114
2006	165	127
2007	N/A	136

Year	Prosecutions	Convictions
2008	N/A	115
2009	N/A	139

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Public Protection Arrangements

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the services offered by voluntary and community sector organisations, what recognition is given of their role within the Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland .
(AQW 16076/11-15)

Mr Ford: The guidance to agencies on public protection arrangements (PPANI), issued under Article 50 of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, recognises the role of voluntary and community organisations. The NSPCC is listed under Article 49 as an “agency” and is a full member of the Strategic Management Board.

Section 2.4 of the guidance states that it is important for the Board to obtain wider views from a mixture of statutory and voluntary representation to help shape the strategic operational development of the public protection arrangements.

Indeed one of the key objectives for 2012/13 in the recently published PPANI annual report is the development of a victims group comprising representatives of relevant voluntary sector organisations.

The PPANI agencies also regularly brief stakeholders from the community sector on their public protection work.

Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Justice for the total amount of financial or grant-aid assistance provided by the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust to police officers retiring under the Patten severance scheme in each year since it was established.
(AQW 16104/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust (PRRT) did not provide any financial or grant-aid assistance to police officers retiring under the Patten severance scheme. Those retiring under the scheme were provided for under the “Voluntary Severance Scheme” run by Police Service of Northern Ireland. The Department of Justice allocates funding to PRRT for providing services for those officers who left the police under the Full Time Reserve (FTR) compulsory scheme, which are free at the point of use.

Murder Convictions

Mr Easton asked Minister of Justice how many people have been (i) prosecuted for; and (ii) convicted of murder, in the last three years.
(AQW 16142/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below gives the number prosecuted and convicted for the calendar years 2004 - 2006 and the number convicted for the calendar years 2007 - 2009 (the latest year for which figures are currently available). It is not possible from our database to provide prosecution data for 2007 - 2009.

Number of prosecutions and convictions for murder, 2004-2009

Year	Prosecutions	Convictions
2004	32	13
2005	34	14
2006	31	11
2007	N/A	18
2008	N/A	12
2009	N/A	24

Data is collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Department for Regional Development

Car Parking Charges: Banbridge, Lurgan and Portadown

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration he has given to allowing the first hour of parking to be free of charge at the new pay and display car parks in (i) Lurgan; (ii) Portadown; and (iii) Banbridge.

(AQW 15296/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I would advise the Member that, with regard to this matter, I cannot consider Lurgan, Portadown and Banbridge in isolation. This being the case, I could not introduce the first hour free in those towns without taking into account all other charged parking.

My Department's Roads Service has advised that to provide the first hour free for all charged parking would require Roads Service to replace its 600 Pay & Display machines at an estimated cost of approximately £2.5m.

In addition, it is estimated that approximately £3.2m per annum would be lost in revenue income, as a result of such an initiative, leading to a total deficit in the Department's budget of £5.7m for the first year. For every year thereafter there would be a further £3.2m loss in revenue, even before any tariff increases are considered.

In light of the very tight financial constraints on my budget, I cannot agree to the introduction of such a scheme at this time.

Bridges: Risk Assessments

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development what risk assessments his Department carries out on each type of bridge.

(AQW 15478/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it carries out a programme of bridge inspections in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB). This programme includes a General Inspection, carried out every 2 years, looking for obvious defects which may need attention, and a Principal Inspection, carried out every 6 years, which is carried out by professional structural engineers and every element of the bridge receives a close-up inspection. This programme of inspections gives a broad assessment of risk and the bridge condition.

Roads Service officials further advise that allied to this inspection regime is the bridge assessment programme, whereby every bridge has undergone a detailed inspection and structural assessment to assess its loading capacity. If, following this assessment, a bridge is deemed to be sub-standard then a further risk assessment is carried out to determine the level and priority of risk, and to establish what remedial measures are appropriate.

Roads Service has also completed other more specific risk assessments, such as the Road over Rail study completed in 2003, a risk assessment study on all half-joint bridges, and the underwater study to determine scour damage following the floods in 2007.

Strangford to Portaferry Ferry Service: Vessels

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many vessels have been purchased since 1969 to operate on the Strangford to Portaferry ferry service; and (ii) the cost of each vessel.

(AQW 15492/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advice that since 1969 six vessels have been purchased for the Strangford Lough Ferry Service. Details of these vessels and the associated cost, where figures are available, are shown in the table below:

Vessel	Year purchased	Vehicle / Passenger	Cost	Current status
MV Strangford	1969	Vehicle	Not Available	In service
Jacqueline	c 1969	Passenger	Not Available	Sold c 1988
MV Portaferry	1975 (second hand, converted)	Vehicle	Not Available	Sold 2002
Isle of Valla	1988 (second hand, converted)	Passenger	Not Available	Sold 2006
MV Portaferry II	2002	Vehicle	£3.1M	In service
MV Rachlyn	2009	Passenger	£50K	In service

Strangford to Portaferry Ferry Service: Capital Investment

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Regional Development how the recent capital investment into the Strangford to Portaferry ferry service represents value for money.

(AQW 15493/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the only recent capital investment in the Strangford Lough Ferry Service, was the major refurbishment work to the Ferry Terminal Building. This work cost approximately £227,000 over the previous 3 financial years. This work included a major refurbishment, extension and new customer facing ticket office.

Roads Service has further advised that in 2011-12, whilst not capital investment, there was expenditure of £323,000 on exceptional maintenance to the MV Strangford vessel. The work carried out included the manufacture and fitting of new vehicle ramps and the sand-blasting and repainting of the entire vessel. Without new vehicle ramps, the vessel would not have been certified fit for service by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and would have been withdrawn from service.

In 2009, marine consultants were commissioned to advise on the future of the MV Strangford and to consider alternative options for the continuing provision of the current level of service. The report anticipated exceptional maintenance work, including significant spend on the vehicle ramps, which would be necessary to keep the MV Strangford in service. Given the projected maintenance requirements, the report appraised a number of options including: - the removal of MV Strangford from service and operating with a single vehicle ferry, investing in the required maintenance, leasing a similar vessel and replacing the MV Strangford by purchasing a new vessel.

The report concluded that investment in the projected exceptional maintenance on the MV Strangford remains the most value for money option up until 2016, when the substantial maintenance costs then dictate that the most cost effective option would be to replace the MV Strangford by purchasing a new vessel. A business case for the procurement of a new ferry is currently with DFP for approval.

Portaferry and Strangford: Bridge

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the sensitive environmental issues that would be involved in the building of a bridge between Portaferry and Strangford.

(AQW 15495/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As the Member is aware Strangford Lough, including Strangford Narrows, is subject to a number of environmental designations. It has been designated:

- an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI);
- an Earth Science Conservation Review Site (ESCR);
- a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (Natura 2000 site);
- a Special Protection Area (SPA);
- a Ramsar site; and
- Northern Ireland's first Marine Nature Reserve and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

There are also four Nature Reserves in the vicinity of Strangford Narrows - Cloughy Rocks, Killard, Granagh Bay and Ballyquintin, National Nature Reserve.

Given this range of designations, my Department's Roads Service has advised that an Article 6 Assessment, under the terms of the EU Habitats Directive, to test the likely significance of building a bridge at the location would be required. Issues ranging from visual intrusion, noise, air and water quality to the impacts of a bridge on flora and fauna would have to be considered.

Officials further advise that such an environmental assessment would have to be undertaken with the expectation that the assessment details and conclusions are likely to be the subject of close scrutiny at a Public Inquiry into the proposal.

Portaferry to Strangford Ferry Service: Environmental Damage

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the environmental damage that the current Portaferry to Strangford ferry service is causing to the local environment.

(AQW 15496/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service is not aware that the operation of the Strangford Lough Ferry Service causes any environmental damage. The service has been in operation since 1969 and is delivered in accordance with legislative and regulatory requirements. With regard to possible pollution incidents, Roads Service has in place, the Marine Pollution and Oil Spill Preparedness and Response Plan, which has been approved by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). Roads Service also has a Waste Management Plan for Strangford Harbour in place and this is reviewed at regular intervals, as is the Marine Pollution Plan.

Roads Service officials advise that the vessels are maintained to a high standard to minimise any potential environmental impacts, including noise and exhaust fumes.

In addition, any work carried out to the actual harbours in Strangford and Portaferry is approved by NIEA to ensure that any potential environmental impacts are appropriately mitigated.

Strangford to Portaferry Ferry Service: Environmental Impact Assessment

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Regional Development whether Roads Service or his Department has carried out an Environmental Impact Assessment on the Strangford to Portaferry ferry service in its current form.

(AQW 15498/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that no Environmental Impact Assessment has been carried out on the Strangford Lough Ferry Service. I should explain that an Environmental Impact Assessment is a method for ensuring that the likely effects of a new development on the environment, are fully understood and taken into account before consent is given for that development to proceed. The current service commenced operation in 1969 when no Environmental Impact Assessment was required.

Apprentices: Departmental Contracts

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development how many apprentices have been employed through departmental contracts in this financial year; and what percentage this number represents of the total posts allocated.

(AQW 15501/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department and its Arm's Length Bodies expect to recruit 32 apprentices in procurement contracts awarded in 2012/13.

The number of apprentices is not monitored as a percentage of total posts. However, the number of apprentices to be recruited is in line with the social inclusion clauses in contracts which state that apprenticeships should make up 5% or more of the workforce of first tier contractors.

Auctioned Items

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the items which his Department has disposed of at auctions in (i) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12, including the auction value of each item.

(AQW 15575/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department did not dispose of any items at auction during 2010/11. However, during 2011/12 it disposed of property adjacent to the A2 Dual Carriageway at Priory Park, Holywood. The property was agreed for sale at auction on 26 June 2012 and disposed of on 2 October 2012 for the sum of £45,000.

Ballymena Borough Council Area: Road Maintenance

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how the spend on road maintenance in the Ballymena Borough Council area changed from the 2006/07 to the 2011/12 financial years.

(AQW 15641/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Structural Maintenance spend in the Ballymena Borough Council area in the 2006/07 financial year was £2,471,000 and in 2011/12 it was £4,463,000.

Moyle District Council Area: Road Maintenance

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how the spend on road maintenance in the Moyle District Council area changed from the 2006/07 to the 2011/12 financial years.

(AQW 15645/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Structural Maintenance spend in the Moyle District Council area in the 2006/07 financial year was £1,187,000 and in 2011/12 it was £1,891,000.

Downpatrick Town Centre: Parking Facilities

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the location of parking facilities for cyclists in Downpatrick town centre.

(AQW 15653/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that cycle parking facilities are available at the following locations:

Location	Number of Cycle Stands
Millennium Square	4
Market Street	2
Bus Station	20

Location	Number of Cycle Stands
Southern Eastern Regional College	48
Total	74

Badgers: Derrygowan Road, Randalstown

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to the dualling of the A6, how his Department dealt with badgers at the Derrygowan Road, Randalstown.

(AQW 15662/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, during planning for this scheme, extensive ecological surveys were carried out in April, May and June 2006. The results of these surveys, which were included in the Randalstown to Toome Environmental Statement that was published in March 2007 and subsequently examined at Public Inquiry in November 2007, confirmed that no badger setts or tracks were recorded in the vicinity of the Derrygowan Road.

Officials have further advised that, should the scheme progress to construction, the Environmental Statement requires Roads Service to carry out further ecological surveys before construction would start to determine whether the use of the area by badgers has changed since the previous surveys were carried out.

Should subsequent surveys find evidence that new badger setts have been established during the intervening period, every effort will be made to retain the setts. Where destruction of a sett is unavoidable and other established setts are not available nearby, provision of an artificial sett may be required. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has strict licensing requirements which must be met before it will sanction exclusion of badgers from an existing sett or destruction of any existing setts.

Portavoe Reservoir, Donaghadee

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Regional Development when NI Water plans to dispose of the Portavo Reservoir, Donaghadee.

(AQW 15667/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that Portavoe Reservoir is surplus to its requirements and will be disposed of at some time in the future. However, there are many issues which have to be resolved before the reservoir can be offered for sale; these include ownership, council interest, private interests and other legalities. NIW is continuing to address these issues and has assured me that all interested parties will be informed when they are resolved and before the property is offered for sale or transfer.

Conlig Upper Reservoir

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Regional Development when NI Water plans to dispose of the Conlig Upper Reservoir.

(AQW 15668/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that Conlig Upper Reservoir is surplus to its requirements and will be disposed of at some time in the future. However, there are many issues which have to be resolved before the reservoir can be offered for sale; these include ownership, private interests and other legalities. NIW is continuing to address these issues and has assured me that all interested parties will be informed when they are resolved and before the property is offered for sale or transfer.

Conlig Lower Reservoir

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Regional Development when NI Water plans to dispose of the Conlig Lower Reservoir.

(AQW 15669/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that Conlig Lower Reservoir is surplus to its requirements and will be disposed of at some time in the future. However, there are many issues which have to be resolved before the reservoir can be offered for sale; these include ownership, private interests and other legalities. NIW is continuing to address these issues and has assured me that all interested parties will be informed when they are resolved and before the property is offered for sale or transfer.

Ballysallagh Upper Reservoir

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Regional Development when NI Water plans to dispose of the Ballysallagh Upper Reservoir in North Down.

(AQW 15670/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that Ballysallagh Upper Reservoir is surplus to its requirements and will be disposed of at some time in the future. However, there are many issues which have to be resolved before the reservoir can be offered for sale; these include ownership, private interests and other legalities. NIW is continuing

to address these issues and has assured me that all interested parties will be informed when they are resolved and before the property is offered for sale or transfer.

Street Lights: Energy Efficiency

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development whether all street lights have energy saving bulbs, given the increasing cost of electricity.

(AQW 15693/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the types of lamps used in street lights in Northern Ireland are among the most energy efficient available. The two main lamp types used are low-pressure sodium and high-pressure sodium. Both of these lamp types are more energy efficient than the typical fluorescent energy saving bulbs that are widely used in domestic, commercial and industrial applications.

Other types of energy efficient lamps, such as Light Emitting Diodes (LED), are likely to become viable for street lighting in the near future. Roads Service is currently trialling a number of LED lanterns to assess their efficiency and performance, with a view to more widespread use in the future.

Public Transport: One-day Free Initiative

Mr Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to implement a one-day free public transport initiative to encourage people to use public transport.

(AQW 15694/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: At present I have no plans to implement a one-day free public transport initiative. Translink has a range of promotions in place to encourage people to use public transport. There has been large scale investment in public transport infrastructure, including new buses and trains, in recent years. And the Belfast On The Move scheme is designed to make public transport a more attractive option for travel in Belfast City Centre. I am also currently considering options for promoting travel over the Christmas period.

Rathlin Island: Visitor Numbers

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how the number of visitors to Rathlin Island, since introduction of the ferry service, compares with the number of visitors before introduction of the ferry service.

(AQW 15740/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below provides a breakdown of the number of passenger journeys taken on the Rathlin Island ferry service from 1 April 1997 to 31 March 2012. My Department does not hold the specific information on the number of journeys undertaken by Rathlin Island residents prior to 1 April 2008.

The ferry service was a one boat operation up until commencement of the current contract on 1 July 2008. Prior to this date there were four return sailings per day in the summer and two return sailings per day in the winter. Following the introduction of a second vessel under the new contract there are now ten return sailings per day on peak days, normally nine, and in the winter there are five return sailings per day.

Date	Total Journeys	Rathlin Island Resident Journeys
1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998	34,634	Not available
1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999	32,716	Not available
1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000	35,762	Not available
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001	37,099	Not available
1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002	36,106	Not available
1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003	39,399	Not available
1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004	46,562	Not available
1 April 2004 to 31 March 2005	45,378	Not available
1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006	48,217	Not available
1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007	49,630	Not available
1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008	49,885	Not available
1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009	56,486	3,738
1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010	79,562	4,123

Date	Total Journeys	Rathlin Island Resident Journeys
1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011	87,015	8,117
1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012	80,159	8,085

Caledonian MacBrayne, now known as CalMac Ferries Limited, was awarded the contract for the provision of a Rathlin Island ferry service in December 1996 and was responsible for its operation until 30 June 2008. A subsequent six year contract was awarded to Rathlin Island Ferry Limited from 1 July 2008.

Residents Only Parking Schemes: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he is considering any residents only parking schemes for the North Down area.

(AQW 15741/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware from my answers to previous questions and correspondence that it is the intention of my Department's Roads Service to work towards the introduction of Residents' Parking Schemes, where appropriate, within all areas of parking restraint identified in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 (BMTP).

Roads Service advises that the only area of parking restraint identified in the BMTP, in the North Down area, incorporates the main urban centre of Bangor. Roads Service is currently not in a position to indicate when work could start on a scheme in this area, as progress will depend on a number of factors, such as the successful implementation of schemes in other areas.

Creightons Green Reservoir, Craigantlet

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Regional Development when NI Water plans to dispose of the Creightons Green Reservoir, Craigantlet.

(AQW 15745/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that Creightons Green Reservoir is surplus to its requirements and will be disposed of at some time in the future. In disposing of surplus assets, NIW must ensure that it obtains the best price, achieves value for money and maintains high standards of propriety. Any sale is dependent on a number of factors, not least the market conditions at the time of the sale and the level of expressions of interest.

NIW has not yet identified a timeframe for offering Creightons Green Reservoir to the market.

Wellington Park Area of Bangor: Footpaths

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans there are to resurface the footpaths in the Wellington Park area of Bangor.

(AQW 15751/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to his Assembly Question AQW 14975/11-15.

Traffic Lights: Donaghadee Area

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new traffic lights are planned for the Donaghadee area.

(AQW 15753/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my answer to his Assembly Question AQW 14975/11-15.

Longstone Road, Annalong: Road Safety

Mr Rogers asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to improve road safety along the Longstone Road and in the vicinity of Moneydarragh Primary School, Annalong.

(AQW 15770/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service informs me that Moneydarragh Primary School is situated on an old unadopted section of roadway adjacent to the C315 Longstone Road, Annalong. I understand that there is a voluntary one-way system operating at the school.

Officials from Roads Service's Southern Division assessed this location in 2010 in response to requests from residents and elected representatives. In order to improve driver awareness of the school, Roads Service agreed to install new enhanced school warning signs on yellow backing boards, complemented by 5m bands of red textured surfacing with 'School Ahead' road markings on both approaches. This work was completed in late 2010. These road safety measures are considered most appropriate in the circumstances and Roads Service has no further proposals at this time. An assessment for the provision of a footway was also carried out. Regrettably, however, the site registered too low in priority to merit inclusion in Southern Division's work programme for the foreseeable future based on current funding levels.

Oaklands, Claudy: Road Surface

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development, following the letter received in July 2012 by the Member of Parliament for East Londonderry from Roads Service regarding the state of the road surface at the Oaklands Estate, Claudy, when Roads Service intends to complete the work.

(AQW 15772/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that an Article 11 Notice, under The Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980, issued on 24 July 2012. The Notice gave the developer 28 days to complete all of the works required to enable Roads Service to adopt the carriageways and footways. The Notice was not complied with and Roads Service has, on 16 October 2012, instructed a contractor to carry out all remedial works and have the site brought up to an adoptable standard.

The initial phase of the works will involve CCTV camera surveys of the storm and foul sewers to enable Northern Ireland Water to identify any defects. Following this, all remedial works will be completed and the site adopted as soon as possible thereafter.

Traffic Lights: Responsibility

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 14997/11-15, whether responsibility for the repair and maintenance of traffic lights is carried out centrally or by section level operatives.

(AQW 15773/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that my Department's Roads Service has a single traffic signal maintenance contract in place, which covers all of the traffic signals in Northern Ireland. However, each of Roads Service's 4 Divisions is responsible for overseeing the repair and maintenance of the traffic signals in their respective areas.

NI Water: Capital Projects in East Antrim

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made on NI Water's capital projects in East Antrim.

(AQW 15776/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the planned expenditure within its Capital Works Programme for East Antrim Constituency area is as detailed in the table below.

Period	Expenditure (£000s)
PC10 year 3 (2012/13)	£3,629
PC13 year 1 (2013/14)	£7,235
PC13 year 2 (2014/15)	£27
Total	£10,891

This will include expenditure on projects such as improvements to Killylane Watermain, Lough Mourne Zone Watermain, Carrickfergus Zone Watermain, upgrading Carrickfergus Wastewater Treatment Works and capital maintenance at Larne Wastewater Treatment Works.

Church Road Reservoir, Holywood

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Regional Development when NI Water plans to dispose of the Church Road Reservoir, Holywood.

(AQW 15802/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the Church Road Reservoir at Holywood is surplus to requirements and will be disposed of at some time in the future. In disposing of surplus assets, NIW must ensure that it gets the best price for the property, achieves value for money and maintains high standards of propriety. The sale of such assets is dependent on a number of factors, not least the market conditions at the time of the sale and the level of expressions of interest. NIW has not yet identified a timeframe for offering Church Road Reservoir to the market.

Carrickfergus Waste Water Treatment Works

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development why infrastructure projects and upgrades at Carrickfergus Waste Water Treatment Works have not yet begun.

(AQW 15807/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am pleased to confirm that my Department has been able to bring forward some capital funding from future years which has enabled Northern Ireland Water (NIW) to approve maintenance work at Carrickfergus Waste Water Treatment Works. A contractor has been appointed to undertake the work and NIW anticipates that it will commence before Christmas.

Electric Vehicles: Charge Points

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 14112/11-15 and given the low number of applications for the Ecar Home and Workplace Charge Point Grant, what further actions his Department will take to make the transition to an electric vehicle a more attractive option.

(AQW 15808/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Studies have shown that electric vehicles become more prevalent as charge point infrastructure is developed. My Department has to date overseen the installation of 40 charge points and 4 rapid charge points for electric vehicles. By the end of March 2013 it is anticipated that a further 120 charge points and 10 rapid charge points will have been installed with the result that nobody in Northern Ireland will be more than 30 miles from a charge point. I also recently introduced legislation to ensure that the parking spaces at charge points in DRD managed sites are restricted to electric vehicles which are using the charge point.

Over the past year, there have been launch events held in six council areas, in addition to overall project and website launch events in Stormont during 2011. A formal charge point launch event took place in March 2011 at Belfast City Hall, to which approx. 200 people attended.

However, to further encourage the uptake of Electric Vehicles my Department is currently planning a number of marketing activities, culminating in a three day conference during 'Climate Week' in March 2013, which will target schools, businesses and motorists in general. I anticipate that around 700 people will have a direct opportunity to hear about, and drive in, an electric vehicle during the conference. My Department is also engaging in speaking events, magazine and newspaper articles and local electric vehicle launches, all of which assist in raising the profile of the ecar Project. Other marketing activities planned for include further website development, the launch of a smart phone app and advertisement.

My Department is also in regular contact with car dealers and distributors to keep them informed of our growing infrastructure and also with local councils who are members of our ecar Consortium to encourage local promotional events. Local dealerships are also engaging with manufacturers on reducing the purchase price of the electric vehicles, and offering deals and incentives for electric vehicle drivers. We are aware that purchase price is currently a barrier to uptake, and manufacturers have assured us that less expensive electric vehicle options will be appearing on the market in early 2013.

Finally, my Department is running a series of 'fleet trials', where businesses across Northern Ireland have been offered the opportunity to trial electric vehicles for a 1-week period. There has been considerable interest in this, with up to 15 businesses taking part to date.

Gritting Bill

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the potential for a Gritting Bill that would clarify the laws in relation to the liability faced by the public in the cleaning or gritting of footpaths or roads.

(AQW 15809/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that I have no plans to introduce legislation such as you have described. However, I would state that there is no law stopping the public from clearing snow and ice on the pavement outside their homes or from public places. In 2010, the Attorney General of Northern Ireland advised "if you clear snow/ice carefully you are unlikely to be held liable".

Door-2-Door Transport Scheme: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many people in North Down have used the Door 2 Door scheme in each of the last three years.

(AQW 15811/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The number of people who have availed of Door-2-Door Transport in North Down (Bangor and Holywood) in the last three years is as follows:-

2009/10	376
2010/11	369
2011/12	305

Blue Badge Scheme

Ms Lo asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the eligibility criteria for the Blue Badge scheme; and whether discretion can be used to assess eligibility in certain cases.

(AQW 15815/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Blue Badge scheme in Northern Ireland is regulated by Section 14 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons (NI) Act 1978 and the Disabled Persons (Badges for Motor Vehicles) Regulations (NI) 1993. Under the legislation, you can only get a Blue Badge if you:

- receive the higher rate of the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance;

- are registered blind;
- receive a War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement;
- have a permanent and substantial disability which means you cannot walk, or have very considerable difficulty walking (in this case your doctor may be asked to answer a series of questions to confirm your eligibility for a badge); or
- drive a vehicle regularly, have a severe disability in both arms and are unable to operate, or have considerable difficulty operating, all or some types of parking meter.

In addition to applicants who meet the criteria above, children under the age of two, who have a disability due to a medical condition and need to travel with bulky equipment, or close to a vehicle for emergency medical treatment, may be eligible for a badge.

Organisations, which care for people with disabilities and meet one of the above criteria, may also be eligible for a badge.

If an applicant does not qualify automatically for a Blue Badge, that is, they fail to meet at least one of the first three criteria listed above, their mobility will be assessed. However, in line with the existing legislation, Roads Service can only issue a Blue Badge to applicants who meet one or more of the above criteria.

Northside Park-and-ride Scheme

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development how the new contract for parking enforcement and car parking management will affect the operation and cost to users of the bus service between the Northside Park and Ride and Belfast City Centre.

(AQW 15832/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service plans to convert its remaining 29 kiosk-operated car parks to pay-and-display by April 2013. This includes the Northside and Eastside Park and Ride car parks in Belfast.

The park and ride facility will continue to operate in these car parks after they are converted to pay-and-display and there will be no change in the cost of the service to users as a result of the conversion. In addition to issuing a pay-and-display ticket, the pay-and-display machines in these car parks will also issue tear-off tickets for the inward and outward bound bus journeys.

Signage will be installed to provide customers with full instructions on how to use the new system and the car parks will continue to be manned for a period after conversion to assist customers. Customers will still be able to purchase season tickets in the normal way, and they will be issued with permits for the car park and the associated bus journeys.

In due course and after the conversion to pay-and-display, traffic attendants will make routine enforcement patrols to ensure that vehicles do not park in contravention of restrictions that apply to the car park.

Flooding: Bloomfield Road, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to fix the flooding issue on the Bloomfield Road in Bangor.

(AQW 15833/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that in order to alleviate the flooding on the Bloomfield Road, Bangor, it intends to remove any debris that has gathered in the road culvert at this location. In addition, officials also intend to carry out a feasibility study into the installation of a grille at the upstream end of the culvert to reduce the likelihood of debris blocking it in the future.

Sewerage System: Millisle

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether there is money available in his budget to fix the sewage problem in Millisle.

(AQW 15834/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Budget 2010 allocates £660m for investment in our water and sewerage services from 2011/12 to 2014/15. This is a significant sum but there are many demands on these resources. While I set the overall policy objectives for water and sewerage through Social and Environmental Guidance, detailed measures and operational priorities are determined by NIW and its regulators. The Regulator's Draft Determination for the years 2013 -2015 is currently issued for public consultation until 8 November 2012. I sympathise with the problems experienced by local residents but I cannot give guarantees on specific schemes.

I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that its current plans for 2013-2015 include a £2.2 million capital project to upgrade the sewerage system in Millisle to meet EU Bathing Water standards and reduce the risk of out-of-sewer flooding.

NIW has been consulting with local residents and has reached agreement on the site for a new pumping station at Millisle Presbyterian Church car park. The legal issues regarding the site acquisition could take up to one year to conclude. In the interim, NIW will be seeking planning permission for the pumping station and Northern Ireland Environment Agency consent for construction of a new sea outfall pipeline.

Civil Servants: Bonuses

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether any bonuses have been paid to departmental staff over the last three years.

(AQW 15836/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: A number of payments under the NI Civil Service Special Bonus Scheme have been made to staff in my Department during the period concerned.

Details for each of the last three complete financial years are set out in the table below.

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Number of Staff	164	98	74
Amount Paid (£)	72,975	32,400	30,550

These figures remain unchanged from those supplied in the Department of Finance and Personnel's response to a recent question on the same subject from Mr Pat Ramsey (AQW 9774/11-15, tabled on 16 March 2012).

Traffic Lights: Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new traffic lights are planned for the Bangor area.

(AQW 15837/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise that my Department's Roads Service currently has no plans to provide any new traffic lights in the Bangor Area. The work programme for the present financial year for Roads Service's Eastern Division may be viewed on-line by selecting 'Roads Service reports to councils' from the following web address: http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information.htm

I can, however, advise that a new puffin crossing, associated with the planning approval for the new Bangor Grammar school on Gransha Road, Bangor was activated on 9 Oct 2012.

One Plan: Integrated Transport

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development what work his Department has undertaken to assist in the implementation of the One Plan in relation to integrated transport in Derry.

(AQW 16075/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is a member of the One Plan Interdepartmental co-ordination Group and is committed to supporting implementation of the One Plan. This is reflected in the significant investment my Department is taking forward through Translink and Roads Service to deliver key transport projects in the North West. These align with the One Plan and include:

- my Department funding a project to upgrade the railway track between Coleraine and Londonderry over three phases with the first phase to be completed in 2013 in time to accommodate a projected increase in passengers for the Derry City of Culture year.
- since September 2010 Translink has conducted a full revision of Londonderry city bus services and also created a quality bus corridor.
- the Executive agreeing to proceed with dualling of part of the A5 with the proposed works between Londonderry and Strabane improving access to both Londonderry, the main centre of population in the North West with port and airport facilities and to Strabane, with its important cross border link. Roads Service continues to complete the planning process for the A6 Londonderry to Dungiven Dualling with the results awaited of a public enquiry completed last month, however, progression of this scheme will be subject to funding being made available in future budget settlements.
- extending the park and ride facilities at Drumahoe to 271 spaces to be delivered by the end of January 2013 in time to service the City of Culture requirements.
- Consulting on a bus priority lane and investigating associated technology.
- the Outer Orbital Route Feasibility Study.
- processing legislation required to deliver a Resident's Parking Scheme in the Bogside by end of 2013.
- tendering for a Car Park Management system which will utilise variable messaging signs located strategically throughout the city.
- delivering a traffic calming scheme at Rossville Street/Lecky Road, and consulting on a further scheme, at Steelstown Road.

In addition, officials within my Department continue to engage with ILEX and Derry City Council to examine further opportunities to support the delivery of the One Plan.

Department for Social Development

Benefits: Post Office Accounts

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of benefit claimants who have their benefits paid directly into a post office account.

(AQW 14371/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): As of August 2012, 159,301 benefit claimants were receiving their payments into a Post Office card account.

Civil Servants: Suspensions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development how many people employed in his Department are (i) suspended from work pending criminal charges or investigations; and (ii) continuing in their duties whilst facing criminal charges or investigations.

(AQW 15337/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Two people employed in the Department for Social Development are suspended from work pending criminal charges or investigations. The Department is not aware of any people in the Department who are continuing in their duties whilst facing criminal charges or investigations.

Clarendon Street/Queen Street, Derry: Conservation Area

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister for Social Development what restrictions are in place to protect the Clarendon Street/Queens Street conservation area of Derry during the current work scheme.

(AQW 15568/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The aim of the current public realm scheme in Clarendon Street and Queen Street in Londonderry is to enhance the streetscape, which is in a very poor state of repair. Since these streets are in a designated Conservation Area, a number of measures have been taken to protect the historic character of this part of the city. The selection of materials for the scheme was made following extensive discussions involving my Department, DRD Roads Service, DOE Planning Service and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. A number of options for the size and style of paving slabs were considered before the final selection was made on optimum balance of appearance, cost, time required to deliver the scheme and health and safety factors. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency inspected a sample of the paving material and agreed that it was acceptable for the location.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency also asked that the remaining granite kerbs be re-used if at all possible. Although it was originally believed that these would not be a suitable size for re-use, they have been examined following their removal from the street and it has been agreed that they can be re-used in a section of Clarendon Street.

The old cast iron street lighting columns were removed due to concerns about their ability to withstand impact from vehicles. The replacement lighting columns are similar to those already used in the Historic City Conservation Area.

I am satisfied that, taken together, these measures will not only ensure that the character of the area is respected, but that the completed scheme will positively enhance the built heritage of the Clarendon Street Conservation Area.

Social Fund Payments

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development what was the average amount paid to claimants from the Social Fund in each of the last three years; and what has been the change in the number of refusals for first time applicants during this period.

(AQW 15609/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is set out in the tables below.

Average Amount of Social Fund Awards

	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012
Community Care Grants	£449.31	£471.18	£475.53
Crisis Loans	£122.33	£133.00	£132.80
Budgeting Loans	£436.28	£410.63	£404.57
Sure Start Maternity Grants	£973.46	£991.22	£999.62
Funeral Payments	£506.71	£508.34	£507.14

Change in the number of refusals for first time applicants**Budgeting Loans**

	1st time applicants	Awards	Refused	% Refused
2009	36,103	18,224	17,879	49.5
2010	37,144	19,427	17,717	47.7
2011	38,455	20,399	18,056	47.0

Community Care Grants

	1st time applicants	Awards	Refused	% Refused
2009	38,757	9,081	29,676	76.6
2010	38,487	8,362	30,125	78.3
2011	36,539	10,275	26,264	71.9

Crisis Loans

	1st time applicants	Awards	Refused	% Refused
2009	47,410	37,957	9,453	19.9
2010	47,026	37,666	9,360	19.9
2011	44,145	34,146	9,999	22.7

NB: No comparable information is available for Sure Start Maternity Grants or Funeral Payments.

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Auctioned Items

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the items which his Department has disposed of at auctions in (i) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12, including the auction value of each item.

(AQW 15618/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The only item disposed of at auction in the last 2 years was a Departmental car in 2010-11, which realised £2,500 when sold at Wilson's car auctions, Mallusk.

Personal Independence Payment: Assessments

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development, given the recent announcement in Scotland that Atos has subcontracted the Lanarkshire NHS to carry out the medical assessments for Personal Independence Payments, whether he plans to put a similar arrangement in place.

(AQW 15626/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The procurement of the Assessment Provider for Personal Independence Payment in Northern Ireland has been completed but there remain a small number of approval and contract award processes which have yet to be completed. It is anticipated that the formal award will take place within the next 4-6 weeks.

Following contract award my officials will work with the successful Assessment Provider to implement the medical assessment arrangements for Northern Ireland.

Oaklee Housing Association: Newbuilds

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Social Development to list the (i) main contractors; and (ii) electrical and mechanical sub-contractors working on the Oaklee Housing Association's new build developments.

(AQW 15628/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The main contractors and associated sub-contractors working on Oaklee Housing Association's new build developments currently on-site are listed in the attached table.

Project Title	Contractor	Mech	Elect
Coulter Carpark Belfast	Donaghmore (Dungannon)	Anderson Mechanical	Irwin Electrics
Longstone Road Annalong	Kelly Bros (Warrenpoint)	CMK plumbing	Braham Electrical

Project Title	Contractor	Mech	Elect
Clifton Park Ave Belfast	Qmac (Dungannon)	M Mc Ginn	O Hanlon Farrell
Glenview Rathfriland	Cunninghams (Newry)	S Matthews	Norlect Engineering
167 Andersonstown Road Belfast	Tal (Lisburn)	Anderson Mechanical	Emerald Electrics
Rectory Close Loughgall	McGurran (Derrygonnelly)	O Kane Plumbing & Electrics	James Haughey & Co
Mill Court Ph2 Belfast	Moss (Seaghan)	Devlin Mech	O Hanlon Farrell
Alliance Avenue Belfast	Geda Construction (Coalisland)	CMK Mechanical Services Ltd	P Dougan Electrical

Oaklee Housing Association: Contracts

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 14172/11-15, to outline the consequences when a main contractor changes a sub-contractor where there are no exceptional circumstances; and how Oaklee Housing Association ensures that the reasons for changing a sub-contractor are genuine and not fabricated.

(AQW 15629/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Where a main contractor changes a sub-contractor with the consent of the housing association there are no consequences.

If a main contractor was to change a sub contractor, where there are no exceptional reasons, without the consent of the housing association, the association relies upon advice provided by its Project Manager (Consultant Design Team).

In such circumstances the Project Manager would request the main contractor to provide reasons for the change of sub-contractor and having received advice from the Project Manager, the housing association would either retrospectively approve the change of sub contractor or seek to enforce its requirement for the main contractor to use the sub-contractor named at pre-qualification stage.

Oaklee Housing Association relies on the advice provided by its Project Manager to ensure reasons provided for the request to change a sub-contractor are genuine.

Housing Associations: Installations

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Social Development whether a Housing Association, or an electrical and mechanical consultant, can detail, within the specification or employer's requirements, a specific brand of products to be installed; and whether an equal alternative product would be accepted if one were proposed.

(AQW 15630/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Housing associations, acting as contracting authorities procuring goods, works and services, are governed by The Public Contract Regulations 2006.

Regulation 9, paragraphs 16, states that:

'...a contracting authority shall not lay down technical specifications in the contract documents which refer to—

- (a) materials or goods of a specific make or source or to a particular process; or
- (b) trademarks, patents, types, origin or means of production;

which have the effect of favouring or eliminating particular economic operators'.

In addition, Regulation 9, paragraph 17, states that:

'...exceptionally, a contracting authority may incorporate the references referred to in paragraph (16) into the technical specifications in the contract documents, provided that the references are accompanied by the words 'or equivalent', where—

- (a) the subject of the contract makes the use of such references indispensable; or
- (b) the subject of the contract cannot otherwise be described by reference to technical specifications which are sufficiently precise and intelligible to all economic operators'.

Therefore, generic specification of products should be the norm for public sector procurement. If however a housing association or its consultant believes that a particular circumstance satisfies the restrictive requirements of the Regulation, they must be able to robustly defend their position if challenged.

Social Enterprise Incubation Hubs: Location

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development what criteria will be used to determine the locations for the ten social enterprise incubation hubs.

(AQW 15684/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My department is leading on the Accelerating Social Enterprise project supported by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. This £4million project is one of six Delivering Social Change Signature projects announced by the First Minister and deputy First Minister on 10 October 2012.

At this early stage I am not in a position to provide information about criteria or possible locations of the proposed Social Enterprise Incubation Hubs as these details are still being developed.

Social Fund Payments: Foyle

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development how many payments have been made from the Social Fund to claimants in the Foyle constituency in each of the last three years.

(AQW 15696/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Due to system limitations it is only possible to provide figures for the number of Discretionary Social Fund payments by parliamentary constituency. Discretionary Social Fund includes Budgeting and Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants. The numbers of these payments in the Foyle constituency for the last three financial years are set out in the table below.

Year	Discretionary Social Fund Payments
2011/12	27,600
2010/11	29,710
2009/10	26,327

The information provided is an Official Statistic. The production 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.

Social Security Payments: Frequency

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development how many claimants in the Foyle constituency have their social security payments made (i) weekly; (ii) fortnightly; and (iii) monthly.

(AQW 15698/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Due to systems limitations my Department can only provide this information for certain benefits. The figures requested for Foyle Assembly Area are in the table below.

	Weekly Claimants	Fortnightly Claimants	Monthly Claimants
Employment and Support Allowance	0	3,040	0
Jobseekers Allowance	0	5,490	0
Income Support	20	7,270	0
Pension Credit	5,780	150	40

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Minimum Wage: Working Parents

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development how many working parents are on the minimum wage, broken down by gender.

(AQW 15707/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My department does not have the necessary data required to answer this query. However, I understand that estimates of people earning below the national minimum wage come from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) which is commissioned by DETI. I understand however that this survey does not collect information on parental status.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Barnagh Park Flats at Beechfield, Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what maintenance issues need to be addressed for the Barnagh Park flats in Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee.

(AQW 15709/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are currently three Housing Executive flats at Barnagh Park and a further 21 flats at Barnagh Grove which are included in a kitchen replacement scheme programmed to commence in 2013/14.

The flats at Barnagh Grove are also included in a double glazing scheme. There are a total of 142 dwellings included in the scheme across the Newtownards district which went on site during week commencing 15 October 2012.

Housing Executive: Underspend on Newbuilds

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has received any indication from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive that there will be an underspend on new builds in its budget for this financial year.

(AQW 15713/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As I outlined in my response to AQW 14784/11-15 an £8 million underspend in the Social Housing Development Programme has been identified in the current financial year; I am seeking, through the October Monitoring Round, to reallocate this funding to the Co-Ownership Scheme.

Current Programme for Government plans are to deliver 8,000 new social and affordable homes over the four year period 2011-2015. Progress is ahead of target with 2,053 new properties provided in 2011/12. For the current year I am committed to achieving the delivery of 1,825 new social and affordable homes and my latest information is that all is on course to succeed this target by the end of the financial year.

Civil Servants: Suspensions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development how many members of staff in his Department are currently (i) suspended due to internal investigations, and (ii) not suspended whilst facing internal investigations.

(AQW 15737/11-15)

Mr McCausland: No members of staff in the Department for Social Development are currently suspended due to internal investigations. Twenty one members of staff are not suspended whilst facing internal investigations.

Employment and Support Allowance: Applications

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development what is the average time taken from notification to decision in an Employment Support Allowance mandatory reconsideration.

(AQW 15738/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Information on the time taken for an Employment and Support Allowance decision as part of the mandatory reconsideration process is not available in the format requested.

When a customer lodges an appeal against a social security decision a different decision maker than the one who made the original decision carries out a reconsideration of that decision. The reconsideration process was introduced to ensure that where cases have been decided incorrectly they can be put right easily and quickly by the decision maker and not at a tribunal. In instances where a customer is unhappy with the outcome of the decision on their claim they can opt to have the decision reconsidered instead of submitting an appeal.

The Welfare Reform Bill currently being considered by the Assembly contains a provision to introduce mandatory reconsiderations.

Disability Living Allowance: Recipients

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development what was the (i) total number of people who were in receipt of Disability Living Allowance; and (ii) ratio of recipients to population in each constituency on 31 December 2011.

(AQW 15771/11-15)

Mr McCausland: At 31 December 2011, there were a total of 188,210 people receiving Disability Living Allowance. The table shows the breakdown of this total, based on Parliamentary Constituency, and the ratio of recipients to population in each constituency.

Parliamentary Constituency	Number of Disability Living Allowance Recipients	*2010 Population	% of Population per constituency
Belfast East	8,960	90,400	9.9%
Belfast North	14,950	101,400	14.7%

Parliamentary Constituency	Number of Disability Living Allowance Recipients	*2010 Population	% of Population per constituency
Belfast South	8,490	103,700	8.2%
Belfast West	17,620	90,800	19.4%
East Antrim	7,380	89,200	8.3%
East Londonderry	8,460	97,200	8.7%
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	9,630	104,300	9.2%
Foyle	13,810	103,000	13.4%
Lagan Valley	7,820	100,400	7.8%
Mid Ulster	10,340	97,900	10.6%
Newry and Armagh	12,290	113,100	10.9%
North Antrim	8,600	107,000	8.0%
North Down	6,340	90,200	7.0%
South Antrim	8,140	99,500	8.2%
South Down	11,120	109,600	10.1%
Strangford	7,580	90,400	8.4%
Upper Bann	12,910	118,400	10.9%
West Tyrone	12,960	93,000	13.9%
No Constituency Specified	820		
Total	188,210	1,799,400	10.5%

* Constituency population figures (rounded to nearest 100) for 2010 are based on the Mid-year Population estimates for 2008 Westminster Parliamentary Constituency / 2011 Assembly Area

Social Security Payments: Frequency

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many claimants in the North Down constituency have their social security payments made (i) weekly; (ii) fortnightly; and (iii) monthly.

(AQW 15814/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Due to systems limitations my Department can only provide this information for certain benefits. The figures requested for North Down Assembly Area are in the table below.

	Weekly Claimants	Fortnightly Claimants	Monthly Claimants
Employment and Support Allowance	0	1,490	0
Jobseekers Allowance	0	2,030	0
Income Support	0	2,030	0
Pension Credit	3,390	60	60

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Disability Living Allowance: Reassessment Criteria

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the process by which Disability Living Allowance claimants are chosen to be reassessed.

(AQW 15818/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Since 1999 a process has been in place to review indefinite awards of Disability Living Allowance. It was introduced following a Westminster Public Accounts Committee report on the administration of Disability Living Allowance in Northern Ireland and was designed to address the Committee's concern that the changing needs of customers with indefinite

awards of Disability Living Allowance were not being addressed, and to ensure that the rate of benefit paid accurately meets the needs of the customer.

Cases for review are identified in the Disability Living Allowance caseload where it is considered there is high propensity for change to have occurred since the award was made. This analysis takes into account characteristics such as age, disability type and award rate. Certain types of cases are excluded from the initial selection process, mainly customers who are under 16, over 65 or within one year of age 65.

The process is designed to ensure those in receipt of Disability Living Allowance receive the correct rate of benefit.

Housing Executive Double-glazing Scheme: Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development when the Laps Window Scheme will start in the (i) Rathgill; (ii) Whitehill; and (iii) Kilcooley estates in Bangor.

(AQW 15835/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW 14334/11-15 on 26 September, which advised that the need for double glazing schemes to be programmed through Local Area Priority schemes has now been superseded by the Programme for Government target to ensure full double glazing in all Housing Executive properties by 2014/15.

The Housing Executive has advised that the up to date position with regards to the double glazing schemes in North Down is as follows:-

The scheme in Whitehill, Bangor is due to be presented for approval to the Housing Executive Board in October 2012 with a revised scheme value of £570k, with an anticipated start date in November 2012.

The Rathgill/Kilcooley/Loughview scheme commenced on 15th October 2012

All start dates within the Housing Executive's programme of planned improvement schemes are indicative and subject to change as schemes proceed through the various clearance and approval stages.

Benefit Entitlement: Students

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development what provision, in terms of job-seekers allowance or other benefits, is made for students who have to take a period of leave from their university course for re-sits but who remain registered at the university.

(AQW 15842/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The benefit system is not generally designed to meet the needs of full-time students enrolled on university courses; therefore the vast majority of full-time students are not entitled to benefits as a means of supporting themselves whilst studying. This is because primary financial support for students comes from the educational maintenance system, which is designed for their needs, unlike the social security system.

Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-based Employment and Support Allowance and Housing Benefit continue to be available to certain students in vulnerable groups, including disabled students and students who are responsible for a child of qualifying age. In addition, partners of students, who are not full-time students themselves, may claim benefits on behalf of the couple, providing they satisfy the relevant criteria, as may part-time students.

Housing Benefit: Claimants

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development what proportion of Housing Benefit claimants (i) of all ages; and (ii) under 25 years old were (a) in work; and (b) unemployed, in the latest period for which figures are available.

(AQW 15845/11-15)

Mr McCausland: At 1 October 2012 based on a total housing benefit caseload of 164,724, the proportion of Housing Benefit claimants of (i) all ages and (ii) under 25's who are (a) in work or (b) unemployed is shown in the tabled below.

Age	Housing Benefit Claimants			
	Proportion in work		Proportion unemployed *	
All	15,458	9%	23,588	14%
Under 25	1,605	1%	3,041	2%

* Relates to the number of claimants in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Employment and Support Allowance: Claimants

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people who were claiming Employment Support Allowance have been disallowed in the last twelve months; and how many of those are now claiming Job Seekers Allowance.

(AQW 15871/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Whilst it is not possible to provide the information in the format requested due to systems limitations, I can confirm that between August 2011 and July 2012 a total of 22,220 customers moved off Employment Support Allowance benefit. This number includes customers found fit for work following a medical assessment, those who have failed to attend a medical assessment, have not provided the required medical documents or have not provided necessary information. The figures also include claims where entitlement has ceased as a result of a customer reporting a change in their circumstances. Of these customers, 2,800 were recorded on Jobseekers Allowance within 1 month of their Employment Support Allowance claim ending.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Housing Executive Wardens: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive Wardens were operating in North Down, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 15873/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested in relation to the North Down area. However, the Housing Executive has had two Neighbourhood Officers operating in the Bangor area in each of the last five years.

Housing Executive Kitchen-replacement Scheme: Ballykeel

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development how many properties in the Ballykeel area of Ballymena have been withdrawn from the Kitchen Replacement Schemes because they have not had asbestos survey completed; (ii) why these surveys were not completed on time for the kitchen replacement schemes; and (iii) what criteria the properties with asbestos surveys met which the properties without a survey did not.

(AQW 15874/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive have temporarily withdrawn 80 dwellings from the Ballykeel kitchen replacement scheme because, although they had been added to the scheme they were not included in the original scheme brief and therefore not covered by the programme of asbestos surveys at the same time as the original dwellings. Under the Control of Asbestos Regulations NI 2012 Section 4 the Housing Executive is required to manage asbestos within their dwellings. Their current policy reflects this requirement, requiring that all of their properties have an asbestos survey carried out prior to the commencement of any works.

The 80 dwellings have been prioritised for surveying to allow them to be reinstated to the Ballykeel scheme at the earliest opportunity. Where the Housing Executive gains access to allow the asbestos surveys to be completed they are confident that the kitchen replacement works to these dwellings will be completed as part of the Ballykeel kitchen replacement scheme within the current scheme duration.

Social Security Agency: Relocation of Bank Liaison Section

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development why 16 staff within the Bank Liaison Section currently located in Lisahally, are to relocate in advance, to James House, Belfast within the next three weeks instead of as originally planned, to College Street in October 2013 as part of the overall centralisation of Finance; and why the Staff Officer and Executive Officer 1 posts, that currently exist within Bank Liaison Section, have been suppressed and are not being relocated to James House as part of the redeployment plan.

(AQW 15888/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As part of its modernisation programme, the Agency is continuing to introduce new systems and methods of payment for its customers. Consequently it is also necessary to review staffing levels and organisation structures as part of the Agency's efficiency programme.

The Bank Liaison team is part of the Social Security Agency's Payment Management Service which is currently provided from two locations in Londonderry and Belfast, with the majority of the function based in Belfast.

As part of a wider review of the finance function, driven by the Agency's Modernisation Programme and preparations for Welfare Reform, the Payment Management Service is being co-located in Belfast. The co-location will impact 14 staff from Administrative Assistant to Executive Officer 2 from the Bank Liaison team in Lisahally.

Whilst it was originally envisaged that the co-location would take place over 12 months, redeployment options have arisen earlier than anticipated due to increasing workloads in the new Northern Ireland Pension Centre. As a result, the Lisahally staff have been offered the choice of moving to Belfast or the Pension Centre.

The Agency is in discussions with the Department of Finance and Personnel about its future accommodation needs both in Belfast and across Northern Ireland which includes the potential to co-locate the majority of the finance function in College Street, Belfast. However, until decisions on the Agency's future accommodation needs are made, the Payment Management service will be co-located in James House, Belfast.

The Bank Liaison team includes one Staff Officer and one Executive Officer 1. The Staff Officer post is currently located in Belfast and the Executive Officer 1 post is currently vacant. No decisions have been taken to suppress either of these posts, although it is expected the Payment Management Service structure will be reviewed following co-location.

Citizens Advice: Funding

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development, given the increased number of citizens who are likely to require assistance as a result of the reform of many of the means tested benefits, whether he is giving consideration to providing additional funding to the Citizens Advice Bureau.

(AQW 15907/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department provides funding in the region of £3m per annum to a number of organisations to support advice provision – including Citizens Advice Bureau. My Department is currently considering what support our customers require in relation to Welfare Reform. Consultation with customers and stakeholders has already begun and officials will shortly be meeting with representatives from the voluntary and community sector to discuss the role they can play in implementing Welfare Reform in Northern Ireland.

Housing Executive Boiler-replacement Scheme

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development to explain the delay in sending out application forms to Boiler Replacement Scheme applicants; and when he expects all application forms to be issued.

(AQW 15955/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I launched the Boiler Replacement Scheme in September with a budget of £12m available over the next 3 years. This equates to about 5,500 boiler replacements each year and the Housing Executive's Grant Office were resourced to deal with these numbers.

The scheme has been very popular and already some 19,500 enquiries have been received in less than 2 months. I have instructed NIHE to allocate additional resources, both in terms of budget and staff available to deal with the huge number of enquiries. NIHE have advised that they anticipate the effect of the additional staff will be evident in 3-4 weeks. To date, 10,500 application forms have been issued and 4,500 have been returned. These are very large numbers compared to the anticipated 5,550 cases per year.

NIHE have confirmed to me that the Grants Offices are reducing the backlog of enquiries awaiting the issue of application forms and this will accelerate as the additional staff are added to the offices. However, enquiries continue to be received at the rate of approximately 1,000 per month.

NIHE have assured me that they continue to issue application forms to enquirers as soon as possible and any additional funding required will be allocated to the scheme.

Housing Executive: Review

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

(AQW 16016/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Fundamental Review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive reported in June 2011. This report was followed by a series of engagement meetings with key stakeholders. These pieces of work have informed my thinking on the way forward and an Executive Paper has been prepared outlining my proposals. Once cleared by the Executive, the Social Development Committee will be briefed and my officials will then plan and progress the necessary work, consulting with key stakeholders as necessary.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Parliament Buildings: St Patrick's Day

Mr Flanagan asked the Assembly Commission what plans it has to turn Parliament Buildings green on St Patrick's Day.

(AQW 15447/11-15)

Mr Weir (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): During the period when Invest NI was legally prevented from delivering a full start-up business support programme, an 'Interim Service' began on 1st October 2011 and was operational until 19th October 2012.

Invest NI's Regional Start programme will become operational on 22nd October 2012 and will be delivered on a 2-year contract by Enterprise Northern Ireland following a tender process carried out by CPD.

The total number of business starts supported by Invest NI between the start of the legal challenge to the award of the tender to ENI is 1290. The breakdown by constituency is detailed in the table below.

INVEST NI INDIGENEOUS STARTS (From 1st October 2011)

PCA	Total
Belfast East	54
Belfast North	50
Belfast South	58
Belfast West	61
East Antrim	60
East Londonderry	71
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	93
Foyle	142
Lagan Valley	45
Mid Ulster	103
Newry and Armagh	82
North Antrim	93
North Down	50
South Antrim	41
South Down	68
Strangford	42
Upper Bann	75
West Tyrone	102
Total	1290

Parliament Buildings: Union Flag

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission, pursuant to AQW 14891/11-15, as the Union flags were flown on the occasion of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's visit to Stormont Estate in June 2012, why similar provision could not be made for 29th September 2012.

(AQW 15858/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Flags Regulations (NI) 2000, as amended by the Flags Regulations (NI) (Amendment) 2002, contains certain provisions regarding the flying of flags during a visit by Her Majesty the Queen. There are no provisions in the Flags Regulations which cover the 29th September 2012.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 9 November 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Single Equality Bill

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the introduction of the Single Equality Bill.
(AQW 13980/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): There are currently no plans to develop a Single Equality Bill here.

Our Department continues to legislate in order to provide legal protection against discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity.

European Union Events

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the jurisdictional issues arising from the suggestion that European Union events should be hosted in Northern Ireland under the aegis of the upcoming Irish Presidency of the European Council.
(AQW 14553/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We do not consider that any jurisdictional issues are likely to arise.

Community Relations Council: Reviews

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) how many times since 2007 they have carried out reviews into the effectiveness of the Community Relations Council and (ii) how often the Community Relations Council has requested such a review.
(AQW 14830/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The last review into the effectiveness of the Community Relations Council was in 2007. An effectiveness review has been the subject of discussion at quarterly liaison meetings with the Community Relations Council. We are currently considering all options for a review within the context of the development of the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy.

Goal Line Youth, Portadown

Mrs Dobson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) for their assessment of the contribution of Goal Line Youth, Portadown; (ii) whether they are aware of its present urgent funding needs which, if unmet, will lead to the organisation closing its doors on 31 October 2012; and (iii) what assistance their Department can provide to the organisation as it seeks to continue to meet the needs of over two hundred children, almost 50 percent of whom have special educational and disability needs.
(AQW 14999/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Our Department has had no involvement or funding relationship with Goal Line Youth in Portadown and has no plans to fund this organisation.

We understand that the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) has provided core funding to the organisation since 2010/11 and there are no immediate plans to change this.

Reinvestment and Reform Initiative

Mr P Ramsey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the current status, balance and priorities for the Reinvestment and Reform Initiative.
(AQW 15205/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Reinvestment and Reform Initiative (RRI) commenced implementation in 2002. Elements of the Initiative have since been subsumed into a number of key Executive programmes, including the Programme for Government and Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland. The Programme for Government, which includes actions in relation to a number of former military sites previously included in the RRI, was published in March 2012 and the Investment Strategy, which outlines how the Executive will allocate its capital investment funding was published in October 2012.

Under RRI, six former military sites were gifted to the Executive. The regeneration of the Maze/Long Kesh (2 sites) is being taken forward by the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation, the two initial projects being the building of a Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre on the site and the sale of 65 acres of land

to the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society who are moving the Balmoral Agricultural Show by 2013 and creating a new Centre of Rural Excellence at the site. The development of the Ebrington site is being delivered by the Urban Regeneration Company Ilex. OFMDFM is directly taking forward the development of the Crumlin Road Gaol. The remaining two sites at Malone Road and Magherafelt were sold for re-development. In 2011, a further three sites were gifted under the Hillsborough Agreement. These sites were not intended primarily for regeneration but are intended to provide capital receipts for the Executive.

Borrowing by DFP under the Reinvestment and Reform Initiative is ongoing. The level of borrowing built into the Budget 2011-15 for the years 2012-2013 to 2014-2015 is £200m per annum.

Delivering Social Change

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to their Delivering Social Change announcement, which constituencies will benefit from the (i) additional 230 graduate teachers delivering one to one tuition; (ii) ten Family Support Hubs; (iii) additional 50 health workers delivering positive parenting programmes; (iv) ten Social Enterprise Incubation Hubs; (v) NEET intervention project to support 500 families; and (vi) 20 Nurture Units.

(AQW 15434/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The lead departments responsible for the signature projects will be developing Programme Delivery Plans in the coming weeks, with the aim of having work rolled out at the earliest possible opportunity. However, all investment zones will benefit from the schemes.

Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation Board

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 15114/11-15, how many members of each of the respective selection panels which were convened to appoint the Maze Regeneration Board, declared an interest, or otherwise declared any knowledge of, or association with, any of the applicants; and for how many of the applicants (i) deemed appointable; and (ii) appointed, was such a declaration made.

(AQW 15654/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Selection Panels for both the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation Board public appointment competitions received redacted application forms at sift stage and it would not be possible for panel members to declare an interest or knowledge of any of the applicants at that stage.

Prior to the interview stage for both competitions, the Selection Panel was made aware of the applicants' names. In the November 2011 competition, individual members of the Selection Panel indicated that between them they knew professionally and/or personally ten of the twelve applicants deemed appointable. Of those appointed from this list, some panel members indicated that they knew professionally and/or personally four of the applicants appointed.

At the March 2012 competition, individual panel members indicated that between them they knew professionally and/or personally all fourteen of those deemed appointable. Of those appointed to the Board from this list, some panel members indicated they knew seven of the applicants appointed.

Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation Board

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 14129/11-15, how many applicants were deemed appointable by each respective interview panel.

(AQW 15657/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There were twelve applicants deemed appointable as Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation Board members in the October/November 2011 public appointment competition. No one was deemed suitable by the interview panel to fill the Chair position.

In the May 2012 Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation Board public appointment competition, there were seven applicants deemed appointable for the Chair position and a further nine applicants deemed appointable for the Board member positions.

Delivering Social Change: Signature Project

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the Delivering Social Change signature project will be financed, or partially financed, from the Social Investment Fund.

(AQW 15726/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Funding for the Delivering Social Change Signature Projects will be found within central Government funds.

The £80m Social Investment Fund remains ring-fenced for the development of strategic projects which will tackle recurring issues faced by communities living with the consequences of poverty and deprivation and will be spent in the first phase of SIF.

Childcare Strategy

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQO 2642/11-15, (i) how the Policy and Economic Appraisal of Options for the Childcare Strategy 2010 research has been used; (ii) whether it continues to represent the completion of Phase 1 of a two phase process adopted by their Department's Child Poverty Sub-Group in developing a Care Strategy, phase 1 being the completion of the policy and economic appraisal and phase 2 being development of a childcare strategy underpinned by the findings and recommendations set out in the policy and economic appraisal; and (iii) how much was spent on this initial appraisal.

(AQW 15731/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The findings of the 2010 Policy and Economic Appraisal were the basis for including a commitment to publish and implement a Childcare Strategy in the current Programme for Government. The findings were also the basis for the Executive's £12m allocation towards the development of a Childcare Strategy over the course of the current Comprehensive Spending Review period. The Policy and Economic Appraisal represented the completion of Phase 1 of the work originally identified by the Child Poverty Sub-Group. Work identified as Phase 2 is now being taken forward under the Delivering Social Change Framework. The 2010 Policy and Economic Appraisal cost £33,000.

Corporation Tax

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the devolution of Corporation Tax.

(AQO 2654/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A reduction in the rate of Corporation Tax would provide a major stimulus to the local economy; one of the key commitments in our Programme for Government is to press for the devolution of Corporation Tax and reduce its level. The Joint Ministerial Working Group examining the issues involved in devolving responsibility for the rate of Corporation Tax met for the last time on 18 October.

We have completed our work and addressed the Terms of Reference. We have agreed that a joint report will go to the Prime Minister highlighting findings on the costs, administrative changes and the potential legislative vehicle for devolving Corporation Tax powers.

Officials are currently drafting this joint report which we expect to go to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor soon.

We are pressing for a meeting with the Prime Minister after this to make our case.

Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what reassurances they can give to witnesses in the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry who feel under-represented without access to independent legal representation.

(AQW 15780/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Inquiry has supplied the following response:

"Victims and survivors who appear before the Statutory Inquiry as witnesses will be represented by the Inquiry legal team. Victims and survivors can be assured that the Inquiry legal team will be competent, experienced and appropriately resourced to carry out its functions. It should be borne in mind that the Statutory Inquiry is an inquisitorial rather than an adversarial forum and it will not be determining questions of any person's civil or criminal liability."

Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to the Historical Institutional Abuse inquiry, in the event of a judicial review challenge to the decisions of their Department or the Inquiry Panel, (i) whether members of the Inquiry legal team will be tasked with advising witnesses on potential challenges; (ii) would the Inquiry legal team be sufficiently independent to offer independent legal advice; and (iii) were the Panel not considered suitably independent, who would be allowed to advise witnesses.

(AQW 15796/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A challenge to a decision of the Inquiry or the Department would be outside the remit of the legal team and anyone seeking to do this would have to seek their own legal advice in the normal way.

Commissioner for Older People: Resources

Mr Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what resources will be provided to the Commissioner for Older People to implement the priorities for action contained in the Hope, Confidence and Certainty document.

(AQW 15838/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We understand that the draft priorities for action contained in the Hope, Confidence and Certainty document will be subject to public consultation in 2013 and so could change.

The budget for the Commissioner for Older People NI is determined by our Department within the terms of the current Comprehensive Spending Review settlement. For 2012/13 the budget is £988k, for 2013/14 it is £959k and for 2014/15 it is £930k. Should the Commissioner require additional resources, she does have the option of submitting bids for them to the Department.

High Court: Appointments

Mrs D Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) how many (a) males; and (b) females have been appointed to the Northern Ireland High Court since 2002; (ii) how many were practising (a) barristers; and (b) solicitors at the time of their appointment; and (iii) how many of those appointed had previously held full-time posts in other branches of the judiciary.
(AQW 16045/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Judicial Appointments Commission (NIJAC) is the independent body for the appointment of judicial office holders to courts and tribunals. We have no locus in judicial appointment matters and have referred the question to the Chief Executive Officer of the Commission to provide the Member with the relevant information.

High Court: Vacancies

Mrs D Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) how many competitions have been held to fill vacancies in the Northern Ireland High Court since 2005; (ii) how many valid applications were received from (a) males; and (b) females; (iii) how many (a) males; and (b) females have been appointed as a result of these competitions; and (iv) how many successful applicants were practising barristers at the time of their appointment.
(AQW 16047/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Judicial Appointments Commission (NIJAC) is the independent body for the appointment of judicial office holders to courts and tribunals. We have no locus in judicial appointment matters and have referred the question to the Chief Executive Officer of the Commission to provide the Member with the relevant information.

High Court

Mrs D Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) how many (a) male; and (b) female judges are currently serving in the Northern Ireland High Court; (ii) how many were practising (a) barristers; and (b) solicitors at the time of their appointment; and (iii) how many had previously held full-time offices in other branches of the judiciary.
(AQW 16048/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Judicial Appointments Commission (NIJAC) is the independent body for the appointment of judicial office holders to courts and tribunals. We have no locus in judicial appointment matters and have referred the question to the Chief Executive Officer of the Commission to provide the Member with the relevant information.

Attorney General: European Court of Human Rights Adoption Case

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any communication they have had with the Attorney General regarding his decision to intervene in a European Court of Human Rights' case on adoption.
(AQW 16087/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have not had any communication with the Attorney General regarding this issue.

Ebrington/Fort George Sites, Derry

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on achieving the Programme for Government milestone of development framework completion and securing outline planning approval for Ebrington Barracks and Fort George Army Base in Derry.
(AQW 16152/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A Business Case for appointment of the design Team to develop a Framework for Ebrington has been prepared by Ilex and is currently being assessed by the Department. An Outline Planning Application with Environmental Statement will be based on the completed Framework and will be submitted at the end of April 2013 which is in line with the target set in the "One" Regeneration Plan. The Fort George site is under the ownership of the Department for Social Development (DSD).

Social Investment Fund: Zones

Mr Buchanan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline when they anticipate that an area based plan will be in place for each of the Social Investment Fund zones.
(AQO 2765/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have recently commenced the area planning stage of the Social Investment Fund, with a two-day workshop for voluntary/community and political Steering Group members, on 17th and 18th October in Crumlin Road Gaol.

The consultants, recently appointed to support the Steering Groups to develop the strategic area plans, were also in attendance.

This was a significant event at which members began the process of scoping the issues and preparing engagement strategies to ensure wider community involvement in the area planning process. These engagement strategies are now being delivered.

We expect Steering Groups to submit strategic plans for their zones to the Department by 31 January 2013.

Following official assessment of the proposed projects within each plan, we will then sign off on the final area plan for each zone, with a view to commencing delivery on the ground as early as possible.

Our officials will engage the Funders Reference Group during this process to ensure other funders are made aware of the projects we approve for funding and that these dovetail as much as possible with the wider work being taken forward.

Social Investment Fund: Update

Mr Newton asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Social Investment Fund Programme. (AQO 2766/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We have recently commenced the area planning stage of the Social Investment Fund, with a two-day workshop for voluntary/community and political Steering Group members, on 17th and 18th October in Crumlin Road Gaol.

The consultants, recently appointed to support the Steering Groups to develop the strategic area plans, were also in attendance.

This was a significant event at which members began the process of scoping the issues and preparing engagement strategies to ensure wider community involvement in the area planning process. These engagement strategies are now being delivered.

We expect Steering Groups to submit strategic plans for their zones to the Department by 31 January 2013.

Following official assessment of the proposed projects within each plan, we will then sign off on the final area plan for each zone, with a view to commencing delivery on the ground as early as possible.

Our officials will engage the Funders Reference Group during this process to ensure other funders are made aware of the projects we approve for funding and that these dovetail as much as possible with the wider work being taken forward.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Flooding: East Antrim

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the work the Rivers Agency has carried out, or will carry out, to address the recent flooding in East Antrim, in particular Cairncastle and Cushendall. (AQW 15856/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Rivers Agency is not aware of any recent flooding in the Cairncastle area and therefore no schemes have been identified or works planned. Rivers Agency attended two meetings in September with DRD Roads Service, NIW and local councillors where the ongoing flooding problems in Cushendall were discussed. It was accepted that the recurring flooding in the centre of the town was not related to the river but was due to excess run-off exceeding the capacity of road and storm drainage systems. The recent flooding replicated previous events with flood waters travelling along roadways and ponding in Shore Street. Rivers Agency is working with Roads Service colleagues to review the flooding event and consider what the options are for reducing the likelihood of further recurrence. Individual properties along the River Dall upstream of the town are also at risk of flooding but no viable works were identified by a study in 2009 which would offer increased protection. However an additional length of the river was designated to allow maintenance by Rivers Agency to optimise the capacity of the watercourse.

Rural Development Programme: Strategic Projects

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many strategic projects have been funded through the Rural Development Programme, including their location and under which arm's-length body they fall. (AQW 15875/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: All applications are working their way through the assessment process and at the time of writing no letters of offer have issued to any strategic project, therefore no projects have been funded.

Animal Cruelty: Legislation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she intends to introduce legislation to permanently ban farmers from keeping livestock following a conviction of animal cruelty at Londonderry Magistrates Court, if there are previous convictions.

(AQW 15917/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The welfare of animals here is protected by the Welfare of Animals Act 2011, which will replace the Welfare of Animals Act 1972. Both Acts provide powers to allow the Courts to disqualify a person convicted of an offence of cruelty or of causing unnecessary suffering from owning animals, either permanently or, for such a period as the Court thinks fit, irrespective of whether it is a first offence.

The powers of disqualification have been strengthened in the 2011 Act to ensure that a person who is disqualified from owning animals cannot keep, or participate in the keeping of animals, or be party to any arrangements to control or influence the way in which animals are kept. In addition, the powers have been extended to cover not just offences of unnecessary suffering, but also a wide range of other offences such as failing to provide for the needs of the animal. Disqualification may be imposed in relation to animals generally, or to one or more kinds of animal. If the Court decides not to make an order to disqualify the person for cases brought forward under the 2011 Act, the Court must state its reason.

I am content that the legislation in place provides Courts with the powers to disqualify those persons convicted of animal welfare offences from owning and keeping animals. With regard to permanently banning farmers with previous convictions, sentencing within the legislative framework is a matter for the independent judiciary. In making sentencing decisions, Judges take into account the law, the seriousness of the offence, any aggravating or mitigating factors, sentencing guidelines and all the relevant circumstances in each case. In the case to which you refer, which was heard at Derry Magistrates' Court on 20 September 2012, a farmer who pleaded guilty to permitting an act of cruelty was convicted under the Welfare of Animals Act 1972 and was fined £750 plus £24 costs. I understand this was the first time that this farmer had been convicted for animal cruelty.

I have been advised by the Minister of Justice that the Lord Chief Justice, in his Programme of Action on Sentencing, is enhancing the structures by which the judiciary ensure consistent and appropriate sentencing and that sentencing guidelines on offences of animal cruelty heard in the Magistrates' Courts will be developed in the near future.

Bovine Tuberculosis: Testing Regulations

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has had any contact with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in relation to the changes to tuberculosis testing regulations.

(AQW 15923/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The proposed TB testing changes in England have not been on the agenda for my meetings with Agriculture Ministers from Britain.

However, I can assure you that my officials are in regular contact with their Defra counterparts and those from the Scottish Government and the Welsh Assembly Government via monthly TB Liaison Group teleconferences and also in relation to the TB Eradication Plans that are submitted annually to the EU Commission for approval.

You will be aware that we have a robust EU Commission approved TB Eradication Programme in place that is based on testing to detect infected cattle, removing infected animals and reducing the risks of disease spread through herd restrictions and movement controls.

My officials are also involved with their counterparts in Defra, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Assembly Government concerning any Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) audits or EU Commission TB Task Force visits in relation to the TB Eradication Programmes in place in the north and in Britain.

There have been no significant changes to our TB programme since 1 January 2010 when we introduced the requirement to remove as reactors animals that give a second consecutive inconclusive result to a TB test, rather than three consecutive tests as formerly. However, we review our Eradication Programme annually and will consider further amendments to our existing controls should these prove necessary to improve disease control here.

Any proposal to enhance our controls will be considered in the context of the estimated costs and benefits, the assessment of likely impact on the disease, as well as on farm businesses and will be subject to consultation with industry stakeholders.

Bovine Tuberculosis: Testing Regulations

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs proposed changes to tuberculosis testing regulations.

(AQW 15924/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: You will appreciate that it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the detail of Defra's proposed changes to their TB Eradication programme. However, we continue to monitor closely any changes made to the TB programmes in Britain and in the south.

All EU Member States and regions of Member States have to comply with the requirements of the Council Directive 64/432, the "Trade Directive". In addition, Member States and regions of Member States may be required to apply tighter conditions in

their TB Eradication Plan if they wish to secure the EU Commission's approval for co-funding from the EU Veterinary Fund for TB Eradication.

We have a rigorous EU approved TB Eradication Plan, which has enabled us to apply for EU co-funding for the years 2010, 2011 and 2012. Our draft TB Eradication Plan for 2013 has been submitted to the EU Commission for consideration.

Unlike the position in England, all cattle herds here are tested annually for TB and animal movement controls are applied uniformly across the north.

However, we review our TB Eradication Programme annually and will consider further amendments to our existing controls should these prove necessary to improve disease control here.

Any proposals to enhance controls will have to be considered in the context of the estimated costs and benefits, the assessment of likely impact on the disease, as well as on farm businesses and will be subject to consultation with industry stakeholders.

Portavogie Fishing Fleet

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW14420/11-15, what representation she has made in relation to securing spare fishing effort from other Member States which can be used by the Portavogie fleet. (AQW 15926/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department is continuing to work with the other Fisheries Administrations to secure additional fishing effort in the West of Scotland through a swap of spare fishing quota for spare fishing effort. We have agreed to negotiate a swap subject to the terms of such a deal being considered reasonable value in terms of effort secured against quota donated. As soon as we have an equitable offer we will approach Producer Organisations to invite them to donate fishing quota for the swap.

Fishing Licence Fee

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) whether her Department was consulted by the Isle of Man Government in relation to the introduction of a fishing licence fee, on 1 April 2013, by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; and (ii) to outline her Department's response. (AQW 15927/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department was not consulted by the Isle of Man authorities prior to them taking a decision to introduce a £435 fee for a 2-year fishing vessel license from April next year. This will apply to all vessels wishing to fish in the Isle of Man territorial sea, including Manx vessels. This matter was raised with me by Phil Gawne MHK, the Isle of Man Fisheries Minister when we met on 19th October. He explained that it was necessary to introduce this charge following a cut of 40% to his Department's fisheries budget. Given those circumstances I understand why the Isle of Man had to take this action, which while necessary, will be unpopular with fishermen. I was assured that the fee has been based on the estimated cost of the administration of the licenses including variations made over the 2-year period and does not include any contribution to other fisheries management costs.

Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute: Public Health Risks

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department, or any other Department, is advised of public health risks identified by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute at Newforge whilst carrying out analytical research on behalf of private sector clients. (AQW 15936/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Where there is a statutory basis to do so, the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) advises my Department, and other departments, of potential public health risks while carrying out analytical research on behalf of private sector clients.

AFBI reports to DARD the identification of pathogens specified in The Zoonoses Order (Northern Ireland) 1991, The Zoonoses Order (NI) 1997 and The Zoonoses (Amendment) Order (NI) 2011, in samples submitted by private sector clients. Examples of this include salmonella, psittacosis and enzootic abortion of ewes.

AFBI also reports to DARD the results of any analysis for veterinary drug residues or pesticides which demonstrate levels above the limits of compliance as set out in EC Regulation 470/2009 and EU Commission Regulation 37/2010.

AFBI follows the position taken by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS), the Lead Partner in The Shellfish Partnership, that as a government agency, it is under an obligation to support the government's consumer protection law and policy. Consequently, in the event that AFBI becomes aware of a non-compliant product being placed on the market, it is under an obligation to inform the relevant competent authority. On this basis, and whilst not a legislative requirement, results from any private sector samples found to be non-compliant for marine biotoxins are reported by AFBI to the Food Standards Agency.

AFBI reports to DARD, as the competent authority, the submission of bovine stillbirths and abortions submitted by private sector clients. AFBI also reports to DARD the identification of pathogens listed in the Diseases of Animals Act (NI) 2010. These include agents that may be of public health significance, e.g. highly pathogenic strains of influenza.

Bovine Tuberculosis: Vaccination Programme

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an estimate of the cost of undertaking a vaccination programme with a view to eradicating bovine tuberculosis.

(AQW 15937/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department is fully committed to reducing and ultimately eradicating bovine TB in cattle here.

You may be aware that, on 3 July 2012, I advised the Assembly Agriculture and Rural Development Committee that I have asked my officials to design specific wildlife intervention research that would involve testing live badgers; vaccinating and releasing the test negative badgers; and removing the test positive ones.

The purpose of this wildlife intervention research is to assess the impact of this approach on the level of TB in badgers and in cattle in the field study area. This balanced approach would focus on removing diseased badgers and protecting uninfected ones. It would avoid removal of uninfected badgers and could lead in time to a reduction of TB in badgers and in reduced transmission of TB from this source to cattle. The design of the study will be complex and we want to make sure that we get it right. You will appreciate that the design work must first be completed, and the results of badger sett survey work evaluated, before detailed cost estimates can be provided. Subject to the completion of the necessary preparatory steps, I would wish this study to start as early as possible next year.

I am very encouraged by the wide spectrum of stakeholder support and engagement for this test and vaccinate or remove wildlife intervention research. Farmer, environmental and private veterinary representative organisations are participating fully through the newly constituted TB stakeholder working group on the development of this research approach.

EU Commission legislation prohibits the vaccination of cattle against bovine TB, although research continues in England into the feasibility of developing such a vaccine. Field trials would have to be approved, conducted and validated before any change to the legislative position would be considered. In addition, we should wish to be certain that any such vaccine developed would have international acceptance before considering its use here, given the value of our export dependent trade in livestock and livestock products which is worth over £1,000 million per year.

Unclassified Roads

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has any plans to meet with the Minister for Regional Development to discuss the involvement of the farming sector in keeping unclassified roads clear during periods of snow, severe frost and subsequent flooding.

(AQW 15938/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have no plans at present to meet with the Minister for Regional Development to discuss the involvement of the farming sector in clearing unclassified roads affected by frost, snow or subsequent flooding, however, I will keep this under review.

I can also advise that Roads Service employs contractors and farmers to help remove snow from local roads, using their own equipment, in severe weather conditions.

Flooding: Greater Lisburn Area

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what co-operation her Department has had from other Departments following the recent flooding in the greater Lisburn area.

(AQW 15969/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: During the flood event of 27 June 2012, drainage systems as a whole throughout Greater Belfast and Lisburn were overwhelmed, such was the intensity of the rainfall and the flows generated in watercourses and culverts. Generally for each flooding locality, a lead organisation (namely Rivers Agency, NI Water or Roads Service) will head up an investigation. At many locations, flooding may well have been caused by a combination of factors. Rivers Agency is currently inspecting and investigating numerous watercourse related flooding locations throughout Greater Belfast and Lisburn. Co-operation from other authorities at this stage has generally been in the form of discussion and evidence-gathering for particular investigations. The authorities have jointly attended residents' meetings, local and central government meetings and forums. These meetings clearly identify the particular roles of each organisation in investigating and reporting on flooding locations. The Inter-Agency Flood Liaison Group (Eastern) recently met and a key element of the meeting was the June 2012 flood event and the identification of various hotspots.

Rivers Agency: Resources

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department plans to increase resources within the Rivers Agency in relation to the regular inspection of culverts and grilles.

(AQW 15970/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Rivers Agency has an inspection regime in place for both culverts and grilles. Culverts are inspected on a three year cycle, while grilles are inspected depending on their risk classification. Category "A" grilles are inspected a minimum of weekly and category "B" grilles are inspected a minimum of monthly. Rivers Agency constantly keeps the risk classification under review and some grilles may move categories, particularly following flooding events. The Agency has no plans to change these regimes, and therefore has no plans to increase resources significantly.

Fishing Vessels

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in light of her decision not to proceed with a decommissioning scheme, whether she will allocate additional funds to the grant application scheme available to local fishermen for modernising their vessels.

(AQW 15976/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Investments on board fishing vessels and selectivity measure has been allocated a budget of £2.4m and to date the Department has committed £378k (16% of budget) to 54 projects focussed mainly on improving safety on board, working conditions, product quality and energy efficiency. The remaining £2m of the budget is considered sufficient to meet the current and anticipated future demand to support modernisation needs of the fleet to the end of 2013 when the EFF programme comes to a close. The position is monitored continuously and should circumstances change then finance can be reallocated to this measure.

The Department proposes to reallocate the funding reserved for decommissioning to Axis 2 and 3, where demand already exceeds the approved budgets and work is ongoing to revise the relevant business cases.

Ash Dieback Disease

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she would consider removing ash trees as a preferred species in Field Boundary Restoration in the NI Countryside Management Scheme, given that ash dieback is a threat.

(AQW 16014/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have introduced emergency legislation to control the movement of ash plants. With this legislation in place, supplies of ash plants will not be available for the coming planting season for the Field Boundary Restoration option within the NI Countryside Management Scheme or indeed other options which could involve the planting of ash. I also recommend that all agri-environment scheme participants remain vigilant and look for any signs of this disease on ash trees they have already planted on their farmland.

Countryside Management Scheme

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Minister when her Department expects to have all 2012 inspections for the NI Countryside Management Scheme completed.

(AQW 16058/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department plans to start inspections for NICMS 2012 claims in early 2013 and the completion date will be determined by the findings of the inspections. In line with Article 12, paragraph 2 of Commission Regulation (EU) No 65/2011 my Department is obliged to increase the number of on-the-spot checks (OTSCs) where the initial sample of OTSCs reveal significant irregularities. Therefore if, at inspection, it is discovered that a significant level of work is not carried out or not completed to standard, the number of inspections on 2012 claims may need to be increased. Once all the inspections are complete, payment processing can commence.

Field Boundary Restoration Claims

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the rationale behind the decision that there should be further checks on Field Boundary Restoration claims, thus causing a further delay in the payments of the 2011 NI Countryside Management Scheme; and (ii) why the checks could not be included in the 2012 or 2013 farm inspections and any necessary adjustments made in subsequent payments.

(AQW 16059/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) In line with Article 12, paragraph 2 of Commission Regulation (EU) No 65/2011 my Department is obliged to increase the number of on-the-spot checks (OTSCs) where the initial sample of OTSCs reveal significant irregularities. During the 2011 OTSCs for the NI Countryside Management Scheme, significant irregularities were detected on Field Boundary Restoration (FBR) claims. These irregularities related to inspection findings where work was not done, or not done to the correct standard. Therefore, as required by the above mentioned EU legislation, my Department has had to increase the number of checks on FBR claims. We will progress these claims once we are satisfied that all claims are accurate and valid.
- (ii) Article 12, paragraph 2 of Commission Regulation (EU) No 65/2011 requires the number of OTSCs to be increased in the claim year and therefore the checks cannot be included in 2012 or 2013 farm inspections. My Department is progressing additional checks to allow payment processing to continue as quickly as possible.

Agri-food Research Fund

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the administration of the Agri-Food Research Fund, in particular how much has been spent on advertising.

(AQW 16085/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department opened the Research Challenge Fund for the third time on 8 October 2012 for a 15 week period. We advertised the re-opening of the fund in the Belfast Telegraph, Newsletter, Irish News, Farm Week, Farming Life, Irish Farmers Journal and on the NI Business Info website with a total cost of £2,844.74

Single Farm Payment

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans there are to ensure that the additional £15 million, made available by reducing the amount of modulation, will be directed to farmers who are most in need.
(AQW 16086/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The 2013 Single Farm Payment (SFP) will not be subject to voluntary modulation deductions. The additional €19 million (£15million at current exchange rates) will be made available to all those SFP applicants that receive a payment from December 2013 onwards.

The amount received by individual farmers under the Single Farm Payment Scheme is determined by the value of entitlements held and by the amount of eligible land used to claim those entitlements. The allocation of entitlements with a few minor exceptions took place back in 2005 when the SFP scheme commenced and the current allocations will not change prior to a new CAP Reform agreement, except where entitlements are traded between farm businesses.

Bovine Tuberculosis: Interdepartmental Discussions

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions have taken place between her Department and the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on the issue of bovine tuberculosis and any potential badger cull.
(AQW 16120/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The issue of bovine tuberculosis and the potential badger cull in England have not been on the agenda for my meetings with Agriculture Ministers from Britain. However, I can assure you that my officials are in regular contact with their Defra counterparts and those from the Scottish Government and the Welsh Assembly Government via monthly TB Liaison Group teleconferences and also in relation to the TB Eradication Plans that are submitted annually to the EU Commission for approval.

You will be aware that we have a robust EU Commission approved TB Eradication Programme in place that is based on testing to detect infected cattle, removing infected animals and reducing the risks of disease spread through herd restrictions and movement controls.

My officials are also involved with their counterparts in Defra, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Assembly Government concerning any Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) audits or EU Commission TB Task Force visits in relation to the TB Eradication Programmes in place in the north and in Britain.

Countryside Management Scheme/Single Farm Payment

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given the Countryside Management Scheme is claimed using the same form as the Single Farm Payment, was paid in conjunction with the Single Farm Paid in 2009 and 2010 and is still to be paid for 2011, meaning a delay of 10 months compared to previous years, can she clarify that it will be subject to a delayed payment for the remaining years of the scheme.
(AQW 16178/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Participants in the NI Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS) must claim their payment annually on the Single Application Form (SAF). Whilst the SAF is also used to claim Single Farm Payment, DARD does not make payments for NICMS in conjunction with Single Farm Payment. My Department cannot process NICMS payments until inspections are completed, the claims are validated and we are sure that payment can be correctly verified.

In line with these requirements my Department started making payments for 2011 NICMS claims in September 2012. One of the main reasons which caused a delay between claims being submitted and payments commencing is that additional inspections have been needed. This is because my Department discovered that a high number of claims had over-declarations, especially for Field Boundary Restoration where work was either not done or not done to the correct standard.

I plan to start inspections for 2012 claims in early 2013, but as NICMS is claimed annually, it will be the outcome of subsequent years' inspections that will determine the timing of future payments. However my Department aims to make payments as quickly as possible within the regulatory framework of the Scheme each year.

Brucellosis: Blood Testing

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has any plans to regulate the fee charged by vets for Brucellosis blood testing.
(AQW 16183/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have no plans to intervene and regulate fees charged by private veterinary practitioners for brucellosis pre-movement testing. I consider this to be a matter between the vet and his customer.

Animal Cruelty: Legislation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans she has to introduce additional legislation to combat animal cruelty or abuse.

(AQW 16193/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Welfare of Animals Act 2011 is a major step forward in terms of protecting the welfare of both farmed and other animals. The 2011 Act will become fully operational on 1 January 2013 when the final provision to ban the cosmetic docking of dogs' tails is commenced. The 2011 Act provides powers to prevent unnecessary suffering to any animal and it places a 'duty of care' on people to secure the welfare of animals, including domestic pets and horses, for which they are responsible.

Over the last year I have introduced the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations 2012, which lays down the standards for the protection of animals kept for farming purposes, and the Welfare of Animals (Permitted Procedures by Lay Persons) Regulations 2012. In addition to this programme of legislation, earlier this year my Department published Codes of Practice setting out the standards of care required for sheep, beef cattle, meat chickens, dogs, cats, horses, rabbits and non-human primates. My Department also aims to publish updated Codes of Practice setting out the standards of care required for dairy cows, pigs and laying hens by the end of 2012.

Currently, Regulations regarding the welfare of dogs in breeding establishments and the welfare of animals at the time of killing are progressing through the legislative process.

Next year I plan to bring forward updated subordinate legislation in relation to the licensing and registration of petshops, animal boarding establishments and horse riding establishments in order to protect, safeguard and promote the welfare of animals in these establishments. The licensing and registration functions associated with such establishments will transfer from DARD to Councils as the new subordinate legislation is made and on the basis that fees will be set at an appropriate level to allow Councils to recover full costs.

Over the coming weeks I will be meeting the Minister for Justice and the Minister for Education on a number of issues relating to animal welfare.

Schmallenberg Virus

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the recent detection of schmallenberg virus.

(AQW 16315/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: On Wednesday last week, I was informed that a case of Schmallenberg virus had been detected on a farm in Co Down. My Veterinary staff are currently undertaking an investigation on farm. The information to date indicates that it is a closed herd that has had no recent imports. This development is not surprising given the rapid spread of the virus across northern Europe and large parts of Britain since it was first identified in late 2011.

AFBI have been undertaking surveillance of aborted and stillborn fetuses that meet a recognised clinical case definition of Schmallenberg virus. The recent case was detected as a result of that surveillance. One calf submitted from the farm tested positive for Schmallenberg virus. A second calf submitted from the same farm displayed the clinical signs of Schmallenberg virus but did not test positive. It is likely that the mother in this case was infected with Schmallenberg virus about 6 months ago but will now have recovered.

Schmallenberg virus was also detected in a deformed calf in the south last week. I understand that the farm involved, which is in Co Cork, was also a closed herd and virus was detected in a malformed calf submitted for post mortem examination.

In response to the recent development, I have issued a press release asking farmers to be vigilant for signs of disease and to report any suspicion to their PVP. To assist with this, information has been provided to farmers and their PVPs to enable them to recognise the clinical signs which might give rise to suspicion of the disease. Offspring which meet the clinical case definition will be tested free of charge by AFBI.

My staff have met with key stakeholders to discuss the situation.

While Schmallenberg virus is recognised as a low impact disease, I appreciate the distress that it can cause at an individual farm level and any losses as a result of this disease are regrettable. The actions we are taking to date are proportionate to the assessed risk.

Flooding: South Belfast

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she has taken to reduce flooding in the South Belfast constituency.

(AQO 2790/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In the aftermath of the June flooding Rivers Agency undertook considerable work to clear debris and blockages in watercourses across Belfast. This was in addition to the Agency's ongoing inspection and maintenance programme to ensure that the main watercourse network, for which it is responsible, is functioning as effectively as possible.

The Agency also investigated watercourse related flooding to determine what could be done to reduce the risk of further flooding. Where minor works were identified, many of these have been progressed. The Agency is also seeking approval from the Drainage Council to take on responsibility for a number of watercourses where there are clear benefits for this work to be undertaken by government.

For my part, I am delighted to confirm that I have secured £6m for flood alleviation work to help protect 1,700 properties in East Belfast. This will enable Rivers Agency to commit to the integration of flood alleviation work as part of the Connswater Community Greenway project, and is in addition to the £5m worth of stand-alone work which Rivers Agency is taking forward to reduce the risk of flooding.

Farm Numbers

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of farms.
(AQW 16355/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The June Agricultural Census 2011 found 24,436 farm businesses in the north of Ireland. Additional statistical information about the local farming industry is available on the DARD website.

Animal Welfare

Mr Maskey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the effectiveness and enforcement of the current sanctions for breaches of animal welfare.
(AQO 2784/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Welfare of Animals Act 2011 is a major step forward in terms of protecting the welfare of both farmed and non-farmed animals. The 2011 Act has significantly increased the penalties for animal welfare offences from a maximum of 3 months imprisonment and/or a £5,000 fine to a maximum of 2 years imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine. These new penalties are stiffer than those in Britain, which has a maximum penalty of one year imprisonment and/or a £20,000 fine.

I strongly support tough penalties for animal welfare offences and the full use of the newly extended sentences introduced by the Welfare of Animals Act 2011.

Powers to prosecute offences under the 2011 Act became available to the PSNI from 11 July 2011 and to DARD and Councils from 2 April this year. Enforcement of the new Act is already working well and I have been very encouraged by the positive approach taken by Councils to their new responsibilities for animal welfare.

Based on the number of successful convictions that have been recently publicised in the media, there are positive indications that the new tough penalties in the 2011 Act will provide a strong deterrent, thus protecting animals from unnecessary suffering including deliberate acts of cruelty. In the cases taken forward to date for prosecution by the PSNI, the penalties imposed include fines, prohibition from keeping animals and suspended sentences.

I have arranged to meet the Minister for Justice to ensure that the guidelines on sentencing, which his Department will be developing in the near future, encourage the Courts to make full use of the range of penalties available and in cases of extreme cruelty that the Courts apply the maximum penalty available to them.

Farming: Imported Feeds

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she is encouraging and assisting farmers to become less dependent on imported feeds.
(AQO 2789/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department is strongly focused on helping farmers to maximise production from natural home-grown forages which will reduce reliance on imported feeds. Forages, especially grass, are the cheapest source of feed for ruminant livestock. My Department's college, CAFRE, encourages farmers to maximise the use of forages through programmes of training and knowledge and technology transfer events.

Over the last year CAFRE has delivered training to over 2,750 farmers at local events held throughout the north. In addition CAFRE has also established 12 new grassland monitor groups which aim to improve farmers' knowledge and skills in grassland management. CAFRE, in partnership with AFBI, also produce weekly grassland management bulletins in the local farming press.

Flooding: Newcastle

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps her Department is taking to prevent flooding in Newcastle.
(AQO 2792/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In order to reduce the impact of flooding in Newcastle, Rivers Agency completed the Newcastle - Burren River Flood Alleviation Scheme in 2007. Following completion of the Scheme, a number of back drainage problems were identified, that had resulted in the nuisance flooding of garden areas adjacent to the river flood defences. Back drainage problems can arise when floodwalls which are constructed to prevent the river inundating property hinders natural drainage towards

the river. In order to address the problems identified, Rivers Agency has successfully undertaken remedial works at three locations and is currently considering proposals, with a view to undertaking further works over the next few months. The most recent flooding related to storm drainage systems and not rivers.

Single Farm Payments: Inspections

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many Single Farm Payment farm inspections were completed by remote sensing in 2012.

(AQO 2794/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: For the 2012 Single Farm Payment scheme year we will complete 250 On The Spot (OTS) checks by Remote Sensing.

Flood Defence: Ballygawley Water

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had with the Minister for Regional Development regarding the impact that the proposed Flood Defence Scheme at St Ciaran's School will have on the Ballygawley Water.

(AQO 2795/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: While I have not met directly with the Minister for Regional Development to discuss the impact that the proposed Flood Defence Scheme at St Ciaran's School will have on the Ballygawley Water, I can confirm that during the Feasibility Study and Detailed Design stages of the Ballygawley Flood Alleviation Scheme, officials from Rivers Agency have undertaken extensive discussions with DRD Roads Service.

Inshore Fisheries Strategy

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the delivery of an Inshore Fisheries Strategy.

(AQO 2796/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Agri-food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) was commissioned to draw up an Inshore Fisheries Strategy on DARD's behalf and has produced a comprehensive draft report that includes much detail on the current state of inshore fisheries. My Department is currently reviewing the draft and will engage with the Inshore Strategy Steering Group during November to consider and, where necessary, refine the strategy with the view of having the final version ready for consultation during Spring 2013.

Department of Education

Substitute Teachers' Register

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW12101/11-15, for an update on the tender for the Northern Ireland Substitute Teachers Register.

(AQW 15329/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): It is intended that all ICT procurement will be addressed within the Strategy that has been developed to modernise the ICT Infrastructure in Education. Procurement of a substitute teachers' register is subject to a business case which will be prepared in the context of that ICT strategy.

Schools: Omagh

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education whether the recent announcement by the Chair of the Board of Governors of Omagh Academy, that the Board is withdrawing from negotiations on the Lisanelly site, will affect his proposals on other Omagh schools, particularly Omagh High School, Sacred Heart College and Arvalee Special School.

(AQW 15488/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Lisanelly Campus is a unique project and an opportunity to develop a state of the art, innovative, shared education campus to serve the needs of young people in the Omagh area. Delivering on this is a commitment in the Programme for Government and I have previously stated it will be one of my priorities moving forward. Work is progressing and an Outline Business Case (OBC) is due to be submitted to the Department in the near future.

I would hope that the Board of Governors of Omagh Academy will in due course reengage in developing and delivering this exciting project.

Special Educational Needs: Expenditure

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education to detail the total departmental spend on children with Special Educational Needs in each of the last five years.

(AQW 15881/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below provides the total departmental spend on children with Special Education Needs (SEN) in each of the last five financial years from 2007/08 to 2011/12.

	2007/08 £m	2008/09 £m	2009/10 £m	2010/11 £m	2011/12 £m
Total	174	192	197	201	199*

Note: 2011/12 figure is provisional.

The above figures include spend on statemented pupils in mainstream schools, pupils in special schools and home to school transport for statemented pupils attending primary, post-primary and special schools.

Schools are also responsible for meeting any additional needs of pupils within the first three stages of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of SEN. Such funding is not separately identified from within the overall delegated budget distributed to schools, nor is it separately reported on. The level of spend by schools for such pupils cannot be disaggregated from the schools' overall expenditure.

During the same five year period additional funding has been provided by the Department to support children with SEN in relation to the Middletown Centre for Autism and the Special Education Needs and Disability Tribunal. Further funds have been made available through the Special Education and Inclusion Review for the SEN integrated capacity building programme from 2010/11 to 2014/15 to prepare schools for the introduction of the new SEN and Inclusion framework and provide for pilots in Early Years settings and Educational Assessment.

Procurement: Social Clauses

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education what social clauses he has in place in relation to procurement in his Department.

(AQW 15896/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department complies with procurement guidance provided by the Department of Finance and Personnel, Central Procurement Directorate. It should be noted that the Department does not procure schools' construction projects; these are procured by the education authorities such as the Education and Library Boards.

Current guidance may be located using the following link:

http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/index/procurement-2/cpd/cpd-policy-and-legislation/content_-_cpd_achieving_sustainability_in_construction_procurement/content_-_cpd_proposal_for_promoting_equality_and_sustainable_development.htm

Primary and Post-primary Education: Average Cost

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education to detail the average cost of educating a child in (i) primary education; and (ii) post-primary education, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 15899/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below provides the average delegated and non-delegated recurrent expenditure per primary and post-primary school pupil in each of the five financial years from 2007/08 to 2011/12.

	2007/08 £	2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £	2011/12 £
Primary Pupil	3,279	3,531	3,556	3,684	3,682
Post-Primary Pupil	4,696	4,936	4,966	5,206	5,298

Notes

- (i) Data for Primary Schools includes Nursery Classes within Primary Schools;
- (ii) Primary School data incorporates expenditure for Controlled; Maintained; Controlled Integrated; Grant-Maintained Integrated and Irish Medium Primary Schools;
- (iii) Data for Post-Primary schools includes Preparatory Departments attached to Controlled Grammar and Voluntary Grammar Schools as it is not possible to disaggregate this data from the host school expenditure;
- (iv) Post-Primary School data incorporates expenditure for Controlled; Maintained; Controlled Integrated; Grant-Maintained Integrated; Controlled Grammar; Voluntary Grammar and Irish Medium Post-Primary Schools;
- (v) Data included for 2011/12 in respect of Voluntary Grammar and Grant-Maintained Integrated Schools is provisional pending validation by the Department; and
- (vi) Data excludes capital expenditure which is not available in the format requested.

Primary and Post-primary Education, Irish-medium Sector: Average Cost

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education to detail the average cost of educating a child within the Irish Medium Sector in (i) primary education; and (ii) post-primary education, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 15900/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below provides the average delegated and non-delegated recurrent expenditure per Irish Medium primary and post-primary school pupil in each of the five financial years from 2007/08 to 2011/12.

	2007/08 £	2008/09 £	2009/10 £	2010/11 £	2011/12 £
IM Primary Pupil	3,579	3,955	4,202	4,270	4,339
IM Post-Primary Pupil	4,345	5,348	5,081	4,994	5,164

Notes

- (vii) Data for Irish Medium Primary Schools includes Nursery Classes within the Irish Medium Primary Schools;
- (viii) Data relating to pupils attending Irish Medium Units attached to English Medium host schools cannot be provided as it is not possible to disaggregate the costs of pupils attending Primary and Post-Primary Irish Medium Units which are attached to English Medium schools;
- (ix) Data excludes capital expenditure which is not available in the format requested.

Primary and Post-primary Education, Special Educational Needs: Average Cost

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education to detail the average cost of educating a child with Special Educational Needs in (i) primary education; and (ii) post-primary education, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 15901/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am concerned that the information as sought will not represent a robust measure. There is a continuum of special education needs (SEN) within the SEN register and the cost of support for children with special education needs will vary depending on the individual needs of the child and the type of intervention.

The table below provides the total departmental spend on children with Special Education Needs (SEN) in each of the last five financial years from 2007/08 to 2011/12.

	2007/08 £m	2008/09 £m	2009/10 £m	2010/11 £m	2011/12 £m
Total	174	192	197	201	199*

Note: 2011/12 figure is provisional.

The above figures include spend on statemented pupils in mainstream schools, pupils in special schools and home to school transport for statemented pupils attending primary, post-primary and special schools.

In addition, pupils in schools in the first three stages of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of SEN will receive support directly from their school; the funding for which is contained within the schools' own Local Management of Schools' delegated budget. Such funding is not separately identified and is, therefore, in addition to the figures provided above.

The number of SEN children at stages 1 to 3 and 4 to 5 of the Code of Practice, along with the number of children in special schools are identified in the table below for each of the last five years.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Stages 1 - 3	43,031	44,446	46,676	48,045	50,207
Stages 4 - 5	9,692	9,974	10,316	10,598	10,707
Special Schools	4,611	4,598	4,443	4,458	4,549

Early Years: Funding

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 15137/11-15, to detail (i) the composition of the panel; and (ii) the 155 groups that were allocated funding.

(AQW 15959/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: (i) The composition of the funding panel was as follows:

Pauline Walmsey (Chair) - Early Years, Director of Knowledge

Jenny McDaid – Southern Childcare Partnership Manager

Evelyn Curran – Eastern Childcare Partnership Manager

DE Departmental officials also attended as observers.

(ii) A breakdown of the groups which were allocated funding during 2012/13 is as follows:

Name of Project

- 174 Trust Pre-School
- Acorn Women's Group
- Aghadowey Pre-School Playgroup
- An Droichead
- Appletree Childcare
- Ardmonagh Pre-School Playgroup
- Ardstraw Community Playgroup
- Armoy Cross Community Playgroup
- Ashgrove Pre - School Playgroup
- Ashton Centre
- Atlas Creche
- Atticall Playgroup
- Ballinascreen Early Years
- Balloughry Integrated Com. Playgroup
- Ballykinlar Cross Community Pre Sch Ltd
- Ballymacarrett Youth & Com Project
- Banagher Community Playgroup
- Barnardos Forward Steps
- Barnardos Travellers Pre-School
- Ballynafeigh Community Development Association pre school
- Beacon Playgroup
- Bees Nees Early Years Centre
- Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid
- Benburb Playgroup
- Blackie Creche
- Bloomfield Playgroup
- Bunnahone Bunnies Playgroup
- Carebears Community Playgroup
- Carryduff Pre School Playgroup
- Castlerock Community Playgroup
- Caw Community Playgroup
- Chirpy Chicks Playgroup
- Chrysalis Women's Centre
- Clady Tiny Tots
- Clough & District Community Playgroup
- Cloughmills Early Years
- Covenant Christian Playgroup
- Crows Nest Community Playgroup
- Dara Playgroup
- Derry Well Woman Creche
- Derrytrasna Playgroup
- Dervock Playgroup
- Drumellan Community Association
- Drumsurn Parent and Toddler
- Dundrum Cross Community Playgroup
- Dunloy Community Playgroup
- Dunnaman Childrens Centre
- Early Bird
- Falls Women's Centre
- First Steps Com. Playgroup PM Session
- First Steps Day Care Project
- First Steps Playgroup
- Forthspring Afterschools
- Gingerbread Lone Parent Services
- Glenarm Community Pre School
- Glenview
- Greengables Playgroup
- Grove Community Playgroup
- Hansel and Gretel Pre School
- Happy Days Playgroup
- Harbour Bears Pre-School Playgroup
- Harpurs Hill Community Early Years
- Hillside Pre School Playgroup
- Hobby Horse Playgroup
- Holy Trinity Centre
- Ionad Uibh Eachach
- Kiddies Castle Playgroup
- Kids Korner
- Kidzone Playgroup (Lurgan)
- Kids R U's
- Kidzone Playgroup (Newry)
- Kilkeel Community Association
- Killean Playgroup
- Killen Parent and Toddler
- Killyleagh Early Years P & T
- Killyman Community Playgroup
- Kingdom Playgroup
- Krafty Kids (Ogras)
- Ladybird Playgroup
- Laurencetown Playgroup
- Leitrim Community Playgroup
- Ligoniel Family Centre
- Little Acorns Playgroup
- Little Acorns Playgroup Derrynoose
- Little Amps Playgroup
- Little Castle
- Little Diamonds Community Playgroup
- Little Doves Childcare Centre
- Little Folks Playgroup
- Little Oaks Pre-School Playgroup
- Little People Playgroup
- Little Rainbows PG
- Little Rascals Community Playgroup
- Little Villagers Playgroup
- Lorag Childrens Project
- Loughgiel Community PG
- Lower Oldpark Community Association
- Macosquin Community Playgroup
- Magherafelt Womens Group (Kidz Lodge)
- Magic Roundabout Playgroup

- Magilligan Community Playgroup
- Millburn Community Playgroup
- Monkstown Community School Playgroup
- Mother Goose Community Playgroup
- Naiscoil an Chreagain
- Naiscoil an tSleibhe Dhuibh
- Naiscoil Ard Eoin
- Naiscoil Charn Tochair
- Naiscoil Chois Locha
- Naiscoil Dhun Pdraig
- Naiscoil Mhachaire Ratha
- Naiscoil na Rinne
- Newhill First Steps Playgroup
- Newtownabbey Meth Miss. Playgroup
- O'Faich Playgroup
- Old Warren Community Association
- Omagh Early Years Centre
- Orana Nursery
- Parish of Nativity Playgroup, Poleglass
- Pomeroy Pre School Playgroup
- Portaferry Playgroup
- Portrush Com. Pre-School Playgroup
- Poyntzpass Community Playgroup
- Rainbow Child & Family Centre (WHSSB)
- Rainbow Community Playgroup
- Rainbow Playgroup (Carrick)
- Rasharkin Community Playgroup
- Roden Street Development Group
- Scoil na Fuiseoige
- Shalom House Creche
- Shankill Women's Centre
- Slievegallion Community Playgroup
- Smart Attack Childcare Services
- Springwell Centre
- St Theresa's Youth Centre
- Stepping Stones Playgroup
- Stepping Stones Pre School Nursery
- Stewartstown Tiny Tots
- Straidarran Community Playgroup
- Strangford Parent and Toddler
- Sugar and Spice Playgroup
- Sunflower Early Years Group
- Taghnevan Pre School Playgroup
- Taylorstown Cross Community Complex
- The Firs Playgroup
- The Orchard Playgroup
- Tiny Steps Creche
- Tiny Toons Playgroup
- Tiny Tots Community Playgroup
- Tiny Tots Corner Playgroup
- Tober Tinys Playgroup
- Upper Andersonstown Comm. Forums Daycare Facility
- West Bann Development (Creche)
- Whiterock Creche Centre
- Windsor Women's Centre
- Zero-8-Teen

In addition, there are also 7 organisations that received funding for capacity and development work, including running costs. These groups are:

- NI Childminding Association
- Barnardos Black Minority Ethnic project
- Early Years Organisation – Early Years Advisors
- Early Years Organisation - Community Development Workers
- Foyle Down Syndrome Trust
- Lifestart Limavady
- The Cedar Foundation
- West Bann Development (Dev Worker)

Non-departmental Public Bodies: Board Membership

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to list the current Board membership of each of his Department's non-departmental public bodies.

(AQW 15962/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The current membership of each of the Department's non-departmental public bodies is listed in the table below.

Bodies	Members
Belfast Education & Library Board	Rev Norman Hamilton Miss Rosemary Rainey Mrs Dinah MacManus Mr Gerry McMahon Mr Alastair Mackay Mr Stephen Cumper

Bodies	Members
Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta	Mr Caoimhín Ó Peatáin Ms Janet Muller Mr Deaglán Ó mocháin Mr Malachy Crudden Mr Caoimhín Mac Cionnaith Ms Eibhlín Mhic Aoidh Mr Niall Ó Catháin Mr Aodán Mac Póilin Ms Gabrielle Nig Uidhir Ms Áine Andrews Mr Seosamh Ó Coinne Mr Brendan Henry Ms Muireann Ní Mhóráin Ms Aingeal Nig Aoidh Mr Gerard Campbell Mr Micheál Mac Giolla Ghunna Ms Máire Uí Éigeartaigh Mr Séamas Ó Donnghaile Mr Caoimhín Williamson Ms Rosemary Mulholland 2 vacancies
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools	Mrs Joan Christie Mr Brian McCargo Mrs Sheila McCaul Mr Eamon Mullan The Most Rev John McAreavey
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools	Sister Eithne Woulf Rt Rev Monsignor S Cahill Ms Caroline Callan Mrs Pat Carvill Ms Deirdre Connor Father Kevin Donaghy Very Reverend Sean Emerson Brother Patrick Collier Dame Geraldine Keegan Fr Paul Farren Mr Harry Goodman Rt Rev Mgr Aidan Hamill Mrs Mary Haughey Mr Seamus McCaughey Most Rev Donal McKeown Mrs Eleanor McWilliams Mr Dermot Mullan Fr Aidan Mullin Very Rev Canon J Mullin Ms Adrian Nugent Ms Catherine O'Neill Ms Grainne Perry Ms Anne Rice Fr S Rice Ms Paula Sheils Mr Stanley Smyth Most Rev Noel Treanor

Bodies	Members
Diocesan Education Committees	Mr John Farrell Mr Brian Rafferty Mr Gerard Burns Mrs Sheila McCaul Mrs Collette McNelis Mr Gerald Murray Mr Matthew Murray Mr Shaun McCann Mr John Campbell Mrs Pat Carvill
Diocesan Education Committees	Rev Sister Mercedes Coen Very Rev Gerard McAleer PP Mrs Kay McCaul Very Rev Joseph McKeever PP VF Very Rev Martin McVeigh PP Mr David Millie Very Rev Seamus Rice PE AP Rt Rev Monsignor S Cahill VG Very Rev F McKiernan PP Mrs M Connolly Mr M Duffy Mr B McManus Mrs T Murray Rev Aidan Mullan PP Mrs Sally O'Kane Rt Rev Mgr Eamon Martin VG Mrs Mary Healy Mr Jim Smyth Mr Brian Baxter Mrs Michelle Simpson Mr Peter Torney Most Rev A Farquhar DD Very Rev S Emerson Adm Very Rev J Forsythe PP
	Mr Jim Smyth Mr S Doherty Dr A Hamill Miss Anne McGrath Mr E O'Hare Ms D Downey Mr Paddy Hoey Rt Rev Mgr A Hamill VG Mrs Anne Doran Mr P Poland Mr Sean McGuigan Mrs Rosemary Mulgrew Miss Una Lawless

Bodies	Members
Exceptional Circumstances Body	Mr Joe Moore Mrs Sarah Havlin Miss Mairead Lavery Mr David Hunter Mr Michael Flanigan Mr Clive Connell Mr Eamon O'Connor Ms Anne Marshall Mr Paul Shevlin Mr Simon Jenkins Htaik Win Mrs Anne MacRandal Mrs Niamh Luft Ms Eithne Ryan Miss Jenny Burns Miss Judith Lowry Ms Teresa Leonard Mrs Patricia Montgomery
Exceptional Circumstances Body	Ms Carol McClean Mr Timothy Mayes Ms Eileen Brady Miss Marion Reynolds Mr John David William Moore Mrs Andrea Smyth Mr Thomas Gerald Strong Mr Trevor Cecil Magee Mrs Diana Elizabeth Press Mrs Alannah Bingham Mrs Angela Hampton Dr Robert Stuart Maguire Mrs Susan Elizabeth Smyth Mrs Magdalen Carmel Maneely Mrs Arlene Kee Ms Miriam Karp Mr Stanley Smith Mr Bill Reilly Mr Peter Somerville Miss Sheelagh Sleath Mr Seamus Duffy Mr Arthur Rainey Mr Tim O'Prey Mrs Gillian Reid Mrs Mary McCartan Mr Diarmuid Maginn Mrs Karen Keers Mrs Deirdre Brown Mr Wilbert McKee Mr Brendan McConville Ms Barbara A Stuart

Bodies	Members
General Teaching Council (GTCNI)	Mr Graham Agnew Ms Aine Andrews Mr Ivan Arbuthnot Ms Rosemary Barton Ms Sharon Beattie Mr David Canning Mr Brian Carlin Mr John Colgan Ms Jennifer Cornyn Ms Sheila Crea Mr Carney Cumper Ms Audrey Curry Mr Colm Davis Mr John Devlin Mrs Frances Donnelly Ms Sandra Douglas Ms Gillian Dunlop Mrs Teresa Graham Mr Dermot Hardy Mr Bryan Jess Mr Sean Lambe Ms Mary Leonard Ms Ciara McCay Mrs Sally McKee Ms Elizabeth McNeice Ms Daisy Mules Mr Barry Mulholland Mr Eugene O'Neill Mr John Pollock Mrs Rosemary Rainey Ms Gillian Scott Mr Ian Simons
Middletown Centre for Autism Ltd	Professor Mary Hanratty Mr Harry Mullan Mrs Daphne O'Kane Mrs Ethel Ruddock Dr Lawrence Crowley Mr Leo Kinsella Mr Michael Travers Mrs Goretti Newell Mr James O'Grady
Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)	Mr Colm Cavanagh Mr Michael Morrow Mr Martin Stroud Ms Simone Bartlett Mr David Clement Mr Vincent Fullam MBE Ms Helen Hamilton Ms Brigid Heron Ms Claire McGlynn Mr Ian McKay Ms Helen McLaughlin Mr Ian McMorris Mr John Milliken Mr Brendan O'Loan Mr Andrew Sleeth Ms Heather Watson

Bodies	Members
Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (NICCEA)	Mrs Helen McClenaghan Ms Dorothy Black Mr Jim Clarke Mr James Collins Michele Crilly Ms Patricia O'Farrell Mr David Thompson Mr John Wilkinson
North Eastern Education & Library Board	Rev Amanda Adams Rev Selwoode Graham Rev Trevor Jamieson Mrs Una Duncan Mr Liam Raven Mr John Devlin Mr Michael Newman Mrs Gillian Scott Mr Samuel McCrea Mr Joseph Donaghy Dr David Elliott Dr Alan Preston Mr Sean Quinn Cllr James Currie Cllr Evelyn Robinson Alm James Brown Cllr Samuel Cole Alm Roy Beggs Cllr Sean Kerr Cllr Lynn Frazer Cllr Joan Baird
South Eastern Education & Library Board	Mr Pat Carvill Mr Lawson McDonald Mrs Joan Christie
Southern Education & Library Board	Rev John McKegney Mr Ronald McVeigh Mr Plunkett Campbell Mrs Kay McCaul Dr Peter Cunningham Mr Ciaran Mackin Mr John Wilkinson Mrs Roberta Brownlee Prof Patrick Murphy Cllr Sylvia McRoberts Cllr Junior McCrum Cllr Sean Clarke Cllr Jim Cavanagh Cllr Ronnie Harkness Cllr Mick Murphy
Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards	Mr Barry Mulholland Mr Shane McCurdy Professor Brian Cullen Mrs Una O'Kane Mrs Angela Connelly Mr Bumper Graham

Bodies	Members
Western Education & Library Board	Mrs Margaret Cooper Rev Robert Herron Mr Peter Duffy Mrs Kathleen Bradley Mr Gordon White Mrs Rita Fox Mr Fintan Murphy Mr Donal McDermott Cllr Shaun Gallagher Cllr Robert Irvine Cllr Anne Brolly Cllr Declan McAleer Cllr Maoliosa McHugh
Youth Council (YCNl)	Ms Marie Young Mr Bertie Faulkner Mr Derek Capper Mr Jim Currie Mr Gerard Doran Ms Ann-Marie McClure

Special Education Needs: Units

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (i) Special Education Needs units in each Education and Library Board area; and (ii) children attending these units, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 15987/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Number of Learning Support Centres in primary and post-primary schools and pupils enrolled in these Centres by ELB, 2007/08 – 2011/12

Year	No of Centres/ pupils	ELB					TOTAL
		BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	
2007/ 08	Centres	11	7	28	49	75	170
	Pupils	159	63	314	628	731	1,895
2008/ 09	Centres	12	11	29	48	71	171
	Pupils	164	60	333	515	730	1,802
2009/ 10	Centres	12	13	31	50	79	185
	Pupils	166	60	359	476	749	1,810
2010/ 11	Centres	19	15	25	45	81	185
	Pupils	163	55	355	466	688	1,727
2011/ 12	Centres	17	16	35	49	77	194
	Pupils	147	57	358	453	690	1,705

Source: School census

Biomass Heating Systems

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether feasibility studies have been conducted to assess the potential savings that could be achieved by switching his Department's buildings to biomass heating.

(AQW 16020/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education does not own any buildings. The buildings occupied by my Department are part of the NICS Estate and therefore owned and managed by Properties Division in the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP).

I understand that you have tabled a similar question to the Minister for Finance and Personnel who will be responding to you for all DFP managed buildings.

Schools: Nurture Units

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what mechanisms he proposes to decide on the location of, and to establish, the 20 nurture units that were announced by the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

(AQW 16033/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Work is currently being undertaken to establish arrangements for identifying the locations of the 20 additional nurture units to ensure that support, help and guidance is targeted at those children most in need.

Schools: Nurture Units

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what role his officials have played in the establishment and development of nurture units in schools.

(AQW 16034/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My officials have been involved in assessing bids for Neighbourhood Renewal funding from schools and Education and Library Boards. For successful bids, the relevant Education and Library Board manage the implementation, including quality assurance and monitoring of the provision.

Schools Absences: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many children in North Down have been identified as not attending school.

(AQW 16064/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the tables below and refers to 3 categories:

- 1 Children with a bad absenteeism record i.e. <85% attendance
- 2 Children receiving their education other than at school
- 3 Children who are home schooled

Current numbers in categories 1 and 2 are taken from the annual school census.

- 1 Primary and post primary pupils attending schools in the North Down constituency who had less than 85% attendance in 2010/11

School type	Primary	Post primary	Total
Total pupils	143	30	173

- 2 Primary and post primary pupils attending schools in the North Down constituency who are recorded as being educated off site but not in a school – 2011/12

School type	Primary	Post primary	Total
Total pupils	0	10	10

- 3 I have also been informed by the South-Eastern Education and Library Board that it is aware of 8 children in the North Down area who are being home educated. It is important to note that parents can choose to home educate, however, there is no legal requirement for parents to advise their Education and Library Board or the Department of their decision.

Middletown Centre for Autism

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what are the budgetary requirements to expand the provision at Middletown Centre for Autism.

(AQW 16099/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The budgetary requirements for the expansion of services at the Middletown Centre for Autism are subject to the completion of an appropriate business case. It is expected that the expansion should be able to be delivered with a relatively modest increase in funding and would be phased in over a 2 year period as the Centre builds its capacity to deliver an expanded service.

Early Years Funding: Service Level Agreement

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 15137/11-15, (i) when the Service Level Agreement (SLA) was placed for tender: (ii) the renewal date for the current SLA; and (iii) whether the new SLA will be awarded through an open tender process.

(AQW 16101/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) Responsibility for the Early Years Fund transferred from DHSSPS to DE in 2006. This Fund was created by DHSSPS to support groups which were providing early childhood services in areas of greatest need when their Peace II funding was ending. The tender for administration of the Peace II funds to pre- school groups had previously been awarded to Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children (then known as NIPPA) and the existing arrangements continued. Following transfer of responsibilities, DE has continued to support these arrangements under an annual SLA with Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children. A review of the operation of the Fund was commissioned by the Department and commenced in Spring 2012. The review is expected to report shortly.
- (ii) The current Service Level Agreement expires on 31st March 2013.
- (iii) The review will include a number of recommendations for change around the implementation and management of the Fund. Funding will be reviewed in light of the findings of the review. It is not yet clear what the way forward on the Fund will be but services required will be procured through an open tender process if appropriate.

Woodlands Language Unit

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education whether restrictions have been placed on staff employed at the Woodlands Speech and Language Unit at the Belmont site in Londonderry, regarding communications with either the media or parents on proposals for the Unit.

(AQW 16138/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been advised by the Western Education and Library Board that no restrictions have been imposed on staff at the Woodlands Speech and Language Unit. Indeed, the Board has stated that it is aware of continuing engagement of staff with parents and also, indirectly, with the media, in relation to this issue.

Sure Start: Departmental Role

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to outline his Department's role in the Sure Start programme.

(AQW 16181/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education has policy responsibility for the Sure Start programme and for the financial resources allocated to the programme. A Memorandum of Understanding formalises the financial governance and accountability arrangements between DE and DHSSPS in respect of Sure Start and some other services. The operational aspects of Sure Start delivery are overseen by the Health and Social Care Board, under a Service Level Agreement with DE.

Sure Start: Training

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education whether training will be given to management committees implementing the Sure Start programmes, particularly in relation to procurement issues.

(AQW 16182/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Childcare Partnership Managers work with all Sure Start management committees at the project set up and development stage to ensure there is clarity about roles and responsibilities.

A Service and Budget Agreement (SBA) is drawn up between the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and the selected Lead and Accountable body which outlines the contractual requirements. The SBA also contains the necessary financial management guidelines to ensure that probity is maintained in the use of public funds. It contains guidance on the procedures to be followed in utilising the funds made available for Sure Start, including appropriate procurement processes.

An induction programme may be facilitated by the Childcare Partnership to explain the detail contained in the SBA and the procedures with which the organisation must comply and to identify external partnership training issues or on-going support requirements. HSCB Finance officers will provide sessions regarding the financial monitoring systems.

Training will also be provided to Sure Start Project Managers and Chairpersons in relation to the web based information system and self evaluation performance management.

Sure Start: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education which areas of North Down will benefit from the Sure Start programmes.

(AQW 16184/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The wards of Dufferin and Whitehill and the Super Output Areas of Conlig 3 and Harbour 1 will be included in the creation of a Sure Start programme to serve the North Down area.

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. An initial plan is currently being prepared by the management committee and will be available in December.

Sure Start: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to list the programmes that will be offered under Sure Start in North Down.
(AQW 16185/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The wards of Dufferin and Whitehill and the Super Output Areas of Conlig 3 and Harbour 1 will be included in the creation of a Sure Start programme to serve the North Down area.

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. An initial plan is currently being prepared by the management committee and will be available in December.

Schools, North Antrim: Admissions and Enrolment Numbers

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Education what are the proposed (i) admissions; and (ii) enrolment numbers for the 2013/14 school year for (a) Cambridge House Grammar School, Ballymena; (b) Ballymena Academy; (c) Dunclug College; (d) Cullybackey High School; (e) Slemish College; (f) Ballee Community High School; (g) St Louis Grammar School, Ballymena; and (h) St Patrick's College, Ballymena; and how this differs from the previous year.[R]
(AQW 16186/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed on the table below.

School Name	Numbers Consulted on for 2013/14 School Year		Numbers Consulted on and Agreed for 2012/13 School Year	
	Admissions	Enrolment	Admissions	Enrolment
Cambridge House GS	120	950	140	1030
Ballymena Academy	176	1200	176	1200
Dunclug College	110	600	110	600
Cullybackey HS	130	700	130	700
Slemish College	120	720	120	720
Ballee Community HS	100	525	100	525
St Louis GS, Ballymena	139	960	139	960
St Patrick's College	150	760	150	760

The Department consults with post-primary schools on admissions and enrolment numbers annually. For the 2013/14 school year the Department consulted with Cambridge House Grammar School on a reduction in the school's admissions and enrolment numbers from 140 and 1030 respectively to 120 and 950. This reduction was in line with numbers proposed by the school in September 2011, which at that time because of the commencement of the area planning process, the Department was unable to consider. The consultation process for 2013/14 has now been completed and the Department has agreed to retain Cambridge House's admissions and enrolment numbers of 140 and 1030 for the 2013/14 school year.

Assets Transferred to the Catholic Church

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 4980/11-15, to detail (i) the assets to be transferred from his Department to the Catholic Church; (ii) the value of the assets at the time of purchase; and (iii) the estimated current value of the assets.
(AQW 16200/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My answer to AQW 4980/11-15 stated: "certain assets of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) were paid for by the Catholic Church. Those assets will be transferred by my Department to the Church prior to the appointed day, that is, the date of establishment of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA). The remainder of the assets and liabilities of CCMS will be transferred to the ESA on the appointed day."

This answer describes how DE will administer the process to transfer to the Catholic Church some assets of CCMS that were paid for by the Catholic Church. These assets do not include schools. The Education Bill leaves unchanged the ownership (by their Trustees) of Catholic Schools, both maintained and grammar.

This answer does not reflect the transfer to the Catholic Church of any assets of the Department in the context of the dissolution of CCMS and the establishment of ESA. This is because no assets of the Department will transfer to the Catholic Church in this context. Accordingly, details as to the value or nature of any such assets do not apply.

Assets Transferred to the Catholic Church

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 4980/11-15, which of the assets that are to be transferred from his Department to the Catholic Church are still required for the provision of education; and how replacements, or agreement, for continued use will be procured.

(AQW 16201/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My answer to AQW 4980/11-15 stated: "certain assets of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) were paid for by the Catholic Church. Those assets will be transferred by my Department to the Church prior to the appointed day, that is, the date of establishment of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA). The remainder of the assets and liabilities of CCMS will be transferred to the ESA on the appointed day."

This answer describes how DE will administer the process to transfer to the Catholic Church some assets of CCMS that were paid for by the Catholic Church. These assets do not include schools. The Education Bill leaves unchanged the ownership (by their Trustees) of Catholic Schools, both maintained and grammar.

This answer does not reflect the transfer to the Catholic Church of any assets of the Department in the context of the dissolution of CCMS and the establishment of ESA. This is because no assets of the Department will transfer to the Catholic Church in this context. Accordingly, details as to the value or nature of any such assets do not apply.

Schools: Language Units

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education whether notification has been given to the staff of (i) Ballykelly Primary School; (ii) St Anne's Primary School; and (iii) Ebrington Primary School that new language units will be located in their schools from September 2013.

(AQW 16206/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In accordance with the requisite procedures, the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) is currently in consultation with the school managing authorities, teaching staff and parents of the Woodlands Speech and Language Unit regarding about the Board's proposal to relocate the speech and language provision from the Unit to mainstream primary schools.

As part of this consultation process, I understand that the WELB has been in discussion with Ballykelly and Ebrington Primary Schools and that the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) has been in discussion with St Anne's Primary School regarding the relocation of the speech and language provision to these schools.

While I have been informed these schools are in agreement I would emphasise that this proposal is at an early stage of development and that no final decision can be made prior to the publication of a supporting statutory Development Proposal (DP).

Woodlands Language Unit

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education whether a decision has been made on the proposed closure of Woodlands Language Unit and the relocation of language classes to Ballykelly Primary School, St Anne's Primary School and Ebrington Primary School.

(AQW 16207/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In accordance with the requisite procedures, the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) is currently in consultation with the school managing authorities, teaching staff and parents of the Woodlands Speech and Language Unit regarding about the Board's proposal to relocate the speech and language provision from the Unit to mainstream primary schools.

As part of this consultation process, I understand that the WELB has been in discussion with Ballykelly and Ebrington Primary Schools and that the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) has been in discussion with St Anne's Primary School regarding the relocation of the speech and language provision to these schools.

While I have been informed these schools are in agreement I would emphasise that this proposal is at an early stage of development and that no final decision can be made prior to the publication of a supporting statutory Development Proposal (DP).

Consultations: Accessibility

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education what efforts are being made to improve the accessibility to his Department's consultations for parents.

(AQW 16211/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: When undertaking a consultation the Department of Education carefully considers the audience and the group(s) who might be affected by any proposed change in provision, be that school governors, teachers, pupils or parents.

On launching a consultation process, consideration is also given to the most appropriate mix of communications channels to reach target audiences. These may include the use of classified advertising, social media, the Departmental website and NI Direct or the issue of press releases or articles.

Consultation events, public meetings and roadshows are arranged at various locations and times to accommodate the availability of and greatest involvement by the target audience. The Department also asks schools to notify parents of consultations on various policies.

Consultation documents are normally available in a variety of formats including printed copy in English and Irish, electronic format on the DE website and alternative formats and languages on request.

The Department has also expanded its use of social media in recent years. The NI Executive and NI Direct Twitter and Facebook accounts have been used to communicate consultation periods and the front page of the Department's recently re-launched website prominently highlights current consultations and their closing deadlines.

Consultations: Better Engagement

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education what efforts are being made by his Department to engage better with parents as part of its consultation process.

(AQW 16212/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education seeks to proactively engage with parents during its consultation process through a variety of methods:

- Targeted consultation exercises with parents.
- Direct engagement with representative groups such as Parenting NI, the Parenting Forum, NI Parent Teacher Associations, Barnardo's and Save the Children.
- Public meetings/roadshows at various locations and times to accommodate the greatest involvement.
- Requesting that schools notify parents of consultations on various policies.
- Holding meetings with individual groups on a preplanned or ad hoc basis.
- Making consultation documents available in a variety of formats such as printed copy in English and Irish, electronic format on the Department's website, alternative formats and languages on request.
- The Department has also expanded its use of social media in recent years. The NI Executive and NI Direct Twitter and Facebook accounts have been used to communicate consultation periods and the front page of the Department's recently re-launched website prominently highlights current consultations and their closing deadlines.

The Department will continue to use a range of appropriate methods to engage with parents and seek parents' views as part of its consultation process.

Sure Start: East Belfast

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education which areas of East Belfast will benefit from Sure Start programmes.

(AQW 16226/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The East Belfast Sure Start project currently provides services for children aged under 4 and their families within the electoral wards of The Mount, Ballymacarret, Island, Woodstock, Tullycarnet and Enler and Bloomfield SOA1.

There are also plans for the East Belfast Sure Start project to provide services to the Cregagh ward due to the planned expansion of Sure Start services to the top 25% most disadvantaged wards. Work is currently underway to develop the plan for services in this ward.

Manhattan System: Belfast Education and Library Board

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education when the Belfast Education and Library Board implemented the Manhattan system.
(AQW 16331/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) The implementation of the Manhattan system began in February 2000.
- (ii) The Department utilises the Manhattan system, where possible, as an asset management tool for obtaining information on the Education estate.

Manhattan System

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education why his Department does not use the Manhattan system as its asset management tool.
(AQW 16332/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (iii) The implementation of the Manhattan system began in February 2000.
- (iv) The Department utilises the Manhattan system, where possible, as an asset management tool for obtaining information on the Education estate.

Department for Employment and Learning

Students: Jurisdictions

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) to explain the financial arrangements for the attendance of students from the Republic of Ireland at third level institutions in Northern Ireland, and vice versa; (ii) what is the resulting cost balance; and (iii) how these arrangements are discharged or settled between the two jurisdictions.

(AQW 15425/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Students domiciled in the Republic of Ireland (and other European Union nationals) attending undergraduate courses at third level institutions in Northern Ireland are eligible for the same financial support for tuition fees as Northern Ireland students studying here. In the academic year 2012/13 the maximum fee charged for home and EU nationals is £3,465. Students from the Republic of Ireland can apply to the Student Loans Company's European Unit for a non means-tested loan to cover the fee charged up to £3,465. The cost to my Department of subsidising this loan arrangement is approximately one third of the amount of each loan taken which, based on a loan of £3,465, equates to approximately £1,150 per student.

Under the Free Fees Initiative in the Republic of Ireland, home students and European Union nationals (including Northern Ireland domiciles) do not pay tuition fees for undergraduate courses. The cost of tuition is met in full by the Irish Government. However, all students must pay a student contribution charge of €2,250. My Department currently pays this charge in full on behalf of all eligible Northern Ireland domiciled students at institutions in the Republic of Ireland.

From academic year 2013/14 my Department is introducing a new non means-tested loan arrangement to cover the student contribution charge for students from Northern Ireland commencing courses in the Republic of Ireland. The cost to my Department of subsidising this loan arrangement will be approximately one third of the amount of each loan taken, which will equate to approximately £695 per student (based on a loan of €2,500).

In line with EC directive (Article 12 EC), the Department is compelled to fund provision for all EU-domiciled students attending Further Education Colleges in Northern Ireland, on the same basis as home students.

The latest indicative, non-validated figures, from the 2011/12 academic year indicate that £8.1m was expended on students from the Republic of Ireland enrolled in the six Northern Ireland Further Education colleges.

The Department does not hold information on the level of expenditure resulting from Further Education students from Northern Ireland enrolling at further education institutions in the Republic of Ireland, as there is no comparable sector.

Third Level Education: Access

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what additional steps are being taken to increase access to, and participation in, third level education among communities that have traditionally had low levels of involvement.

(AQW 15665/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department will be implementing Access to Success, the new regional strategy for widening participation in higher education and for the first time, all of the funded institutions offering higher education courses will be included within widening participation arrangements. The main aims of the Strategy will be to widen participation among those groups which are currently under-represented in higher education. This will be achieved through a range of additional measures which include; clearer identification, at individual level where possible, of the most disadvantaged students/groups when applying to higher education, and the improved targeting of available resources to support these students.

There will be a centralised programme to raise awareness of the benefits of higher education to which all higher education providers will subscribe. My Department will make available increased funding, on a competitive basis, to encourage all institutions offering higher education courses to offer additional "outreach" programmes in schools, colleges, local communities and the workplace, which are designed to raise aspiration and educational attainment in order to facilitate entry to higher education.

The strategy will encourage the development and piloting of regional programmes for disadvantage and disability application routes into higher education. Additional support measures will also be developed to sustain the continuing participation in higher education of these disadvantaged students through targeted bursaries, fee waivers and other forms of direct support.

The further education sector has a proven track record of delivering a high proportion of its provision to the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland. In 2010/11, for example, 22% of FE enrolments were from these areas, drawing down funding of £11.5m.

My Department has recently announced its proposals for the introduction of the mainstream Learner Access and Engagement Programme. This programme will allow FE Colleges to contract with third party organisations for the provision of learner support. Support will be directed at those 'hard-to-reach' adults who are economically inactive, disengaged from the labour market, with few or no qualifications, to encourage them to undertake suitable further education to help prepare them for employment or further learning. The procurement process for the programme is underway and is expected to complete by May 2013.

Regional Colleges: Students from the Republic of Ireland

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students on average from the Republic of Ireland study or take courses at the Regional Colleges in Northern Ireland each year; and who pays for such provision.

(AQW 15822/11-15)

Dr Farry: The numbers of professional and technical enrolments from the Republic of Ireland (RoI) who attended the NI Further Education Colleges over the last 3 years for which data are available, are set out in the table below.

Academic Year	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Enrolments from RoI	3,092	4,567	4,142

Source: Further Education Statistical Record

The bulk of these enrolments are funded by the Department for Employment and Learning, whilst a small number are funded by individuals or employers through full cost recovery.

Employment: People with Disabilities

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action is being taken to encourage employers, particularly those who cite insurance liability issues, to engage staff with disabilities.

(AQW 15978/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department for Employment and Learning has a dedicated Employer Engagement Team who work with employers throughout Northern Ireland, and in doing so, provide a professional and comprehensive service.

This specific service to Employers is delivered through teams of Employer Contact Managers. These staff are tasked with promoting all Departmental services and programmes available to employers within their local area.

The range of services and programmes include a number which have been specifically designed to help and support Employers to recruit and retain people with disabilities.

This specialist provision is managed by the Department's Disability Employment Service. Programmes and services available include; Access to Work (NI), Workable (NI), Work Connect, Job Introduction Scheme, and the Department's own Occupational Psychology Service.

The help and assistance provided to local employers through these programmes and services include: Financial incentives, coaching and training for managers and employees, provision of special aids, equipment and adaptations to premises, employment assessments and a dedicated mentor for the disabled employee.

The Department works in partnership with leading disability organisations from throughout Northern Ireland, who have extensive experience of helping people with disabilities obtain and sustain work. This is achieved, in part, through the very positive employer relationships that they have built up over the years.

Specially trained staff, from the Disability Employment Service and from the Jobs and Benefits Office network across Northern Ireland, actively engage with local employers to advocate on behalf of disabled clients that they are currently working with, and in doing so, will explain how each of the programmes and services can assist them.

In addition, and as required, they will offer advice and support relating to any specific issues or concerns that a local employer might have in relation to their employer responsibilities, such as reasonable adjustments or requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act. My Department is not aware of employers citing insurance liability issues as a reason not to employ a person with a disability.

My Department also enjoys a close working relationship with Employers for Disability NI (EFDNI). This is a network of employers, drawn from all sectors, with a common aim, to promote training and employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The Disability Employment Service has worked in partnership with EFDNI in the organisation and delivery of disability awareness events and in the promotion and publication of Best Practice Booklets for employers.

Stranmillis University College and Queen's University Belfast: Merger

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether the merger between Stranmillis University College and Queen's University Belfast is no longer proposed.

(AQW 15990/11-15)

Dr Farry: At the end of last year I announced that the formal policy of my Department is to support a merger between Stranmillis University College and Queen's University Belfast. This I believe to be the best option for the College. I also announced a two stage study of teacher education in Northern Ireland. As you will be aware, from my response to AQW 14979/11-15, I commissioned the first stage of the study earlier this year and await the outcome of that work.

Evidence suggests that 'strong performing' education systems such as exist in Singapore, Korea, Canada and Finland, have systematically invested in enhancing the initial education of their teachers. In all of these education systems, teachers are educated in academic universities where theory and practice are combined to form a foundation for teaching that is on a par with other academic professions. Recently the Republic of Ireland has restructured its initial teacher education provision

following a review by a panel of international experts. It recommended reducing the number of providers from nineteen to six through integration and merger. The six integrated providers are all located in a university. I further understand that most education systems in Europe have implemented or are considering structural reforms similar to those carried in the Republic of Ireland. The proposed merger of Stranmillis with Queen's is in line with what is considered best practice. I believe it is also best for the future generations of children in Northern Ireland.

Stranmillis University College: Board of Governors

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether the process of finding a replacement for the Chairman of the Board of Governors for Stranmillis University College who is due to retire has commenced.

(AQW 15991/11-15)

Dr Farry: I can confirm that the process has commenced.

Stranmillis University College: Board of Governors

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether there will be an increase in the number of members sitting on the next Board of Governors for Stranmillis University College.

(AQW 15992/11-15)

Dr Farry: There are fourteen members on the Governing Body of Stranmillis University College and currently three of these positions are vacant. Work has commenced on the process of recruiting persons to fill these three vacancies.

Stranmillis University College: Student Numbers

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many students are enrolled at Stranmillis University College.

(AQW 15993/11-15)

Dr Farry: In the 2010/11 academic year there were 915 full-time and 385 part-time students enrolled at Stranmillis University College.

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- 1 HESA data are rounded to the nearest 5.
- 2 The latest available data are for academic year 2010/11.

South Eastern Regional College: Lisburn Campus

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much Lisburn College receives per post-16 student with learning difficulties.

(AQW 16042/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department provides funding to further education colleges on the basis of agreed, planned provision that is in support of economic priorities. Funding, which is made through a formal funding mechanism, is allocated at a college level and it is not possible, therefore, to provide details relating to the Lisburn campus of the South Eastern Regional College (SERC).

I can advise, however, that in the 2011/12 academic year, SERC had 760 students with a learning difficulty or disability (SLDD) enrolled across all campuses and the total value of grant funding provided by my Department, in support of those students, was £1.350 million.

My Department also provides financial support to assist colleges in discharging their responsibilities towards SLDD students. These support funds provide assistance to colleges for the provision of technical and personal support and the total value of support funds provided to SERC in 2010/11 was £0.481m.

Consequently, in the 2010/11 academic year, my Department provided a total of £1.831m to students with a learning difficulty or disability enrolled on courses within South Eastern Regional College. As the level of funding will vary between full and part-time enrolments, and different levels of support fund are payable, I am unable to provide you with an accurate breakdown, or average cost, per student.

Further Education College/Secondary Education Review: Co-ordination

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what co-ordination there is between the review of further education college provision, particularly in Ballymoney, and the Department of Education's review of secondary education.

(AQW 16055/11-15)

Dr Farry: There is no current review of further education college provision in Northern Ireland. However, I can confirm that the Northern Regional College is currently preparing a business case considering its estate's requirement across its entire area, including Ballymoney. The Department of Education and the North Eastern Education and Library Board will both be consulted as part of this exercise. The consultation will be wide ranging but in particular will focus on the need for

the inclusion in the college facilities of accommodation for the delivery of the professional and technical elements of the entitlement framework, particularly elements such as construction and engineering.

Education and Library Boards, working with CCMS and other sectors, including the further education sector, are currently engaged in an area planning process to identify the need for post-primary education in each Board area, including Ballymoney, and to develop proposals to meet that need.

The consultation on these area plans closed on 26 October 2012. Revised plans, taking account of the consultation responses are due in the Department of Education by 7 December 2012.

NEETS: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) how many young people are Not in Employment, Education or Training in the North Down area; and (ii) what action his Department is taking to address the problem. **(AQW 16070/11-15)**

Dr Farry: It is not possible to provide estimates of the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) in the North Down area due to sample size constraints in the Labour Force Survey (LFS). However, estimates of those who are not in employment, Government supported training or full-time education are available at the Northern Ireland level from the LFS.

For the period April – June 2012, in Northern Ireland, the LFS estimated that there were 54,000 (24.4%) 16-24 year olds who were not in employment, Government supported training or full-time education.

In terms of initiatives my Department is undertaking, on 31 May 2012, I secured Executive endorsement of 'Pathways to Success', the cross-departmental NEET strategy for Northern Ireland. I also secured substantial additional funding to implement the strategy and the 'Youth Employment Scheme'. On 2 July I made an oral statement to the Assembly announcing £5.8m for this financial year and proposals for future years of £15.6 million in 2013/14 and £19.6 million in 2014/15.

The 'Pathways to Success' strategy comprises a three tier package of measures aimed at prevention, helping young people in the 16-18, especially those facing barriers to participation and assisting unemployed young people aged 18-24 more generally.

My Department is now implementing several initiatives under that strategy.

One of the initiatives is the Community Family Support Programme (CFSP). The CFSP pilot will focus on the needs of 44 disadvantaged families in targeted areas and will be delivered by Local Employment Intermediary Service providers in partnership with other mainstream provision.

The pilot will be concentrated on the needs of disadvantaged families, to support parents, help prevent younger family members falling into the NEET category and help other young family members already in this situation to re-engage with education, training or employment.

As this is one of the Delivering Social Change Signature Projects an additional £2 million will now mean that the service can be extended over the next two years to some 500 families.

I am also piloting a Community Based Access Programme through the Learner Access and Engagement Programme. The programme will enable non-statutory organisations to provide learner support to young people aged 16 to 18, through a contractual arrangement with a Further Education College.

I also recently announced the introduction of a training allowance for young people participating in projects funded by the European Social Fund. This allowance has been designed to ensure there are effective incentives for young people to progress from provision which re-engages them with learning and develops skills linked to education and training, to programmes that provide the skills and qualifications to support progression and success in work. The allowance was introduced from 15 October.

A call for proposals under the Collaboration and Innovation Fund was issued on 23 October. My Department is seeking applications for grant under the Fund to test new approaches, based on sound evidence, aimed at piloting a range of approaches to re-engaging young people in the NEET category.

For unemployed 18 to 24 year olds, the Youth Employment Scheme is offering the following -

Initially 1,000 short 2 to 8 week work experience placements, rising to 3,000 placements annually by March 2013, designed to ensure early engagement with the labour market; this will cost £200,000 in 2012/13 rising to £400,000 and £600,000 respectively in 2013/14 and 2014/15.

800 employer subsidies of £5,750 a year in sectors which have the potential to help rebuild and rebalance the economy; (rising to 1,200 by 2014/15), provided employers agree to facilitate and enable further skills development; this will cost £2.3 million in 2012/13 rising to £5.75 million in 2013/14 and £6.9 million in 2014/15.

400 training places coupled with additional sector based work experience of between 6 and 9 months (rising to 1,800 by 2014/15) in sectors which have the potential to help rebuild and rebalance the economy. While in training young people will receive a training allowance of £100 a week. This will cost £1.1 million in 2012/13 rising to £5.3 million in 2013/14 and £6.4 million in 2014/15.

My Department will also invest £400,000 this year in direct employer engagement rising to £1.1 million in 2014/15. This will provide for marketing and developing a cadre of staff to manage employer engagement and participation in the various strands of the initiative.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Youth Unemployment: Dungannon

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department is taking to address the high youth unemployment figures for Dungannon.

(AQW 16147/11-15)

Dr Farry: Addressing youth unemployment, in all areas of Northern Ireland including Dungannon, is a priority. In the Dungannon District Council area young people make up 27.5% of the total number claiming Jobseekers Allowance which is above the Northern Ireland average of 21.1%.

Steps to Work and Pathways to Work are the Department's main return to work programmes and in the Dungannon area 149 young people are currently availing of the former while 94 young people are involved in the latter.

The Youth Employment Scheme (YES), which I announced to the Assembly on 2 July, will invest £31 million across Northern Ireland in new measures to help young unemployed people find work over the next 3 years. This Scheme is in the early stages of implementation but at present, 22 work experience opportunities are available through YES in the Dungannon area. I expect this number to rise significantly in the coming months.

Whistle-blowing/Grievances

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many (i) grievance cases have been taken; and (ii) whistleblowing complaints have been made, against (a) his Department; and (b) its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years; and at what cost to the public purse.

(AQW 16157/11-15)

Dr Farry: A total of forty-seven grievance cases have been taken by employees of the Department in the last five years.

The Department's Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) are USEL (Ulster Supported Employment Ltd), CITB (CITB-ConstructionSkills Northern Ireland), LRA (Labour Relations Agency) and, with effect from 1 April 2012, the six Further Education Colleges and Stranmillis University College. In the Department's ALBs, a total of twenty-six grievances have been taken in the last five years.

The number of grievances, for the Department and its ALBs in each of the last five years is set out in the table overleaf:

Year	Number of Formal Grievances in DEL	Number of Formal Grievances in ALBs *
2008	8	3
2009	9	10
2010	11	0
2011	10	1
2012	9	12

* Information on Further Education Colleges and Stranmillis University College has been included with effect from 1 April 2012, the date they were classified as Non-Departmental Public Bodies.

No complaints have been made against the Department which can be categorised as 'whistle blowing' complaints in the relevant time period. Six such complaints have been made in the Department's ALBs.

No Departmental grievance has resulted in the payment of any money to an employee. £17,947.20 has been incurred to date in relation to grievance and 'whistle blowing' complaints in the Department's ALBs.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Tourism: Downpatrick

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what (i) tourism potential can be developed; and (ii) job opportunities created, by promoting Downpatrick as the burial place of St. Patrick (a) locally; and (ii) abroad.

(AQW 15803/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and Tourism Ireland are both working to capitalise on Downpatrick's tourism potential in Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, Great Britain and overseas.

Downpatrick has a wealth of Patrician and wider Christian Heritage product including the burial site of St. Patrick, which has been supported, developed and promoted as part of the St. Patrick/Christian Heritage Signature Project. To date NITB has invested over £2.5million in capital works through the Tourism Development Scheme, leveraging a total of over £8.9million for the project, with a further £300,000 revenue assistance having been provided by NITB.

Tourism Ireland feature the St Patrick's Trail (including Downpatrick) as part of its extensive global destination marketing programme and has profiled Christian heritage and the St Patrick Centre in its promotion overseas, particularly in the GB and US markets. In March, ten Italian tour operators specialising in religious tourism visited Downpatrick as part of a visit organised by Tourism Ireland in partnership with NITB.

The story of St. Patrick can act as a job creator and the Chief Executive of NITB has recently taken the lead in organising a workshop with key stakeholders, Tourism Ireland and senior Council Officers with a view to re-focusing the St. Patrick project and exploring development and promotional opportunities further.

Natural Gas Distribution Licence

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the gaps in domestic gas distribution and supply to many urban housing estates, (i) when the natural gas distribution licence is due for renewal; and (ii) in relation to the terms of a new distribution licence, what measures will be put in place to ensure that extensive surveys are carried out by the chosen distributors to analyse consumer interest in domestic gas installation, particularly in urban housing estates.

(AQW 15974/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As with other gas licenses, the licence for distributing gas in the '10 Towns' licensed area outside Greater Belfast, which is held by firmus energy, is an ongoing licence which is not subject to renewal.

Roll out of the gas distribution network in the '10 Towns' licensed area is based on a development plan agreed between firmus energy and the Utility Regulator which concentrates on connecting key gas loads, i.e. primarily businesses but also public sector buildings, social housing and new private housing developments, in order to achieve economic viability. The licence holder may discuss plans for further development of the gas network with the Utility Regulator at any time, including connecting more properties in existing private housing developments. Such plans must be subject to economic appraisal.

Invest NI: Indigenous Businesses, North Antrim

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 14400/11-15, how many indigenous businesses in North Antrim shared the £1.85 million assistance from Invest NI from 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012.

(AQW 15982/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There were 89 indigenous businesses assisted by Invest NI between 1st April 2011 and 31st March 2012 in the North Antrim Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA). These businesses received 190 offers of financial support throughout that period.

Invest NI: Indigenous Businesses

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many indigenous businesses were assisted by Invest NI in the 2011/12 financial year, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 15983/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Table 1 shows the number of indigenous businesses assisted by Invest NI between 1st April 2011 and 31st March 2012 broken down by Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA). The number of offers of assistance has also been included, as a business can receive more than one offer per year.

Table 1 Number of Indigenous Business Assisted by Invest NI (2011-12)

PCA	No of Businesses	No of Offers
Belfast East	131	246
Belfast North	106	176
Belfast South	208	414
Belfast West	66	93
East Antrim	74	148
East Londonderry	94	131
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	138	278
Foyle	171	234
Lagan Valley	118	229
Mid Ulster	186	411

PCA	No of Businesses	No of Offers
Newry & Armagh	147	262
North Antrim	89	190
North Down	74	122
South Antrim	104	262
South Down	131	232
Strangford	63	123
Upper Bann	126	224
West Tyrone	84	131
Total	2,110	3,906

Notes:

- 1 Figures are provisional and may be subject to change.
- 2 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 provided support and guidance through the Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) to nearly 2,400 individuals to start their own business. A breakdown of these individuals by PCA is contained in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of Individuals Supported by EDP (2011-12)

PCA	No of Offers
Belfast East	101
Belfast North	125
Belfast South	119
Belfast West	121
East Antrim	126
East Londonderry	164
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	175
Foyle	205
Lagan Valley	95
Mid Ulster	175
Newry & Armagh	142
North Antrim	126
North Down	80
South Antrim	99
South Down	142
Strangford	79
Upper Bann	149
West Tyrone	164
Not Yet Located	9
Total	2,396

Notes:

- 1 Figures are provisional and may be subject to change.
- 2 'Not Yet Located' refers to cases where the applicant has not identified a final location for the project.

In direct response to the economic downturn, Invest NI launched its Boosting Business initiative on 14th November 2011. This initiative promotes the range of support and advice available to local businesses through accessible contact points, via telephone, email and social media.

Since June 2012, Invest NI has had a dedicated full time Business Support Team in place to deal with enquiries from businesses across Northern Ireland. Where appropriate, enquirers are referred to relevant teams within Invest NI, other stakeholders such as local Councils, as well as web-based sources of support such as www.nibusbusinessinfo.co.uk.

From 14th November 2011 to 31st March 2012, through the Boosting Business campaign Invest NI dealt with a total of 6,124 enquiries.

Since 1st July 2012, following software enhancements, Invest NI has been able to break down enquiries by geographic region, and as a result 1,761 enquiries can be analysed by parliamentary constituency area, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Boosting Business Enquiries by PCA

PCA	No of Businesses	No Of Cases
Belfast East	110	124
Belfast North	83	101
Belfast South	180	197
Belfast West	66	75
East Antrim	48	51
East Londonderry	63	70
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	86	93
Foyle	57	60
Lagan Valley	105	116
Mid Ulster	95	104
Newry & Armagh	100	114
North Antrim	75	81
North Down	91	99
South Antrim	83	88
South Down	105	114
Strangford	74	83
Upper Bann	114	125
West Tyrone	61	66
Total	1,596	1,761

Gas Storage Project, Islandmagee

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the regulatory environment which needs to be established to enable the gas storage project at Islandmagee to be delivered at no additional cost to gas consumers; (ii) the cost of providing such an environment; and (iii) the potential costs to the consumer of the gas storage project if such an environment was not established.

(AQW 16008/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) The regime for economic regulation of a gas storage facility in Northern Ireland will comprise a licence to store gas from the Utility Regulator, a third party access regime for the facility as required by European law, and a tariff regime. The Utility Regulator granted a gas storage licence to Islandmagee Storage Ltd on 17 October 2012 and published its decision on third party access on 5 July 2012. The Utility Regulator advises that it is working jointly with the Commission for Energy Regulation in the Republic of Ireland on the development of the tariff regime to ensure a consistent approach across the island. This work is ongoing and the tariff will be approved by the Utility Regulator.
- (ii) The cost of providing this regulatory environment has been minimal and involves only the internal costs borne by the Utility Regulator in consulting and analysing these issues.
- (iii) It is a legal obligation to have this regulatory environment in place. Without an appropriate regulatory environment, it would seem unlikely that a gas storage project would proceed, hence the issue of consumer costs would not be relevant.

Gas Transmission Pipelines: Capacity

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the current situation in relation to spare capacity in transmission pipelines within Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 16009/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Utility Regulator has advised that there is sufficient capacity in gas transmission pipelines in Northern Ireland to accommodate current gas demand and that the situation is monitored on an ongoing basis. Spare capacity is offered for sale in line with European regulations. The situation in relation to spare capacity in gas transmission pipelines in the Republic of Ireland is a matter for their regulatory body, the Commission for Energy Regulation.

Gas Storage Project, Islandmagee

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the need for a tariff structure to allow the gas storage facility at Islandmagee to compete with facilities in Great Britain.

(AQW 16010/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Utility Regulator has advised that it is working with the Commission for Energy Regulation in the Republic of Ireland on the development of the tariff regime for gas storage to ensure a consistent approach across the island. As in Great Britain, the tariff structure will need to be consistent with European legal requirements, and under European law, the regulatory authorities must consider the impact to trade and competition when developing tariff structures.

World Police and Fire Games: Accommodation

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, based on the trend of the last five years and anticipated availability, to outline (i) the spare capacity in tourist accommodation during the World Police and Fire Games 2013; and (ii) the likely additional demand to be generated by the World Police and Fire Games 2013.

(AQW 16011/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The 2013 World Police & Fire Games aims to attract 25,000 visitors from over 70 countries. This will include an estimated 10,000 competitors competing in 57 sports, plus 15,000 friends and family. The key challenge is to ensure that there is enough accommodation capacity to meet the demand.

Work is well advanced in carrying out an analysis of potential capacity to meet this anticipated demand and to manage any constraints and constructive negotiations have been held with the hotel sector.

World Police and Fire Games: Restaurants

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, based on the trend of the last five years and anticipated availability, to outline (i) the spare capacity of restaurants during the World Police and Fire Games 2013; and (ii) the likely additional demand to be generated by the World Police and Fire Games 2013.

(AQW 16012/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The 2013 World Police & Fire Games aims to attract 25,000 visitors from over 70 countries. This will include an estimated 10,000 competitors competing in 57 sports, plus 15,000 friends and family. The key challenge is to ensure that there is enough capacity to meet the demand in all aspects of the visitor experience including food and drink.

Comprehensive information on the capacity of restaurants and/or the likely additional demand to be generated (aside from total numbers expected) is not collected or held.

There are opportunities for the private sector to work together and develop loyalty, offers and "passes", to maximise the opportunities of large groups of visitors to restaurants, cafes and shops.

The Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau (BVCB) is working with 2013 WPFPG Ltd to deliver a quality visitor experience including food and drink.

DuPont, Derry: Job Losses

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she is aware of any proposed job losses at DuPont in Derry.

(AQW 16017/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Between July and September 2012, 12 contract staff left DuPont as a result of the global economic downturn.

It is expected that around 5 DuPont Maydown employees will be made redundant in the coming 6 - 12 months. The company anticipates this will be achieved through a voluntary process. The posts involved will be machine operatives and general operative roles.

Invest NI: Funding

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) how much funding in total the Executive, British Government and European Union has allocated to InvestNI for the manufacturing and engineering sector; (ii) how much has been distributed to businesses; (iii) how many businesses benefited; (iv) the location of each business; (v) how each business used the money; and (vi) what proportion of the funding each business allocated to administrative budgets.

(AQW 16023/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI's budget is allocated annually by my Department, which receives its funding via the NI Block allocated to the Executive. The funds allocated to Invest NI's Programme budget are derived from various sources including the EU. In each of the last three years the total Programme budget allocated to Invest NI was as shown below:

- 2009 - 2010: £173.4million, of which £20.8million was EU funding
- 2010 – 2011: £168.9million, of which £25.2million was EU funding
- 2011 – 2012: £125.4million, of which £17.9million was EU funding

Invest NI's annual budget allocation is used to meet new and existing financial assistance commitments as well as elements of programme expenditure not directly paid to businesses, such as expenditure for trade activities, business start up, inward investment marketing activities and skills development programmes.

(ii, iii & iv)

During the three years in question, Invest NI committed a total of £369.45million to 5,683 businesses in the manufacturing & services industries across Northern Ireland. This is broken down as:

Invest NI Assistance Offered by Manufacturing and Services and Parliamentary Constituency 2009-10

PCA	Manufacturing		Services		Total	
	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £million	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £million	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £million
Belfast East	34	8.78	67	10.26	101	19.04
Belfast North	24	1.42	54	6.64	78	8.07
Belfast South	26	0.43	113	18.12	139	18.55
Belfast West	25	2.23	18	1.43	43	3.67
East Antrim	33	1.72	24	2.03	57	3.76
East Londonderry	51	1.44	43	0.63	94	2.07
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	81	3.82	57	1.53	138	5.35
Foyle	39	14.79	61	2.43	100	17.22
Lagan Valley	56	6.09	42	1.48	98	7.57
Mid Ulster	118	10.87	59	1.37	177	12.24
Newry And Armagh	77	2.41	57	3.08	134	5.50
North Antrim	50	5.52	33	0.58	83	6.10
North Down	22	1.51	24	1.16	46	2.67
South Antrim	72	4.15	44	1.08	116	5.24
South Down	62	3.63	44	0.71	106	4.35
Strangford	38	2.39	17	0.70	55	3.09
Upper Bann	69	8.72	37	10.02	106	18.74
West Tyrone	54	2.56	47	0.86	101	3.42
Unknown	2	0.01	1	0.24	3	0.25
Total	933	82.50	842	64.39	1,775	146.89

Notes:

1. In addition 91 Organisations / Businesses were offered over £30million of assistance at which this level of detail is unavailable.

2. Table may not add due to rounding.

Invest NI Assistance Offered by Manufacturing and Services and Parliamentary Constituency 2010-11

PCA	Manufacturing		Services		Total	
	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £million	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £million	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £million
Belfast East	35	6.48	71	14.42	106	20.91
Belfast North	15	0.70	34	3.44	49	4.15
Belfast South	25	0.80	103	10.08	128	10.87
Belfast West	13	0.18	16	0.16	29	0.34
East Antrim	32	2.01	20	0.26	52	2.27
East Londonderry	25	0.91	31	0.46	56	1.37
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	68	2.03	43	0.91	111	2.93
Foyle	32	0.38	47	1.91	79	2.29
Lagan Valley	62	4.71	35	0.43	97	5.14
Mid Ulster	98	2.68	57	0.92	155	3.60
Newry And Armagh	49	1.07	40	5.68	89	6.75
North Antrim	31	5.66	32	0.50	63	6.16
North Down	13	0.24	24	0.25	37	0.49
South Antrim	61	11.18	41	0.58	102	11.76
South Down	45	0.57	39	0.57	84	1.13
Strangford	43	0.51	16	0.15	59	0.66
Upper Bann	48	0.86	39	5.16	87	6.02
West Tyrone	36	0.49	28	0.25	64	0.74
Unknown			1	0.00	1	0.00
Total	731	41.47	717	46.13	1,448	87.60

Notes:

1. In addition 128 Organisations / Businesses were offered over £16million of assistance at which this level of detail is unavailable.
2. Table may not add due to rounding.

INVEST NI ASSISTANCE OFFERED BY MANUFACTURING AND SERVICES AND PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY 2011-12

PCA	Manufacturing		Services		Total	
	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £million	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £million	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £million
Belfast East	42	6.49	82	3.35	124	9.83
Belfast North	24	0.83	52	1.83	76	2.66
Belfast South	37	0.91	136	12.77	173	13.68
Belfast West	23	2.08	29	2.12	52	4.19
East Antrim	45	0.78	26	0.57	71	1.36
East Londonderry	41	0.92	46	0.53	87	1.44
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	76	1.88	49	1.00	125	2.88
Foyle	48	2.24	87	1.07	135	3.32

PCA	Manufacturing		Services		Total	
	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £million	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £million	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £million
Lagan Valley	59	3.33	48	0.94	107	4.28
Mid Ulster	106	5.52	61	1.30	167	6.81
Newry And Armagh	79	1.75	55	0.80	134	2.55
North Antrim	44	1.96	37	0.53	81	2.49
North Down	28	1.05	32	0.55	60	1.60
South Antrim	53	2.95	49	1.26	102	4.21
South Down	62	1.21	61	1.40	123	2.61
Strangford	39	0.72	17	0.57	56	1.28
Upper Bann	65	0.89	50	5.11	115	6.00
West Tyrone	37	1.00	38	0.53	75	1.52
Unknown	2	0.03	6	0.20	8	0.23
Total	910	36.54	961	36.42	1,871	72.96

Notes:

1. In addition 370 Organisations / Businesses were offered over £16million of assistance at which this level of detail is unavailable.
2. Table may not add due to rounding.

Of the above, the following was allocated to companies in the engineering sector:

Invest NI Assistance Offered Within the Engineering Sector by Manufacturing and Services and Parliamentary Constituency 2009-10

PCA	Manufacturing		Services		Total	
	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £000s	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £000s	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £000s
Belfast East	3	327	2	28	5	355
Belfast North	1	35			1	35
Belfast South	1	4	4	55	5	59
Belfast West	1	4			1	4
East Antrim	4	208			4	208
East Londonderry	7	227	1	85	8	312
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	11	491	4	92	15	583
Foyle	4	83	3	111	7	194
Lagan Valley	4	52	2	129	6	181
Mid Ulster	22	503	9	164	31	668
Newry And Armagh	8	78	5	67	13	145
North Antrim	7	178	2	55	9	233
North Down	3	787			3	787
South Antrim	2	43	2	7	4	51
South Down	12	332			12	332
Strangford	3	66	3	96	6	162
Upper Bann	6	162	3	220	9	382

PCA	Manufacturing		Services		Total	
	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £000s	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £000s	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £000s
West Tyrone	5	75	3	72	8	146
Unknown	2	14			2	14
Total	106	3,670	43	1,181	149	4,851

Notes: Table may not add due to rounding.

Invest NI Assistance Offered Within the Engineering Sector by Manufacturing and Services and Parliamentary Constituency 2010-11

PCA	Manufacturing		Services		Total	
	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £000s	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £000s	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £000s
Belfast East	4	198	3	284	7	483
Belfast North	1	31	1	0.1	2	31
Belfast South	4	51	3	6	7	57
Belfast West	2	7	1	3	3	9
East Antrim	6	118			6	118
East Londonderry	2	29	4	38	6	67
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	11	213	3	28	14	241
Foyle	4	97	1	33	5	129
Lagan Valley	5	80	1	7	6	87
Mid Ulster	15	221	8	209	23	430
Newry And Armagh	2	56	1	10	3	66
North Antrim	4	39	2	15	6	54
North Down	2	3			2	3
South Antrim	2	1	1	3	3	4
South Down	6	122			6	122
Strangford	1	2	4	56	5	58
Upper Bann	4	57	3	15	7	73
West Tyrone	4	42	2	5	6	47
Total	79	1,368	38	712	117	2,080

Notes: Table may not add due to rounding.

Invest NI Assistance Offered Within the Engineering Sector by Manufacturing and Services and Parliamentary Constituency 2011-12

PCA	Manufacturing		Services		Total	
	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £000s	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £000s	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £000s
Belfast East	4	51	3	80	7	131
Belfast North	2	28	1	5	3	33
Belfast South	3	257	6	17	9	274
Belfast West	3	14	1	9	4	24

PCA	Manufacturing		Services		Total	
	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £000s	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £000s	No of Businesses	Total Assistance £000s
East Antrim	7	103	2	66	9	169
East Londonderry	7	313	2	3	9	316
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	13	292			13	292
Foyle	4	93	3	9	7	102
Lagan Valley	3	81	3	94	6	176
Mid Ulster	14	817	10	233	24	50
Newry And Armagh	6	222	3	9	9	230
North Antrim	5	319	3	33	8	352
North Down	3	811	1	1	4	811
South Antrim	4	60	2	39	6	100
South Down	4	29			4	29
Strangford	2	30			2	30
Upper Bann	4	48	4	111	8	159
West Tyrone	2	8	2	26	4	34
Unknown			1	0.2	1	0.2
Total	90	3,577	47	736	137	4,312

Notes: Table may not add due to rounding.

Financial assistance is negotiated on the basis of the requirements of each individual project, its use will therefore vary considerably from company to company. Specific targets are agreed as part of each offer of support relevant to the business development activities being undertaken and these will typically include appropriate milestones for employment growth, innovation, R&D and improving competitiveness.

Administrative expenses are not considered eligible for financial support.

Exports: Manufacturing and Engineering Sectors

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) by county, the number of exports from the manufacturing and engineering sector; and (ii) how the exports are distributed geographically. (AQW 16024/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Exports data are not available at county level. However, there are two sources available for Northern Ireland as a whole.

Regional Trade Statistics are published by HM Revenue and Customs on a quarterly basis and detailed results, including geographic destinations of exports, are publically available to download from <https://www.uktradeinfo.com/statistics/rts/pages/default.aspx>.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) publish a Manufacturing Sales and Exports Survey each year which provides estimates of the sales and exports generated by all businesses within the manufacturing industry in Northern Ireland. The latest figures available are for 2010/11, with 2011/12 results due for release in early December 2012. The results of this survey are publically available to download from the DETI website: <http://www.deti.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-surveys/stats-manufacturing-sales-exports.htm>

You should note that various engineering activities are included in, but not limited to, the Manufacturing and Construction sectors, and various services sub-sectors such as Wholesale and Retail, Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities and Administrative and Support Service Activities. Exports information is not available for the majority of these industries, however, the recent integration of the Annual Business Inquiry and the Manufacturing, Sales and Exports Survey means that this information will be available going forward. More details of the integration are available on the DETI website at http://www.deti.gov.uk/notice_to_users_-_integration_of_the_annual_business_inquiry_and_the_manufacturing_sales_and_exports_survey.pdf. In some of the above industries, not all of the activity within these sectors would be classified as engineering, and hence any estimate of activity would likely be an over-estimate.

Exports data are published in terms of value rather than number of exports. Table 1 below summarises the total value and the broad destinations of manufacturing exports from Northern Ireland over the last three years.

Table 1: Northern Ireland Manufacturing Exports (current prices) - 2008/09 – 2010/11

	2008/09 (£million)	2009/10 (£million)	2010/11 (provisional) (£million)
Republic of Ireland	£1,590	£1,459	£1,230
Rest of EU	£1,479	£1,062	£1,228
Rest of World	£2,658	£2,566	£2,599
Total Exports	£5,727	£5,087	£5,057

Source: Manufacturing Sales and Exports Survey, NISRA

Invest NI: Employment

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of people employed by InvestNI, broken down by (i) job title; (ii) grade; and (iii) salary band.

(AQW 16026/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI currently employs 629 full and part time staff members, 612.41 full time equivalent.

The breakdown of employees by (i) job title; (ii) grade; and (iii) salary band is set out in the attached table.

Job Title/Grade	Salary Band		No of Staff
	Min	Max	
Ancillary	<£18,038		1
Administrative Officer and Equivalent	£18,038	£22,180	60
Executive Officer II and Equivalent	£21,392	£23,250	138
Executive Officer I and Equivalent	£23,336	£26,086	28
Staff Officer and Equivalent	£27,115	£30,520	104
Deputy Principal and Equivalent	£34,163	£38,893	184
Deputy Principal (Personal to Holder)	£40,000	£44,000	4
Grade 7 and Equivalent	£44,796	£50,796	85
Grade 6 and Equivalent	£52,127	£62,407	5
Grade 5 and Equivalent	£57,300	£116,000	15
Grade 3 and Equivalent	£81,600	£160,000	4
Grade 1 and Equivalent	£160,000	£205,000	1

Ballylumford Power Station: Jobs

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 15203/11-15, in relation to the transfer of ten jobs from Foyle to the Ballylumford Power Station, whether she can offer an assurance that the remaining jobs will be secured.

(AQW 16027/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The company has advised Invest NI that the 10 jobs at Ballylumford Power Station have been secured, with employees taking up positions with the Shaw Group Inc. who have been awarded the service contract.

Unfortunately the company has also advised that the outstanding employees, 8 of which are based at the company's Londonderry office and 4 in the company's Scottish office, have been issued notice letters.

Invest NI has offered an advisory service to those employees affected and awaits the company reply.

Ministerial Appointments

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the success rates of (i) catholic; and (ii) protestant applicants for Ministerial appointments from May 2007 to April 2011.

(AQW 16030/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There were 34 ministerial appointments made to DETI-sponsored Non Departmental Public Bodies in the period May 2007 to April 2011. Of these, 20 appointees (59%) declared community background as Protestant, 11 appointees (32%) as Roman Catholic and 3 appointees (9%) as "Neither".

Invest NI: Land

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what land bank InvestNI holds in (i) Ballymena; (ii) Ballymoney; and (iii) Moyle.

(AQW 16056/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI's land is held in support of economic development projects brought forward by qualifying businesses with an approved business case and immediate property need.

Within the Ballymena, Ballymoney and Moyle Council areas Invest NI holds a total of 104 acres. Whilst a significant proportion of this has been developed and is occupied by businesses, there remain 36 acres available. The breakdown of these figures by Council area is as follows:

District Council	Landholding (acres)*	Land Availability (acres)*
Ballymena	85.34	29.23
Ballymoney	12.75	4.50
Moyle	6.03	2
Total	104.12	35.73

* Figures correct as at 30 September 2012.

Invest NI employs a long term strategy in respect of its land holding and does not hold land in reserve.

Data on Businesses

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what new types of data her Department has started collecting on businesses in each of the last five years.

(AQW 16092/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The information below relates to new surveys of business introduced during the period 1 October 2007 to 30 September 2012.

My Department collects energy efficiency data from energy suppliers and government departments only (i.e. not all businesses) to assist with the UK's compliance with the Energy Efficiency and End-Use Services Directive. The Department started collecting this data from 1 April 2008 and has done so annually since.

DETI and DSD are currently undertaking a scoping exercise on the size and scale of the Third Sector, including an assessment of the potential of community and voluntary organisations to make the transition to the social enterprise model. This exercise involves a survey of around 3,800 known Third Sector organisations across Northern Ireland. The final report is expected by December 2012 and will be used to help shape future policy developments across relevant Executive departments.

On behalf of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, DETI has collected occupancy statistics from all hotels and a sample of Bed & Breakfasts/Guesthouses and Guest Accommodation on a monthly basis (from July 2010 – June 2011). DETI also collected annual data from self-catering establishments and visitor attractions in 2011. Up until 2010 these same surveys were carried out by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board.

From 1 April 2011, the responsibility for the collection of data and production of official labour market and economic statistics, including business surveys, transferred from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, an agency of the Department of Finance and Personnel. This transfer mirrored the position in Great Britain where most business surveys and labour market data collection and statistical production have been transferred from the departments with policy responsibilities to the Office for National Statistics.

During the last five years two new statistical business surveys have been introduced by NISRA. The first, Northern Ireland Access to Finance, part of an EU wide survey of Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs), was introduced in 2010 and is conducted on an ad-hoc basis. Secondly there is the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES); a statutory, sample survey, which provides estimates for the number of employee jobs in all industries except agriculture. This was introduced in 2010 and will be conducted on a biennial basis.

Changes to surveys in existence prior to 1 October 2007 are not included. Such changes may be made to enhance the robustness and coverage of results, for example, by combining surveys or boosting the number of businesses sampled. All such changes are made in consultation with users and are assessed in terms of policy need and the implications for additional burden on businesses.

Commercial Data

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when she last reviewed the commercial data collected by her Department.

(AQW 16093/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Commercial data collected by, or required by my Department to fulfil its policy responsibilities is subject to ongoing assessment by my officials and changes to business survey needs communicated to NISRA through both formal and informal mechanisms. In addition, officials within my Department regularly consider the need for any changes to data collection in response to emerging issues.

From the 1st April 2011, the responsibility for the collection of data and production of official labour market and economic statistics including business surveys transferred from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), an agency of the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). This transfer mirrored the position in Great Britain where most business surveys and labour market data collection and statistical production have been transferred from the departments with policy responsibilities to the Office for National Statistics. Business surveys affected by this transfer of function were, and remain, collected under the Statistics of Trade and Employment Order 1988 and are subject to the Code of Practice for Official Statistics under the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007.

All commercial data collected through business surveys classified as a National Statistic are subject to an assessment by the UK Statistics Authority and are subject to regular reviews including engagement with users and providers of data.

Statistical surveys by Government are subject to survey control procedures which apply to all statistical surveys of businesses and local authorities where there is potentially a burden, or a perceived burden on those approached to participate. To fulfil the survey control obligation, NISRA published a statistics notice on 4th July 2012 summarising survey activity by all Government Departments in 2010 and the associated compliance costs.

Agrifood Strategy: Consultation

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given that the date for responding to the consultation on the future Agri-Food Strategy has passed, (i) when she plans to publish her initial findings and those of the Agri-Food Strategy Board on the way forward for the agri-food sector; and (ii) for her assessment of the responses received.

(AQW 16094/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Agri-Food Strategy Board (AFSB) is currently assessing nearly 40 responses received from stakeholders via a public Call for Evidence issued by the Board in August 2012. The AFSB also established 9 sectoral sub groups, comprising approximately 60 industry representatives, to obtain feedback from the Agri-Food sector on specific challenges and opportunities for each of the main sub sectors.

The information received via the Call for Evidence, and the sectoral sub groups, will be used by the Board to inform the creation of a draft Strategic Plan to develop the Agri-Food sector to 2020 and beyond.

EU Funded Programmes

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many EU funded programmes her Department expects to operate in (i) 2013/14; (ii) 2014/15; and (iii) 2015/16.

(AQW 16098/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department currently acts as Managing Authority for the EU Sustainable Competitiveness Programme for Northern Ireland 2007–2013.

In addition, DETI acts as the Northern Ireland Accountable Department for tourism, enterprise, energy and telecoms elements of the Interreg IVA Programme (2007-2013) for which the Special European programmes Body (SEUPB) is the Managing Authority.

The EU Structural Funds Programmes for 2014 – 2020 are currently being developed and decisions around the administration of these have yet to be made.

Craigavon Industrial Development Organisation

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what representations her Department or InvestNI has made to potential investors of the CIDO Innovation Centre in Craigavon.

(AQW 16130/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI is keen to build on previous FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) success across Northern Ireland and actively works with local stakeholders to maximise investment and employment opportunities in all areas. Invest NI has facilitated nine potential investor visits to the Craigavon District Council area over the previous four years. These investors visited a number of sites including Silverwood Business Park, Magowan West, the Exchange and the Seagoe Industrial Estate.

Invest NI continues to offer a wide range of support to encourage the start up and growth of high technology focused businesses located at the Craigavon Industrial Development Organisation (CIDO) Innovation Centre. Invest NI currently markets the

Innovation Centre through its Property Database and through the Northern Ireland Business Info website. The Centre is also profiled in Invest NI's Southern Regional Office sales proposition.

The Regional Start Initiative contract was awarded to Enterprise Northern Ireland (ENI) last month. This contract will be delivered through the Local Enterprise Agencies including CIDO.

Growth Loan Fund

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 15722/11-15, in light of the level of public funding allocated to Whiterock Capital Partners, why details of the other bids cannot be disclosed.

(AQW 16177/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have disclosed details of the winning bid for the Growth Loan Fund.

Details of other bids cannot be disclosed. In respect of future fund manager procurements, it could be detrimental to disclose details of other bids since it provides an insight to other bidders and may enable them to bid tactically which could have an adverse impact on value for money and ultimately be detrimental to the public purse. It may even prevent fund managers from bidding. Significant effort goes into making a market of fund managers and disclosure would detract from this effort.

Farming: Safety

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has given any further consideration to the commissioning of a television advertising campaign, similar to the successful road safety campaigns, to highlight the dangers of working on farms following recent on-farm fatalities.

(AQW 16385/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I can confirm that the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland have commissioned an advertising agency to take forward the development and production of a farm safety advertising campaign. The campaign is scheduled to go live in late February/early March 2013.

Department of the Environment

Councils: Chief Executives

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to list the councils in which the post of Chief Executive is currently (i) filled on a permanent basis; (ii) filled on a temporary basis; and (iii) vacant.

(AQW 14472/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): The information requested is provided in the table below.

Councils	Current Chief Executive/s post is (i) filled on a permanent basis; (ii) filled on a temporary basis; or (iii) vacant
Antrim Borough Council	Permanent
Ards Borough Council	Permanent
Armagh City & District Council	Permanent
Ballymena Borough Council	Permanent
Ballymoney Borough Council	Permanent
Banbridge District Council	Permanent
Belfast City Council	Permanent
Carrickfergus Borough Council	Permanent
Castlereagh Borough Council	Permanent
Coleraine Borough Council	Permanent
Cookstown District Council	Temporary
Craigavon Borough Council	Permanent
Derry City Council	Permanent
Down District Council	Temporary
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council	Temporary
Fermanagh District Council	Permanent

Councils	Current Chief Executive/s post is (i) filled on a permanent basis; (ii) filled on a temporary basis; or (iii) vacant
Larne Borough Council	Permanent
Limavady Borough Council	Permanent
Lisburn City Council	Permanent
Magherafelt District Council	Permanent
Moyle District Council	Permanent
Newry & Mourne District Council	Permanent
Newtownabbey Borough Council	Permanent
North Down Borough Council	Permanent
Omagh District Council	Permanent
Strabane District Council	Temporary

Civil Servants: Criminal Offences

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether any departmental staff have been charged with criminal offences; and (ii) what is her Department's position regarding staff employment whilst court proceedings are pending.
(AQW 15419/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Prior to March 2008, when Human Resource services within the Department were centralised, it was the practice of the Department and its Agencies to record disciplinary cases on individual personal files. Consequently, no central record was held. As a result it is not possible to obtain information prior to March 2008, without incurring a disproportionate cost.

However, I can confirm that since March 2008, a total of 15 officers have been charged, arrested or convicted of a criminal offence. Arising from these cases, each is considered under the NICS disciplinary policy and subsequent penalties have raised from formal written warnings to dismissal. In total, 3 officers have been dismissed.

Under the NICS Handbook the onus is on an officer to notify their employing Department, as soon as possible, if they have been arrested, charged or convicted by a Court of a criminal offence (except a traffic offence with a private vehicle for which the penalty has not included imprisonment or disqualification from driving). Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action being taken by the Department.

Upon notification of a charge, arrest or conviction the Department decides on a case by case basis if the officer should remain in their post pending the outcome of the police investigation or the conclusion of court proceedings and whether it is appropriate that formal disciplinary action should commence. I can confirm there have been occasions where, upon notification of a charge of a criminal offence and pending court proceedings, that the Department has deemed it appropriate to suspend an officer from duty until the conclusion of the Department's disciplinary investigation.

Marie Stopes Clinic: Planning Application

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment whether a planning application has been received for the proposed Marie Stopes Clinic in Belfast.
(AQW 15537/11-15)

Mr Attwood: A planning application was received on the 1st March 2012 for a change of use from office accommodation to medical and health services. The application site was described as 8th floor, 14-16 Great Victoria Street, Belfast and the applicant was R & A Developments, Bangor.

The proposal was advertised in the local press and neighbours were notified in line with normal Departmental procedures. No objections were received and

Belfast City Council was consulted in accordance with the agreed Streamlined Council Consultation arrangements.

The planning application was approved on the 18th May 2012 and the approval permits a medical or health facility to operate from the premises.

Auctioned Items

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the items which his Department has disposed of at auctions in (i) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12, including the auction value of each item.
(AQW 15572/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department has disposed of the following items at auctions in 2010/11 and 2011/12:

Assets	2010/11 Sale Value (£)	2011/12 Sale Value (£)
Vehicle Registration Marks	898,476	860,882
Motorcycles/Mopeds	23,135	1,748
Total	921,611	862,630

In relation to the proceeds from the sale of vehicle registrations, proceeds are returned to the Department for Transport (Dft) as the function of vehicle licensing is an excepted matter under Section 4(1) and Schedule 2(9) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Sale of Registration Marks Regulations 1995 makes provision for the acquisition of a registration mark from the Secretary of State (SoS) for Transport. Accordingly, registration marks belong to the SoS for Transport and likewise the revenue from their sale.

Warm Homes Scheme: Building Control Fees

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment which councils charge building control fees for home insulation that is provided under the Warm Homes Scheme; and how much each council charges.

(AQW 15602/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The information requested is provided in the table below.

Council	Does the Council charge building control fees for home insulation provided under the Warm Homes Scheme	Amount Council Charges
Antrim Borough Council	Yes	£60
Ards Borough Council	No	-
Armagh City & District Council	Yes	£60
Ballymena Borough Council	No	-
Ballymoney Borough Council	No	-
Banbridge District Council	Yes	£60
Belfast City Council	Yes	£60
Carrickfergus Borough Council	Yes	£60
Castlereagh Borough Council	Yes	£60
Coleraine Borough Council	Yes	£60
Cookstown District Council	Yes	£60
Craigavon Borough Council	Yes	£60
Derry City Council	Yes	£60
Down District Council	Yes	£60
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council	Yes	£60
Fermanagh District Council	Yes	£60
Larne Borough Council	Yes	£60
Limavady Borough Council	No	-
Lisburn City Council	Yes	£60
Magherafelt District Council	Yes	£60
Moyle District Council	No	-
Newry & Mourne District Council	No	-
Newtownabbey Borough Council	No	-
North Down Borough Council	No	-
Omagh District Council	Yes	£60
Strabane District Council	Yes	£60

Northern Ireland Environment Agency: Pilot Cockle Fishery

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of the Environment whether the Northern Ireland Environment Agency had any input into the pilot cockle fishery, which was initiated by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Belfast Lough in 2008; and whether the Agency is aware of the findings of the most recent Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute Report on the Belfast Lough Cockle Fishery.

(AQW 15688/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) did not have any input to the 2008 pilot cockle fishery in Belfast Lough.

The Department has just received the Belfast Lough Cockles monitoring report for 2012 prepared by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute. The Department will review this report, evaluate any management implications for the Area of Special Scientific Interest and Special Protection Area and as appropriate discuss these with DARD.

Loughside Playing Fields: Proposed Asda Store

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the proposed Asda store at Loughside playing fields and given the choice of a notice of opinion instead of an Article 31 public inquiry, to outline the duties of a developer to engage in a meaningful and wide public consultation with the local community when a proposed development affects a whole neighbourhood.

(AQW 15739/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I will consider the need for a public inquiry in relation to this major Article 31 planning application when I have received a recommendation from my officials.

It is the case that at present, there is no statutory obligation for a developer to engage in pre-application community consultation prior to the submission of a planning application. The Department however encourages all applicants to engage positively with those most closely affected by a development proposal at an early stage in the development process, from experience this early dialogue can avoid misunderstanding and avoid delay later in the process. In this regard, in advance of the transfer of planning powers to councils I am bringing forward a Planning Bill that will accelerate the implementation of a number of the reforms in the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 to be administered by the Department.

The Bill will introduce strengthened community consultation for major planning applications. A statutory requirement will be placed on developers to consult the community, before submitting a major application to the Department, and to take account of their views when drawing up proposals for the major development. It also gives DOE the power to decline to determine an application if this consultation is not carried out to the Department's satisfaction. This provision provides a mechanism for third parties to influence applications for major development early in the process and for developers to improve the acceptability of their proposals.

Giant's Causeway: World Heritage Site

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment how much money has been received, in each of the last five years, from the World Heritage Fund for preserving and promoting the Giants Causeway World Heritage Site.

(AQW 15885/11-15)

Mr Attwood: No funding has been received over the last five years from the World Heritage Fund for preserving and promoting the Giants Causeway World Heritage Site. The World Heritage Fund is available primarily for developing or post-conflict countries to secure threatened properties.

In Britain or the North of Ireland, no site has applied to the World Heritage Fund for assistance. World Heritage Site status does not bring any financial awards from Government or UNESCO, although it can attract indirect funding from other sources such as Lottery funding or from the private sector.

Castlebawn Site, Newtownards: New Retail Development

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether an assessment was made of the impact on existing shops from the new retail development at the Castlebawn site in Newtownards prior to his decision to grant planning permission; and to outline the process and findings of this assessment.

(AQW 15946/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The proposal involves approximately 20,000 square metres of comparison shopping which will straddle the town centre boundary with one quarter of the retail floorspace within the town centre itself. In accordance with Planning Policy Statement 5: Retailing and Town Centres, my Department assessed the impact of the proposal on Newtownards primary retail core as well as the impact of that part of the proposal which lies outside the town centre on the existing shops within Newtownards town centre.

The assessment concluded that the proposed development will have a retail impact on Newtownards primary retail core, the town centre and Ards Shopping Centre. The process and findings of that assessment are presented as part of the Development Management Report for the planning application. It involved the calculation of the amount of trade which will be diverted from existing centres within the catchment to the comparison retailing provided at the Castlebawn site. However in contrast to the calculated impacts, the proposal has an edge of centre location and could support and enhance Newtownards

town centre by promoting linked trips and attracting a new modern retail offer with increasing choice for consumers. These benefits could potentially bring a greater number of shoppers offsetting any initial impacts in the short term.

I fully considered the findings of the retail assessment and balanced those findings against other considerations which were material to the proposal, including the positive and regenerative effects which the proposal will have on listed buildings within Court Street and the restoration of the historic "Bawn Wall" – a Scheduled Monument to include public access.

Warm Homes Scheme: Building Control Fees

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any powers to prevent local councils from removing the waiver on building control fees on loft insulation installed under the Warm Homes Scheme.

(AQW 15948/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have no powers to prevent councils from removing the waiver of building control fees on loft insulation installed under the Warm Homes Scheme. This is a matter for the councils themselves to determine. However, I note that some councils do not 'charge' the fee and I welcome this approach. Due to an ongoing dispute on this issue, it would not be appropriate to comment further, save that I liaise with DSD on the issue.

Drivers: Category Tests

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the initiatives he has used to raise public awareness on the necessity for drivers, who wish to tow a trailer in excess of 750Kgs, to undertake the B+E and C1+E category tests.

(AQW 15965/11-15)

Mr Attwood: EU directive 2006/126/EC, which comes into force on 19 January 2013, introduces new driving licence rules for drivers of cars and small vehicles (categories B and B+E) who want to tow trailers. The new rules apply to drivers who pass their tests on or after that date. Driving entitlements obtained before that will not be affected.

The rules on what a driver can tow are different depending on when they passed their driving test. A driver who passed their car test before 1 January 1997 is generally entitled to drive a vehicle and trailer combination of up to 8.25 tonnes maximum authorised mass (MAM). A driver who passed the test after 1 January 1997 and who has an ordinary category B (car) licence can drive either:

- a vehicle up to 3,500kg MAM towing a trailer of up to 750kg MAM (with a combined weight of up to 4,250kg in total);
- a trailer over 750kg MAM as long as it is no more than the unladen or 'kerb' weight of the towing vehicle (with a combined weight of up to 3,500kg in total).

For anything heavier, the driver will have to take a category B+E driving test.

Drivers who pass their tests to drive cars from 19 January 2013 will be able to tow:

- light trailers weighing no more than 750kg;
- trailers weighing more than 750kg where the combined weight of the towing vehicle (the car/ small vehicle) and the trailer is not more than 3,500kg.

Anyone wishing to tow a trailer that weighs more than 750kg, where the combined weight of the towing vehicle and the trailer is more than 3,500kg, will have to pass a further test to obtain category B+E (car and trailer) entitlement.

After passing the B+E test, the trailer being towed must not be heavier than 3,500kg and the combined weight must not be more than 7,000kg.

To tow a trailer that weighs more than 3,500kg with a car or small vehicle (category B), a driver will need to pass additional tests for category C1+E (medium-sized goods vehicles with trailers).

The table below sets out the current arrangements and the changes being introduced, with the new requirements.

Category	Current Arrangements	3rd Directive	Requirements
B	Car or light van with light trailer of <750kg (trailer can be >750kg if total weight of combination does not exceed 3500kg)	Car or light van with light trailer of <750kg (trailer can be >750kg if total weight of combination does not exceed 3500kg)	Normal car (B) licence
B+E	Car or light van with trailer > 750kg, no vehicle/trailer weight ratio prescribed	Car or light van with heavy trailer, where total weight of combination >4250kg, up to a maximum of 7000kg (Car or light van 3500kg, trailer 3500kg)	Normal car licence plus B +E test

The main change to the current licence entitlement is to the total weight combination of the car and trailer. Currently there is no car/trailer weight ratio prescribed; the only thing that governs this is the legal design weight the vehicle can tow. When the changes are introduced the combination weight will be capped to a maximum of 7,000kg on the driving licence entitlement. The legal design weight will remain, which will mean that in some cases, due to the design of the vehicle, it may not be legally

permissible to reach the 7,000kg maximum. New drivers who wish to tow trailers in excess of 3,500kg will have to pass a category C1+E test.

The initiatives used to raise public awareness of the changes to date include:

- in December 2011, the establishment of a stakeholder group made up of those who responded to the consultation document issued in January 2010;
- from 20 April 2012, the publication of information through NI Direct;
- in May 2012, the publication of an article in the newsletter issued to all approved driving and motorcycle instructors;
- in July 2012, the issue of a press release on the forthcoming changes;
- from August 2012, the display of posters at DVA test centres, theory test centres and vehicle licensing offices;
- in September 2012, the issue of a leaflet to every theory test and practical motorcycle test candidate;
- the distribution of leaflets at the Balmoral Show, the North West 200, through the PSNI Bikesafe initiative, and at other motorcycle and car events;
- the distribution of leaflets on request to approved driving and motorcycle instructors.

Further initiatives planned include:

- a new booklet, containing full details of the forthcoming changes, to be issued with all provisional licences from 19 November 2012;
- information seminars for driving and motorcycle instructors in early November 2012;
- a further article in the next edition of the newsletter for approved driving and motorcycle instructors;
- a trade bulletin to be published on the DVA website and to be issued via email to the trade and to other stakeholders including MLAs;
- information bulletins issued via the NI Direct SMS text messaging and Twitter services;
- a "newsroom" article on NI Direct;
- a further press release.

Planning Application

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of the Environment when he will be able to announce the outcome of the planning application for a single dwelling near Claudy, about which he met the homeowner and the MP for East Londonderry, on the 31 August 2012.

(AQW 16004/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As you are aware this application remains under consideration. I hope to make a decision on it shortly.

Ardglass Railway Station

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department is taking to secure and restore Ardglass Railway Station.

(AQW 16018/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Responsibility for the repair, maintenance and upkeep of a listed building rests with the owner. Departmental policy advises that although there is no specific duty on owners to keep their buildings in a good state of repair, it will normally be in their interests to do so. If necessary, the Department will serve an Urgent Works Notice under Article 80 of the Planning (NI) Order, which provides a statutory authority to carry out urgent works for the preservation of a listed building.

The current position in relation to this building is that both planning permission and listed building consent was granted for the conversion of the listed structures and additional new-build units in the vicinity of the listed building on 8 November 2011. The Department's conservation architect visited the site in November 2011, and noted that no works were being carried out. A letter seeking an update on actions to secure and protect the listed building from further damage, and providing information on the NIEA listed buildings grant-aid scheme, was issued to the owner in November 2011. No response was provided by the owner. The NIEA area architect visited the building again in May 2012, and the complex is assessed by NIEA as priority 'A'; i.e. the Department is seeking urgent action to be undertaken by the owner. A schedule of works to secure the building has been prepared, and recent engagement with the owner has been undertaken, seeking the securing of the building from unauthorised access and water ingress.

If works to secure the listed structures are not undertaken by the owners, my Department will issue an Urgent Works Notice to secure and protect this important constituent component of Co. Down's railway heritage.

Bayshore Developments Ltd: Planning Application

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether the proposed planning application by Bayshore Developments on Loughside Park, North Belfast, has been withdrawn following Asda's decision not to proceed with relocating to this site; and,

if the application has not been withdrawn, what impact the decision by Asda to withdraw its interest in the proposed relocation to Loughside will have on his decision on whether this proposal should proceed.

(AQW 16019/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The applicant has indicated that they wish the planning application to be determined. My officials are currently reviewing the planning application in light of the change in circumstances prior to submitting a report for my consideration.

Ministerial Appointments

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the success rates of (i) catholic; and (ii) protestant applicants for Ministerial appointments from May 2007 to April 2011.

(AQW 16028/11-15)

Mr Attwood: During the period May 2007 to April 2011, my predecessors made Ministerial Appointments 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).

During this period the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner, 11 Assistant Local Government Boundaries Commissioners and the Chair of the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group were also appointed by the previous Ministers of the Environment.

There were a total of 214 applications received by the Department to serve on these bodies between May 2007 and April 2011. Of these, the Department made a total of 77 appointments.

A breakdown of the figures by religious background is detailed in the table below.

Background	Number of applicants	Number of Appointments	Percentage of successful applicants
Protestant	90	40	44%
Catholic	73	24	33%
None	51	13	25%

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Compensation

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of the Environment how much has been paid in compensation to Driver and Vehicle Agency customers in each of the last five years; and why this compensation was paid.

(AQW 16044/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The amounts paid in compensation to Driver & Vehicle Agency customers in each of the last five years, and the reasons why compensation was paid, are as follows.

Year	Amount
2007-08	£36,679.61
2008-09	£32,700.92
2009-10	£45,731.05
2010-11	£28,270.19
2011-12	£66,493.74
Total	£209,875.51

Amount Paid (£)	Reason(s)
2007-08	
14,175.14	7 payments – 6 for damage caused during vehicle tests and 1 for damage caused during a vehicle licensing inspection
12,302.31	471 payments – compensation in relation to driving tests cancelled because no examiner was available eg due to illness
2007-08	

Amount Paid (£)	Reason(s)
2,017.25	118 payments – compensation in relation to vehicle tests cancelled due to equipment failure eg faulty brake tester, burst hydraulic hose, server failure
1,683.81	102 payments – compensation in relation to vehicle tests cancelled due to the unavailability of staff eg because of illness
2,593.44	Multiple payments - compensation in relation to administrative errors eg payment for replacement number plates, travel costs, bank charges, postage, etc
3,907.66	Multiple payments – compensation in relation to loss of documents eg passports, identity documents, marriage certificates, insurance certificates
Total Paid in 2007-08 - £36,679.61	
2008-09	
4,250.00	3 payments - litigation regarding personal injury
4,909.50	17 payments – damage caused during vehicle tests
2,593.44	Multiple payments - compensation in relation to administrative errors eg in relation to replacement number plates, travel costs, bank charges, postage, etc
1,705.55	Multiple payments – compensation in relation to loss of documents eg passports, identity documents, marriage certificates, insurance certificates
10,564.35	113 payments – compensation in relation to driving tests cancelled because no examiner available to conduct the test eg due to illness
7,492.34	460 payments – compensation in relation to vehicle tests cancelled due to equipment failure eg faulty brake tester, power failure, vehicle lift inoperable, server failure
1,185.74	77 payments – compensation in relation to vehicle tests cancelled due to the unavailability of staff eg illness
Total Paid in 2008-09 - £32,700.92	
2009-10	
10,088.32	5 payments – litigation regarding personal injury, loss of vehicle value, damage to motorcycle, and car hire
15,299.66	25 payments – damage caused to vehicles during vehicle tests
2,527.16	Multiple payments - compensation in relation to administrative errors eg payments for replacement number plates, travel costs, bank charges, postage, etc
2,000.00	1 payment – loss of vehicle value due to error in first registration date
6,119.40	157 payments – compensation in relation to driving tests cancelled because no examiner was available eg due to illness
8,116.88	603 payments – compensation in relation to vehicle tests cancelled due to equipment failure eg faulty brake tester, burst hydraulic hose, server failure
2009-10	
1,579.63	103 payments – compensation in relation to vehicle tests cancelled due to the unavailability of staff eg due to illness
Total Paid in 2009-10 - £45,731.05	
2010-11	
2,939.43	2 payments – litigation regarding personal injury and loss of earnings
9,706.90	29 payments - damage caused to vehicles during vehicle tests
2,535.06	Multiple payments - compensation in relation to administrative errors eg replacement number plates, travel costs, bank charges, postage, replacement documents, medical forms, loss of earnings, etc
1023.75	Multiple payments – compensation in relation to loss of documents eg passports, identity documents, marriage certificates, insurance certificates
410.00	11 payments – compensation in relation to cancelled driving tests due to motorcycle failure

Amount Paid (£)	Reason(s)
1,812.00	59 payments – compensation in relation to driving tests cancelled because no examiner was available eg due to illness
9,064.05	491 payments – compensation in relation to vehicle tests cancelled due to equipment failure eg faulty brake tester, server failure, faulty vehicle lift
779.00	47 payments – compensation in relation to vehicle tests cancelled due to the unavailability of staff eg as a result of illness
Total Paid in 2010-11 - £28,270.19	
2011-12	
43,750.00	3 payments – litigation regarding personal injury
12,740.18	35 payments - damage caused to vehicles during vehicle tests
3,466.46	Multiple payments - compensation in relation to administrative errors eg replacement number plates, travel costs, bank charges, postage, errors with test bookings, etc
467.33	Multiple payments – compensation in relation to loss of documents eg passports, identity documents, marriage certificates, insurance certificates
1,300.00	1 payment – compensation paid as vehicle crushed in error
336.96	13 payments – compensation in relation to driving tests cancelled due to errors made during booking
138.00	6 payments – compensation in relation to driving tests abandoned eg due to severe traffic congestion
3,349.81	116 payments – compensation in relation to driving tests cancelled because no examiner was available eg due to illness
929.00	47 payments – compensation in relation to vehicle tests cancelled due to equipment failure eg faulty brake tester, burst heating pipes, failure of exit door
2010-11	
16.00	1 payment – compensation in relation to a vehicle test cancelled due to the unavailability of staff
Total Paid in 2011-12 - £66,493.74	

It should be noted that the amounts of compensation paid are recoverable in some cases eg from the Post Office, in relation to payments for items lost in the post, or from the contractor responsible for providing and maintaining vehicle testing equipment, in respect of tests cancelled due to equipment failure.

The amounts paid in compensation are monitored very closely by the Agency, and some success has been achieved in driving the levels of compensation down in some categories eg in relation to tests cancelled. However, efforts to minimise compensation payments are continuing.

I have raised a series of questions in relation to the nature of the matters listed above.

Marie Stopes Clinic: Planning Application

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the particulars supplied in the planning application relating to the Marie Stopes clinic in Belfast.

(AQW 16060/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The agent completed the particulars specified in the prescribed P1 Application Form for planning permission. Questions completed by the agent on the P1 Application Form included the applicant's details - R&A Developments Ltd; and the agent's details - Like Architects. Information was also provided about the application site. The full postal address was given as 8th Floor, 14-16 Great Victoria Street, Belfast, the area of the site in hectares - 0.0324ha and the present use of the building was given as office accommodation.

Particulars supplied about the development proposal included the type of application - full permission and details of the proposed development were described as change of use from office accommodation class B1(a) to class D1(a) medical and health services.

The agent confirmed on the P1 Form that the proposal involved a change of use and that it would make use of an existing unaltered access to a public road. Further questions on the P1 Form confirmed that the agent was not aware of the existence on the site of any protected wildlife species and that a public right of way was not within or adjoining the site. The agent confirmed on the P1 Form that the proposal would source mains water supply and that foul sewage would be disposed with

mains. The agent detailed floorspace figures for the existing and proposal use and the average number of persons attending the premises daily.

The agent signed Planning Certificate A on the prescribed Notice under Article 22 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 which confirmed that the applicant owned the application site and confirmed that the applicant did not own or control any adjoining land. The postal addresses of occupied buildings on neighbouring land were provided as required for the purposes of neighbour notification and a fee of £1,464.00 accompanied the application.

The site was clearly indicated outlined in red on the site location plan supplied. Other plans which detailed the existing and proposed layout of the 8th floor of the building at the appropriate scale were submitted.

The particular details which were received met the statutory requirements of planning legislation and the guidance for applicants.

MOT Certificates

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of the Environment what measures are in place to ensure that vintage or old vehicles are not driven on public roads without an MOT certificate.

(AQW 16072/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Vintage vehicles or cars over four years old are required to be tested and licensed annually under the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 before they can be legally driven on a road or in a public place.

The Driver & Vehicle Agency actively promotes compliance by issuing MOT and vehicle licence reminder letters each year, and a valid MOT certificate must be available before a vehicle can be licensed.

MOT certificates and licence discs also have to be displayed on vehicle windscreens, and failure to display them is an offence. These items serve as visual reminders to motorists of the relevant requirements, and their absence can trigger enforcement action such as wheelclamping.

The Agency also utilises roadside checks and Automated Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras to identify non-compliant vehicles.

Taxi Industry

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the timescale for the introduction of any planned legislation relating to changes in the taxi industry.

(AQW 16084/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I plan to introduce a new single tier taxi licensing, new taxi vehicle regulations and taxi fare regulations during 2013. While I am committed to introducing the changes in a timely manner, the timing of each change will be subject to the legislative scrutiny progress. In bringing forward the changes I am mindful of the financial impact of taxi operator licensing on the taxi industry and will structure subsequent changes so that taxi business can adjust their operations so that they comply in a timely manner.

The new Taxi Driver Testing regime and a new specification for wheelchair accessible vehicles will follow in 2014.

In delivering the changes in this controlled manner I am confident that my Department can deliver a new modern taxi licensing framework that improves customer confidence and is affordable.

MOT Centres

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on plans for the future of the MoT centres.

(AQW 16126/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department has initiated a strategic review of options for the future delivery of vehicle testing services in Northern Ireland. A Strategic Outline Case, which sets out a number of high level delivery models, has been developed and approved and work is currently ongoing to more fully explore those options and identify the most appropriate way forward for the delivery of the service into the future. This has involved research into vehicle testing models operating in Britain, Ireland and other European countries.

At this stage in the Review a broad range of delivery solutions is still being evaluated, and it is not yet possible to assess the impact of any emergent preferred option on the existing test centres. However, further details on the Review and its findings will be provided to the Environment Committee as progress is made.

Waste Disposal

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made in improving waste disposal, over the last three years.

(AQW 16128/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In Northern Ireland, the Department, councils and the community & voluntary sector have all been actively encouraging more waste prevention, reuse and recycling which reduces the amount of our waste that has to be disposed of to landfill.

Over the past three years my Department's Rethink Waste Campaign has played a key role in encouraging behavioural change by promoting initiatives to increase waste prevention, re-use and recycling. Under the Rethink Waste Funds, grants in excess of £7 million have been awarded to councils to cover the capital costs of improving or extending their existing waste collection, re-use and recycling infrastructure. Revenue grants in excess of £1.7 million have also been made available to community & voluntary bodies, and others, to assist with the costs of projects targeting re-use and recycling and reducing the amount of waste to landfill.

The percentage of all waste recycled/composted by Councils in Northern Ireland has increased from 31.6% to 35.5% over the most recent three year period for validated data (2008/09 to 2010/11). Provisional data for 2011/12 shows an increase in recycling to 38.3%. I am also on record as stating a 60% recycling target by 2020 is achievable. Additionally, in the three years from 2008/09 to 2010/11 Councils collectively reduced the amount of biodegradable waste sent to landfill by 124,353 tonnes, a reduction of some 26%. I regard all of these results as indications that we are continuing to improve our performance in relation to waste disposal.

Climate Change

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the results of the assessment of the Climate Change Unit in his Department has made of the impact of climate change on Northern Ireland over the last three years.

(AQW 16129/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The full impact of global climate change will take place incrementally over a long period of time. The latest UK Climate projections indicate that by the 2050s Northern Ireland will experience an increase in winter and summer mean temperatures of approximately 2°C, a change in winter mean precipitation of approximately +9%, and a change in summer mean precipitation of approximately -12% (http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/protect_the_environment/climate_change/uk_climate_change_projections-3.htm).

There will also be an increased frequency of extreme weather occurrences such as heatwaves, dry spells, heavy rain and flooding. We are already vulnerable to, and beginning to experience a change in our climate e.g. a recent increase in localised flash flooding throughout Northern Ireland.

Combating climate change is the collective responsibility of all Ministers in the Northern Ireland Executive. I chair the Cross Departmental Working Group on Climate Change (CDWG CC) which provides annual reassurance to the Executive that appropriate progress is being made across all Departments towards the Programme for Government target for greenhouse gas emission reductions and also in our preparations to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

In terms of mitigation over the last three years my Department's Climate Change Unit has:

- provided support to allow the CDWG CC to produce a Northern Ireland Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Action Plan (February 2011 (http://www.doeni.gov.uk/northern_ireland_action_plan_on_greenhouse_gas_emissions_reductions.pdf) and its first Annual Report (http://www.doeni.gov.uk/northern_ireland_greenhouse_gas_emissions_reduction_action_plan_1st_annual_progress_report.pdf) (presented to the Executive in May 2012);
- facilitated the implementation of the Carbon Reduction Commitment Energy Efficiency Scheme;
- commissioned the Committee on Climate Change to produce a report on the appropriateness of Northern Ireland climate change legislation (http://www.doeni.gov.uk/the_appropriateness_of_a_northern_ireland_climate_change_act.pdf);
- monitored greenhouse gas emissions in Northern Ireland through inventories (http://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/reports/cat07/1208241153_DA_GHGI_report_2010_Issue1_r.pdf); and
- provided input to EU and UK policies e.g. the EU Emissions Trading System;

In terms of adaptation to climate change over the last three years my Department's Climate Change Unit has:

- overseen the launch of the latest UK Climate Change Projections (<http://ukclimateprojections.defra.gov.uk/>) in 2009 and associated training and guidance; worked with DEFRA and the Northern Ireland departments to develop UK and Northern Ireland Climate Change Risk Assessments. The reports, published in January 2012, identified and assessed the key climate change risks and opportunities at UK and Northern Ireland (http://www.doeni.gov.uk/climate_change_risk_assessment_ni_2012.pdf) level.
- liaised with Northern Ireland departments to assist development of an Adaptation Programme which will set out government policies and actions needed to address the climate change challenges that face us. The adaptation programme will be presented to the Assembly in 2013; and
- allocated additional resources to widen the understanding and knowledge of the impacts of climate change and the adaptation actions necessary to deal with it.

I believe that the ambition for government in the North should be to become a world leader in carbon reduction with the economic prospects that this provides. In our efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address the risks and opportunities provided by our changing climate we must ensure that we are at the forefront of new ideas and new technology. We need to actively encourage innovation in identifying new ways to ensure a clean and green future for everyone as we make the transition towards a low carbon sustainable economy.

Whistle-blowing/Grievances

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment how many (i) grievance cases have been taken; and (ii) whistleblowing complaints have been made, against (a) his Department; and (b) its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years; and at what cost to the public purse.

(AQW 16155/11-15)

Mr Attwood:

- (i) From 1 November 2007 to 29 October 2012 a total of 87 grievance cases have been lodged against the Department by members of staff. No grievance cases have been lodged against the Departments 5 Arms Lengths Bodies. The table below provides a break down of the number of cases lodged per financial year and has been provided by HRConnect. HRConnect has the responsibility for the provision of HR services following centralisation of Departmental HR Services in March 2008.

Financial Year	No of Grievance cases in DOE
2007/2008*(see note 1)	2
2008/2009	27
2009/2010	11
2010/2011	15
2011/2012	13
2012/2013*(see note 2)	19
Grand Total	87

Note

- 1 No central record in DOE was held prior to 1 November 2007.
 - 2 2012/2013 provides the number of cases received up to 29 October 2012.
- (ii) HR services within the Departments were centralised in March 2008. It is therefore possible for the Department to confirm that from March 2008, 6 instances of reports to the Department have been treated as whistleblowing allegations and have been/are being dealt under the Department's Whistleblowing Policy and under the Public Interest Disclosure (NI) Order 1998. No allegations have involved the Departments 5 Arms Length Bodies.

The Department does not hold information in relation to costs.

Downpatrick Area Planning Office: Suspensions/Dismissals

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment how many senior enforcement staff employed in the planning office in Downpatrick have been suspended or dismissed in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16166/11-15)

Mr Attwood: No senior enforcement staff employed in the Area Planning Office in Downpatrick have been suspended or dismissed in the last three years. However, within the last three years, one planning officer who worked in the enforcement section in Rathkeltair House, Downpatrick, was suspended and was subsequently dismissed from the NICS in September 2012.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Education and Skills Authority: Business Case

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether the Department of Education sought guidance on the preparation or commissioning of a business case on the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority; and when such guidance was sought and provided.

(AQW 15252/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The Department of Education submitted an Outline Business Case (OBC) for the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) to my Department, and this was approved after discussions between the two departments in 2008. This gave approval for the Department of Education to proceed to the development and submission to DFP of a Full Business Case (FBC) prior to the establishment of the ESA.

I understand delays with progressing the legislation and the need to take on board changes to the Body's remit would have affected the timing of any further submission. In December last year I re-stated the DFP position on the need for an FBC to the Minister for Education and our officials met earlier this year to discuss the requirements for this exercise. The FBC has yet to be submitted to my Department.

Residential Management Companies: Governance

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what progress has been made in ensuring that there is effective legislation in place to govern residential management companies.

(AQW 15600/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Northern Ireland Law Commission has, for some time, been looking at the law relating to the use of multi-unit development and their management. The Commission has undertaken to publish a consultation paper by 15th November 2012 and that consultation will run for 10 weeks, until 21 January 2013. The Commission will then consider the representations it receives and publish its final report by 1 May 2013. That final report and recommendations will need to be critically assessed and we would have to then draft and consult on any required legislation and secure a legislation slot. I am concerned about whether we will be able to do all this in what remains of the current mandate. However I will do all in my power to expedite the legislative process and to ensure that effective and accessible solutions are made available.

Residential Management Companies: Governance

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) how often the group established to examine legislation governing management companies has met; (ii) when the next scheduled meeting is due to take place; and (iii) when the group last met.

(AQW 15601/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Northern Ireland Law Commission has, for some time, been looking at the law relating to the use of multi-unit development and their management. The Commission has undertaken to publish a consultation paper by 15th November 2012 and that consultation will run for 10 weeks, until 21 January 2013. The Commission will then consider the representations it receives and publish its final report by 1 May 2013. That final report and recommendations will need to be critically assessed and we would have to then draft and consult on any required legislation and secure a legislation slot. I am concerned about whether we will be able to do all this in what remains of the current mandate. However I will do all in my power to expedite the legislative process and to ensure that effective and accessible solutions are made available.

Siege Heroes Museum: Funding

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) when the date for the event to announce funding for Siege Heroes Museum was agreed; (ii) who has been invited; and (iii) how and when an invitation list was drawn up.

(AQW 15893/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), PEACE III Managing Authority, advise that the date for the launch of the project was agreed in late August / early September. All planning for the event was conducted by a working group led by the Apprentice Boys of Derry. The group included representatives from Derry City Council (the project's lead partner), the General Committee for the Apprentice Boys of Derry, the Strategic Investment Board and SEUPB.

The invitation list for the event, drawn up in September, included representatives of all project funders, including the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (represented by Minister Foster), the Department for Social Development, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, the Republic of Ireland's Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, and SEUPB. The invitation list is attached.

Name	Association
Minister Nelson McCausland	DSD
Minister Arlene Foster	DETI
Minister Carál Ni Chuilín	DCAL
Minister Phil Hogan TD	Department of the Environment Community and Local Government
Mark Durkan MP	
Gregory Campbell MP	
Diane Dodds MEP	
Martina Anderson MEP	
Jim Nicholson MEP	
Brett Hannam	SIB
Pat Colgan	SEUPB
Alan Clarke	NITB
Brenda Burns	SIB
Wesley Emmett	Derry City Council

Name	Association
John Kelpie	Derry City Council
Francis Morrison	Derry City Council
Sharon O' Connor	Derry City Council
Kevin Campbell	Mayor Derry City Council
Willy Hay	ABoD
Billy Moore (Trustee 1)	ABoD
Ivan Taylor (Trustee 2)	ABoD
Philip Gillen (Trustee 3)	ABoD
William Stewart (Trustee 4)	ABoD
Jim Brownlee	Governor of the Apprentice Boys of Derry
Rev David Latimer	First Derry Presbyterian
William Morton	St Columb's
Adrian Kerr	Museum of Free Derry
Richard Doherty	Historian
Dr Brian Scott	Archaeologist
Aideen Mc Ginley	ILEX
Caoimhin Corrigan	ILEX
Pauline Ross	Playhouse
Martin Melarky	City of Culture
Brenda Mc Ginn	Culture Programme
Stella Mc Dermott	HLF
Mark Lusby	City Walls Heritage Project
Eamonn Deane	City Walls Heritage Project
Craig Mc Guicken	Museum Services DCC
Graeme Farrow	City of Culture
Tony Monaghan	Derry City Council
Natalie O' Rourke	NIEA
Manus Deery	NIEA
Edward Montgomery	The Honourable The Irish Society
Mr Heafley	Foyle and Londonderry College
Laura Cooke	Immaculate Conception
Mrs Canning	Oakgrove Integrated College
Eleanor Mc Daid	St Cecilia's College
Finvola Mc Caul	St Joseph's Boys School
Marion Mc Clintock	St Mary's College
Mr Condren	St Peter's High School
Jareth Parlour	Thornhill College
Leorna O Donnell	St Brigid's College
Claire Bell	Lisneal College
Mrs Mc Hugh	St Patrick's and St Brigids
Mr Meenan	St Columbs College

Name	Association
Dr Gormely	Lumen Christi College
Professor Ian Thatcher	Magee College
James Kerr	Verbal Arts
Sarah Lapsley	Verbal Arts
Maoliosa Boyle	The Void
Brenda Hegarty	SEUPB
Lorraine McCourt	SEUPB
Garret McGinty	SEUPB
John McCandless	SEUPB
Martin Bradley MBE	Culture Company
Alwyn Ferguson	Treasurer of General Committee ABoD
David Mc Keegan	Lay Chaplin – General Committee ABoD
Craig Jefferson	ABoD
Rev Storey	Minister of St Augustine's
Niall-McCaughan	The Playhouse
Bill Irwin	DUP Waterside Office
John Smith	Chairman of the Social Club
Gordon Porter	Secretary of the Social Club
	City Grandmaster of the Orange Order
Sue Divin	Good Relations Department DCC
Paul Jordan	Good Relations Council
David Hoey	
Barry Mulholland	Western Education Board (rep)
John Edmund	
Fergal Rafferty	Manager of Foyleside Shopping Centre
	Manager of Richmond Shopping Centre
Luke Hasson	Austins
Garvan O'Doherty	Garvan O'Doherty Group
Jim Roddy	City Centre Manager
Martin Mc Crossan	City Centre Trade Association
Maurice Devenney	
Sinead McLaughlin	
Mary Blake	
Odhran Dunne	
Shaun Henry	Director of Managing Authority, SEUPB
Aisling Heffernan	The Office of Public Works
Eugene Keane	
Fergal Martin	
Frank Flood	
Eamonn Rossi	

Name	Association
Noel Moore	
Andrew McCartney	McCartney Accountants
Shona McCarthy	City of Culture
Mary McNamee	City of Culture
Martin Graham	NITB
Oliver McKeown	NITB
Andrew Johnston	DSD
Glenn Hampton	DSD
Tony Mc Kibben	DSD
Martin Turner	SIB

Public Procurement: Committee Report

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what actions he has taken since the publication of the four recommendations on collaborative procurement and efficiencies, contained within the Report on the Inquiry into Public Procurement in Northern Ireland undertaken by the Committee for Finance and Personnel.

(AQW 15894/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) in conjunction with Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs) reviewed the four recommendations on collaborative procurement and efficiency and have agreed a set of actions with the Procurement Board. These actions have included:

The issue of revised guidance for small and medium-sized enterprises.

The guidance includes encouraging greater collaboration through the establishment of consortia.

The establishment of a Business Industry Forum for Northern Ireland (BIFNI) which includes representatives from the business and social economy sectors. The Forum has met on seven occasions.

The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between CPD and the UK Government Procurement Service. This sets out a framework within which relationships between each jurisdiction will be conducted. The MoU supports co-operative working including joint working on collaborative contracts where appropriate.

CPD has established a Collaborative Contracts Group, comprising Heads of Procurement from the Supplies and Services CoPEs to oversee future collaborative competitions. This Group has agreed a schedule of all potential pan-government contracts and is putting in place arrangements to implement these contracts.

House Price Index

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he has any plans to provide information relating to the House Price Index on either the Land and Property Services or Land Registry websites.

(AQW 15905/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Land & Property Services Northern Ireland Residential Property Price Index was published for the first time on 23 May 2012. The statistics report and the accompanying data are already published on both the Land & Property Services website <http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/lps/index/about-lps/publications/statistics-and-research-publications.htm> and the Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency website <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/HousePriceIndex/hpi.html>

This quarterly Index will next be published on 21 November and available on the website from 9:30am.

House Price Index

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why the Housing Price Index is not included on the Land and Property Services or the Land Registry websites, as is the case on the equivalent websites in England and Wales.

(AQW 15906/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Land & Property Services Northern Ireland Residential Property Price Index was published for the first time on 23 May 2012. The statistics report and the accompanying data are already published on both the Land & Property Services website <http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/lps/index/about-lps/publications/statistics-and-research-publications.htm> and the Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency website <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/HousePriceIndex/hpi.html>

This quarterly Index will next be published on 21 November and available on the website from 9:30am.

Employment: Availability

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of people available for employment in each of the last 24 months; and (ii) the number of people available for employment (a) 3 years ago; (b) four years ago; and (c) five years ago.

(AQW 15933/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Estimates of those available for employment are defined as those who are economically active and are sourced to the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS). The economically active comprises of people in employment or those who are unemployed. The most recent LFS data available, for the period June – August 2012, estimate that there were 868,000 people, aged 16 and over, described as being economically active.

The design of the LFS sample is such that data published are for rolling three month average time periods and, therefore, comparisons over time should only be made within series of non-overlapping quarters.

The requested breakdown of those available for employment is shown in Table 1

Table 1 - Numbers Available for Employment, Northern Ireland

Quarter	Available for Employment (000's)
Jun-Aug 2007	807
Jun-Aug 2008	825
Jun-Aug 2009	806
Jun-Aug 2010	837
Sep-Nov 2010	833
Dec-Feb 2011	842
Mar-May 2011	863
Jun-Aug 2011	867
Sep-Nov 2011	862
Dec-Feb 2012	859
Mar-May 2012	862
Jun-Aug 2012	868

Employment Figures

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of people employed (i) in each of the last 24 months; (ii) three years ago; (iii) four years ago; and (iv) five years ago.

(AQW 15934/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The official measure of those in employment is sourced to the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS). The most recent LFS data available, for the period June – August 2012, estimate that there were 796,000 people, aged 16 and over, in employment.

The design of the LFS sample is such that data published are for rolling three month average time periods and, therefore, comparisons over time should only be made within series of non-overlapping quarters.

The requested breakdown of those in employment is shown in Table 1 overleaf.

Table 1 – Total in Employment, Northern Ireland

Quarter	Total in Employment (000's)
Jun-Aug 2007	777
Jun-Aug 2008	790
Jun-Aug 2009	750
Jun-Aug 2010	779
Sep-Nov 2010	767
Dec-Feb 2011	781
Mar-May 2011	802
Jun-Aug 2011	801

Quarter	Total in Employment (000's)
Sep-Nov 2011	804
Dec-Feb 2012	802
Mar-May 2012	802
Jun-Aug 2012	796

Utility Regulation: In-house Legal Adviser

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether his Department approved the recent search to recruit an in-house Legal Adviser by the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation; and what is the salary band for this position. (AQW 15999/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As NIAUR has been granted delegated authority in relation to pay related matters, DFP has no responsibility for approving the detailed numbers and terms and conditions of service of NIAUR staff. The Utility Regulator has the authority to set its own pay, terms and conditions of employment.

Utility Regulation: In-house Legal Adviser

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation, whose funding is approved by his Department, is recruiting a full-time permanent in-house Legal Adviser instead of using the facilities of the Departmental Solicitor's Office (AQW 16000/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As NIAUR has been granted delegated authority in relation to pay related matters, DFP has no responsibility for approving the detailed numbers and terms and conditions of service of NIAUR staff. The Utility Regulator has the authority to set its own pay, terms and conditions of employment.

Rates Relief Scheme

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what discussions (i) he has had; and (ii) intends to have, with stakeholders in relation to the future of the Rates Relief Scheme. (AQW 16015/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Welfare Reform, and its implications for the rating system, is something that has been and is being actively considered by the Executive Subgroup on Welfare Reform.

The Executive agreed in May of this year to preserve entitlement to the current level of rates support for up to two years, following the change in funding arrangements which will occur in April 2013. The Press Release can be accessed at the link below:

<http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/media-centre/news-departments/news-dfp/news-releases-dfp-june-2012/news-dfp-010612-finance-minister-sammy.htm>

This holding operation will soon become impracticable and unaffordable and therefore the Executive will have to consider alternatives. Officials in the Department for Social Development are looking at long term solutions that look at a range of non social security benefits that will sit outside Universal Credit and over which NI has discretion in spending. This may present an opportunity to better target vulnerable households and make better use of limited resources.

In the meantime, however, I believe we will need to have a new rates support scheme ready when Universal Credit is established. Accordingly, I will be asking the Executive to agree to a preliminary consultation in the New Year.

This will not only present some challenging issues and high level choices to be made, it will also afford stakeholders the opportunity to come forward with evidence. The process will help inform policy direction for a scheme that effectively supports households least able to pay domestic rates. A further public consultation will occur when detailed options are sufficiently developed and impacts assessed.

Incidentally, I note that you refer to rates relief in your question. I appreciate that you are referring to the rates element of Housing Benefit, better known as rate rebate. There is a separate low income rate relief that acts as an enhancement to rate rebate and its future will also have to be reviewed alongside the main rates support scheme.

Non-identifiable Expenditure

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the benefits of the locally attached non-identifiable expenditure. (AQW 16022/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Non-identifiable expenditure comprises spending on areas such as defence, debt interest and international services and is incurred by the Government on behalf of the UK as a whole. While the specific benefits of this expenditure for individual regions cannot be distinguished, it is considered to benefit the UK as a whole in terms of the services that are

funded, for example in terms national security in the case of defence spending or the servicing of the national debt which has been incurred by the country as a whole.

Ministerial Appointments

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the success rates of (i) catholic; and (ii) protestant applicants for Ministerial appointments from May 2007 to April 2011.

(AQW 16031/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I make appointments to 5 bodies as follows:

- Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation (NIAUR)
- Northern Ireland Building Regulations Advisory Committee (NIBRAC)
- Statistics Advisory Committee (SAC)
- Lay Observer for Northern Ireland
- Public Service Commission (PSC)

Information on the number of appointments and the community background the successful applicants belong to can be found for all bodies except PSC in the Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Report for the appropriate years on the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) website.

There were no Ministerial appointments to the PSC between May 2007 and April 2011.

Economic Inactivity: Training

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people considered economically inactive are engaged in some type of training.

(AQW 16073/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The latest available information from the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (for the period April – June 2012) estimated that 23,000 people considered economically inactive took part in job related training or education in the previous three months.

Economic Inactivity: Students

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people considered economically inactive are students or involved in some type of education programme.

(AQW 16074/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The latest available information from the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (for the period April – June 2012) estimated that 101,000 people considered economically inactive were classified as students, either in a full-time (88,000) or a part-time (13,000) capacity.

Of those economically inactive and not classified as being a student, a further 5,000 people took part in job related training or education in the previous three months.

House Prices

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether a legislative change would be required to enable the prices at which houses are sold to be published; and whether such a change has been considered.

(AQW 16091/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Within the Land Registration system there is no requirement to include the purchase price of a property within the Memorial document lodged in the Registry of Deeds.

Within the Land Registry there is a requirement to include the purchase price in the transfer document but this figure relates to all of the lands transferring and therefore may include a house and land, land alone or commercial premises and land. There is no legislative requirement to provide information on the type of property which is transferring or indeed to give a property address. Therefore it is difficult to identify from the Register prices which relate solely to dwelling houses.

The purchase price may also not reflect the full market value if, for instance, the transfer is an inter family transaction.

It is proposed to review the Land Registration Act (NI) 1970 following the implementation of the Land Law Reform Legislation and the requirement to provide further details of house prices can be considered at that time.

However, Land & Property Services already publishes the Northern Ireland Residential Property Price Index (NIRPPI) created from details of individual property sales provided by HMRC. LPS is not permitted to pass the individual level data to anyone outside LPS.

The NIRPPI can be accessed on the LPS website <http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/lps/index/about-lps/publications/statistics-and-research-publications.htm> and on the NISRA website <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/HousePriceIndex/hpi.html>

Savings Delivery Plans

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on each Department's compliance in the recent Savings Delivery Plan monitoring exercise.

(AQW 16100/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My officials have recently commissioned an exercise seeking an update from departments on implementation of their Savings Delivery Plans as at 30 September 2012. This information, collated every six months, is then provided to both the Executive and the Committee for Finance and Personnel for information.

In response to this most recent request, returns have been received from eight departments. It is disappointing that the remaining departments have failed to meet the deadline set for this exercise. However I am anticipating responses from all departments with the notable exception of the Department of Education.

Disappointingly, the Education Minister wrote to me advising that his department would not be participating in the Savings Delivery Plan monitoring exercises. As a consequence, in a time of constrained budget allocations it remains difficult for the Executive, Assembly and citizens of Northern Ireland to gain assurance that the Education Minister is making every effort to deliver service efficiencies and thereby protect the quantum of resources available for frontline educational services.

Ulster Covenant Event

Mr McKay asked Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 14881/11-15, whether his Department has contacted the organisers of the Ulster Covenant event in the Stormont Estate after it was revealed that UDA and UVF music CDs were on sale at the event, which were not historic and commemorative goods associated with the Ulster Covenant.

(AQW 16103/11-15)

Mr Wilson: No contact was made with the organisers following the event.

INTERREG IV Programmes: Cross-border Expenditure

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the total spend under INTERREG IV Programmes on cross-border groups in each year since the programme began.

(AQW 16109/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Spend by each of the cross border groups since the inception of the INTERREG IVA Programme is as outlined below:-

Cross Border Group	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	Total 2007-13
	Total Spend (£)*	Total Spend (£)	Total Spend (£)	Total Spend (£)	Total Spend (£)	Spend To Date (£)	Spend to Date (£)
COMET	-	8,330	59,811	87,722	90,444	13,021	259,328
EBR	-	-	307,487	394,092	619,205	144,678	1,465,462
ICBAN	-	7,732	321,646	400,558	820,337	56,622	1,606,895
NWRCBG	-	-	137,593	167,415	314,503	54,331	673,842
NEP	-	-	57,007	80,565	286,097	18,824	442,493
Total	-	16,062	883,544	1,130,352	2,130,586	287,476	4,448,020

* An exchange rate of £1=€1.25 has been used where necessary

Public Procurement: Committee Report

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why he has not accepted the recommendation in the Committee for Finance and Personnel report on its Inquiry into Public Procurement, to introduce a requirement on main contractors to pay sub-contractors within 10 days of receipt of valid invoices.

(AQW 16113/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The standard payment period for government contracts is 30 days. This is reflected in standard forms of contract and widely accepted throughout industry. During the recent consultation on amendments to the Construction Order there were no calls for changes to these arrangements.

While earlier settlement is encouraged, enforcing it in every case could increase finance requirements for main contractors and could result in serious cash flow difficulties.

I have frequently emphasised the importance of ensuring that main contractors meet their contractual commitments. A number of measures have been introduced to help ensure this happens. Where contractors fail to comply with payment terms they can now be excluded from future government tender opportunities for a period of twelve months.

Social Enterprises

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what consideration he has given to the introduction of awarding extra points for social enterprises which bid for tenders for social benefit.

(AQW 16114/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Public Contracts Regulations 2006 (as amended), which implement the EU Directives on public procurement, do not allow for this. The Regulations state (Regulation 4.3) that contracting authorities must treat all tenderers equally and in a non-discriminatory way.

Public Procurement: Contracts

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the actions being taken to break public procurement contracts into lots which are more manageable for small and medium sized enterprises in the public procurement process.

(AQW 16115/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Procurement Board Strategic Plan requires all procurements over the EU threshold to have a documented procurement strategy, including early engagement with local suppliers. Part of this process includes consideration of breaking a contract into lots.

The EU Commission is currently considering changes to the Procurement Directives. Northern Ireland has lobbied the EU to limit the number of lots which can be awarded to one tenderer. This follows instances where a contract has been broken into lots but a single contractor has won all or most of the lots. Current indications are that the new Directives will include such measures. This would allow Contracting Authorities to provide greater access to large contracts for small and medium sized enterprises.

Public Procurement: Bureaucracy

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how he has reduced bureaucracy for small and medium sized enterprises involved in the public procurement process.

(AQW 16116/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Small and medium sized enterprises play an important role in the Northern Ireland economy. I am keen that they can access public contracts with the minimum of bureaucracy. The Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) has developed an extensive set of Procurement Guidance Notes aimed at assisting smaller businesses and simplifying procurement processes. They include measures which will help to:

- explain public procurement processes and show how procurement opportunities can be accessed;
- reduce and remove barriers for smaller businesses wishing to compete for public sector opportunities – examples include reductions in the levels of experience and financial requirements needed;
- increase the visibility of opportunities by requiring all contracts above £30,000 to be advertised on a single procurement portal;
- streamline procedures for procurements below the EU thresholds and reduce the paperwork associated with tendering for these contracts;
- reduce liability and insurance requirements by making these proportionate to the risks associated with the project; and
- ensure that departments operate small and medium sized enterprise friendly procedures in their supply chains.

These measures are supported by a programme of 'Meet the Buyer' events undertaken by CPD and Centres of Procurement Expertise. This year, for example, CPD has attended events with representation from over 1,200 smaller businesses.

Public Procurement: Processes

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what work he has undertaken to improve the public procurement processes during this Assembly mandate.

(AQW 16117/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Substantial progress has been made during this Assembly mandate in improving public procurement processes. This work has been undertaken by Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) under the auspices of the Procurement Board and includes the following measures:

- Issue of a revised Procurement Board Strategic Plan with three key objectives, namely:
 - to deliver best value for money in a challenging economic climate;
 - to use public procurement to support economic growth; and
 - to provide confidence in the public procurement environment.
- Development and approval of revised proposals for the achievement of greater consistency and assurance of best practice in public procurement.
- Development and approval of a new model for the accreditation of Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs).

- Implementation of the recommendations arising out of the Committee for Finance and Personnel Inquiry into Public Sector Procurement.
- Issue of nine Procurement Guidance Notes focused on simplifying public procurement, particularly for smaller businesses; and on improving procurement processes more generally. A list of these Guidance Notes is set out at Annex A.
- Initiating a programme of procurement skills training.

In improving procurement processes the CPD has liaised closely with industry. During this Assembly mandate, there have been five meetings with the Construction Industry Forum and four with the Business Industry Forum. These formal events are supplemented by one to one engagements with supplier representative bodies.

I have also lobbied for changes to the new EU Procurement Directive which, if accepted, will lead to further improvements in and simplification of procurement processes.

Annex A

List of Procurement Guidance Notes

2012

- Procurement Guidance Note 06/12 – Helping SMEs Benefit from Subcontracting Opportunities
- Procurement Guidance Note 05/12 – Simplified Approach to Procurement Over £30k and Under Threshold
- Procurement Guidance Note 04/12 – Procurement Control Limits and the Basis for Contract Awards
- Procurement Guidance Note 03/12 – Liability and Insurance in Government Contracts
- Procurement Guidance Note 02/12 – Public Procurement: A Guide for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs)
- Procurement Guidance Note 01/12 – Contract Management – Procedures and Principles

2011

- Procurement Guidance Note 03/11 – Award of a Contract Without a Competition
- Procurement Guidance Note 02/11 – Helping Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) and Social Economy Enterprises (SEEs) access the Public Sector contracting opportunities
- Procurement Guidance Note 01/11 – A Guide for Social Economy Enterprises

Rates Relief Scheme: Welfare Reform

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what changes the implementation of welfare reform will mean for the rate relief scheme in relation to housing benefit.

(AQW 16159/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Welfare Reform, and its implications for the rating system, is something that has been and is being actively considered by the Executive Subgroup on Welfare Reform.

The Executive agreed in May of this year to preserve entitlement to the current level of rates support for up to two years, following the change in funding arrangements which will occur in April 2013. The Press Release can be accessed at the link below:

<http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/media-centre/news-departments/news-dfp/news-releases-dfp-june-2012/news-dfp-010612-finance-minister-sammy.htm>

This holding operation will soon become impracticable and unaffordable and therefore the Executive will have to consider alternatives. Officials in the Department for Social Development are looking at long term solutions that look at a range of non social security benefits that will sit outside Universal Credit and over which NI has discretion in spending. This may present an opportunity to better target vulnerable households and make better use of limited resources.

In the meantime, however, I believe we will need to have a new rates support scheme ready when Universal Credit is established. Accordingly, I will be asking the Executive to agree to a preliminary consultation in the New Year.

This will not only present some challenging issues and high level choices to be made, it will also afford stakeholders the opportunity to come forward with evidence. The process will help inform policy direction for a scheme that effectively supports households least able to pay domestic rates. A further public consultation will occur when detailed options are sufficiently developed and impacts assessed.

Incidentally, I note that you refer to rates relief in your question. I appreciate that you are referring to the rates element of Housing Benefit, better known as rate rebate. There is a separate low income rate relief that acts as an enhancement to rate rebate and its future will also have to be reviewed alongside the main rates support scheme.

Stormont Estate: Event Cost

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 15044/11-15, for a breakdown of the costs incurred and to who the payments were made, including how the suppliers of the goods and services were decided upon.

(AQW 16167/11-15)

Mr Wilson: A breakdown of the costs incurred is provided in the table overleaf. All payments were made to H&J Martin and delivered through an existing property management contract.

Breakdown of Costs:

Description of Spend	Spend (£)
Supply and delivery of directional road signage	£6,502.60
Site clearance work at Park and Ride car parks	£950.00
Supply and delivery of commemorative Jubilee banners	£9,765.22
Post-event repairs to grounds due to Jubilee event	£43,000.00
Total	£60,217.82

INTERREG IV Programmes: Cross-border Expenditure

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the total (a) allocation to; and (b) spend by cross border groups under INTERREG IV Programmes; (ii) the total (a) management cost allocation; and (b) management cost spend; and (iii) the percentage of each programme allocated to technical assistance.

(AQW 16168/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table below provides the information requested under (i) and (ii).

Cross Border Group	Total Allocation To Date 1 (£)*	Total Expenditure To Date 2 (£)*	Total Management Cost Allocation (£)*	Total Management Cost Expenditure To Date (£)*
COMET	1,500,213	259,329	450,732	250,496
EBR	26,416,970	1,465,462	861,078	569,174
ICBAN	10,052,281	1,606,894	886,127	674,327
NWRCBG	15,517,154	673,843	764,057	466,499
NEP	8,315,491	442,494	519,193	204,252
Total	61,802,109	4,448,022	3,481,187	2,164,748

The total budget for the INTERREG IVA Programme is £204.8 million*. From this total budget, 4.7% (£9.6m) has been allocated to Technical Assistance.

These figures include approved applications, letters of offer accepted and letters of offer issued only.

These figures include management cost expenditure.

* An exchange rate of £1=£1.25 has been used where applicable

Non-domestic Rates Initiatives

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many businesses in (i) Larne; and (ii) Carrickfergus town centres have benefited from the recent non-domestic rates initiatives.

(AQW 16197/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Information on the number of businesses that have benefited from the recent non-domestic rates initiatives in (i) Larne and (ii) Carrickfergus town centres is not available as data is collated at District Council and Ward levels only. Information is available for the Larne and Carrickfergus Borough Council Areas.

As at 28th October 2012, there were 106 businesses in the Larne Borough Council Area and 131 businesses in the Carrickfergus Borough Council Area which have benefitted from the recently introduced 20% rate of Small Business Rate Relief. To date one property in the Larne and one property in the Carrickfergus Borough Council Areas have benefitted from the Empty Premises Relief. No properties in either Larne or Carrickfergus Borough Council Areas have benefited from the Shop Window Display relief which also commenced on 1st April 2012.

Private Sector Jobs: Foyle

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many private sector jobs have been created in the Foyle Constituency in each of the last four years.

(AQW 16198/11-15)

Mr Wilson: It is not possible to provide information on the total number of private sector jobs created in Foyle as requested. NISRA collect information on the number of jobs at a particular point in time and therefore can only provide the net change between two points in time.

The table overleaf provides information on the net change in all private sector employee jobs in the Parliamentary Constituency of Foyle as measured by the biennial Census of Employment. The net decrease takes into account both job gains and losses during the period.

Number of Employee Jobs in Foyle PCA

Year	Private Sector Jobs	Net Change from previous period
2007	27,534	
2009	27,141	-393
2011	25,800	-1,341

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Breast Cancer: Soya

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what qualitative research has been carried out on the detrimental effects that soya can have on women diagnosed with oestrogen sensitive breast cancer.

(AQW 15795/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has funded several studies looking at phytoestrogens and cancer which contributed to the review by the Committee on Toxicity on Phytoestrogens and Health in 2003 and the research recommendations in this report. (Phytoestrogens are naturally occurring compounds found in some plant based foods, notably soya). The Committee on Toxicity in 2012 reviewed this research programme. A link to this report is provided below.

<http://cot.food.gov.uk/pdfs/cotstatements201201>.

Waiting Times: Pacemaker Battery

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the current waiting time for a replacement battery for a pacemaker; and what steps have been taken to reduce the waiting time.

(AQW 15847/11-15)

Mr Poots: Surgery for a replacement battery for a pacemaker is undertaken at the Belfast and Southern Health and Social Care Trusts. This procedure requires a cardiac catheterisation laboratory. I am advised by the Health and Social Care Board that the number of people waiting for a replacement battery for a pacemaker, at 15 October 2012, was 78. Of this total, 79% (62 people) were waiting less than 13 weeks.

The Northern Ireland Programme for Government 2011-2015 includes a commitment to expand cardiac catheterisation capacity to improve access to diagnostic intervention and treatment for all cardiology procedures by 2015. A percentage of this additional capacity will be used to address the demand for a replacement battery for permanent pacemakers.

Fire and Rescue Service: Governance

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much it has cost to date to investigate the governance and management of the Fire and Rescue Service.

(AQW 15851/11-15)

Mr Poots: Recent investigations into the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service which have included governance and management issues have cost a total of £23,650.

Antrim Area Hospital/Causeway Hospital: Car Parking

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail all the contracts in place which are associated with car parking at the (i) Antrim Area Hospital; and (ii) Causeway Hospital, including the purpose, length, cost and associated revenue of each contract.

(AQW 15852/11-15)

Mr Poots: The list of all contracts associated with car parking at Antrim Area and Causeway Hospitals, including the purpose, length and cost of each contract, is as follows:

Advanced Parking Solutions -

Purpose - To provide comprehensive maintenance cover for all SkiData car parking equipment on both sites. Equipment

covered - Pay stations, barriers, ticket columns, intercoms and system PCs.

Contract duration - 12 months (18/05/12 - 17/05/13)

Cost - £28,421 plus VAT

Parking Enforcement Agency (PEA) -

Purpose - To provide parking enforcement on both sites to ensure all access routes are kept free and to help prevent the abuse of all hospital car parks.

Contract duration - 24 months (18/04/11 - 17/05/13) (with the option of a one year extension)

Cost - Up to £42761.25 (including possible usage on bank holidays)

Scan Coin -

Purpose - To provide maintenance cover for 2 coin counting machines.

Contract Duration - 12 months (12/06/12 - 11/06/13)

Cost - £1208

Longmore Electronics -

Purpose - To provide maintenance cover for NHSCT security cameras. This contract not only covers the cameras relevant to car parking but the internal camera system within each hospital site.

Contract Duration - This contract is currently being renegotiated.

Cost - See above

This contract applies to all CCTV on the Antrim & Causeway sites with a small percentage directly linked to car parking.

The Trust has Measured Term Contracts (MTC) in place for repairs on all road surfacing, white lining and winter maintenance. A proportion of expenditure relates to car parking but information relating specifically to car parks is not available separately.

In relation to "Associated Revenue", the only contractor who receives additional revenue from the provision of the service is PEA. The contractor is not required to provide details of this revenue.

Ballee Children's Home: Purchase of Land

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the business cases that he has received over the last three years from the Northern Health and Social Care Trust in relation to the purchase of land around the Ballee Children's home for the purpose of alternate access routes to (i) the existing building; and (ii) the new building.

(AQW 15883/11-15)

Mr Poots: No business cases were received by the Department in relation to the purchase of land around the Ballee Children's Home for the purpose of alternate access routes over the last three years.

Cardiology Services

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the plans for cardiology services in the next five years, particularly in relation to Craigavon Area Hospital.

(AQW 15891/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Programme for Government 2011- 2015 includes a commitment to expand cardiac catheterisation capacity to improve access to diagnostic intervention and treatment for all cardiology procedures and the development of a new primary percutaneous coronary intervention (primary PCI) service model for Northern Ireland by 2015.

I am advised that the Health and Social Care (HSC) Board has approved proposals for the expansion of cath lab capacity in the Belfast and Western HSC Trusts to include the provision of a primary PCI service. This is planned to take place by September 2013.

It is anticipated that further expansion of cath lab capacity will be required beyond 2013/14 and the service provision for Northern Ireland will be reviewed by the HSC Board at this time. A decision will then be made on the level and location of any additional capacity required.

In relation to Craigavon Area Hospital, the HSC Board is currently working with the Southern HSC Trust to assess the need for any further investment required to ensure ongoing continuity and quality of care for patients.

Prisoner Service: Engagement

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust engages with the Prison Service to ensure that prisoners receive services comparable to those in the community.

(AQW 15895/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is responsible for the delivery of healthcare services in all prison establishments in Northern Ireland. The South Eastern HSC Trust engages with the Northern Ireland Prison Service through a number of strategic and operational fora on issues that might affect the delivery of prison healthcare services.

The requirement on the South Eastern HSC Trust to provide services that are equivalent to what a patient could access in the community is set out in the Partnership Agreement between my Department and the NI Prison Service. The South Eastern

HSC Trust's performance in delivering prison healthcare services is monitored by the Health and Social Care Board through its normal governance and performance management arrangements.

Cystic Fibrosis

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Cystic Fibrosis sufferers have the specific gene mutation G551D.

(AQW 15897/11-15)

Mr Poots: I understand that there are approximately 30 - 35 cystic fibrosis patients in Northern Ireland who have at least one copy of the G551D gene mutation.

The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and the Public Health Agency (PHA) are aware that this new drug treatment is presently undergoing an assessment process on behalf of specialist NHS commissioning bodies in England. That assessment will be available in England in the coming weeks or months. When the commissioning decision for England is determined, the HSCB and PHA will make every effort to work towards a comparable evidenced-based approach to the availability of Kalydeco (ivacaftor) in Northern Ireland.

Cystic Fibrosis

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to make the drug Kalydeco available to Cystic Fibrosis patients.

(AQW 15898/11-15)

Mr Poots: I understand that there are approximately 30 - 35 cystic fibrosis patients in Northern Ireland who have at least one copy of the G551D gene mutation.

The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and the Public Health Agency (PHA) are aware that this new drug treatment is presently undergoing an assessment process on behalf of specialist NHS commissioning bodies in England. That assessment will be available in England in the coming weeks or months. When the commissioning decision for England is determined, the HSCB and PHA will make every effort to work towards a comparable evidenced-based approach to the availability of Kalydeco (ivacaftor) in Northern Ireland.

Strokes

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many stroke patients have been admitted to each hospital since the start of 2012; and how many of these were treated with Thrombolysis.

(AQW 15910/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not available on the number of stroke patients that have been admitted to each hospital since the start of 2012; or the number of these that were treated with Thrombolysis.

Information is however available on the number of emergency admissions to each HSC Trust between 1st January and 31st March 2012 where a primary diagnosis of ischaemic stroke was recorded; and the number of times during this period that Thrombolysis was administered as shown in the table below:-

HSC Trust	Number of Emergency Admissions	Number of Thrombolysis Administrations
Belfast	151	11
South Eastern	122	8
Northern	132	11
Southern	121	11
Western	93	10
Total	619	51

Source:- Hospital Inpatient System & Priority 2 – Stroke Services Return

Figures do not include patients who attended an Accident and Emergency Department and were not subsequently admitted. Deaths and discharges have been used to approximate admissions.

Causeway Hospital: Ross Thompson Unit

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the planned future for the Ross Thompson Unit in the Causeway Hospital.

(AQW 15911/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has submitted a Strategic Outline Case (SOC) outlining their assessment of need for the provision of mental health inpatient services across the Trust area.

The SOC is currently with Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) for their approval and a decision is expected within the next few weeks. Subject to approval, the Trust will then be asked to develop a business case for the provision of acute mental health inpatient services across the Northern Trust. As part of the business case process, the Trust will consider a range of options including the use of Ross Thompson Unit in Causeway Hospital.

I can assure you all of the options identified in the business case will be fully explored to determine which model delivers best in terms of optimising care, strategic fit and affordability.

Any changes to services identified through this or other processes will be subject to further consultation.

Liverpool Care Pathway

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the Liverpool Care Pathway for the Dying Patient is used in local hospitals.

(AQW 15920/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department published 'Living Matters:Dying Matters a Strategy for Palliative and End of Life Care in Northern Ireland in March 2010. The Strategy recommends the use of improvement tools to improve the quality of care in the last few days of life. The Liverpool Care Pathway (LCP) which was developed by Marie Curie Cancer Care is such a tool. It is an established and respected tool that is recommended by NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) and it has been used in hospital care in Northern Ireland for a number of years.

The LCP is initiated by clinicians who are trained and competent to do so. The use of the LCP is discussed with patients, if appropriate, and with relatives/carers before use.

Domiciliary Care: Rural Areas

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that care is now being delivered in a task centred way, what steps his Department is taking to mitigate isolation and loneliness caused by the change in the delivery of domiciliary care services in rural areas, such as the Ards Peninsula.

(AQW 15956/11-15)

Mr Poots: Given the wide range of circumstances which can lead to social isolation, the solutions require involvement and input across a range of services designed to help people remain active and involved in their communities whether rural or urban

My Department published a Service Framework for the Health and Wellbeing of Older People for consultation at the beginning of October. The overall aim of the Framework is to improve the health and wellbeing of older people in Northern Ireland, promote social inclusion, reduce inequalities in health and improve HSC quality of care for all older people.

Within the South Eastern locality the Public Health Agency (PHA) are currently funding a 'Safe and Well' service targeting older people at risk of social isolation. This service has been developed with a range of local partners and offers a co-ordinated response from local statutory, voluntary and community partners to assess and address the needs of at risk older people. There are similar schemes in all Local Commissioning Group (LCG) localities, funded from various sources. The PHA is currently working to develop a regional service model and to support the implementation of the model with LCGs as part of the future development of older people's services.

Community and Voluntary Sector: Resources

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department can support and resource programmes that specifically address ageing issues and volunteering to help deliver better services for rural areas, given that there is a move towards utilising the voluntary community sector to deliver better health outcomes, as highlighted in the Compton Review.

(AQW 15957/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department provides funding towards voluntary and community sector organisations which deliver a wide range of services to different client groups, including older people. This funding is provided to organisations working on a regional basis throughout Northern Ireland, including rural areas.

The process of funding individual organisations on a local basis, or for any allocation of contracts open to the voluntary, community or private sectors, would be a matter for local Health and Social Care Trusts and the Health and Social Care Board to consider, in the context of the level of services required in each situation and the resources available.

Marie Stopes Clinic

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, having become aware in January 2012 of the prospect of a Marie Stopes clinic in Belfast, when he first sought advice from the Attorney General.

(AQW 15967/11-15)

Mr Poots: As the member will be aware there is a strong convention that whether the Attorney general has been consulted is not disclosed and I do not intend to breach that convention.

Direct Payment Scheme: Applications

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many applications for Direct Payments were authorised, in each of the last three years, from (i) clients with mental health issues; and (ii) clients with a learning disability, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 15973/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of Direct Payment applications authorised is not held centrally within the Department. The Department does however hold information on the number of Direct Payments in effect at the end of each quarter.

Tables 1 and 2 below detail the number of Direct Payments in effect at the end of the financial year for the last three years, for both Mental Health and Learning Disability programmes of care, by HSC Trust.

Table 1: Number of direct payments in effect at 31 March (2010-12) for a Mental Health Programme of Care, by HSC Trust.

Year	HSC Trust				
	Belfast	Northern	South Eastern	Southern	Western
2010	8	*	*	59	*
2011	12	*	*	59	*
2012	22	5	*	58	*

* Less than 5 payments in effect

Source: DHSSPS CC8 Returns provided quarterly by HSC Trusts

Table 2: Number of direct payments in effect at 31 March (2010-12) for a Learning Disability Programme of Care, by HSC Trust.

Year	HSC Trust				
	Belfast	Northern	South Eastern	Southern	Western
2010	60	65	96	170	79
2011	70	75	118	203	95
2012	86	87	129	225	109

Source: DHSSPS CC8 Returns provided quarterly by HSC Trusts

Causeway Hospital/Altnagelvin Area Hospital: Maternity Unit

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether, under any new possible arrangement between the Causeway and Altnagelvin Hospitals, it would be possible to operate a maternity unit based at the Causeway Hospital, which would attract expectant mothers from the Limavady area, freeing up Altnagelvin while sustaining numbers at the Causeway.

(AQW 16005/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department's recently published document, A Strategy for Maternity Care in Northern Ireland 2012-2018, recognises that a change in the model of maternity care is inevitable. Any change will need to complement the broader aspects of the reconfiguration of community and hospital services, as outlined in Transforming Your Care, which is being formally consulted on at present.

The Maternity Strategy makes clear that it will be for Health and Social Care (HSC) organisations to consider how best to maximise choice for local women and, where appropriate, develop a regional networked approach, with cross boundary flows between Trusts and other jurisdictions. Such an approach may improve local access and enhance care for women. It may make some maternity units more sustainable and reduce pressure on others.

It is for the HSC Board, as commissioner of services and working in collaboration with Trusts and other organisations to lead on the Strategy's implementation.

Family Support Hubs: Location of

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what mechanisms will be put in place to identify the locations of the ten family support hubs.

(AQW 16035/11-15)

Mr Poots: The locations of the ten new family support hubs will be identified by the HSC Board working with other agencies, including the Locality Planning Groups of the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership.

There are a number of different models for family support hubs, with the most appropriate model being dependent upon a number of factors, including social, educational and health needs which must be taken into consideration before any decision on the location or the format of a family support hub.

Family Support Hubs: Good Practice

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what examples of good practice exist to inform the establishment and development of the ten family support hubs.

(AQW 16036/11-15)

Mr Poots: At present, there are 17 family support hubs established across Northern Ireland. There are a number of different models for family support hubs, with the most appropriate model for each location being dependent upon a number of factors, including the current infrastructure in a particular area.

Any new Family Support Hub will provide a focused, personal service for a family and can assist them to obtain the support they may require from existing services and services the family support hubs can offer. Best practice learning derived from the establishment of the existing Family Support Hubs will inform the establishment and development of the ten new hubs.

Public Health: Expenditure

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what his Department's expenditure on Public Health was in (i) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12.

(AQW 16051/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department's expenditure on Public Health, represented by the total expenditure of the Public Health Agency in the financial years 2010/11 and 2011/12 was £69.648m and £77.605m, respectively.

Direct Payment Scheme: Promotion

Mr B McCreagh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how is the direct payment scheme being promoted; and to outline the process for personal budgets being allocated on the direct payment scheme.

(AQW 16124/11-15)

Mr Poots: At present in Northern Ireland we do not have personal budgets. We have the Direct Payment Scheme. Direct Payments enable the Health and Social Care Trusts to offer individuals an alternative to traditional service provision whilst ensuring public funds are being used both effectively and efficiently. Direct Payments are cash payments, made in lieu of social service provision, to individuals who have been assessed as needing services. Direct Payments increase choice and promote independence.

A pilot scheme based on Self Directed Support has been rolled out by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust and as a result of this the Board and the Department are now working together to progress this area further with agreement having been reached to develop and plan the roll out of similar pilots across all Trusts and all programmes of care.

On 9 October 2012 the Health and Social Care Board launched a three-month consultation "Transforming Your Care: From Vision to Action" which outlines proposals for change in Health and Social Care services in response to the report "Transforming Your Care: A Review of Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland" (published December 2011). This includes a clear focus on a more personalized approach.

Suicide and Self-harm

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how incidents of self-harm or suicide are recorded in each Health and Social Care Trust, including whether drugs and alcohol were a factor; and what are the protocols in each Trust for referring patients for appropriate aftercare, and how information is shared between health and social care professionals.

(AQW 16132/11-15)

Mr Poots: Since April 2012 each Health and Social Care Trust in Northern Ireland has been collating anonymised data on incidents relating to self harm attendances at each acute Accident and Emergency Department. The data is recorded onto the NI Deliberate Self Harm Registry.

The Deliberate Self Harm Registry holds the following data items: gender, age, date and time of attendance, admission details (where applicable), and method(s) of self harm. Information also includes whether drugs and alcohol were involved and details of psychiatric assessments undertaken at Accident and Emergency Departments. This information is subsequently made available to the Health and Social Care system to assist with planning the delivery of accident and emergency services such as: targeting of resources to deal with increases in specific self-harm methods, and treatment of people who self-harm while under the influence of drugs and alcohol.

With regard to how suicides are recorded in each Trust, in recognition of the importance of early identification of potential clusters and response, in 2012 the Sudden Death process was introduced regionally. Sudden Death forms (SD1) are completed by PSNI officers when attending a sudden death, whereby the cause is possible or probable suicide. These are then shared with the relevant Trust and HSC representatives, to ensure that support can be provided to those bereaved by

suicide. The SD1 process also provides for more timely data collection on suspected suicide, along with the opportunity to identify potential clusters, and put in place a Community Response Plan (CRP). The involvement of drugs and/or alcohol is not recorded on these forms.

When someone presents in hospital after an attempted suicide or having self harmed they are assessed and treated medically in the first instance. When they are deemed to be fit for a mental health assessment they are referred - either for an urgent assessment that day, or for low risk patients, or those unwilling to wait for a mental health assessment, given a next day mental health appointment through the "Card Before You Leave" (CBYL) scheme.

Mental health assessment arrangements in the Emergency Department, including the operation of "Card Before you Leave" are currently under review.

Firefighters: Part-time or Reserve

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what employment agreements are relied upon to allow part-time or reserve fire-fighters to attend emergency call-outs or training.
(AQW 16133/11-15)

Mr Poots: The employment agreement for Retained Firefighters is the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire & Rescue Services Scheme of Conditions of Service. This document outlines the terms and conditions for Firefighters including payment for emergency call outs, pre-arranged work and attendance at training courses. This document is noted in the Written Statement of Employment Particulars.

Urological Care: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to improve the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust's capacity to improve the delivery of urological care and cope with the level of demand.
(AQW 16134/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board is: supporting recruitment of additional consultants, including locum staff where available; and, working with the three Northern Ireland Urology Teams and Local Commissioning Groups to agree key actions and timescales which will facilitate redirection of core urological conditions from the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to local units. The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust also continues to run a partial booking pilot to offer urology day surgery patients a choice of procedure date. This initiative should help reduce the current number of patients not attending appointments. The Trust is also considering how the team can be more effective by introducing initiatives such as centralisation of referrals and pooling of waiting lists.

Safe and Sustainable Review

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will take account of the recent decision on the UK Safe and Sustainable Review in England and Wales; and whether he will consider a full review into the closure recommended by the report.
(AQW 16135/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have not reached any decision on the provision of paediatric cardiac surgical services for the population of Northern Ireland.

I announced on 25 September 2012 the commencement of a 12 week period of consultation on the draft service specification and the standards that are proposed for the future commissioning of this service, as well as a number of options for the delivery of this service in the future. The consultation is being carried out by the Health and Social Care Board and will run until 21 December 2012, following which I will take a decision on the future provision of this service for Northern Ireland.

Health Service Dentists: Waiting Times

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the current average waiting time in each Health and Social Care Trust to become a patient of a Health Service dentist.
(AQW 16137/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not available.

Drug Abuse: Services in North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services are available in North Down to help drug abusers.
(AQW 16139/11-15)

Mr Poots: There is a range of services available in the North Down to help prevent and address the harm related to alcohol and drug misuse in the area. These are set out below:

Prevention

- School health alcohol harm reduction project (SHAHRP) alcohol awareness education and teacher training programme operates in all of the post-primary schools.
- Targeted drug awareness education programmes for young people are provided by ASCERT/Opportunity Youth for vulnerable young people.

Treatment and Support - Adults

- Harm reduction outreach project - Specific service for the North Down and Ards area targeting drug and alcohol users provided by the Simon Community.
- Addiction NI - Services for adults, older population and those people with drug and alcohol problems who have committed offences.
- Family Treatment and Support Service (The Pharos Project) - Service for parents who have a substance misuse problem covering South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT) area, delivered by Barnardos through their family centre in Bangor.
- South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust - Community Addiction Teams based in Lough House, Ards Hospital covers North Down and Ards Peninsula area. The Inpatient Addiction Unit at Shimna House also provides services right across the Trust Area, including North Down.
- Dunlewey Substance Advice Centre - Adult Counselling Service, 226 Stewartstown Rd, Belfast. Service level agreement with SEHSCT for taking appropriate referrals across SEHSCT area.

Treatment and Support - Young People

- DAISY Project - Youth treatment and support service for young people and their families delivered by ASCERT and Opportunity Youth and covers SEHSCT area.
- One Stop Shop Service in North Down and Ards - FASA provide an information, support and sign posting service in their Bangor office for young people and their families in relation to substance misuse and wider issues including mental health, sexual health, employment etc.
- Dedicated substance misuse workers based within Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) - Treatment service for those with substance misuse and mental health problems.

Services for the Community

- Community Support Service - Service provides support to local groups helping them address local problems.
- Community Drug Awareness Training - Access to this training is coordinated via the community support workers and is delivered by ASCERT/FASA and Falls Community Council offering.

Suicide: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services are available in North Down for people who are contemplating suicide.

(AQW 16140/11-15)

Mr Poots: During my term as Health Minister a range of services has been provided regionally which are available to people from the North Down constituency. These include:

- Lifeline 24/7 helpline and associated, locally-based, support services;
- The Deliberate Self Harm Registry, which operates at all A&E Units
- operation of the Card Before You Leave (CBYL) protocol at all A&E sites;
- Training on suicide/mental health awareness; and
- Public information campaigning to: encourage help-seeking; raise awareness of suicide and positive mental health; and reduce stigma associated with suicide and mental health.

In relation to North Down, the Public Health Agency and Northern and Southern Trusts work with, and help fund, a number of organisations to deliver suicide and self harm prevention services. These organisations, some of which are based in North Down and some of which have Trust-wide coverage, include North Down CRUSE Bereavement Care, Hollywood Family Trust, FASA, Opportunity Youth, ASCERT, Bangor YMCA, New Life Counselling, Belfast Central Mission, Aware Defeat Depression, Action Mental Health, Mindwise, CAUSE and Northern Ireland Association of Mental Health.

Services provided include crisis response and counselling for high risk groups such as families affected by suicide, young men, people who self harm, and people with substance misuse problems. Personal development programmes, and drama based awareness/education interventions have also been supported. In addition, community emergency response plans have been developed to respond to potential suicide clusters in the area.

Respite Care

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that respite care is provided by the Health and Social Care Trusts in Trust facilities, how the proposal to close some Trust facilities in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust will impact on Transforming Your Care in the area.

(AQW 16146/11-15)

Mr Poots: 'Transforming Your Care' has demonstrated that changing how our services are provided is an inevitability. With more people being supported to live independently in their own home, as they wish to do, the model of care must change to meet their needs. I want to ensure that those changes are planned and managed so that they will bring optimum benefits to patients, service users, staff and the wider community. It is crucial that safe, suitable and better alternatives to residential care, such as supported living, self-directed support and more respite care, are in place for those who need it.

In that context, and as outlined in its draft Population Plan, the Southern Health and Social Care Trust is reviewing its residential care provision with a view to developing alternative models of care, which will reduce reliance on its care homes for long term placements as well as for short break provision. Any consequential closures will be taken forward in a planned and phased way, with residents, families and local communities involved in the local consultation process. The Trust has confirmed that closure of facilities will not reduce capacity to provide respite: indeed its aim is to provide a range of innovative alternatives for respite, and other forms of carer support, by integrating respite care into the local community and promoting independence, choice and control.

Whistle-blowing/Grievances

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) grievance cases have been taken; and (ii) whistleblowing complaints have been made, against (a) his Department; and (b) its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years; and at what cost to the public purse.

(AQW 16171/11-15)

Mr Poots:

(a) The Department

(i and ii)

The table below details the number of Formal Grievances and Whistleblowing cases made against my Department in each of the past 5 years.

Financial Year	Grievances Taken		Whistleblowing Cases
	Dignity at Work	Other	
2007/08	0	0	0
2008/09	1	2	0
2009/10	0	1	0
2010/11	0	3	0
2011/12	2	1	0

The cost of action taken to investigate grievance cases is not available as this is undertaken as part of normal duties/processes.

(b) Arms Length Bodies

NIFRS

(i) The table below details the number of Grievance claims that have been lodged within NIFRS in each of the past 5 years.

Year	Grievance Claims
2008	28
2009	25
2010	19
2011	21
*2012	48
Total	141

* As at 29 October 2012

- (ii) The table below outlines the number of Whistleblowing complaints received against NIFRS in each of the past 5 financial years to date.

Financial Year (Apr-Mar)	External Provider	Internal Process
2007/2008	6	1
2008/2009	6	0
2009/2010	8	0
2010/2011	1	0
2011/2012	1	3
2012/2013 (to date)	0	1
Total	22	5

NIFRS is unable to give costs for Grievance cases and Whistleblowing complaints as extracting this information can only be done at disproportionate costs.

HSC

- (i) HSC organisations are responsible for dealing with grievances and whistleblowing issues locally. Due to the local aspect to these processes, records of the numbers handled by HSC organisations are not held centrally by my Department and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

The costs associated with grievances and whistleblowing cases, heard by HSC employers, is not available and could only be provided at a disproportionate cost. This work is undertaken by line managers as part of their normal duties.

- (ii) My Department has received 9 complaints from whistleblowers about related HSC issues. The "cost to the public purse" of dealing with these whistleblowing complaints is not held centrally by my Department and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

Sure Start: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the role (i) his Department; and (ii) the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, have in the Sure Start programme for the North Down area.

(AQW 16180/11-15)

Mr Poots: While the Department for Education has lead responsibility for policy and funding of Sure Start, the operational implementation of the policy is done by the local Childcare Partnerships within the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) through service level agreement with DE.

Childcare partnerships were established by the NI childcare strategy "Children First". One of their responsibilities is the delivery of Early Years services including Sure Start programmes.

The South Eastern Trust is one of a number of organisations working in partnership to contribute to the planning and delivery of the Sure Start programme in the North Down area.

Transforming Your Care: Implementation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the implementation of the Compton Review.

(AQW 16196/11-15)

Mr Poots: 'Transforming Your Care: a review of health and social care in Northern Ireland' proposes significant changes across health and social care services. It focuses on reshaping how services are to be structured and delivered in order to make best use of all resources available to us and, in so doing, ensure that our services are safe, resilient and sustainable into the future.

Following the publication of Transforming Your Care, Draft Population Plans were produced by the Local Commissioning Groups in liaison with the Health and Social Care Trusts and others. An over-arching Strategic Implementation Plan was also prepared by the Health & Social Care Board to draw together the key elements of the Population Plans, including cross-cutting, regional aspects. These draft Plans were subject to a quality assurance process over the summer period.

Following this quality assurance process, I made a Statement to the Assembly on 9th October 2012, launching a consultation to seek the views the response to the proposals set out in Transforming Your Care. I would encourage everyone - patients, clients, service users, service providers and citizens - to engage with this important consultation. Full details of how you can get involved are available at www.tycconsultation.hscni.net. This consultation will remain open until 15 January 2013.

Antrim Area Hospital: Car Parking Charges

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the car parking charges at Antrim Area Hospital.

(AQW 16202/11-15)

Mr Poots: Since April 2011, car park charging for visitors and patients has been in place at Antrim Area hospital. The charging bands are currently:

Charge Bands	£
Up to 1 hour	1.00
1-2 hours	1.50
2-3 hours	2.00
3-4 hours	2.50
4-5 hours	3.00
5-6 hours	3.50
6-8 hours	4.00
Over 8 Hours	5.00

My Department issued a policy on car parking to all trusts at the end of July 2012. The policy allows for charging for car parking to both staff and visitors subject to consultation at local level on the detail of the proposed charges.

The Northern HSC Trust commenced a 12 week consultation on 10 October on the introduction of staff charging at Causeway and Antrim Hospitals.

Fire and Rescue Service: Senior Positions

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many senior positions have been filled in the Fire and Rescue Service in each of the last five years; (ii) what procedure was followed for the recruitment of each of these positions; and (iii) in which publications were the positions advertised.

(AQW 16205/11-15)

Mr Poots:

i The table below outlines the number of senior positions* filled in NIFRS in each of the last five years:

Year	Operational Posts	Support Staff Posts
2008	0	4
2009	4	5
2010	1	0
2011	2	0
2012	6	0

* Senior posts are defined as Principal Officer grade for support staff and Area Commander and above for operational staff

ii. The procedure followed was in accordance with NIFRS' Code of Procedures on Recruitment and Selection and included Assessment and Interview arrangements.

iii. The Support Staff posts were advertised in the Belfast Telegraph, Irish News and News Letter as well as the Careers Section of the NIFRS' Website.

The Chief Fire Officer, Deputy and Assistant Chief Fire Officer posts were advertised in the Belfast Telegraph, News Letter, Irish News and Irish Times. They were also advertised on the Chief Fire Officer's Association website, on the Careers Section of the NIFRS' website, by internal Establishment instruction and distributed UK-wide via the Fire Information National Data Service.

The Area Commander posts were advertised internally by Establishment Instruction and distributed UK-wide via the Fire Information National Data Service.

Research and Development: Promotion of

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what he is doing to promote research and development in health.

(AQO 2773/11-15)

Mr Poots: In July this year, I was very pleased to announce our contribution to the funds for the research programmes of the National Institute for Health Research, thereby, increasing potentially by up to 25% our annual investment in health and social care research. This will help to ensure that our HSC researchers remain competitive with colleagues UK-wide and internationally.

The very important MoU on 'Connected Health and Prosperity' which the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I signed jointly last year will contribute to the Programme for Government commitment to support £300 million investment by businesses in R&D. On 24th October in Boston, I announced a further £4.7 million investment in health research by InvestNI which is an early confirmation of this.

Another focus is on ensuring increased drawdown of EU Commission R&D funding.

Good research leads to innovation and the delivery of more effective health and social care services. Our work in Connected Health, for which R&D is essential, will make a vital contribution to the success of Transforming Your Care.

Fire and Rescue Service: Use of Property

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking in response to the alleged use of Fire Service property in Orange Halls.

(AQW 16276/11-15)

Mr Poots: This allegation has been raised with me and, as I advised in my written statement to the Assembly on Thursday 1 November, where appropriate, all material allegations will be investigated rigorously and proportionately.

I have tasked the Departmental Accounting Officer with the responsibility to ensure that a satisfactory and independent investigation is carried out into the material specific allegations that have been made.

Suicide: County Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps his Department and its agencies are taking to ensure that a cluster of suicides is not allowed to develop in County Fermanagh following the recent spate of deaths by suicide in the county.

(AQW 16277/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Public Health Agency activated a pre-prepared emergency community response plan on 19 October and Agency staff are working closely with other organisations in Fermanagh to prevent further suicides in the area. These organisations include the Western Health and Social Care Trust, the Western Education and Library Board, Fermanagh District Council, Lifeline, local churches and community groups involved in suicide prevention and bereavement support.

The purpose of the emergency community response plan is to quickly put in place multi-agency actions to prevent further deaths when it is suspected, through established surveillance systems that a potential suicide cluster is developing in an area. These plans have been developed in each Health and Social Care Trust area in Northern Ireland in partnership with local voluntary, community, and statutory organisations.

Smoking-related Deaths

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the action he is taking to reduce deaths from smoking.

(AQO 2778/11-15)

Mr Poots: In February 2012, I launched a new ten-year tobacco control strategy for Northern Ireland. The strategy is aimed at reducing the number of people starting to smoke; encouraging more smokers to quit; and protecting the population from tobacco-related harm. The Public Health Agency will be leading on the delivery of the strategy and has established an implementation group to take this work forward.

My Department has also been engaged in a programme of legislative change with regards to tobacco control, the main aim of which is to prevent the uptake of smoking by young people. This includes banning the sale of tobacco from vending machines, from 1 March 2012, and banning displays of tobacco products in large shops, which was introduced just last week. The display ban legislation will be extended to include small shops from 6 April 2015.

In the forthcoming months, I also intend to introduce a Bill to the Assembly which will impose tougher sanctions on retailers who persistently sell tobacco to under eighteens.

Other legislative options under consideration are the introduction of plain packaging for tobacco products and a ban on smoking in private vehicles. Decisions on these issues will only be made following comprehensive consultation exercises and considered analysis of the responses.

I will also continue to invest in public information campaigns to inform people about the dangers of smoking, and in the development of smoking cessation services provided in a range of accessible settings.

All of the above actions will help to reduce the appalling toll of preventable morbidity and premature deaths from smoking.

E. coli Outbreak

Mrs McKevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the E Coli outbreak linked to Flicks Restaurant, Belfast

(AQO 2779/11-15)

Mr Poots: As of Friday November 2nd, the number of laboratory-confirmed cases of E. coli infection linked to this outbreak was 137 and the number of probable cases stood at 164.

The total number of confirmed and probable cases levelled off during the week commencing 22 October.

The Public Health Agency, Belfast City Council and the Food Standards Agency are continuing to investigate this outbreak. They are not in a position yet to confirm the cause of the outbreak.

All of the laboratory-confirmed cases from this outbreak that have been typed so far are E. coli Type 54. This is a different strain from the cases that were linked to Flicks Restaurant in August.

Antrim Area Hospital: Accident and Emergency

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients have presented with fractures at Antrim Area Hospital Accident and Emergency department since 2010.

(AQO 2780/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Health and Social Care Board that during the period from January 2010 to September 2012, the total number of patients presenting at Antrim Area Hospital emergency care department with any fracture diagnosis is 10,766.

Department of Justice

Prisons: CCTV

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 14270/11-15, to provide a copy of the Northern Ireland Prison Service Registration Requirement Notification in relation to the use of CCTV in prisons and the relevant approval of the Information Commissioner's Office.

(AQW 15854/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The information required is publicly available on the following website: <http://www.ico.gov.uk/ESDWebPages/DoSearch.asp>.

Prison Service: Code of Conduct

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Devolution of Policing and Justice Functions) Order 2010 replaced all aspects of legislation in the Prison Service Code of Conduct, including the 1995 amendments. **(AQW 15855/11-15)**

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Devolution of Policing and Justice Functions) Order 2010 made no amendments to the Northern Ireland Prison Service Code of Conduct and Discipline.

Prostitution

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 12907/11-15, whether he will address the issue of removing statutory barring.

(AQW 15857/11-15)

Mr Ford: Although I have no plans to change the time limit for making a complaint to a magistrates' court, I will look into any difficulties raised in relation to the time limit for making a complaint in relation to the summary offence of paying for the sexual services of a prostitute subjected to force.

Young Offenders: Education

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether young offenders are encouraged to enter into education on leaving custody or whilst on probation; (ii) what is the percentage uptake; and (iii) what agencies are involved in pursuing this issue with young offenders.

(AQW 15859/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) Young people of school age are actively supported to remain in, or engage with, the appropriate education provision whilst on probation supervision by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) or on release from the Youth Justice Agency's (YJA) Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre. In Woodlands, all young people undergo an assessment that informs a personal education plan and programme. This is subsequently shared with the relevant Education and

Library Board, to ensure that the progress that they have made in custody informs their education placement in the community. However, the majority of young people in Woodlands are beyond compulsory school age. While remedial education programmes provide a valuable way of helping them in addressing certain key deficits, a greater emphasis is now placed on providing them with a wider range of life and vocational skills. Under a recently developed joint initiative, between the YJA and the Department of Education and Learning (DEL), these young people are referred direct to career services to maximise their opportunity of securing further education, training and employment.

- (ii) There are currently no complete figures available for the percentage uptake of education in the community. The joint initiative with DEL will be reviewed in March 2013, after which both DEL and YJA data will be available.

Agencies include:

- (iii) the Department of Education, through schools and education welfare officers; the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety, through social services; the Department for Employment and Learning; PBNI and the YJA. PBNI also assists young people to access personal development programmes, which include educational elements, from a range of third sector providers such as NIACRO, Challenge for Youth and Opportunity Youth.

Prison Service: Dismissals

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many members of staff in the Prison Service have been dismissed for either criminal or disciplinary conduct, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 15876/11-15)

Mr Ford: As less than five members of staff have been dismissed from the Northern Ireland Prison Service, for either criminal or disciplinary conduct, in each of the last five years, the actual number has been withheld. This is to protect the identity of the individuals concerned as disclosure would be contrary to the Data Protection Act 1998.

Prisons: Deaths in Custody

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) how many families of prisoners, who died in custody as a result of suicide, have instigated legal proceedings against the Northern Ireland Prison Service for failing in their duty of care, broken down by prison; (ii) how many of the proceedings have concluded; and (iii) how many are outstanding.

(AQW 15916/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) claims database holds records for the last 13 years and shows that 10 families of prisoners who died as a result of suicide have instigated legal proceedings against NIPS.

Seven prisoners died from suicide in Maghaberry, two died in Hydebank Wood and one died in Magilligan.

Of these 10 claims, four have concluded, two are statute barred, one has been abandoned and three remain live.

Prison Service: Resignation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 11464/11-15, if, and when, one of the governors has since resigned from the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

(AQW 15919/11-15)

Mr Ford: I can confirm that a governor, as referred to in AQW/11464/11-15, voluntarily left the service on 3 June 2012.

Michael McDonagh

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the death in custody of Michael McDonagh at HMP Maghaberry on 15 October 2012, whether (i) he was a remand or sentenced prisoner; (ii) he was considered at risk and accommodated as such; and (iii) any staff have been suspended whilst a investigation is carried out.

(AQW 15921/11-15)

Mr Ford: Mr McDonagh had been remanded in Maghaberry Prison since June 2012.

During his current period in custody Mr McDonagh was not considered to be at risk. His behaviour was of no concern and he had not failed any of his drug tests. There was no active 'Supporting Prisoner At Risk' (SPAR) in place and no previous recorded placement on SPAR monitoring. The staff on duty in Erne House did not have any concerns regarding Mr Connors' behaviour or mood and there were no indications of him planning to self harm or take his own life.

No staff have been suspended whilst an investigation is being carried out.

Court Cases: Diminished Responsibility

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 14744/11-15, to detail the advice supplied in relation to alcohol intoxication being viewed as an aggravating factor, particularly in light of court cases where charges have been reduced due to a defence of diminished responsibility through intoxication.

(AQW 15922/11-15)

Mr Ford: AQW 14744 referred to people arrested and charged with disorderly behaviour. The case law referred to in my answer derived from DPP v Majewski (1977) in relation to voluntary intoxication and R v Kingston (1995) in relation to involuntary intoxication.

The law regarding diminished responsibility is contained within sections 5 (diminished responsibility generally) and 6 (diminished responsibility by virtue of voluntary intoxication) of the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 1966. Section 5 was amended by Section 53 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 with effect from 1 June 2011.

Prison Service: Expenditure

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice how much the Prison Service has spent (i) paying external companies to clean cells in Roe House, Maghaberry Prison; and (ii) buying supplies such as arco absorbent compound to address the on-going protests effects, broken down by (a) each month since the beginning of the protest; and (b) the total cost.

(AQW 15940/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service has spent £446,913 on paying external companies to clean cells in Roe House at Maghaberry Prison up to 30 September 2012.

The monthly costs of buying supplies such as the Arco absorbent compound are set out in the following table. These total £55,738.

	2011/12 £	2012/13 £
April		192
May		5,134
June	3,209	57
July	935	7,924
August	1,046	1,505
September	4,395	7,163
October	4,921	
November	2,600	
December	4,932	
January	6,147	
February	2,149	
March	3,429	
Total	33,763	21,975

DNA Database

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice for details of any instances when a test profile, that was uploaded onto the DNA database, has matched a profile already on the system.

(AQW 15964/11-15)

Mr Ford: FSNI do not upload test profiles to the DNA database.

Maghaberry Prison: Discovery of a Camera

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the circumstances behind the alleged discovery of a camera hidden in a prisoner's watch in HMP Maghaberry.

(AQW 15977/11-15)

Mr Ford: During a routine search of a prisoner on 8 October 2012 he was found to be wearing a watch which had an inbuilt camera and recording facility. This is a prohibited article and was confiscated by staff. The prisoner has been charged with an offence under Prison Rules.

Prisoners: Amnesty International

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many separated republican prisoners have had submissions made by Amnesty International.

(AQW 15979/11-15)

Mr Ford: As stated in my answer to AQW/14564/11-15, Amnesty International wrote to my Department on 13 February 2012 in respect of Marian McGlinchey.

Amnesty International has not made submissions on behalf of any other separated republican prisoners.

Edward Connors

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether convicted sex-offender Edward Connors was ever placed in, or resided in, Thompson House, Belfast.

(AQW 15980/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Data Protection Act 1998 precludes the provision of information relating to a prisoner's placement or residence after his release from prison.

Offender Levy

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the Offender Levy is applicable in instances where police officers issue fixed penalty notices.

(AQW 15981/11-15)

Mr Ford: A £5 Offender Levy applies to fixed penalty notices issued by police under the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 for certain low level offences, which include criminal damage and disorderly behaviour.

The Levy has not yet been extended to fixed penalties issued by police for road traffic offences.

Forensic Science Northern Ireland

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail the arrangements in place for co-operation between Forensic Science Northern Ireland and similar bodies in other jurisdictions.

(AQW 15989/11-15)

Mr Ford: Bilateral Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) have been established between Forensic Science Northern Ireland (FSNI) and the Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA) Forensic Services and Eolaíocht Fhóirínseach Éireann (EFÉ) respectively. Each MoU provides for mutual aid in the event of the loss of facilities or demand surges; the scope for brokering of some excess demand and best practice support on specialist and quality issues. A similar trilateral agreement is also in place between FSNI, EFÉ and the SPSA Forensic Services.

The Intergovernmental Agreement on Co-operation on Criminal Justice Matters also supports cooperation between FSNI and EFÉ. Officials from each laboratory meet regularly under the auspices of that agreement.

FSNI staff have also participated in joint training and sharing of best scientific practice with the Ministry of Defence Forensic Explosives Laboratory.

Considerable collaboration also takes place through FSNI's membership of the UK & Ireland Association of Forensic Science Providers and the European Network of Forensic Science Institutes. FSNI staff are involved in a number of specialist working groups in both organisations.

In addition, co-operation takes place through FSNI's membership of the UK Regulator's Forensic Science Advisory Council and its specialist working groups.

Prison Service: Annual Report and Accounts

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) why the Northern Ireland Prison Service Annual Report and Accounts 2011/12 does not contain an appendix detailing the statistics for self inflicted injuries and deaths in custody in the last five years, since such information was published in previous years; (ii) whether such an appendix will be included in future annual reports; and (iii) who made the decision to exclude the appendix in the Annual Report and Accounts 2010/11 and 2011/12 and the rationale for the decision.

(AQW 16046/11-15)

Mr Ford: Following publication of its 2009/10 Annual Report, the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) carried out a review of the annual report template with a view to making improvements and better aligning it to the new 2011-2015 Corporate Plan. The report's format was also streamlined to avoid duplication of information. The decision was also taken to rationalise a number of appendices, including the one referred to in the question. However, subsequent Annual Reports have continued to provide information relating to any deaths in custody which have occurred during the period of time covered by those reports in the context of Significant Internal Control Issues.

NIPS will continue to keep the format for the annual report under review although at this stage it is not possible to say definitively whether future reports will include an appendix on self inflicted injuries and deaths in custody. However, I can confirm that information on deaths in custody will continue to be provided in future reports. In addition, NIPS' 2012-2013 Business Plan sets a specific Key Performance Target (KPT) for the Service for reducing the number of instances of self harm and the 2012/13 Annual report will provide information on performance against this KPT.

The Annual Report format was approved by the Director General of NIPS and the Acting Director General of NIPS in the 2010/11 and 2011/12 reports respectively.

Prison Service: Nursing Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to all Northern Ireland Prison Service nursing staff who have been dismissed or suspended over prisoner suicides, how many were trained in Supporting Prisoners at Risk prior to the incidents. (AQW 16049/11-15)

Mr Ford: All Prison Officers who applied for and were found suitable at selection for the specialism of Hospital Officer, including those suspended or dismissed as a result of the death in custody in 2009 of a prisoner at Maghaberry prison, would have completed the nurses induction training which included training in the Prisoner at Risk (PAR) process, and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills (ASIST) training.

These suspensions pre-date the introduction of the Supporting Prisoners at Risk (SPAR) process which was introduced in December 2009.

Courthouses: Security Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 14948/11-15, how many instances of non-compliance have occurred at each court house in which security staff have raised concerns with local management. (AQW 16050/11-15)

Mr Ford: Security staff at Newry Courthouse have recently raised one instance of possible non-compliance with the Court Administrator.

Prison Service: Nursing Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to all Northern Ireland Prison Service nursing staff who have been dismissed or suspended over prisoner suicides, how many were trained in Prisoner At Risk procedures and the completion of PAR1 or Supporting Prisoners at Risk forms prior to the incidents. (AQW 16052/11-15)

Mr Ford: All Prison Officers who applied for and were found suitable at selection for the specialism of Hospital Officer, including those suspended or dismissed as a result of the death in custody in 2009 of a prisoner at Maghaberry prison, would have completed the nurses induction training which included training in the Prisoner at Risk (PAR) process, and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills (ASIST) training.

These suspensions pre-date the introduction of the Supporting Prisoners at Risk (SPAR) process which was introduced in December 2009.

High Court: Vacancies

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many competitions have been held to fill vacancies in the Northern Ireland High Court since 2005; (ii) how many valid applications were received from (a) males; and (b) females; (iii) how many (a) males; and (b) females have been appointed as a result of these competitions; and (iv) how many successful applicants were practising barristers at the time of their appointment. (AQW 16077/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service retains records on competitions to fill vacancies for three years. There have been eight competitions to fill staff vacancies in the High Court since 2008. The table below relates to concluded competitions:

Number of competitions	Male applicants	Female applicants	Male appointees	Female appointees	Practising Barristers appointed
7	19	59	2	6	0

One competition has not concluded, there were 11 male and 12 female applicants.

In November 2010 the Lord Chief Justice appointed five persons with a social work background as General Visitors to support the Master of Care and Protection:

Number of competitions	Male applicants	Female applicants	Male appointees	Female appointees	Practising Barristers appointed
1	1	10	1	4	0

The Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission is the independent body for the appointment of judicial office holders and is sponsored by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. Therefore I cannot provide an answer for judicial appointments to the High Court.

Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total number of people who have been assisted by the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust (PRRT) in each year since it was established; and the number of police officers retiring under the Patten severance scheme that have been assisted by PRRT in each of year since it was established.

(AQW 16105/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below details the total number of people assisted by PRRT since 1 April 2007. The information requested, since PRRT was established on 2 March 1999 to 31 March 2007, is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Total Number of Clients

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	Total
Training & Education	339*	389*	496	495	327	2046
Personal Development	432	306	259	190	167	1354
Psychology	331	237	178	169	210	1125
Physiotherapy	370	415	546	635	709	2675
Total	1472	1347	1479	1489	1413	7200

* Training & Education – the number of new clients is only available from 2009/10 onwards therefore an average has been taken for the years 2007/08 and 2008/09.

PRRT does not make a distinction between Patten and non-Patten retirees as the organisation was set up to provide a service to all former police officers. Therefore I am unable to confirm the number of police officers retiring under the Patten severance scheme that have been assisted by PRRT in each of year since it was established.

Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Justice to list all companies with whom the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust has had (i) service level agreements; (ii) contracts; or (iii) commercial transactions since it was established; and the value of each.

(AQW 16106/11-15)

Mr Ford: In line with guidance received from both the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) and from OFMDFM, it is not appropriate to publish the names of contractors awarded DoJ contracts.

The table below details the total value of (i) service level agreements; (ii) contracts; or (iii) commercial transactions that the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust (PRRT) has had with companies from 1 April 2007 to 29 October 2012.

Category	Amount £
(i) Service Level Agreements	2,852,535
(ii) Contracts	1,329,318
(iii) Commercial Transactions	6,731,603
Total	10,913,456

The information requested, since PRRT was established in 1999 to March 2007, is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Justice to list the Board of Directors of the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust in each year since it was established; and to detail any relevant interests which were declared by the Directors.

(AQW 16107/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Board of Directors of the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust (PRRT), since it was established on 2 March 1999, together with the period they served as a member and the interests declared by the Directors in post from 1 April 2007 to date are detailed in the table below. For the period 2 March 1999 to 31 March 2007 no declared interests were recorded by PRRT.

Board Member	Membership Period	Declared Interests
Blair, George	March 1999 – June 2000	Not Recorded
Brown, Billy	March 1999 – March 2007 April 2007 – Present	Not Recorded None
Courtney, David	June 1999 – June 2005	Not Recorded
D'Arcy, Jackie	April 2000 – March 2007 April 2007 – Present	Not Recorded Castlerobin Consultancies -Provision of professional services (marketing courses)
Dixon, Catherine	March 1999 – June 2006 August 2009 – Present	Not Recorded None
Fairburn, James	April 2000 – July 2000	Not recorded
Hamill, Sheamus	March 2006 – Present	Chair of Futures (NI) Ltd
Hanna, Teddy	July 2009 – Present	Chair of Audit Committee for NI Police Fund; Chair of Audit Committee for Action Mental Health; Honary Treasurer Ulster New Zealand Trust
Irvine, Jim	March 1999 – June 2005	Not recorded
Lewis, Tim	August 1999 – June 2007 August 2009 - Present	Not recorded None
Maginnis, Ken	March 1999 – June 2001	Not recorded
McClurg, David	March 1999 – June 2006 June 2008 - Present	Not recorded Chair of NI Police Fund; Practice Manager of Edwards & Co Solicitors (private company); Vice President of NI Retired Police Officers Association
Montgomery, Irvin	June 2006 – March 2007	Not recorded
Sherrard, Aidan	October 2000 – Present	None
Spence, Terry	June 2007 – March 2008 April 2008 – March 2009 April 2009 – March 2010 April 2010 – March 2011 April 2011 – March 2012	Police Dependants Trust; RUC Benevolent Fund; Harp and Crown Credit Union Chair of Police Federation; Director of NI Police Fund Chair of Police Federation; Vice Chair of PSNI/RUCGC Benevolent Fund; Chair of Police Dependants Trust; Director of NI Police Fund Chair of Police Federation; Vice Chair of PSNI/RUCGC Benevolent Fund; Chair of Police Dependants Trust; Director of NI Police Fund; Trustee of National Police Memorial Day Committee; Executive Committee member of European Confederation of Police; Director of NI Police Fund Director of NI Police Fund; Chair of Police Federation; Vice Chair of PSNI/RUCGC Benevolent Fund; Chair of Police Dependants Trust

Board Member	Membership Period	Declared Interests
Stewart, Joe	February 2002 – April 2007	Not recorded
	April 2007 – March 2009	None
	April 2009 – Present	Director of HR for PSNI
Strudley, David	April 2000 – June 2003	Not recorded
Toner, Roy	June 2008 – June 2009	Not recorded
Walker, Richard	March 1999 – March 2007	Not recorded
	April 2007 – March 2008	None
	April 2008 – March 2009	Provision of consultancy services for PRRT
	April 2009 – Present	None
Watkins, David	August 2009 – Present	None

Prisons: Supporting Prisoners at Risk

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many Supporting Prisoners at Risk cases have been opened in each prison facility in each year since the introduction of the scheme.

(AQW 16108/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Supporting Prisoners at Risk (SPAR) process commenced in all three establishments on 1 December 2009, however the recording of SPARs was not introduced onto the Prisoner Record Information System (PRISM) until the 12 January 2010. The table below details the number of SPAR cases opened since 12 January 2010.

Year	Maghaberry	Magilligan	Hydebank Wood (Female)	Hydebank Wood (Male)
2010	425	32	80	133
2011	489	47	88	201
2012*	467	44	98	143

* Covers the period 1 January - 30 September 2012

Maghaberry Prison: Prisoner False Name

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how a person was prosecuted and held in HMP Maghaberry under a false name; and how this only came to light after the prisoner's death in custody.

(AQW 16110/11-15)

Mr Ford: The prisoner in question was committed into custody in HMP Maghaberry on 27 June 2012.

At the point of committal the identity of the person being committed is confirmed by a member of the PSNI or a member of the Northern Ireland Prison Service's Prisoner Escorting Court Custody Service (PECCS) staff, who has escorted the person to prison following their attendance at court.

On this occasion a member of PECCS identified the person being committed as having associated alias records. NIPS staff were aware that he was known to the PSNI by both names. It is not unknown for persons being committed into custody to have a number of "alias records".

Prisons: Supporting Prisoners at Risk

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many staff were trained in the Prisoners at Risk initiative; and whether this training was available to all staff.

(AQW 16111/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prisoner at Risk 1 (PAR1) process was replaced by the Supporting Prisoners at Risk (SPAR) process in 2009.

Since its launch in 2009, SPAR training has been delivered to over 600 staff including new recruits, discipline managers, discipline staff and staff in specialist and supporting functions.

Prior to the introduction of SPAR, PAR1 awareness sessions were made available to all staff.

Thomas Ward

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether Thomas Ward was ever placed in, or was resident in, Thompson House.
(AQW 16112/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Data Protection Act 1998 precludes the provision of information relating to placement or residence of an offender after his release from prison.

Sexual Abuse: Victims

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice whether any reassessment is taking place of the way that victims of sexual abuse are treated within the judicial process.
(AQW 16121/11-15)

Mr Ford: I recently published for consultation a new five year strategy for victims and witnesses of crime. This aims to provide better quality services, responsive to the needs of victims and witnesses, and secure a more positive experience for all those who engage with the criminal justice system.

In this respect it is important that victims of sexual abuse have access to a range of support services as they move through the criminal justice process and that the support offered is tailored to their individual needs, as much as possible.

A number of actions in the draft strategy will help secure this including the establishment of a new Victim and Witness Care Unit; a comprehensive formal assessment process to identify the needs of individual victims and witnesses; commencement of Article 16 of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, dealing with video recorded cross-examination and re-examination; and the development and implementation of a process to collate the experiences of victims of serious crime. Taken together this should improve the services provided to some of the most vulnerable in our society.

You will be aware that my Department and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety are the lead Departments in tackling sexual violence. The current "Tackling Sexual Violence and Abuse" Strategy will end in 2013. A new joint Domestic and Sexual Violence Strategy, is due to be published in Autumn 2013. The new joint strategy will be developed through consultation with key stakeholders and a public consultation in 2013.

Orange Halls: Attacks

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many Orange Halls have been attacked in each of the last five years.
(AQW 16122/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information is not available in the format requested. However, the following information details the number of attacks on Orange Halls and Apprentice Boys' Halls for each of the last five years.

	July 2007 to June 2008	July 2008 to June 2009	July 2009 to June 2010	July 2010 to June 2011	July 2011 to June 2012
No. of Attacks on Orange/ Apprentice Boys' Halls	63	61	72	58	32

Legal High Substances

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice whether he will consider changes in legislation on the availability of the legal high substances which are currently available in retail outlets.
(AQW 16136/11-15)

Mr Ford: The issue of legal highs, or new psychoactive substances, fall within the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, which is a reserved matter for the UK Government.

Illegal Fireworks

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many people have been (i) prosecuted for; and (ii) convicted of selling illegal fireworks, in the last three years.
(AQW 16141/11-15)

Mr Ford: Selling of illegal fireworks may be prosecuted under Regulation 4(2) and 13 of the Explosives (Fireworks) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999.

There have been no convictions for selling of illegal fireworks in the calendar years 2004 – 2009, the latest year for which conviction figures are available. There have been no prosecutions from 2004-2006, however prosecution data are not available for 2007 to 2009.

There have been prosecutions and convictions, however, for a number of fireworks related offences prosecuted under the Explosives (Fireworks) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999. These are given in the table below.

Number of prosecutions and convictions for firework related offences 2004-20091.

Year	Prosecutions	Convictions
2004	26	21
2005	18	17
2006	12	10
2007	N/A	48
2008	N/A	26
2009	N/A	21

1 The offences included are, unlawfully keeping fireworks for sale, throwing firework, unlawfully exposing fireworks for sale, possession of the "banger", possession of fireworks without a licence, possession of prohibited fireworks, selling fireworks without production of a licence, failing to keep proper records of fireworks sales, purchasing fireworks without a licence and using fireworks without a licence.

In the run-up to Hallowe'en last year, PSNI seized 9,760 fireworks. There were 24 arrests and 27 prosecutions were initiated. Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Justice how many police officers, who retired under the Patten severance scheme, have undergone employment training provided by the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust; and how many of those retired officers have subsequently taken up new employment.

(AQW 16143/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust (PRRT) provide business training courses for all retired police officers. PRRT does not record whether officers retired under the Patten severance scheme or whether retired officers have subsequently taken up new employment.

The table below details the total number of people for whom PRRT provided business training courses since 1 April 2007 to date. The information requested since PRRT was established on 2 March 1999 to 31 March 2007 is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
132	96	93	75	53	23

Prison Service: Nursing Staff

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many Northern Ireland Prison Service nursing staff, who are currently suspended or were dismissed over prisoner suicides, had been fully Prisoner At Risk trained prior to the respective incidents.

(AQW 16165/11-15)

Mr Ford: All Prison Officers who applied for and were found suitable at selection for the specialism of Hospital Officer, including those suspended or dismissed as a result of the death in custody in 2009 of a prisoner at Maghaberry prison, would have completed the nurses induction training which included training in the Prisoner at Risk (PAR) process, and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills (ASIST) training.

These suspensions pre-date the introduction of the Supporting Prisoners at Risk (SPAR) process which was introduced in December 2009.

Injury on Duty Awards

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice how many Injury on Duty awards have been appealed, and of those, how many resulted in the award being (i) varied upwards, (ii) varied downwards, and (iii) the same, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 16191/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department only holds detailed records of completed medical appeals from 2010. During this period 435 appeals were completed. Details of the outcomes are provided in the table below:-

Year	Upwards	Downwards	The same
2010	37	7	184
2011	17	9	87
2012	3	1	37

In addition to the above the decision to refuse an Injury on Duty award was overturned in 52 appeals and one award was removed on appeal.

Courts: Applied Language Solutions

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice whether the current failure of Applied Language Solutions to function in dispensing court interpreters in England and Wales is likely to have a knock on effect in this jurisdiction.

(AQW 16218/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is not expected to be any knock on effect in Northern Ireland of the problems associated with Applied Language Solutions in England and Wales as the Northern Ireland contract is with a different supplier.

The current interpretation services contract for face to face interpretation for the courts (both civil and criminal) along with all other criminal justice organisations in Northern Ireland was awarded to CONNECT- NICEM for foreign language interpretation and to Action on Hearing Loss for sign language interpretation. The contract has currently been running smoothly and there have been no complaints regarding the quality of service provided.

Holy Cross Primary School, North Belfast

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of (i) prosecutions; and (ii) convictions arising out of the protests at Holy Cross Primary School in North Belfast.

(AQW 16326/11-15)

Mr Ford: The information requested is not available. Court sentencing and conviction datasets do not hold information on the circumstances in which offences were committed.

Department for Regional Development

Translink: Abuse of Staff

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development how many successful prosecutions there have been for cases of anti-social behaviour and abuse of staff taken by Translink, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 15860/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Translink advise that in the case of NIR there are bye laws in place which facilitate them in pursuing prosecutions for a range of offences. The table below details the number of incidents that have been pursued successfully through the Court system for NI Railways:

Calendar Year	Anti-Social Behaviour	Abuse of Staff
2007	45	12
2008	35	3
2009	29	4
2010	29	13
2011	39	9

The above figures relate to the years in which the prosecutions were brought; the incidents themselves may well have taken place in a previous year.

In the case of Metro and Ulsterbus, such matters would routinely be pursued by PSNI as criminal matters. Translink does not hold details of successful prosecutions in this regard.

A5: Proposed Western Transport Corridor

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide an estimate of any financial benefits of the proposed A5 western transport corridor to the economy west of the Bann.

(AQW 15870/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Economic assessments associated with the A5 Western Transport Corridor scheme indicate that, over the standard 60-year assessment period, the financial benefits associated with implementing the entire A5 dualling project would be of the order of £1.072 billion.

This includes accident and time savings which generate benefits associated with existing use as well as wider economic benefits associated with regeneration of the local area.

Primary Schools: Coleraine

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 14848/11-15, to list the schools involved.
(AQW 15928/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the rural schools, in the Coleraine Borough Council area, which have requested additional traffic safety precautions in the vicinity of the school, in each of the last five years are:-

- Gorran Primary School, Garvagh;
- Ballyhackett Primary School, Castlerock;
- Culcrow Primary School, Coleraine;
- Ballerin Primary School, Garvagh; and
- St Patrick's & St Joseph's Primary School, Garvagh (two requests).

Road Traffic Accidents: B7

Mr Rogers asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to reduce the number of accidents occurring on the B7, at the black spot 500 meters south of the Derrylecka Road entrance, Newry.
(AQW 15939/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it currently has no plans to carry out any further improvements at the location you have described. The Member may be aware that an improvement scheme at the junction of Derryleckagh Road/Bridge Road, costing £172K, was completed in April 2012.

I can also advise that collision records supplied by the PSNI, covering the period 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2011, indicate that there has been one minor collision involving personal injury at this location.

Traffic Lights: Hollywood

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what new traffic lights are planned for the Hollywood area.
(AQW 15951/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would advise the Member that the work programme for the present financial year for Roads Service's Eastern Division may be viewed on-line by selecting 'Roads Service reports to councils' from the following web address:

http://www.drdsn.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/customer_information.htm

Work programmes for subsequent years have not yet been finalised.

Flooding

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development how regularly Roads Service officials co-operate with other Departments in relation to the increased problem of flooding in each divisional area.
(AQW 15971/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service officials are in regular contact, and co-operate fully, with other Departments in relation to flooding related issues in each divisional area. To facilitate this co-operation, Roads Service has established a network of Divisional Flood Liaison officers to provide clear channels of communications for other departments, local Councils and Area Health Emergency Planning Co-ordinators (EPCO's).

Roads Service also plays a key role in multi-agency flooding groups, such as the Flood Liaison group (FLG), which promotes co-operation and co-ordination between the main organisations required to respond to flooding incidents, namely: Rivers Agency, NI Water, Roads Service and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service.

This group meets at both Regional and Divisional level, maintaining and reviewing on an ongoing basis a schedule of combined and multi-agency flooding hotspots. This group discusses the issues associated with individual flooding instances and, where possible, agrees multi-agency solutions to either resolve the causes of flooding, or put forward flood alleviation schemes. Roads Service officials have regular contact with their counterparts in the FLG, and although the group only meets formally every six months, contact is maintained on an almost-weekly basis, with the facility to meet on an ad hoc basis when required, or following a flooding incident.

On a more operational level, the FLG has developed a Best Practice Guidelines document which provides a framework for the three drainage agencies to coordinate their response to flooding incidents. This document establishes lines of communications and reporting procedures across the various agencies.

Loughadian Brae, Poyntzpass: Sewerage System

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the unfinished sewerage system at Loughadian Brae, Poyntzpass, involving NI Water and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, including timescales and expected outcomes.
(AQW 15996/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the sewers and pumping station at Loughadian Brae, Poyntzpass are private because the developer did not enter into an agreement for the future adoption of the system. Since it is not part of the public sewerage system, NIW has no involvement in its maintenance or repair.

Loughadian Brae, Poyntzpass: Sewerage System

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development, in relation to the unfinished sewerage system in Loughadian Brae, Poyntzpass, (i) for an update on the investigations carried out by McAdam Design engineering company; (ii) to detail the nature of the investigations; and (iii) who instructed that the investigations be carried out.

(AQW 15997/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the developer did not enter into an agreement for the future adoption of the sewers and pumping station at Loughadian Brae, Poyntzpass and the system remains private. NIW therefore has no obligation to consider adoption of the sewerage system and no responsibility for its maintenance or repair. However, following a request from a public representative NIW did ask McAdam Design, who were undertaking work in the area, to carry out a visual inspection of the private pumping station to identify the properties served by it. This confirmed that the pumping station services three of the houses in the development and that it would not meet the standard specification or requirements for adoption by NIW.

Glen Road, West Belfast: Bus Shelters

Ms McCorley asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of bus shelters on the Glen Road, West Belfast; and (ii) what plans he has to increase the number.

(AQW 15998/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has confirmed that there are 2 bus shelters on the Glen Road.

Roads Service has further advised that it currently has no plans to provide any more bus shelters through its contract with Adshel.

Public Transport: Fare Evasion

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of prosecutions for fare evasion on (i) trains; and (ii) buses, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16003/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below details the number of prosecutions for fare evasion on trains in each of the last three years.

Year	2009	2010	2011
No. of prosecutions	22	12	6

The above figures relate to the calendar years in which the prosecutions were brought; the incidents themselves may well have taken place in a previous year.

As far as the bus companies are concerned, the nature of operations does not lend itself to fare evasion, as passengers boarding have to interact with the driver to either purchase a ticket or present a smartcard for validation. The introduction of an increasing range of such facilities over recent years has resulted in negligible levels of fare evasion.

Flood Prevention Measures: North Antrim

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to reinforce existing, and invest in more, flood prevention measures in anticipation of flooding in North Antrim in the upcoming months.

(AQW 16006/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that 12 locations in the North Antrim area are in the process of being investigated by representatives from Northern Ireland Water, Roads Service, and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Rivers Agency, to establish the causes of recent flooding and decide what measures could be considered by each Department to reduce the risk. Until the results of these investigations are known, I am unable to commit to any programme of works or investment by my Department.

I have also been advised by the Department for Agriculture and Regional Development that Rivers Agency plans, as a result of its investigations, to undertake flood alleviation schemes at Sea View Terrace, Waterfoot and at Knocknacarry, Cushendun, in this financial year.

Comber Bypass

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 13777/11-15, whether it is still the case that no major maintenance work has been carried out on the Comber Bypass since it was opened to traffic and that the cost of routine maintenance is not available for individual roads.

(AQW 16040/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that officials in my Department's Roads Service have confirmed that no major maintenance work has been carried out on the Comber Bypass since it was opened to traffic.

In addition, as indicated in my recent response to the Member's question (AQW 13777/11-15 refers), I can advise that details of the cost of carrying out routine maintenance for individual roads are not available, as expenditure on such activities is recorded on a District Council basis.

Parking Enforcement Services

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the tender for the delivery of parking enforcement services.

(AQW 16041/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department awarded the new contract for the provision of parking enforcement and car park management services to NSL Ltd on 19 July 2012 and it commenced on 30 October 2012.

Biomass Heating Systems

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development whether feasibility studies have been conducted to assess the potential savings that could be achieved by switching his Department's buildings to biomass heating.

(AQW 16053/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Pilot projects to assess the suitability of the use of biomass have been installed at three sites within the NICS Office Estate. None of these pilot projects are taking place within buildings for which DRD is responsible.

Hedges

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent on cutting overgrown hedge along roads, in each of the last two financial years.

(AQW 16062/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the information requested is not held in a format that can be readily extracted to provide figures specifically for spend on hedge cutting.

Roads Service has further advised that the vast majority of roadside hedges belong to adjacent landowners and responsibility for maintenance lies with these landowners. When hedges become overgrown causing an obstruction or danger to road users, Roads Service officials consult with the relevant landowners to have them cut, and in some cases will serve Notices under The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993.

Traffic-calming Measures: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent on traffic calming measures in the North Down area, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16071/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I would refer the Member to my response to AQW 12904/11-15.

Parking Enforcement Services

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department has signed a new contract with NSL to provide parking enforcement services; and to provide the details.

(AQW 16080/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department awarded a new contract for the provision of parking enforcement and car park management services to NSL Ltd on 19 July 2012. This contract commenced on 30 October 2012 and will operate for an initial term of four years, with an option to extend up to a maximum total period of 10 years.

Mobile Traffic Wardens

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has undertaken a pilot scheme involving mobile traffic wardens; and to detail the cost of the scheme.

(AQW 16081/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has not undertaken a pilot scheme involving mobile traffic wardens.

However, I can advise the Member that Mobile Traffic Attendants have been deployed since the commencement of the initial parking enforcement contract in October 2006. Currently, Traffic Attendants are routinely deployed to their patrol locations by various means, including by foot, by car or moped.

Bus Lanes: Removal of Vehicles

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department, through NSL, has the power to remove vehicles obstructing bus lanes or parked dangerously, and, if not, who has the power to remove these vehicles.

(AQW 16083/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Under the Traffic Management (Northern Ireland) Order 2005, my Department has the power to remove vehicles on a public road, or in a parking place, under the following conditions:

- (a) a traffic attendant has fixed a penalty charge notice to the vehicle; or
- (b) an amount is recoverable from the owner of the vehicle under Article 15 and prescribed conditions are satisfied.

Currently, my Department only removes vehicles for debt recovery purposes, under condition (b) above.

However, under condition (a) above, officials will be developing procedures that will allow my Department to commence removal of vehicles illegally parked on bus lanes and urban clearways. I hope to introduce this in 2013 through my Department's contract with NSL.

Roads/Footpaths

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department intends to take to improve the joined-up approach with companies such as Phoenix Gas to prevent newly surfaced roads and footpaths being dug up.

(AQW 16097/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that my Department's Roads Service already co-ordinates work with Phoenix Natural Gas and other utility companies to minimise the risk of newly surfaced roads and footpaths being dug up. However, some utility works cannot be planned sufficiently far in advance so as to avoid the excavation of some newly surfaced roads and footpaths. Such utility work would include a request for a new customer connection, which is a more frequent occurrence for companies, such as Phoenix Natural Gas, which have a growing customer base, than for those utility companies which already provide a connection to virtually every property.

Traffic-calming Measures

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the procedures involved in the introduction of traffic calming measures, in particular when objections have been raised by local residents.

(AQW 16149/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service's traffic calming policy aims to manage vehicle speed and driver behaviour, primarily in order to reduce collisions, especially those involving vulnerable road users. Traffic calming will be considered for residential and urban areas, thereby reducing the speed and volume of local and through traffic, consequently improving their environmental quality and local amenity value.

The assessment process to prioritise traffic calming schemes takes account of collision history, volume of traffic and its speed and also environmental factors.

Those residents most likely to be affected by a traffic calming scheme, are consulted before it is implemented. In addition, the Emergency Services, Translink, Councils, etc are normally consulted during the design process of schemes, and statutory notices of intention to proceed with schemes are placed in the local press and at appropriate points on the road, as required by Article 65 of The Roads (NI) Order 1993.

When a scheme is proposed, frontagers directly affected by the proposals are normally notified by letter and/or leaflet with an accompanying map outlining the proposed scheme. For larger, complex, or more controversial schemes, it is sometimes appropriate to meet with local residents' groups or hold public exhibitions in the affected area.

When individuals object to a traffic calming proposal (and the objection is made within the specified period), Roads Service gives full and sympathetic consideration to the objections and will try to address any concerns raised as quickly as possible.

In all instances, Roads Service will write to the individuals concerned explaining why the scheme is required, what precisely is being proposed and the implications for traffic in the area. The letter also addresses the objections or points raised and requests that the objector considers withdrawing his/her objection.

If, following correspondence with the objector, it is not possible to overcome objections, Roads Service may decide to:

- hold a public inquiry;
- proceed with the scheme without recourse to a public inquiry;
- re-advertise the scheme and invite objections or representations anew; or
- abandon the scheme.

Whistle-blowing/Grievances

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development how many (i) grievance cases have been taken; and (ii) whistleblowing complaints have been made, against (a) his Department; and (b) its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years; and at what cost to the public purse.

(AQW 16156/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The numbers of grievance cases within my Department in each of the last five years are set out in the table below. No central record of whistleblowing complaints concerning the Department is maintained.

Year	Number of grievance cases
2008	19
2009	26
2010	14
2011	11
2012	27 (to date)

Over this period, the total cost to the public purse in terms of compensation awarded by the Department as a result of grievances amounted to £5,886.

As far as the Department's Arm's-Length Bodies are concerned, the numbers of grievance and whistleblowing cases within Translink and NI Water during each of the last five years were detailed in my recent answers to AQW 15212/11-15 and AQW 15148/11-15 respectively.

I am advised that, over this period, no compensation in relation to internal grievances or whistleblowing complaints was awarded by Translink. In the case of NI Water, costs of £40,000 were incurred on grievance cases with no costs incurred as a result of whistleblowing complaints.

Magherafelt Bypass

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Magherafelt Bypass.

(AQO 2799/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As the Member may be aware, the focus of the Strategic Road Improvement (SRI) Programme in the current Budget period to 2015 is on the delivery of the A8, A5 and A2 dual carriageway schemes. My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Magherafelt Bypass is at an advanced stage, with the Notice of Intention to Proceed, associated with the Environmental Statement and the Direction Order for the scheme published in 2010. The timing of procurement and construction of Magherafelt Bypass will, however, be dependent on subsequent budgetary settlements.

Free Public Transport: Schoolchildren

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration he has given to extending free public transport to all school children.

(AQO 2802/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: At present children under 16 are entitled to half-price concession fares on public transport. School children over 16 can get one third off their public transport fares by using a y-Link smartcard. A large number of children are also eligible for free transport to and from school but via Department of Education funding arrangements. Given the current pressures on my budget I am not in a position to extend free public transport to all school children.

Concessionary Fares schemes currently in place currently costs around £30 million per annum and over the next few years this budget will come under significant pressure.

A5: Costs of Delay

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the cost implications resulting from the delay in the commencement of the A5 scheme.

(AQO 2804/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am advised by my Department's Roads Service that the main construction contracts were due to start in mid-October 2012, and the delay in commencing construction as programmed will certainly result in increased costs in a number of areas. Assuming that there is no change to the total construction period, there would be direct, quantified inflationary increases arising from month-on-month delays to the start of construction. The project team will attempt to mitigate the impact of any delay; however, the initial assessment of a delay to the starting date is in the order of £700K to £750K per month.

Railways: Coleraine to Londonderry

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made on the relaying of the Coleraine to Londonderry rail link, including an estimate of the completion date.

(AQO 2808/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is closely monitoring progress with the relaying of the Coleraine to Londonderry rail link and is represented at Project Board Meetings. Work on site commenced as planned in July 2012 and I am pleased to report that the contractors are making good progress. The work is on programme to be completed by April 2013 when services on the line will resume as planned.

A2: Greenisland

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the scheme to alleviate congestion on the A2 at Greenisland.

(AQO 2809/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As the Member will be aware, following a series of meetings with Executive colleagues and a review of spending priorities across my department for the budget period, I issued a statement on 14 February 2012, announcing that funding had been secured for delivery of this scheme within the 2011-15 budget period.

Following this, my Department's Roads Service commenced the procurement process for the scheme which included a pre-qualification competition to select suitable tenderers followed by the tendering procedure for the Design and Build contract. This tendering procedure is ongoing.

Subject to successful completion of the procurement process, it is anticipated that the construction stage will commence in early 2013 and will take approximately 2 years to complete.

My Department has recently acquired the lands necessary to construct the scheme, through the publication of the Vesting Order on 31 October 2012.

A26: Upgrade

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the upgrading of the A26 north of Glarryford.

(AQO 2810/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that development of this scheme commenced in 2006.

The draft Vesting Order, draft Direction Order, draft Stopping-Up of Private Access Order, and the Environmental Statement were published on 20 March 2012 initiating the formal consultation period for the scheme, which ran until 11 May 2012. Although my Department received only a small number of objections to this scheme, I decided that it was important to hold a Public Inquiry to discuss and debate the issues of contention. The Public Inquiry will commence on 5 November 2012 at the Tullyglass House Hotel in Ballymena.

As the Member may be aware, the funding levels within the current budget do not allow for construction to start before April 2015 with the focus of the Strategic Road Improvement (SRI) programme in the current Budget period to 2015 on the delivery of the A8, A5 and A2 dual carriageway schemes.

Beyond 2015 the recently published Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011 - 2021 envisages the A26 being delivered as part of a package of high priority highway schemes, using alternative finance. Roads Service will investigate this delivery option on the basis of affordability, relative value for money and compliance with public expenditure rules.

Progression of the A26 scheme will therefore be subject to a successful outcome to the Public Inquiry and confirmation of funding in future budget settlements.

Department for Social Development

Derelict Buildings: Town Centres

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Social Development what grants or funding are available to assist property owners with the re-development of derelict buildings in town centres, particularly in rural areas.

(AQW 15805/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): My Department's physical regeneration programmes are delivered in urban areas which are defined by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency's 'Report of the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group' as being settlements of 4,500 people and over.

Urban Regeneration Grants can be applied for by owners of eligible properties. These grants are targeted at bringing derelict or vacant Town Centre properties back into productive use and at enhancing the commercial viability of existing properties. The scheme operates in specific priority urban areas with the aim of encouraging their economic, physical and social regeneration by:

- encouraging investment in property to improve the economy;
- assisting the expansion of local businesses and the creation of jobs; and,
- improving the appearance of existing buildings and supporting the erection of new buildings on derelict or run down sites.

My Department also operates the pilot ReStore programme which aims to direct funding at distinct commercial districts and small independent retailers and traders. The initiative seeks to provide technical and funding assistance to design and improve streetscapes and building frontages and promote the areas as shopping destinations. Several pilot schemes have recently been rolled out in Northern Ireland with the possibility of further funding for similar projects.

Universal Credit: Citizens Advice

Mrs Dobson asked Minister for Social Development, given that the moves towards Universal Credit will necessitate the purchase of a considerable number of scanners and other computer related equipment, whether he is giving consideration to providing additional funding to the Citizens Advice Bureau.

(AQW 15908/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department provides funding in the region of £3m per annum to a number of organisations to support advice provision, including Citizens Advice Bureau. We are currently considering what further support our customers require in relation to Universal Credit. Consultation with customers and stakeholders has already begun and officials will shortly be meeting with representatives from the voluntary and community sector to discuss the role they can play in implementing Universal Credit in Northern Ireland.

Warm Homes Scheme: Building Control Fees

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development what impact the removal by local councils of the building control fees wavier on loft insulation, installed under the Warm Homes Scheme, will have on fuel poverty.

(AQW 15949/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Building Control professionals have expressed concerns about the lack of ventilation in roof spaces which is leading to serious problems with damp. They argue that there is a need to inspect insulation given the focus there has been in recent years on roof space insulation. Article 13(2)(e) of The Building Regulations (Northern Ireland Order) 1979 authorises district councils to charge prescribed fees for inspection of roof space insulation. There is no mandatory obligation to do so but where District Councils decide to charge fees they can. The fees that are applicable are those set by the Department of Finance and Personnel. However, District Councils may absorb the fee i.e. pay the fee itself using powers provided by Section 115 of The Local Government Act 1972.

A dispute process is underway between the Warm Homes Scheme managers and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to ascertain who is obliged to pay the Building Control Fee and this matter has not been concluded.

I am confident that the Public Service Agreement target of assisting 9,000 vulnerable homes with energy efficiency improvements will be met. The commitment of both the Warm Homes Scheme managers and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has ensured that, since the contract was awarded in 2009, the target has consistently been exceeded.

Housing Executive Properties: Fitting of Showers

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development why does it take up to 40 weeks for a shower to be fitted in a Housing Executive property, even after a recommendation from an occupational therapist.

(AQW 15950/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Demand for housing adaptations has risen as a result of increasing numbers of elderly and disabled people opting to live at home rather than being cared for in residential care facilities. Upwards of 11,000 showers/other shower adaptations were completed between 2004 and 2012.

The Housing Executive currently classifies the need for shower adaptations as either "urgent" or "non-urgent", based on arrangements in place with the Community Occupational Therapy Service. The Service Standard for delivery of "urgent" showers is 10 weeks and 40 weeks for "non-urgent" showers.

However, an Inter-Departmental Review of Housing Adaptation Services has been jointly approved by myself and the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety and it is intended that this will be considered by my Executive colleagues this month. One of the recommendations emanating from that is to initiate a review to develop common standards of customer service across all housing tenures and Health and Social Care Trusts. On that basis, historic performance targets (such as the 40 week "non-urgent" shower target) are being reviewed to reflect current operational performance standards.

Community Groups: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how much funding his Department has awarded to community groups in North Down, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 15985/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Details of funding awarded by my Department to community groups in North Down, in each of the last five years, are as follows:

2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
£268,937.88	£437,755.12	£477,541.84	£530,903.19	£526,024.69

My Department also provides funding to community groups through the Community Support Programme, a jointly funded programme between DSD and councils, with councils taking responsibility for allocation of funding in accordance with their local Community Support Plans. Whilst North Down Borough Council provides Community Support Programme funding to community groups in North Down, a breakdown of DSD funding from this programme is not readily available.

Public Realm Scheme: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the work his Department has planned to carry out in the North Down constituency in 2012/13.

(AQW 15986/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department is currently working with North Down Borough Council on a major public realm scheme for both Bangor and Holywood. The Council has appointed an Integrated Consultancy Team to develop the concept design and complete an economic appraisal and this report is due to be completed in December 2012. When completed the economic appraisal will be submitted to my Department for consideration and subject to funding being available and all necessary approvals, the schemes will commence on the ground in January 2014.

The process of commissioning a consultancy team to carry out a masterplan for Holywood Town Centre and this assignment will commence in February 2013.

Under its Neighbourhood Renewal programme, the Department continues to work in Kilcooley in Bangor where, in addition to the programme of measures already underway, a number of new projects are being advanced in conjunction with the South Eastern Education and Library Board, South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust and Kilcooley Allotments Ltd. These include a new literacy and numeracy programme with the necessary Information Technology facilities to complement this together with the provision of new outdoor play equipment in Kilcooley Primary School, new Family Health and Wellbeing and Men's Health & Education Projects and a Healthy Living Centre Project to compliment the Kilcooley Allotments initiative.

Under the Areas at Risk programme, work is ongoing with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the local community association in Beechfield in Donaghadee to explore the potential for carrying out some minor environmental improvements within the Beechfield estates. This will complement the programme of community capacity work already underway in the area.

Under the Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme, funding has been allocated to Rathgill Community Association and Bangor YMCA to fund community, economic or social renewal projects in Rathgill Estate, Bangor and the Harbour, Bangor respectively.

The Housing Executive advises that its maintenance programme for the North Down area for 2012/13 is as follows:

Scheme	Dwellings	Start Date
Lisnabreen/Clanmorris double glazing	168	On site (August 2012)
Bangor (Rathgill/Kilcooley/Loughview) double glazing	167	On site (October 2012)
Whitehill double glazing	257	November 2012
Bangor medium-rise flats fire doors	84	January 2013
Bangor low-rise flats fires	632	January 2013
Bangor frost stats	94	November 2012
Bangor smoke detector replacements	153	On site (August 2012)
Bangor district carbon monoxide detectors	318	November 2012

In 2012/13, my Department's Voluntary and Community Unit is providing funding totalling £142,149.10 to help support the work of the Voluntary and Community Sector in the North Down Constituency. This is broken down as follows:

Organisation	Funding Programme	Funding Award
Hollywood Family Trust	Community Investment Fund	£61,786.00
North Down Community Network	Community Investment Fund	£49,890.74
Kilcooley Women's Centre	Women's Centres Childcare Fund	£30,472.36

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Houses in Multiple Occupancy: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses of multiple occupancy are registered in North Down.
(AQW 15988/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has registered 35 Houses in Multiple Occupancy in North Down.

Housing Executive Double-glazing Scheme

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the double-glazing window replacement scheme for Northern Ireland Housing Executive properties.

(AQW 16039/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has put in place a programme to install double glazing windows in all of its dwellings by 2015. To date the Housing Executive and its contractors have already started double glazing and external cyclical maintenance schemes, which include double glazing, for 4,260 dwellings. Subject to the remaining schemes in this year's programme going on site, including 13 double glazing schemes recently approved by me, the Housing Executive will have started work on over 9,000 homes this year. The remainder of the Double Glazing programme will be delivered in 2013/14 and 2014/15 through a new separate contract which will be in place by the end of this financial year.

Housing Executive: Evictions

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive tenants have been evicted for anti-social behaviour, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 16066/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive tenancy agreements do not capture the number of people resident at a property. However, the table below details the number of Housing Executive properties recovered, on the grounds of anti-social behaviour for the period 2007/08 to 2011/12.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Total	33	43	54	62	51

Welfare Reform

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development to publish the written communication from Lord Freud detailing the commitments given in relation to the Welfare Reform Bill.

(AQW 16088/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is not normal practice to routinely publish correspondence between Ministers. However, I would re-affirm what I said in my statement to the Assembly on 22 October 2012, that Lord Freud has given me a written commitment that the Universal Credit IT system will have specific functionality to:

- automate the payment of housing costs to both social and private sector landlords;
- split the payment between parties in a household; and
- make bi-monthly payments of Universal Credit.

He has also confirmed that this functionality will be incorporated in time to allow me to launch Universal Credit here in April 2014, so ensuring Northern Ireland maintains parity on this social security issue with the rest of the United Kingdom.

Warm Homes Scheme: Indigenous Renewables Industry

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development, given that there is an indigenous renewables industry, why there is no mention of renewable heat on his Department's website advertising the Warm Homes Scheme.

(AQW 16089/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive manages the Warm Homes Scheme on behalf of my Department. For heating installations, my Department's preferred option is gas where gas is available. Wood pellet boilers however, are offered in exceptional circumstances, commonly in rural areas where there is no alternative to oil.

I have asked the Housing Executive to ensure that information on the Warm Homes website is amended to include reference to the availability of wood pellet boilers.

District Heating Systems

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development what assessment has been made of the benefits of the use of district heating systems for social housing projects, including the impact on fuel poverty.

(AQW 16090/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has considered District Heating but has advised that in order for such a system to be viable, it would require a critical mass of dwellings. Due to house sales, the Housing Executive does not have sufficient numbers of dwellings in housing estates to make this financially viable. The one exception to this relates to high rise flats and the Housing Executive is currently assessing an Ecopod system which is a form of District Heating for such flats.

Housing Associations similarly advised that they have an insufficient concentration of properties across their respective portfolios to make District Heating schemes viable.

However, Oaklee Homes Group has advised that consideration had been given to a District Heating system for 70 properties in Carryduff but the relative small scale, remote generation location and distribution of heat and water would make it difficult to be cost effective. It is for these reasons as well as advice from consultants that Oaklee decided against installing such a system.

Clanmil Housing Association currently has a District Heating system in an eco village in Lisburn, but the bio mass wood chip system now has to be replaced and they are planning to provide gas as a substitute for their tenants.

Fort George Master Plan

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development when the Fort George Masterplan will be fully implemented. (AQW 16150/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Development Framework was submitted to the Planning Service in July 2012 as an application for outline planning permission for the entire Fort George site. The consideration of the application is ongoing and my Department and Ilex hold regular meetings with the Planning Service to address emerging issues.

The implementation of the Development Framework will involve infrastructure works and the engagement of private sector partners to construct the planned development. The timescale for implementation will be over a longer period of a minimum of 10 years.

Single Room Rate

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in East Belfast will be affected by the introduction of the single room rate. (AQW 16190/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Shared Accommodation Rate which was extended to include persons aged 25-34 years was introduced on 1 January 2012. The number of single persons aged 25-34 currently claiming housing benefit in East Belfast is 336, of these 178 are currently affected by the Shared Accommodation Rate.

Universal Credit: Parity

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the effect of the delay of universal credit from October 2013 to April 2014; and to explain how this does not represent a breach of parity with Great Britain. (AQW 16321/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As agreed with Lord Freud, to enable the development of the necessary IT functionality to support payment flexibilities, I have decided to launch Universal Credit in Northern Ireland in April 2014. This timing has the added advantage that any lessons learned in the early stages of the UK-wide roll-out can be reflected in local implementation and delivery.

The implementation of Universal Credit in Great Britain commences in April 2013 with early pathfinder activity in the greater Manchester area followed by a phased national roll-out commencing from October 2013. I have agreed with Lord Freud that the launch in Northern Ireland will be a part of the phased UK-wide roll-out, and as such, that this does not constitute any breach in social security parity with other parts of the United Kingdom.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 16 November 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Welfare Reform Advisory Group

Mr Durkan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 14370/11-15, whether any departmental staff are members of the Welfare Reform Advisory Group.

(AQW 15099/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): Departmental staff are not members of the group.

Officials from the Department have provided secretariat support to the meetings of the Group and supported the Group in making arrangements for meetings.

We would also confirm that the group you refer to is known as the "Advisory Group on Alleviating Hardship" and not the Welfare Reform Advisory Group.

Civil Servants: Suspensions

Lord Morrow asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many members of staff their his Department are currently (i) suspended due to internal investigations, and (ii) not suspended whilst facing internal investigations.

(AQW 15853/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We can confirm that no members of staff in OFMDFM are currently (i) suspended due to internal investigations, and (ii) not suspended whilst facing internal investigations.

St Lucia Site, Omagh

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) whether ownership of St Lucia Barracks, Omagh is to be passed from the Ministry of Defence; (ii) whether they are planning for the Ministry of Defence to gift the site to their Department; and (iii) what future use do they envisage for the former military site.

(AQW 15892/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: On 15 April 2012, part of St Lucia Barracks was gifted to OFMDFM under the Hillsborough Castle Agreement. The listed buildings and parade ground at St Lucia remain the property of the Ministry of Defence (MOD). It has not been possible for the MOD to transfer that part of the site to OFMDFM for legal reasons, although we understand that discussions are ongoing in relation to this and that MOD hopes to resolve the difficulties.

OFMDFM officials will maintain contact with the owners of the listed part of the site, so that any options which involve both portions of the site can be explored.

The purpose of the gifting sites under the Hillsborough Castle Agreement is to raise capital revenue to meet Executive pressures. Officials are currently considering options for disposal of the site to maximise yield and in the short to medium term are looking at ways to minimise costs and achieve some financial or social return. OFMDFM has established a Strategic Sites Oversight Board to undertake strategic management of the former military sites owned by the department and this will make recommendations to the Departmental Board and Ministers in due course in relation to the future of the sites.

Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry: Cost

Mr Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what are the estimated financial implications for the cost of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry, in light of the recent decision to extend the date of possible instances of abuse to 1922.

(AQW 15903/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Victims and survivors whose experiences of abuse were before 1945 were already eligible to come to the Acknowledgment Forum. It is anticipated that the Judicial Inquiry will investigate primarily those institutions and periods where allegations of institutional abuse come to light through the Acknowledgment Forum.

It is very unlikely, therefore, that the change of the 1945 parameter to 1922 would impact on the overall cost of the Inquiry.

Ebrington Barracks, Derry

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when opportunities for development of Ebrington Barracks, Derry will be opened to the market.

(AQW 16151/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM is working closely with Ilex on the development of Ebrington. The process of initiating a Development Framework to secure outline planning permission for the legacy usage of the site is underway which will open up the site to full market potential. Ilex has received almost 40 expressions of interest for developments at the site to date and we are assisting Ilex in agreeing a process to identify market interest in some of the existing building stock through non-binding expressions of interest. This process will inform the Development Framework and ensure that, at second-stage, direct market opportunities can be tailored to underpin delivery of the One Plan.

In advance of the Development Frameworks, we are working closely with Ilex to facilitate uses of the site to maintain interest and momentum in the development of Ebrington.

Delivering Social Change: Signature Projects

Mr Hilditch asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the progress of the recently announced Signature Projects.

(AQO 2764/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: On 10 October 2012 we announced £26 million pounds of additional investment in the form of six Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes.

These Signature Programmes are designed to tackle multi-generational poverty and to improve children's health, wellbeing, educational and life opportunities.

It is also the intention that the programmes will stimulate economic growth and tackle dereliction through encouraging social enterprise in communities.

Following on from our announcement, a Senior Responsible Owner has now been identified for each of the Programmes and lead departments are currently developing Delivery Plans and Expenditure Profiles, with the aim of having work rolled out at the earliest possible opportunity.

St Lucia Site, Omagh

Mr Hussey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to detail the current status in relation to the gifting of the St Lucia Barracks in Omagh; (ii) whether they have been involved in discussions with the Ministry of Defence in relation to the gifting of this site to the Executive; and (iii) the expected date that the negotiations between the leaseholders and Ministry of Defence will be completed.

(AQW 16317/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM currently owns a portion of the St Lucia Barracks site consisting of open ground, workshops and former military housing, which was gifted by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) in 2011 under the Hillsborough Castle Agreement. The remainder of the site was not gifted because of legal impediments.

OFMDFM officials have maintained contact with MOD in relation to the legal discussions on the remainder of the site, and possible future scenarios, but without any commitment on either side.

The legal negotiations are a matter for MOD rather than OFMDFM and we understand these are still a matter for due process.

St Lucia Site, Omagh

Mr Hussey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether departmental officials have undertaken any preliminary discussions with officials from Omagh District Council in relation to the potential use of St Lucia Barracks; and whether officials have been in discussion with the Department for Social Development, since the completion of the Omagh Town Centre Masterplan in 2009, in relation to the development of this site.

(AQW 16318/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM officials have undertaken discussions with Omagh District Council and the Department for Social Development in relation to St Lucia Barracks. These discussions have included consideration of the St Lucia site itself, the links to the neighbouring Lisanelly site and the context of St Lucia in the wider development of Omagh Town Centre.

Officials will continue to liaise with the Council, DSD and any other stakeholders on the future of the site.

Delivering Social Change: Next Steps

Mr Molloy asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the next steps in the Delivering Social Change agenda. (AQO 2767/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: On 10 October 2012 we announced £26 million pounds of additional investment in the form of six Delivering Social Change Signature Programmes.

These Signature Programmes are designed to tackle multi-generational poverty and to improve children's health, wellbeing, educational and life opportunities.

It is also the intention that the programmes will stimulate economic growth and tackle dereliction through encouraging social enterprise in communities.

Following on from our announcement a Senior Responsible Owner has now been identified for each of the Programmes and lead departments are currently developing Delivery Plans and Expenditure Profiles, with the aim of having work rolled out at the earliest possible opportunity.

Strategic Investment Board

Ms Boyle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the Strategic Investment Board. (AQO 2769/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Strategic Investment Board (SIB) supports the Executive in the delivery of complex projects, helping to accelerate the ongoing transformation of the region into an excellent location in which to live, work and invest.

SIB is currently supporting some 40 departmental projects and programmes with an estimated capital value of £2.6 billion. This support includes the provision of Project Directors for Desertcreat College; Colin Town Regeneration; the Lisanelly Educational Campus, the Maze Long Kesh Development Corporation; the Belfast Rapid Transit Project; the implementation of the Education and Skills Authority; the Apprentice Boys of Derry Heritage Centre; the Regional Stadiums Programme and the Prisons Estates Strategy. SIB is also providing support to Belfast and Derry City Councils; the Primary Health Infrastructure Programme and the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre. It is supporting Ilex, Derry City Council and the Culture Company by providing project management support for work on an exhibition space and a temporary pavilion at Ebrington Barracks and by facilitating the secondment to Derry City Council of Dermot McLaughlin as Project Director for the City of Culture 2013.

On 8 October 2012 the Executive published the Investment Strategy for 2011-21. This Strategy is the expression of the Executive's long-term vision for investment to renew and upgrade our infrastructure. It sets out a rolling programme of investment for a ten-year period that offers a platform to deliver the objectives of the Programme for Government.

The Executive has established the Asset Management Unit (AMU) within SIB to deliver a programme of asset disposals and to develop a public sector asset management strategy. Since it was fully established in September 2011, AMU has undertaken a rigorous examination of opportunities to extract value from assets with departments. AMU successfully met its target of £2.5m of disposals for 2011/12. AMU is on course to achieve its £25.2m realisation target for asset disposals in 2012/13.

As part of its support to the Executive in the reform and delivery of effective public services, SIB has prepared a Social Clauses Toolkit which will be launched shortly. It is leading, with CPD, the forthcoming review of public procurement which was announced by the DFP Minister in the Assembly on 8 October. We have also directed SIB to bring forward detailed proposals for the provision of additional resources for infrastructure projects through the use of private and alternative finance mechanisms.

Attorney General: Role of

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to outline the reasons for commissioning a review into the role of the Attorney General; (ii) for their assessment of the findings or recommendations contained in the report; and (iii) whether there are any other on-going reviews of which Assembly Committees should be aware. (AQW 16448/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive agreed in 2010 that the newly appointed Attorney General, in addition to his wider constitutional and legal functions, should act as chief legal adviser to the Executive and departments. It was decided at that time that aspects of this legal adviser role would be reviewed after a period of operation.

Earlier this year, in our capacity as joint Chairs of the Executive, we invited the Rt Hon Dame Elish Angiolini DBE QC, who has particular experience as a Law Officer in a devolved administration, to carry out this limited review of the Attorney General's legal adviser relationship with the Executive and departments. We have recently received her report on an 'in confidence' basis, and we are currently considering it.

Her report deals with internal Executive procedures and arrangements for the provision of legal advice to Ministers and departments. We do not accept the implication that any Assembly Committee needed to be aware of the review.

Civil Servants: Suspensions

Lord Morrow asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many people employed in their Department are (i) suspended from work pending criminal charges or investigations; and (ii) continuing in their duties whilst facing criminal charges or investigations.

(AQW 16466/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We can confirm that no members of staff in OFMDFM are currently:

- (i) suspended from work pending criminal charges or investigations;
- (ii) continuing in their duties whilst facing criminal charges or investigations.

Disposal of Assets

Mr McNarry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the items that their Department disposed of for a monetary return in (i) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12.

(AQW 16539/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In 2010/11 there was a single land disposal for £10,000. No other assets were sold during the financial year.

In financial year 2011/12 there were no asset disposals for consideration.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Whistle-blowing/Grievances

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many (i) grievance cases have been taken; and (ii) whistleblowing complaints have been made, against (a) her Department; and (b) its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years; and at what cost to the public purse.

(AQW 16175/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Details in respect of the number of grievances taken and whistleblowing complaints made against DARD and its Arms Length Bodies are detailed in the attached tables. The cost of handling grievance cases is not recorded and is therefore not available. The cost of handling whistleblowing complaints is included where this is known.

Details regarding the number of grievances taken and whistleblowing complaints made in the last 5 financial years against the Department and its Arms Length Bodies are as follows:

Number of Grievances taken against:-		1/01/08*	2008//09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Department- DARD	Number	10	24	34	17	16
	Cost	Not held	Not held	Not held	Not held	Not held
Arms Length Bodies	Number	1	Nil	4	3	3
	Cost	Not held	Not held	Not held	Not held	Not held
Total number of grievances	Number	11	24	38	20	19
	Cost	Not held	Not held	Not held	Not held	Not held

Number of Whistleblowing complaints made:-		1/01/08*	2008//09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Department - DARD	Number	Nil	Nil	Nil	1	nil
	Cost	-	-	-	16k	-
Arms Length Bodies	Number	Nil	2	3	1	3
	Cost	-	8k	51k	Not held	Not held

Number of Whistleblowing complaints made:-		1/01/08*	2008//09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Total number of Whistleblowing cases	Number	Nil	2	3	2	3
	Cost	-	8K	51K	16k	Not held

* Details only held from January 2008

Countryside Management Scheme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given that the Countryside Management Scheme has now been in operation for more than three years, will her Department have the ability to fulfil its undertaking to provide grant assistance to comply fully with the requirement to restrict grazing on portions of land, and when this will take place.

(AQW 16179/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Funding has been made available to participants in agri-environment schemes, including the Countryside Management Scheme, to allow them to comply with the requirement to restrict grazing through the provision of protective fencing. Recently some participants in the NI Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS) have requested further approvals for additional work. My Department plans to offer these in 2013.

Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute: Survey of Sea Angling

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why the Irish Federation of Sea Anglers was not fully consulted on the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute survey of sea angling.

(AQW 16199/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Agri-Food and Bio-Sciences Institute (AFBI) survey of sea angling is a public consultation exercise which uses an internet questionnaire to gather information on the fishing activities and views of sea anglers.

The questionnaire is specifically aimed at individual anglers and was constructed in consultation with economists to gain results representative of the full range of sea anglers, including those who are not members of angling clubs or organisations. It is already generating interest and receiving broad support from a range of sea anglers.

The need for a widely targeted sea angling questionnaire was discussed with the Irish Federation of Sea Anglers (IFSA) on a number of occasions before the survey was launched and the Irish Federation of Sea Anglers is certainly very welcome, collectively and as individual members, to participate and respond to the questionnaire and make their views known.

The survey will provide an overview of the economic activity, fishing habits and attitudes of our sea angling community. AFBI will be content to discuss the results of the questionnaire with stakeholders as requested.

Animal Cruelty

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the benefit of introducing a register or database for persons convicted of animal cruelty.

(AQW 16214/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Welfare of Animals Act 2011 is enforced by my Department in respect of farmed animals, by Councils in respect of other animals and by the PSNI in respect of animal fighting offences and animal welfare offences where other criminal activity is involved.

The 2011 Act allows the Courts to disqualify a person convicted of causing unnecessary suffering to an animal from owning animals, either permanently or for such a period as the Court thinks fit. Provisions in the 2011 Act ensure that a person who is disqualified from owning animals cannot keep, or participate in the keeping of animals, or be party to any arrangements to control or influence the way in which animals are kept.

As the Act is enforced by three different agencies, I believe it is important that each agency has ready access to up-to-date information in order to check if a person has been disqualified from keeping animals or has any previous animal welfare related convictions.

I have arranged to meet with the Justice Minister, David Ford MLA, to discuss the sentencing of animal welfare offences and other related matters. At this meeting I intend to raise a number of issues regarding the enforcement of the Welfare of Animals Act 2011, including how information in respect of animal welfare convictions is recorded and its availability to the respective enforcement bodies.

Farms: North Down

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of farms in the North Down constituency, broken down by (i) size of herd numbers; (ii) in receipt of single farm payments; and (iii) which are arable producers.

(AQW 16388/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Based on the applications for Single Farm Payment in 2012, the number of farms in the North Down constituency broken down by:

(i) size of current herd numbers are:

Herd size (cattle)	Number of farm businesses
Up to 20	20
21 - 100	27
101- 300	23
Greater than 300	11

in receipt of single farm payments:

(ii) 233 farm businesses submitted a claim for 2012 Single Farm Payment (SFP). Payment in respect of these claims will only issue once the claims have been fully verified;

(iii) which are arable producers:

Of the 233 farm businesses that submitted a claim for 2012 Single Farm Payment, 81 indicated they are involved in arable production.

Schmallenberg Virus

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she will consider commissioning AFBI to test midges for Schmallenberg Virus, similar to the current programme of testing for Blue Tongue.

(AQW 16417/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: AFBI are undertaking surveillance of aborted and stillborn foetuses that meet a recognised clinical case definition of Schmallenberg virus. (SBV) The recent case in Co Down was detected as a result of that surveillance.

In response to these recent developments, AFBI are undertaking some additional SBV testing on blood samples taken for brucellosis from the herd which had the SBV positive case. This information will let us know the level of exposure to SBV in the herd earlier this year.

Whilst in theory molecular tests may be available to detect virus within the midge population, the proper test protocols and validations have yet to be established. Consequently, at present, routine surveillance for Schmallenberg virus in midge populations is practically impossible.

The surveillance currently being undertaken to date is proportionate to the assessed risk.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mobile Libraries: Consultation

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline any measures her Department has taken to ensure maximum public participation in the Mobile Library Service Strategy consultation.

(AQO 2845/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Libraries NI will consult on the Mobile Library Service Strategy until Friday 14th December. They are promoting participation in the following ways:

- Press release to all local and regional press;
- Letters to all MLAs, MPs and MEPs;
- Letters to equality consultees and educational organisations;
- Letters were sent to all rural stakeholders, including the Rural Community Network. Libraries NI met with the RCN and stakeholders on the 6th and 7th of November and will continue to do so during the consultation period;
- Via Libraries NI's online presence and their mobile libraries.

I would recommend that all Members contribute to the consultation process to ensure that the views of their constituents are considered during the decision making process.

Sport: People with Disabilities

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what efforts have been made, by the governing bodies of the main sports, to engage with Disability Sports NI and other organisations on the provision of sports facilities and programmes for disabled people.

(AQO 2842/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has a challenging target, set out in its "Sports Matters" strategy covering the years 2011-2019, to deliver at least a 6% increase in the participation rates in sport and physical recreation among people with a disability from a 2011 baseline. The associated Action Plan for Implementation, which is publically available in the Sport NI website, has a range of actions and key steps to which each of the main governing bodies for sport have signed up.

Achieving this target requires a genuine partnership approach with elements of work being taken forward by those best placed to contribute and the pooling of resources and expertise.

That collective approach includes Disability Sports NI, who provide a range of policy and practical advice to the governing bodies of the main sports, who are committed to the delivery of a range of actions detailed in the Sport Matters Action Plan.

These actions include:

GAA: Special schools outreach programme;

IFA: Regular structured participation and competition programmes for various impairment specific groups; and

IRFU: running coaching courses/ clinics specifically for those coaches working with players who have disabilities.

Libraries: Kilkeel

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the timetable for the provision of a new library in Kilkeel. (AQO 2850/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am committed to the improvement of our library service, and in particular to ensuring that libraries that serve rural areas remain sustainable.

Libraries NI are continuing to develop the Kilkeel replacement Library Project. The design of the replacement library has been developed and Libraries NI have prepared tender documentation.

If everything goes to plan work should start on site early next year and the new facility should open to the public in early 2014.

Arts: People with Disabilities

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what her Department is doing to improve the opportunities for people with disabilities to enjoy arts facilities. (AQO 2851/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Through the Arts Council, my Department has made a significant investment over a number of years enhancing existing and creating new opportunities for people with disabilities to be able to fully utilise and enjoy arts facilities in a way that suits their wants and needs. My Department centres on tackling barriers to equality based on feedback from people with disabilities.

Arts Council's funding objectives promote the concept of universal accessibility in arts venues. And a condition of grant for their funded capital projects requires that all new and approved schemes provide an access audit report compiled by a suitably qualified and experienced independent access consultant.

Furthermore, new arts venues, such as the MAC, the Lyric, the Crescent and the Playhouse include provision for other methods to support access such as induction loops, braille literature and disabled seating areas as standard. Some venues also offer the 'buddy' scheme, which allows a person who is in need of a carer a free ticket with the purchase of their own ticket.

Libraries: Review of Policy

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update of her review of libraries policy. (AQO 2852/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I informed the CAL Committee that I would carry out a Review of the Library Policy Framework in July last year and it features in my Department's Corporate Plan.

A small Project Team is carrying out research, stakeholder engagement and analysis and officials have briefed the CAL Committee on the work programme.

I am pleased this work has commenced as it is appropriate that all bodies in receipt of public money regularly review their policies, practices and budget allocations to ensure that the money is spent in a way that delivers the best possible service to the public and real outcomes for the communities they serve.

The Project Team will make recommendations in early 2013 which will allow me to decide if a full Policy Review is required or the Library Standards updated.

UK City of Culture 2013: Extra Funding

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department could provide extra funding to the Culture Company, if deemed necessary, to ensure that Derry/Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 will be a success. (AQO 2853/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Executive has agreed to allocate over £30m to City of Culture 2013. My Department is investing up to £12.6 million to support the Cultural Programme of events in 2013.

The Department of Social Development is investing £4.6m to provide the Temporary Pavilion for major events in 2013; a £10m capital fund; £656k for Sports Campus and is considering other legacy projects.

OFMDFM is investing £2.4m in the refurbishment of buildings 80&81 at Ebrington to provide a venue for the Turner Prize. From 2014 this building will then be converted to space for creative and digital industries.

It is anticipated that Derry City Council will be able to deliver a high quality project with this allocation.

Re-imaging Communities Programme

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what can her Department do to help the Re-imaging Communities Programme.

(AQO 2855/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department through the Arts Council has recently been successful in securing funding from the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) in order to build upon the key successes of the Re-imaging Communities Programme.

The successor programme, Building Peace through the Arts - Re-imaging Communities will be funded by monies from Arts Council (Lottery), the Internal Fund for Ireland and the SEUPB, and is expected to open in January 2013.

The funding will be used to encourage local communities to work creatively with artists in tackling both visible and invisible signs of sectarianism while allowing for legitimate expression of cultural celebration.

Department of Education

St Patrick's High School, Banbridge

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Education when the refurbishment works planned for St Patrick's High School, Banbridge will be given approval to proceed.

(AQW 16001/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): My Department has only recently been advised by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) that there are a number of high priority projects which require to be considered by the Department for inclusion in the Minor Capital Works Programme. The Department of Education has not as yet received individual applications for these projects. I understand, however, that

CCMS is arranging to have these applications forwarded to the Department as soon as possible. Once these applications are received the Department will assess and prioritise the projects alongside all other competing priorities.

Whistle-blowing/Grievances

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education how many (i) grievance cases have been taken; and (ii) whistleblowing complaints have been made, against (a) his Department; and (b) its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years; and at what cost to the public purse.

(AQW 16174/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

(i)(a) In each of the last five financial years, the following grievance cases have been taken against the Department under the formal NICS Grievance Procedure as set out in the NICS HR Handbook. The information can only be provided from October 2007 when HR Connect was introduced. No compensation was paid as a result of any of these cases.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Number	0	8	3	3	3
Cost	0	0	0	0	0

In each of the last 5 financial years the following table shows the number of whistleblowing complaints which have been made against the Department and its Arms Length Bodies.

Whistleblowing Cases

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Number	1	0	4	6	10
Cost	0	0	0	£1560	£5000

In each of the last 5 financial years the following table shows the number of grievance cases which have been taken against the Department's Arms Length Bodies.

Grievances

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Number	8	20	26	23	41
Cost	0	0	0	£500	0

Redburn Primary School, Holywood

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to detail the plans for the development of the site previously occupied by Redburn Primary School, Holywood.

(AQW 16223/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In 2006 a multi-schools project was announced for Holywood which recommended Priory Integrated College relocating to a new build on the Redburn site.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board continues to review best use of the Redburn site including how it could be used to benefit new builds for Holywood Primary School and Holywood Nursery School.

Consultations on the Area Plans for Post-Primary schools have just completed and are being reviewed. The Area Plans for primary provision will also be published for public consultation. It is right that time is allowed for scrutiny and public consultation on these.

In the interim I will continue to examine the case for capital investment, and proposals for the use of the Redburn site will continue to be a part of these deliberations.

Pupil Absenteeism

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education to detail the level of pupil absenteeism in (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools, in each of the last ten years, broken down by (a) month; and (b) Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 16243/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Information on the level of absenteeism from schools has been collected by the Department since 2007/08 and is available in relation to complete academic years. Information in this regard has been provided in the tables below.

Percentage absence in primary schools by Education and Library Board area, 2007/08 - 2010/11

ELB	2007/08 ¹	2008/09 ²	2009/10 ³	2010/11 ⁴
Belfast	6.2	6.3	6.2	6.1
Western	5.3	5.1	5.5	5.3
North-Eastern	4.7	4.5	4.7	4.6
South-Eastern	5.0	4.9	5.0	4.9
Southern	5.2	5.0	5.3	5.1
Average	5.2	5.1	5.3	5.1

Note:

- Attendance information was not available for 32 primary schools in 2007/08. Of the 32 schools, 17 closed just prior to the information being collected and the remaining 15 either did not have access to the electronic schools management information system or did not yet use it to record pupil attendance.
- Attendance information was not available for 20 primary schools in 2008/09. Of the 20 schools, 9 closed just prior to the information being collected and 11 did not have access to the electronic schools management information system or did not yet use it to record attendance.
- Attendance information was not available for 9 primary schools in 2009/10. Of the 9 schools, 4 closed just prior to the information being collected and 5 did not submit the data at pupil level.
- Attendance information was not available for 13 primary schools which had closed or amalgamated with another, prior to the data being collected for 2010/11.
- Figures relate to pupils in Year 1 – 7.
- Attendance or absence is measured in half day sessions (am and pm).

Percentage absence in post-primary schools by Education and Library Board area, 2007/08 - 2010/11

ELB	2007/08 1	2008/09 2	2009/10	2010/11
Belfast	7.8	7.5	7.6	7.2
Western	7.7	7.9	7.8	7.6
North-Eastern	7.6	7.2	7.4	7.1
South-Eastern	8.4	8.1	8.3	7.8
Southern	7.6	7.7	7.5	7.2
Average	7.8	7.7	7.7	7.4

Note:

1. Attendance information for four post-primary schools which were open in 2007/08, but closed prior to the data being collected in 2008/09 has not been included.
2. Attendance information for four post-primary schools which closed prior to the data being collected in October 2009 has not been included.
3. Figures relate to pupils in Year 8 – 12.
4. Attendance or absence is measured in half day sessions (am and pm).

Pupils: Term-time Absences

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education what advice is given to parents about taking pupils out of school during term time. (AQW 16245/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department issues guidance to schools on attendance and the recording of absence in Circular 2012/18 Pupil Attendance – Absence Recording by Schools. This is available on the Department of Education website. It is the responsibility of the school to communicate guidance relating to attendance to parents. Decisions relating to family holidays during term time are based on exceptional circumstances and are at the discretion of the school.

Pupils: Term-time Absences

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education what action his Department can take against parents who repeatedly take their children out of school for holidays during term time. (AQW 16246/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Family holidays taken during term time are categorised as unauthorised absence unless very exceptional circumstances are presented. If a pupil's attendance falls below 85%, a referral will be made to Education Welfare Service (EWS). Following this, EWS will engage with the school and parents to address poor attendance. If the parent fails to comply, the respective Education and Library Board (ELB) may issue a parental fine up to a maximum of £1,000. The ELB can also apply to the Family Proceedings Court to make an Education Supervision Order which places the child under the supervision of the ELB.

Pupils: Term-time Absences

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education whether he plans any further action to discourage parents from taking their children on family holidays during term time. (AQW 16247/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department provides guidance to schools regarding the recording of attendance. This year the guidance, Circular 2012/18 Pupil Attendance: Absence Recording by Schools, was amended to state that parents should not take pupils on holiday during term time.

My Department is also looking at methods of improving school attendance and reducing levels of absenteeism. To assist with this a working group comprising of DE officials, schools and Education Welfare Service has been formed to develop guidance to schools on effective policy and practice in promoting good attendance.

Civil Servants: Bonuses

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to 15943/11-15, to outline the extra duties that departmental staff carried out to receive the special bonus payments; and how many staff this involved over the three year period. (AQW 16267/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Special Bonuses are used to reward exceptional performance in particularly demanding tasks or situations during the course of the year or where good performance was achieved under particularly adverse conditions. Departments may make awards to an individual, or to a group of individuals to reward teamwork.

Period	No. of Staff
2009/10	202
2010/11	161
2011/12	126

EU Funded Programmes

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education how many EU funded programmes are currently operated by his Department; and how many will continue beyond 2013.

(AQW 16279/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: While my Department is not currently delivering any EU funded programmes, my officials recently had a very useful meeting with representatives from the Special EU Programmes Body where a number of potential projects were identified as potentially being suitable to attract future EU funding. It is likely that any potential EU income from these projects would only arise in the next Budget period i.e. from 2015-16 onwards.

Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Education which schools are participating in the Duke of Edinburgh Award; and how many pupils from each school are taking part.

(AQW 16285/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In the north of Ireland, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award has a joint agreement with Gaisce – The President's Award, which enables young people who complete the programme to have a choice of award certification: a Duke of Edinburgh's Award Certificate, a Gaisce – The President's Award Certificate or an International Award Certificate.

The schools listed below are taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. A total of 5,713 pupils are currently participating.

Board Area	School
WELB	Foyle & Derry College
	Limavady High School
	Lumen Christi College, Derry
	Collegiate Grammar, Enniskillen
	Thornhill College, Derry
WELB	Strabane Academy
	Limavady Grammar
	Arvalee School, Omagh
	St Columb's College, Derry
	Drumragh College, Omagh
	St Mary's College, Derry
	St Joseph's College, Enniskillen
	Castlederg High School
NEELB	Antrim Grammar
	Ballycastle High School
	Ballyclare High School
	Ballyclare Secondary School
	Ballymena Academy
	Ballymoney High school
	Belfast High School
	Cambridge House Grammar
	Carrickfergus College
	Carrickfergus Grammar

Board Area	School
NEELB (<i>continued</i>)	Castledawson Youth Club
	Coleraine Academical Institution
	Coleraine High School
	Cross & Passion College
	Dalriada School
	Dominican College
	Downshire High School
	Dunluce School
	Glengormley High School
	Larne Grammar School
	Loreto College
	Maghera High School
	Magherafelt High School
	Monkstown School
	North Coast Integrated College
	Parkhall College
NEELB	Rainey Endowed
	Slemish College
	St. Benedict's High School
	St. Colm's High School
	St. Killian's College
	St. Mary's Grammar
	St. Patricks College
	Ulidia Integrated College
SELB	Banbridge Academy
	Banbridge High School
	Cookstown High School
	Craigavon Senior High School
	Dromore High School
	The Royal School Dungannon
	Fivemiletown College
	Kilkeel High School
	Lisanally Special School
	Lurgan College
	Newry High School
	Newtownhamilton High School
	Portadown College
	Sacred Heart Grammar School
	St Brigid's High School
St Catherine's College	
St Colman's College, Newry	

Board Area	School
SELB (<i>continued</i>)	St Joseph's High School
	St Mark's High School, Warrenpoint
	St Mary's High School
	St Paul's High School, Newry
	St Patrick's Academy
BELB	Aquinas Grammar School
	Ashfield Girls' School
	Belfast Royal Academy
	Bloomfield Collegiate School
BELB	Colaiste Feirste
	Dominican College
	Belfast Girls' Model
	Glenveagh School
	Grosvenor Grammar School
	Hunterhouse College
	Little Flower Girls' School
	Methodist College Belfast
	Royal Belfast Academical Institution
	St Dominic's High School
	St Malachy's College
	Strathearn School
	Victoria College
	Wellington College
	Hazelwood College
	Ashfield Boys' School
SEELB	Bangor Academy
	Bangor Grammar
	Blackwater Integrated School
	Down High School
	Forthill College
	Friends' School
	Glastry College
	Glenlola Collegiate
	Knockbreda High School
	Lagan College
	Laurelhill Community College
	Lisnagarvey High School
	Longstone Special School
	Movilla High
	Newtownbreda High School
Our Lady & St Patrick's College	

Board Area	School
SEELB (<i>continued</i>)	Priory Integrated College
	Regent House
SEELB	Rockport School
	Shimna College
	St Colman's High School
	St Malachy's High School
	Sullivan Upper
	The High School, Ballynahinch
	Wallace High School

Teaching: English and Maths in Primary Schools

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education whether he plans to increase the teaching time spent on English and Maths in primary schools.

(AQW 16300/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: English and Maths are not just stand alone subjects - they are part of the cross curricular skills which are embedded throughout all areas of learning in the revised curriculum.

Count, read: succeed, my Department's Strategy to Improve Outcomes in Literacy and Numeracy recognises that teachers are the key to raising standards by meeting the needs and aspirations of pupils through high-quality teaching and learning. It also recognises that teachers need to have the flexibility to draw on their professional judgement and use a broad and balanced range of approaches to developing literacy and numeracy. This would include determining the amount of teaching time devoted to developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills and therefore timetabling is a matter for individual schools to manage.

Schools are required by law to deliver the statutory Minimum Content across the Areas of Learning within the revised curriculum and how they choose to do this across year groups is a matter for the senior management of the school. I do not have any plans to change this position.

Whilst there has been improvement delivered in developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, the Chief Inspector's Report 2010-2012 highlighted the need to further raise standards in literacy and numeracy for almost one in five of our primary school children. The report also highlighted the need to improve around 18% of learning in primary schools including where teaching does not develop adequately a child's reading and writing skills and mathematical understanding.

Therefore, first and foremost, schools need to ensure that they are providing high quality teaching and learning. Increasing the teaching time spent on literacy and numeracy may be counter-productive if the quality of teaching is not of a suitable standard.

You will be aware that the First and deputy First Ministers recently announced six 'signature' projects worth £26million to improve literacy and numeracy, offer increased family support and to support job creation within local communities. My Department is leading on the project to employ 230 graduate teachers not currently in employment, on a two year contract, to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of our young people; 80 of these teachers will be employed in primary schools. This will have a direct impact on the educational outcomes for pupils who are most at risk of under achieving.

Department officials are currently working on arrangements for the development and implementation of this project including details of which schools will benefit from this additional funding, how schools and teachers will be matched, how teachers will be recruited to these posts and the potential costs.

Teachers: Appointment of

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education whether panels appointing teachers to controlled schools in each of the Education and Library Board areas are advised to appoint on merit and within fair employment and equality guidelines; and whether they are also advised that there is no legal barrier to discriminating on grounds of religion or political opinion.

(AQW 16308/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Each Education and Library Board is required to have in place a Scheme for Teaching Appointments outlining the procedures and practices to be followed in the recruitment and selection of teaching staff. The schemes specify that the appointment of teaching staff should be based on merit and suitability for the post, and that there should be no unlawful discrimination, direct or indirect, against any teacher in recruitment, training, promotion or in any other way. Copies of the Teaching Appointments Schemes may be obtained from the Education and Library Boards.

An Equal Opportunities Policy for Teachers in Schools (TNC 2009/2), which includes reference to recruitment and selection, was agreed by the Teachers' Negotiating Committee and issued to schools for adoption by Boards of Governors. The aim of the policy is to communicate the commitment of the Employing Authorities to the promotion of equality of opportunity. It

contains a reference to the exception applied to the recruitment of teachers under Article 71 of the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (NI) 1998 (as amended).

Teachers: Religion of

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail by percentage the religion of teachers in the various sectors and levels obtained for in the 2004 Article 71 Investigation by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland on the exception of teachers from the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998.

(AQW 16309/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is published in the report of the investigation, which may be accessed on the Equality Commission website via the following link:-

<http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/TeacherExceptionReportDec04.pdf>

Schools: Funding

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 15269/11-15, which schools will receive funding to progress their projects from the £1.5m provisionally allocated for 2012-13.

(AQW 16328/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: On 25th June 2012 I announced capital investment plans of £133m across 18 major capital build projects, including 5 Special Schools. The schools announced were:

- | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| ■ Colaiste Feirste, Belfast | ■ Victoria Park Primary School, Belfast |
| ■ St Clare's Convent & St Colman's Abbey Primary School, Newry | ■ Enniskillen Model Primary School |
| ■ St Joseph's Convent Primary School, Newry | ■ St Mary's Primary School, Banbridge |
| ■ Dromore Central Primary School | ■ Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain, Belfast |
| ■ Eglinton Primary School | ■ Belmont House Special School, Derry |
| ■ Tannaghmore Primary School, Lurgan | ■ Rossmar Special School, Limavady |
| ■ Ebrington Controlled Primary School, Derry | ■ Castletower, Ballymena |
| ■ Foyle College, Derry | ■ St. Gerard's Resource Centre (Balmoral facility) |
| ■ St Teresa's Primary School, Lurgan | ■ Arvalee Special School (Lisanelly Project) |

Each of the 18 capital build projects are at different stages in their development process. In 2012/13 the £1.5m capital funding will be used to cover costs and fees associated with advancing each of the 18 new build projects through the various stages in design and planning required to bring them to construction.

Again, it should be noted, that due to the nature and the degree of uncertainty associated with timings of capital projects allocations are subject to fluctuation and will be continually reviewed.

Single Tender Actions

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many single tender actions his Department has approved in the current financial year.

(AQW 16330/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Up until the 31 October 2012, the Department of Education had approved six single tender actions in the current financial year.

Schools: Enrolment Figures

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the total 2012 enrolment in each of the school sectors; and how this compares to (i) 2000; (ii) 2005; and (iii) 2010.

(AQW 16335/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is routinely published and is available on the Department's website at the following web link. The latest information available relates to the 2011/12 school year.

http://www.deni.gov.uk/enrolment_by_school_management_type_updated_1112.xls

Schools: Maintenance Backlog in Lagan Valley

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education to detail the current maintenance backlog for each school in the Lagan Valley constituency.

(AQW 16338/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: According to the Education and Library Boards' estate management system, the current maintenance backlog in schools in the Lagan Valley constituency is as follows:

School Name	Total Maintenance backlog £
Barbour Nursery	1,670
Pond Park Nursery	12,650
Holy Trinity Nursery	16,825
Anahilt Primary	27,400
Ballinderry Primary	40
Ballymacash Primary	138,900
Brownlee Primary	137,645
Carr Primary	39,525
Dromara Primary	23,565
Dunmurry Primary	149,830
Fort Hill Integrated Primary	46,357
Harmony Hill Primary	165,044
Killowen Primary	344,560
Knockmore Primary	286,026
Largymore Primary	227,294
Lisburn Central Primary	126,480
Maghaberry Primary	1,600
Moirra Primary	33,680
Oakwood Integrated Primary	2,325
Old Warren Primary	148,974
Seymour Hill Primary	16,830
Tonagh Primary	43,040
Riverdale Primary	830
Meadow Bridge Primary School	481
Saint Aloysius Primary	183,650
Saint Josephs P.S. (Lisburn)	340,715
Laurelhill Community College	406,090
Lisnagarvey High	216,905
Saint Patricks High School	267,560
Fort Hill College	431,255
Friends School	502,920
Beechlawn Special School	118,945
Parkview Special	22,910
Dromore Central Primary School	1,005,330
Fairhill Primary School	5,900
St Colman's Primary School (Dromore)	34,490
St Michael's Primary School (Finnis)	101,340
Dromore High School	488,690

There is a programme of planned maintenance across the schools' estate that influences the overall maintenance backlog (currently £311m for the estate). In addition reactive maintenance is required to address unexpected emergency issues such as a heating system failure. The cost of emergency work is not reflected in the maintenance backlog.

Pupil Numbers

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for an estimate of the percentage of surplus places required within the system at any given time to deal with fluctuations in pupil numbers.

(AQW 16369/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not set a percentage of surplus places required within the system to deal with fluctuations in pupil numbers. If in any given year there is a shortage of places in a sector in any particular area the Department will vary, by way of a temporary variation, a school's numbers to ensure that all pupils can be placed in their chosen sector and within a reasonable travelling distance of their home address. In the future the Area Planning process will be the process through which need for all education provision will be determined. Where area plans identify a need for either an increase or a decrease in the number of places in a particular sector they will also specify how this will be achieved.

Teacher Education Review

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on Teacher Education Review.

(AQW 16370/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My officials briefed the Education Committee on the direction of travel for the strategy in March this year and have since been working to ensure it complements the Department's other policies which are designed to improve education outcomes for all our young people.

On completion of this work I intend to agree the way forward for the strategy with the Minister for Employment and Learning who has responsibility for Higher Education in the north. The Department will offer its key stakeholders, including the Higher Education Institutes and the General Teaching Council, the opportunity to provide comments on the strategy document prior to further engagement with both the Education and Employment and Learning Committees.

My intention is to publish the strategy once this programme of engagement has been completed and views arising from it have been considered.

Irish-medium Examinations: Cost

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for a breakdown of the cost of the assessment and marking of Irish Medium examinations by the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 16371/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table outlines the costs associated with the assessment and marking of Irish Medium examinations in each of the last 5 years. This includes the fees paid to examiners and moderators for marking and assessing Irish Medium examinations and coursework/controlled assessments.

Table 1: Cost of assessment and marking of Irish Medium examinations for the last 5 years

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Cost	£9,217	£10,751	£11,219	£9,403	£7,067

The cost for translating student responses from Irish back into English is absorbed within the CCEA Irish Medium Team and cannot be separated from the total running costs of the team.

Cycle-to-work Scheme

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education (i) which Education and Library Boards do not implement the cycle to work scheme; (ii) to outline the rationale for not implementing the scheme; (iii) whether these Education and Library Boards plan to implement the scheme; and (iv) if so, when it will be implemented.

(AQW 16394/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: None of the 5 ELB's presently operate the cycle to work scheme.

In light of the anticipated changes to organisational structures that are expected, the boards have decided not to participate in any new schemes, in advance of the establishment of ESA.

None of the ELB's therefore plans to implement the scheme at this time.

Sure Start: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education which areas of North Down will benefit from Sure Start Programmes.
(AQW 16412/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Currently, within North Down, Sure Start services are provided in the Super Output Areas of Conlig 3 and Harbour 1. The Dufferin and Whitehill wards will be included in the expansion of the Sure Start programme to serve the North Down Area through the creation of a project in Bangor.

Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education what financial contribution his Department has made to the Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South (SCoTENS) since its was established.
(AQW 16414/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has made financial contributions to SCoTENS as follows:

2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
£10,000	£10,000	£20,000	Nil	£25,000	Nil	£25,000	£25,000	£12,500	£12,500	£12,500

A further £12,500 has yet to be paid in respect of 2012/13.

Public Appointments

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education to detail all the public appointments he has made (i) during the current Assembly mandate; and (ii) the previous mandate, broken down by community background.
(AQW 16450/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Since my appointment as Minister for Education in May 2011 I have made 167 public appointments. 78 were from the Roman Catholic community background, 77 were from the Protestant community background, 8 were not known and 4 were from neither community background.

All 2011/2012 public appointments will be detailed in OFMDFM, Central Appointment Unit's Public Appointments and Public Bodies Annual Report in due course.

The reports will be available on the OFMDFM website and can be accessed from the following link: <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/making-government-work/public-appointments.htm>

Disposal of Assets

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education to detail the items that his Department disposed of for a monetary return in (i) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12.
(AQW 16480/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education did not dispose of any items for a monetary return in 2010/11 or 2011/12.

Education and Training Inspectorate: Inspectors

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education for a list, without names, of the length of (i) classroom experience; and (ii) school management experience of the Inspectors in the Education and Training Inspectorate.
(AQW 16582/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is not readily available in the format required. An exercise to obtain such information would result in disproportionate costs.

Education and Training Inspectorate: Inspectors

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, without naming the individual inspectors, how many Inspectors in the Education and Training Inspectorate have not taught in a classroom in the last (i) five; (ii) six; (iii) seven; (iv) eight; (v) nine; and (vi) ten years.
(AQW 16583/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is not readily available in the format required. An exercise to obtain such information would result in disproportionate costs.

Education and Training Inspectorate: Inspectors

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, without naming the individual inspectors, how many Inspectors in the Education and Training Inspectorate have not held a school management position in the last (i) five; (ii) six; (iii) seven; (iv) eight; (v) nine; and (vi) ten years.
(AQW 16584/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is not readily available in the format required. An exercise to obtain such information would result in disproportionate costs.

Schools: Proposed Closures, Amalgamations and Reorganisations

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education how many letters he has received in the past year expressing concern at the proposed closure, amalgamation and reorganisation of schools.

(AQW 16585/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Any significant change to a school, such as closure or amalgamation, requires the publication of a statutory Development Proposal. In the last year, November 2011- November 2012, I can confirm that my Department received 136 letters of concern or objection to published development proposals.

Outside the Development Proposal process, my Department also receives correspondence raising objections to possible changes to education provision. However, until the proposals are published, such letters concern speculation on possible change, not actual proposed change.

Schools: Killeel

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Education, following the responses to the area planning consultation, what action he intends to take in the Killeel area.

(AQO 2870/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Now that the consultation period for the Post Primary Area Plans has ended the Education and Library Boards, working closely with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools are undertaking an analysis of the responses. Once this has been completed they have been asked to prepare a report to the Department which outlines the key issues raised in the consultation and details what action the Board has taken or plans to take to address such issues.

This report is to be submitted along with revised or enhanced Post-primary Area Plans to the Department for consideration.

Until the work on the area plans is complete and the plans are approved I am not in a position to comment further on options for any specific school or on the specifics in the area plans.

Primary Schools: Common Funding Scheme

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Education whether he has any plans to reform the common funding formula as many primary schools complain that they do not get a fair share of the budget.

(AQO 2862/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I announced in my Autumn Statement to the Assembly last September that I was not satisfied that the current Common Funding Scheme adequately supports, and is consistent with, my key policy objectives. I do not believe that it takes sufficient account of social need in our drive for sustainable schools. I confirmed then that I would commission a Review of the Scheme.

In June of this year I appointed Sir Robert Salisbury to chair an independent panel to undertake the Review of the Common Funding Scheme. The independent panel are due to complete their analysis and submit their findings and recommendations to me by the end of December 2012.

Catholic Education: Reform

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the 'Together Towards Tomorrow' document for the reform of Catholic education.

(AQO 2863/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: While I have not undertaken a formal assessment of the 'Together Towards Tomorrow' document I understand this discussion paper was prepared as part of the Post-Primary Review process in the Derry City Project Area.

I welcome the proposed move away from academic selection and rejection. It offers the Senior Derry Diocesan Trustees strategic vision for post-primary education in that area and I understand that it is intended to be read alongside the recommendations of the Post-Primary Review Strategic Regional Report published by the Commission for Catholic Education in February 2012.

I understand that the recommendations in that Report are reflected in the Western Education and Library Board's (WELB) draft area plan for post-primary education.

The public consultation period on the draft Board area plans concluded on 26 October 2012. The Boards are now analysing the responses received and will present a report on the issues raised during the consultation along with their refined and enhanced plans to the Department for consideration.

Any proposals on Post Primary Education in the Derry City Area coming forward must be aligned with the area plan.

Pupil Absenteeism: South Antrim

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Education to outline the level of absenteeism in the South Antrim area in controlled, maintained and integrated schools at primary and post-primary level in the last year.

(AQO 2864/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

Primary Schools

Absence rates for primary schools in the South Antrim area by management type of school, 2010/11

Management Type	Overall absence rate (% of total half days absent)
Controlled (not including integrated)	4.5
Controlled integrated	5.8
Maintained	4.5
Grant Maintained Integrated	5.5
Voluntary	N/A
Total	4.6

Post-Primary Schools

Absence rates for post-primary schools in the South Antrim area by management type of school, 2010/11

Management Type	Overall absence rate (% of total half days absent)
Controlled (not including integrated)	5.5
Controlled integrated	9.7
Maintained	11.0
Grant Maintained Integrated	N/A
Voluntary	N/A
Total	7.2

Notes:

- Maintained includes Catholic and other maintained schools.
- Figures for primary schools include Years 1-7 and for post-primary schools include Years 8-12.
- The figures are based on 44 primary schools and 6 post-primary schools in the South Antrim parliamentary constituency. Care should be taken when interpreting the results at post-primary due to the small number of schools when broken down by management type.
- Attendance is recorded for every pupil in half day sessions – morning and afternoon.
- N/A = Not applicable. There are no schools of this management type in the South Antrim parliamentary constituency.

Post-primary Education: South Armagh

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education to outline his plans for post-primary education provision in south Armagh.
(AQO 2865/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Proposals for post-primary schools in the south Armagh area were detailed in the Southern Education and Library Board Area Plan which was published for public consultation on 5 July 2012.

Consultation on the draft post-primary area plans ended on 26 October 2012 and the Education and Library Boards are now analysing the responses received.

Once this has been completed they have been asked to prepare a report to the Department which outlines the key issues raised in the consultation and details what action the Board has taken or plans to take to address such issues.

This report is to be submitted along with revised or enhanced Post-primary Area Plans to the Department for consideration.

Until the work on the area plans is complete and the plans are approved I am not in a position to comment further on options for any specific school or on the specifics in the area plans.

St Ita's Primary School, Belfast

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Education what discussions he has had with the Minister for Regional Development to ensure the safety of pupils who walk to St. Ita's Primary school, Belfast.

(AQO 2866/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The relevant school authorities have not contacted the Department of Education regarding the safety of pupils who walk to St Ita's Primary School in Belfast. I have therefore not had any discussions with the Minister of Regional Development on this matter.

Pupils: Mental Health Issues

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Education what services are available in schools to assist pupils with mental health problems. **(AQO 2867/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: Provision of mental health services is the responsibility of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS).

Schools do, however, focus on the emotional health and well-being of our children and young people through a number of ways. Opportunities to teach pupils about mental health issues are provided through the revised curriculum which is taught to all pupils of compulsory school age in grant-aided schools. At primary level, managing feelings and emotions is a compulsory element of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding while at post-primary level, Learning for Life and Work provides pupils with opportunities to understand the importance of recognising and managing factors that may influence emotional/ mental health throughout life.

My Department's "iMatter" programme is addressing how the entire school community should be engaged in promoting resilient emotional health for all pupils, what support systems are available for vulnerable pupils, and what support is available to schools in the event of a crisis. The programme is a vehicle to integrate individual policies and services in a consistent and coherent way. It benefits from the active involvement of other Departments, schools and of the voluntary sector through a series of working groups, each with a specific task.

The groups have developed a range of 'products' including a suite of homework diary inserts/posters on topics of concern to young people such as self esteem, substance abuse, relationships and outline sources of help for pupils.

An independent school based professional counselling service is accessible to young people of post-primary age in mainstream and special schools during difficult and vulnerable periods in their lives.

As part of the current arrangements for support following a critical incident, pupils in primary schools have access to counselling support.

Education and Library Boards promote positive emotional health and well-being using a range of resources. Some schools are involved with issue-based class or group work around resilience, coping with stress, the transition from primary to post-primary school using evidenced-based programmes such as 'Bounce' and 'Mind Out'. Peer support, peer mentoring and school councils also assist with building positive emotional health and well-being of pupils.

Woodlands Language Unit

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Education to outline the rationale behind the proposed closure of Woodlands Speech and Language Unit at the Belmont campus, Londonderry.

(AQO 2868/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am pleased to have the opportunity to answer this question today as Assembly colleagues and parents have expressed a number of their concerns to me about this proposal. I hope that I will now be able to provide them with some reassurance by explaining the statutory processes that must be followed before any decision can be taken.

The Woodlands Language Unit is located on the same site as Belmont House Special School and offers speech and language support for non-statemented children who attend mainstream primary schools.

The management of the unit is undertaken by Belmont House Special School. Belmont House is a special school that caters for a wide range of special needs, including moderate learning difficulties (MLD), language disorders and emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Article 7 of the Education (NI) Order 1996 provides that children with special educational needs (SEN) will be educated in ordinary schools. This will also apply to children who have Statements of SEN unless that is incompatible with a parent's wishes or the provision of efficient education for other children.

All Education and Library Boards and schools have a duty to comply with this legislation. The Western Education and Library Board (WELB) has therefore developed a policy for such facilities to be located at mainstream schools.

In line with this policy, the WELB has been in discussion over the past two years with the Board of Governors of Belmont House Special School about the relocation and extension of the current provision - 4 speech and language classes - to 6 units at 3 mainstream primary school locations in both the controlled and maintained sectors.

The Board has also initiated consultation with parents and other directly affected parties. This consultation is part of the statutory process leading to the publication of a Development Proposal (DP) to support the intent to relocate this provision.

Until a DP is published the issues involved are a matter for the WELB to address. However, once a DP is published a further statutory 2-month period ensues during which any interested party may make their views known to the Department. I take account of all views expressed when making a decision on a DP but it is the best educational interests of the children concerned that are of primary concern.

Bangor Grammar School

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education whether Bangor Grammar School will continue to maintain its current enrolment cap of 900 pupils when it moves to its new build premises on the Gransha Road, Bangor.

(AQO 2869/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The new school currently under construction for Bangor Grammar School has been built to accommodate a Long Term Enrolment (LTE) of 850 pupils. This number was agreed with the school during the early planning stages of the new build.

For the 2012/13 school year the admissions and enrolment numbers of the school are 125 and 900 respectively. Over the next 2-3 school years, the Department will work with the school, in consultation with the South Eastern Education and Library Board, to gradually reduce the approved enrolment number in line with the LTE.

The school are aware of these plans and have already agreed an admissions number of 125 and an enrolment number of 880 for the 2013/14 school year.

Any further increases to the LTE of 850 would require the publication and approval of a Development Proposal.

Department for Employment and Learning

Stranmillis University College: Financial Surplus

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the financial surplus of Stranmillis University College.

(AQW 15994/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I understand that the accounts for the 2011-12 have not yet been published but I have been informed that they are likely to show a surplus of £559,000 against an anticipated surplus for the year of £435,000. This is a credible performance but one must remember that Stranmillis continues to receive a number of subsidies associated with its activities such as moderation funding (£0.2m), small institution funding (£0.45m) and a historical buildings premium (£0.08m). These are reflected in the above result and have contributed directly to the anticipated surplus position. However, there is continuing concern over the sustainability of the College in the medium term.

Education, Training and Employment: 16-year-olds

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what percentage of 16 year olds are currently in (i) secondary education; (ii) third level education; (iii) training; (iv) employment; and (v) none of these categories.

(AQW 16118/11-15)

Dr Farry: The percentages of 16, 17, 18, and 19 year olds in secondary education; third level education; training; employment; and none of these categories for the most recent available dates are given in the table below. The information has been derived from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and relate to the period April-June 2012. Some of the categories are too small to be statistically reliable.

Proportions of age category by classification

	Age				
	16	17	18	19	16-19
Secondary education	83.3%	69.7%	42.7%	*	53.3%
Third level education	*	*	37.1%	36.0%	23.5%
Training	*	*	*	*	10.3%
Employment	*	*	*	34.6%	18.9%
None of above categories	*	*	*	*	14.0%

* Estimates are too small to be statistically reliable.

Source: LFS April – June 2012, NISRA/DFP

Notes:

- (i) Categories are not mutually exclusive, ie individuals can fall into more than one category.
- (ii) LFS is a household survey and estimates produced from it are subject to sampling variability. It is the nature of sampling variability that the smaller the group whose size is being estimated, the proportionately less precise that estimate is.
- (iii) Estimates too small to be statistically reliable will not be released by NISRA.

Education, Training and Employment: 17-year-olds

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what percentage of 17 year olds are currently in (i) secondary education; (ii) third level education; (iii) training; (iv) employment; and (v) none of these categories.

(AQW 16119/11-15)

Dr Farry: The percentages of 16, 17, 18, and 19 year olds in secondary education; third level education; training; employment; and none of these categories for the most recent available dates are given in the table below. The information has been derived from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and relate to the period April-June 2012. Some of the categories are too small to be statistically reliable.

Proportions of age category by classification

	Age				
	16	17	18	19	16-19
Secondary education	83.3%	69.7%	42.7%	*	53.3%
Third level education	*	*	37.1%	36.0%	23.5%
Training	*	*	*	*	10.3%
Employment	*	*	*	34.6%	18.9%
None of above categories	*	*	*	*	14.0%

* Estimates are too small to be statistically reliable.

Source: LFS April – June 2012, NISRA/DFP

Notes:

- (iv) Categories are not mutually exclusive, ie individuals can fall into more than one category.
- (v) LFS is a household survey and estimates produced from it are subject to sampling variability. It is the nature of sampling variability that the smaller the group whose size is being estimated, the proportionately less precise that estimate is.
- (vi) Estimates too small to be statistically reliable will not be released by NISRA.

Education, Training and Employment: 18-year-olds

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what percentage of 18 year olds are currently in (i) secondary education; (ii) third level education; (iii) training; (iv) employment; and (v) none of these categories.

(AQW 16187/11-15)

Dr Farry: The percentages of 16, 17, 18, and 19 year olds in secondary education; third level education; training; employment; and none of these categories for the most recent available dates are given in the table below. The information has been derived from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and relate to the period April-June 2012. Some of the categories are too small to be statistically reliable.

Proportions of age category by classification

	Age				
	16	17	18	19	16-19
Secondary education	83.3%	69.7%	42.7%	*	53.3%
Third level education	*	*	37.1%	36.0%	23.5%
Training	*	*	*	*	10.3%
Employment	*	*	*	34.6%	18.9%
None of above categories	*	*	*	*	14.0%

* Estimates are too small to be statistically reliable.

Source: LFS April – June 2012, NISRA/DFP

Notes:

- (vii) Categories are not mutually exclusive, ie individuals can fall into more than one category.
- (viii) LFS is a household survey and estimates produced from it are subject to sampling variability. It is the nature of sampling variability that the smaller the group whose size is being estimated, the proportionately less precise that estimate is.
- (ix) Estimates too small to be statistically reliable will not be released by NISRA.

Education, Training and Employment: 19-year-olds

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what percentage of 19 year olds are currently in (i) secondary education; (ii) third level education; (iii) training; (iv) employment; and (v) none of these categories.

(AQW 16189/11-15)

Dr Farry: The percentages of 16, 17, 18, and 19 year olds in secondary education; third level education; training; employment; and none of these categories for the most recent available dates are given in the table below. The information has been derived from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and relate to the period April-June 2012. Some of the categories are too small to be statistically reliable.

Proportions of age category by classification

	Age				
	16	17	18	19	16-19
Secondary education	83.3%	69.7%	42.7%	*	53.3%
Third level education	*	*	37.1%	36.0%	23.5%
Training	*	*	*	*	10.3%
Employment	*	*	*	34.6%	18.9%
None of above categories	*	*	*	*	14.0%

* Estimates are too small to be statistically reliable.

Source: LFS April – June 2012, NISRA/DFP

Notes:

- (x) Categories are not mutually exclusive, ie individuals can fall into more than one category.
- (xi) LFS is a household survey and estimates produced from it are subject to sampling variability. It is the nature of sampling variability that the smaller the group whose size is being estimated, the proportionately less precise that estimate is.
- (xii) Estimates too small to be statistically reliable will not be released by NISRA.

Employment after Benefits

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people who were transferred from Incapacity Benefit to Job Seeker's Allowance have since secured employment.

(AQW 16192/11-15)

Dr Farry: As of 26 October 2012, the number of claims to Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) for those people who were previously in receipt of Incapacity Benefit is 857.

Of this total figure, 260 claims have since been terminated for various reasons, including transfer to another benefit, clients have simply failed to attend or they have moved abroad. The Department has a record of 43 JSA claimants having moved off the benefit and into employment.

Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much funding his Department has allocated to the Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South since its establishment.

(AQW 16427/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department has provided the following funding to the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS):

2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2005/06	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
£10,000	£10,000	£20,000	£25,000	£25,000	£25,000	£12,500	£12,500	£12,500

A further £12,500 has yet to be paid in respect of 2012/13.

University of Ulster, Magee Campus: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many of the additional 500 undergraduate STEM places announced in the Economy and Jobs Initiative will be allocated to the Magee campus of the University of Ulster.

(AQW 16487/11-15)

Dr Farry: A final decision on the allocation of the additional places has not yet been taken. In any event, I will be allocating the places to the higher education providers and it is up to each provider to determine where the places will be deployed.

University of Ulster, Magee Campus: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many of the additional STEM places will be allocated to the Magee campus of the University of Ulster, in line with the regeneration plan.

(AQW 16615/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have not yet made a final decision on the allocation of the additional STEM places. It will be for the University of Ulster to determine how many of the places will be allocated to its campus at Magee.

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics: Places

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, following his comments regarding the allocation of STEM student places at the Employment and Learning Committee meeting on 14 November 2012, for a breakdown of where the places will be allocated.

(AQW 16760/11-15)

Dr Farry: I would hope to be in a position to make a final decision on the allocation of the additional STEM places shortly.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Whistle-blowing/Grievances

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many (i) grievance cases have been taken; and (ii) whistleblowing complaints have been made, against (a) her Department; and (b) its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years; and at what cost to the public purse.

(AQW 16172/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment):

	(a) Department	(b) Arms Length Bodies				
	Grievance Cases	Whistle Blowing complaints	Total Costs incurred	Grievance Cases	Whistle Blowing complaints	Total Costs incurred
2007-2008	nil	nil	nil	9	nil	nil
2008-2009	2	nil	nil	3 (one of which incurred additional costs of £1959)	1	£1,959*
2009-2010	nil	nil	nil	1	nil	nil
2010-2011	4	nil	nil	8	1	nil
2011-2012	5	nil	nil	1	nil	nil

* Costs have only been included where these have been additional to the normal internal staffing costs.

Corporation Tax

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the recent market reports published by property agents Lisneys comparing Foreign Direct Investment success in Northern Ireland with that in the Republic of Ireland, whether the Treasury has been pressed on the need to lower Corporation Tax sooner rather than later.

(AQW 16234/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Clearly as time moved on and discussions around the devolution of corporation tax powers continued, Northern Ireland was potentially losing out on opportunities for jobs and investment that we might have otherwise attracted. This is something that has been raised at the Joint Ministerial Working Group (JMWG) on rebalancing the economy.

It is also one of the reasons why Northern Ireland Ministers have consistently pressed for early decisions, and an implementation timetable, that would allow us the ability to lower corporation tax as soon as possible. In this regard it is helpful that the JMWG held its final meeting on 18 October and so we will now be looking to the Prime Minister for a clear decision.

Department of the Environment

Wind Turbines: Applications

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of the Environment how many applications for individual wind turbines are currently in the planning system; and what is the average time taken for a decision on an application in the (i) Northern; and (ii) Western divisions.

(AQW 16007/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): The Department welcomes the contribution that wind turbines make to the reduction of carbon emissions and acknowledges the importance of processing these types of applications in a timely manner.

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 improve processing times. Wind turbines are usually categorised as major planning applications and I have included more challenging targets for processing these applications over the next three years. For the 2012/13 business year the target is to process major planning applications within an average of 23 weeks.

Unfortunately, figures to date indicate that this target is not being met. However progress had been made and there has been an overall improvement in processing times for major applications with an average time of 26 weeks in Q1 of 2012/2013 compared with 28 weeks in Q1 of 2011/2012.

The number of decisions issued in relation to renewable applications has almost doubled from 73 in Q1 of 2011/2012 to 135 in Q1 of 2012/2013. Over four-fifths of those applications were approved. These improvements reflect the increased focus, across the Area Office network, on actively progressing all renewable applications.

As of 24 October 2012 there were 769 planning applications for wind turbines which are currently being processed by DOE Planning and have not yet been decided. Table 1 below sets out the number of applications for wind turbines in Northern and Western Area Planning Offices as of 24 October 2012. The figures include applications for single wind turbines, wind farms and meteorological masts.

Table 1: Live wind turbine applications for Northern and Western Area Planning Offices (APO)

APO	Number of applications
Northern	193
Western	253

Source: Planning, DOE

Table 2 below outlines the average processing time and number of planning decisions in relation to wind turbine applications during 2011/12 and Q1 of 2012/13 for Northern and Western Area Planning Offices.

Table 2: Average Processing Time Northern and Western Area Offices; 2011/12 and Q1 2012/13

APO	Number Approved	Number Refused	Average Processing Time (weeks)
Northern	77	32	46
Western	110	30	36

Please note: This information has been sourced from a live database, is subject to change following validation, and will not equate to any finalised official statistics which may be later published on the topic

In order to further improve performance I have established a Sub Group of the Planning Forum to look at measures to improve planning performance for renewables and to consider issues such as licensing requirements, resources and structures.

To date this work has resulted in the majority of renewable applications being redirected from Strategic Planning Division to the Area Office network which has increased capacity to speed up the decision making process. Prior to the redistribution of this work training was rolled out across the Area Offices to ensure consistency in decision making.

Applications for wind turbines differ in complexity and in quality of submission and are attracting increasing levels of objection. Consultation with a number of statutory and non-statutory bodies is required to inform the decision-making process and all of these issues may prolong the processing of an application.

To improve the consultation process and ensure substantive responses are received in a timely basis, I have instructed my staff to monitor the performance of the statutory bodies. I have also asked Senior Officials to meet with all other interested parties to ensure the consultation process is operating effectively and additional training has been provided to planning staff to reduce the number of consultations. Staff have also been reminded that they should only consult in the correct circumstances to avoid unnecessary consultations and delay.

I would urge applicants to engage with planners and local communities at an early stage in the planning process, 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.

Wind Turbines: Applications

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of the Environment how many applications for multiple wind turbines are currently in the planning system; and what is the average time taken for a decision on an application in the (i) Northern; and (ii) Western divisions.

(AQW 16038/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department is currently processing 37 planning applications for wind farm developments. Of these applications, 20 relate to the Northern area, 10 relate to the Western area and 7 relate to the South Antrim area.

- (i) Within the Northern Division 31 planning applications for wind farms have been determined. The average determination time has been 33 months.
- (ii) Within the Western Division 36 planning applications for wind farms have been determined. The average determination time has been 34 months.

I would acknowledge that these determination times are considerable. They are large and complex applications accompanied by environmental statements. In the case of wind farm applications, the Department has agreed to a process of negotiation with applicants to seek to secure acceptable schemes where a positive outcome is considered to be achievable. This may properly lead to prolonged processing times as in many instances applicants have to undertake further survey work or technical assessments in order to revise their schemes.

Nevertheless these processing times need to be significantly reduced and to that end I have established a Renewable Energy Subgroup of the Planning Forum, the purpose of which is to engage with stakeholders and, among other things, seek to improve the quality of planning application submitted to the Department for consideration.

Furthermore, significant additional resources have been made available to the Renewable Energy team within DOE Planning and I expect this to result in improvements in processing times. Already in 2012, 14 decisions have issued on wind farm planning applications. This compares with 5 decisions in 2011 and 8 decisions in 2010.

To date my Department has approved 62 wind farms with the potential to generate some 925MW of electricity. The DETI target for 2012 was for 12% of energy generation to come from renewable sources. Largely as a result of wind farm development, that target has been exceeded and currently almost 15% of electricity comes from renewable sources.

The 2020 target for energy generation from renewable sources is 40%. Already, operational wind farms and consented wind farms to date have the potential to produce 28%, if they are constructed.

Slurry Spreading

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment, following an incident in which a farmer was stopped from spreading slurry despite having met the necessary conditions to spread slurry, what advice was given to field officers at a meeting in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency on the 26 October 2012; and how this advice will affect slurry spreading during the closed season.

(AQW 16216/11-15)

Mr Attwood: At a meeting on 10 October, staff working for Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) were informed that the slurry spreading 'closed period' would be regulated as it was last year, when it was emphasised that farmers could avail

of the reasonable excuse provision in the Nitrates Action Programme Regulations. In instances where it has been established that slurry spreading has taken place, NIEA needs to assess all relevant information including basic information on weather and ground conditions to determine application of reasonable excuse.

There was no meeting on 26 October 2012. However, an e-mail was issued on 26 October reminding staff of the protocol to follow should they encounter slurry spreading during the closed period.

It further stated that NIEA would not be stopping farmers from spreading slurry solely because this occurred during the closed period. There would need to be some other reason to do so.

I have asked for a report on all cases to date where an inspection has occurred following the closure of the season. Farmers representatives advise me that the 'reasonable excuse' provision worked well last year - I am determined that they work well this year. On a case by case basis I am prepared to speak with MLAs, but must also ensure that I, DOE, NIEA or others do not prejudice any interests.

Malone Conservation Area

Mr Maskey asked the Minister of the Environment what action is being taken to enforce the regulations on "to let" signs in the Malone Conservation Area.

(AQW 16228/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department is aware of the proliferation of "to let" signs in areas such as Lower Malone and Stranmillis. Under the Advertisement Regulations, advertisements relating to the sale or letting of property may be displayed with deemed consent on condition that the advertisement is removed within 14 days after the sale is completed or the tenancy is granted. In areas such as Lower Malone and Stranmillis, "to let" signs may often remain on properties after the property has been sold or let.

When a complaint is received the Department will normally issue a warning letter seeking the removal of the unauthorised sign. There are, however, difficulties in relation to enforcement. It is often difficult to establish the precise date that the tenancy of a property has been granted. Properties may be partially let with only one room remaining unlet, thus allowing the "to let" sign to remain in place. The seasonal nature of letting in these areas very often means that signs may be removed in winter only to reappear again in the summer months prior to the start of the new university term.

In recognition of these difficulties the Department maintains regular contact with local estate agents seeking their co-operation in the control of "to let" signs

Department of Finance and Personnel

Suicide

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the process by which a suicide is registered.
(AQW 16437/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The Coroner's Act (Northern Ireland) 1959 instructs medical practitioners to report a death from any cause other than natural illness to the Coroner. The Coroner investigates the circumstances surrounding the death and may order a post mortem investigation or hold an inquest.

On completion of his investigation the Coroner issues a certificate to the District Registrar. Where an inquest is not held, the Coroner's certificate can be issued within 6-12 months on average. Where an inquest is held it takes longer for the certificate to be issued. The Coroner's certificate will state whether or not the death is a suicide.

On receipt of the Coroner's certificate, the District Registrar registers the death in accordance with the provisions of the Births and Deaths Registration (Northern Ireland) Order 1976.

A copy of the registration, together with the Coroner's certificate is sent to the General Register Office. The death is then coded in accordance with the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision. It is only at this time that the death is officially registered as a suicide.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Southern Health and Social Care Trust/South Tyrone Area: Budgetary Provision

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department intends to increase the budgetary provision in South Tyrone and the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area, in light of the recent census figures.
(AQW 16145/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Using available resources in as fair a way as possible to optimise the levels of health and well-being in our local populations is a key objective of my Department. Achieving

equity in commissioning health and social care for local populations is a key objective of the Health and Social Care Board's 2012/13 Commissioning Plan.

A key measure which informs the HSCB in assessing whether resources have been allocated fairly to local populations is the capitation formula. This is a statistical formula which measures the relative need for local populations, taking into account the population numbers, and other relevant factors such as age and social deprivation. In addition to the formula, the HSCB will also consider the impact on service provision and the pace at which such changes can be implemented. The results of the 2011 Census of population are to be included in the formula for 2013/14 and will subsequently be included in plans going forward.

Health Service: Staff Numbers

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 15514/11-15, to detail the advice his Department gives to Health and Social Care Trusts on which sources of information are acceptable in determining safe staffing levels within the Health Service.

(AQW 16161/11-15)

Mr Poots: As these questions are related I shall provide a single answer.

The determination of appropriate staffing levels is a matter for HSC employers taking into account service needs and available resources and as such my Department does not routinely provide advice to Health and Social Care Trusts on the issue. The Department's role is to ensure the supply of sufficient, suitably qualified staff to meet the needs of the health service overall.

Health and Social Care Trusts undertake robust evidence-based workforce planning which assists in the determination of appropriate staffing levels. This is a complex area which uses data on workforce numbers matched to an assessment of the needs of patients/clients.

Professional recommendations on staffing numbers are often limited to a single staff group or, particularly in the case of doctors, an individual specialist area of practice. In addition such recommendations often relate to overall population numbers and either assume, or do not take account of, individual service profiles. As a range of professionals can contribute to a specific service in a locality, recommendations relevant to an individual staff group can only be a crude guide to the specifics of service delivery which need to take account of the detailed profile of service provision, the staff already contributing to that service and the quality of service based on that staffing profile.

Health Service: Staff Numbers

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 15514/11-15, in instances where recommendations made by professional bodies for staffing levels are not used, to outline the basis upon which alternative standards are used; and how the clinical basis for such alternative levels has been determined.

(AQW 16162/11-15)

Mr Poots: As these questions are related I shall provide a single answer.

The determination of appropriate staffing levels is a matter for HSC employers taking into account service needs and available resources and as such my Department does not routinely provide advice to Health and Social Care Trusts on the issue. The Department's role is to ensure the supply of sufficient, suitably qualified staff to meet the needs of the health service overall.

Health and Social Care Trusts undertake robust evidence-based workforce planning which assists in the determination of appropriate staffing levels. This is a complex area which uses data on workforce numbers matched to an assessment of the needs of patients/clients.

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Medical Appointments: Reminders

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the plans to introduce an SMS reminder scheme for medical appointments.

(AQW 16272/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following a pilot text messaging scheme conducted in 2010, all Health and Social Care Trusts have plans in place to introduce such a scheme to remind patients to attend their hospital appointments. It is expected these will be in place in all Trusts during 2013/14.

Nursing: Consultation

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the results of the consultation on A District Nursing Service for Today and Tomorrow will be made public.

(AQW 16361/11-15)

Mr Poots: The results of the consultation on a District Nursing Service for Today and Tomorrow are being considered by my Department and will be made public in the New Year along with the publication of the final document.

Cleft Palate

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what support is given to parents of newborn children with a cleft palate.

(AQW 16376/11-15)

Mr Poots: Newborn children suffering from a cleft palate will either be seen initially by a Consultant Orthodontist or a Consultant Plastic Surgeon, with involvement from a multidisciplinary team.

A cleft palate nurse specialist with a regional remit has recently been appointed and has responsibility for coordinating care and supporting parents at diagnosis.

Cleft Palate

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what long term aftercare and advice is given to the parents of children with a cleft palate.

(AQW 16377/11-15)

Mr Poots: All cleft palate children are treated by a multidisciplinary team; this includes providing advice to parents and when appropriate to the children at every stage of treatment and in the longer term.

Children are reviewed at around the age of 2 ½ years, 5 years, 7 years, 10 years, 15 years and 20 years, which is in line with guidance applied within the UK.

Abortion Statistics

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the reclassification of abortion statistics, what measures have been, or will be, put in place to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of women who have had legal terminations.

(AQW 16392/11-15)

Mr Poots: The reclassification of termination of pregnancy statistics has no impact on patient confidentiality. Previously published statistics had used the code 'O04 medical abortion' as recorded on the Patient Administration System (PAS). The audit clarified that Termination of Pregnancy was actually a subset of the term 'medical abortion'. As in the past, only anonymised statistics will be published.

Existing organisational procedures, designed to meet the legal and ethical obligations of patient confidentiality and the data protection act, are maintained.

Cancer Drugs Fund

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 15625/11-15, to explain the delay in the establishment of a Cancer Drugs Fund; and when a decision on this matter will be taken.

(AQW 16460/11-15)

Mr Poots: My reply to AQW 15625/11-15 advised that no decision has been taken regarding the establishment of a Cancer Drugs Fund for Northern Ireland. Therefore there has been no delay in the establishment of such a fund. Patients in Northern Ireland may access unapproved cancer drugs through the process of individual funding requests (IFR). IFRs are made on behalf of patients by their clinicians. My Department is cognisant with the Cancer Drugs Fund provided in England and will continue to monitor our local funding arrangements to determine whether any adaptation similar to the funding regime in England is considered necessary.

Disposal of Assets

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the items that his Department disposed of for a monetary return in (i) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12.

(AQW 16481/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department disposed of the following surplus properties for monetary return from 2010/11 and 2011/12, the details of which are set out in the table below:

2010/11	New Building Health Centre Londonderry	£84.5k
2011/12	Irish Street Clinic Londonderry	£37k

Hip Fractures

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQO 2780/11-15, how many patients were suspected of having a fractured hip.

(AQW 16484/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of patients presenting at Antrim Area hospital emergency care department that were suspected of having a fractured hip is not available.

Addiction Treatment Unit, Omagh

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the future plans for the Addiction Treatment Unit in Omagh.

(AQW 16529/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has tasked the Public Health Agency (PHA) and the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) with developing a regional commissioning framework for addiction services in Northern Ireland. The overall aim of this work is to establish a more consistent and effective regional service provision model. Residents in all areas would benefit from access to regional level specialist service provision, including both stabilization/detoxification and rehabilitation provision, within a regional 'Treatment Network' arrangement.

In light of this, the Western Health and Social Care Trust has stated that it has no current plans to cease the Addiction and Alcohol Treatment Services in Omagh, however, it will consider the outcomes and recommendations from the commissioning framework, and its implication for services, once it has been finalised.

No actual decisions have been or will be taken about individual services in advance of the outcome of this work.

Thalidomide Survivors

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the discussions around future funding for Thalidomide Survivors.

(AQW 16599/11-15)

Mr Poots: Officials from each of the UK administrations have been engaged in ongoing discussions about future funding for Thalidomide survivors and I hope to make an announcement on the future of the health grant in the near future.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the current 8 week respite package which is available to multiple sclerosis patients at the Ballycastle Unit will continue into 2013 and beyond.

(AQW 16606/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust that, for the foreseeable future, respite care will continue to be provided in the specialist Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Respite Unit at Dalriada Hospital, Ballycastle. Furthermore, there is no standard respite package for MS patients, as such care is provided commensurate with an individual's specific assessed needs.

Department of Justice

Edward Connors

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 15155/11-15, and in line with the stated guidance of Article 49 of the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008, to state why the case of convicted rapist Edward Connors does not meet the criteria for a serious case review, as there were "significant failures in the risk management" (PPANI Guidance 2.14) and the stated outcome of reviews is to examine if all agencies did all they reasonably could to manage the assessed risks and if lessons can be learned about the effectiveness of public protection arrangements.

(AQW 16169/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): PPANI guidance states that the Strategic Management Board, the joint agency forum which oversees the management of the public protection arrangements, must be informed by the relevant agencies of any case where an individual, whose risk of serious harm is being managed through those arrangements, is charged with a serious sexual or violent offence, or where a significant failure occurs in risk management. Where a case warrants the commission of a review in those circumstances, this would be taken forward by the agencies concerned.

Mr Connors has not been charged in relation to further sexual or violent offending, and there is no evidence of any significant failure in risk management procedures. Therefore, a serious case review was not deemed necessary by the agencies in this case.

It is my view that a serious case review in this case would not strengthen the arrangements that exist under PPANI for the management of risk from offenders in the community.

Prisons: Deaths in Custody

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to all non-natural deaths in custody over the last 10 years, including those which have been classified as suicide, was there a history of sustained drugs abuse.

(AQW 16170/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service is unable to quantify the number of deaths in custody where there was a history of sustained drug abuse.

However, since the Prisoner Ombudsman took on the role of investigating deaths in custody in Northern Ireland Prisons in September 2005, nine reports into non-natural deaths in custody have made reference to the prisoner having used illicit drugs or prescribed medications in the community and/or in prison.

Statutory Rules and Orders

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 14503/11-15 and prior to the devolution of Policing and Justice, to outline the legislation that authorised a Secretary of State, or their Private Secretary, to approve rules or regulations provided for in Statutory Rules and Orders.

(AQW 16176/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prison & Young Offenders Centre Rules (NI) 1995, specifically Rule 6, provided the power for the Secretary of State to approve a Code of Conduct and Discipline for use within the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

Downpatrick Courthouse: Heating Costs

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Justice how much it cost to heat Downpatrick Courthouse in each of the last five years.

(AQW 16229/11-15)

Mr Ford: The cost to heat Downpatrick Courthouse in each of the last five years is outlined in the table below.

Date	Cost
April 2012 to date	£12,045
April 2011 to March 2012	£28,382
April 2010 to March 2011	£30,799
April 2009 to March 2010	£28,686
April 2008 to March 2009	£24,321

Crime: Elderly People

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice whether he will (i) undertake research into the fear of crime among elderly people; and (ii) offer assurances to elderly people regarding the penalties available to the courts for people found guilty of such criminal activity.

(AQW 16261/11-15)

Mr Ford: Tackling crime against older and vulnerable people is a commitment for my Department within the Programme for Government and the Community Safety Strategy.

The Community Safety Strategy includes a commitment to improve our understanding of the fear of crime. As part of this commitment, my Department is currently in discussions with partners to consider research on fear of crime and its impact on vulnerable people.

As part of the Programme for Government commitment I intend to develop and build on work already underway to build community confidence in sentencing.

Under the current legislative framework, custodial offences are available to the judiciary for those convicted of serious crime. Sentencing decisions within this legislative framework are a matter for the independent judiciary. In making these decisions, judges are guided by sentencing guidelines which already indicate that the courts should treat the age and vulnerability of the victim as aggravating factors. The Lord Chief Justice, in his Programme of Action, is enhancing the structures by which the judiciary ensure consistent and appropriate sentences. But I believe more needs to be done to increase transparency and confidence in sentencing which is why I have announced that two lay members will be included on the Lord Chief Justice's Sentencing Group, one of whom will be representative of the views of victims. My Department will also be bringing forward a community engagement strategy.

Child Abuse

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the number of child abuse cases; and (ii) the percentage of cases that resulted in conviction, in each year since 2002.

(AQW 16319/11-15)

Mr Ford: Child abuse is a colloquial term and there is no specific offence for child abuse. The data reported in this answer are sexual and/or violence against the person offences involving children and young persons. Related offences may be prosecuted under a range of legislation including

the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, the Offences Against the Person Act 1861, the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968, the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885, the Children and Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968, the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, the Child Support (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, the Child Abduction (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 and the Offences Against the Person Act 1861.

The table below gives the number prosecuted, convicted and conviction rate for the calendar years 2002 -2006 and the number convicted for the calendar years 2007 – 2009 (the latest year for which figures are currently available). It is not possible to provide prosecution data for 2007 to 2009.

Number of prosecutions and convictions for sexual and/or violence against the person offences involving children and young persons.

Year	Prosecutions	Convictions	Conviction rate
2002	50	36	72%
2003	50	35	70%
2004	62	38	61%
2005	50	37	74%
2006	96	46	48%
2007	N/A	58	-
2008	N/A	52	-
2009	N/A	54	-

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Justice Sector: Staff Security

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice whether he will review the security arrangements for people working in the wider justice sector, as a result of the recent murder of prison officer David Black.

(AQW 16322/11-15)

Mr Ford: Following the murder of Prison Officer David Black, and in parallel with an assessment of security arrangements for Prison Officers and prison staff, advice was sought from the relevant authorities in relation to the Department of Justice, its Agencies and Arms Length Bodies.

Victims of Crime: Definition

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the potential for the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing minimum standards for the rights, support and protection of victims of crime to change the definition of a victim in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 16334/11-15)

Mr Ford: The new Directive on minimum standards for the rights, support and protection of victims of crime is due to be formally published this month and must then be transposed within three years.

While Northern Ireland is already largely compliant with the Directive, the position of victims, in terms of service provision and rights, will be strengthened following its implementation.

The draft five-year strategy for victims and witnesses of crime, which I published for consultation last month, includes two proposed commitments relating to the new Directive. These are that we will amend the existing Code of Practice for Victims of Crime to ensure that it is in compliance with the provisions in the Directive and that we will routinely consider, and keep under review, wider national and European developments in relation to the treatment of victims and witnesses.

My officials will shortly, in conjunction with counterparts in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, begin progressing work to give effect to the Directive and this will include an analysis of the definition of a victim of crime, for which there is currently no legal provision in Northern Ireland.

Prison Service Staff: Security

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice what steps he is taking with the Northern Ireland Office to address the issues surrounding the provision of the security measures needed to provide and maintain home protection for Prison Service staff.

(AQW 16444/11-15)

Mr Ford: As I said on the floor of the Assembly on Monday, following the murder of Prison Officer David Black last week, NIPS management responded immediately to remind staff of the need for vigilance and re-issued guidance on personal security.

The Director General also triggered an urgent review of security and subsequently issued further advice to staff, reminding them of the range of personal security measures which are already available to staff. My Department has taken steps to ensure all necessary equipment is available.

NIPS Officials have met with the PSNI to discuss the security of prison staff, and I have met the Chief Constable.

NIPS is responsible for the administration of Prison Service Protection Scheme which provides additional security measures for staff who are deemed to be at significant risk. An earlier policy which imposed an 18 month time limit on the maintenance of equipment under this scheme, following installation, has been withdrawn with immediate effect.

The Northern Ireland Office is responsible for the Home Protection Scheme which provides limited home protection for those in public service, including NIPS staff. I plan to discuss the operation of this scheme with the Minister of State for Northern Ireland when I meet him later this week.

The safety and personal security of NIPS staff is a high priority and is of course kept under constant review. My Department and Prison Service management continue to work closely with the appropriate authorities to consider further any implications for staff security.

Prisoner Numbers

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice how many people are currently serving sentences in prison.

(AQW 16566/11-15)

Mr Ford: At 08:30am on 12 November 2012 the Northern Ireland Prison Service had a total of 1254 sentenced prisoners.

PSNI: Agency, Consultancy and Associate Staff

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Justice what discussion he has had with the Chief Constable about the findings of the Audit Office report into the use of agency, consultancy or associate staff.

(AQO 2830/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have not had any detailed discussions with the Chief Constable about the findings of the Audit Office although the issues have arisen in the context of wider conversations about policing.

As I previously informed the House on 25 June, the awarding and management of contracts by the Police Service is an operational matter for the Chief Constable, for which he is accountable to the Policing Board. It was therefore appropriate that the Chief Constable and the Chief Executive of the Policing Board gave evidence with my Permanent Secretary at the Public Accounts Committee hearing.

This is a valuable report which contains a number of recommendations. I know the PSNI takes the report very seriously and that the PSNI has accepted all of the recommendations made in the report. It is important that the lessons are learned from the report and the subsequent PAC hearing.

Police resourcing needs to be seen in the round. I believe that the use of managed service contracts and agency staff can be justified in cases where there is a clear business need and against the context of uncertain future budgetary provision and I welcome the Audit Office's agreement with that approach.

It is the case that since devolution, the governance and accountability requirements around the police and other justice organisations have been tightened, a fact acknowledged in the report.

Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service: Estate Management

Mr B McCreagh asked the Minister of Justice when the 2009 PricewaterhouseCoopers report on a Strategic Outline Case for an Estate Management Strategy for the Northern Ireland Courts Service was made public.

(AQO 2832/11-15)

Mr Ford: Although the PricewaterhouseCoopers Outline Business Case has not been formally published, it has been shared with the Justice Committee. It is a policy development document, completed prior to the devolution of justice, to assist the then Northern Ireland Court Service in its work to develop an Estate Strategy.

On 1 May 2012, following the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland report into the adequacy of the court estate, I instructed my officials to begin work on drafting an Estate Strategy that is affordable and meets the needs of court users. Officials will be briefing the Justice Committee on progress on 22 November 2012.

Marie Stopes Clinic

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Justice whether he plans to carry out investigations into the running of the Marie Stopes clinic to ensure the legality of its activities.

(AQO 2835/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is not for me as Minister of Justice to carry out such investigations but for the agencies which have that responsibility.

Firearms Licensing

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Justice for a summary of the responses to the consultation on the proposals to vary the firearms licensing fees.

(AQO 2837/11-15)

Mr Ford: A consultation response document will be published on the Department of Justice website early in the New Year when the 55 consultation responses have been considered and a proposed way forward has been agreed. The publication will follow the Justice Committee being provided with a summary of the consultation responses.

Counterfeit Goods

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Justice to outline what work his Department, in conjunction with the PSNI, has undertaken to combat the sale of counterfeit goods.

(AQO 2838/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF), of which I am the Chair, has a dedicated Intellectual Property Crime sub-group which is made up of representatives from the law enforcement agencies and business partners. The aim of this group is to develop strategies to deal with a range of issues associated with intellectual property crime, including counterfeit goods.

In terms of practical steps, local markets throughout Northern Ireland continue to be a source of counterfeit goods. The PSNI has conducted searches at market venues in NI and continue to monitor the situation for further investigative opportunities. On 20 July 2012, the OCTF, in conjunction with Belfast City Council, launched the 'Real Deal' initiative at St. George's market. The 'Real Deal' provides a framework for market operators, councils, enforcement agencies and businesses to work together, at a local level, to keep counterfeit and other illicit goods, out of markets. The issue of counterfeiting was also discussed at an event with the Business community at the end of last year.

The education of the public on the dangers of the goods and where the income is going (often to drugs supply etc.) is important as is their assistance in reporting suspicions. The OCTF will continue to build on its programme of engagement with the public.

Criminal Assets: Confiscation of

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Justice how many applications were received for funding under the Criminal Confiscation Scheme.

(AQO 2839/11-15)

Mr Ford: A call for projects was launched on 29 August with a closing date of 12 October. One hundred and thirteen (113) expressions of interest were received from a range of organisations.

Requests for funding total approximately £2.4m, which far exceeds the amount of money available.

All those who expressed an interest in the scheme have been written to, inviting them to submit further information. This stage of the process will close on 26 November.

Prison Service: Estates Strategy

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of Justice to outline the next steps in the development of the Prison Service Estates Strategy.

(AQO 2840/11-15)

Mr Ford: A public consultation on the Northern Ireland Prison Service's Outline Estate Strategy was launched on 7 June this year. The written consultation formally closed on 28 September and since then NIPS has hosted a number of workshops with consultees to explore some of the issues raised, as well as public meetings and meetings with staff.

Throughout this consultation process I have been impressed by the level of engagement and the quality of input from stakeholders. The concerns and the suggestions which have been raised have been useful and insightful and are helping to challenge assumptions and to shape the strategy.

In response to some of the issues raised I have written to those consultees who have participated in workshops inviting further engagement on a range of themes, including how best to build in flexibility to our management of women prisoners in order to best meet their needs; how to put in place an effective approach, based on learning and development, to work with young offenders; and how best to meet the needs of the adult male population, including whether any of those needs might be served by locating a prison in the North West, rather than in a more central location. I have also met with three Coleraine, Limavady and Ballymoney Borough Councils and have invited further submissions from them on whether there is scope to build on and improve rehabilitation opportunities for prisoners in the North West.

NIPS' strategy for the development of the prison estate is an opportunity to create an environment which will promote rehabilitation, reduce risk and enhance public safety. That is why I want to ensure that all consultation responses are properly considered and evaluated before making final decisions. However, I hope to be able to make an interim announcement on the way forward before the end of November.

Department for Regional Development

Car Parking: Bangor

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 15741/11-15, to outline the timescale for any residents parking schemes in the centre of Bangor.
(AQW 16283/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I would advise the Member that, as stated in my answer to AQW 15741/11-15, my Department's Roads Service is currently not in a position to outline a timescale for the implementation of Residents' Parking Schemes in the North Down area, which includes the centre of Bangor.

Fuel Duty Rebate Scheme

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 15674/11-15, to list all organisations and associations that are members of, or benefit from, the Northern Ireland Fuel Duty Rebate Scheme.
(AQW 16288/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Northern Ireland Fuel Duty Rebate Scheme is open to all public transport operators in receipt of a valid Road Service Operators Licence to run stage carriage services as issued by the Department of Environment. In accordance with long standing Department for Regional Development policy, operators who apply for and show that they can meet the terms and conditions of the scheme are accepted onto the Fuel Duty Rebate scheme. A list of all organisations and associations that are members of, or benefit from, the Northern Ireland Fuel Duty Rebate Scheme is as follows:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ■ Ace Coaches | ■ Logans Executive Coach Hire |
| ■ Airporter Limited | ■ Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway Company T/A The Swilly Bus Service |
| ■ B&C Coaches | ■ Ulsterbus Limited |
| ■ Cavehill Coaches | ■ West Belfast Taxi (Transport) Limited |
| ■ Citybus Limited (Metro) | ■ Yellowline Coach Hire |

EU Funded Programmes

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development how many EU funded programmes are currently operated by his Department; and how many of these will continue beyond 2013.
(AQW 16310/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department does not currently operate or manage any EU programmes and it is unlikely that it will operate or manage any future programmes. However, during the current EU programme period (i.e. 2007 to 2013) the Department has engaged with the following EU funding programmes and networks:

- the Cross Border Territorial Co-operation Programme;
- the European Sustainable Competitiveness Programme; and
- the Trans-European Transport Network.

It is likely that these programmes and networks will continue to support projects across the EU during the next EU programme period (i.e. 2014 to 2020).

Hospital, Omagh: Link Road

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration he has given to constructing a link road between the existing A5 and the proposed new hospital in Omagh; and whether he has had any discussions with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in relation to the proposals.
(AQW 16350/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I met with a cross party delegation of councillors from Omagh on 10 October 2012, to discuss the potential for an access road to link the proposed new hospital in Omagh, from the main A5 arterial route.

Following that meeting, I am now arranging a meeting with Minister Poots to discuss the matter further.

Abercorn Bridge, Newtownstewart

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he intends to take as a matter of urgency to address the safety issues on the Abercorn Bridge, Newtownstewart.

(AQW 16351/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Abercorn Bridge in Newtownstewart is 80 years old and has suffered a significant amount of corrosion, which has consequently reduced the strength of the bridge. Officials have further advised that, in order to address these safety concerns, interim measures of limiting the weight of vehicles using the bridge to three tonnes and restricting traffic on the bridge to one lane were introduced in 2006.

Roads Service is currently investigating the cost effectiveness of refurbishing and strengthening this bridge. If this option proves to be good value for money and sufficient funding is available, it is hoped that the work could commence in autumn 2013. However, it is likely that, even after completion of the strengthening works, a permanent restriction in terms of either vehicle weight, or the number of traffic lanes will be required.

Rural Transport Fund

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Rural Transport Fund.

(AQW 16372/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Rural Transport Fund (RTF), which is administered by my Department, continues to provide support to:

- (i) the rural community transport partnerships to provide transport options for members who live in rural areas and do not have access to public transport due to reduced mobility;
- (ii) Translink to provide routes in rural areas which are deemed socially necessary but are uneconomic to run; and
- (iii) the Community Transport Association to provide advice guidance and some training to the partnerships.

This year we expect to provide RTF funding of £3.1m and attain 660,000 passenger trips (both individual and group trips). These figures are based upon the business plans submitted by the partnerships for 2012/13.

The main scheme which is provided by the partnerships is the Dial-A-Lift scheme which provides access to local services for its members. I am aware of the increase in the demand for Dial-A Lift services across all the partnerships and indeed rising costs in providing them. This has led the partnerships to focus on the most cost effective and efficient ways of delivering front line services including partnership working and mergers.

One of the most frequent requests made to the partnerships is to provide direct transport to hospital appointments outside their operational areas and primarily to hospitals in Belfast. There has been no change to my Department's approach to funding services in this regard. 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 has been done both directly through services provided by the partnerships and by linking members with existing public transport services provided by Translink. In this regard the position remains unchanged. However this is not 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 other Departments 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.

Civil Servants: Bonuses

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) what extra duties departmental staff carried out to receive bonus payments; and (ii) how many staff received a bonus in (a) 2009/10; (b) 2010/11; and (c) 2011/12.

(AQW 16379/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Bonus payments were made in recognition of a variety of behaviours and actions which were of significant benefit to the Department at a local or strategic level. These ranged from examples of exceptional commitment in difficult or demanding circumstances to incidences of outstanding teamwork which made a major contribution to the improvement of service delivery standards.

Details of the numbers of DRD staff who received bonuses during each of the years concerned were supplied in my recent answer to AQW 15836/11-15.

Sewage Pollution Alleviation Scheme: Kinnegar Lagoons, Holywood

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made on the NI Water sewage pollution alleviation scheme at Kinnegar Lagoons, Holywood, including a timescale for commencement and completion.

(AQW 16399/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the £3.5 million project to resolve the sewage pollution at Kinnegar Lagoons, Holywood is on target to be delivered within its PC13 Business Plan which covers the period

April 2013 to March 2015. Subject to the usual statutory approvals and budgetary constraints, NIW may be able to commence the project early within the next financial year with a construction period of approximately twelve months.

While this project will prevent further pollution to the Lagoons, a second phase will consider the remediation options for the Lagoons and particularly the odours emanating from the mud at low-tide. NIW has commenced work on this second phase and it is progressing well with several environmental studies and mud samplings completed this year. Further water sampling and flood analysis is also planned and the emerging findings will be known in the Spring of 2013 along with any financial and timing implications which will be largely dependent on the recommended remediation option.

Department for Social Development

Whistle-blowing/Grievances

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development how many (i) grievance cases have been taken; and (ii) whistleblowing complaints have been made, against (a) his Department; and (b) its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years; and at what cost to the public purse.

(AQW 16173/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):

The information relating to grievance complaints within the Department and its arm's length bodies is included at Table 1. Data relating to whistleblowing complaints in contained in Table 2.

Table 1: Grievance Complaints over last 5 years

Year	Organisation							
	DSD	Cost (£)	NI Housing Executive	Cost (£)	Ilex	Cost (£)	Charities Commission for NI	Cost (£)
1/4/2007 – 31/3/2008	30 *	0	25	0	0	0	0	0
1/4/2008 – 31/3/2009	71	0	11	0	1	0	0	0
1/4/2009 – 31/3/2010	87	0	11	0	1	25,352***	0	0
1/4/2010 – 31/3/2011	71	0	14	0	0	0	0	0
1/4/2011 – 31/3/2012	115	0	7	11,400**	3	0	0	0
Total	374	£0	68	£11,400**	5	£25,352***	0	£0

Foot Notes

* HRConnect is the source of data for the grievance information for the Department. This data is only available from 25 January 2008.

** This grievance cost relates to external legal assistance and advice provided to the NIHE.

*** This grievance cost relates to external legal assistance and advice provided to ILEX and the cost was shared equally between DSD and OFMDFM as sponsoring Departments.

Table 2: Whistleblowing Complaints over last 5 years

Year	Organisation							
	DSD	Cost (£)	NI Housing Executive	Cost (£)	Ilex	Cost (£)	Charities Commission for NI	Cost (£)
1/4/2007 – 31/3/2008	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0
1/4/2008 – 31/3/2009	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
1/4/2009 – 31/3/2010	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0
1/4/2010 – 31/3/2011	0	0	16	0	0	0	0	0
1/4/2011 – 31/3/2012	0	0	24	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	£0	54	£0	0	£0	0	£0

Foot note: The number of NIHE complaints include those received from staff, the public and anonymous complaints

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

Underoccupation Penalties: East Belfast

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in east Belfast will be affected by the under occupation penalty.

(AQW 16188/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The number of housing benefit claimants who will be affected by the under-occupation penalty in East Belfast is estimated at just under 1,500. This is based on data taken from Housing Executive records in May 2012 and will be subject to change in April 2013 when the under-occupation rules are scheduled to be introduced.

My officials are working with the Housing Executive to develop a range of support measures to compliment those outlined in my Housing Strategy, which will help mitigate the effects of the under-occupation penalty. I have increased funding for discretionary housing payments to help those in difficult situations and will change the legislation to allow such payments to be made to all social housing tenants. I have also asked landlords to ensure, as far as is possible, that all options are explored to prevent social tenants from being evicted from their homes. I continue to work with GB government officials to develop a programme of welfare reform that is tailored to the particular needs of Northern Ireland.

Welfare Reform: Departmental Budgets

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development what consideration has been given to the impact of Welfare Reform on other departmental budgets; and for his assessment of the British Medical Association report "Welfare Reform: pain but no gain".

(AQW 16194/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The impact of Welfare Reform on other departmental budgets is being fully assessed by each individual strand of the Welfare Reform programme, through engagement with both internal and external stakeholders. All known impacts are incorporated within the relevant Economic Appraisals.

My officials are actively considering a number of reports from a broad range of organisations, to ensure that the NI Welfare Reform Bill is fully impacted against the needs of people in Northern Ireland. This includes comments made in the British Medical Association report.

Social Housing: East Belfast

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development (i) to detail the social housing stock levels in East Belfast, broken down by bedroom numbers; (ii) to detail the current levels of vacancy and demand for each property type; and (iii) whether his Department holds the same information for the private rental sector.

(AQW 16195/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information regarding social housing stock in East Belfast is as follows: -

Housing Executive Stock: -

NIHE Dwellings	0 bed (Bedsits)	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5 bed
Total dwellings	22	287	1888	1139	121	9
Vacant dwellings	2	22	51	5	1	0

Housing Association Stock: -

Housing Association Dwellings	0 bed (Bedsits)	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed	5 bed
Total dwellings	0	931	1245	675	93	9
Vacant dwellings	0	26	42	4	2	0

Waiting List for East Belfast (as 30 September 2012): -

Calculated Bedroom Requirements	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed
	1007	443	174	56

Housing Executive and Housing Association Transfers Requests: -

Calculated Bedroom Requirements	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 bed
	251	139	79	23

In relation to (iii) my Department does not hold this information but the Land and Property Services in the Department of Finance and Personnel may.

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Personal Independence Payment: Assessments

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development whether assessors for Personal Independence Payments will have access to past medical records; and whether they will have been trained to a sufficient medical standard. (AQW 16208/11-15)

Mr McCausland: No decision has been taken as to whether medical reports held in Disability Living Allowance files will be available when considering a Personal Independence Payment claim. While there may be potential benefits Personal Independence Payment is an entirely new benefit with very different entitlement criteria from Disability Living Allowance.

Health Professionals that will undertake the Personal Independence Payment assessments must have the following qualifications and experience:

- They are an occupational therapist, nurse (level 1), physiotherapist, paramedic or doctor;
- They are fully registered with the relevant licensing body (doctors must have a licence to practise);
- They have no sanctions attached to registration unless they relate to disability; and
- They have at least 2 years post full registration experience or at less than 2 years post full registration by individual agreement with the Department.

Personal Independence Payment: Reassessments

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development what measures he will put in place to support people with disabilities, who appeal their assessments for Personal Independence Payment, and have to go through several reassessments. (AQW 16209/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I fully understand and appreciate that existing working age Disability Living Allowance customers may be anxious and concerned about the introduction of Personal Independence Payment and my Department, through the Social Security Agency, will be working to fully support those customers on an individual basis as they encounter the new benefit.

As part of this work, the Social Security Agency has been working with voluntary and community organisations in Northern Ireland in developing detailed customer journeys covering Personal Independence Payment new claims, reassessment, terminally ill cases and disputes process which include reconsideration and appeals. These customer journeys will involve interventions by Social Security Agency staff which are designed to support people through the process. The Welfare Reform

Bill also introduces a new mandatory reconsideration process which is intended to enable disputed social security benefits decisions to be changed at the earliest stage in the process and that customers are given a clear explanation of decisions taken. Customers will then be able to make an informed decision on whether to formally appeal, taking the outcome of the reconsideration into account.

It is not envisaged that any customer would have to undergo any more than one independent assessment during the lifetime of any claim.

Personal Independence Payment: Appeals

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development what measures he will put in place to monitor the impact the removal of Disability Living Allowance and a temporary failure to attain Personal Independence Payment will have on a person's ability to cover their living and care costs while they go through the appeals process.

(AQW 16210/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As with Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment is an additional, non-means-tested benefit and will be available to people with disabilities whether they are in or out of work. The intention is to target support at those disabled people who face the greatest barriers to leading full, active and independent lives.

Where a person is found not to be eligible for Personal Independence Payment, they may appeal the decision. A mandatory reconsideration process is being introduced to avoid unnecessary anxiety and delays for claimants as well as reduce additional administrative costs that can be incurred during the appeals process. Introducing mandatory reconsiderations will help to identify and revise incorrect decisions without the time-consuming appeals process.

You asked about the monitoring measures being put in place. The need to ensure that the Personal Independence Payment assessment is operating correctly and that it can be amended in light of operational experience is recognised. That is why the first independent review is to be undertaken within the first two years of the legislation on Personal Independence Payment coming into operation.

It is also important to remember that disability benefits are only one part of the package of support available to disabled people. For example, the Disabled Facilities Grant and the Supporting People programme provide alternative sources of support.

Personal Independence Payment: Assessments

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the tendering process for the assessments of Personal Independence Payments; and when he intends to make a final decision.

(AQW 16323/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The procurement process has been completed but there remain a small number of approval and contract award processes which have yet to be completed.

It is anticipated that formal award of the contract will take place within the next 2-3 weeks.

Housing Executive: Evictions

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive tenants have been evicted for anti-social behaviour in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16402/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive tenancy agreements do not capture the number of people resident at a property. However, the table below details the number of Housing Executive properties recovered on the grounds of anti-social behaviour for each of the last three years: -

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Total	54	62	51

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Customer First Initiative: South Down

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Social Development to outline any recent developments in the Social Security Agency's plans to roll out 'Customer First' in South Down.

(AQW 16503/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Social Security Agency announced, on the 1st June 2012, the continued roll-out of the Customer First initiative across the rest of the Social Security Working Age Network having completed the process in what was formerly North District and Belfast West and Lisburn. These have delivered significant service improvements and the continued roll-out of Customer First will ensure all of the Agency's network customers can benefit from these service improvements.

This final phase of Customer First implementation will include offices in South Down namely, Ballynahinch, Downpatrick, Kilkeel and Newcastle Social Security Offices. Current proposals include the establishment of Benefit Processing Centres in Newry (processing Jobseekers Allowance) and Lurgan (processing Income Support). This will result in processing staff from Ballynahinch, Kilkeel and Newcastle offices relocating to either Newry or Lurgan Benefit Processing Centres. Taking account of the emerging impacts of the Social Fund reforms, it has now been agreed that, as there is a critical mass of Social Fund processing staff already located in Downpatrick Social Security Office and that this location should continue to be utilised. All staff in this office are therefore expected to remain in situ although this will be subject to final confirmation of staffing requirements as a result of Social Fund reform. Additionally, staff in Newcastle Social Security Office currently processing Social Fund, will relocate to Downpatrick Social Security Office.

Personal Independence Payment: Assessments

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister for Social Development to outline whether he will take past issues with the Work Capability Assessments into consideration when preparing for the assessments for Personal Independence Payment.

(AQO 2817/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is important to emphasise that the Personal Independence Payment assessment will be very different to the Work Capability Assessment. The assessment for Personal Independence Payment will focus on ability to carry out key everyday activities, the challenges people face, and the support they need where as the Work Capability Assessment is linked to a person's ability to work. Personal Independence Payment will be payable to disabled people regardless of whether or not they are in work. That fact alone means the assessments will be different.

We are seeking to learn from the experience of delivering the Work Capability Assessment to ensure we get Personal Independence Payment right from the start. As part of this we are looking closely at the findings of both of the independent reviews of the Work Capability Assessment carried out by Professor Malcolm Harrington to ensure that where appropriate his recommendations are fully taken into account. We are however aware the assessment itself will be a living tool, which will continue to be monitored to ensure that it reflects any further best practice arising from future recommendations which may be appropriate.

The Personal Independence Payment assessment criteria have also been the subject of extensive consultation –all the consultations have been issued in Northern Ireland at the same time as in Great Britain beginning in May 2011 with most recent issued in January this year.

I have had numerous meetings with the Department for Work and Pensions Ministers on Welfare Reform matters including Personal Independence Payment and made them fully aware of the particular circumstances that we are facing in Northern Ireland to ensure that they are factored into the design of the new benefit. This is important given the differences in Northern Ireland Disability Living Allowance customer base with its much higher proportion of mental health cases.

Following the latest consultation exercises I wrote to the Minister for Disabled People, Esther McVey MP and secured a commitment that all views and concerns expressed from Northern Ireland are being given careful consideration as they evaluate what further changes need to be made to assessment criteria to ensure they are a fair reflection of disabled people's needs.

I fully appreciate the concerns that people have about the Personal Independence Payment assessment processes and understand the views around that there are aspects of the reform which are financially driven. I support reform which is focussed on ensuring resources are properly targeted on supporting those with a disability and not simply intended to reduce benefit expenditure. I am totally committed to ensuring that what is in place in Northern Ireland delivers a positive experience for customers and recognise the importance of having a transparent and empathetic claims and assessment process.

Gambling Law

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development whether he intends to review the laws on gambling at race meetings on a Sunday.

(AQO 2818/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am currently completing a review of the gambling law within Northern Ireland. Any proposal to change the law will depend upon the agreement of the Executive. I expect to bring a paper to my Executive colleagues in the near future; it is not, however, my intention to propose any changes to the law on gambling on Sunday.

High Streets Task Force

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development to outline any outcomes from the High Street Taskforce.

(AQO 2819/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Earlier this year I established a Taskforce to review the support my Department provides to our town and city centres. The objective of the review was to see if this support could be further strengthened in the light of the High Street Review commissioned by the Prime Minister for England's town and city centres.

The Taskforce has consulted with a range of groups which represent Northern Ireland's high streets and those Departments most closely involved with addressing the issues faced by our town and city centres. The Taskforce also held 29 public meetings across Northern Ireland during May and June to listen to the concerns and hear the ideas of retailers and other

businesses owners. My officials are currently considering the evidence collected and their report, including recommendations, will be with me shortly.

I anticipate that a number of the recommendations arising as a consequence of the review will extend beyond my Department and will require the consideration of my Executive colleagues. I will be studying the report carefully and will make my response in due course.

Housing: Ballymena

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on improving the housing stock in the Waveney Estate and Doury Road areas of Ballymena.

(AQO 2820/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Last year, when I visited Ballymena, I was shown around the estate and can only say I was shocked at the poor state of some of the housing. The housing in the north of the estate is without doubt amongst the worst I have seen anywhere. Many of the offending properties are in the private sector and alongside Housing Executive voids, all have left this part of the estate in a very vulnerable position and totally unattractive for prospective new tenants.

It is specifically areas like this, that have suffered decline and empty homes, that prompted me to include community regeneration proposals in my new Housing Strategy. We urgently need to address these kinds of issues that have been blighting once vibrant areas for far too long.

There is an imperative to look anew at how we can best use housing to take the lead in rejuvenating failing communities and put them back on their feet.

That is why, some months ago, I tasked the Housing Executive with undertaking a full economic appraisal to identify the best option that could deliver for the worst part of the Doury Road Estate. Discussions have already taken place with a number of private landlords to determine their intentions and this continues to be work in progress.

I expect the appraisal to be completed by the end of 2012 and I will then make a decision on the way forward.

Meantime, the Housing Executive continues to make improvements to their own stock. Some of their beyond repair houses have been demolished to tidy up the area. Other homes have been improved, with recent kitchen and heating system upgrades.

Housing: Rents

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of whether the use of discretionary payments to supplement rents is a short-term solution to a long-term problem.

(AQO 2821/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Housing benefit reforms are aimed at bringing Housing Benefit expenditure under control, so the long-term problem is being tackled. The intention is to provide a fairer, more sustainable scheme by taking steps to ensure that people on benefit are not living in accommodation that would be out of reach of many people in work.

Discretionary housing payments are available to help people with the impact of housing benefit reforms, though they are not intended to maintain previous housing benefit levels. The Discretionary housing payments budget has been increased substantially, with £3.426million available in 2012-13, £6.944million in 2013-14, £5.939million in 2014-15 and £4.431million in 2015-16 and in 2016-17.

I indicated at the recent launch of my new housing strategy, that I am taking forward a number of actions that will put in place housing services that will provide support and assistance for those households impacted by housing benefit reforms. For example, as well as increasing the funding for discretionary housing payments, to help alleviate the size criteria restriction, an advice service will be put in place which will proactively contact social tenants and help them to consider their housing options. These could include helping them to move to more appropriately sized houses, facilitating home swaps, or advising on how to take in lodgers/boarders. I have also emphasised the need for social landlords to consider their operational flexibility and focus on opportunities to bring forward more appropriately sized accommodation which will increase their stock of small accommodation/one-bedroom units in those designated areas of need. I will ensure as far as is possible that all options are explored to prevent social tenants from being evicted from their homes.

Welfare Reform: Regulations

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development when he expects all the regulations which will flow from the Welfare Reform Bill to be approved.

(AQO 2822/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The target date for approval of all regulations flowing from the Welfare Reform Bill will be dependent on the date on which the Bill receives Royal Assent. Where the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) operational date for regulations is April 2013 or before, I am seeking to have the equivalent Northern Ireland regulations approved by the Assembly as soon as possible after Royal Assent, and where possible to match the DWP operational date.

Welfare Reform: IT

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister for Social Development, following his statement on Welfare Reform on 22 October 2012, whether he has been seeking a commitment from Lord Freud to make the necessary changes to the IT system to facilitate the different circumstances which exist here.

(AQO 2823/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I refer to my Statement to the Assembly on 22 October 2012 (please see link below) in which I explained that after a series of detailed negotiations with the Department for Work and Pensions Ministers, I have secured key commitments from Lord Freud to implement changes to the computer system supporting Universal Credit. These commitments mean that the housing cost element of Universal Credit will be paid automatically to the landlord, unless the claimant chooses to receive the full Universal Credit payment and in turn pays the landlord. In addition additional functionality will enable the computer system supporting Universal Credit, where necessary, to split the payment between the two parties in the household, or to make two smaller payments each month rather than one single payment.

To allow time to develop, build and test the additional system functionality required to support these local arrangements I have decided to launch Universal Credit in Northern Ireland in April 2014, by which time the supporting information technology systems will be available.

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Official-Report/Reports-12-13/22-October-2012/#1>

Newbuilds: East Belfast

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Social Development how many new build homes are planned for the East Belfast constituency in 2013.

(AQO 2824/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Plans, as detailed in the current Social Housing Development Programme, are to start 91 new social homes in the East Belfast Constituency in 2012/13 and 26 new homes in 2013/14.

However, proposals outlined in my new Housing Strategy mean that there is potential for these numbers to increase, because of a range of initiatives that look to stretch public funding and provide additional housing.

For example, I am developing a bid through the Get Britain Building Fund for interest free loan funding in the region of £19m for housing associations to build more shared ownership housing. Where social housing is concerned, amongst a raft of other proposals, I plan to harmonise building standards with those used for private housing, which will reduce both bureaucracy and costs and allow more housing to be produced. I also intend to explore long term leasing from the private sector and, in addition, also have work underway to introduce developer contributions when market circumstances improve.

All are designed to use scarce public funding in more innovative ways, in order to speed up, and add to, the supply of housing for our most vulnerable citizens.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 23 November 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Quangos

Mr Beggs asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many QUANGOs were attached to each Department at 1 July 2009; and how many are currently attached to each Department.

(AQW 13786/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): Information on the number of public bodies sponsored by departments during the 2009/10 financial year is contained in the Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Report 2009/10 which is available from the Assembly Library (reference number NI 8346) or from our Department's website -

http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/microsoft_word_-_of1_10_0152180___public_bodies___annual_report_-_pdf.pdf.

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 or from the Assembly Library (reference number R351.41609 NOR). Annual Reports for previous years going back as far as the 1996/97 financial year are also available on our Department's website.

We hope to publish the Report for 2011/12 later this year. A copy will be placed in the Assembly Library and on the OFMDFM website.

Inter-ministerial Groups: Meetings

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 11354/11-15, to list (i) the dates of each individual meeting; (ii) the attendees at each meeting; and (iii) the duration of each meeting.

(AQW 13845/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The information requested is set out in the table below. Since our response to AQ11354/11-15 some of the groups have held further meetings and the information has been updated to reflect this.

Title of Group	Meeting dates	Attendees	Duration of meeting
Programme for Government	12/04/12	First Minister deputy First Minister Minister of Finance and Personnel	Information not held
Budget Review Group	30/09/10	First Minister Deputy First Minister Minister of Finance and Personnel Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Social Development Minister of Justice Departmental Officials	Information not held
	28/10/10	First Minister Deputy First Minister Minister of Finance and Personnel Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Social Development Minister of Justice Departmental Officials	Information not held

Title of Group	Meeting dates	Attendees	Duration of meeting
	04/11/10	First Minister Deputy First Minister Minister of Finance and Personnel Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Social Development Minister of Justice Departmental Officials	Information not held
	11/11/10	First Minister Deputy First Minister Minister of Finance and Personnel Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Social Development Departmental Officials	Information not held
	17/11/10	First Minister Deputy First Minister Minister of Finance and Personnel Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Social Development Minister of Justice Departmental Officials	Information not held
	01/12/10	First Minister Deputy First Minister Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Social Development Minister of Justice Departmental Officials	Information not held
	14/12/10	First Minister Deputy First Minister Minister of Finance and Personnel Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Social Development Departmental Officials	Information not held
	18/01/11	First Minister Deputy First Minister Minister of Finance and Personnel Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Social Development Minister of Justice Departmental Officials	Information not held
	25/01/11	First Minister Deputy First Minister Minister of Finance and Personnel Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Social Development Minister of Justice Departmental Officials	Information not held
	15/02/11	First Minister Deputy First Minister Minister of Finance and Personnel Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Social Development Departmental Officials	Information not held
	24/02/11	First Minister Deputy First Minister Minister of Finance and Personnel Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Social Development Minister of Justice Departmental Officials	Information not held

Title of Group	Meeting dates	Attendees	Duration of meeting
	15/06/11	First Minister Deputy First Minister Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Regional Development Departmental Officials	Information not held
	11/10/11	First Minister John O'Dowd – Acting Deputy First Minister Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Regional Development Minister for Social Development Minister of the Environment Departmental Officials	Information not held
	31/01/12	First Minister deputy First Minister Minister for Employment & Learning Minister of Finance & Personnel Minister of the Environment Minister for Regional Development Departmental Officials	Information not held
	01/03/12	First Minister deputy First Minister Minister for Employment & Learning Minister of Finance & Personnel Minister of the Environment Minister for Regional Development Departmental Officials	Information not held
	15/05/12	First Minister deputy First Minister Minister for Employment & Learning Minister of the Environment Minister for Regional Development Departmental Officials	Information not held
	27/09/12	First Minister Deputy First Minister Minister of Finance and Personnel Minister of Regional Development Minister for Employment and Learning Minister of the Environment Departmental Officials	Information not held
Poverty and Social Inclusion	26/03/09	First Minister deputy First Minister Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Minister for Social Development Minister for Employment and Learning Mr Jeffrey Donaldson – JM OFMDFM Mr Gerry Kelly – JM OFMDFM Departmental Officials	Information not held
	21/05/09	First Minister deputy First Minister Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Minister of Education Mr Jeffrey Donaldson – JM OFMDFM Departmental Officials	Information not held
	29/03/10	First Minister Mr Gerry Kelly – JM OFMDFM Mr Robin Newton – JM OFMDFM Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Departmental Officials	Information not held

Title of Group	Meeting dates	Attendees	Duration of meeting
	03/10/12	Mr Jonathan Bell – JM OFMDFM Ms Jennifer McCann – JM OFMDFM Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure Minister of Education Minister of the Environment Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety Minister of Justice Minister for Social Development Departmental Officials	Information not held
Children and Young People	13/03/08	Mr Jeffrey Donaldson – JM OFMDFM Mr Gerry Kelly – JM OFMDFM Minister for Regional Development Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety Minister of Education Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Minister for Employment and Learning Departmental Officials	Information not held
	24/06/08	Mr Jeffrey Donaldson – JM OFMDFM Mr Gerry Kelly – JM OFMDFM Minister for Social Development Minister for Employment and Learning Departmental Officials	Information not held
	11/09/08	Mr Jeffrey Donaldson – JM OFMDFM Mr Gerry Kelly – JM OFMDFM Minister for Employment and Learning Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Minister of Education Departmental Officials	Information not held
	18/06/09	Mr Jeffrey Donaldson – JM OFMDFM Mr Gerry Kelly – JM OFMDFM Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Minister of Education Minister for Social Development Departmental Officials	Information not held
	19/11/09	Mr Robin Newton – JM OFMDFM Mr Gerry Kelly – JM OFMDFM Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure Minister of Education Departmental Officials	Information not held
	29/06/10	Mr Jeffrey Donaldson – JM OFMDFM Mr Gerry Kelly – JM OFMDFM Minister of Justice Departmental Officials	Information not held
	02/03/11	Mr Gerry Kelly – JM OFMDFM Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Departmental Officials	Information not held
	11/01/12	Mr Jonathan Bell – JM OFMDFM Ms Martina Anderson – JM OFMDFM Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure Minister of Education Departmental Officials	Information not held

Title of Group	Meeting dates	Attendees	Duration of meeting
	20/06/12	Mr Jonathan Bell – JM OFMDFM Ms Jennifer McCann – JM OFMDFM Minister for Social Development Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety Minister of Justice Minister for Employment and Learning Departmental Officials	Information not held
Welfare Reform	16/01/12	Minister for Social Development Minister of Finance & Personnel Minister of the Environment Minister for Regional Development Ms Martina Anderson – JM OFMDFM Departmental Officials	Meetings are not timed, however the average duration for these meetings has been between 1½ - 2 hours
	06/02/12	Minister for Social Development Minister of Finance & Personnel Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Regional Development Ms Martina Anderson – JM OFMDFM Departmental Officials	
	20/02/12	Minister for Social Development Minister of Finance & Personnel Minister for Employment and Learning Minister of the Environment Ms Martina Anderson – JM OFMDFM Departmental Officials	
	27/02/12	Minister for Social Development Minister of Finance & Personnel Minister for Employment and Learning Minister of the Environment Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety Minister of Education Departmental Officials	
	02/04/12	Minister for Social Development Minister of Finance & Personnel Minister for Employment and Learning Minister of the Environment Ms Martina Anderson – JM OFMDFM Minister of Justice Minister of Education Minister for Regional Development Departmental Officials	
	14/05/12	Minister for Social Development Minister for Employment and Learning Minister of the Environment Ms Martina Anderson – JM OFMDFM Minister for Regional Development Departmental Officials	
	18/06/12	Minister for Social Development Minister for Employment and Learning Minister of the Environment Ms Jennifer McCann – JM OFMDFM Minister for Regional Development Departmental Officials	

Title of Group	Meeting dates	Attendees	Duration of meeting
	02/07/12	Minister for Social Development Minister for Employment and Learning Ms Jennifer McCann – JM OFMDFM Minister of Finance and Personnel Departmental Officials	
	10/09/12	Minister for Social Development Minister for Employment and Learning Ms Jennifer McCann – JM OFMDFM Minister for Regional Development Minister of Education Minister of the Environment Departmental Officials	
	22/10/12	Minister for Social Development Minister of Finance and Personnel Ms Jennifer McCann – JM OFMDFM Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Regional Development Minister of Education Minister of the Environment Departmental Officials	
Ministerial Road Safety Group	30/01/08	Minister of the Environment Departmental Officials	1- 2 hours
	10/03/08	Minister of the Environment Minister for Regional Development Departmental Officials	1 – 2 hours
	15/12/11	Minister of the Environment Minister for Regional Development Minister of Justice Departmental Officials	1 hour
	09/05/12	Minister of the Environment Minister of Justice Departmental Officials	1 hour
	17/10/12	Minister of the Environment Minister of Justice Minister for Regional Development Departmental Officials	1 hour
Ministerial Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence	21/05/08	Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety Minister for Employment and Learning Mr. Gerry Kelly – JM OFMDFM Departmental Officials	2 hours
	30/09/09	Mr. Gerry Kelly – JM OFMDFM Mr. Robin Newton – JM OFMDFM Departmental Officials	2 hours
	29/06/10	Minister of Justice Minister of Education Minister for Social Development Departmental Officials	1 hour 30 minutes
	24/05/12	Minister of Justice Ms Martina Anderson – JM OFMDFM Departmental Officials	1 hour 25 minutes
Ministerial Group on Mental Health and Learning Disability	22/10/07	Not available	1 hour

Title of Group	Meeting dates	Attendees	Duration of meeting
	26/01/09	Mr. Jeffery Donaldson – JM OFMDFM Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety Minister for Employment and Learning Departmental Officials	1 hour
	23/11/09	Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety Minister for Employment and Learning Departmental Officials	1 hour
	14/06/10	Minister for Social Development Minister of Justice Departmental Officials	1hour 30 minutes
	01/12/10	Minister of Justice Departmental Officials	1 hour 30 minutes
Ministerial Co-ordination Group on Suicide Prevention	16/10/07	Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety Minister of Education Mr. Ian Paisley – JM OFMDFM Departmental Officials	1 hour 30 minutes
	23/06/08	Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety Mr. Jeffery Donaldson – JM OFMDFM Mr. Gerry Kelly – JM OFMDFM Departmental Officials	2 hours
	20/01/11	Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety Mr. Gerry Kelly – JM OFMDFM Mr. Robin Newton – JM OFMDFM Departmental Officials	2 hours
	28/06/12	Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure Minister of Education Minister for Employment and Learning Ms Jennifer McCann – JM OFMDFM Departmental Officials	2 hours
Sub-Committee on the Economy	20/05/10	Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Regional Development Minister of Education Minister of Finance and Personnel Mr. Robin Newton – JM OFMDFM	1 hour
	08/07/10	Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Regional Development Minister of Education Minister of Finance and Personnel Mr. Robin Newton – JM OFMDFM	1 hour
	27/09/10	Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Regional Development Minister of Education Minister of Finance and Personnel	1 hour
	27/06/11	Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Regional Development Minister of Education Ms Martina Anderson – JM OFMDFM Mr. J Bell – JM OFMDFM	1 hour

Title of Group	Meeting dates	Attendees	Duration of meeting
	12/09/11	Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister for Employment and Learning Minister of Education Minister of Finance and Personnel Mr. J Bell – JM OFMDFM Minister of the Environment Minister of Social Development	1 hour
	18/10/11	Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister for Employment and Learning Ms Martina Anderson – JM OFMDFM Mr. J Bell – JM OFMDFM Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development	1 hour
	23/01/12	Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Regional Development Minister of Education Minister of Finance and Personnel Ms Martina Anderson – JM OFMDFM Mr. J Bell – JM OFMDFM	1 hour
	07/06/12	Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister for Employment and Learning Minister for Regional Development Minister of Education Minister of Finance and Personnel Ms Martina Anderson – JM OFMDFM Mr. J Bell – JM OFMDFM Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety	1 hour
	11/09/12	Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister for Employment and Learning Minister of Education Minister of Finance and Personnel Ms Jennifer McCann – JM OFMDFM Mr. J Bell – JM OFMDFM	1 hour 30minutes

Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation Board: Remuneration

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the remuneration arrangements for the members of the Maze Regeneration Board.

(AQW 14065/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: This matter is under consideration.

Quangos

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the number of QUANGOs linked to their Department (i) at 8 May 2007; and (ii) at the date of this question; and how many people served on the QUANGOs on these respective dates. (AQW 14782/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The table below gives details of the public bodies linked to OFMDFM.

Please note that some of the bodies outlined as existing on 27 September 2012 were also in existence on 8 May 2007, but have since been reclassified as “public bodies”.

Public Body	No of Appointees
8 May 2007	
Advisory Council on Infrastructure Investment	17
Commissioner for Children and Young People	1
Commission for Victims and Survivors	0
Economic Research Institute of NI Ltd	14
Equality Commission	17

Public Body		No of Appointees
8 May 2007 (<i>continued</i>)	Ilex Urban Regeneration Co Ltd	8
	Planning and Water Appeals Commissions	23
	Strategic Investment Board Ltd	5
	Statute Law Committee	9
	Total = 9	Total = 94
27 September 2012	Commissioner for Children and Young People	1
	Commission for Victims and Survivors	1
	Commissioner for Older People	1
	Community Relations Council	16
	Equality Commission	16
	Ilex Urban Regeneration Co Ltd	9
	Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation	11
	NI Judicial Appointments Commission	10
	NI Memorial Fund	14
	Planning and Water Appeals Commissions	22
	Strategic Investment Board Ltd	7
	Victims and Survivors Service	0
	Total =12	Total = 108

Fort George Site, Londonderry

Mr Campbell asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 15452/11-15, whether any such costs are associated with the Fort George site in Londonderry.

(AQW 16221/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The costs referred to in AQW 15452/11-15 related to the annual maintenance, security and other associated costs for the Ebrington site and are not associated with the Fort George site.

Delivering Social Change: Signature Projects

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 15434/11-15, whether the Delivering Social Change signature projects will be rolled out according to the Investment Zones identified by the Social Investment Fund.

(AQW 16383/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The aim is to have interventions across all the Social Investment Fund Investment Zones.

Ebrington Site: Derry

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether all monies allocated for the redevelopment of Ebrington for 2012/13 will be spent in this financial year.

(AQW 16409/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The budget allocated to Ilex for the redevelopment of Ebrington is monitored at various points in the year to ensure any identified funding easement can be re-allocated in year. This process identified funding easements in 2012/13 and Ilex has declared this easement to the Department through the monitoring process. Ilex has provided assurance that the remaining budget will be fully utilised during this year.

Corporation Tax

Mrs McKeivitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the negotiations on devolving powers for Corporation Tax.

(AQO 2763/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Joint Ministerial Working Group which examined the issues involved in devolving responsibility for the rate of Corporation Tax to the Executive, met for the last time on 18 October.

We have completed our work and addressed the Terms of Reference. We are currently considering the joint report from the Group which should be passed to the Prime Minister by the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury soon. This will highlight findings on the costs, administrative changes and the potential legislative vehicle for transferring Corporation Tax powers.

We are pressing for a meeting with the Prime Minister to make our case and pushing for a decision by the end of the year.

Attorney General: Report into Role of

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will publish the report carried out by the former Scottish Lord Advocate, Dame Elish Angiolini, into the role of the Attorney General of Northern Ireland.

(AQW 16447/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive agreed in 2010 that the newly appointed Attorney General, in addition to his wider constitutional and legal functions, should act as chief legal adviser to the Executive and departments. It was decided at that time that aspects of this legal adviser role would be reviewed after a period of operation.

Earlier this year, in our capacity as joint chairmen of the Executive, we invited the Rt Hon Dame Elish Angiolini DBE QC, who has particular experience as a Law Officer in a devolved administration, to carry out this limited review of the Attorney General's legal adviser relationship with the Executive and departments. We have recently received her report on an 'in confidence' basis, and we are currently considering it.

We have no plans to publish this report.

Childcare Strategy Group

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) how many times the Childcare Strategy Group has met; (ii) which Departments are represented on the Group; and (iii) to outline the Group's workplan and priorities.

(AQW 16452/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: To date, there have been six meetings of the Childcare Strategy Group. The membership of the Group is currently comprised of senior representatives from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Education. Other departments may from time to time be invited to attend meetings of the Group.

In developing the Childcare Strategy, the Group has identified three main priority work areas: better information and advice for parents and those looking for childcare; capacity building and improved provision within the childcare sector; and establishing a research programme to inform the development of the Strategy. The Group's work plan includes overseeing the development of a draft consultation document on the Strategy and identifying, with departments, proposals for projects to be funded through the Executive's Childcare Fund.

Ministerial Directions

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, since May 2007, how many decisions with spending implications have been made as a result of ministerial directions.

(AQW 16624/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Since May 2007 there has been one Ministerial Direction issued within the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister which has had spending implications.

Administration Costs

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why there has been a 16.5 percent increase in administration costs in 6 months in 2012/13, as revealed in Table H of the Minister of Finance and Personnel's statement of 12 November 2012.

(AQW 16759/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The entire increase of 16.5% relates to technical changes agreed as part of June 2012 Monitoring, incorporating the reclassification of costs from resource to administration and budget transfers from other departments for services provided centrally by OFMDFM.

These are:

- Technical transfers into the Department for Government Advertising Unit costs (£0.9m).
- Reclassification of Attorney General for Northern Ireland (AGNI) costs (£1.7m) from resource to admin as it is not a frontline body.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

DARD Headquarters: Relocation of

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development on what date it was decided that the site in Ballykelly would be the location of her Department's new headquarters.

(AQW 15735/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I made the decision to relocate my Departmental Headquarters to Ballykelly following an Executive meeting on 3rd September 2012.

Schmallenberg Virus

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the detection of the schmallenberg virus, whether the affected herd, or any herd in neighbouring areas, consists of imported stock from the rest of the UK, or elsewhere.

(AQW 16236/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I can confirm that the affected herd has not imported stock since Schmallenberg virus was first detected in 2011. I am not in a position to comment on other herds.

Investigations are ongoing on farm but it is considered that the likely source of infection is midges. The investigation has not extended to neighbouring farms as this is unlikely to give us useful information.

My officials had a meeting with key industry stakeholders on 5 November at which they outlined our approach to surveillance. Stakeholders were supportive of the current level of surveillance undertaken which is proportionate to the risk.

Microchip Scanners

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Minister for her assessment of PSNI personnel using microchip scanners to assist them in investigating criminal activity, such as the theft of dogs.

(AQW 16250/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I understand that the PSNI do not use microchip scanners at this time.

Dog control is legislated for here by the Dogs Order 1983, as amended by the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011. In April this year provisions in the 2011 Act amended the Dogs Order by making microchipping a condition of a dog licence. Compulsory microchipping was introduced as one of a range of new dog control measures to help tackle the problems of dog attacks, straying and unwanted dogs; protect the public; promote responsible dog ownership; and penalise irresponsible owners.

By making microchipping a requirement of the dog licence, the Act makes it easier to identify stray dogs and return them to their owners, therefore reducing the number of dogs humanely destroyed each year. It also makes the identification of problem dogs and tracing their owners easier therefore helping to promote responsible dog ownership.

Stray Dogs

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, given that there are no dog breeding establishments registered in Belfast; to detail (i) how many stray dogs, on average annually, are picked up in Belfast; and (ii) where the dogs are kept.

(AQW 16252/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Dog control is legislated for here by the Dogs Order 1983, as amended by the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011. The Councils enforce this legislation and provide statistics to my Department regarding its operation.

- (i) Based on information provided by Belfast City Council, over the last 5 calendar years, there have been on average around 860 stray dogs impounded each year.
- (ii) I understand that stray dogs seized in Belfast are held at a dog pound operated by Carrickfergus Borough Council.

Fish Hatchery Licence

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the process within her Department, or its arm's-length bodies, by which an individual or organisation can obtain a licence for a fish hatchery.

(AQW 16280/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The legislative provisions governing the licensing of fish farms, which may incorporate a hatchery, for the commercial production of fish and shellfish, is contained in sections 11 and 11A of the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966, as amended ("the 1966 Act").

Under section 11 of the 1966 Act it is an offence to operate a fish farm other than under the authority of a fish culture licence granted by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and in accordance with any conditions attached to the licence.

Section 11A(5A) of the 1966 Act (as inserted by regulation 16 of the Aquatic Animal Health Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009 provides that, where an authorisation is required for the operation of a fish farm under the 2009 Regulations, a fish culture licence shall not be issued for that operation until an authorisation is granted.

An application for a fish culture licence must be supported by all relevant supporting documentation including proof of ownership or lease of the site, a business plan and, if appropriate, other statutory consents i.e. planning permission, a water discharge consent and a licence to abstract water.

If, after having considered the potential environmental impact of the proposed development, the Department is minded to grant a fish culture licence, it is required to publish, at the applicant's expense, notice of the application in at least two newspapers in order to give local interests and the public an opportunity to express their views on the proposal.

The Department will allow a period of at least one month for receipt of written objections. After this period if no objections are received or if the objections received are deemed vexatious, frivolous or insubstantial, the Department will make a decision. Where an objection causes genuine grounds for concern, and it is not possible to resolve the concern by compromise, the Department will not grant a fish culture licence without the holding of a local public inquiry by the Water Appeals Commission for N I to consider the objections.

In relation to arm's-length bodies, the Loughs Agency of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (FCILC), through powers conferred on it by the Foyle and Carlingford Fisheries (Northern Ireland) Order 2007 (and parallel Southern legislation), will, on commencement of the necessary provisions, be responsible for the licensing of aquaculture, including hatcheries, in the Foyle and Carlingford Areas. The commencement of these provisions will occur once the necessary arrangements to facilitate such a roll-out take place, which will include the FCILC, the Crown Estate and the southern Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine signing off on a management agreement in respect of the seabed in Lough Foyle.

Horse Board

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to what extent her Department subsidises the NI Horse Board. (AQW 16324/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department does not subsidise the NI Horse Board.

Woodlands/Parks: Grants

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much her Department has spent on grants for creating new woodlands or parks in each of the last five years. (AQW 16352/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department supports creating new woodlands including community woodland, through the Woodland Grant Scheme and Agri - Environment Schemes. Over the past five years a total of £12.2M has been spent to support this. A breakdown of the expenditure is detailed in table 1 below.

Table 1 – DARD expenditure to support creating new woodland

Year	Agri-Environment Scheme Expenditure (£M)	Woodland Grant Scheme Expenditure (£M)	Total (£M)
2011	0.7	1.7	2.4
2010	0.7	1.4	2.1
2009	0.7	2.0	2.7
2008	0.7	1.2	1.9
2007	0.7	2.4	3.1
Total	3.5	8.7	12.2

Woodlands/Parks: Creation of

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the new woodlands and parks created in each of the last five years. (AQW 16353/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department provides support for land owners to create new woodland through Agri-Environment Schemes and the Woodland Grant Scheme. Over the past 5 years, 4,771ha of new woodland has been supported with these schemes. New woodlands supported by DARD are predominantly native woodlands and are widely distributed across the whole of the north on land that is suitable for planting. The details of these newly planted areas in each of the last five years by schemes are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Areas of new woodland supported by DARD

Year	Agri-Environment Scheme (ha)	Woodland Grant Scheme (ha)	Total Area (ha)
2011	602	337	939
2010	626	262	888
2009	628	251	879
2008	615	289	904
2007	624	537	1,161
Total	3,095	1,676	4,771

Bovine TB: Gamma Interferon Tests

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in light of the cost of gamma interferon tests for bovine TB, what work has been carried out, or commenced, to produce a test within his Department or the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute; and what timescales are in place for completion.

(AQW 16382/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) undertakes gamma interferon tests on approximately 17,000 animals per year on behalf of DARD as part of the bovine TB eradication programme. The gamma interferon blood test is EU Commission approved as a complementary test to the mandatory tuberculin skin test.

This gamma interferon testing is undertaken using a commercial assay (test kit), which until recently was protected under patent. With the expiry of the test's patent protection, AFBI has been undertaking a preliminary scoping exercise to assess the feasibility of developing an equivalent "in-house" test.

While such a development may offer potential cost savings in the longer term, a number of scientific and technical issues would need to be overcome in order to develop a sufficiently robust test and resources secured to allow test development to proceed. AFBI has been provided with information in respect of a possible avenue of funding for what is a commercially orientated project.

AFBI have received DARD funding to conduct an evaluation of the use my Department currently makes of the gamma interferon blood test to detect TB in cattle. This is a three year project and the outcomes will better inform the way the test is used in the TB eradication programme.

Stray Dogs

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many stray dogs have been put down in each of the last five years.

(AQW 16422/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Dog control is legislated for here by the Dogs Order 1983, as amended by the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011. The Councils enforce this legislation and provide statistics to my Department regarding its operation.

The table below details the number of stray dogs humanely destroyed in each of the calendar years 2007 – 2011.

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Stray dogs destroyed	2595	2060	1346	1115	905

Stray Dogs

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many stray dogs have been picked up in each of the last five years, broken down by council area.

(AQW 16423/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Dog control is legislated for here by the Dogs Order 1983, as amended by the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011. The Councils enforce this legislation and provide statistics to my Department regarding its operation.

The table below details the number of stray dogs impounded, by Council area, for the calendar years 2007 – 2011.

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Antrim	244	241	244	296	264
Ards	315	263	234	222	236
Armagh	670	603	436	372	456

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Ballymena	199	181	173	207	201
Ballymoney	127	105	97	99	99
Banbridge	188	190	113	118	119
Belfast	1037	939	668	771	896
Carrickfergus	163	162	158	164	163
Castlereagh	214	197	215	149	115
Coleraine	209	215	201	197	197
Cookstown	136	164	144	139	155
Craigavon	756	789	654	677	584
Derry	444	404	327	287	329
Down	726	686	622	682	657
Dungannon	447	515	502	450	497
Fermanagh	183	221	149	144	182
Larne	176	146	108	150	102
Limavady	101	110	80	70	62
Lisburn	466	380	309	387	437
Magherafelt	143	142	126	104	136
Moyle	71	50	56	38	30
Newry	724	506	380	422	489
Newtownabbey	374	299	311	290	333
North Down	101	96	112	132	242
Omagh	379	159	166	185	162
Strabane	174	167	160	132	133
Total	8735	7930	6745	6884	7276

Civil Servants: Pay Increases

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the percentage pay increase for civil servants in her Department that are due to take effect in August 2013, broken down by each grade.

(AQW 16441/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The average percentage pay increase that takes effect from 1st August 2013 is estimated at 2.58% for DARD staff. This includes both pay progression and revalorisation of the pay scales. The total estimated percentage increase for each grade level is set out in the attached annex.

ANNEX

Percentage Pay Increase in DARD by Grade

Grade 6 and equivalent	1.80%
Grade 7 and equivalent	2.38%
DP and equivalent	1.80%
SO and equivalent	3.21%
EOI and equivalent	2.67%
EOII and equivalent	3.13%
AO and equivalent	2.39%
AA and equivalent	1.62%

Public Appointments

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail all the public appointments made (i) during the current Assembly mandate; and (ii) the previous mandate, broken down by community background.

(AQW 16445/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: During the current Assembly mandate 45 public appointments, including re-appointments, were made to DARD - sponsored Public Bodies of which 24 declared community background as Protestant, 17 as Roman Catholic, 2 as Neither and 2 were unknown. Included in these figures are 9 appointments to the Agri-Food Strategy Board which were made jointly with the DETI Minister.

Details of public appointments are provided in the Public Bodies & Public Appointments Annual Report published each year by OFMDFM's Central Appointments Unit. The Report for 2011/12 has not yet been published.

Assembly Mandate 8 May 2007	No.	Protestant	Roman Catholic	Neither	Unknown
Total appointments	46	26	15	5	0
Current Assembly Mandate 17 May 2011 to date	No.	Protestant	Roman Catholic	Neither	Unknown
Total appointments	45**	24	17	2	2
Total all appointments	91	50	32	7	2

** Includes 9 appointments to the Agri-Food Strategy Board made jointly with the DETI Minister

Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute: Public Health Risks

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department, or any other Department, is advised of public health risks that the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute identifies whilst carrying out analytical research on behalf of the private sector.

(AQW 16464/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I would direct the Member to my response of 6 November 2012 to his question referenced AQW15936/11-15. That response included not only work on AFBI's headquarters site at Newforge Lane, Belfast but across the whole organisation.

EU Protected Food Status

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the impact the award of EU protected food status has had on the marketing and price of each food type.

(AQW 16478/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department's strategy is to raise the profile of the EU Protected Food Names Scheme and generate awareness of the benefits to producer groups. While marketing and price information for individual products is outside the remit of DARD and would be commercially sensitive information held directly by the products in question, it is fair to say that the awarding of a PFN status to Armagh Bramleys, Comber Earlies and Lough Neagh Eels, can only further support the marketing effort of each produce, as it provides a mark of quality and distinction.

The specific role of DARD is to assist and facilitate applications and my officials support producer groups at all stages of application. However, I appreciate that there needs to be a better understanding of the scheme among food companies and so I am pleased to report that my Department recently hosted a Protected Food Name (PFN) seminar in Greenmount. The seminar, which was well attended by interested producer groups and key industry representatives, outlined how they could benefit from being awarded a PFN Designation and the theme of the presentations focused on the objective of how best to utilise a PFN award as well as the benefits of being involved in such a scheme.

I hope that building on the success of our first three food products to achieve a PFN status, coupled with further information about the benefits of the scheme, we will see further successful applications for local produce.

Rural Development Council/Countryside Services: Funding

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the level of funding provided for the administration and delivery of training to (i) The Northern Ireland Rural Development Council; and (ii) Countryside Services, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16494/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The following tables list the funding provided for administration and delivery of training by:

- (i) The NI Rural Development Council (RDC) and
- (ii) Countryside Services Ltd (CSL) in each of the last three years.

(i) NI Rural Development Council (RDC)

RDC	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Admin Only	£97,128	£237,296	£141,455
Delivery	Nil*	Nil*	Nil*

* All Delivery payments made direct to the applicant (beneficiary) by DARD

(ii) Countryside Services Ltd (CSL)

CSL	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Admin Only	£259,008	£271,382	£328,575
Delivery	£4,537	£74,415	£203,337

Rural Development Programme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what constitutes a strategic project under Measure 3.4 of the Rural Development Programme; and whether playgrounds, 3G sports pitches or multi-use games areas fall into this category.

(AQW 16495/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: All strategic projects under the Rural Development Programme must provide long term impact in the rural area and have a more strategic impact than a standard Axis 3 project. They must be eligible within the current Operating Rules and fit with the overall objectives of the respective measure and meet a need/gap identified within the Local Rural Development Strategy. Specific criteria had to be met as per the advertisements in the press as follows:-

- 1 Local authorities, NGO's and the community sector including social economy enterprises will be eligible to apply for strategic projects.
- 2 Planning Permission (and other Statutory Requirements) applied for or already in place;
- 3 The proposed start date is no later than 1st April 2013;
- 4 The planned end date is no later than 31st December 2014;
- 5 The project grant requirement is above £250k but less than £1m;
- 6 The Project must be Capital or Infrastructure;
- 7 The Project Promoter/s matched funding must be at least 15%;
- 8 Robust project delivery costings must be in place at application stage;
- 9 A full business case or a recent (within last 12 months) independent Economic Appraisal to 'Green Book' standard must be in place; and
10. All applications must have consulted the appropriate Local Council as a key informant.

It is not the nature of the individual items eg playground, 3G pitch or multi use gaming area within a project which make it strategic but rather the impact that the project will have across the community. This is within the context of providing the infrastructure to enable rural dwellers to benefit from and participate in strategies of local and central government aimed at healthier lifestyle, sports participation and constructive youth pursuits.

Forest Service

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how local communities have directly benefited from the operations of Forest Service in the last three years.

(AQW 16499/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Our forests provide significant recreational and social benefits for local communities by providing informal recreation access opportunities and this benefit was augmented by new legislation in 2010 (Forestry Act 2010) which provided for a statutory right of pedestrian access to forestry land.

As well as informal access for local communities, a wide range of activities and events have also been facilitated through permission agreements. These activities and events are mainly organised by community based organisations and range from sponsored walks to events as diverse as Santa trails or poultry fairs.

My officials in Forest Service have also developed improved partnership working arrangements with local Government and other bodies to make sure forests play as full a role as possible in supporting local and regional recreation and tourism agendas.

In County Fermanagh, this approach has proven beneficial in allowing Fermanagh District Council to develop the Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark by encompassing many Forest Service properties and enhancing Fermanagh's reputation as an attractive tourist destination.

Forest Parks: Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the caravan parks within government-owned forest parks in Fermanagh; (ii) the cost of upgrading each park to 5 star status; and (iii) how many construction jobs would be created by this work.

(AQW 16579/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Forest Service manages two small caravan sites within the forest estate in County Fermanagh.

The future development of facilities in forests, including caravan parks, will be in line with the Forest Recreation Strategy and my vision for improved partnership working with local government and other bodies to make sure that forests play as full a role as possible in supporting regional and local recreational and tourism agendas.

This will ensure that development within forests supports the needs of local tourism destination areas and the evaluation of prioritised projects including costs involved with construction or jobs created either directly or indirectly through tourism spin-offs will be assessed through this process.

As the major benefits will be to local communities, Forest Service would look to local authorities to take the lead role in developing plans to improve tourism potential and good progress has been made with several councils, including Fermanagh District Council.

Ash Dieback Disease

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what support she is providing for landowners to identify and remove incidences of chalara fraxinea.

(AQW 16936/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department is supporting landowners who have planted ash trees in their woodlands in a number of ways.

DARD staff are proactively assessing ash sites at greatest risk and collecting samples of symptomatic material for laboratory testing. On those sites testing positive, DARD resources are being made available to expedite the removal and destruction of infected material.

We have also provided information about the disease symptoms on the DARD website to assist landowners with their inspections and recognition of the disease. A telephone helpline number for reporting suspect sites is also available on the website.

Ash Dieback Disease

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) when she was first made aware of the discovery of ash dieback disease in Northern Ireland; and (ii) when destruction notices were served on landowners of the five sites where ash dieback disease was discovered.

(AQW 16940/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I was first made aware of the discovery of ash dieback disease in the north on Thursday 15 November. At this stage, there was confirmation of one outbreak at recently planted ash site in County Antrim, near Bushmills. A statutory notice requiring destruction of the affected trees near Bushmills was prepared and issued on the morning of Friday 16 November, this was following formal laboratory confirmation of Chalara fraxinea infection at the site on Wednesday 14 November.

Laboratory confirmation of the disease at a further four sites was received on Friday 16 November, in the afternoon. Work has been in progress since that time to prepare and issue notices for the remaining sites. It is intended that these will all issue this week. Containment notices are in place on all of the remaining sites restricting the movement of plant material and requiring the implementation of appropriate biosecurity measures pending the issue of the destruction notices.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Olympic Games: Success

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in light of the success of athletes in a range of sports in the 2012 Olympics, what steps she intends to take to build on that success for other athletes through partnerships and other means.

(AQW 15929/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): As part of the implementation of my strategy for sport, Sport Matters, I have been working to lay the foundations for a sporting legacy from the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games which includes building on the success of athletes from a range of sports.

Sport Matters already recognises that genuine partnership working and joined up planning are essential to success and achieving excellence in performance amongst existing successful athletes and athletes in other sports. To that end, a Sport Matters Action Plan has been drawn up and published by Sport NI setting out key steps and actions to be taken over the next 4 years to build on the legacy of the 2012 games and help athletes in a range of sports to achieve success at European, Commonwealth, World and Olympic/Paralympic competition.

This action plan has already been agreed with sports organisations and a wide range of parties in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Líofa: Funding

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 13899/11-15, to detail the level of funding her Department has allocated to Líofa for each financial year between 2011/12 and 2015/16.

(AQW 15952/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department has not allocated specific funding to Líofa for each financial year. Individual Business Cases are prepared for expenditure associated with Líofa such as the appointment of a Líofa Officer and the Líofa birthday event.

Líofa: Budget

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when she will publish the business case for the establishment of a specific Líofa budget.

(AQW 15953/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There is no specific Líofa budget. Individual Business Cases are prepared for expenditure associated with Líofa.

Libraries NI

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what support LibrariesNI has provided to the eight libraries initially marked for closure in the Stage 2 Review.

(AQW 15975/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Libraries NI has worked with Library Action Groups established in each of the communities where libraries were considered for closure under the Stage 2 Review. The seven libraries that were retained have been supported through the provision of promotional postcards, leaflets and membership packs and, in some cases, promotion using social media.

The libraries continue to provide core activities such as story-times, book clubs, class visits and activities for pre-school children. All libraries participated in the Titanic Reading Voyage (a summer reading challenge for children) and various IT promotions such as the "ITea and Biscuits" Week which took place in September.

Libraries NI developed an action plan following the second stage of the Review of the Library Estate (libraries outside Greater Belfast). The plan is currently being implemented.

World Police and Fire Games: Parking and Public Transport

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will be working with the Department for Regional Development to increase parking facilities and public transport in Belfast in advance of the World Police and Fire Games 2013.

(AQW 15995/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: 2013 World Police and Fire Games Limited is currently developing a Transportation Plan for the Games in August 2013. The majority of transport provision will utilise the existing public transportation network, as most of the venues are within the Greater Belfast Area.

The Company is currently engaging with Translink regarding the use of the existing network. This includes discussions regarding the temporary enhancement of some routes in terms of numbers of buses and frequency of use during the period of the Games.

In terms of parking facilities, the Company is engaging with the Department for Regional Development (DRD) to consider these facilities. The Company is also engaging with DRD on other transportation issues, including the potential need for any road closures or lane restrictions to facilitate particular sports event such as cycling or the triathlon.

Ministerial Appointments

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the success rates of (i) catholic; and (ii) protestant applicants for Ministerial appointments from May 2007 to April 2011.

(AQW 16029/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The success rates of (i) catholic applicants for Ministerial appointments made from May 2007 to April 2011 is 18.30% while the success rates of (ii) protestant applicants for the same period is 17.92%. This is illustrated in the following table.

	Community Background Catholic	Community Background Protestant	Community Background Neither or Unknown	Totals
Applications	153	240	56	449
Number successful	28	43	6	77
% successful	18.30	17.92	10.71	17.15
% successful out of total applications	6.24	9.58	1.34	-

Sport NI: Chief Executive

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether the Chief Executive of Sport NI is in post, and, if not, why not. (AQW 16054/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I can advise that the Chief Executive of Sport NI has retired with effect from 31 October 2012.

Libraries: Computer Terminals

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the number of computer terminals in each library; and the internet connection speed in each library.

(AQW 16163/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Please see attached Annex A; which details the number of computer terminals in each library broken down by Public Access Terminals, Staff terminals and library management issue terminals and Annex B; which shows the network provision of a series of 2mb lines to each library along with their volumes.

Annex A

Breakdown of PATs (Public Access Terminals), Staff Terminals & Library Management Issue Terminals. (September 2012)

Library	Description	Total
Antrim Library	Issue PC	2
	PAT	35
	Staff PC	6
Ardoyne Library	Issue PC	3
	PAT	16
	Staff PC	1
Armagh Library	Issue PC	5
	PAT	24
	Staff PC	1
Ballycastle Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	5
	Staff PC	1
Ballyclare Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	6
	Staff PC	1
Ballyhackamore Library	Issue PC	4
	PAT	7
Ballymena Central Library	Issue PC	8
	PAT	32
	Staff PC	4

Library	Description	Total
Ballymoney Library	Issue PC	2
	PAT	12
	Staff PC	2
Ballynahinch Library	Issue PC	3
	PAT	6
Banbridge Library	Issue PC	3
	PAT	23
	Staff PC	1
Bangor Carnegie Library	PAT	45
	Staff PC	10
Belfast Central Library	Issue PC	16
	PAT	61
	Staff PC	35
Bessbrook Library	Issue PC	2
	PAT	6
Broughshane Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	4
Brownlow Library	Issue PC	6
	PAT	19
	Staff PC	3
Carnlough Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	3
Carrickfergus Library	Issue PC	3
	PAT	20
	Staff PC	2
Carryduff Library	Issue PC	3
	PAT	5
Castledearg Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	10
	Staff PC	1
Castlewellan Library	Issue PC	3
	PAT	7
	Staff PC	1
Chichester Library	Issue PC	3
	PAT	11
	Staff PC	4
Cloughfern Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	4
Coalisland Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	6

Library	Description	Total
Coleraine Library	Issue PC	5
	PAT	17
	Staff PC	1
Colin Glen Library	Issue PC	6
	PAT	22
	Staff PC	1
Comber Library	Issue PC	2
	PAT	6
Cookstown Library	Issue PC	4
	PAT	30
	Staff PC	1
Cregagh Library	Issue PC	4
	PAT	7
	Staff PC	1
Creggan Library	Issue PC	2
	PAT	9
	Staff PC	1
Crossmaglen Library	Issue PC	2
	PAT	6
	Staff PC	1
Crumlin Library	Issue PC	2
	PAT	6
	Staff PC	1
Cushendall Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	4
Derry Central Library	Issue PC	8
	PAT	35
	Staff PC	6
Donaghadee Library	Issue PC	4
	PAT	10
	Staff PC	1
Downpatrick Library	Issue PC	4
	PAT	22
	Staff PC	4
Draperstown Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	4
Dromore Library	Issue PC	2
	PAT	7
Dundonald Library	Issue PC	3
	PAT	10

Library	Description	Total
Dungannon Library	Issue PC	5
	PAT	34
	Staff PC	15
Dungiven Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	10
	Staff PC	2
Enniskillen Library	Issue PC	4
	PAT	18
	Staff PC	8
Falls Road Library	Issue PC	3
	PAT	16
	Staff PC	2
Finaghy Library	Issue PC	2
	PAT	14
	Staff PC	3
Fintona Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	4
Fivemiletown Library	Issue PC	2
	PAT	6
Garvagh Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	4
Gilford Library	Issue PC	2
	PAT	2
Glengormley Library	Issue PC	4
	PAT	24
	Staff PC	2
Greenisland Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	8
	Staff PC	2
Greystone Library	PAT	5
	Staff PC	1
Grove Library	Issue PC	3
	PAT	16
	Staff PC	2
Holywood Arches Library	Issue PC	4
	PAT	14
	Staff PC	2
Holywood Library	Issue PC	2
	PAT	16
	Staff PC	2

Library	Description	Total
Irish & Local Studies Library Armagh	Issue PC	1
	PAT	9
	Staff PC	2
Irvinestown Library	Issue PC	2
	PAT	12
Keady Library	Issue PC	2
	PAT	12
Kells & Connor Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	4
Kilkeel Library	Issue PC	3
	PAT	5
	Staff PC	1
Killyleagh Library	Issue PC	3
	PAT	5
Kilrea Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	4
Larne Library	Issue PC	4
	PAT	22
	Staff PC	2
Limavady Library	Issue PC	3
	PAT	15
	Staff PC	2
Lisburn Library	Issue PC	12
	PAT	49
	Staff PC	6
Lisburn Road Library	Issue PC	4
	PAT	3
Lisnaskea Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	9
	Staff PC	2
Lurgan Library	Issue PC	5
	PAT	35
	Staff PC	1
Maghera Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	6
	Staff PC	1
Magherafelt Library	Issue PC	3
	PAT	23
	Staff PC	2
Mellon Centre for Migration Studies	Issue PC	1
	PAT	6
	Staff PC	2

Library	Description	Total
Moirá Library	Issue PC	3
	PAT	3
Newcastle Library	Issue PC	3
	PAT	9
	Staff PC	1
Newry Library	Issue PC	4
	PAT	30
	Staff PC	5
Newtownards Library	Issue PC	4
	PAT	5
Newtownbreda Library	Issue PC	3
	PAT	6
	Staff PC	1
Newtownstewart Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	8
	Staff PC	1
Omagh Library	Issue PC	4
	PAT	34
	Staff PC	16
Ormeau Road Library	Issue PC	3
	PAT	14
	Staff PC	3
Portadown Library	Issue PC	5
	PAT	30
	Staff PC	3
Portaferry Library	Issue PC	2
	PAT	10
	Staff PC	1
Portglenone Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	4
Portrush Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	15
	Staff PC	2
Portstewart Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	6
	Staff PC	1
Randalstown Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	6
Rathcoole Library	Issue PC	2
	PAT	14
	Staff PC	3

Library	Description	Total
Rathfriland Library	Issue PC	2
	PAT	6
Richhill Library	Issue PC	2
	PAT	4
Saintfield Library	Issue PC	3
	PAT	5
Shankill Road Library	Issue PC	4
	PAT	22
	Staff PC	1
Shantallow Library	Issue PC	4
	PAT	14
	Staff PC	4
Strabane Library	Issue PC	3
	PAT	20
	Staff PC	3
Strathfoyle Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	8
	Staff PC	2
Suffolk Library	Issue PC	4
	PAT	14
	Staff PC	2
Tandragee Library	Issue PC	2
	PAT	6
	Staff PC	1
Tullycarnet Library	Issue PC	5
	PAT	20
	Staff PC	2
Warrenpoint Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	10
	Staff PC	2
Waterside Library	Issue PC	2
	PAT	10
	Staff PC	2
Whitehead Library	Issue PC	1
	PAT	4
	Staff PC	1
Whiterock Library	Issue PC	5
	PAT	15
Woodstock Library	Issue PC	4
	PAT	7
	Staff PC	1
Grand Total		1828

Summary	
Total number of PATs	1,331
Total number of Issue PCs	286
Total number of Staff PCs	211
Total	1,828

Annex B**Breakdown of the Internet Speed in each Library.**

Library	Bandwidth in MB	Number of 2MB Lines
Cregagh	2	1
Carryduff	2	1
Castlewellan	2	1
Ulster folk park	2	1
Lisburn Rd	2	1
Finaghy	4	2
Castledearg	2	1
Woodstock	2	1
Crumlin	2	1
Dromore	2	1
Dungiven	2	1
Fivemiletown	2	1
Randalstown	2	1
Portglenone	2	1
Whitehead	2	1
NILA Portadown	2	1
Kilkeel	2	1
Killyleagh	2	1
Maghera	2	1
Moira	2	1
Newtownstewart	2	1
Saintfield	2	1
Bangor	6	3
Comber	2	1
Newcastle	2	1
Creggan	2	1
Ulidia Centre	2	1
Ballyhackmore	2	1
Fintona	2	1
Lisnaskea	2	1
Ballycastle	2	1
Bessbrook	2	1
Cushendall	2	1
Keady	2	1

Library	Bandwidth in MB	Number of 2MB Lines
Cloughfern	2	1
Kilrea	2	1
Broughshane	2	1
Carnlough	2	1
Draperstown	2	1
Garvagh	2	1
Greystone	2	1
Kells and Connor	2	1
Portaferry	2	1
Richhill	2	1
Tandragee	2	1
Crossmaglen	2	1
Ballymena New	4	2
Armagh	2	1
Hollywood Arches	2	1
Whiterock	2	1
Tullycarnet	2	1
Rathcoole	2	1
Ballyclare	2	1
Shantallow	2	1
Limavady	2	1
Coleraine	2	1
Downpatrick	2	1
Ballynahinch	2	1
Dundonald	2	1
Chichester	2	1
Larne	2	1
Brownlow	2	1
Armagh Local Studies	2	1
Greenisland	2	1
Portrush	2	1
Portstewart	2	1
Ballymena HQ	4	2
Suffolk	2	1
Ballymoney	2	1
Waterside	2	1
Lisburn Library	8	4
Coalisland	2	1
Warrenpoint	2	1
Enniskillen	4	2
Shankill	2	1

Library	Bandwidth in MB	Number of 2MB Lines
Skegoneill	2	1
Strathfoyle	2	1
Falls Road	2	1
Newtownbreda	2	1
Rathfriland	2	1
Armagh HQ	4	2
Omagh HQ	6	3
Ormeau Rd.	4	2
Dungannon	4	2
Antrim	4	2
Hollywood	2	1
Glengormley	2	1
Lurgan	4	2
Newtownards	2	1
Cookstown	4	2
Magherafelt	2	1
Portadown	2	1
Carrickfergus	4	2
Colin Glen (Daily Farm)	2	1
Newry	4	2
Banbridge	4	2
Ardoyne	2	1
Donaghadee	2	1
Derry Central	4	2

Libraries: Location of

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure which libraries are designated as being in (i) rural; or (ii) urban locations. (AQW 16164/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Please see the attached Annex for a breakdown of libraries designated as being in (i) rural and (ii) urban locations.

The definition of rural / urban is based on the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements (NISRA, 2005) which defines settlements of less than 4,500 as rural communities and all other settlements with a population greater than 4,500 as urban.

You will note that this classification uses data from the 2001 census.

Annex A

Library	Classification
Broughshane	Rural
Carnlough	Rural
Castlederg	Rural
Castlewellan	Rural
Crossmaglen	Rural
Crumlin	Rural
Cushendall	Rural

Library	Classification
Draperstown	Rural
Dungiven	Rural
Fintona	Rural
Fivemiletown	Rural
Garvagh	Rural
Irvinestown	Rural
Keady	Rural
Kells & Connor	Rural
Killyleagh	Rural
Kilrea	Rural
Lisnaskea	Rural
Maghera	Rural
Moira	Rural
Newtownstewart	Rural
Portaferry	Rural
Portglenone	Rural
Rathfriland	Rural
Richhill	Rural
Saintfield	Rural
Tandragee	Rural
Whitehead	Rural
Antrim	Urban
Ardoyne	Urban
Armagh	Urban
Ballycastle	Urban
Ballyclare	Urban
Ballyhackamore	Urban
Ballymena Central	Urban
Ballymoney	Urban
Ballynahinch	Urban
Banbridge	Urban
Bangor Carnegie	Urban
Belfast Central	Urban
Bessbrook	Urban
Brownlow	Urban
Carrickfergus	Urban
Carryduff	Urban
Chichester	Urban
Cloughfern	Urban
Coalisland	Urban
Coleraine	Urban

Library	Classification
Colin Glen	Urban
Comber	Urban
Cookstown	Urban
Cregagh	Urban
Creggan	Urban
Derry Central	Urban
Donaghadee	Urban
Downpatrick	Urban
Dromore	Urban
Dundonald	Urban
Dungannon	Urban
Enniskillen	Urban
Falls Road	Urban
Finaghy	Urban
Glengormley	Urban
Greenisland	Urban
Greystone	Urban
Grove	Urban
Hollywood	Urban
Hollywood Arches	Urban
Kilkeel	Urban
Larne	Urban
Limavady	Urban
Lisburn City	Urban
Lisburn Road	Urban
Lurgan	Urban
Magherafelt	Urban
Newcastle	Urban
Newry City	Urban
Newtownards	Urban
Newtownbreda	Urban
Omagh	Urban
Ormeau	Urban
Portadown	Urban
Portrush	Urban
Portstewart	Urban
Randalstown	Urban
Rathcoole	Urban
Shankill	Urban
Shantallow	Urban
Strabane	Urban

Library	Classification
Strathfoyle	Urban
Suffolk	Urban
Tullycarnet	Urban
Warrenpoint	Urban
Waterside	Urban
Whiterock	Urban
Woodstock	Urban

Fish Hatchery Licence

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the process within her Department, or its arm's-length bodies, by which an individual or organisation can obtain a licence for a fish hatchery.

(AQW 16278/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Fish hatcheries are regulated by DCAL through the issue of Permits under Section 14 of the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966. This allows for the artificial propagation of fish for specific scientific purposes or the improvement of any fishery.

However, where the intention is to feed fry and rear them on, then the facility would be deemed a fish farm and would require to be registered by DARD through the issue of a fish culture licence.

Sport in the Community

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what support her Department has given to the Department for Social Development for the Sport in the Community project.

(AQW 16281/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Neither my Department nor Sport NI received any request or approach from the Department of Social Development for support towards its Sport in the Community project. Having said that, the project which focuses on volunteer development and community capacity building through partnership working, is similar to a number of programmes operated by Sport NI which are aimed at supporting and developing sports volunteers and governing bodies. These include Awards for Sport, Clubmark and Activ8 Young Leaders.

EU Funded Programmes

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many EU funded programmes are currently operated by her Department; and how many of these will continue beyond 2013.

(AQW 16311/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department does not act as the Managing Authority for any EU funded programmes. However, my Department and its ALBs have been successful in securing EU funding opportunities to support a range of culture, arts and leisure projects. I am extremely encouraged by this success which has made a valuable and additional contribution to the growth of the culture, arts and leisure sectors here. My Department and its ALBs will continue to pursue further EU funding opportunities in the next EU funding round, 2014-2020, to build on this success.

Loughs Agency: Service Level Agreement

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 15127/11-15, whether her Department has a service level agreement with the Loughs Agency for the protection of fisheries in the Public Angling Estate which are not in the Loughs Agency's jurisdiction.

(AQW 16342/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Service Level Agreement between my Department and the Loughs Agency only covers those waters that form part of the DCAL Public Angling Estate that are located within the Loughs Agency jurisdiction.

There is no Service level Agreement between the Loughs Agency and DCAL which permits Loughs Agency personnel to provide protection to Public Angling Estate fisheries which fall outside the jurisdiction of the Loughs Agency.

Media Protocol

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 15403/11-15, for an update on the status of each arm's-length body in relation to her Department's media communications protocol.

(AQW 16343/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: All of the Department's ALBs have indicated that they are committed to working with DCAL and improving best practice in communications, in particular at a time when public finance is tight. The Department's ALBs are engaging in the communications forum and have welcomed this development. The communications protocol has been noted by SportNI, WPGF 2013, Armagh Observatory, Armagh Planetarium and NIScreen. LibrariesNI are broadly content with the arrangements as outlined and are working with the Department in clarifying issues as they arise. The Department is waiting for a response from National Museums Council. National Museums NI and the Arts Council have offered some suggested changes to the document and these are under consideration.

Lough Neagh Basin: Fish

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether boddagh and black boddagh fish are present in the Lough Neagh Basin, and its arterial rivers, or if they are extinct.

(AQW 16550/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Boddagh and black boddagh fish are present in Lough Neagh and its tributaries. DCAL has commissioned AFBI to produce a status report on trout stocks in the DCAL area. This report will provide information on fish stock levels and recommendations for future management.

Museums: Funding

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding is available to museums that are accredited by the Northern Ireland Museum Council that is not available to museums not accredited.

(AQW 16569/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Northern Ireland Museums Council (NIMC) supports local museums to gain accreditation under the Arts Council England's 'Museum Accreditation Scheme'. Currently there are 37 accredited local museums, all of which are NIMC members.

All local museums which attain the standard and are members of NIMC are eligible for funding through the various grant schemes that the Council operates. These include the NIMC Accredited Museum Grant Programme and the NIMC Acquisition Fund.

Grants offered through the NIMC Accredited Museum Grant Programme included £67,897 in 2009-10, £57,037 in 2010-11 and £45,756 in 2011-12.

Grants of £6,750 in 2009-10, £4,300 in 2010-11 and £2,714 in 2011-12 were offered through the NIMC Acquisition Fund.

NIMC funding is not available to non-Accredited museums. However assistance is provided to non-Accredited museums, heritage bodies (and the general public) by way of advice, guidance and training, with particular support being given to new museum proposals and to those organisations preparing to apply to the Accreditation standard.

Ministerial Directions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, since May 2011, how many decisions with spending implications have been made as a result of ministerial directions.

(AQW 16626/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: No Ministerial Directions have been given since May 2011.

Freedom of Information Requests

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the number of Freedom of Information requests received by her Department in each year since 2007; (ii) the proportion of requests each year that were not answered within the time limit; (iii) the number of requests currently outstanding by more than (a) one to two months (b) three to four months; (c) five to six months; (d) seven to twelve months; and (e) more than twelve months.

(AQW 16645/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín:

Year	Requests Received	Proportion of Requests not Answered Within Time Limit
2007	454	20 %
2008	523	12.8%
2009	346	13 %
2010	348	16.6%
2011	549	15.3%

Year	Requests Received	Proportion of Requests not Answered Within Time Limit
	Number of Requests Currently Outstanding	
1-2 Months	8	
3-4 Months	6	
5-6 Months	Nil	
7-12 Months	Nil	
More Than 12 Months	Nil	

This information is extracted as at 15 November 2012.

Depression: Exercise and Sport

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she has any plans to work with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to promote exercise and sport as a treatment for depression.

(AQW 16692/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am already working closely with a number of Departments, including the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) to increase participation rates in sport and exercise amongst children and young people, adults, women, people with a disability, older people and socio-economically disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, my Department is supporting DHSSPS in developing a new Investing for Health Framework. As part of that process, DCAL has submitted a number of proposals to DHSSPS setting out where sport might contribute to the implementation of the Framework and, in turn, promote exercise and sport as an aid to treating depression.

Prompt Payment

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what practices, protocols and measures are in place within the Department and its arm's-length bodies to ensure prompt payment to contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers.

(AQW 16731/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Two performance targets exist in this area. First, there is a 30 day target backed by legislation which contains sanctions in the form of potential interest charges where payments are late. Second, there is an Executive-set target to pay suppliers within 10 days.

My Department and its arm's length bodies have a variety of processes in place to ensure prompt payment to suppliers and to monitor performance in this area. These have been developed to suit individual business circumstances but all rely on monthly reporting of performance and on remedial action to correct performance lapses.

In addition to this, my Department monitors overall performance at Board level: a report is provided to the monthly Board meeting which details performance by each ALB and the Department itself against each payment target. Explanations are given for variances and there is follow up action to ensure that the highest possible performance standards are maintained.

The effectiveness of these arrangements is reflected in the fact that overall, in excess of 90% of invoices are currently being paid within the Executive's 10 day target.

Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in light of her contribution to the debate on boxing in the Assembly on 12 November 2012, whether she wishes to revise her answer to AQW 14874/11-15.

(AQW 16774/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do not believe there is any need for my answer to AQW 14874/11-15 to be revised. In my answer I advised that funding is currently only being considered for boxing clubs that are governing body affiliated. This is consistent with the criteria set out in the proposed Boxing Investment Programme, recently published for consultation by Sport NI, which states that clubs must be located in the north of Ireland and be affiliated to an internationally recognised governing body for boxing at the time of the award to avail of the equipment grant. The published programme also defines an internationally recognised governing body as one that is recognised by and affiliated to the International Amateur Boxing Association.

Boxing: Funding

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether those boxing clubs which are applying for funding under her recent £3million announcement do not have, as a condition for payment under the terms of the funding announcement, to be affiliated to the Irish Amateur Boxing Association, either before or after any confirmation of a successful application for funding.

(AQW 16816/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I can confirm that all boxing clubs in the north of Ireland that are affiliated or were affiliated in the last three years to the Irish Amateur Boxing Association, are free to submit expressions of interest in benefitting from the £3.27m funding recently announced under the Boxing Strategy. These clubs may also, as part of that process, have their facility needs independently assessed.

However, in order to be eligible for funding, it is currently proposed that clubs must be located in the north of Ireland and be affiliated to an internationally recognised governing body for boxing at the time of award. An internationally recognised governing body for boxing is defined as a governing body that is recognised by and affiliated to the International Amateur Boxing Association.

Department of Education

Western Education and Library Board: Workforce

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 15863/11-15, how many people are employed in the maintenance workforce of the Western Education and Library Board.

(AQW 16253/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): I have been advised by the Western Education and Library Board that 78 people are employed in the maintenance workforce departments.

Teachers/Classroom Assistants: Religious Breakdown

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of (a) teachers; and (b) classroom assistants who are (1) Protestant; and (2) Catholic in primary and post-primary schools, broken down by sector; and where these figures are not maintained whether he will arrange for monitoring to be undertaken.

(AQW 16307/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (a) The information requested is not available in respect of teachers as schools are not required to monitor the community background of their teaching staff.
- (b) Number and percentage of classroom assistants:

SELB	Community Background						Total
	Protestant Community		Roman Catholic Community		Neither Community		
Management Sector and School Type	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Controlled Primary	463	89.20%	41	7.90%	15	2.90%	519
Controlled Secondary	131	85.60%	18	11.80%	4	2.60%	153
Maintained Primary	41	5.00%	773	94.30%	6	0.70%	820
Maintained Secondary	13	5.80%	206	92.40%	4	1.80%	223

NEELB	Community Background						Total
	Protestant Community		Roman Catholic Community		Neither Community		
Management Sector and School Type	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Controlled Primary	843	82.5	72	7	106	10.5	1021
Controlled Secondary	367	67.6	122	22.5	54	9.9	543
Maintained Primary	78	14.4	390	72.2	72	13.4	540
Maintained Secondary	24	13	139	75.1	22	11.9	185

WELB	Community Background						Total
	Protestant Community		Roman Catholic Community		Neither Community		
Management Sector and School Type	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	Total
Controlled Primary	262	72.4	82	22.7	18	4.9	362
Controlled Secondary	67	64.5	33	31.7	4	3.8	104
Maintained Primary	76	10.8	618	88	8	1.1	702
Maintained Secondary	20	10.1	173	87.8	4	2.1	197

SEELB	Community Background						Total
	Protestant Community		Roman Catholic Community		Neither Community		
Management Sector and School Type	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	Total
Controlled Primary	482	79.02	45	7.38	83	13.6	610
Controlled Secondary	103	71.03	17	11.72	25	17.25	145
Maintained Primary	40	11.17	266	74.3	52	14.53	358
Maintained Secondary	17	16.19	69	65.72	19	18.09	105

BELB	Community Background						Total
	Protestant Community		Roman Catholic Community		Neither Community		
Management Sector and School Type	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	Total
Controlled Primary	280	90.6	19	6.1	10	3.3	309
Controlled Secondary	48	87.3	5	9.1	2	3.6	55
Maintained Primary	23	6.5	318	90.1	12	3.4	353
Maintained Secondary	3	2.7	108	97.3	0	0	111

Schools: Staff Performance

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (i) primary schools; (ii) primary school principals; (iii) primary school teachers; (iv) post-primary schools; (v) post-primary school principals; (vi) post-primary school teachers who were deemed unsatisfactory, inadequate or satisfactory and are now on a support programme, broken down by (a) Education and Library Board; and (b) sector.

(AQW 16313/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below details the number of primary schools and post-primary schools deemed inadequate which are currently on a support programme; these are in effect the schools currently in Formal Intervention. There are currently no primary or post-primary schools deemed unsatisfactory.

Number of primary schools and post-primary schools deemed inadequate which are currently on a support programme.

ELB	Sector	Primary Schools	Post-Primary Schools
		Inadequate	Inadequate
BELB	Controlled	2	1
	Catholic Maintained	-	1
WELB	Controlled	-	1
NEELB	Controlled	2	4*1

ELB	Sector	Primary Schools	Post-Primary Schools
		Inadequate	Inadequate
SEELB	Controlled	-	3
	Grant-Maintained Integrated	-	1
SELB	Controlled	2	-
	Catholic Maintained	1	-

*1 The quality of education provided at Crumlin Controlled Integrated College improved by one level of performance from unsatisfactory to inadequate between the original inspection (January 2010) and the follow-up inspection in November 2011.

Number of teachers currently deemed to be unsatisfactory and on a support programme.

ELB	Sector	Teacher declared Unsatisfactory	Teacher declared Unsatisfactory
		Primary School	Post-Primary School
BELB	Catholic Maintained	1	-
NEELB	Catholic Maintained	1	-
	Voluntary Grammar	-	1
SEELB	Catholic Maintained	-	1
SELB	Catholic Maintained	2	-

Number of principals currently deemed to be unsatisfactory and on a support programme

ELB	Sector	Principal declared Unsatisfactory	Principal declared Unsatisfactory
		Primary School	Post-Primary School
NEELB	Controlled	-	1
SEELB	Catholic Maintained	-	1

School Closures

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what empirical evidence is held by his Department to show that school closures result in improved educational outcomes for those children whose schools have been closed.

(AQW 16329/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department's Sustainable Schools policy provides the framework against which all schools are assessed to ensure that young people are served by a network of strong and vibrant schools that are capable of raising standards. A sustainable school is categorised by quality educational experience, stable enrolment trends, a sound financial position, strong leadership and management, accessibility and strong links with the community.

A viable school is capable of meeting the needs of its current and future pupils by delivering a broad and balanced curriculum, including the entitlement framework in post primary schools. A viable school also provides a suitable environment to support the continuing professional development of its teachers and other staff.

A school closure may occur for a range of reasons including the quality of the education provided. However, regardless of why a school closes it is important that every effort is made to ensure that pupils are given the necessary support on transfer to the new school and that all pupils have every opportunity to fulfil their potential.

The Department does not monitor pupil performance where pupils transfer to new schools as a result of a school closure. Consequently, the Department does not hold any empirical evidence to show that school closures result in improved educational outcomes.

School Leavers: Functional Numeracy

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the current level of attainment of functional numeracy of school leavers.

(AQW 16339/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Literacy and numeracy skills are vital to the success of our young people as they progress through school and beyond into further learning, work and life and are key drivers for the future growth of our economy. Therefore my raising

standards agenda has a focus on improving pupil outcomes in both literacy and numeracy particularly for those young people from disadvantaged backgrounds most at risk of underachieving.

The proportion of school leavers achieving at least five GCSEs at grades A*-C or equivalent including GCSE English and maths has increased by 5.3 percentage points in the period 2006/07 (54.2%) to 2010/11 (59.5%).

The tables below detail the performance of school leavers in GCSE English and GCSE maths or equivalent qualification in 2010/11. A GCSE grade A*-C is equivalent to a Level 2 qualification, recognised internationally as the standard required to function in today's society.

	English	Maths
Percentage of school leavers achieving a GCSE grade A* - C or equivalent qualification.	69.1%	65.4%
Percentage of FSME school leavers achieving grade A*-C or equivalent qualification.	44.0%	37.6%

A GCSE grade D – G is a Level 1 qualification which can provide a platform for further development of literacy and numeracy skills.

	English	Maths
Percentage of school leavers achieving a GCSE grade D - G or equivalent qualification.	21.9%	27.0%
Percentage of FSME school leavers achieving a GCSE grade D - G or equivalent qualification.	38.3%	46.3%

	English	Maths
Percentage of school leavers not achieving GCSE grade A*-G or equivalent qualification.	9.0%	7.6%
Percentage of FSME school leavers not achieving GCSE grade A*-G or equivalent qualification.	17.7%	16.1%

Clearly, there is a need for improvement particularly for FSME pupils – 56% of FSME school leavers are not achieving a grade A*-C or equivalent qualification in English and almost 64% of FSME school leavers not achieving at this level in maths. Also of concern is the percentage of FSME school leavers not getting even a GCSE grade G or equivalent qualification.

Improvement is needed in both the primary and post-primary school sectors. The Chief Inspector's Report 2010-12 highlighted the fact that almost one in five of primary school pupils is not at the expected level of literacy and numeracy when they transfer to post-primary school. The report also advised that, literacy co-ordinators, heads of departments and teachers of English in post-primary schools need to work together to address deficits in children's literacy, before, during and after their transition to post-primary education and, in almost half of post-primary school maths departments inspected, leadership and management needs to improve.

You will be aware of the recent announcement by the First and deputy First Ministers of investment in the employment of 230 graduate teachers to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of our young people. This will complement the policies I have in place to support raising standards and to achieve improved outcomes in literacy and numeracy for all our young people. These include the Every School a Good School policy for school improvement, and Count, read: succeed, the strategy for improving literacy and numeracy. However, more needs to be done, especially in areas of social deprivation, and the key now is to step up the pace of implementation and delivery of these policies and to maintain the focus on raising standards to ensure that every pupil is able to achieve to their full potential.

School Leavers: Functional Literacy

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the current level of attainment of functional literacy of school leavers.

(AQW 16340/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Literacy and numeracy skills are vital to the success of our young people as they progress through school and beyond into further learning, work and life and are key drivers for the future growth of our economy. Therefore my raising standards agenda has a focus on improving pupil outcomes in both literacy and numeracy particularly for those young people from disadvantaged backgrounds most at risk of underachieving.

The proportion of school leavers achieving at least five GCSEs at grades A*-C or equivalent including GCSE English and maths has increased by 5.3 percentage points in the period 2006/07 (54.2%) to 2010/11 (59.5%).

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A GCSE grade D – G is a Level 1 qualification which can provide a platform for further development of literacy and numeracy skills.

	English	Maths
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Percentage of FSME school leavers achieving a GCSE grade D - G or equivalent qualification.	38.3%	46.3%

	English	Maths
Percentage of school leavers not achieving GCSE grade A*-G or equivalent qualification.	9.0%	7.6%
Percentage of FSME school leavers not achieving GCSE grade A*-G or equivalent qualification.	17.7%	16.1%

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Anti-bullying Forum

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education whether the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum has a task group to combat racist bullying.
(AQW 16347/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Anti-Bullying Forum established a racist bullying sub-group in 2006 and it completed its programme of work in April 2008. This group produced content for the Forum's website (www.niabf.org.uk) including resources for schools to promote cultural diversity and inclusion with a view to preventing bullying due to race, faith and culture. They also produced a leaflet entitled 'What is bullying due to Race, Faith and Culture' which provides advice and signposting for parents and carers. The Forum can decide to re-establish this sub-group as need arises.

The theme of Anti-Bullying Week 2007 was 'Bullying due to Race, Faith and Culture' and the 2008 theme was tackling the fear of being bullied in a new school which was particularly relevant for newcomer pupils.

The theme for this year's Anti-Bullying Week, which takes place from 19 - 23 November, is "Everybody is Somebody". This covers all bullying that is motivated by difference or prejudice, such as racist bullying.

Anti-bullying Strategies

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact that anti-bullying strategies are having on the level of bullying behaviour in schools.

(AQW 16348/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Bullying, in whatever form and for whatever reason, has no place in schools. All schools are required by law to have a discipline policy which includes anti-bullying measures.

My Department does not require schools to record all reported incidents of bullying and to make a return. However, the research report "The Nature and Extent of Pupil Bullying in Schools in the North of Ireland", published by my Department in October 2011, showed little change in the level of bullying behaviour reported by pupils compared to earlier studies in 2002 and 2007.

Whilst the proportion of pupils experiencing bullying had not changed significantly, the study showed that pupils are using different means to bully. In particular the report highlighted the increased use of social networks and mobile phones.

The Department recognises that it cannot tackle bullying alone and it is for this reason that it continues to fund and participate in the local Anti-bullying Forum (NIABF).

A specific programme of training is currently being delivered to schools by Education and Library Boards on a new resource "Effective Responses to Bullying Behaviour" which was produced by the NIABF. This document takes schools on a staged journey to resolving a concern, offering levelled interventions, including restorative approaches, for both the child who is being bullied and the child displaying bullying behaviour.

Early Years

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education whether the revised proposals for the Early Years Strategy will be subject to a full public consultation.

(AQW 16397/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am currently considering the need for further consultation given that the previous strategy was widely consulted on.

Post-primary Schools: First World War Battlefields Visits

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Education, in light of the Prime Minister's recent announcement for schools in Great Britain, what plans his Department has to assist post-primary schools that wish to attend First World War battlefields to mark the centenary of the Great War.

(AQW 16459/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department delegates as much funding and decision-making as possible to schools which are best placed to assess the needs of their pupils and we take the view that it is very much a matter for schools themselves to reach a judgement on programmes or visits they wish to participate in to enhance their teaching and learning.

I therefore have no plans to assist post-primary schools that wish to attend First World War battlefields to mark the centenary of the Great War – such a decision will be a matter for each school.

Belfast Education and Library Board: Speech and Language Therapy Unit

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education why the Belfast Education and Library Board can retain a Speech and Language Therapy Unit but the Western Board is unable to retain such a unit; and what he can do to address the disparity.

(AQW 16475/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have assumed that the member is referring to the Woodlands Speech and Language Unit currently located at Belmont House Special School.

Article 7 of the Education (NI) Order 1996, as substituted by Article 3 of SENDO, refers to the duty of the Education and Library Board to educate children with special educational needs (SEN) in ordinary schools if no statement of SEN is maintained for the child.

The Chief Executive of the Western Education and Library Board has advised that as the Woodlands Unit has children attending without a statement of SEN the board is, therefore, considering its re-location to mainstream primary schools.

The Chief Executive of the Belfast Education and Library Board has confirmed that all speech and language units in its area are attached to mainstream primary schools.

Special Educational Needs: Units

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 15987/11-15, to explain the reasons for the disparity in the number of children attending special education needs unit between the Education and Library Boards.

(AQW 16490/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the education and library boards (ELBs) that the number of special educational needs (SEN) units, also known as Learning Support Centres, is based on need, as determined by each

ELB, in order to make provision for children and young people with SEN within their areas. The number of children enrolled in these units depends on the type of SEN provision being made and the individual SEN of the child.

The process involved in opening a unit is subject to the statutory Development Proposal process which facilitates consultation. This consists of consultation prior to the publication of the Proposal with those directly affected, including parents and teaching staff. There is also a statutory 2-month period post-consultation which enables anyone with an interest to comment directly to the Department.

South Eastern Education and Library Board: Workforce

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many people are employed in the maintenance workforce of the South Eastern Education and Library Board.

(AQW 16491/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been advised by the South Eastern Education and Library Board that 39.5 (Full Time Equivalent) people are employed in the maintenance workforce departments.

Schools, North Down: Inspections

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education which schools in North Down have been subject to inspections in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16493/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The schools in North Down that have been subject to inspections in each of the last three years, are as follows:

Academic Year	School Type	Name of School
2009/2010	Primary	Ballyholme Primary School
2009/2010	Post-Primary	St Columbanus' College
2010/2011	Nursery	Hollywood Nursery School
2010/2011	Nursery	Trinity Nursery School
2010/2011	Primary	Bangor Central Primary School
2010/2011	Primary	Ballymagee Primary School
2010/2011	Post-Primary	Bangor Grammar School
2011/2012	Special	Clifton Special School
2011/2012	Primary	Grange Park Primary School
2011/2012	Primary	Kilcooley Primary School
2011/2012	Primary	Towerview Primary School
2011/2012	Primary	Clandeboye Primary School
2011/2012	Independent	Bangor Independent Christian School

Dyslexia Support

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education what level of provision for dyslexia support will be included in the new teacher employment scheme under which 300 newly qualified teachers will be appointed to deliver one to one tutoring.

(AQW 16514/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I warmly welcome the announcement by the First and deputy First Ministers of investment in the employment of 230 graduate teachers not currently in employment, on a two year contract, to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of our young people. Not only does this provide employment opportunities for graduate teachers, it should also have a positive impact on my raising standards agenda by improving the educational outcomes of pupils who are most at risk of under achieving.

My Department officials are currently working to establish arrangements for the development and implementation of this project including details of which schools will benefit from this additional funding, how schools and teachers will be matched and how pupils will be identified for additional support. I have asked my officials to work through the finer details of the project as quickly as possible, however it is not possible at present to give exact details on the timescales and costs.

You may be aware that support for continuing professional development of teachers is the responsibility of the Education and Library Boards through their respective Curriculum Advisory Support Service (CASS). CASS carries out an annual audit of training needs for each school in their area from which they prepare a scheme of support. Schools can avail of the wide range of courses on all aspects of Special Educational Needs (SEN) offered by the Boards.

You may also be aware that my Department is supporting the SEN Continuing Professional Development Literacy Project which is being jointly delivered by Stranmillis and St Mary's University Colleges.

The project will be delivered to all primary schools and some special schools over the next three years. The project will deliver whole school training to enhance the skills of teachers in the teaching of literacy.

The project also offers specialist training, accredited by the British Dyslexia Association, to a number of SEN Co-ordinators and teachers, to enable them to meet the needs of pupils with literacy difficulties, including dyslexia.

Pooled Budgets: Legislative Barriers

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education what are the legislative barriers which prevent the development of pooled budgets, as raised by the Director of Families in his Department at the All Party Group on Children and Young People on Tuesday 6 November.

(AQW 16524/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Departments (NI) Order 1999 defines the status of each department as a body corporate.

Managing Public Money provides guidance on the use of public resources. In accordance with that guidance, departments are statutory corporations and as such have no powers except those which are conferred under statute. Expenditure can only be properly incurred where there is specific statutory authority for the activity or service as well as authority through the Budget Act for the related expenditure.

The Accounting Officer of each department is responsible for ensuring that the Estimate(s) presented to the Assembly for the department's annual expenditure are consistent with the statutory powers and with the Executive's expenditure plans; and use of resources in the department is consistent with the Estimates. The Accounting Officer must answer to the Assembly for stewardship of these responsibilities.

I have confirmed with my official that this is the point she was making in response to a question from a member of the Green Party at the All Party Group about the barriers to 'pooled budgets'.

Departments can and do fund joint initiatives, the budget is not 'pooled' as such. One department would generally take the lead, and other departments contribute. In other cases where there is a central fund, departments can bid to the fund for resources.

Joint Commissioning of Services

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education which services are being jointly commissioned between his Department, or the Education and Library Boards, and any other Department or agency.

(AQW 16526/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

Service	Commissioned by DE or ELB?	In conjunction with which Department?
Food in Schools Co-ordination (Public Health Agency)	DE	DHSSPS
Education Works Advertising Campaign	DE	OFMDFM
Architectural Services	SELB	Libraries NI (DCAL) & Southern Regional College (DEL)
Maintenance Services	SELB	Libraries NI (DCAL) & Southern Regional College (DEL)
Belong – Family Support Programme	SELB	Southern Health Board
Headstart	NEELB	Northern Health Trust
Relationships and Sexuality Training	NEELB	Public Health Agency
Behaviour Support Service	NEELB	DHSS&PS
LAC Support Service	NEELB	Health & Social Care Board
Youth Service – Young Men's Health Project	NEELB	Health Promotion Agency
Educational Catering Service – Nutritional Guidelines for Schools	NEELB	DHSS&PS
Student Finance	NEELB	DEL
Northgate – Teacher's Salaries	DE	Teacher Employers
Capita – Teacher's Pension	DE	Teacher Employers including DEL

Service	Commissioned by DE or ELB?	In conjunction with which Department?
Irish Medium Bursary Scheme	DE	Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG)
Transport (Translink)	DE & ELBs	DRD

Education and Training Inspectorate: Appointments

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education how many members of the Education and Training Inspectorate were appointed in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 16581/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

Financial Year	Number of Inspector Appointments
2012/2013(to date)	3
2011/2012	2
2010/2011	2
2009/2010	4
2008/2009	4
2007/2008	6
2006/2007	0
2005/2006	1
2004/2005	5
2003/2004	7
2002/2003	6

Multiagency Support Teams: Early Years

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of Multi-Agency Support Teams and their effectiveness at prioritising the work of early years intervention.

(AQW 16589/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I understand that the Multi-Agency Support Teams (MASTS) service, which operates within the Northern Health and Social Care Trust and North Eastern Education and Library Board area, has evidenced positive outcomes to date which demonstrate the teams' effectiveness in prioritising early years intervention. For example, during the 2011/12 academic year 57% of referrals received by the team were from children in their P1 year and 5% of children referred were in P4.

Furthermore feedback from an evaluation carried out in June 2012 with school staff reported that 82% found the training beneficial to extremely beneficial and 87% found the therapeutic intervention beneficial to extremely beneficial in meeting the needs of both the children and school staff.

In addition 95% of parents/carers who accessed support from the MASTS service, who also took part in a service evaluation in June 2012, found that the support delivered by the MASTS service, directly within the school environment, as beneficial to extremely beneficial in meeting their child's needs.

Multiagency Support Teams

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to list the schools in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust that (i) are part of the Multi-Agency Support Team scheme; and (ii) have since applied to the scheme but who have not yet been incorporated, broken down by Parliamentary Constituency.

(AQW 16591/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education does not hold this information.

The North Eastern Education and Library Board has advised that this information is held by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust as the lead body in the Multi-Agency Support Team scheme.

Assets: Transfer of

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 16201/11-15, which of the assets to be transferred from the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools to the Catholic Church, in advance of the introduction of the Education and Skills Authority, are still required for the provision of education; and how replacements, or agreement, for continued use will be procured. (AQW 16596/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Of the assets which shall transfer from CCMS to the Catholic Church upon the creation of ESA, none are being used for the provision of education. The assets concerned are headquarters and local offices.

School Transport

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Education to outline his Department's policy for home to school transport for primary school pupils where their chosen school is outside the statutory distance and there is a school within the statutory distance. (AQW 16607/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education's home to school transport policy is set down within DE Circular 1996/41 (as amended) and is available on the Department's website at:

<http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/schools-and-infrastructure-2/admission-and-transport/transport-to-school.htm>

Eligibility is determined by two criteria: 'distance' and 'suitable school'. For primary schools the distance is two miles. A 'suitable' primary school is one in the recognised categories of controlled, integrated, Irish medium, and maintained. No other definition of 'suitable' is permitted.

When a parent selects a school for their child, then the category to which that school belongs becomes the category used in an assessment of their child's eligibility for assistance with transport. Schools in other categories are then ignored. Should there be other primary schools in the same category within two miles of the pupil's home, then the parent(s) must apply to all of them, and be refused a place in each, before transport assistance will be granted to a school in the same category that lies beyond two miles.

Ministerial Directions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education, since May 2011, how many decisions with spending implications have been made as a result of ministerial directions. (AQW 16627/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There have been no decisions with spending implications, since May 2011, made as a result of ministerial direction within the Department of Education.

Area Planning: Post-Primary Schools

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education to outline the next steps in the Post-Primary Area Planning Process; and when he expects to receive proposals from each Education and Library Board. (AQW 16638/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Now that the consultation period for the Post Primary Area Plans has ended the Education and Library Boards, working closely with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools are undertaking an analysis of the responses received.

Once this has been completed they have been asked to prepare a report to the Department which outlines the key issues raised in the consultation and details what action the Board has taken or plans to take to address such issues.

The Education and Library Boards have been requested to submit their report for consideration by 7 December 2012, together with revised or enhanced Post-Primary Area Plans. It is my aim to make decisions in regard to these area plans in the New Year.

The Boards are also working to finalise the draft area plans for primary provision. It is important that lessons are learned from the Post-primary consultation. It is therefore my intention that these will be published for consultation early in the New Year.

Area Planning: Primary Schools

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education when the Area Planning Process for primary schools will begin. (AQW 16639/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Now that the consultation period for the Post Primary Area Plans has ended the Education and Library Boards, working closely with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools are undertaking an analysis of the responses received.

Once this has been completed they have been asked to prepare a report to the Department which outlines the key issues raised in the consultation and details what action the Board has taken or plans to take to address such issues.

The Education and Library Boards have been requested to submit their report for consideration by 7 December 2012, together with revised or enhanced Post-Primary Area Plans. It is my aim to make decisions in regard to these area plans in the New Year.

The Boards are also working to finalise the draft area plans for primary provision. It is important that lessons are learned from the Post-primary consultation. It is therefore my intention that these will be published for consultation early in the New Year.

Schools: Principles of Leadership

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education on what principles of leadership will schools be judged.
(AQW 16643/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information relating to the inspection of leadership and management in schools is already in the public domain on the Education and Training Inspectorate's website in the Together Towards Improvement framework for inspection. The Together Towards Improvement framework can be found at the following link: <http://www.etini.gov.uk/index/together-towards-improvement.htm>

The relevant performance indicators relating to leadership and management are in Section A of the document.

Freedom of Information Requests

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of Freedom of Information requests received by his Department in each year since 2007; (ii) the proportion of requests each year that were not answered within the time limit; (iii) the number of requests currently outstanding by more than (a) one to two months (b) three to four months; (c) five to six months; (d) seven to twelve months; and (e) more than twelve months.

(AQW 16646/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: FOI Requests received each year since 2007

Year	No of Requests	Proportion of requests not answered within the time limit.
2007	138	5.07 (7 requests)
2008	168	7.74 (13 requests)
2009	162	1.85 (3 requests)
2010	207	7.73 (16 requests)
2011	206	6.80 (14 requests)
2012 (to-date)	172	5.81 (10 requests)

There are currently no outstanding requests falling outside the statutory time limit.

Area Planning: Ballymena

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education when the final decisions will be made on the outworkings of the Ballymena area planning exercise.

(AQW 16655/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Education and Library Boards published area plans for post-primary provision on 5 July 2012 with the consultation period ending on 26 October 2012. The Education and Library Boards, working closely with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, are undertaking an analysis of the responses. Once this has been completed they have been asked to prepare a report to the Department which outlines the key issues raised in the consultation and details what action the Board has taken or plans to take to address such issues.

Any changes required to be made to a school or schools in an area as a result of proposals in the area plans will, as now, be subject to the statutory Development Proposal (DP) process and will require the publication of a DP. Once it is published, a statutory 2-month period then ensues, during which anyone who wishes to express an opinion may do so directly to the Department of Education.

I hope to be in a position to make decisions on area planning in January 2013. Until I see the revised plans I am not in a position to comment on the outworkings for the Ballymena area.

National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education what contact he has had with National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts to seek additional inward support.

(AQW 16656/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: While I have had no direct contact with NESTA I am aware that they visited the north of Ireland in October 2012 and during this visit they hosted a round table discussion of agency, private and public sector bodies – this included a C2k representative and two school Principals. I understand that discussions revolved around how NESTA could best support innovation in education in the north and they are looking for an agency to partner and act as co-ambassadors.

Sure Start: East Londonderry

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education, in light of the planned expansion of Sure Start services to the top 25 percent of the most disadvantaged wards, which areas in the East Londonderry constituency are likely to benefit.

(AQW 16658/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Roeside (Limavady) and Royal Portrush (Coleraine) wards are included in the expansion of the Sure Start programme to the top 25% areas of disadvantage in East Derry.

Literacy and Numeracy Assessments

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education whether his interim solution to address the technical difficulties with the Northern Ireland Literacy and Numeracy assessments will overcome all the problems experienced by schools; and whether he is aware of the views within the sector that the computer systems in many primary schools are unable to cope adequately with these assessments.

(AQW 16660/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Following an extensive investigation by suppliers of computer-based assessments, CCEA, C2k and Northgate Managed Services, a potential issue was identified for the Literacy application, which accounted for the majority of the reported issues. An interim solution has been implemented for this assessment. The effectiveness of the potential solution continues to be monitored. Initial indications are that there has been a significant reduction in the number of errors being logged as a result of this intervention. Work is ongoing to determine the root cause of these issues.

Some schools may continue to experience a range of individual issues. If assistance is still required, the CCEA and/or C2K help-lines will be able to assist or if required, CCEA and C2K will arrange an on-site support visit to a school.

I am assured by C2k that the hardware provision in all primary schools is common and an important part of the procurement and subsequent development processes was to ensure that assessments were designed to operate on the system infrastructure. Many schools have experienced no significant issues conducting the assessments on this equipment, subject to their following the appropriate prerequisite checks. Where issues with computer equipment are logged with the C2k Service Desk, these will be investigated and resolved.

GCSE/A Levels: Review of

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how he will involve school principals in the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment Review of GCSE and A levels.

(AQW 16661/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In my commissioning letter to CCEA, I made it clear that in formulating its advice and recommendations, I wanted wide consultation in particular with parents and teachers. In addition, I have asked CCEA to set up an expert group and this will include representatives from schools. I see it as particularly important that the views of school principals are sought and I know that school principals will be included in the membership of the expert group.

CCEA will be launching an on-line questionnaire to gain views about the current GCE and GCSE qualifications. This initial consultation will be open to the public and will be advertised widely using the press and social media. A letter of invitation to respond will be issued to key stakeholders, including schools. I would expect principals to lead on responses from schools. The online questionnaire will be followed by deliberative research events and these will offer further opportunities for school leaders to feed in their thoughts and views to the researchers.

Finally, I know that CCEA will be keen to arrange meetings on the review with the professional bodies/unions representing school principals.

Preschool Enrolments

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update his Department's preparations for this year's enrolment process for pre-school places.

(AQW 16662/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The process for pre-school admissions in September 2013 is due to commence on 30 November 2012 when application forms and booklets containing information about pre-school providers in an area will be made available to parents. The closing date for completed application forms to be returned to a parent's first preference pre-school provider is noon on Friday 11 January 2013.

The legislative requirement for pre-school providers to give priority in their admissions criteria to children born in July or August has been removed.

The Department and each Education and Library Board (ELB) have reviewed their publicity material and will be promoting the availability of funded pre-school places over the coming weeks to help maximise parental engagement with the process.

The Programme for Government commits my Department to ensuring that at least one year of pre-school education is available to every family that wants it. I have increased the budget available for the pre-school programme and my Department has

advised ELBs that they may proceed to secure the required number of funded places in advance of the process commencing. My officials will continue to work closely with the ELBs to respond to the demand for funded places in each area.

Teachers: North Antrim

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many of the 230 new teaching posts that are being created to improve literacy and numeracy in schools will be in North Antrim.

(AQW 16677/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I warmly welcome the announcement by the First and deputy First Ministers of investment in the employment of 230 graduate teachers not currently in employment, on a two year contract, to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of our young people. Not only does this provide employment opportunities for graduate teachers, it should also have a positive impact on my raising standards agenda by improving the educational outcomes of pupils who are most at risk of under achieving.

My Department has been tasked with taking forward this project and my officials are currently working to establish arrangements for the development and implementation of this project including details of how schools and teachers will be matched and how teachers will be recruited to these posts. I have asked my officials to work through the finer details of the project as quickly as possible. However, it is not possible at present to provide details of which schools will benefit from the additional funding or the timescales and costs for the project.

Prompt Payment

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education what practices, protocols and measures are in place within the Department and its arm's-length bodies to ensure prompt payment to contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers.

(AQW 16688/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department and its Arms Length Bodies (ALBs) are committed to the Better Payments Practice Code, as set out in Annex 4.6 of Managing Public Money (MPMNI), and are subject to the Late Payment of Commercial Debt Regulations 2002. Payment is regarded as late if it is made outside the agreed terms, or 30 calendar days after receipt of a valid invoice where no terms are agreed. In line with DFP guidance issued in November 2008 and section A.4.6.3 of MPMNI, the Department and its ALBs seek to maximise the number of suppliers paid within 10 working days.

Targets have been set for the 2012-13 year, to pay 97% of all non-disputed invoices within 30 days and to maximise the payment of all non-disputed invoices within 10 working days. The annual resource accounts include a note on performance against prompt payment targets.

The Department monitors prompt payment figures by business area to identify any specific areas where improvements can be made. Cost centre managers are provided with management information on a regular basis and are advised to take action to improve performance if required.

ALBs report their performance to the Department on a monthly basis and are challenged where there are dips in performance. The Department is leading a working group with the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) in an effort to share best practice and address common issues. The ELBs have processes in place to monitor the prompt payment performance of schools in their area.

The prompt payment of invoices to all suppliers is supported and monitored by senior management and the performance of the Department and its ALBs is a standing agenda item at Departmental Board Meetings. Prompt payment performance of the Department's ALBs is made available on the DE website.

GCSEs: Results

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Education (i) how many; and (ii) what percentage of Year 12 pupils, in each electoral ward, failed to achieve 5 GCSE A*-C grades, in each of the last four academic years, broken down by gender.

(AQW 16696/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly library.

The answer includes all pupils from Year 12 or above leaving school in the given academic year. Analysis is based on pupil residence.

Area Plans: Consultations

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education (i) how his Department will assess the 47,000 responses to the consultations on draft area plans; (ii) how the public will be informed of the actions taken as a result of the responses; and (iii) how many of the responses were received via the internet.

(AQW 16702/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) The consultation on the draft Post-primary Area Plans, which ended on 26th October 2012, was conducted by the Education & Library Boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS). Hence it is these organisations, not the Department, which will analyse the responses received.

- (ii) The Boards, working closely with CCMS, will provide a report to the Department on the analysis of the consultation responses in all Board areas highlighting the issues raised and what action has been taken or is proposed to be taken to address these issues. Following my consideration of the report on the consultation responses and the amended area plans it would be my intention to make these publicly available to ensure all interested parties are fully informed on the issues and actions.
- (iii) A total of 16,806 responses were completed via the on-line questionnaires.

Classroom Assistants

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to outline his future plans for Classroom Assistants.
(AQW 16703/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department will continue to respond to the educational needs of children in accordance with the prevailing legislative provisions. The Education and Library Boards will continue to support schools in meeting the needs of children and young people as identified in their Statement of Special Educational Needs. This will include funding schools in respect of the allocation of Additional Adult Assistance as recommended by appropriate professionals.

The proposals set out following the review of special educational needs (SEN) and inclusion relate to changes to the existing SEN framework to provide a less bureaucratic and more streamlined process to meet the needs of children. The review has not made specific recommendations about the role of classroom assistants in how they support children with SEN. It will be a matter for the Education and Library Boards and, in time, the Education and Skills Authority to ensure that they provide equitable SEN services that are determined and provided through commonly applied criteria.

In the meantime, the Education and Library Boards will continue to provide training and support for classroom assistants in addition to advice and training for schools on best practice in the management of classroom assistants.

Schools: Special Educational Needs

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education what consideration he has given to increasing the age limit to over 18 years for young people who attend a special needs school.
(AQW 16741/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Young people can stay at special schools until they are 19 years old.

If a pupil has a statement of special educational needs, an Education and Library Board (ELB) may maintain the Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) until the pupil is 19 years old.

Following a young person's 14th birthday ELBs must produce a Transition Plan at the first and subsequent Annual Review of the Statement of SEN. The Transition Plan includes provision to facilitate transition from childhood to adulthood through, for example, further education, training, work or day care.

When a young person leaves a special school responsibility for that person passes from the Department of Education to the appropriate department e.g. the Department for Employment and Learning or the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety.

Cross-border Education: Questionnaire

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education what bodies were consulted on the objectivity of the questionnaire issued to parents on cross border education; and how he will ensure that the questionnaire is not open to accusations of having questions construed in such a way so as to achieve a particular outcome.
(AQW 16815/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education in the North, and the Department of Education and Skills in the South, cooperated on the content, design, and testing of the survey's questionnaire. To ensure that best practice was applied to the survey, and that the outcome would be robust, it was designed, and questions were developed, with input from research and statistics specialists from both Departments. Before issuing the main survey, the questionnaire and associated on-line site was piloted with the key stakeholder group, the parents of children at schools in the border corridor in the target group in Years 1, 7 and 8.

The questionnaire is relatively short and straightforward. It collects factual information about: current levels of awareness of being able to apply to schools across the border; experience of having applied; level of interest in sending children to schools across the border; types of school that would be of interest; and, any factors that might inhibit interest. The parents of pupils attending all categories of school have been surveyed. Parents of pupils at schools in the survey area and in the relevant year groups (P1, P7, and Year 8) will have an opportunity to contribute.

Given this development process, it was not considered necessary to consult any other bodies on the objectivity of the questionnaire.

Equality Impact Assessments: Cost

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost to his Department over the last three financial years of undertaking equality impact assessments.
(AQW 16824/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Once a policy is screened and screening has identified that an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is necessary, it is carried out in accordance with Equality Commission guidance.

The Department does not hold information on the costs of EQIAs, and could not readily disaggregate them.

Irish Language: Cost of Advertising

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how much his Department has spent on advertising in the Irish language in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16825/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The expenditure on advertising in the Irish language in each of the last three financial years is detailed in the following table. Some of the expenditure is listed in Euro as the Department advertises in one publication based in the south of Ireland to widen the reach and effectiveness of its classified advertising.

Year	£ Sterling	Euro
2011-12	11,503.88	5,682.75
2010-11	16,328.50	10,811.47
2009-10	27,890.26	930

Education and Training Inspectorate: Recommendations

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of changes to education, classroom and school management practice which the Education and Training Inspectorate has recommended be made in schools that it has inspected in the last ten years; and how many of these changes have subsequently been implemented.

(AQW 16828/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is not readily available in the format required. An exercise to obtain such information would result in disproportionate costs.

Education and Training Inspectorate: Performance

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education what quality and performance tests have been applied to the Education and Training Inspectorate over the past five years; and how the Inspectorate has performed.

(AQW 16829/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As an organisation committed to continuous improvement, and increased openness, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) secures an independent evaluation of its work on an annual basis.

Up until 2008/2009, this external independent evaluation had been conducted for a number of years by Price Waterhouse Coopers. From 2009 to date, to reduce costs involved, an independent, confidential, post-inspection evaluation has been conducted by the Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

During the last three years, ETI has also been subject to Charter Mark Assessment, a DE Internal Audit Evaluation and a Customer Service Excellence Award assessment.

All of these assessments of quality have reported very positively on the organisation. Further details are available from the Annual Business Reports for each of the last three years which are available at www.etini.gov.uk.

Education and Training Inspectorate: Monitoring

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education what external moderation of the Education and Training Inspectorate is in place; and what recommendations have arisen from this moderation.

(AQW 16830/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In order to ensure continuous improvement, and increased openness, the Education and Training Inspectorate secures an independent evaluation of its work on an annual basis. Up until 2008-09, this external evaluation had been conducted for a number of years by Price Waterhouse Coopers. From 2009 to date, to reduce costs involved, an independent, confidential, post-inspection evaluation has been conducted by the Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

In addition, a "Charter Mark Certification Review" relating to the Education and Training Inspectorate was undertaken in September 2007 by EMQC Ltd. The resulting report, which was very positive, ensured that ETI retained its Charter Mark award up until Charter Mark was replaced by Customer Service Excellence in 2011.

In January 2011, the Education and Training Inspectorate was assessed by EMQC for the Customer Service Excellence Award which it was subsequently granted. The assessment concluded:

"The Education and Training Inspectorate is a highly customer focused organisation with a discrete balance between the rigorous assessment of educational and training establishments against educational policy and the support for these organisations to change and improve. Customers appreciate the rigour of the inspection process and the support to make

positive change provided. Customers spoke highly at assessment of the approachability of Inspectors and the value added their advice and guidance provides in ensuring learners have the best opportunities for attainment. Policy makers at the Department of Education appreciate the objectiveness of reporting the ETI provides that enables clear measurement of improving standards in education.

There are no actions that require immediate attention and I am pleased to pass on to EMQC Ltd's Certification Committee my recommendation that you are certificated as meeting the Customer Service Excellence Standard. Certification is valid for three years from the Certification Committee's decision date and subject to ongoing annual monitoring."

The key mission of the Education and Training Inspectorate is "to promote improvement in the interests of all learners". This includes the promotion of improvement in its own procedures and practices.

In 2010, the DE Internal Audit Branch conducted an evaluation of the work of the Education and Training Inspectorate. The resulting evaluation report noted: "Internal Audit considers that the quality of the service provided by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) complies with best practice".

"The Review highlighted a number of ETI's strengths in each of the areas examined. The most notable of these are:

- The quality of documentation detailing ETI's system processes
- The importance assigned by ETI management to the development of their staff
- The openness and transparency with which ETI shares its work with stakeholders
- The desire to continually improve the inspection service provided to its customers by being subject to an annual independent evaluation of the inspection process."

Education and Training Inspectorate: Inspectors

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education how often Inspectors from the Education and Training Inspectorate return to (i) teaching for an extended period; and (ii) school management positions for an extended period.

(AQW 16831/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is not current practice for the inspectors from the Education and Training Inspectorate to return to:

- (i) teaching for an extended period;
- (ii) school management positions for an extended period.

Voluntary Grammar Schools

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education when the £250 payment will be made to eligible staff of Voluntary Grammar Schools for the 2010/11 year.

(AQW 16834/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The £250 payment will be made to eligible staff of Voluntary Grammar Schools once all of the necessary approvals have been obtained in accordance with the requirements of public sector pay policy.

Teachers: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many of the 230 new teaching posts that are being created to improve literacy and numeracy in schools will be in North Down.

(AQW 16855/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I warmly welcome the announcement by the First and deputy First Ministers of investment in the employment of 230 graduate teachers not currently in employment, on a two year contract, to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of our young people. Not only does this provide employment opportunities for graduate teachers, it should also have a positive impact on my raising standards agenda by improving the educational outcomes of pupils who are most at risk of under achieving.

My Department has been tasked with taking forward this project and my officials are currently working to establish arrangements for the development and implementation of this project including details of how schools and teachers will be matched and how teachers will be recruited to these posts. I have asked my officials to work through the finer details of the project as quickly as possible. However, it is not possible at present to provide details of which schools will benefit from the additional funding or the timescales and costs for the project.

Education and Training Inspectorate: Confidentiality

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to outline his Department's policy on the confidentiality of school inspections carried out by the Education and Training Inspectorate; and to detail any breaches of this confidentiality which have occurred in the last five years.

(AQW 16861/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: All inspection evidence is scanned and stored electronically in the Department of Education's central repository for documentation. The inspection file, which contains the inspection evidence, is held for seven years in accordance with the

Education and Training Inspectorate's retention and disposal schedule. All inspection evidence is treated confidentially and evidence unique to each individual is handled under the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998.

There have been no breaches of this confidentiality in the last five years.

Education and Training Inspectorate: Lay Involvement

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education whether there is any lay involvement in the work of the Education and Training Inspectorate.

(AQW 16862/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) does not currently have any lay involvement in its work. However, ETI does use Associate Assessors during inspection. An Associate Assessor is a serving Principal/Vice Principal, senior manager or senior support officer from the CASS service, who is released from their school/organisation to join an inspection team. Training is provided by ETI for all Associate Assessors.

Education and Training Inspectorate: Appointments

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education whether there is any lay involvement in the appointment of members of the Education and Training Inspectorate.

(AQW 16863/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There is no lay involvement in the appointment of members of the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). The appointment of members of ETI is carried out by HR Connect, the Civil Service's partner, which delivers all recruitment services.

Education and Training Inspectorate: School Staff Involvement

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education what steps he has taken to involve (i) practising teachers; and (ii) practising school managers and principals in the inspections that are carried out by the Education and Training Inspectorate.

(AQW 16865/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In relation to (i) and (ii), many inspection teams include among their numbers, Associate Assessors. An Associate Assessor is a key professional who is currently serving as a Principal/Vice Principal, senior manager or senior support officer from the CASS service and who is released from their school/organisation to join an inspection team.

Down High School: Newbuild

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Education for an update on the progress towards a new build for Down High School, Downpatrick.

(AQW 16911/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As you will be aware, the consultation on post-primary area plans has completed and responses are currently being considered. Potential capital projects such as that for Down High School will be critically assessed as part of this process to determine how they will contribute to the overall infrastructure needed.

Proposals for a new build at Down High are somewhat complicated by the need to purchase land on the Strangford Road.

In addition to the site issues, planning approvals will have to be renewed and the economic appraisal will need to be updated and reassessed before a new build project can progress.

Council for the Curriculum, Examination and Assessment: Irish-medium Team

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what was the total cost of the Irish Medium team within the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment in each of the last five years.

(AQW 16939/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment has provided the following information:

Year	Total Cost	Note
2011-2012	£447,530.92	
2010-2011	£384,425.15	
2009-2010	£258,711.91	
2008-2009	£191,997.20	CCEA did not have a dedicated Irish Medium team during this year. CCEA had a number of individuals, including translators, working on Irish Medium activities.

Year	Total Cost	Note
2007-2008	£138,759.51	CCEA did not have a dedicated Irish Medium team during this year. CCEA had a number of individuals, including translators, working on Irish Medium activities.

In 2009, the Department initiated a programme by which CCEA was tasked with significantly increasing the availability of curriculum support materials for the Irish Medium sector and specifically to address recommendations 15 and 16 of the Review of Irish-Medium Education Report.

The costs for 2007-2012 are for the direct team costs and do not include the cost of any materials that were produced e.g. the production/print cost of support materials.

Teacher Education Review

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 16370/11-15, what is the estimated date for the publication of the draft strategy.

(AQW 16946/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The target in the Department's Corporate Plan for 2012-15 is to publish the strategy document on the Review of Teacher Education by the end of January 2013.

Department for Employment and Learning

Auctioned Items

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the items his Department disposed of at auctions in (i) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12, including the auction value of each item.

(AQW 16312/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): The Department has not disposed of any items at auctions in either 2010/11 or 2011/12.

Youth Unemployment: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department is taking to help young people find jobs in the North Down area.

(AQW 16358/11-15)

Dr Farry: Addressing youth unemployment, in all areas of Northern Ireland including North Down, is a priority.

Steps to Work is the Department's main return to work provision and in the North Down area 265 young people are currently availing of this programme. This is a flexible programme which tailors provision to the individual's need with the aim of assisting participants to find and sustain employment.

A new initiative has recently been implemented within the StW programme known as 'First Start'. Between now and 2014 First Start will support 1,700 waged employment opportunities, each lasting a minimum of six months, for young people aged 18 to 24 who have been in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance for at least six months.

The Department's Pathways to Work programme assists people with health conditions and disabilities move into employment and presently 62 young people in the North Down area are involved in this programme.

In March the Executive agreed a package of new measures – "the Youth Employment Scheme" - to help young people gain experience, acquire new skills and find employment.

My Department is actively working with employers to secure as many opportunities as possible as quickly as possible across Northern Ireland. I have been encouraged by the response of employers so far and I expect many more to come forward to offer opportunities for young people in the coming months.

In the period April to October 2012 my Department helped 390 young people move from welfare to work in North Down (the area served by Bangor and Newtownards Jobcentres). This is 25% above target for those areas for the period. (The target for Bangor was 145 and for Newtownards, 167).

Beecroft Report

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the Beecroft Report on Employment Law. **(AQW 16413/11-15)**

Dr Farry: In my statement to the Assembly on 5 November 2011 on the Department's employment law review, I stated that the debate around employment law is often pitched as the interests of business against the rights of workers, and I rejected

the argument that this has to be a zero-sum situation. I also stated that I am committed to evidence-based policymaking, to better regulation, and to making the decisions that best serve employees and employers.

With the above in mind, my overall assessment of the Beecroft Report is that it does not sufficiently consider the needs of employees. I have already ruled out the introduction of compensated no-fault dismissal.

Disposal of Assets

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the items that his Department disposed of for a monetary return in (i) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12.

(AQW 16483/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department has not disposed of any items for a monetary return in either 2010/11 or 2011/12.

Stranmillis University College: Chairperson

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 14514/11-15, how, and when, a new chairperson of the Governing Body of Stranmillis University College, Belfast will be appointed; and whether he can give an assurance that the post will be filled by a publicly advertised competitive process.

(AQW 16515/11-15)

Dr Farry: Work has commenced on the process of recruiting a new Chair to the Governing Body of Stranmillis University College. I can confirm that this is being carried out in accordance with the Code of Practice issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland and that the post will be publically advertised. Subject to a suitable candidate being identified, who meets the advertised selection criteria, a new Chair will be appointed when the process is completed.

Stranmillis University College: Vice-chairperson

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how, and when, a new vice-chairperson of the Governing Body of Stranmillis University College, Belfast will be appointed; and whether he can give an assurance that the post will be filled by a publicly advertised competitive process.

(AQW 16516/11-15)

Dr Farry: In accordance with the Governing Body's Instrument of Government, the Vice-Chair is elected by Governing Body members from among their own number. The current Vice-Chair's term of office is not due to expire until July 2014.

Stranmillis University College: Governing Body

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how, and when, a new Governing Body of Stranmillis University College, Belfast will be appointed; and for his assessment of whether the size of the present board allows it to be fully representative.

(AQW 16517/11-15)

Dr Farry: There is no requirement for a new Governing Body of Stranmillis University College to be appointed. However, the Chair is due to retire at the end of December 2012 and there are three vacancies among other members. Work has commenced on the process of recruiting people to fill these four vacancies through open competitions.

The make up of the present Governing Body is fully representative of the required categories of members specified in the Colleges of Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2005.

Teacher Education Review

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 14550/11-15, when the departmental review of Teacher Education in Northern Ireland, including the viability audit of the two University Colleges, will be published.

(AQW 16518/11-15)

Dr Farry: As I stated in AQW 14550/11-15, work on the First Stage of the Study of the Teacher Education Infrastructure in Northern Ireland is ongoing. The report will be available once this has concluded and the findings have been discussed with both university colleges.

Pedagogy: Courses

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) whether any degree level courses in Pedagogy are being offered; (ii) the number of students enrolled on the courses; and (iii) if courses are not being offered, why this is the case.

(AQW 16530/11-15)

Dr Farry: As my Department does not hold this information, my officials contacted the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for a response. The universities and university colleges have confirmed that there are currently no degree-level courses in Pedagogy. However, the study of pedagogy is an integral part of the courses of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) available at the four HEIs.

Universities: PhD Places

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the distribution of the additional 150 PhD places between universities.

(AQW 16561/11-15)

Dr Farry: I am currently considering the basis on which to allocate to the universities both the 150 additional PhD places announced under the Jobs and Economy Initiative and the additional 150 places already announced in "Graduating to Success", my Department's Higher Education Strategy. I would hope to be in a position shortly to make a final decision on their distribution between the two universities.

The first tranche of 100 additional places will be available in the 2013-14 academic year.

Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics: Places

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when the additional 500 Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics undergraduate places will be available; and when he intends to announce how the places will be distributed between universities.

(AQW 16562/11-15)

Dr Farry: I would hope to be in a position to make a final decision and announcement on the allocation of the additional STEM places shortly. The places will be available from the 2013-14 academic year.

National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what contact he has had with National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts in relation to seeking additional inward support.

(AQW 16570/11-15)

Dr Farry: Departmental officials have recently been present at several NESTA organised events and meetings. There have been no specific discussions about additional inward support and no approach of this nature has been made recently by the organisation.

I welcome the recent decision of the Assembly to consent to NESTA's reconstitution as a charity and look forward to working together with the organisation in the future.

Learner Access and Engagement Programme

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) to outline the timescale for the delivery of the Learner Access and Engagement Programme; and (ii) whether he can offer an assurance that funding will be available to continue community education in the Derry area until the programme is implemented.

(AQW 16580/11-15)

Dr Farry: The timeframe produced by the Western Education and Library Board, the Centre of Procurement Excellence for the Learner Access and Engagement procurement exercise, has indicated that the process will take approximately 26 weeks, concluding in May 2013. The programme is expected to commence in September 2013.

The Department's funding to the six further education colleges for community education will continue, pending the programme's implementation.

Forth and Foyle: Employees

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he can offer an assurance that the six remaining former employees of Forth and Foyle will be offered training programmes as a matter of urgency.

(AQW 16617/11-15)

Dr Farry: My officials have been pro-active and along with colleagues from the Social Security Agency; they have already met with the six former employees of Forth and Foyle on the 2 November 2012 at their premises at Skeoge Industrial Estate.

During this meeting, each employee was spoken to individually to give him/her appropriate benefit guidance and advice, and for those who wished to make claims to Job Seekers Allowance, appointments were made in both Foyle and Lisnagelvin Jobs and Benefits Offices.

My officials outlined the range of DEL services available to them, including upskilling, identifying alternative employment, and a Self Employed Test Trading option. The employees indicated that they would be interested in availing of specialised training specifically in relation to off shore work on both oil rigs and wind turbines. They also indicated they were very keen to update and improve their CVs in order to enhance their employability.

My officials advised that the employees could receive immediate help with CVs through the Job Clubs in both Foyle and Lisnagelvin Jobs and Benefits Offices, and that they would be eligible for a range of assistance under the Steps to Work programme (StW). My Department's ability to fund these will of course be dependent on the costs and whether or not these

courses are available in Northern Ireland. My staff also made an initial enquiry with Invest NI on their behalf, to see if they could provide any assistance.

It was agreed that the employees would compile a list of courses and send these to my staff, who would in turn consider these with our local StW Lead Contractor, Bryson Future Skills. To date my officials have not received this list, so on the 8 November 2012, they followed up on this; however I will ask them to do so again as a matter of urgency.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises: Support

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the evaluation of the outcomes of the research project, commissioned by his Department, to identify the support mechanisms that the small and medium-sized enterprise sector requires to comply with employment law.

(AQW 16618/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department is anticipating receipt of a final report on the research project shortly, and I intend to publish the report by the end of the year.

The key output from the research will be a set of recommendations on how SMEs might be better supported to overcome challenges in interpreting and complying with employment law.

I will then consider how best to take forward the research recommendations and hope to announce proposals in the Spring of 2013.

Freedom of Information Requests

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the number of Freedom of Information requests received by his Department in each year since 2007; (ii) the proportion of requests each year that were not answered within the time limit; (iii) the number of requests currently outstanding by more than (a) one to two months (b) three to four months; (c) five to six months; (d) seven to twelve months; and (e) more than twelve months.

(AQW 16647/11-15)

Dr Farry: The information requested in relation to (i) and (ii) is published in a series of FOI Annual Reports, which are on the basis of calendar years. The reports up to 2011 can be accessed from the OFMDFM website at:

http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/improving-public-services/information_management_and_central_advisory_branch/annual-reports-and-statistics.htm

An overview of the Department's statistics is detailed below for your information.

Year	Number of Requests Received	Proportion of requests not answered within time limit
2007	100	1%
2008	109	3%
2009	102	1%
2010	107	1%
2011	189	3%
2012*	108	1%

* until 12 November 2012

My Department currently has no responses to Freedom of Information requests outstanding beyond the legislative deadline.

Step-Up Programme

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in light of the concerns of teachers and schools in Londonderry and Belfast that the quality of provisions and funding for the Step-Up Programme will be diminished, given that the designer and director has been absent from university for over seven months and has now resigned, what action he is taking to address this matter.

(AQW 16745/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Step-Up programme has been extremely successful in raising the motivation, aspiration and academic performance of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and has enabled many young people to progress to higher education, including some who would not previously have considered higher education as an option for them.

The University of Ulster has confirmed that the Step-Up programme remains an important part of its overall widening participation plan and that the university intends to explore new opportunities to extend this very successful model to other economically relevant disciplines. The Step-Up programme is a collaboration between the schools, industry and the University of Ulster and as such is not dependent on the contributions of single individual. However, the university has

confirmed that a new director will be appointed for the Step-Up programme as soon as possible in order to ensure that all Step-Up activities continue to be carried out to a very high standard.

I believe that "Step-Up" will contribute significantly to the achievement of the objectives set out in Access to Success, my Department's strategy to widen participation in higher education which I launched on 11 September 2012. I am committed to providing continuing funding for the Step-Up programme and will be considering the introduction of similar new programmes within the new strategy.

Steps to Work: Placements

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the timescale for the additional 500 work experience placements on the Steps to Work Programme.

(AQW 16747/11-15)

Dr Farry: The 500 work experience placements on the Steps to Work programme will be available across the Public Sector. It is envisaged that there will initially be 40 starts in 2012/13 with a further 230 starts during both 2013/14 and 2014/15.

Steps to Work: Educational Attainment Levels

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the educational attainment level of participants on the Steps to Work Programme in the Foyle and Lisnagelvin Jobcentre catchment areas in each of the last two years.

(AQW 16772/11-15)

Dr Farry: The contract for the delivery of Steps to Work in the Foyle contract area that covers the Foyle and Lisnagelvin Jobs & Benefit offices catchment areas was awarded on 25 July 2011 to North West Regional College. This contract ended on 30 September 2012 and a new contract was awarded to Bryson Future Skills from 1 October 2012.

The educational attainment level of participants who started Steps to Work provision with the Lead Contractors from 25 July 2011 to 12 November 2012 is detailed in Annex A.

The data on educational attainment was input on the Department's Trainee Management System (TMS) by the Lead Contractors, North West Regional College and Bryson Future Skills.

Annex A

Highest Qualification held	Number of participants	Highest Qualification held	Number of participants
Masters Degree	26	HND	22
Diploma in Further Education	35	OND	2
Diploma in Higher Education	9	Higher leaving Certificate	3
Diploma in Vocational Education	16	Leaving Certificate	4
Degree	103	GNVQ Advanced	3
A Level	119	GNVQ Intermediate	19
Advanced Senior	1	GNVQ Foundation	15
AS Level	12	NVQ Level 1	93
GCSE	411	NVQ Level 2	373
O Level	28	NVQ Level 3	81
CSE	26	RSA Stage 1	4
BTEC National	49	RSA Stage 2	5
BTEC Certificate	12	RSA Stage 3	1
BTEC First	24	Key Skills	2
BTEC General	13	Basic Skills	1
Junior Certificate	2	Other	43
City and Guilds	129	No formal qualifications	1566
Unstated	5	Certificate of Achievement	17

Apprenticeships

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how his Department aligns the number and type of apprenticeship places with the gaps in skills and workplace needs.

(AQO 2886/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department's current policy on apprenticeship training is to fund apprenticeships based on demand. Demand is determined by employers recruiting and nominating apprentices on to the programme linked to their business and skills needs.

The ApprenticeshipNI budget contains funding for two categories: those apprentices aged 16-24; and those aged 25 and over. Following a recent review of adult training, including apprenticeships, support for adults aged 25 and over is prioritised in the economically important sectors which are constrained by skills needs and which are needed to rebalance the economy.

These are business services specifically ICT; financial services; manufacturing, including food and drink/agri-food, advanced manufacturing and advanced engineering; and the emerging sectors of life and health sciences and the creative industries.

This policy will aid the growth of a strong private sector and promote high value/high paid jobs in sectors with the potential to expand, to innovate and to export.

A pilot higher level ICT apprenticeship programme for eight participants commenced in October 2012. It is planned also to pilot higher level apprenticeships in Engineering.

The Department has worked closely with the Department of Finance and Personnel and private sector companies to design a Public/Private ICT Apprenticeship Scheme to employ and train individuals for work in the ICT sector. 32 ICT apprentices have recently been recruited into the scheme in a variety of roles.

The number of people undertaking apprenticeship training at the moment is 11,600. This figure is testimony to the value that employers put on ApprenticeshipsNI training.

I would encourage all employers to avail of the programme. In particular, through the new Jobs and Economy Initiative we will encourage further employer engagement with ApprenticeshipsNI by supporting the cost of "off the job" apprenticeship training for up to 900 additional young people that have participated on the Youth Employment Scheme.

Graduate Acceleration Programme: South Antrim

Ms Brown asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many graduates from the South Antrim constituency have benefited from the Graduate Acceleration Programme since 2008.

(AQO 2893/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Graduate Acceleration Programme was introduced in January 2010 as a strand of Steps to Work provision.

Since its introduction, 404 graduates have started on this strand of provision. Of these 404 participants, 17 or 4% resided in the South Antrim parliamentary constituency.

Apprenticeships

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people who enrolled in the Programme-Led Apprenticeship Scheme, over the past three years, were able to gain work placements to complete their vocational qualifications.

(AQO 2894/11-15)

Dr Farry: The numbers enrolled in each intake of the Programme-Led Apprenticeship programme since its introduction in September 2009 are as follows. In 2009/10 there were 3,397 participants, in 2010/11 there were 3,519 participants, in 2011/12 there were 3,588 participants and in 2012/13, 2,792 participants have enrolled to date.

A work placement is required to ensure the participant can gain evidence towards their competence based vocational qualifications. To date 2,266 NVQ2 vocational qualifications have been achieved.

The Programme-Led Apprenticeship programme aims to assist young school leavers who have been unable to find the requisite employed status to train as an apprentice through the Department's ApprenticeshipsNI programme during the economic downturn.

The Department is determined that in this downturn we continue to invest in the skills training of our young people.

We do not want to be in a position at the end of this recession where we have a group of young people who have been disenfranchised and disenchanting, nor do we want there to be a skills gap.

South West College: Enniskillen Campus

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the capital requirements for the Enniskillen campus of the South West College.

(AQO 2895/11-15)

Dr Farry: The South West College is preparing a business case to address accommodation needs at its Fairview campus in Enniskillen. We anticipate having a draft presented to us, for assessment, by the end of 2012. In the business case the College is considering a number of options including a new build option on the site of the old Erne Hospital. This option is looking at the possibility of developing a shared services site with a range of other public sector bodies. Whilst no firm decisions can be made on options or capital requirements, until the business case is complete, the project forms part of my Department's advanced planning and a bid will be made in respect of the South West College to the next Comprehensive Spending Review.

Steps to Work: Delivery

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why it is necessary to use non-indigenous providers to deliver the Steps to Work Programme.

(AQO 2896/11-15)

Dr Farry: By the term non-indigenous I assume the Member means outside Northern Ireland. Steps to Work, my Department's main employment programme, is delivered in Northern Ireland through a network of eight lead contractors across 10 contract management areas.

When the delivery of Government programmes is subject to the public procurement process it must adhere to the EU Public Procurement Directives including the EU Treaty Principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination on the grounds of nationality. It is therefore unlawful to restrict the award of contracts to Northern Ireland companies only.

There is only one company with headquarters in Great Britain currently delivering Steps to Work in Northern Ireland.

Employment: People with Disabilities

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how his Department assists people with disabilities to gain employment.

(AQO 2897/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department's provision for people with disabilities is delivered by my staff, healthcare professionals and specialist providers. Providers have a range of expertise required to meet the specific needs of disabled people wanting to obtain or sustain employment.

All provision can be accessed through highly trained Employment Advisers based in Jobs and Benefits Offices and Jobcentres throughout Northern Ireland. In addition, the Department's Disability Employment Managers provide ongoing support and guidance to these Employment Adviser teams.

Specialist provision offered by the Department's Disability Employment Service includes:

- a dedicated Occupational Psychology Service;
- the Work Connect programme;
- the Workable programme;
- the Access to Work programme;
- the Condition Management Programme; and
- the Job Introduction Scheme.

The Department, in partnership with disability organisations and Employers for Disability Northern Ireland, also works with employers to advocate on behalf of, and to promote the benefits of employing people with a disability.

Youth Unemployment

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on his plans to address the levels of youth unemployment.

(AQO 2898/11-15)

Dr Farry: Through the Youth Employment Scheme this year, we expect to offer 1,000 short two to eight week work experience placements, 400 longer six to nine month skills development opportunities and subsidise 350 jobs by March 2013. These figures will rise steadily over the next three years to a total of 6,000 opportunities across all strands of the Scheme. We expect to spend £31 million by March 2015.

Since the successful promotional event on 26 September in the Titanic Building in Belfast, almost 200 employers have signed agreements to participate in the scheme. To date there have been 154 opportunities advertised with 37 young people availing of the scheme. A new Enterprise Allowance to help 150 young people establish their own business will also be made available.

Following the Executive's recent Economy and Jobs announcement, an additional 500 jobs for unemployed young people will be supported through my Department's 'First Start' Initiative this year which has already attracted almost 100 vacancies within the first week of operation.

Education Maintenance Allowance: Review

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what progress has been made on his Department's review of Educational Maintenance Allowance.

(AQO 2899/11-15)

Dr Farry: I can advise that my Department and the Department of Education launched a joint public consultation on the future of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme on Monday 30 July. The consultation ran for fourteen weeks and closed on Friday 2 November. The consultation document contained five options for the future structure of the scheme which were agreed with the Minister of Education. I can also advise that sixty-two consultation responses were received.

My Department and the Department of Education are now carefully analysing all responses received prior to making a joint recommendation on the future structure of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme. Final decisions on the way forward will rest with the Executive.

It is intended that all agreed changes to the scheme will be implemented from the 2013/14 academic year and an announcement made as soon as practically possible, in order to ensure that current and prospective students are provided with sufficient notice of how any proposed changes to the scheme may affect them. It is also to ensure that there is sufficient time for the Student Loans Company, which administers the scheme on behalf of both Departments, to make the required changes to the ICT infrastructure, application forms and guidance documentation.

Employment Law: Review of

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when he expects to bring a paper to the Executive on the review of employment law.

(AQO 2900/11-15)

Dr Farry: In my statement to the Assembly on 5 November, I identified a number of policy issues that merit further consideration, many of which may require legislation and Executive approval.

Some of these proposals include: the routing of all tribunal claims through the Labour Relations Agency; increasing the qualifying period for unfair dismissal claims; and the introduction of protected conversations.

However, there is a need for a more detailed appraisal of a range of policy proposals before seeking Executive approval to go out to public consultation. I intend to take a paper to the Executive in the early part of 2013, having taken the views of the Employment and Learning Committee and key stakeholders.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Foreign Direct Investment

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the recent market reports published by property agents Lisneys, to detail the available square footage of office space outside Greater Belfast that has been deemed suitable for potential Foreign Direct Investment projects.

(AQW 16231/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Businesses seeking to invest in Northern Ireland, whether they are Foreign Direct or indigenous, will have specific property requirements unique to their particular needs. It is therefore not possible to detail the available square footage of office space outside Greater Belfast that has been deemed suitable solely for potential Foreign Direct Investment projects.

Invest NI does, however, maintain an online database which contains details of a range of available properties, both private and public sector, across Northern Ireland. The database is accessible through the NI Business Info website and provides potential investors with a range of property solutions that may meet their particular needs.

Invest NI can also provide qualifying businesses, both Foreign Direct and indigenous, with bespoke property searches tailored to their specific requirements to present them with a range of innovative solutions.

Foreign Direct Investment

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in light of the recent market reports published by property agents Lisneys highlighting the virtual total collapse of bank lending to the property sector, to detail (i) what consideration has been given to this as a threat to the ability to attract Foreign Direct Investment opportunities; and (ii) what plans there are to introduce any form of government subvention, by means of either short-term rental guarantee or capital shortfall grant, to ensure the availability of premises, particularly outside Greater Belfast

(AQW 16233/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The availability of suitable office space is an important part of Northern Ireland's investment proposition. Potential investors are attracted by competitive rents and immediate availability.

Invest NI considers that the current level of availability of Grade A office space is not having a negative impact upon its ability to attract and secure Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to Northern Ireland.

It should be noted that the current trend in FDI projects across the UK and indeed Republic of Ireland is for smaller projects in terms of overall job numbers. This may have a resultant impact on the demand for large office floor plates.

As a result of the continuing economic downturn Invest NI has brought forward a number of measures to help businesses, both FDI and indigenous, directly with their property needs. However, in terms of plans to introduce any form of government subvention to ensure the availability of premises, market failure would have to first be proven. There would also be a need to consider whether such an intervention would result in any demonstrable market advantage. Invest NI will continue to keep this matter under review.

Small and Medium-sized Businesses: EU Funding

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps her Department is taking to ensure that local small and medium-sized enterprises benefit from future EU funding initiatives, such as the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Programme and Horizon 2020.

(AQW 16254/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department continues to take the lead in improving the support available to small and medium-sized enterprises who wish to participate in EU Innovation Programmes. As part of this, plans are well advanced for the creation of a new Northern Ireland Horizon 2020 Network. This Network will consist of research experts who will be known as Horizon 2020 Contact Points and who will work with companies and research organisations to assist them in availing of future funding opportunities. Importantly, as part of this Network, Invest NI will fulfil the specific role as Horizon 2020 Contact Point for SME's.

This new Horizon 2020 Network will augment the financial and other support already available through Invest NI and InterTradeIreland to help SMEs develop funding proposals.

Small and Medium-sized Businesses: Narrow Water Bridge

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans her Department has to ensure that small and medium-sized enterprises in South Down benefit as a result of the proposed Narrow Water Bridge linking Warrenpoint and Omeath.

(AQW 16255/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI continues to offer a wide range of support to encourage the start up and growth of small and medium sized businesses within South Down.

Invest Northern Ireland's Southern Regional Office in Newry has an active relationship with many local business and key stakeholders in the South Down area. The products, services and support available to both new and existing businesses of all sizes are extensively promoted through a range of channels, including advertising campaigns such as Boosting Business and Go For It, direct marketing, social media, events, workshops and seminars which cover all regions of Northern Ireland. Through this, Invest NI will be particularly keen to help local businesses to take advantage of the physical link with Rol to sell their products/services in the Louth area.

The new Regional Start Initiative has commenced in the last month to assist with the development of new start-up businesses and is available to all prospective enterprises in South Down.

Invest NI's Boosting Business initiative, encompassing support under five themes: Jobs, R&D, Exports, Technology and Skills, is also available to local businesses in the area.

Under the Local Economic Development (LED) measure Invest NI Southern Office has worked closely with the Down and Newry and Mourne District Councils and the South Eastern Economic Development (SEED) group to progress 9 initiatives to support business in the Down area. These initiatives have a total value of £1.9 million.

Of these, the Renewable Energy and Marine Technologies Development Program will be particularly attractive to businesses in the South Down Area. However, all the programmes of assistance will help build the capacity of the local business base and prepare them to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the new link.

Narrow Water Bridge

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she has any plans to meet with Ministers from the Irish Government to discuss ways in which the proposed Narrow Water Bridge project can advance the fortunes of local trade and investment.

(AQW 16259/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have no plans at present to meet with Irish Government Ministers to discuss this project.

Layde Graveyard, Cushendall

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether he will investigate the decline of the Causeway coast and glens tourist attraction Layde Graveyard, Cushendall.

(AQW 16284/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Neither my Department nor the Northern Ireland Tourist Board have been made aware of the decline of the Layde Graveyard visitor site in Cushendall until now.

Moyle District Council, The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and the National Trust are the key stakeholders responsible for this visitor site.

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail how many meetings her Department has had with representatives from Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann in relation to promoting and developing cultural musical tourism in the Glens of Antrim in each of the last three years, including the date of each meeting.

(AQW 16286/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has had three meetings with Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.

Tourism: Glens of Antrim

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department has taken to promote and develop tourism in the Glens of Antrim.

(AQW 16287/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Causeway Coast and Glens is one of the proposed 'key tourism areas/destinations' identified in a Priorities for Action Plan for tourism which is currently being finalised by my Department. As part of the work in developing this Plan the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) has fully supported the development of tourism in the Glens of Antrim by facilitating the implementation of the Causeway Coast & Glens Tourism Area Plan.

Through NITB's Tourism Development Scheme 2008-2011, NITB provided financial support for a Causeway Coastal Route visitor infrastructure and interpretation programme which included the Glens area. This culminated in project costs of £5million, with NITB contributing £2.5million, to enhance the existing visitor experience across the Causeway Coast and Glen's region. NITB has a Service Level Agreement with the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust, from which a number of local sustainable tourism initiatives have also been delivered in the region.

NITB and Tourism Ireland have promoted the Glens area, both at home and abroad, through their extensive marketing campaigns, PR, and other promotional materials including brochures and on their consumer websites.

Airlines: Meetings with

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail any meetings she has had with the airlines in each of the last two years.

(AQW 16291/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Improving Northern Ireland's air connectivity is a priority for my Department and I have met with airline and airport representatives, on a number of occasions in the last two years. For example, I hosted a Northern Ireland Access Initiative event earlier this year at which I met with representatives from easyjet, Flybe, Ryanair and United/Continental.

Air Passenger Duty

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she is taking to secure new airline routes on the basis of the forthcoming reduction in air passenger duty.

(AQW 16293/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department, through Tourism Ireland, is in dialogue with airlines, and Belfast International Airport, on an ongoing basis to identify and develop opportunities for new or re-instated services to long haul destinations.

The decisive action taken by the Northern Ireland Executive, and the Assembly, to eliminate Air Passenger Duty on direct long haul flights will help to support these endeavours by sending a positive message to long haul airlines that Northern Ireland can be a viable option for their business.

Flights: Canada and the United States

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she is taking to secure direct flight routes to and from Canada and the United States.

(AQW 16294/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department, through Tourism Ireland, is in dialogue with airlines, and Belfast International Airport, on an ongoing basis to identify and develop opportunities for new or re-instated services to North America. The decisive action taken by the Northern Ireland Executive and the Assembly, to eliminate Air Passenger Duty (APD) on direct long haul flights, will help to support these endeavours, by sending a positive message to long haul airlines, that Northern Ireland can be a viable option for their business.

The removal of direct long haul APD, will help to secure our existing link with the United States, thereby protecting and improving our international air access and competitiveness. It will also send a positive message to airlines with the potential to operate between Northern Ireland and Canada. The long established and highly valued family, cultural and business links which exist between Canada and Northern Ireland, make direct air access on this corridor highly desirable to our growth aspirations. Indeed, of the four million Canadian residents boasting Irish ancestry, almost two thirds of them trace their roots back to Northern Ireland.

Tourism Strategy: Implementation

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the draft Tourism Strategy, including the timescale for the implementation of the final strategy.

(AQW 16327/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department is working to finalise a 'Priorities for Action' Plan for tourism to ensure that tourism commitments in the Programme for Government are delivered. The Plan will set out how we propose to develop tourism up to 2014/15 and how this will provide a platform to move towards our aspirations to 2020. The Plan will be reviewed in 2014 to ensure that we are on target to meet our long term goals. I intend to take it to the Executive for endorsement shortly.

Flights: Brazil, Russia, India and China

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she is taking to improve air passenger routes to Brazil, Russia, India and China.

(AQW 16344/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department, through Tourism Ireland, is in dialogue with airlines, and Northern Ireland's airports, on an ongoing basis to identify and develop opportunities for services to important markets such as those represented by the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China). This includes the potential for direct access and also access via hub airports.

While there are no direct flights from Northern Ireland to the BRIC countries, we are well connected to these important markets via the British Airways (BA) service which operates between George Best Belfast City Airport and Heathrow, the United Kingdom's hub airport. This service, which operates seven flights per day, provides inbound and outbound business and leisure travellers with excellent onward connectivity with BA to a range of destinations including the BRIC countries.

Invest NI: Visits

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 14405/11-15, to detail the seven potential investors who visited Derry in 2011/12.

(AQW 16349/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Due to the commercially sensitive nature of ongoing negotiations, Invest NI does not disclose the name of potential investors until they have committed to locating in Northern Ireland. As a result, Invest NI cannot detail in full the seven inward investment visits to the Londonderry District Council Area (DCA).

It is important to note that Invest NI does not determine the location of an inward investment project. Ultimately this is a decision taken by the investor. As noted by the Independent Review of Economic Policy, it is essential to allow companies the scope to locate where they consider that they will be able to operate most profitably.

Farmers: Bankruptcies

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many farmers have gone bankrupt as a result of the recession.

(AQW 16356/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Insolvency Service is unable to provide statistics on the number of farmers that have gone bankrupt as a result of the recession. It can, however, provide the number of individuals that have been made bankrupt in the Agricultural Sector for the last ten years.

Financial Year	Number of Bankruptcies in the Agricultural Sector	Total Number of Bankruptcies	%
2002 - 2003	10	350	3%
2003 - 2004	16	582	3%
2004 - 2005	12	685	2%
2005 - 2006	12	892	1%
2006 - 2007	25	1008	2%
2007 - 2008	17	906	2%

Financial Year	Number of Bankruptcies in the Agricultural Sector	Total Number of Bankruptcies	%
2008 - 2009	14	1155	1%
2009 - 2010	24	1250	2%
2010 - 2011	20	1456	1%
2011 - 2012	33	1569	2%

WhiteRock Capital Partners: Contract

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 15072/11-15, to detail (i) how the figure of £6,740,558 for the contract awarded to Whiterock Capital Partners was arrived at; and (ii) whether the contract value could increase over time.

(AQW 16384/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The award of the management contract to Whiterock Capital Partners followed a competitive tendering process.

The contract was awarded on the basis of best practice advice on making appointments to External Delivery Organisations, as provided by Central Procurement Directorate.

The figure of £6,740,558 was arrived at from the bid that was submitted by the consortium that established Whiterock Capital Partners. This will be paid over a 10 year period.

There is scope for a bonus to be earned, subject to the successful achievement of the performance targets outlined within the legal contract. The performance bonus will be based on a percentage of the funds repaid to Invest NI above a £15million hurdle incentivising the Manager to maximise the return of public money which can then be utilised for additional programmes and initiatives.

Ulster Science and Technology Park, Derry

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she will visit the Ulster Science and Technology Park, Derry, with a view to increasing Foreign Direct Investment in the North West.

(AQW 16386/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would ask the Member to send visit requests through the normal appropriate channels within my Department where they will be considered in line with all other invitations.

InterTradelreland: Job Creation

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the 115 (i) temporary; (ii) permanent; (iii) part-time; and (iv) full-time jobs created by InterTrade Ireland in the first half of 2012, broken down by (a) type; (b) salary; and (c) location.

(AQW 16449/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In relation to types of jobs InterTradelreland categorises its job impact in terms of industrial sectors. The breakdown is as follows:

Sectors:	Number of Companies	Jobs Impact
Administrative & Support Service Activities	5	31
Electricity, Gas, Steam & Air Conditioning Supply	1	3
Human Health & Social Work Activities	2	17
Information & Communication	7	23
Manufacturing	5	30
Mining & Quarrying	1	3
Professional, Scientific & Technical	2	3
Water Supply, Sewage, Waste Management & Remediation Activities	1	5
Total	24	115

InterTradelreland does not collect data on salaries.

In terms of location the figures are as follows:

Jobs Impact	Number of Companies	Jobs Impact
Northern Ireland Companies	13	69
Republic of Ireland Companies	11	46
Total	24	115

Please note that all jobs are reported as full-time permanent positions.

Disposal of Assets

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the items that her Department disposed of for a monetary return in (i) 2010/11; and (ii) 2011/12.

(AQW 16482/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department disposed of a vehicle on which the sales proceeds were £10,000 during the 2010/11 Financial Year. The Department did not dispose of any items for a monetary return in the 2011/12 Financial Year.

Hydraulic Fracturing: Impact

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether any discussions have taken place within the Tourist Board on the impact of hydraulic fracturing; and whether it has developed a policy in relation to the process.

(AQW 16497/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board does not have a policy in relation to the process.

Hydraulic Fracturing: Impact

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether any representatives from the Tourist Board have outlined to her Department the potentially negative impact of hydraulic fracturing on the tourism sector.

(AQW 16498/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has not outlined to my Department the potentially negative impact of hydraulic fracturing on the tourism sector.

Invest NI: Scheme

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an outline of InvestNI's Skills Growth scheme, including the criteria for inclusion and the remit of the scheme.

(AQW 16508/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As with a number of the proposals put forward under the Economy and Jobs Initiative, the "Skills Growth" scheme is still at a relatively early stage of development and the details of how this will operate have not yet been finalised. Invest NI are currently working to develop the details of the scheme and will confirm this when available.

It is anticipated that this scheme will operate as a 50% grant for small businesses towards external skills development costs.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises: Finance Voucher Scheme

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how the new Finance Voucher scheme, to help small and medium sized enterprises access specialist support to grow their businesses, will operate; (ii) which SMEs will be eligible; and (iii) how they can apply for this scheme.

(AQW 16510/11-15)

Mrs Foster: When Invest Northern Ireland was developing its Access to Finance strategy, it was clear that businesses need support, in particular to have a better understanding of the types of finance which are available, what the funder's lending criteria were likely to be, and how to prepare an application/plan, which is going to succeed. It was from this that the proposals for a Finance Voucher emerged.

The Finance Voucher will form an important element in enhancing the ability of local small and medium sized businesses to access available sources of finance by providing the necessary support to enable them to make a strong case to potential funding providers.

Whilst it is still in relatively early stages of development, it is likely that it will incorporate:

- Awareness raising amongst SMEs on available funding, understanding financial information, Funders' criteria and how to make the case and manage the relationship with a funder; and
- A Finance Voucher for local SMEs with growth potential, to enable the production of a funding application, and which can be redeemed with approved suppliers. The Voucher is likely to be awarded by way of competitive calls. Eligibility criteria are currently under development.

Invest NI is currently working to develop the details of the scheme and will confirm these when available.

Debt Advice Service: Foyle

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many people have availed of the Debt Advice Service in the Foyle constituency since August 2012.

(AQW 16548/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Debt Action NI, the new DETI funded debt advice service for Northern Ireland, commenced on 1 August 2012. The service has 27.5 full-time equivalent debt advisers working at a range of outlets throughout Northern Ireland, as well as delivering a telephone debt advice service. Debt Action NI dealt with 116 new clients from within the Foyle constituency area during the period 1 August until 31 October 2012.

Farms: Health and Safety

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many farms are subject to health and safety legislation.

(AQW 16564/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Health and Safety at Work Order (Northern Ireland) 1978, and subordinate legislation, applies to all workplaces where persons are either employed or are self employed, including farms.

Department of Agriculture figures indicate that, in 2011, there were 24,436 farm businesses in Northern Ireland.

Energy Efficiency: Homes

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the budget that has been set aside to cover the proposals to boost economic activity through the retro-fitting of energy efficiency measures in homes.

(AQW 16574/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department of Social Development has statutory responsibility for energy efficiency in the domestic sector.

I understand that the Office of the First Minister and the deputy First Minister plans to bring forward proposals to boost economic activity through the retro-fitting of energy efficiency measures into homes.

Energy Efficiency: Green New Deal Group

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether in considering options for energy efficiency retro-fitting she will pro-actively engage with representatives from the Green New Deal Group.

(AQW 16575/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department of Social Development has statutory responsibility for energy efficiency in the domestic sector.

Economy and Jobs Initiative: Gas Network

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether the announcement in the Economy and Jobs Initiative to progress the extension of the gas network to additional towns in the west and north-west including Strabane and Omagh, and to towns in east Down is a change from the Economic Strategy; and (ii) whether this will have any impact on the Economic Appraisal on the extension of the natural gas network.

(AQW 16576/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The announcement in the Economy and Jobs Initiative on gas network extension is not a change from the Economic Strategy. The Economic Strategy supports gas network extension and, on page 70 of the document, states:

- (i) Building on what we have delivered to date, we will seek to overhaul our energy infrastructure to ensure it will be fit for purpose through to 2050. This will include ... exploring prospects for further development of the natural gas network".
- (ii) The announcement will have no impact on the economic appraisal which has recently been completed by the Department.

Energy Efficiency: Homes

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when she will publish the proposals for the retro-fitting of energy efficiency measures in homes.

(AQW 16577/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department of Social Development has statutory responsibility for energy efficiency in the domestic sector.

Energy Efficiency: Homes

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when she will bring forward proposals to retrofit energy efficiency measures into homes; and how this will help the construction industry.

(AQW 16608/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department of Social Development has statutory responsibility for energy efficiency in the domestic sector.

Freedom of Information Requests

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the number of Freedom of Information requests received by her Department in each year since 2007; (ii) the proportion of requests each year that were not answered within the time limit; (iii) the number of requests currently outstanding by more than (a) one to two months (b) three to four months; (c) five to six months; (d) seven to twelve months; and (e) more than twelve months.

(AQW 16648/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Relevant Departmental FOI statistics for each year from 2007 are published on the OFMDFM website and can be accessed via the following link:

http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/improving-public-services/information_management_and_central_advisory_branch/annual-reports-and-statistics.htm

Farms: Health and Safety

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what approaches have been used to secure health and safety improvements on farms.

(AQW 16693/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Health and Safety Executive have employed a wide range of approaches to securing health and safety improvements on farms. These have included:

- inspections and advisory visits;
- investigations of reported incidents and complaints;
- practical demonstrations at regional Safety and Health Awareness Days;
- speaking and providing information at a range of events arranged by partner bodies;
- providing information stands at Agricultural Shows and Events;
- working in partnership with the Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster at events and competitions;
- delivering 'Be Aware Kids' child farm safety events at rural primary schools and regional events;
- running an annual Children's Farm Safety Calendar Competition;
- an ongoing proactive strategy of delivering key messages through the farming press;
- setting up a Farm Safety Partnership (FSP) in May 2012; and
- developing a Farm Safety Action Plan along with its FSP partners.

Farms: Health and Safety

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how health and safety risk scoring for farms compares with other small and medium-sized businesses.

(AQW 16694/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The internationally recognised method for comparing health and safety risks in one work sector with another is based on the number of fatal accidents per 100,000 employed, i.e. Fatal Accident Incidence Rate. Although this does not take account of business size, it is significant that over 99% of businesses in Northern Ireland are classified as small or medium-sized.

Using a five year average (2007-2012) the Fatal Accident Incidence Rate for a number of sectors, including agriculture, is given below:

Sector	Fatal Accident Incidence Rate (Per 100,000 at risk)
Agriculture	11.7
Manufacturing & Quarrying	4
Construction	2.5
All Northern Ireland Employment	0.8

Patton Group: Subcontractors

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps she intends to take to support sub-contractors affected by the Patton Group going into administration; and whether she has considered helping sub-contractors with their liquidity issues.

(AQW 16712/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I recognise the devastating effect that the failure of the Patton Group has had on the Group's employees, their families and increasingly on the owners, employees and families of the Patton Group sub-contractors.

It was clear at the discussion on Monday 12 November that many of the sub-contractors were seeking advice on the potential implications that the Patton Group administration could have on their businesses. In response, Invest NI has urgently put in place arrangements to provide initial expert advice and guidance on a one-to-one basis to those affected, along with the offer of more detailed follow up consultations. These clinics took place on Thursday 15 and Friday 16 November. Invest NI is also engaging with the Administrator to identify any further creditors who might benefit from these clinics and, if there is demand, will deliver these.

Whilst there have been some calls for financial aid to creditors to Patton Group by means of loan or grant assistance from the Department of Finance and Personnel, there are a range of legislative and financial constraints, including European State Aid rules that prohibit this.

Although it will not be possible to provide any direct financial support to creditors of the Patton Group, the Executive announced a £200 million package of investment measures on 7 November many of which are designed to help the construction sector.

Patton Group: Administrator

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what contact her Department has had with the administrator dealing with the Patton Group.

(AQW 16713/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI has been in contact with the Administrator on a number of occasions to seek clarity on the scale of redundancies in the Patton Group and endeavour to get an appreciation of the impact on the supply chain.

Invest NI: Growth Loan Fund

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to explain the administrative cost of £6.74m for the £50m InvestNI Growth Loan Fund.

(AQW 16722/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The award of the management contract for the £50million Growth Loan Fund was made to Whiterock Capital Partners following a competitive tendering process.

The contract was awarded on the basis of best practice advice on making appointments to External Delivery Organisations, as provided by Central Procurement Directorate.

The cost figure of £6.74million was arrived at from the bid that was submitted by the consortium that established Whiterock Capital Partners. This will be paid over a 10 year period. Current staffing comprises of six qualified investment professionals with administrative support and this is expected to rise to at least ten during the next year.

Small Businesses: Money Owed

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what advice her Department can give to small businesses that are owed money for sub-contracting when the main contractor goes into administration.

(AQW 16768/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would advise that sub-contractors seek urgent professional and legal advice as the potential for the recovery of their debts could well be informed by the terms and conditions of the contract they are party to.

For instance, it may be possible for a sub-contractor to seek recovery of a debt from a client if it is a nominated sub-contractor. A nominated sub-contractor is one that is selected by the client to carry out an element of the works. However, this is often a complex contractual issue that undoubtedly would require specific legal advice.

In the current case of the Patton Group administration I would encourage sub-contractors to seek advice through contact with Invest NI. Invest NI has already set up a number of clinics to provide practical advice and guidance and is working with the Administrator to identify creditors who might benefit from these.

Wind Farms

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many wind farms are currently operating.

(AQW 16854/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are currently 29 onshore wind farms (with installed capacity above 1 MW) already in operation in Northern Ireland and supported under the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation. Their combined installed capacity is 428 MW.

Oil/Gas: Prices

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what she can do to encourage oil and gas companies to reduce prices for consumers.

(AQW 16859/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Wholesale oil and natural gas prices are traded daily on world markets, hence I have no direct role in the setting of such prices, nor in the final retail costs charged to consumers, particularly in relation to heating oil.

Natural gas prices are subject to regulation by the Utility Regulator, and where appropriate, my Department has supported the mutualisation of natural gas transmission infrastructure, and the introduction of gas supply competition, both of which should contribute to lowering retail gas prices.

The heating oil market in Northern Ireland is not subject to regulation by the Utility Regulator.

The Office of Fair Trading report published in October 2011 clearly stated that the home heating oil market was working well for consumers on price across the United Kingdom, and particularly noted that Northern Ireland households can exercise real choice from a large number of oil distributors operating in the local retail market. Data recently produced by independent energy consultants continues to show that local households can buy heating oil at prices below those in the Republic of Ireland and most areas of Great Britain.

Renewable Energy

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the potential for creating local renewable energy sources.

(AQW 16860/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Strategic Energy Framework's target of 40% renewable electricity by 2020 is solely derived from the level of Northern Ireland's natural renewable resource.

Development rights for 600MW offshore wind and 200MW of tidal energy were announced in October.

The draft On Shore Renewable Electricity Action Plan has identified potential on shore renewable generation mixes ranging from 1400 MW – 2360 MW of installed renewable capacity. It will be for the market to bring forward the most cost effective renewable technologies.

Employment

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment given that 8,600 jobs were promoted by Invest NI between April 2011 and September 2012, for her assessment of the number of job losses during the same period.

(AQO 2909/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI mainly provides support to businesses in the manufacturing and service sectors with high export potential, and it has made good progress against its jobs target in challenging global economic conditions. However, jobs will have been both created and lost elsewhere in the economy.

Across all the economy there has been a net loss of some 4,500 jobs between March 2011 and June 2012. But the position is not uniform and, for example, construction and retail combined have seen net job losses of around 4,600, offsetting some job growth in manufacturing and other industries.

Overall, the marginal rates of economic growth seen in recent years have not been sufficient to create enough jobs to substantially reduce our unemployment figures.

Low-carbon Energy: Job Creation

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she plans to create jobs through the expansion of indigenous and low carbon energy sources in order to meet targets for a low carbon future.

(AQO 2907/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Northern Ireland already has a significant Low Carbon Environmental Goods & Services sector with over 1,500 companies employing some 31,000 people. The long term goal is to grow this further and Invest NI has developed an active programme across FDI, Trade & Supply Chain that has engaged with over 800 businesses and responded to over 1400 enquiries in the past year. I am also committed to extending the natural gas network in Northern Ireland which will provide a lower carbon energy source to additional consumers and create employment opportunities.

UK City of Culture 2013: Marketing

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she will seek Executive endorsement for a bespoke marketing campaign in advance of Derry-Londonderry UK City of Culture 2013 events.

(AQO 2908/11-15)

Mrs Foster: NITB is working with other agencies and partners in Londonderry to develop an agreed marketing strategy so that the huge potential of the UK City of Culture can be realised. During my visit to the World Travel Market in London earlier this month I had the opportunity to see Tourism Ireland's plans for promoting the UK City of Culture in key markets.

I am confident that NITB and Tourism Ireland marketing plans will provide the platform to promote Londonderry as the UK City of Culture across all of our major markets.

Energy Costs for Business: Mid-Ulster Area

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the plans she has to help reduce energy costs for businesses in the Mid Ulster area.

(AQO 2910/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has recently completed an economic appraisal on extending the natural gas network to further towns in Northern Ireland, including Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt and Coalisland. Pipeline construction works could begin as early as 2015 and local businesses should be able to reduce energy costs significantly by switching from oil to gas. Earlier this month, I launched the Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive, a £25 million scheme that will provide incentive payments for up to twenty years to businesses and other organisations installing renewable heat technologies to help offset ongoing energy costs.

Tourism Development Scheme

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the success of the Tourism Development Scheme.

(AQO 2911/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The NITB Tourism Development Scheme has operated since 1992 and has been very successful.

Over the last three years the Scheme has provided direct funding of £60 million, which attracted a further £90 million of match funding, to a total of 99 capital projects across Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Executive has announced an extra £5.7million of funding will go to the Tourism Development Scheme which could deliver total investment of over £27.5million. It is estimated that this additional investment will support over 450 jobs in the construction phase and create or sustain 50 tourism jobs once complete.

Tourism: GB Visitors

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many tourists are travelling to Northern Ireland from Great Britain annually.

(AQO 2912/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The estimated number of visitors to Northern Ireland from Great Britain for the last five years is as follows:

Year	Visitors (000s)
2007	1,285
2008	1,202
2009	1,017
2010*	973
2011*	970

* Following a review of the Northern Ireland Passenger Survey, the methodology was revised in 2010. This means that it is not possible to directly compare visitor numbers for 2010 and 2011 to those collected using the previous methodology.

Source: NI Passenger Survey (NITB), NI Passenger Survey (NISRA), Survey of Overseas Travellers (Failte Ireland), Country of Residence Survey, Passenger Card Inquiry (CSO)

Job Creation

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what impact the Executive's recently announced £200 million package will have on potential job creation.

(AQO 2913/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I expect the Economy and Jobs Initiative to create and secure employment, particularly within the construction sector. The actions will also support the longer term objectives of the NI Economic Strategy.

The initiative contains actions that are aimed at supporting people impacted by difficulties in the labour market, supporting businesses facing challenges in key markets and delivering investment in infrastructure to support the construction sector.

Small Businesses: Regulation

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what she is doing to reduce the regulation of, and bureaucracy for, small businesses.

(AQO 2914/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Economic Strategy reiterates the Executives commitment to reducing the regulatory burden on all business, particularly small business in Northern Ireland, and it highlights key initiatives reforming environmental, employment, planning and agri-food regulation. My Department assists small business through advice, mentoring and best practice initiatives, to minimize cost and effort to comply with regulation, safeguarding employees and citizens. The recent Economy and Jobs Initiative announcement identifies a number of additional initiatives, including streamlining the application/approval process for InvestNI Selective Financial Assistance projects under £100,000.

Mobile Phone Coverage: Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on her efforts to secure funding to aid the improvement of mobile phone coverage in rural parts of Fermanagh.

(AQO 2915/11-15)

Mrs Foster: At this moment the Mobile sector is under significant change and evolution. Mobile operators are investing to improve their networks; 4th Generation services are already being introduced by one operator; an auction of 4th generation licences for other operators is imminent which will include a Northern Ireland coverage target of 95%; and the development of a Mobile Infrastructure Project across the UK to improve 2G services is under way.

All of this will impact on the provision of mobile services across Northern Ireland including Fermanagh. My officials are watching these developments and will explore how any consequent gaps are best filled through public investment.

An indicative budget of up to £12million has been identified from EU and Department of Culture, Media and Sport sources to address improvements to 3rd Generation mobile services and at the same time, future-proof networks for the delivery of 4th Generation services across Northern Ireland. This work will take account of the investments and improvements the industry are making.

Department of the Environment

Consultees

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment to list all the consultees within his Department whose responses will no longer be available to the public.

(AQW 14428/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): Earlier this year, revised arrangements were put in place in for seeking advice on planning applications from other sections within Planning and Local Government Group (PLGG). These revised arrangements were introduced on that basis that there was a distinction between (i) external consultees to the Planning process, such as DRD Roads Service, (ii) Departmental consultees, such as NIEA and (iii) other sections of PLGG where staff have a level of expertise.

These revised arrangements will involve the following sections which form part of the internal structures of PLGG: Design Unit, Conservation Area Officers (CAOs), Strategic Projects (Retail Unit, Mineral Unit, and Environment Unit), Landscape Architects Branch (LAB) and Development Plan.

The internal advice that those sections listed provide on planning applications will be taken into account together with all other material planning considerations in the preparation of the Development Management Officer's report.

Following consideration by the Development Management Group meeting and when a recommendation on an application has been made and referred to the Council, the Development Management Officer's report will be made available on the Planning Portal and it can also be viewed by members of the public under the Open File arrangements. There is not an issue of responses being no longer available to the public.

The Development Management Officers report is a key document which sets out the considerations of the Department in making a recommendation on a planning application and will include details of the internal advice provided. I will keep this matter under review.

Article 31 Planning Applications

Ms Lo asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the Article 31 planning applications currently outstanding; (ii) for how long they have been under consideration; and (iii) the target dates for decisions.

(AQW 14583/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There are 36 current Article 31 applications. A schedule of the applications including the date the application was submitted to the Department is appended.

As Environment Minister I have impressed on my planning officials the need to process planning applications, particularly those of major importance, in a timely manner. To that end, I have instructed my officials to bring to a conclusion older Article 31 applications in the near future.

Reference	Date Received	Applicant	Proposal	Location	Status
F/1999/0465	23/12/1999	Larne Marina Company	Site for Waterfront leisure development	Off Chaine Menorial Road, Curran and Drumaliss, Larne	On Hold awaiting applicants submission of further Environmental Information
A/2004/0976	17/09/2004	Tesco Stores	Proposed foodstore	Land at the junction of Buncrana Road & Templemore Road, Derry	Hearing Before PAC postponed by Applicant
X/2005/1156	07/10/2005	Tesco Stores Ltd & Castlebawn Ltd	Retail development	Former abbattoir site, Portaferry Road, Newtownards	Applicant considering how to proceed*
A/2006/0180	24/02/2006	McCormick Properties & Crumley Construction	Food Store	Lands off Buncrana Road, Londonderry	Under consideration as part of a series of applications in L'derry
R/2007/0853	10/08/2007	Mr J Miskelly	Retail development	Belfast Road, Ballynahinch	Applicant considering alternative proposal
S/2008/0630	04/06/2008	Rose Energy Ltd	Biomass fuelled power plant	Ballyvannon Road, Glenavy, County Antrim	Under Assessment
P/2009/0163	12/02/2009	The Hill Partnershipo c/o Ostick & Williams	Comprehensive mixed use development	Carbane Way/ Shepherds Way Roundabout, Newry	Under Assessment
H/2009/0264	06/05/2009	JHT Upperlands Ltd	Heritage led regeneration	Former William Clark & Sons Ltd, Upperlands, Maghera, Co Londonderry	Applicant to provide detailed scheme. Proposal in principle agreed. Decision anticipated by end 2012.
S/2009/0579	12/06/2009	Rose Energy Ltd	Water abstraction facility and water pipeline	Ballyvannon Road, Glenavy, County Antrim	Under Assessment
O/2009/0477	31/07/2009	Homecare (NI)	Proposed retirement village and nursing home	Within the grounds of Manor House, Milford, Co Armagh	Under Assessment
A/2009/0689	21/08/2009	D & A Properties Ltd	Mixed use regeneration development	Drumahoe Industrial Estate, Drumahoe, Londonderry	Under consideration as part of a series of applications in L'derry. Decision expected Nov 2012

Reference	Date Received	Applicant	Proposal	Location	Status
S/2009/1045	26/10/2009	Sprucefield Centre Ltd	Erection of Phse 2 of Sprucefield Park	Sprucefield Regional Shopping Centre, Lisburn	PAC has scheduled a public inquiry for 15 April 2013
X/2009/0858	26/11/2009	Comber Consortium	Mixed use development	Lands south east of the Comber by-pass	Under Assessment
Z/2009/1607	27/11/2009	Belfast City Council / Bayshore Developments Ltd	Mixed use development	Loughside Recreation Centre, Shore Road, Belfast	Decision expected Nov 2012
O/2009/0792	15/12/2009	NIE Plc	Proposed Interconnector	From new substation at Trewmount Road, Moy to link to proposed network in the Republic of Ireland	Public Inquiry currently adjourned. Applicant to amend Environmental Statement.
Y/2010/0087	05/03/2010	Lagmar Properties Ltd	Retail store, petrol filling stations, industrial units	Former Rolls Royce factory, Upper Newtownards Road, Dundonald	Decision before end 2012
X/2010/0296	02/04/2010	Marm Developments	Mixed use development	Lands at Marm Factory site, 20 Comber Road, Newtownards	Decision before end 2012
A/2010/0241	12/04/2010	GSB Guemsey Trading Ltd & GML (NI) Ltd	Mixed use development including hotel, offices, healthcare facility	Lands to the east of Crescent Link, north of Sevenoaks, Londonderry	Under consideration as part of a series of applications in L'derry
A/2010/0240	12/04/2010	GSB Guemsey Trading Ltd & GML (NI) Ltd	Retail superstore	Lands to the east of Crescent Link, north of Sevenoaks, Londonderry	Under consideration as part of a series of applications in L'derry. Decision Nov 2012
S/2010/0041	19/05/2010	Lisburn Energy Recovery Ltd	Proposed energy from waste gasification plant and ancillary infrastructure	211 Moira Road, Lisburn	Further environmental information being processed.
H/2010/0254	24/05/2010	Merit Investments & Properties	Retail food superstore, petrol filling station	Moneymore Road, Magherafelt	Under Assessment
A/2010/0493	09/07/2010	Genova North West Ltd	Food superstore	Unit 1, Crescent Link Retail Park, Crescent Link Road, Londonderry	Under consideration as part of a series of applications in L'derry Decision Nov 2012
Z/2010/1006	26/07/2010	Belfast Harbour Commissioners	Mixed use development	City Quays, Clarendon Dock, Belfast	Under Assessment. Further information to be submitted.
Z/2010/1284	10/09/2010	The Trustees of the Diocese of Down and Connor	Mixed use development	Glenmona (former St. Patricks site) west of Monagh By-Pass, Springfield Road, Belfast	Under Assessment

Reference	Date Received	Applicant	Proposal	Location	Status
X/2010/0819	02/11/2010	JHT Newtownards Ltd & Asda Stores Ltd	Redevelopment of site to provide foodstore, petrol filling station	Former Scrabo High School site, Scrabo Road, Newtownards	Under Assessment
H/2011/0103	25/02/2011	RSL Developments	Proposed foodstore, petrol filling station	Land between Thornhill Avenue and Oakvale Manor, Magherafelt	Under Assessment
H/2011/0104	25/02/2011	Forbes Furniture Group	Demolition of existing furniture store and erection of supermarket	Lands including Forbes Furniture store, existing Lidl store and vacant site, Castledawson Road, Magherafelt	Under Assessment
H/2011/0145	14/03/2011	Corbo Ltd	Food superstore, dental surgery, filling station	40 Ballyronan Road, Magherafelt	Under Assessment
X/2011/0189	14/03/2011	Castlebawn Development Ltd	Foodstore	Comber Road, Castlebawn Roundabout, Southern Relief Road, Newtownards	Under Assessment
U/2011/0138	06/04/2011	Ballyclare Developments Ltd	Mixed use development	Former Spinning Mill, Hillhead Road, Ballyclare	Under Assessment
A/2011/0226	07/04/2011	Caw Properties Ltd c/o Rapport Architects	Food superstore, hotel	Lands at Gransha Londonderry	Under consideration as part of a series of applications in L'derry Decision Nov 2012
L/2011/0359	08/04/2011	Townland Properties Ltd	Tourist destination resort	Gublusk bay, Killadeas, Co Fermanagh	Decision before end 2012
J/2011/0433	18/11/2011	Riverside Building and Development Ltd	Mixed use cross border development	Lifford, Strabane	Under Assessment
I/2012/0240	15/06/2012	PSNI	Joint Services Training College	Desertcreate Road, Cookstown	Decision Dec 2012
S/2012/0421	29/06/2012	Royal Ulster Agricultural Society	Redevelopment of part of former Maze/Long Kesh prison site to create international showground facility	Former maze/Long Kesh prison site, Halftown Road, Lisburn.	Decision Nov 2012

* This application has been superseded by an approval which is now built and operational.

Craigantlet Hills, Dual Carriageway and Roundabout System

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions his Department has had with the Minister for Regional Development in relation to the construction of a dual carriageway and roundabout system for the Craigantlet Hills. (AQW 14902/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In the course of processing this application, the Area Planning Office has been in discussion with officials from Roads Service on a number of occasions.

I am fully aware of the application. I have met local residents who raised legitimate questions and issues. At present the proposal is for a 3500sqm of new carriageway. However no decision has been taken if even this is appropriate.

Millennium Way, Lurgan

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions his Department has had with the Minister for Regional Development concerning the completion of Phase 2 of Millennium Way, Lurgan.

(AQW 15431/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The position in relation to this matter remains as Danny Kennedy MLA, Minister for Regional Development, indicated during the Adjournment Debate on 7 February 2012 on the completion of Millennium Way. At that time, the Minister confirmed that he fully understood the potential benefits that an extension of Millennium Way from Malcolm Road to Gilford Road could provide, including relieving peak hour traffic congestion on the road network in that part of Lurgan. In addition, this improvement would also enhance the attractiveness of Millennium Way as a through-traffic route generally.

However, the resources currently available for road improvements are focused on the strategic road network, primarily on the A5, A8 and A2 projects, and are committed up to 2014-15. Therefore, funding for other road improvements beyond this timeframe will be dependent on future budget settlements. Given the present economic climate, future funding may not be sufficient to deliver schemes contained in the current Strategic Road Improvement Programme, within the timescale envisaged in the Department for Regional Development's Investment Delivery Plan for Roads. The same also applies to schemes, such as the extension of Millennium Way from Malcolm Road to Gilford Road, that do not form part of the strategic road network.

Minister Kennedy remains committed to identifying, within the prevailing financial constraints and competing demands, the funds required to progress this scheme as quickly as possible. In this respect Roads Service, having obtained planning permission for the scheme, continues to develop this proposal in preparation for progressing it through the Vesting Order, should the necessary resources become available.

Quarrying: Spring Road, Drumnakilly, Omagh

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment whether a stop notice was issued in relation to quarrying on the Spring Road, Drumnakilly, Omagh; and if so, how it has been enforced.

(AQW 15715/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Resulting from unauthorised sand and gravel extraction and processing, the Department served a temporary stop notice on the site on 2 February 2007. This notice was complied with. The temporary stop notice expired on 2 March 2007.

A stop notice and enforcement notice were served on 2 March 2007. The stop notice had immediate effect and the enforcement notice came into effect on 2 April 2007. No appeal was received by the Planning Appeals Commission and the enforcement notice took effect on this date. The stop notice and enforcement notice were not complied with.

Instructions to summons were issued by the Department on 9 May 2007 and the matter listed for hearing before the Magistrate sitting in Omagh on 10 August 2007. However the matter was adjourned on five occasions; 14 September 2007, 9 November 2007, 11 January 2008, 8 February 2008 and 9 May 2008. The matter was finally listed for a two day trial on 17 and 18 September 2008.

The operator continued to work the site throughout this period. In view of the non compliance, the delays in court proceedings and continuing complaints, the Department on 26 June 2008 applied to the High Court for an interlocutory injunction. The judge adjourned the matter until 28 August 2008. Subsequently an injunction was secured which remained in place until early 2009, when retrospective planning permission was granted for continued extraction on the site. The terms of settlement in relation to the injunction proceedings were agreed in March 2009.

Marie Stopes Clinic

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to statutory requirements and guidance, whether the planning application for the Marie Stopes clinic in Belfast contained sufficient particulars to adequately describe the development which was the subject of the application.

(AQW 16061/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I requested and received legal advice confirming that the Department has fulfilled its statutory duties for determination of planning application Z/2012/0244/F – change of use of the premises in Great Victoria Street Belfast from which the Marie Stopes clinic is now operating. The Department received particulars consistent with statutory requirements and guidance to describe the development which was the subject of the planning application.

Tourism

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment how he engages with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Tourist Board over tourism related issues.

(AQW 16125/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Given the significant contribution my Department makes towards the economy and tourism, I regularly engage with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Tourist Board.

By way of specific example, I fully engaged with the Minister, Arlene Foster, and the Tourist Board in bringing forward new planning policy for tourism and I have had meetings with both Arlene Foster and the Tourist Board to discuss my proposals for national parks.

More generally as part of the consideration of a planning application, the Department may consult with a range of public bodies, depending on the nature and location of planning applications, to inform the decision making process and would consult with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Tourist Board as appropriate in applications relating to the tourism.

Additionally although not directly with the Minister herself, I have considerable ongoing engagement with NITB at a very senior level, with its Chief Executive, who is an appointed member of the Historic Environment Strategic Ministerial Forum, which I chair, and which commissioned the recently published report 'Study of the Economic Value of Northern Ireland's Historic Environment'. I expect this engagement to continue as an action plan emerges to address the various recommendations from the report. My officials have engagement with NITB, for example on the Envisioning Day for Dunluce Castle, which NITB is co-ordinating with staff from NIEA, and officials from both DETI and DOE worked together on the delivery of the Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre.

I firmly believe that our built and natural heritage will be the greatest driver for future increases in tourist numbers and spend. Six of the top ten visitor attractions in the North are our built and natural heritage assets.

I was also pleased to be able to make a very positive intervention in Portrush and Portstewart by providing £405k of funding to address dereliction in advance of the hosting of the Irish Open. Following on from the success of this, I have also recently announced a further £503k for Derry City to tackle dereliction in the run up to the city's year as UK City of Culture 2013.

This reflects my commitment to address this issue which I see as an important opportunity to attract investment and tourists to the North. This sort of intervention is extremely effective and I am currently looking at ways of extending the approach taken in Portrush/Portstewart and Derry to other towns and cities. My officials are currently working with other departments to ensure joined up government and I will continue to engage with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Tourist Board over tourism related issues.

Natural Gas Storage Facilities, Larne Lough

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment what the timescale is for the development of natural gas storage facilities under Larne Lough, until it becomes operational.

(AQW 16127/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The project timeline submitted by the applicant in support of their planning application for the onshore elements of the Islandmagee Natural Gas Storage Facility envisaged that, employing the best case scenario, the first caverns would become operational in year 5, with project completion and final caverns becoming operational in year 7.

Marie Stopes Clinic

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment, given the deficiency of the particulars supplied with the planning application for the Marie Stopes clinic in Belfast, whether consideration will be given to revoking the planning permission.

(AQW 16154/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department has the power to revoke a planning permission for a change of use at any time before the change has taken place (Article 38(3) b of The Planning (NI) Order 1991). As the change has taken place already, the Department has no power to revoke the permission.

The particular details which were submitted with the application met the statutory requirements and guidance.

Archaeological Artefacts

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of the Environment whether there have been any developments on the storage and collection of archaeological artefacts since the Assembly debate on 2 July 2012.

(AQO 2854/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As I outlined in the Assembly debate on 2 July 2012, one way of progressing the resolution of this matter would be to complete a baseline quantification survey of the material held by private archaeological companies from excavations conducted in Northern Ireland. Such a baseline survey is key to moving the debate forward as it will properly inform discussion of the wider issue here. I have initiated this survey and preliminary findings should be available by the end of December 2012.

Carlisle Memorial Methodist Church, Belfast

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made on the restoration of the former Carlisle Memorial Methodist Church in Belfast.

(AQW 16230/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Earlier this year I authorised the allocation of £400,000 to ensure that urgent remedial works could be undertaken to stabilise the fabric of the former Church building. These works have now been completed.

Officials in NIEA have recently been in contact with the owners of the building, the Belfast Buildings Preservation Trust (the Trust), to discuss the next phase of works. These works will include the introduction of basic services to facilitate interim occupancy, in line with the Trust's plans to have a 'meanwhile use' for the building, in association with the Belfast Activity Centre. I understand that the Trust anticipates completion of this phase within the next 18 months.

Furthermore, I am advised that the Trust is also engaging with local communities in North Belfast to consider a long term, sustainable use for the building.

Woodlands/Parks in Towns

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what funds or grants are available through his Department to help create woodlands or parks in towns.

(AQW 16238/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) administers the Natural Heritage Grant Programme to encourage the conservation and enhancement of key elements of the environment and its wildlife and the provision of facilities which help as wide a range of people as possible to enjoy and appreciate our natural heritage.

Grant applications to the annual competitive Natural Heritage Grant programme are invited from not-for-profit organisations to support actions contributing to natural heritage interests. Elements of the creation of woodlands or parks in towns may be eligible for support if the project meets the grant criteria; it is deemed of sufficient merit in comparison with other projects; and there are sufficient grant resources available.

Layde Graveyard, Cushendall

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment why the Layde Old Graveyard has been allowed to fall into such a state of decline; and whether he will work with the National Trust and Moyle District Council to have the site restored.

(AQW 16262/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) protects and conserves the ruins of Layde Church as it is 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. My Department does not have responsibility for the upkeep of the graveyard, NIEA officials have recently met with the Council and the National Trust to discuss the condition of the site. As a part of a programme of enhancement measures, NIEA is working towards improving visitor information signage at the site. I trust that the member will address his concerns also to the owners of the graveyard and the car park respectively and acknowledge how NIEA is clearly helping those in ownership.

Recycling

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what more his Department can do to encourage people to recycle.

(AQW 16265/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department currently has a comprehensive set of actions to encourage waste prevention and recycling including:

- a The Rethink Waste Communications Plan with a national advertising campaign, due to run until at least August 2013.
- b Technical advisory support through the grant-in-aid funding of the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP). WRAP also delivers bespoke communications advice to councils to improve recycling.
- c Rethink Waste Funds with funding of projects to increase recycling particularly for local councils. Over the past three years, capital grants totalling in excess of £7 million have been made available to councils and revenue grants totalling in excess of £1.17 million have been made available to councils, the private sector and Community & Voluntary sector.

The latter two initiatives are due to run until 31 March 2015. The Department is currently minded to continue with these initiatives taking on board lessons learned and feedback from stakeholders to improve future iterations.

The review of the Waste Management Strategy will also provide further policy and legislation drivers in order to directly and indirectly improve recycling rates.

- a The introduction of a new statutory recycling target requiring 60% of local authority collected municipal waste to be recycled by 2020.
- b Proposals for food waste landfill restrictions.
- c The introduction of higher packaging recycling rates for aluminium, plastic and steel packaging for the period 2013-2017, and to achieve an overall recovery rate of 79% and overall recycling rate of 72.7% for packaging by 2017.
- d The Department will consult on legislation required to implement the recast WEEE Directive by early 2013 to come into effect by January 2014 by the introduction of reuse targets and the increase in collection targets.

The Department continues to provide support for WRAP's voluntary agreements (also referred to as responsibility deals) for industry in Northern Ireland to promote resource efficiency including recycling. The key voluntary agreements being supported are:

- a The Courtauld Commitment 2 aims to improve resource efficiency and reduce the carbon and wider environmental impact of the grocery retail sector. A successor "Courtauld Commitment 3" is currently being developed.
- b The Halving Waste to Landfill Commitment provides a supportive framework to encourage the construction industry to work together to reduce waste and increase recycling rates.
- c The Hospitality and Food Service Agreement supports the sector in reducing waste and recycling more.

Landfill Sites

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment what percentage of waste goes to landfill sites in each council area annually.

(AQW 16266/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Since January 2005, all District Councils have submitted waste data returns on a quarterly basis via the WasteDataFlow system. This national on-line database assists District Councils to carry out timely and structured reporting.

All holders of waste management licences and those with certain waste exemptions are required to submit timely site operator waste data returns on a quarterly basis to NIEA.

The information available from these NIEA databases has been used to collate the requested data. The attached Table 1 provides the percentage of waste going to landfill sites in each council area annually as a total of all waste landfilled in Northern Ireland. It should be noted that this will depend on where the landfill site is located and is independent of the origin of the waste. These data have been arranged by Waste Management Groups.

Table 2 shows the percentage of the NI Local Authority collected municipal waste landfilled annually in each council area. These figures are independent of landfill location and only relate to District Council waste. These data are provisional estimates and will be confirmed by December 2012.

Table 1 shows the Waste landfilled in each NI District Council area as a % of all waste landfilled in NI per financial year

All percentages are calculated individually and then rounded up and so individual values should not be totalled to derive / check higher levels e.g. waste management group and country as this would introduce avoidable rounding errors.

Table 1

	2009/10 (%)	2010/11 (%)	2011/12 (%)
arc21			
Antrim	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Ards	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Ballymena	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Belfast	23.0%	12.4%	8.0%
Carrickfergus	0.9%	1.4%	2.8%
Castlereagh	0.1%	0.9%	0.8%
Down	0.4%	2.5%	2.2%
Larne	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Lisburn	26.0%	23.5%	15.3%
Newtownabbey	34.1%	35.6%	37.5%
North Down	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
All arc21	84.6%	76.3%	66.5%
NWRWVG			
Ballymoney	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Coleraine	9.7%	12.1%	17.0%
Derry	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Limavady	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Magherafelt	1.1%	1.1%	1.0%
Moyle	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Strabane	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

	2009/10 (%)	2010/11 (%)	2011/12 (%)
All NWRWMG	10.8%	13.1%	18.0%
SWaMP2008			
Armagh	0.4%	1.6%	2.6%
Banbridge	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Cookstown	2.6%	2.4%	3.7%
Craigavon	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Dungannon	0.3%	1.3%	3.7%
Fermanagh	0.8%	2.2%	2.1%
Newry & Mourne	0.5%	3.0%	3.2%
Omagh	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
All SWaMP2008	4.5%	10.6%	15.4%
Northern Ireland	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 2 shows the percentage of the NI Local Authority collected municipal waste landfilled annually in each council area

All percentages are calculated individually and then rounded up and so individual values should not be totalled to derive / check higher levels e.g. waste management group and country as this would introduce avoidable rounding errors.

Table 2

Council sorted by waste management group	2009/10 (%)	2010/11 (%)	2011/12 (%) #
arc21			
Antrim	48.2%	50.2%	45.3%
Ards	62.7%	61.8%	61.5%
Ballymena	65.8%	66.8%	61.7%
Belfast	77.6%	74.2%	70.8%
Carrickfergus	69.1%	58.7%	54.0%
Castlereagh	61.5%	57.7%	56.3%
Down	71.6%	70.4%	68.7%
Larne	64.6%	61.1%	42.9%
Lisburn	63.4%	59.5%	58.8%
Newtownabbey	65.1%	60.1%	57.0%
North Down	60.1%	56.7%	55.0%
All arc21	67.1%	64.2%	60.8%
NWRWMG			
Ballymoney	65.3%	65.6%	63.5%
Coleraine	66.7%	63.2%	57.2%
Derry	70.4%	70.8%	70.1%
Limavady	61.7%	60.9%	58.2%
Magherafelt	49.8%	42.5%	28.1%
Moyle	67.4%	66.0%	59.5%
Strabane	75.8%	65.9%	63.2%
All NWRWMG	66.0%	63.3%	58.7%
SWaMP2008			

Council sorted by waste management group	2009/10 (%)	2010/11 (%)	2011/12 (%) #
Armagh	61.1%	54.0%	49.2%
Banbridge	48.4%	49.0%	46.3%
Cookstown	60.7%	60.4%	58.3%
Craigavon	64.7%	49.6%	29.2%
Dungannon	68.4%	64.2%	57.3%
Fermanagh	68.4%	67.6%	62.4%
Newry & Mourne	71.2%	70.6%	66.7%
Omagh	61.7%	60.0%	55.8%
All SWaMP2008	64.1%	59.7%	52.2%
Northern Ireland	66.1%	62.8%	58.1%

provisional estimates only - to be confirmed by Dec 2012

This measure is a key performance indicator KPI(f) and as such is subject to regular quarterly updates at http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/waste-home/municipal_data_reporting.htm

Driver and Vehicle Agency: Business Plan

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment what programmes have been designed to improve road user attitudes and behaviour in line with the Driver and Vehicle Agency Business Plan.
(AQW 16297/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Driver & Vehicle Agency business plan for 2011-12 outlines the Agency's key priorities, describes the strategic context within which it operates, lists the main challenges it faces over the coming year, and sets out the performance levels it is seeking to achieve and the tasks it is aiming to complete in order to meet its key performance targets and Departmental commitments.

In setting out the contexts and challenges for 2011-12, the business plan sets out a number of Departmental business objectives to which the Agency also contributes - for example, "reduce deaths and serious injuries on our roads by delivering a strong and enforced system of driver and vehicle regulation in Northern Ireland, and aligned with it a number of programmes designed to improve road user attitudes and behaviour".

During 2011-12 the Agency contributed to several Departmental programmes designed to improve road user attitudes and behaviour.

As part of the Learning to Drive programme, the Agency introduced a number of initiatives aimed at changing the way young people learn to drive and the way they are tested. In order to better assess a candidate's understanding of safe driving, we introduced case studies to the theory test, and, in order to encourage learners to understand the material and not just learn by rote, we ceased publication of live theory test questions. In addition, we introduced a section of independent driving into the practical driving test, where the candidate has to take responsibility for route finding - for example, by following signs or driving to a local landmark. This allows for a more realistic assessment of their driving ability.

In 2011, the Agency changed its practical driving test policy actively to promote the benefits for all candidates of having observers in their cars during tests. This involves an Approved Driving Instructor (ADI), parent or friend sitting in on the test to observe and listen to the examiner's feedback – all with a view to providing critical support for the learner and newly qualified driver's ongoing development and lifelong learning.

The requirement for learner motorcyclists to complete compulsory basic training (CBT) was introduced in February 2011. CBT requires learner motorcyclists to complete basic training before they may ride unaccompanied on public roads. Whilst it is too early to measure any impact in Northern Ireland, evidence from Britain indicates that the scheme there delivered an improvement in road safety both for motorcyclists and for other road users.

As a pre-requisite to CBT, the Agency introduced a mandatory register of approved motorcycle instructors (AMIs). CBT and motorcycle instruction can now be delivered only by registered AMIs who are quality assured by DVA.

In addition, the Agency meets regularly with a range of stakeholders including representative associations from the driver/ rider instruction industry, taxi industry and freight industry. The Agency's Driver Licensing Division has provided information through various publicity campaigns to raise awareness of driving related issues and is currently undertaking campaigns on the high risk offenders scheme, on the mutual recognition of driving disqualifications between the United Kingdom and Ireland, and on the importance of holding a current driving licence with up-to-date entitlements.

The Agency encourages motorists to keep their vehicle MOTs up-to-date by issuing vehicle test reminders seven weeks in advance. It also measures levels of compliance within the goods, bus and taxi industries and publishes key results from surveys it conducts for use by the industries.

In addition, the introduction of new legislative requirements such as the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act (NI) 2010 increased the emphasis for operators and drivers on ensuring that they were compliant with roadworthiness and licensing requirements.

The introduction of the Taxis Act (NI) 2008 also created a new framework for improved standards in the taxi industry delivered through increased awareness, more accountability and better and more effective enforcement.

Forthcoming Programmes

The Department's Road Safety and Vehicle Regulation Division (RSVRD) works in conjunction with DVA to educate road users and influence attitudes and behaviours in order to achieve road casualty reductions. RSVRD is responsible for promoting road safety, educating road users, producing the Highway Code and developing policy and legislation.

Among current relevant road safety initiatives being led by the Division, with support from DVA, are measures to establish a radically different driver training and testing regime. This new programme, which will require primary legislation to be introduced into the Assembly in the coming months, aims to improve road safety by changing attitudes and behaviours associated with learning to drive. It will be designed to encourage learner drivers to appreciate that learning to drive requires skills and attitudes which it takes time to master and develop, that they should take a progressive approach to learning to drive, following a structured programme, and that their aim should be not just to pass the theory and practical driving tests but to learn to drive safely for life.

The Department is also proposing to introduce other graduated driver licensing measures to change the attitudes and behaviours of new drivers when they first start to drive. These will include a requirement to display 'N' plates for the first two years and a restriction on young drivers carrying peer group passengers (other than family members) for the first six months post-test.

Also, as part of a proposed new drink drive regime, there will be a lower blood alcohol limit for new drivers during their first two years post-test and for professional drivers.

Inappropriate attitudes to breaking road safety laws across the island of Ireland will be addressed through the implementation of plans to deliver mutual recognition of penalty points for drink and drug driving, speeding, use of mobile phones and non-wearing of seatbelts by 2015.

Domestic Planning Applications: North Down Borough Council Area

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment for the average time taken to make decisions on domestic planning applications within the North Down Borough Council area.
(AQW 16336/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In 2011/2012 the average processing time for domestic alterations and extensions in the North Down Borough Council area was 55 working days.

Environmental Crime Unit: South Antrim

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment what is the standard response time to an enquiry, in the South Antrim constituency, to the Environmental Crime Unit; and how many complaints are ongoing.
(AQW 16395/11-15)

Mr Attwood: NIEA's Environmental Crime Unit is intelligence-led and therefore does not operate an incident response process or have a standard response time. All intelligence received is considered and used to build up detail of serious environmental offending and to lead investigations.

In the South Antrim constituency area, there are currently seven ongoing criminal investigations into alleged breaches of environmental law.

Car Safety Campaigns

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the car safety campaigns his Department is currently running.
(AQW 16405/11-15)

Mr Attwood: This question has been clarified by the member as referring to road safety campaigns.

The Department has an extensive portfolio of campaigns which it runs on a regular basis, addressing many negative road user behaviours.

Research shows the main causes of collisions (and therefore of deaths and injuries on roads) in Northern Ireland to be speeding, drink driving and inattention. Only a very small percentage of road collisions can be attributed to reasons other than attitude and behaviour. It is for this reason our road safety campaigns concentrate on changing these behaviours.

Campaigns are delivered throughout the year in the form of television, radio, on-line activity, bus shelters, bus backs and cinema.

In this financial year, the Department is running the following road safety campaigns.

“Hit Home” was launched in 2009 and addresses drink driving. The image of the smashing pint glass and the line ‘Every drink increases your risk of crashing’ reinforces the dangers of drink driving from the very first sip.

This current campaign continues to be supported by the older, iconic anti drink drive campaigns that still resonate with the Northern Ireland public. “Shame” was first launched in 2000 and features a drink driver crashing into a garden fence where a young boy was playing. The message warns ‘Could you live with the shame?’ In 2005, “Just One” was developed further to reinforce the fact that ‘Just one drink impairs driving.’

All the anti drink driving campaigns have carried the strapline ‘Never Ever Drink And Drive’ since 1995.

“Steps” was launched in 2009 and highlights the dangers of driving under the influence of drugs. It also appeals to passengers who suspect that their driver may be impaired through drugs. This campaign carries the strapline ‘What steps would you take to stop a drug driver from wrecking your life?’

“Moment” was launched in 2011 and addresses for the first time driver carelessness and inattention. Driver carelessness and inattention is the biggest cause of death on Northern Ireland’s roads and is made up of over 20 different driving behaviours. This campaign shows several scenarios with devastating consequences. “Moment” carries the strapline ‘One lapse can last a lifetime.’

“Mess” was launched in 2007 and addresses the issues of speeding, which is the single biggest cause of road death over the last 10 years. The campaign dramatises a scenario where a speeding driver is forced to swerve to avoid the unexpected but was unable to avert the tragedy. This campaign warns ‘The faster the speed the bigger the mess’ and depicts the consequences of prison, serious injury and death.

The Department has several campaigns addressing seatbelt wearing, targeting different audiences.

“Damage” was launched in 2002 and was instrumental in changing the public’s attitudes towards choosing not to wear a seatbelt. For the first time, the message was clear, that it was the young male in the back who did the damage.

“Get It On” was launched in 2007 and targeted back seat passengers who chose not to wear a seatbelt. This shows the consequences for other passengers inside the car in the event of a collision should someone be unbelted. The research had shown the reasons that young people chose not to wear a seatbelt and the advert dispelled the idea that it was anti-social or uncool.

“Selfish” was launched in 2007 and is aimed at parents, reminding them that it is the driver’s responsibility to ensure that child passengers are properly restrained while travelling. The message was clear and carried the strapline ‘How selfish can you get?’

Each seatbelt campaign builds on the message “No Seatbelt No Excuse”.

“Just Because” was launched in May this year. Just over one in five deaths on Northern Ireland’s roads are pedestrians and, as such, the campaign focuses on the vulnerability of pedestrians and the shared responsibility both drivers and pedestrians have to respect each other on the road. The message urges road users to ‘Respect Everyone’s Journey.’

Launched on 19th September this year, “Excuses” highlights that over 95% of collisions where someone is killed or seriously injured are due to human error – not the roads, not the weather, not the vehicles, not the environment. Hence the campaign clearly states that crashes are not ‘accidents’. The advert differs from DOE Road Safety campaigns in the past, which individually concentrated on one aspect of road safety, for example speeding or drink driving. This advert plays out examples across the whole gamut of road safety and the excuses that those responsible for collisions make. The campaign states: ‘Kill the Excuses. It’s no Accident.’

The “Kids” campaign, launched in 2005, empowers older children to pay more attention while using the road whilst making drivers aware that children are particularly vulnerable. The message is ‘Stop. Look. Listen. Live.’

As responsibility for motorcyclist casualties is shared almost equally between motorcyclists and drivers, the Department has two campaigns to address the issue.

“Thinking Ahead” was launched in 2002 and is aimed at motorcyclists. The message urges bikers to ride appropriately and to remember their loved ones in the event of them being involved in a collision. It carries the warning ‘It’s not just you who crashes.’

In 2009, “Underneath” targeted drivers asking them to give more consideration to motorcyclists. It reminded motorists that every motorcyclist is a human being – a father, a brother, a son, an uncle, a sister, a mother, a partner. The message stated: ‘Take another look’ at motorcyclists and see the person underneath the helmet.

The first series of “Crashed Lives”, the real life accounts of road tragedy, were launched in 2009 with Dr Gerry Lane, followed by the mother’s stories in 2010. In 2011, another set of four were developed featuring two sets of bereaved parents and two victims who had received lifelong debilitating injuries.

In addition to the television campaigns, there is a series of general radio intervention messages aired each month. Some of these reinforce the rules of the road and some address specific driving behaviours such as speeding, drink driving and seatbelt wearing.

Others such as the cyclist safety campaign, the HGV blind spot awareness campaign, and the Signs and Lights on School Buses were developed specifically for radio with outdoor advertising support.

The "Gift" radio campaign was specifically developed to address the historical spike in road deaths around the Christmas period and runs during the month of December.

The impact of these campaigns is carefully monitored; the evidence shows that they are consistently rated as the most important influence on road user behaviour, and therefore are an important element of the Department's work to reduce casualties on our roads, with the aim of achieving zero deaths.

Planning Applications: Council Areas

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications have been received in each of the last three years in each council area.

(AQW 16406/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Over the last 3 business years the number of planning applications received by the Department has steadily declined from 19,557 in 2009/10 to 13,680 in 2011/12; a decrease of 30% in this 3 year period.

The table below provides the details of the number of applications received in each council area over the last 3 business years.

Table 1 Applications received in the last 3 business years

Council Area	2009/10	2010/11	2011/2012
Antrim	630	537	466
Ards	924	753	622
Armagh	830	767	554
Ballymena	775	684	509
Ballymoney	368	310	259
Banbridge	617	532	426
Belfast	1651	1498	1321
Carrickfergus	252	217	186
Castlereagh	480	408	348
Coleraine	758	596	540
Cookstown	604	548	442
Craigavon	739	636	472
Derry	842	648	584
Down	936	871	690
Dungannon & South Tyrone	1002	774	624
Fermanagh	1249	889	864
Larne	370	333	226
Limavady	414	375	284
Lisburn	1065	964	806
Magherafelt	689	579	496
Moyle	367	294	203
Newry and Mourne	1539	1296	938
Newtownabbey	537	492	369
NorthDown	622	573	473
Omagh	828	692	620
Strabane	469	502	394
All Areas	19557	16768	13680

Waste Products: Exemptions

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether the T19 exemption for bio diesel produced from waste products apply in Northern Ireland as in England.

(AQW 16454/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There is no equivalent legislative measure in Northern Ireland of the T19 waste exemption. However the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has published a number of policy papers to advise and assist staff and those involved in the production of biodiesel using waste cooking oil and rendered animal fat.

NIEA published a Regulatory Position Statement in February 2011 which provides guidance on low risk activities. The paper permits the recovery of biodiesel using waste vegetable oil as a fuel in motor vehicles. Up to 100 litres of biodiesel can be produced at one time and up to 1000 litres stored on the site without the requirement for a waste management licence. Full details can be found on the following link:

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/low_risk_activities_20-02-11.pdf.

The physical treatment of used cooking oil and production of more than 100 litres of biodiesel will require a waste management licence.

The chemical treatment and non commercial production of less than 5000L of biodiesel per annum for personal use will also require a waste management licence. However the commercial production of biodiesel will require a PPC permit. Full details can be found on the following link:

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/position_statement_on_biodiesel_protocol.pdf.

A Quality Protocol setting out end-of-waste criteria for the production and use of biodiesel derived from waste cooking oil and rendered animal fat (tallow) is applicable in Northern Ireland. Full details of the QP can be found on the following link:

http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/static/documents/Business/Biodiesel_QP_NIEA_GEH00311BTPC-E-E.pdf

The Department will consider the introduction of a waste exemption for the physical treatment of waste to produce biodiesel when it next undertakes a legislative review of all waste exemptions.

Non-domestic Planning Application: Waiting Times

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the average waiting time for a non-domestic planning application decision in each district council area.

(AQW 16476/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The average time taken to process a non-domestic planning application in the first quarter of 2012/13 was 86 days. This is a significant improvement in performance when compared with an average processing time of 102 days for these types of applications in the 2011/12 business year.

The tables below detail the average processing times in days for non-domestic planning applications for the 2011/12 business year and for Q1 of 2012/13.

Table 1 2011/12 Business Year: The number of non-domestic planning applications decided by district council area and the average processing time in days

	Approvals		Refusals		Total	
	No. of Applications	Av. Processing time	No. of Applications	Av. Processing time	No. of Applications	Av. Processing time
Antrim	171	46	7	339	178	49
Ards	212	108	15	267	227	117
Armagh	215	122	10	643	225	125
Ballymena	195	71	10	412	205	78
Ballymoney	89	77	0	.	89	77
Banbridge	129	124	10	173	139	126
Belfast	614	111	48	159	662	116
Carrickfergus	70	63	4	126	74	66
Castlereagh	95	109	6	94	101	109
Coleraine	192	56	9	156	201	57
Cookstown	132	102	3	94	135	101

Craigavon	224	106	7	379	231	108
Derry	318	92	18	232	336	98
Down	238	158	14	415	252	161
Dungannon	211	61	22	161	233	67
Fermanagh	261	57	14	152	275	62
Larne	95	107	2	174	97	112
Limavady	92	111	19	273	111	131
Lisburn	213	138	10	233	223	138
Magherafelt	127	91	4	144	131	92
Moyle	74	102	5	242	79	113
Newry And Mourne	315	124	24	419	339	130
Newtownabbey	133	93	5	133	138	94
North Down	165	74	5	140	170	74
Omagh	206	79	26	190	232	91
Strabane	175	55	16	236	191	61
Total	4,961	96	313	242	5,274	102

Notes:

- 1 Non Domestic Planning Applications Refer To Any Applications Not Listed As "Residential".
- 2 The Median Has Been Used As The Measure Of Average Processing Time.
- 3 Cluds Are Excluded From This Analysis.

Table 2 Quarter 1 of 2012/13: The number of non-domestic planning applications decided by district council area and the average processing time in days

	Approvals		Refusals		Total	
	No. of Applications	Av. Processing time	No. of Applications	Av. Processing time	No. of Applications	Av. Processing time
Antrim	28	36	2	272	30	41
Ards	67	101	1	282	68	102
Armagh	48	111	1	412	49	112
Ballymena	45	65	2	285	47	69
Ballymoney	18	123	0	.	18	123
Banbridge	40	99	1	161	41	102
Belfast	190	108	13	86	203	106
Carrickfergus	23	71	1	317	24	72
Castlereagh	28	63	0	.	28	63
Coleraine	41	58	7	224	48	58
Cookstown	41	65	1	71	42	67
Craigavon	49	76	2	920	51	76
Derry	88	59	4	241	92	60
Down	67	128	7	318	74	140
Dungannon	48	46	3	149	51	47
Fermanagh	76	53	3	205	79	53

Larne	19	124	0	.	19	124
Limavady	22	53	3	308	25	56
Lisburn	100	105	2	288	102	110
Magherafelt	45	95	2	129	47	96
Moyle	17	100	2	591	19	109
Newry And Mourne	59	102	6	265	65	103
Newtownabbey	34	96	3	144	37	111
North Down	32	83	1	113	33	83
Omagh	41	52	4	134	45	58
Strabane	25	40	3	1,054	28	42
Total	1,291	83	74	214	1,365	86

Notes:

- 1 Non Domestic Planning Applications Refer To Any Applications Not Listed As "Residential".
- 2 The Median Has Been Used As The Measure Of Average Processing Time.
- 3 Cluds Are Excluded From This Analysis.

The Department's approach to negotiation on planning applications to resolve issues of concern is evident in the significantly longer times to process applications that are result in a refusal decision.

However, the Department does acknowledge the importance of processing applications in a timely manner and I have asked senior officials to actively monitor performance to ensure appropriate allocation of resources and to maintain improvements in performance.

Tourism-related Planning Applications: Moyle District Council Area

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment (i) to list the tourist related planning applications currently under consideration for the Moyle council area; (ii) the status of each application; (iii) the length of time since the application was initially submitted; and (iv) when a decision will be made on each application.

(AQW 16477/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Following a manual check of all live applications in the Moyle area, six 'tourist related' applications were identified.

In most cases additional information is required from third parties. However, the Department is striving to bring each application to a conclusion as expeditiously as possible.

E/2009/0316/F - Amendment to previous approval to provide 45 bedroom hotel with 29 suites and 24 holiday chalets at Clare Park, Clare Road, Ballycastle.

Application submitted: 11 September 2009.

Status: Opinion to approve agreed with Moyle Council on 21/12/2009. Under Article 40 of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 the applicant agreed to enter into a legal agreement with the Department that the holiday apartments and chalets will be used for holiday letting only and not be used as permanent place of residence. The site is now under the control of the Bank of Ireland.

When will the decision issue: As the site is now under the control of the Bank of Ireland, the applicant has no further input into the planning process. The agent confirmed on 27th September that the Bank has instructed their legal representatives to take the matter forward with respect to finalising the A40. The Department is awaiting contact from the Bank's Solicitors to allow the necessary documentation to be exchanged in order to finalise the A40 Agreement.

E/2009/0415/F - Two bedroom self catering cottage, Glenariffe Road, Glenariffe.

Application submitted: 14 December 2009

Status: Application originally presented to Council with an opinion to refuse on 25th April 2010, in that, it was contrary to Planning Policy Statement 21, policy CTY 1 and policy TOU 3 of the Department's Rural Strategy. The access arrangements were also unacceptable. The planning policy issues have now been resolved and the Department considers the proposal is an acceptable farm diversification scheme. The Roads Service has advised that the access arrangements are unrealistic and impractical.

When will the decision issue: Subject to satisfactory resolution of the access arrangements, the application will be returned to Council with a change of opinion to approve.

E/2010/0289/F - Eco holiday cottage, Ballyvenagh Road, Ballyvoy, Ballycastle.

Application submitted: 22 October 2010.

Status: The application was presented to Council on 24/10/2011 with an opinion to refuse, in that it was contrary to policy TOU 3 of the Rural Strategy and CTY 1 of PPS 21 – The application was deferred and further information was submitted including a business case submitted on 28/9/2012 and a bat survey on 14/11/2012.

When will a decision issue: Subject to satisfactory consultation response from NIEA-NH regarding the bat survey the application can be returned to Council with an opinion to approve.

E/2012/0133/O - 10 Self catering holiday cottages, Straid Road, Bushmills.

Application submitted: 19 July 2012

Status: NIEA Historic Monuments Unit require an archaeological evaluation. NIEA Natural Heritage has advised that the proposal will impact on a protected species and is therefore contrary to PPS 2: Planning and Nature Conservation.

When will decision issue: Discussions are ongoing to establish how development may proceed while having regard to the archaeological and protected species issues. Subject to resolution of these issues and completion of a legal agreement the application can be concluded. In light of the above outstanding issues, this application has yet to be presented to the Council.

E/2012/0154/F - Pedestrian and cycle path link to Causeway Hotel and Visitors' Centre.

Application submitted: 16 August 2012.

Status: The Department is waiting on the agent to submit up to date information demonstrating how the proposal will link to the Causeway Hotel and Visitors' Centre.

When will decision issue: The application will be progressed to present an opinion to Council following receipt and evaluation of the outstanding information.

E/2012/0168/F - Two storey side extension to Causeway Tavern Bed & Breakfast, Whitepark Road, Bushmills.

Application submitted: 29 August 2012.

Status: Nearing completion.

When will decision issue: This application is streamlined and the Approval Notice should issue week commencing 12 November 2012.

On these matters, the decision at Runkerry and other initiatives, as Minister I am working to ensure the Planning System protects our heritage, positively develops it, not least the causeway Coast and Glens, arguably our greatest natural and built heritage.

Planning Policy Statements

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether he intends to overhaul any of the planning policy statements; (ii) how many officials he has tasked to carry out this work; and (iii) when they will report their findings.

(AQW 16592/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As part of the overall programme of planning reform, the Department is undertaking a comprehensive consolidation and review of planning policy which will reconfigure existing provisions within a single policy document. The single 'Strategic Planning Policy Statement' (SPPS) will reflect a new approach to the preparation of regional planning policy. It will be much more strategic in focus, simpler and shorter

I have tasked officials from within Planning Policy Division (PPD) to carry out this work and the precise number of officials involved will vary through the course of preparing the SPPS. There will also be engagement with and contributions from many other officials and stakeholders as this work is progressed.

I am currently considering a Scoping Paper which sets out the preferred approach for this work, key next steps and timescales. The SPPS will be needed in time for the transfer of planning powers to Councils in 2015 and it is my intention that a public consultation draft SPPS will be made available before the end of 2013.

Vehicle Tax Exemption

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans to extend vehicle tax exemption for Historic Vehicles constructed or manufactured after 1 January 1973.

(AQW 16597/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The criterion for an Historic Vehicle to be exempt from vehicle excise duty is that the vehicle must have been built or registered prior to 1 January 1973.

Rates of duty and criteria for exemptions are matters for HM Treasury, as part of wider fiscal policy, and for the Department for Transport.

I recently wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport on this matter pointing out that it seemed unfair that the exemption was limited to those vehicles built or registered after 1 January 1973 and asking for a review of the historic vehicle criteria.

In the response received from Stephen Hammond, the Parliamentary Under - Secretary of State for Transport, I am advised that there were no plans at present to change the criterion for the exemption of historic vehicles. Mr Hammond did, however, advise that as the Chancellor keeps all taxes under review he has asked HM Treasury colleagues to note my comments about the exemption from vehicle excise duty for Historic Vehicles.

Ministerial Directions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment, since May 2011, how many decisions with spending implications have been made as a result of ministerial directions.

(AQW 16629/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Since May 2011, there have been no decisions with spending implications as a result of a Ministerial direction.

Reform of Public Administration: Severance Pay for Councillors

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of the Environment for an estimate of the total cost to the taxpayer of the Severance Pay for councillors as part of the Reform of Public Administration.

(AQO 2921/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I will be consulting on a range of options for a councillor severance scheme and aim to do so very shortly. The consultation will outline a number of models, consistent with the principles of a financial cap, graduated scheme for longer serving councillors, no payments for councillors for periods when they held another elected office (etc.). I believe the Executive should agree to fund the scheme to recognise great service over long and difficult years. The final cost will clearly depend on the numbers who apply under the scheme.

Rates Convergence

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on his discussions with the Minister of Finance and Personnel on finding an equitable solution for rates convergence.

(AQO 2922/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Minister of Finance and Personnel and I are very much aware of the concerns which have been legitimately expressed by elected representatives, the business sector and others, about rates convergence and debt issues arising from the implementation of local government reform. We have met on a number of occasions and agree the importance of developing plans and procedures to address the issue of rates convergence.

A group of senior local and central government officers, which include officials from both our Departments, have been commissioned to examine the financial implications of rate and debt convergence. The group is currently developing detailed financial models to quantify the impact on rate levels, arising from local government reform, across each of the councils and council clusters.

In parallel with this, the group is also examining a wide range of options for addressing fairly and fully the issue.

The key findings and recommendations of the group will be carefully considered and a paper will then be presented to the Executive.

My view is that it is widely agreed that a model or models of assistance need to be developed, to ensure that businesses, rate payers, the public and representatives conclude that the rates issue has been addressed satisfactorily.

Local Government: d'Hondt System

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of the Environment whether the d'Hondt method of for allocating council posts will be in place for the 11 new councils.

(AQO 2925/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The sharing of power and responsibility will be a key feature of the governance arrangements for the new councils, from their establishment. This will be provided for in the Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill which I propose, with the Executive's agreement, to introduce to the Assembly early in the New Year.

The d'Hondt method will be one on the approaches that I propose specifying as being available to the new councils to achieve the sharing of positions of responsibility; the others will be Saint Laguë and the Single Transferrable Vote. D'Hondt will be specified as the default method to be used in the absence of qualified majority support for a specific method.

The provision of this choice from the three identified methods was recommended by the Strategic Leadership Board's policy development panel on governance and relationships which was comprised of elected representatives from the five main

political parties. This approach was supported by a significant majority of the respondents to the consultation on the Local Government Reform Policy Proposals.

Local Government: Transition Committees

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the anticipated timeframes and roles for the new Council Statutory Transition Committees.

(AQO 2926/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department is working to provide for Statutory Transition Committees as soon as possible and I intend using enabling powers in the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Act 2010 to make regulations to establish Transition Committees on a statutory footing

My intention is that the Statutory Transition Committees will be responsible for aiding the process of convergence and taking forward the work required around governance, corporate and financial planning, arrangements for service delivery, transferring functions, community planning, capacity building and the appointment of senior staff. I believe this will help create certainty and leadership, as well as drive the reform process.

Wind Turbines: Planning Application Consultations

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment how much weight is given to consultation responses from Belfast International Airport in relation to planning applications for wind turbines.

(AQO 2927/11-15)

Mr Attwood: DOE Planning will consult with statutory and non-statutory bodies to obtain comments on a development proposal in relation to the consultee's area of expertise.

DOE Planning will consult with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) or the airport operators about proposals for developments, the heights of which would exceed the various specified limits within the safeguarded area defined by the CAA around the airport. Belfast International Airport (BIA) and Belfast City Airport (BCA) both have safeguarded areas.

In addressing a development proposal, both the case officer and the development management group will take consultee responses into account as a material consideration in forming an opinion on the application. The weight to be attached to individual consultee responses is a matter for planning judgement which will rest with DOE Planning as the planning authority.

Derelict Properties: Derry City Council Area

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of the Environment given his recent announcement of £500,000 to tackle derelict properties in the Derry City Council area, whether he has plans to fund any future similar schemes to protect the built heritage in the area.

(AQO 2928/11-15)

Mr Attwood: On a recent visit to Derry I announced the sum of £500,000 to address derelict sites within the City's central area as a contribution to the preparations for the UK City of Culture 2013 and as an addition to the £700,000 which I have already committed for various other Built Heritage related projects. This latest funding to Derry City Council follows on from the intervention funding which I provided to Coleraine Borough Council to tackle dereliction in Portrush and Portstewart in the run up to the Irish Open Championship in June 2012.

It has always been my intention that such interventions would be carefully assessed to identify any lessons to be learned from such an approach and to evaluate the contribution which such funding can make to the overall improvements needed across a wide range of towns in Northern Ireland. Expanding the scope of these interventions is dependant on both availability of funding in my Department and a proactive and collaborative approach between departments, councils, other parts of the public sector and voluntary bodies exploring synergies to the maximum benefit of the area.

In regard to the additional £700K that I referred to earlier, you may wish to note that this includes money to help charities to buy listed buildings at risk; to help NIEA to conserve historic monuments in the city and its environs; and to promote the heritage of the city. All of this work is currently being developed and implemented.

This money is in addition to major investment over recent years in a number of listed buildings such as - the Guildhall, St Columb's Cathedral, First Derry Presbyterian Church, the Playhouse and St Eugene's Parochial House. It is also additional to the considerable investment that NIEA has made over many years in conserving and improving the fabric, facilities and setting of Derry's Walls.

This will have an immediate impact by providing increased support for existing listed building grant applications, of which there are eight in the Derry City Council area, and it will be a strong catalyst to encourage further work.

Along with the efforts of others in the city, such as the improved public realm works being delivered by DSD, I believe that this funding has the potential to build confidence and unlock investment in the area's built heritage. This will help create additional, and much needed, jobs particularly within the construction and tourism sectors.

I believe the scheme has application across council areas and should receive central Executive support.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Government Funding: Recouping of

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, over the last three years, how much government funding has been recouped from groups found to have misused their funding, or who failed to comply with the requirements of their letters of offer. (AQW 14331/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Over the period of the last three years £226,745 has been recouped from groups found to have misused their funding, or who failed to comply with the requirements of their letters of offer. The breakdown, as provided by Departments, is detailed below:

Department	2009/10 - 2011/12
DCAL	£8,470
DE	£7,600
DEL	£163,582
DHSSPS	£35,548
OFMDFM	£11,545
Total	£226,745

Figures shown represent grant funding from DHSSPS only and do not include funding provided by HSC organisations.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail, as at 31 October 2012, the total value of the European Regional Development Fund and member state match funding that has been committed to (i) Priority sub-measure 1.1 - Building positive relations at the local level; (ii) Priority sub-measure 1.2 - Acknowledging the past; (iii) Priority sub-measure 2.1 - Creating shared public spaces; (iv) Priority sub-measure 2.2 - Key institutional capacities for a shared society; and (v) Priority 3 - Technical assistance. (AQW 16256/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table overleaf details commitment under each Theme of the PEACE III Programme, broken down by European Regional Development Fund and Member State contributions, as at 31 October 2012.

Commitment includes all projects which have accepted Letters of Offer, projects with Letters of Offer issued, and all completed projects. Projects which have been approved by Steering Committee but which have not yet been issued with a Letter of Offer have not been included.

Theme	Total Commitment (£)		
	ERDF	Regional Match	Total
1.1	78,955,547	37,940,890	116,896,437
1.2	22,849,654	10,980,054	33,829,708
2.1	41,938,060	20,152,698	62,090,758
2.2	19,869,584	9,548,026	29,417,610
3.1	9,322,387	4,479,732	13,802,119
Total	172,935,232	83,101,400	256,036,632

European Regional Development Fund

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail, as at 30 June 2012, the total value of the European Regional Development Fund and member state match funding expenditure on (i) Priority sub-measure 1.1 - Building positive relations at the local level; (ii) Priority sub-measure 1.2 - Acknowledging the past; (iii) Priority sub-measure 2.1 - Creating shared public spaces; (iv) Priority sub-measure 2.2 - Key institutional capacities for a shared society; and (v) Priority 3 - Technical assistance. (AQW 16257/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table below details expenditure under each Theme of the PEACE III Programme, as at 30 June 2012.

Theme	Total Cumulative Expenditure (£)		
	ERDF	Regional Match	Total
1.1	42,168,483	20,263,423	62,431,906
1.2	12,312,487	5,916,578	18,229,065
2.1	14,233,690	6,839,783	21,073,473
2.2	2,556,527	1,228,500	3,785,027
3.1	6,020,700	2,893,157	8,913,857
Total	77,291,887	37,141,441	114,433,328

Stormont Estate: Security Contract

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the value of the contract with G4S to provide security on the Stormont Estate; and what is the hourly rate paid to G4S staff.

(AQW 16258/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The security services performed by G4S on the Stormont Estate are part of a wider Northern Ireland Civil Service Contract covering over 200 buildings across the Government Estate. The value of the services provided by G4S at the Stormont Estate is approximately £430,000 per year.

The hourly rate paid to G4S staff varies from £6.30 per hour to £8.51 per hour.

Unemployment: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people in the North Down area are unemployed.

(AQW 16357/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The official measure of unemployment is sourced to the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS). However, the LFS is a sample survey and estimates of unemployment, at sub-NI geographies, are not sourced to the LFS because of the relatively large confidence intervals around such estimates. This is due to sample size constraints in the LFS.

The following table is sourced instead to the claimant count measure of unemployment. This shows the number of persons claiming unemployment related benefits at October 2012 and this figure as a percentage of the resident working age population.

District Council Area	Claimants	
	Number	Rate
North Down	1,896	3.7

Ulster Covenant Event: Cost

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for a breakdown of the cost of hosting the Ulster Covenant event on 29 September 2012.

(AQW 16362/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In reply to an earlier written question, the costs incurred by my Department in relation to this event were estimated at approximately £1,500 (see AQW 15045/11-15).

This figure represented the value of overtime payments likely to be claimed by Stormont Estate Management Unit staff involved in overseeing and facilitating the event.

Job Losses: Foyle Constituency

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of job losses in the Foyle constituency, since 2003, as a result of Foreign Direct Investors leaving or reducing workforce numbers.

(AQW 16387/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The primary source of Northern Ireland employee job estimates is the Census of Employment (CoE) however the CoE does not collect information on foreign-ownership. The information below is sourced from the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) from which the earliest available data is for 2006.

In September 2006, there were 3,365 employee jobs in the Foyle constituency in foreign-owned businesses. In September 2012, there were 6,045 employee jobs in the Foyle constituency in foreign-owned businesses. These figures are based on 2011 Parliamentary Constituency Area boundaries.

This change in employees jobs is due to a number of factors e.g. businesses opening, closing, relocating jobs to other parts of Northern Ireland (or elsewhere), expanding, reducing their workforce or changing ownership. A further breakdown is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Net change¹ in employees jobs in foreign-owned businesses² in the Foyle Parliamentary Constituency

Reason for change	Change
Business closed (or no longer foreign-owned)	-625
Decrease in employee jobs within Foyle	-1095
Business opened (or now foreign-owned)	+4695
Increase in employee jobs within Foyle	+60
Total net change	+3035

1 Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5 and thus may not add to totals.

2 On the IDBR a business is classified as being directly (or immediately) foreign-owned if a single non-UK investor holds a greater than 50 per cent shareholding in its parent company. This classification is based on information received by the Office for National Statistics (from a market information company, Dun and Bradstreet). This may not be an exhaustive list of foreign-owned businesses.

Maternal Deaths as a Result of Unsafe Abortions

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of maternal deaths as a result of unsafe abortions since 1967.

(AQW 16389/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Deaths are registered with the General Register Office and are classified using the International Classification of Diseases (ICD). The term "unsafe abortion" is not included in this classification and therefore information on the number of maternal deaths specifically due to "unsafe abortion" is not recorded.

There are a number of ICD codes noted below which relate to abortion¹. Two cases of maternal deaths since 1974 are recorded against these codes. Data prior to 1974 is not held electronically.

1 International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision codes 635 – 639; International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes O04 - O06, O07.2, O08.1.

Whitehall Departments: Budgets

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the contribution to non-identifiable expenditure is calculated and allocated across the relevant budgets of Whitehall Departments.

(AQW 16419/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Northern Ireland Executive has no responsibility for, or involvement in, the allocation of either identifiable or non-identifiable expenditure to Whitehall Departments. This is a matter for the UK Government and is determined by the Treasury as part of its budgetary process.

Whitehall Departments: Budgets

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the contribution to identifiable expenditure undertaken by Whitehall Departments is calculated and allocated across the relevant budgets of Whitehall Departments.

(AQW 16420/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Northern Ireland Executive has no responsibility for, or involvement in, the allocation of either identifiable or non-identifiable expenditure to Whitehall Departments. This is a matter for the UK Government and is determined by the Treasury as part of its budgetary process.

Barnett Consequentials: Olympic Games Funding

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much additional funding was awarded under the Barnett consequential associated with Olympic funding.

(AQW 16421/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Northern Ireland Executive Block Grant for 2011-12 received additional in-year funding for the Olympics of £5.4m. This comprised of £5.2m Resource DEL and £0.2m Capital DEL.

Treasury Statement of Funding Policy

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the process for consultation and agreement, between the Executive, the Secretary of State and the Chief Secretary of the Treasury, on the Treasury Statement of Funding Policy: Funding the Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales and Northern Ireland Assembly, which was published in 2010.

(AQW 16424/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Statement of Funding Policy states:

In line with the principle of mutual respect, the terms of this Statement have been agreed between the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, following consultation with the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Northern Ireland Executive.

In practice HMT officials circulate a draft Statement of Funding Policy (SFP), to the Devolved Administrations seeking their views on potential revisions.

My officials write out to each NI department to seek their views on proposed changes and the comparability factors contained within the document. My officials then communicate any necessary changes to HMT. This is an iterative process and can require discussions at Ministerial level to resolve any fundamental differences of opinion.

Once a final draft document is agreed, the SFP is passed to Secretaries of State for their agreement.

EU Structural Funds Programmes

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the EU Structural Funds Programmes for 2014 – 2020 which are currently being developed by Departments.

(AQW 16458/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The following potential EU Structural Funds Programmes for 2014-2020 are currently being developed:

- 1 A European Regional Development Fund programme under the Investment for Growth and Jobs objective.
- 2 A European Social Fund programme under the Investment for Growth and Jobs objective.
- 3 A European Regional Development Fund INTERREG cross-border programme under the European Territorial Cooperation objective.
- 4 A European Regional Development Fund PEACE cross-border programme under the European Territorial Cooperation objective.

Civil Servants: Bonuses

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the criteria for awarding bonus payments to civil service staff.

(AQW 16473/11-15)

Mr Wilson: NICS departments have discretion under the Special Bonus Scheme to reward staff below the Senior Civil Service for exceptional performance in particularly demanding tasks or situations. The overall cost of bonus payments in each department must not exceed 0.2% of its pay bill and must be accommodated within the department's running cost provisions.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) to detail the criteria that businesses must meet to be eligible for the 20 percent reduction in rates, as an extension to the small business rates relief scheme; (ii) from when will the reduction apply; and (iii) for how long it will last.

(AQW 16509/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As I recently announced in the Assembly, the Executive has agreed to extend the small business rates relief scheme to include properties with an NAV up to £15,000 rising from the previous figure of £10,000.

This extension is part of the Jobs and Economy Initiative and will provide much needed support to an additional 3,500 business ratepayers, bringing the total amount of business ratepayers supported by SBRR to just over 27,000.

The 20% relief will automatically be awarded to all eligible small business ratepayers with a net annual of £5,001 to £15,000. However, ratepayers who occupy multiple premises, that are more than three properties in total, are not eligible for the relief under the scheme.

It is also my intention to further refine the scheme by disallowing double rate relief on the same premises and recycling the savings in order, making best use of the available resources and maximising the number of businesses receiving support. This would apply to ratepayers already entitled to derating for industrial or sport and recreation use; relief that is granted at 70% and 80% respectively.

The newly expanded scheme will last for a further two years, from April 2013 through to 31 March 2015.

Construction Sector: Additional Funding

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for a breakdown of how the £40 million additional funding, to deliver a range of projects to support the construction sector, will be allocated in the current financial year.

(AQW 16511/11-15)

Mr Wilson: My Statement on Monday 12 November contained detail of the 2012-13 October Monitoring allocations. This included £41.5 million of allocations that will support the construction sector:

- £23.9 million to DRD for road maintenance, street lightning maintenance and water mains works;
- £8.3 million to DE for schools maintenance and addressing fire damage to Arvalee Special School;
- £8.0 million to DSD for Co-ownership; and
- £1.3 million to DHSSPS to progress hospital car parking on the Tor Bank Site.

Land and Property Registration Fees

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to list the current Land and Property Registration fees in Northern Ireland compared with the fees in England; and why fees in Northern Ireland are more expensive for transfers, leases and exchanges.

(AQW 16512/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The legislation governing the operation of the Northern Ireland Land Registry differs significantly from that under which Land Registers England and Wales operate. In Northern Ireland, in accordance with the provisions of S84 of the Land Registration Act (NI) 1970, Land Registry is obliged to raise fees to cover the costs of registration services. When fees are revised any revisions must reflect the actual cost of provision of services.

The range of services and transactions provided in the two jurisdictions are also different, therefore it is not possible to provide a like-for-like comparison of charges.

Where we do have comparability is in the registration of transfers, leases and exchanges however we do not use the same value bandings as illustrated in the tables below.

LPS Scale Fee Charges

Band No		Fee	Fee (electronic lodgement)
1	0–£20,000	£90	£70
2	£20,001–£80,000	£150	£100
3	£80,001–£100,000	£210	£150
4	£100,001–£150,000	£250	£210
5	£150,001–£200,000	£360	£300
6	£200,001–£250,000	£415	£345
7	£250,001 and over	£525	£435

English Scale Fee Land Registry Charges

Band No		Fee	Fee (electronic lodgement)
1	0–£50,000	£50	N/A
2	£50,001–£80,000	£80	N/A
3	£80,001–£100,000	£130	N/A
4	£100,001–£200,000	£200	N/A
5	£200,001–£500,000	£280	N/A
6	£500,001–£1,000,000	£550	N/A
7	£1,000,001 and over	£920	N/A

The highest maximum fee payable to LPS is significantly lower than the highest fee paid in England and Wales, particularly if the transfer is processed electronically.

The registration fees that the house buyers pay are determined by the selling price of a property. As prices vary significantly between jurisdiction and region, the only way in which a meaningful comparison can be made is to calculate what the registration fee for a house in the average price bracket is in each jurisdiction.

The table below details fees for properties in the average price band.

Jurisdiction	Average House Price (Oct 2012)	Fee	Fee (electronic lodgement)
N Ireland	£129,000	£250	£210
England	£225,954	£280	N/A

The comparison shows that the Northern Ireland house buyer purchasing a property at the average price and using electronic lodgement pays £70 less in fees when compared to their English counterpart.

A comparison of the current Northern Ireland Transfer, Lease and Exchange fees with historic charges shows that due to the rebalancing of property prices, average fees have reduced and the percentage of house purchases attracting fees in the lower bands increased.

In the third quarter of 2007 the average transfer fee was £265, in that same quarter in 2012 the average fee had fallen by 33% to £178.

In October-April 2007, 30% of customers paid fees in Bands 1-3 - in September 2012 that percentage had increased to 63%.

St Patrick's Barracks, Ballymena

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what role his Department had to play in the transfer of St Patrick's Barracks in Ballymena from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to the Department for Social Development. (AQW 16552/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Land & Property Services provided a valuation for OFMDFM in January 2012 in connection with a proposed transfer of part of the overall site to DSD which comprised of 47 dwellings.

OFMDFM submitted a business case seeking DFP approval on 7th March 2012 for the "Disposal of 47 houses at St Patrick's Barracks, Ballymena". My officials considered the proposal and granted approval on 3rd April 2012.

Rating Revaluation: Domestic Properties

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when he intends to carry out a rating revaluation of domestic properties. (AQW 16598/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Executive has currently no plans to carry out a domestic revaluation during the spending review period and lifetime of this Assembly.

Furthermore, carrying one out would be difficult at the moment, as the evidence required to establish the values is not sufficiently reliable, given the low volume of sales and the continued volatility in the housing market.

Research by LPS and other bodies indicate that broadly speaking residential values have now returned to values that existed in January 2005 – the base date for the existing domestic Valuation List.

The Executive and Councils still need the same amount of money out of the system to pay for public services. If a general revaluation of all domestic properties were to take place soon and we found that all values had decreased below the 2005 levels, the tax rate or rate in the pound would simply have to go up.

The important issue in deciding whether to undertake a revaluation, however, is the extent to which some areas of the market have declined over this period relative to others. Revaluation always creates winners and losers; houses that have reduced in value by more than the average since 1 January 2005 would end up paying less rates, those that have reduced by less than the average, or indeed increased, would have an increased rates liability.

LPS will continue to monitor changes and shifts in value and when these relativities get significantly out of line and the housing market is sufficiently stable and active to provide the underlying evidence, the matter can be reconsidered. At present the only calls for a general revaluation are from those who are under the mistaken impression that lower house prices across the board should result in lower rates for all households.

Department of Education: Funding

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the rationale behind the allocation of £75 million to the Department of Education in 2014/15. (AQW 16654/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The rationale for the allocation is to help address pressures on schools' budgets, protecting frontline services as far as possible whilst the Minister for Education moves ahead with implementing strategic reform aimed at creating a more efficient and effective education sector.

Freedom of Information Requests

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of Freedom of Information requests received by his Department in each year since 2007; (ii) the proportion of requests each year that were not answered within the time limit; (iii) the number of requests currently outstanding by more than (a) one to two months (b) three to four months; (c) five to six months; (d) seven to twelve months; and (e) more than twelve months.

(AQW 16667/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The information requested has been provided in the following tables.

Year	Requests Received	Proportion of Requests Not Answered Within Time Limit
2007	336	15%
2008	332	9%
2009	409	10%
2010	374	4%
2011	383	16%

	Number of Requests Currently Outstanding
1-2 months	2
3-4 months	0
5-6 months	0
7-12 months	4
More than 12 months	6

Economically Inactive People

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many economically inactive people aged between 18-25 are not in job related training or education.

(AQW 16669/11-15)

Mr Wilson: For the period July – September 2012, the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimated there to be 17,000 economically inactive individuals, aged between 18 and 25, who were not in job related training or education.

Ministerial Directions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, since May 2007, how many decisions with spending implications have been made as a result of ministerial directions.

(AQW 16679/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There have been no ministerial directions with spending implications initiated by the DFP Minister since May 2007.

Prompt Payment

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what practices, protocols and measures are in place within the Department and its arm's-length bodies to ensure prompt payment to contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers.

(AQW 16686/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The standard payment period for government contracts is 30 days. This is reflected in standard forms of contract and widely accepted by business. In addition DFP aims to complete all payments to contractors within 10 days in line with the prompt payment protocol.

Procurement Guidance Note 01/12 Contract Management - Procedures and Principles and Procurement Guidance Note 06/12 Helping SMEs Benefit from Subcontracting Opportunities set out best practice for contract managers and project managers and provide information for main contractors and subcontractors.

CPD contracts require contractors to offer similar terms and conditions to their subcontractors, such as payment within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice, and also include a poor performance protocol. Ultimately, if a contractor fails to comply

with contract conditions, including those relating to prompt payment of subcontractors, they can be excluded from future government tender opportunities for a year.

The Construction Contracts (Amendment) Act (NI), which came into effect on 14 November 2012, will help to improve the legal position of subcontractors in all construction contracts. The Construction Order also incorporates default conditions on payments that are deemed to be included if the parties have not agreed terms.

In the case of construction contracts, CPD requires main contractors to report monthly on subcontractor payment progress (where the subcontract value exceeds 1% of the total contract or £10k), 'payment issues' must be a standing agenda item at project meetings and project managers are required to validate that subcontractors receive payments due, by conducting random checks.

CPD has produced detailed guidance for Project Managers which includes standard reporting templates.

Prompt Payment

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is being done to ensure that sub-contractors working on Government commissioned contracts are paid promptly and at a reasonable rate.
(AQW 16705/11-15)

Mr Wilson: CPD guidance includes a number of measures to help to counter the sharp practices employed by some main contractors.

- Contractors are required to offer written subcontracts, with terms no more onerous than those that the client has agreed with the main contractor, such as payment within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice.
- Contractors must report monthly on subcontractor payment progress (where the subcontract value exceeds 1% of the total contract or £10k).
- 'Payment Issues' must be a standing agenda item at project meetings.
- Project managers are required to validate that subcontractors receive payments due, by conducting random checks.
- Where main contractors fail to comply with contract conditions, including those relating to fair dealing with subcontractors they face exclusion from future government tender opportunities for up to one year.
- Main contractors are required to declare that their tenders take full account of the price of key elements of the contract that will be subcontracted.

The amendments to the Construction Contracts (NI) Order 1997 which commenced on 14 November 2012 will make access to remedies such as adjudication easier for aggrieved subcontractors.

Government Commissioned Contracts: Payments

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether companies that fail to pay sub-contractors within a reasonable time period can be excluded from future tenders for Government commissioned contracts.
(AQW 16708/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The failure to treat subcontractors fairly is a matter of great concern for me. I am determined to address the sharp practices employed by some main contractors.

CPD guidance requires contractors to pay their subcontractors within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice. Ultimately, if a contractor fails to comply with a contract condition in relation to prompt payment, it can be excluded from future government tender opportunities for a year.

Government Commissioned Contracts: Payments

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether companies which successfully tender for Government commissioned contracts are scrutinised on how promptly they pay their sub-contractors.
(AQW 16710/11-15)

Mr Wilson: CPD guidance for public sector contracts includes a number of measures aimed at ensuring subcontractors are paid promptly.

Included in these is a requirement for main contractors to report monthly on subcontractor payments (where the subcontract value exceeds 1% of the total contract or £10k) to the client's project manager and to ensure that 'Payment Issues' is a standing agenda item for project meetings.

In addition project managers are required to ensure prompt payment is actually applied, by accessing the contractor's records of payments made and by carrying out periodic checks with subcontractors.

CPD guidance also includes a protocol to enable main contractors to be excluded from future government tender opportunities for a year, if they fail to comply with contract conditions on prompt payment of subcontractors

Civil Servants: Continuous Service

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people in each Department, since September 2009, have had their previous non-civil service employment counted as continuous service.

(AQW 16733/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The information on the number of people in each Department, since September 2009, who had their previous non-civil service employment counted as continuous service is not held.

Economy and Jobs Initiative

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the origins of the £200m used to finance the Economy and Jobs Initiative.

(AQW 16738/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Executive's £200 million Jobs and Economy Initiative was funded from a range of sources. These sources included unallocated Barnett consequential from the UK Government's recent Budget and Autumn Statements. These Barnett consequential amounted to £179 million and were additional to the funding allocated to the Executive as part of the 2010 UK Spending Review.

There were also resources made available through reduced requirements identified by departments and by the acceleration of capital spending brought forward from 2014-15.

Employment: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of people in employment in North Down in each of the last five years.

(AQW 16793/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Estimates of the numbers in employment by District Council Area (DCA) are sourced from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), Local Area Database, with the most recent data available for January – December 2011.

Please note that LFS estimates at the DCA level are based on relatively small sample sizes and as a result there are relatively large confidence intervals around such results. In addition, these estimates are based on the residency of an individual.

Estimates of employment in the North Down DCA, for each of the last five years, are shown in the table overleaf.

Number of people in employment in North Down District Council Area

Year	Number in employment
2007	33,000
2008	37,000
2009	39,000
2010	37,000
2011	37,000

Data are rounded to nearest 1,000.

Annual data for 2012 will not be available until mid-2013

Economically Active People: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of economically active people in North Down in each of the last five years.

(AQW 16794/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Estimates of the number of people, who are economically active by District Council Area (DCA), are sourced from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), Local Area Database. The most recent data available are for January – December 2011.

Please note that LFS estimates at the DCA level are based on relatively small sample sizes and as a result there are relatively large confidence intervals around such results. In addition, these estimates are based on the residency of an individual.

Estimates of the number of people, who are economically active in the North Down DCA, for each of the last five years, are shown in the table overleaf.

Number of people who are economically active in the North Down District Council Area

Year	Number economically active
2007	33,000
2008	37,000
2009	40,000
2010	38,000
2011	38,000

Data are rounded to nearest 1,000.

Annual data for 2012 will not be available until mid-2013.

Department of Education: Reclassifications or Reallocations

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) what checks are in place to ensure that any reclassifications or reallocations by the Department of Education during the budgetary year are warranted; (ii) whether the Department of Education has reduced requirements which ought to be notified; (iii) whether the level of scrutiny he is able to apply to the Department of Education is equivalent to that applied to other departments; and (iv) if not, why this is the case.

(AQW 16804/11-15)

Mr Wilson: When proposed reclassifications or reallocations are submitted, including those from the Department of Education, an explanation as to why they are required is sought and challenged where appropriate by officials. All reclassifications and some reallocations require Executive approval.

Departments are required to submit any reduced requirements they identify to the Department of Finance and Personnel in good time, and the Department of Education is no different in this regard. Any reduced requirements not declared will fall as underspend at the end of the year. My Department has stressed to Departments that, if there is likely to be an underspend, they should not leave it until the last moment to declare it.

The level of scrutiny which I am able to apply to Departments depends on the amount of detail available. I am disappointed that my paper on the Review of Financial Processes, which would have increased transparency, has yet to secure the agreement of the Executive. The lack of transparency in the Education budget restricts external scrutiny and I have raised this with the Minister. I am also aware that the Assembly Education Committee has raised similar concerns relating to budget transparency and I hope this issue will be resolved.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Suicides: Limavady Borough Council Area

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of (i) suspected; and (ii) reported suicides in the Limavady Borough Council area, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 16219/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety):

- (i) Information is not available.
- (ii) The table below gives the number of deaths registered due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury'¹ or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'² in Limavady, 2007-2011P.

All suicides are referred to the coroner and can take time to be fully investigated. Therefore there is often a period of time between when the suicide occurs and when it is registered. Figures below will subsequently include deaths that occurred before the period of interest, and exclude those that occurred within the period but have yet to be registered.

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 1: Registered deaths due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'³, 2007-2011P.

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011P	2007-2011 P
Limavady District Council	5	5	8	7	2	27

Source: Demography & Methodology Branch, DFP

- 3 In the UK, in considering suicide events it is conventional to include cases where the cause of death is classified as either 'Suicide and self-inflicted injury' or 'Undetermined injury'.
- P Data for 2011 remains provisional until the publication of the Annual Report of the Registrar General which is due to be published in November 2012.

Adoption Rights for Gay Couples

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 15844/11-15, what advice he has received from officials concerning the cost of the legal challenge; and for an estimate of the total cost.

(AQW 16224/11-15)

Mr Poots: The total costs associated with the Judicial Review proceedings brought by a third party to date are circa £24k. It is impossible to estimate the total cost of the legal challenge. This will depend, to a large extent, on the scope of the appeal, which will only be determined when the appeal is underway.

Psoriasis: Waiting Times

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the waiting time for patients with severe psoriasis to access specialist treatment compares with the rest of the UK.

(AQW 16225/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the waiting times for patients in Northern Ireland with psoriasis for specialist biologic therapy treatment, at 30th September 2012, by HSC Trust, is shown in the table below.

HSC Trust	Waiting Time in Weeks						Total
	0-13	> 13-21	> 21-39	> 39-52	>52-78	>78	
Belfast	10	4	12	3	0	0	29
Northern	9	4	4	0	0	0	17
South Eastern	3	3	7	1	0	0	14
Southern	3	6	6	5	0	0	20
Western	6	5	4	0	0	0	15
Northern Ireland	31	22	33	9	0	0	95

Source: Departmental Return SDR5 (Dermatology)

Waiting times for specialist drugs for psoriasis are not officially collected in other parts of the UK, therefore it is not possible to compare Northern Ireland waiting times with those in the rest of the UK.

Health and Social Care Trusts: Central Business Service Functions

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the timescale for the establishment of central business service functions, such as payroll, between the Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 16232/11-15)

Mr Poots: The current projections for go-live for the HSC shared service centres are:

- Payments & Income – Summer 2013
- Payroll and Recruitment & Selection – Winter 2013.

Strategy Development

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the progress on developing a strategy to succeed the Research for Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2007-2012.

(AQW 16251/11-15)

Mr Poots: A new strategy is in the final stages of drafting prior to public consultation. Over the past 12 months informal consultations have involved stakeholders throughout the province, including lay representatives.

The strategy will also be informed by the independent review of the Impact of Health & Social Care R&D that I commissioned. The report from that review was made public in July and provided evidence of success over the years since the regional HSC R&D Fund was developed. Benefits have been delivered for patients and for the economy. Importantly, the report demonstrated that for every £1 allocated locally, a further £4.15 in R&D funds was attracted to Northern Ireland. Nonetheless recommendations for further improvement were also made and the new strategy will address these as appropriate.

Hospital Car Parks

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 15824/11-15, whether the Northern Health and Social Care Trust pays the company with the contract for vehicle clamping from its own budget; and how much the company has been paid since car parking charges were introduced.

(AQW 16260/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Trust pays the Parking and Enforcement Agency out of the income received from Car Parking. The amount from May 2011 to October 2012 is £21,188.

GP Practices: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many GP practices there are in North Down.

(AQW 16263/11-15)

Mr Poots: Figures provided by the Family Practitioner Services Information and Registration Unit in the HSC Business Services Organisation, show that as at November 2012, there were 12 GP practices located in North Down Local Government District.

The count is based on the postcode of the main practice, branch surgeries are not included.

Chemists: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many chemists there are in North Down.

(AQW 16264/11-15)

Mr Poots: Figures provided by the Family Practitioner Services Information and Registration Unit in the HSC Business Services Organisation, show that as at November 2012, there were 21 community pharmacies located in North Down Local Government District.

Transport: Enniskillen to Altnagelvin Area Hospital

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the Western Trust has any plans to enclose information leaflets for the Pilot Service 294, from Enniskillen to Altnagelvin Hospital, with the appointment letters of people living in County Fermanagh.

(AQW 16270/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Western Health and Social Care Trust has advised that it is sending leaflets about the new Translink pilot bus service with all elective outpatient letters to any addresses in Counties Fermanagh and Tyrone.

Hospital Appointments: Travel and Subsistence Costs

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the criteria that must be met in order to claim back travel and subsistence costs for hospital appointments or visits; and how a claim is made.

(AQW 16273/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Hospital Travel Costs Scheme provides help with travel costs to hospital for health service treatment for people and their dependants who are in receipt of Income Support, Employment and Support Allowance (Income-related), Jobseeker's allowance (Income Based), Guarantee Pension Credit, Working Tax Credit and/or Child Tax Credit; or who are on a low income.

Details about who can claim and how to claim are set out in leaflet HC11 Help with health costs, available from hospitals, Social Security Offices and Jobs and Benefits Offices and on my Department's website at: www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hc11_help_with_health_costs.pdf. Details can also be found on the NI Direct website at: www.nidirect.gov.uk/hospital-travel-costs-scheme.

Beltany House, Omagh

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what guarantee he can give that Beltany House in Omagh will remain open; and what plans he has for the future of this facility and the services it provides.

(AQW 16274/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Western Health and Social Care Trust that there are currently no plans to close Beltany House in Omagh.

The opening of a new children's respite facility in Omagh has led to a small increase in respite services available for adults at Beltany House. The development of the new children's unit will also allow the Trust to review adult learning disability respite services provided across the Trust area to ensure equity of access and to identify new ways of working to address the demand for respite in the area. As part of this review the Trust will be fully engaging with families, staff and Trade Unions.

The Trust acknowledges that respite is crucial for families undertaking their caring roles and aims to continuously strive to ensure respite is provided in a manner that meets the needs of carers and people availing of respite. There is clearly a need to ensure that respite is flexible and we would seek to offer a range of respite options hence the review of respite indicated above.

Fire and Rescue Service: Stock Control

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the accounting procedures in place in the Fire and Rescue Service in relation to stock control; and whether these stock control procedures can detect loss, theft or misappropriation of goods and material intended for use by the Service.

(AQW 16289/11-15)

Mr Poots: NIFRS stock control procedures are detailed within the NIFRS' Stock Control Policies and Procedures document and can be summarised as follows:

NIFRS hold a number of inventories including:

- Uniform Store, eg, PPE (Dress Uniform), Undress Uniform and Safety Shoes;
- Main Store, eg, firefighting equipment, medical consumables and stationery;
- Transport Stores, eg, vehicle parts.

Stock is purchased, after approval of a Business Case, via the e-procurement system and its approval protocols. When it is received stock is logged onto the stores system as a receipt and the system shows the purchase history (e.g. date & cost). Goods are then ordered and controlled using both manual and electronic systems.

Stock taking within NIFRS' Stores is done in accordance with the NIFRS' Stock Taking Policy and Procedure and is independently verified and audited by the Internal Audit Unit.

Recommendations to improve stock control have been made by both NIFRS internal audit and one of the recent reports into whistleblowing allegations and NIFRS management is committed to addressing these recommendations.

Fire and Rescue Service: Inventory

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the nature of any inventory held by the Fire and Rescue Service which shows the date of purchase of assets, the date of disposal, how assets were disposed of, to whom and for how much.

(AQW 16292/11-15)

Mr Poots: The value of NIFRS assets, including those for disposal is referred to in the Accounts section of the NIFRS Annual report.

NIFRS also has a range of inventories which include:

- Capital Assets Register;
- Office Furniture and Equipment;
- Transport Equipment;
- Uniform and Main Store.

The Assets suitable for disposal are recorded in the appropriate register and reflect date purchased (for items greater than £5,000).

Fire and Rescue Service: Agency Staff

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of agency workers currently employed by the Fire and Rescue Service; (ii) the number employed in each of the last five years; (iii) the rank held by those personnel; (iv) the length of time the agency staff were employed by the Service; and (v) the cost of employing agency staff in each of the last five years.

(AQW 16295/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) NIFRS currently employs 51 Agency workers.
- (ii) See Annex A
- (iii) See Annex A
- (iv) See Annex A
- (v) The table below details the cost of employing Agency staff in each of the last five years:

Year	Cost Of Agency Staff £'000S
2007/08	536
2008/09	802
2009/10	933

Year	Cost Of Agency Staff £'000S
2010/11	1,090
2011/12	1,042

The rising trend of agency costs is being addressed by NIFRS senior management.

ANNEX A

NIFRS Agency Staff 2007/08 Total Number Employed = 42

Job Title	Grade	Length of Service (Days)
Sen Quality & Audit Officer	PO1	71
Accountant	PO3	211
Clerical Assistant	Scale ½	366
Clerical Assistant	Scale ½	366
Clerical Assistant	Scale ½	211
Clerk Typist	Scale ½	243
Clerical Assistant	Scale ½	180
Clerk Typist	Scale ½	155
Telephonist/Receptionist	Scale ½	61
Driver/Workshop Cleaner	Scale 1	140
Research & Admin Asst	Scale 3	364
Clerical Officer	Scale 3	211
Payroll Clerk	Scale 3	117
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	57
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	29
Clerk Typist/Receptionist	Scale 3	36
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	71
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	64
Clerk/Typist	Scale 3	204
Clerk/Typist	Scale 3	162
Clerk/Typist	Scale 3	50
Clerk/Typist	Scale 3	366
Clerk/Typist	Scale 3	113
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	281
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	105
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	41
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	78
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	57
Clerical Asst	Scale 3	113
Clerical Assistant	Scale 4	154
IT Technical Person	Scale 4	190
Asst Estates Officer	Scale 6	29
Comms Workshop Mgr	Scale 6	85
Workshop Mechanic	Scale 6	366

Job Title	Grade	Length of Service (Days)
Schools Liaison Officer	SO1	197
Driving Instructor – BTC	SO1	366
Training Resources Officer	SO1	366
Estates Officer	SO2	180
Policy Officer	SO2	90
Policy Officer	SO2	21
Manuel Technician	Manual Tech	113
Storeperson	Storeperson	56
	Total 07/08	6736

NIFRS Agency Staff 2008/09 Total Number Employed = 84

Job Title	Grade	Length of Service (Days)
Manual Technician	Manual Tech	365
Manual Technician	Manual Tech	72
Service Delivery MS Project Manager	P01	109
Sen Quality & Audit Officer	P01	358
Quality & Audit Officer	P01	12
Quality & Audit Officer	P01	6
Quality & Audit Officer	P01	63
MGM Accountant	P02	156
Asst Finance Officer	P03	51
Accountant	P03	365
P/T Project Accountant	P10	147
Educationalist	S01	44
Driving Instructor - BTC	S01	365
Training Resources Officer	S01	365
Educationalist	S01	24
Estates Officer	S02	256
Policy Officer	S02	267
Policy Officer	S02	72
Driver / Workshop Cleaner	Scale 1	123
Clerical Assistant	Scale 1/2	365
Clerical Assistant Scale	Scale 1/2	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 1/2	365
Clerical Assistant	Scale 1/2	365
Clerical Assistant	Scale 1/2	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 1/2	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 1/2	289
Telephonist / Receptionist	Scale 1/2	81
CAD Technician	Scale 3	365
Clerical Officer	Scale 3	365

Job Title	Grade	Length of Service (Days)
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	221
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	365
Clerk Typist (18 hrs)	Scale 3	365
Clerk Typist / Receptionist	Scale 3	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	135
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	359
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	131
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	215
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	3
Clerical Officer	Scale 3	80
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	98
Clerk Typist (18 hrs)	Scale 3	54
HR Policy Administrator	Scale 3	272
Clerical Officer	Scale 3	268
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	2
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	4
CAD Technician	Scale 3	208
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	131
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	7
Clerical Assistant	Scale 3	182
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	173
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	139
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	147
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	139
Clerk Typist / Receptionist	Scale 3	12
Clerical Officer	Scale 3	79
Clerical Assistant	Scale 3	38
Clerical Assistant	Scale 3	79
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	65
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	224
Clerk Typist	Scale 4	351
Clerk Typist (16 hrs)	Scale 4	270
Clerical Officer	Scale 4	23
Clerical Officer	Scale 4	37
Technical Officer -	Scale 4	54
Technical Officer -	Scale 4	64
Equip Project Co-ordinator	Scale 5	365
Workshop Mechanic	Scale 6	214
Comms Workshop Mgr	Scale 6	365

Job Title	Grade	Length of Service (Days)
Asst Estates Officer	Scale 6	365
Personal Secretary - DCFO	Scale 6	57
Workshop Mechanic	Scale 6	35
Storeperson	Storeperson	365
Storeperson	Storeperson	95
	Total 08/09	15739

NIFRS Agency Staff 2009/10 Total Number Employed = 84

Job Title	Grade	Length of Service (Days)
Manual Technician	Manual Tech	12
Manual Technician	Manual Tech	128
Manual Technician	Manual Tech	91
Manual Technician	Manual Tech	233
Manual Technician	Manual Tech	212
Manual Technician	Manual Tech	157
Sen Quality & Audit Officer	P01	87
MGM Accountant	P02	365
Asst Finance Officer	P03	122
Sen Quality & Audit Officer	P03	276
Accountant	P03	206
Accountant	P03	205
Sen Quality & Audit Officer	P03	78
Sen Quality & Audit Officer	P03	192
Accountant	P03	206
P/T Project Accountant	P10	365
Educationalist	S01	227
Workshop Supervisor	S01	96
Educationalist	S01	115
Workshop Supervisor	S01	17
Driving Instructor - BTC	S01	365
Training Resources Officer	S01	365
HR Policy Officer	S02	113
Policy Officer	S02	147
Assistant Parts Person	Scale 1	365
Clerical Assistant	Scale 1/2	3
Clerical Assistant	Scale 1/2	365
Clerical Assistant	Scale 1/2	365
Clerical Assistant	Scale 1/2	33
Clerk Typist	Scale 1/2	59
Clerk Typist	Scale 1/2	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 1/2	38
Clerical Assistant	Scale 1/2	143

Job Title	Grade	Length of Service (Days)
Clerk Typist	Scale 1/2	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 1/2	365
Clerical Assistant	Scale 1/2	188
Clerical Assistant	Scale 1/2	98
Clerk Typist / Receptionist	Scale 3	365
Receptionist	Scale 3	211
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	20
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	365
Clerical Officer	Scale 3	143
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	122
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	285
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	150
CAD Technician	Scale 3	66
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	185
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	29
Clerical Officer	Scale 3	131
HR Policy Administrator	Scale 3	36
CAD Technician	Scale 3	365
Clerical Officer	Scale 3	136
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	69
Clerk Typist (18 hrs)	Scale 3	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	150
CAD Technician	Scale 3	365
Receptionist	Scale 3	68
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	325
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	38
Clerical Officer	Scale 3	59
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	212
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	206
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	160
HR Policy Administrator	Scale 3	365
Clerical Assistant	Scale 3	365
Clerk/Typist	Scale 3	79
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	365
Clerical Officer	Scale 3	365
Clerical Assistant	Scale 3	365
Clerk Typist (21.25 hrs)	Scale 3	162
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	262
Clerical Officer	Scale 4	6

Job Title	Grade	Length of Service (Days)
Technical Officer	Scale 4	365
Clerical Officer	Scale 4	34
Clerk Typist	Scale 4	365
Clerical Officer	Scale 4	365
Clerical Officer	Scale 4	71
Equip Project Co-ordinator	Scale 5	346
Comms Workshop Mgr	Scale 6	365
Asst Estates Officer	Scale 6	206
Workshop Mechanic	Scale 6	365
Storeperson	Storeperson	365
	Total 09/10	17669

NIFRS Agency Staff 2010/11 Total Number Employed = 93

Job Title	Grade	Length of Service (Days)
Manual Tech	Manual Tech	260
Manual Tech	Manual Tech	33
Manual Tech	Manual Tech	53
Manual Tech	Manual Tech	365
Manual Tech	Manual Tech	183
Manual Tech	Manual Tech	365
Mobile Mechanic	Mobile Mechanic	365
Management Accountant	P02	365
Assistant Capital Accountant	P03	365
Internal Auditor	P03	365
Assitant Management Accountant	P03	79
Financial Accountant	P03	365
Assistant Management Accountant	P03	284
Internal Auditor	P03	189
Economist	P06	100
Economist	P06	4
Economist	P06	165
Project Accountant	P10	365
Educationalist	S01	151
Educationalist	S01	93
Workshop Supervisor	S01	365
Driving Instructor	S01	365
Training Resources Officer	S01	365
HR Policy Officer	S02	156
Corporate Comm Officer	S02	186
Employment Policy Officer	S02	123
Employment Policy Officer	S02	52
Data Input Clerk	Scale 1	365

Job Title	Grade	Length of Service (Days)
Clerical Assistant	Scale 1	142
Clerk Typist	Scale 1	156
Clerical Assistant	Scale 1	5
Parts Assistant	Scale 1	193
Clerical Assistant	Scale 1	191
Driver/Transport/Cleaner	Scale 1	33
Clerical Officer	Scale 1	200
Parts Assistant	Scale 1	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 1	70
Clerical Assistant	Scale 1	5
Clerk Typist	Scale 1/2	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 1/2	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 1/2	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	365
Telephonist/Receptionist	Scale 3	365
Telephonist/Receptionist	Scale 3	11
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	70
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	359
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	46
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	318
Telephonist/Receptionist	Scale 3	29
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	213
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	291
Estates Admin Officer	Scale 3	156
Telephonist/Receptionist	Scale 3	234
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	2
CAD Tech	Scale 3	149
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	18
CAD Technician	Scale 3	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	141
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	78
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	51
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	198
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	149
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	164
CAD Technician	Scale 3	221
HR Policy Administrator	Scale 3	65
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	200

Job Title	Grade	Length of Service (Days)
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	218
Clerical Officer	Scale 3	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	178
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	37
Purchasing Assistant	Scale 3	365
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	365
Technical Officer	Scale 4	365
Clerical Officer	Scale 4	365
Clerical Officer	Scale 4	58
Clerical Officer	Scale 4	365
Clerical Officer	Scale 4	365
Admin Support	Scale 4	32
HR Policy Administrator	Scale 4 (18.5)	337
GIS Analyst	Scale 6	149
Communications Support Technician	Scale 6	87
Assistant Estates Engineer	Scale 6	178
Communications Support Technician	Scale 6	196
GIS Analyst	Scale 6	157
Assistant Estates Engineer	Scale 6	16
Estates Engineer	Scale 6	198
Assistant Estates Engineer	Scale 6	130
Pensions Administrator	Scale 6	326
Storeperson	Storeperson	365
	Total 10/11	19881

NIFRS Agency Staff 2011/12 Total Number Employed = 78

Job Title	Grade	Length of Service (Days)
Manual Tech	Manual Tech	366
Manual Tech	Manual Tech	366
Manual Tech	Manual Tech	366
Manual Tech	Manual Tech	366
Manual Tech	Manual Tech	272
Manual Tech	Manual Tech	202
Mobile Mechanic	Mobile Mechanic	366
Mobile Mechanic	Mobile Mechanic	102
Mobile Mechanic	Mobile Mechanic	195
Assistant Management Accountant	P02	366
Assistant Capital Accountant	P03	85
Financial Accountant	P03	366
Assistant Management Accountant	P03	366
Internal Auditor	P03	366

Job Title	Grade	Length of Service (Days)
Economist	P06	372
Project Accountant	P10	366
Driving Instructor	S01	57
Training Resource Officer	S01	57
Workshop Supervisor	S01	366
Management Accounting Technician	S01	250
Corporate Communications Officer	S02	366
Employment Policy Officer	S02	366
Estates Engineer	S02	185
Diversity Officer	S02	132
Data Input Clerk	Scale 1	302
Parts Assisstant	Scale 1	366
Clerical Officer	Scale 1	366
Clerical Assistant	Scale 1	146
Clerk Typist	Scale 1	366
Clerical Assistant	Scale 1	212
Clerical Assistant	Scale 1	35
Clerk Typist	Scale 1/2	50
Clerk Typist	Scale 1/2	50
Clerk Typist	Scale 1/2	366
Clerk Typist	Scale 1/2	297
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	50
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	43
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	322
CAD Technician	Scale 3	366
Purchasing Assistant	Scale 3	64
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	366
Clerical Officer	Scale 3	64
Telephonist/Receptionist	Scale 3	366
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	366
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	366
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	366
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	366
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	366
CAD Technician	Scale 3	366
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	43
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	50
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	43
Estates Admin Officer	Scale 3	64
Telephonist/Receptionist	Scale 3	366
Purchasing Assistant	Scale 3	269
Clerical Officer	Scale 3	195

Job Title	Grade	Length of Service (Days)
Clerical Officer	Scale 3	195
Clerical Officer	Scale 3	139
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	40
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	42
Clerical Officer	Scale 4	366
Clerical Officer	Scale 4	366
Technical Officer	Scale 4	64
Clerical Officer	Scale 4	366
HR Policy Officer	Scale 4	366
Clerk Typist	Scale 4	87
Technical Officer	Scale 4	195
Equipment Technician	Scale 5	356
Physical Training Advisor	Scale 5	55
Pensions Administrator	Scale 6	351
Temp Estates Engineer	Scale 6	54
GIS Analyst	Scale 6	22
Comms Support Technician	Scale 6	366
Uniformed Appointment Officer	Scale 6	366
Assistant Estates Engineer	Scale 6	366
Estates Engineer	Scale 6	195
Statistics Officer	Scale 6	76
Assistant Estates Officer	Scale 6	55
Storeperson	Storeperson	366
	Total 11/12	18578

NIFRS Agency Staff 2012 – to date - Total Number Employed = 51

Job Title	Grade	Length of Service 12/13
Manual Technician	Manual Technician	214
Manual Technician	Manual Technician	214
Manual Technician	Manual Technician	214
Manual Technician	Manual Technician	214
Manual Technician	Manual Technician	214
Manual Technician	Manual Technician	171
Mobile Mechanic	Mobile Mechanic	214
Mobile Mechanic	Mobile Mechanic	214
Assist Management Accountant	P03	214
Internal Auditor	P03	214
Assis Management Accountant	P03	214
Project Manager	P04	136
Temp Project Accountant	P10	214
Workshop Supervisor	S01	214
Corporate Communications Officer	S02	214

Job Title	Grade	Length of Service 12/13
Employment Policy Officer	S02	214
Uniformed Appointments Officer	S02	214
Estates Engineer	S02	214
Corporate Communications Officer	S02	164
Clerical Officer	Scale 1	214
Clerk Typist	Scale 1/2	214
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	24
CAD Technician	Scale 3	214
Telephonist/Receptionist	Scale 3	214
Financial Accountant	Scale 3	214
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	214
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	214
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	216
CAD Technician	Scale 3	214
Telephonist/Receptionist	Scale 3	214
Purchasing Assistant	Scale 3	214
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	171
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	141
Clerical Officer	Scale 3	80
Clerical Officer	Scale 3	65
Clerk Typist	Scale 3	29
Clerical Officer	Scale 3	22
Clerical Officer	Scale 4	214
Clerical Officer	Scale 4	214
Clerical Officer	Scale 4	214
Parts Assistant	Scale 4	171
HR Policy Administrator	Scale 4	214
Equipment Technician	Scale 5	214
Physical Training Advisor	Scale 5	214
Communications Support Technician	Scale 6	214
Temp Estates Engineer	Scale 6	214
Assistant Estates Officer	Scale 6	214
Pensions Administrator	Scale 6	204

NIFRS Agency Staff 2012 - date

Job Title	Grade	Length of Service
GIS Analyst	Scale 6	108
Statistics Officer	Scale 6	87
Storeperson	Storeperson	214
	Total as at 31.10.12	9493

Fire and Rescue Service: Road Traffic Laws

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what procedures are in place within the Fire and Rescue Service to ensure that all drivers, including agency workers, have the appropriate licence to drive the vehicle to which they are assigned; and whether he can confirm that there have been no breaches of the road traffic laws in relation to driving licence classification.

(AQW 16296/11-15)

Mr Poots: The NIFRS' Occupational Road Risk Policy outlines the procedures for checking Driving Licences.

All employees, including agency staff, who may be required to drive as part of their work activities are subject to regular licence checks by their unit head/line manager. The driving licences are confirmed as being current and applicable to the categories of vehicles required to be driven.

In addition to the above, NIFRS Human Resources Department checks the licence details supplied by the Employment Agency for Agency workers and retain a copy for record purposes.

NIFRS uses checking protocols to ensure that Road Traffic Laws are not breached.

Having checked their records, NIFRS can confirm that, currently, there is no indication of NIFRS personnel having breached the road traffic laws in relation to driving licence classification. However, there is an onus upon individuals employed by NIFRS to inform their Line Manager of any change to their licensing conditions.

Benzodiazepine Withdrawal Programme

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of people currently undertaking a Benzodiazepine Withdrawal programme; (ii) when the programme was first introduced; (iii) the number of patients who have been removed from the Benzodiazepine withdrawal programme due to an adverse reaction to the drug; (iv) the number of people who have had Benzodiazepine consumption or withdrawal stating as a contributory factor to their death.

(AQW 16299/11-15)

Mr Poots: The long term use of benzodiazepine drugs can be harmful and can affect the day to day life of patients. Benzodiazepine withdrawal programmes are currently provided by Health and Social Care Trusts in conjunction with local GPs and pharmacists and follow evidence-based benzodiazepine withdrawal protocols. I am advised that prescribing rates for benzodiazepine are significantly higher in North Belfast than others areas of Northern Ireland. As a result a benzodiazepine withdrawal programme was first introduced in the Belfast area in November 2003 following UK wide initiatives to reduce the prescribing of benzodiazepines by GP's to patients. I am advised by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust that the number of individuals currently on a withdrawal programme in the Trust area is 60.

Information detailing the number of patients who have been removed from a withdrawal programme or the number of people who have had Benzodiazepine consumption or withdrawal detailed as a contributory factor to their death is not held centrally or collected routinely.

Sleep Apnoea

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services are available for patients suffering from sleep apnea.

(AQW 16301/11-15)

Mr Poots: Patients with suspected obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA) are usually referred to a consultant in a respiratory out-patients clinic or the main Regional Respiratory Clinic at Belfast City Hospital. Once a diagnosis of OSA has been confirmed the patient may be referred for Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) treatment.

The Regional Respiratory Clinic provides diagnostic testing and reporting for OSA, including Oximetry and Limited Polysomnography (sleep study), as well as CPAP treatment and subsequent monitoring and review for complex and non-complex patients.

Charities: Funding

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain the delay in the award of funding grants to charities that provide support and services to people suffering from eating disorders; and when he will be able to confirm if such grants will be awarded for the next financial year.

(AQW 16302/11-15)

Mr Poots: Officials are assessing budgetary requirements for health and social care in 2013/14. Once this has taken place I will consider the level of funding that should be made available to voluntary and community organisations, including Eating Disorders Association (NI).

Organisations are in receipt of funding for 2012/13.

Charities: Funding

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what funding his Department provides to charitable organisations which provide support and services for people suffering from eating disorders.

(AQW 16304/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department provides an annual grant (currently £25,000) towards the central administrative expenditure of the Eating Disorders Association (NI).

Fire and Rescue Service: Uniforms

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether uniforms, including shoes, are provided to local fire officers.

(AQW 16314/11-15)

Mr Poots: Uniform items, including shoes, are provided to all uniformed personnel within NIFRS.

Fire and Rescue Service: Uniforms

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether fire stations have to buy safety shoes and then invoice for payment; and how many applications for items of uniform are outstanding.

(AQW 16316/11-15)

Mr Poots: NIFRS Uniform Stores provide uniform items, including shoes from centralised stores.

Recently however, stocks of some sizes of safety shoes were depleted pending approval of a business case for certain items of uniform. To ensure the Health and Safety of individual employees an interim measure was introduced, with effect from 5 November 2012, which agreed that NIFRS District Commands could purchase a limited number of NIFRS specification safety shoes locally.

This approval for the business case has now been given and it is intended that orders will be placed shortly to bring stock levels back to normal.

Information is not held centrally for applications for items of uniform that are outstanding.

Transport: New Hospital, Omagh

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has considered the benefits of a link road from the A5 to the new hospital in Omagh; and whether he has had any discussions with the Minister for Regional Development on this issue.

(AQW 16346/11-15)

Mr Poots: I recognise the importance of good transport links to hospital services. My Department has already provided funding for road widening and improvements to the Donaghane Roads as part of the Omagh hospital development through enabling works totalling £17million, which are currently in progress.

Additionally tenders for a new link road and bridge linking the Donaghane Road to the Bankmore Road/Cornagrade Road Roundabout will be issued to contractors shortly.

When complete, both development, funded through my capital budget, will provide a significant portion of the Southern sector of the Omagh outer ring road and will greatly increase access from the A5 to the hospital site and bring substantial benefits to the wider Omagh area.

I am planning to meet Minister Kennedy in the coming weeks to discuss the potential for a further access link road from the A5 to the new hospital.

HIV: Public Awareness Campaign

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when his Department last undertook a public awareness campaign that focused on HIV.

(AQW 16373/11-15)

Mr Poots: Raising public awareness of HIV is included in wider sexual health campaigns, the most recent being undertaken by the Health Promotion Agency in 2007. The Public Health Agency is currently developing a proposal for a sexual health public information campaign in support of my Department's Sexual Health Promotion Strategy and Action Plan which will include a focus on raising awareness of HIV for those most at risk; and on tackling discrimination and stigma associated with HIV.

HIV: Rapid Testing Services

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what developments there are to ensure that HIV Rapid Testing services are available to everyone.

(AQW 16374/11-15)

Mr Poots: In 2008 and 2010 the Chief Professional Officers in my Department issued guidance on HIV including HIV testing, to ensure that patients have access to advice and testing across a range of healthcare settings where appropriate. All patients, where there is a clinical indication, may avail of urgent laboratory test analysis.

A sub-group of the regional Sexual Health Improvement Network, established to oversee implementation of my Department's Sexual Health Promotion Strategy and Action Plan, has identified those most at risk of HIV and is considering opportunities for HIV testing in the Health and Social Care sector and other settings. In addition the Public Health Agency has provided funding to a voluntary organisation for the provision of a rapid HIV testing service for a specific high risk group; and is currently considering an approach from another organisation to reintroduce its HIV rapid testing service.

Anti-TNFs: National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence Guidelines

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the announcement that the Executive will follow National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guidelines, how his Department will allocate a specific budget for anti-tnf biologics for each indication.

(AQW 16378/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has formal links with the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) whereby Technology Appraisals and Clinical Guidelines published by the Institute are reviewed for their applicability to Northern Ireland (NI) and, where appropriate, endorsed here. To date 18 NICE technology appraisals on anti-tnfs have been endorsed by my Department for implementation in Northern Ireland. In 2012/13 the budget allocation for anti-tnfs is estimated to be £35m.

Nursing Homes/Residential Homes: Places

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the number of places, in each district council area, that remain approved for care in (i) nursing homes; (ii) private residential homes; and (iii) statutory residential homes.

(AQW 16380/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not available.

Information is available on the number of registered places in nursing homes and residential care homes in each HSC Trust. This information was requested from the Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) and is detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Number of Registered Places, by Type of Home and HSC Trust at 8th November 2012

HSC Trust	Number of Registered Places at 8th November 2012			
	Nursing Homes		Residential Homes	
	Statutory	Independent*	Statutory	Independent*
Belfast	10	2,040	334	858
Northern	0	3,153	388	603
South Eastern	0	2,469	280	878
Southern	9	2,318	129	293
Western	0	1,707	210	483
Northern Ireland	19	11,687	1,341	3,115

Source: Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA)

* Independent refers to both private and voluntary providers.

Multiagency Support Teams for Schools: East Antrim Area

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which schools within the East Antrim area (i) are included in the Multi-Agency Support Team for Schools (MASTS); (ii) have indicated that they would wish to receive support from MASTS, but have not yet been included; and (iii) have not indicated a wish to join the MASTS project.[R]

(AQW 16381/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust that:

- (i) 34 Schools are included in the MASTS scheme
- (ii) 21 Schools have indicated that they would wish to receive support from MASTS, but have not yet been included
- (iii) 9 Schools have not indicated a wish to join the MASTS Project

The names of the 64 East Antrim schools are set out in the table attached.

Please find table below in response to AQW 16381/11-15 outlining the schools in the East Antrim area who;

- i) Are included in MASTS support
 ii) Have indicated that they would wish to receive MASTS support but are not yet included
 iii) Have not indicated a wish to join the MASTS project

i)	ii)	iii)
Abbott's cross PS	Ballyclare PS	Ballycarry PS
Acorn Integrated PS	Cairncastle PS	Ballyhenry PS
Ashgrove NS	Carrick Model PS	Carnmoney PS
Ashgrove PS	Corran Integ PS	Holybank PS
Ballyclare NS	Doagh PS	Kilbride Central PS
Ballyhenry NS	Gaelscoil Eanna PS	St Anthony's PS
Ballynure PS	Glynn PS	St MacNissi's PS, Larne
Carnlough Integrated PS	Kilcoan PS	St Mary's on the Hill PS
Carrickfergus Central PS	Kings Park PS	Tildarg PS
Eden PS, Larne	Larne & Inver PS	
Earlview PS	Linn PS & NS	
Fairview PS, Ballyclare	Olderfleet PS	
Glengormley Integ PS	St Anthony's NS, Larne	
Greenisland PS	St MacNissis PS, N'abbey	
Mallusk PS	St Nicholas' PS	
Monkstown NS	Sunnylands PS	
Mossgrove PS	Toreagh PS	
Mossley NS	Upper Ballyboley PS	
Mossley PS	Whiteabbey PS	
Moyle PS, Larne	Whitehead PS & NS	
Mullaghdubh PS	Woodlawn PS	
Oakfield PS		
Parkgate PS, Ballyclare		
Rathcoole PS		
Silverstream PS & NS		
St .Bernards PS Glengormley		
St .James PS Whiteabbey		
Straid PS, Ballyclare		
Sunnylands NS, Carrickfergus		
The Thompson		
Tir na n Og PS, Ballyclare		
Victoria PS		
Whitehouse PS & NS		
Woodburn PS		
34	21	9
Total Schools in the East Antrim area = 64		

UK Home Care Association Limited Commissioning Survey 2012

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the Care is not a Commodity report by the UK Homecare Association stating that 28 percent of homecare visits commissioned from independent and voluntary sector providers are for 15 minutes or less and that 59 percent of all the visits commissioned are 30 minutes or less, what action he will take over the commissioning of short homecare visits by the Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 16408/11-15)

Mr Poots: Services provided are based on assessed need, not on minimising the length of visits.

My Department has issued Minimum Standards for Domiciliary Care Agencies (last updated in August 2011). The regulations and minimum standards for domiciliary care agencies focus on ensuring that people using the services provided are protected and the care is quality assured. The standards promote a collaborative, multi-disciplinary approach to providing quality care that is service user-centred.

My Department has also previously published the 'Survey of Home Care Service Users Northern Ireland 2009'. Nearly nine tenths (86%) of respondents rated the service they received as either 'very good' or 'good', with the majority (89%) of respondents reporting that their care worker(s) had spent the amount of time they were supposed to at their home over the 7 days prior to the survey. Nearly three quarters (72%) of respondents thought they were receiving an adequate number of hours.

Medical Appointments: Cancelled or Missed

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost to the Health Service of cancelled or missed medical appointments, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 16411/11-15)

Mr Poots: The cost to the Health Service of cancelled or missed medical appointments can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

However, information on the number of consultant led appointments attended, cancelled by the patient (Could Not Attend) and missed by the patient (Did Not Attend), in each of the last four years, is shown in the table below.

Financial Year(1)	No. of Appointments	No. of Cancelled Appointments	No. of Missed Appointments
2008/09	1,523,802	182,694	184,792
2009/10	1,503,529	180,067	172,877
2010/11	1,502,611	186,260	171,740
2011/12	1,513,998	184,718	157,781

Source: Quarterly Outpatient Activity Return (QOAR) Part 1

Note (1): My department began collecting outpatient cancellation data on an appointment basis from the beginning of 2008/09. Consequently, information on the number of missed and cancelled appointments is only available from 2008/09.

Gerry McGeough

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in relation to the alleged neglect of Gerry McGeough, to detail the issues with his medication which arose on 1 October 2012.

(AQW 16433/11-15)

Mr Poots: Mr McGeough manages his own medication and is also responsible for reordering it. All prisoners who are responsible for their own medication are made aware of the need to re-order medication at least 48 working hours before it is required. Mr McGeough did not request his medication until Saturday, 29th September; therefore it could not be ordered until 1st October and was issued on the 2nd October. This service is in keeping with what is available in the community and on this occasion Mr McGeough failed to provide sufficient notice for the medication to be re-ordered in time.

Social Care Services: Referrals and Assessments of Children

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of referrals and assessments of children carried out by Social Care services over the last three years, broken down by geographical area; (ii) the number of children who have been assessed to be in need in each area; and (iii) the number of children in each area who are the subject of a child protection plan.

(AQW 16453/11-15)

Mr Poots: The figures requested are detailed in Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3, respectively. These and other children's social care activity statistics for Northern Ireland are published on the DHSSPS website at:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-cib/statistics_and_research-cib-pub/children_statistics/stats-cib-children_order.htm

Table 1: Referrals and Assessments by HSC Trust (2009/10 to 2011/12)

HSC Trust	2009/10		2010/11		2011/12	
	Referrals	Assess-ments	Referrals	Assess-ments	Referrals	Assess-ments
Belfast HSC Trust	6,416	4,434	6,879	5,478	7,260	5,584
Northern HSC Trust	7,851	5,827	9,271	6,494	8,897	6,928
South Eastern HSC Trust	6,596	4,867	6,503	4,925	6,874	5,407
Southern HSC Trust	6,021	4,912	7,022	5,452	7,047	5,669
Western HSC Trust	4,809	3,767	4,772	4,031	5,438	4,507
Northern Ireland	31,693	23,807	34,447	26,380	35,516	28,095

Source: DHSSPS Children Order Returns N1 & N2; Children may be referred more than once; years reported cover the period from 1 April to 31 March.

Table 2: Children Assessed to be in Need by HSC Trust (2009/10 to 2011/12)

HSC Trust	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Belfast HSC Trust	4,434	5,382	4,031
Northern HSC Trust	2,654	2,631	4,116
South Eastern HSC Trust	2,516	2,852	3,266
Southern HSC Trust	3,542	3,822	4,288
Western HSC Trust	3,348	3,707	3,631
Northern Ireland	16,494	18,394	19,332

Source: DHSSPS Children Order Return N6; excludes children awaiting assessment; years reported cover the period from 1 April to 31 March.

Table 3: Children on the Child Protection Register at 31 March (2010 to 2012)

HSC Trust	2010	2011	2012
Belfast HSC Trust	586	555	474
Northern HSC Trust	372	452	458
South Eastern HSC Trust	709	686	529
Southern HSC Trust	461	473	363
Western HSC Trust	229	235	303
Northern Ireland	2,357	2,401	2,127

Source: DHSSPS Children Order Return CPR1; all children whose names are on the Child Protection Register are required to have a Child Protection Plan in place;

Out-of-hours Ambulance Cover: Magherafelt and Cookstown

Mr I McCreagh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what out-of-hours ambulance cover is in place in the (i) Magherafelt District Council area; and (ii) Cookstown District Council area.
(AQW 16455/11-15)

Mr Poole: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) provides 24/7 emergency ambulance services 52 weeks a year. The shift profiles for the emergency response resources in the ambulance stations operating in Magherafelt and Cookstown District Council areas are shown in the tables below.

Magherafelt District Council**Magherafelt Ambulance Station**

Monday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 0730 to 1930hours 1 x A&E 0900 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 1930 to 0730hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours
Tuesday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 0730 to 1930hours 1 x A&E 0900 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 1930 to 0730hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours
Wednesday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 0730 to 1930hours 1 x A&E 0900 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 1930 to 0730hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours
Thursday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 0730 to 1930hours 1 x A&E 0900 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 1930 to 0730hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours
Friday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 0730 to 1930hours 1 x A&E 0900 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 1930 to 0730hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours
Saturday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 0730 to 1930hours 1 x A&E 0900 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 1930 to 0730hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours
Sunday	1 x A&E 0800 to 1830hours 1 x A&E 0730 to 1930hours 1 x A&E 0900 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 1930 to 0730hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours

One rapid response vehicle (RRV) provides 10 hours of cover daily distributed between 0800 hours and midnight.

Cookstown District Council**Cookstown Ambulance Station**

Monday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours
Tuesday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours
Wednesday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours
Thursday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours
Friday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours
Saturday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours
Sunday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours

One RRV provides 10 hours of cover daily distributed between 0800 hours and midnight.

It is important to note that the NIAS at all times deploys the nearest available resource to emergency calls and it is quite possible that the response to an incident in either of these District Council areas could be provided by a resource based in another area.

Suicide Prevention: Ministerial Co-ordination Group

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the membership of the Ministerial Co-ordination Group on Suicide Prevention; and to outline the work that has been carried out by the Group.

(AQW 16461/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Ministerial Co-ordination Group is chaired by the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and membership includes: OFMDFM (Junior Ministers); DE (Minister) DARD (Minister); DCAL (Minister); DRD (Minister); DEL (Minister); DOJ (Minister); DSD (Minister); PHA (Chief Executive); Suicide Strategy Implementation Body (Chair) and DHSSPS (Officials).

The role of the Group is to ensure that suicide prevention is a priority across relevant Government Departments and to enhance cross-departmental co-operation on the issue. Its functions are to: monitor and report progress on relevant departmental actions on suicide prevention; determine additional actions; consider wider actions for reducing risk factors associated with suicide; and consider cross-departmental actions to improve the psychological resilience of vulnerable groups.

The Group has helped to ensure a multi-agency response to a suicide cluster in the Colin area which, in turn, has led to the development of emergency community response plans across all areas of Northern Ireland. It has also directed a number of departments to work together to develop a joint programme for addressing suicide and mental wellbeing through sporting and rural organisations. This work is currently progressing.

The Group has also identified a range of ongoing activity within departments that is relevant to suicide prevention. This includes the development of rural "health checks", suicide awareness raising by the National Union of Students, joint health and education work on a pupils' emotional health and wellbeing programme, and Department of Justice support for the prison "Listeners" scheme.

Welfare Reform: Impact on Suicide Rates

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions have taken place between his Department and the Department for Social Development on the impact of Welfare Reform on suicide rates.

(AQW 16462/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has not discussed the potential impact of welfare reforms on suicide with the Department of Social Development. However, I intend to put this issue on the agenda for the next meeting of the Ministerial Co-ordination Group on Suicide Prevention. The Minister for Social Development is a member of this group.

The Protect Life Strategy stresses the importance of training in suicide awareness and mental health issues for frontline staff who deal with potentially vulnerable people. I would therefore encourage Social Security Agency staff to avail of the training that is available.

I should also note that there is substantial evidence that work is good for mental health and wellbeing. Should the welfare reforms help in placing more people in paid or voluntary work, then this will generally benefit their long term mental health.

Mental Health: Accommodation for Under-18s

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the secure accommodation which is available for under 18s with mental health issues.

(AQW 16463/11-15)

Mr Poots: Beechcroft, the Regional Child and Adolescent Mental Health Inpatient Service, based in Belfast, provides inpatient care for under 18s with mental health issues. There is no secure accommodation within the facility.

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people (i) diagnosed with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome; and (ii) awaiting surgery related to this condition in each Health and Social Care Trust area in each of the last five years.

(AQW 16486/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) Information on the number of people diagnosed with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome is not available.

It is however possible to detail the number of admissions to hospital in each of the last five years where Polycystic Ovary Syndrome was recorded as the primary diagnosis; this information is shown in the table below:-

HSC Trust	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Belfast	*	5	9	5	*
South Eastern	*	*	*	*	0
Northern	5	6	*	7	*
Southern	8	10	6	*	8
Western	*	*	*	*	5
Northern Ireland	19	25	21	21	20

Source:- Hospital Inpatient System

Figures do not include patients who attended an Accident and Emergency Department and were not subsequently admitted. Deaths and discharges have been used to approximate admissions.

* Cells containing values less than five have been masked to protect patient confidentiality

- (ii) Information on the waiting times for patients awaiting surgery related to Polycystic Ovary Syndrome is not available, as waiting time information is collected on the basis of the type of procedure the patient is waiting for, rather than the condition that the patient is diagnosed with.

Rathmoyle Site

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the actions that the Northern Health and Social Care Trust has taken in regard to the Rathmoyle site over the last twelve months; and what correspondence it has had with the Housing Executive on the issue.

(AQW 16500/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Northern Trust that they submitted a revised business case to the Northern Area Supporting People Partnership (NASPP) in May 2012. The NASPP is a collaborative arrangement, principally between the Trust, the Health and Social Board and the NIHE, in the planning and developing of supported living schemes.

The Trust has also provided NIHE with maps of the Rathmoyle site and now awaits their nomination of a housing association to take forward the development of this scheme.

The Trust also intends to engage fully with service users and their families on possible options to meet the future day care needs of those currently attending Rathmoyle Resource Centre.

Rathmoyle Residential Home, Ballycastle

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people used the services of Rathmoyle Residential Home, Ballycastle, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 16501/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is not available centrally within the DHSSPS and was requested directly from the Northern Health & Social Care Trust.

Table 1 below details the number of people who used the services of Rathmoyle Residential Home in each of the last five years.

Table 1

Year	Long Term Admissions	Respite	Total
2008	6	11	17
2009	4	12	16
2010	9	8	17
2011	4	14	18
2012	0	20 To Date	20 To Date

Source: Northern HSC Trust

Rathmoyle Residential Home, Ballycastle

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will provide additional care in the community in parallel with the changes to Rathmoyle Residential Home, Ballycastle.

(AQW 16502/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Northern Trust that they intend to reinvest the resources released from the closure of the home towards providing care and support to the residents of the Supported Living facility, when completed.

In addition, the Trust is currently developing a re-ablement domiciliary service for the Ballycastle area with the aim of reducing long-term dependency on domiciliary care and making existing resources available to a greater number of people.

The Trust has also developed a range of Intermediate Care services designed to support people at the time of hospital discharge or to prevent hospital admission. These will include Assessment Beds, Community Rehabilitation and Stroke Teams and a Hospital Diversion Team, all aimed at supporting more people at home rather than in nursing or residential homes.

It is the Trust's intention to fully engage with service users and their families on possible options to meet the future daycare needs of each person currently attending Rathmoyle Resource Centre, as part of the planning process.

Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what level of financial support his Department has provided to support each action plan to tackle domestic and sexual violence and abuse since 2005.

(AQW 16506/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has made available financial support of circa £11m since 2005 specifically for the purpose of tackling domestic and sexual violence.

A further £1.5m capital has also been provided by my Department to build a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) at Antrim Area Hospital, which is due to open April 2013.

Women's Aid: Funding

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what level of funding his Department has provided to Women's Aid since 'Tackling Violence at Home; Action Plan Number 1, 2005-2007', broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 16507/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department provides funding for organisations and projects with a regional focus and in this context NI Women's Aid Federation has received funding of approximately £2.46m since 2005 in respect of tackling domestic and sexual violence. It is not possible to break this down by HSC Trust area.

My Department also made funding of £46k available to Foyle Women's Aid for the delivery of a specific project 'Risk to Response'.

Late Payment Directive 2011/7/EU

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given that the revised Late Payment Directive 2011/7/EU is coming into effect in March 2013, why the Health and Social Care Regional Procurement Board has determined that its payment terms would move to standard terms of 30 days payment with effect only from September 2013.

(AQW 16519/11-15)

Mr Poots: The decision to move to standard 30 days payment terms with effect from September 2013 was made at a meeting of the Regional Procurement Board in June 2012. Subsequently, the consultation was launched in September 2012 on implementing the Late Payment Directive 2011/7/EU in the UK from March 2013. Legal advice is being sought to determine the impact of the revised Late Payment Directive on the timing of the implementation of the standard 30 days payment terms.

Fire and Rescue Service: BBC Investigation

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the claim in the BBC investigation that the former Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) employee, John McGrath, ran his own company called Benco, (i) what investigation was carried out into Benco's operations; (ii) whether other NIFRS employees were investigated for involvement in Benco; (iii) what happened to Mr McGrath's records of NIFRS uniforms and equipment; and (iv) did the recent investigations check records dating back prior to Mr McGrath's death.

(AQW 16521/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) As Benco Ltd was a private company dealing mainly with other private companies Internal Audit did not have the authority to investigate business transactions between two private companies. However, where the allegations suggested contact between Benco or one of its customers and the NIFRS, Internal Audit attempted to establish if the allegation could be verified.

- (ii) At no time was it alleged either through the investigative process or associated interviews that any other NIFRS personnel were involved with Benco.
- (iii) Records of NIFRS uniforms and equipment are held on the NIFRS stores system. Internal Audit was not aware of any personal records held by Mr McGrath.
- (iv) My Department looked at NIFRS store activities during 2008/09. Checks were carried out on equipment issued to NIFRS personnel and any variances were thoroughly investigated.

Fire and Rescue Service: Orange Halls

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many Orange Halls are currently being investigated for using materials originally purchased for Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) training purposes; (ii) how many NIFRS staff members, past and present, are being investigated for using NIFRS materials to furnish or heat Orange Halls; and (iii) whether any of the current allegations were raised by a Board member up to ten years ago.

(AQW 16522/11-15)

Mr Poots: It would be inappropriate to comment in detail on the scope of an ongoing investigation. I can confirm however, that some allegations I have received date back many years.

Fire and Rescue Service: Staffing

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many staff members who had previously retired, or been made redundant, are working for the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service as full-time employees or agency workers.

(AQW 16523/11-15)

Mr Poots: The following table outlines the current number of Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) staff who had previously retired and re-appointed as full-time employees or agency staff:

Staff who had previously Retired and Re-appointed as NIFRS Full-Time Employee	Staff who had previously Retired and Re-appointed as Agency Staff
3	2

I can confirm that no NIFRS staff members have been made redundant.

Budgets

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any of his Department's budget has been pooled with those of other Departments or with agencies outside the remit of his Department; and to provide further details.

(AQW 16527/11-15)

Mr Poots: None of my Department's budget has been pooled with those of other Departments or with agencies outside the remit of my Department, on the basis that there is no enabling legislation to facilitate such an approach. Notwithstanding this, my Department does work collaboratively with other Departments on a range of joint initiatives in order to address common needs and objectives.

Health and Social Care Board: Services

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which services the Health and Social Care Board is commissioning on a cross-departmental basis.

(AQW 16528/11-15)

Mr Poots: The commissioning of health and social care services by the Health and Social Care Board is not conducted on a cross departmental basis. It is in response to a Commissioning Plan Direction issued by my Department setting out my priorities to the commissioners on an annual basis. The Direction sets out the framework within which the HSCB and the PHA commission health and social care services to meet the identified needs of the population within the available resources.

In response to the Direction, the Health and Social Care Board produces in conjunction with the Public Health Agency a Commissioning Plan which identifies the health and social services to be commissioned from a range of service providers, and the resources to be deployed.

Social Pedagogy: Degree

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the value of a degree in social pedagogy for people who are employed in the children's sector.

(AQW 16533/11-15)

Mr Poots: All social workers must have a Degree in Social Work to practise in Trusts' Children's Services. Following qualification, social workers will receive further training appropriate to their job role.

The principles and methods of social pedagogy are relevant for social workers working with children in care settings. Training in social pedagogy equips social workers with additional skills and approaches to practice, but it is not necessary to study this to degree level.

The principles and methods of social pedagogy underpin one of several therapeutic models currently being used by social workers in residential childcare in NI. Its value as a method of working with looked after children has been positively evaluated and specific training is available for social workers who use this approach in practice.

Sexual and Domestic Violence

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what training is given to (i) social workers; (ii) GPs; and (iii) Accident and Emergency staff to ensure that they comply with his Department's policy on sexual and domestic violence; and what enquiry targets they have in place.

(AQW 16535/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) All social work students receive training in assessing and managing risk, which includes situations where domestic and/or sexual violence is suspected. Training for social workers at post qualifying level depends on their job role. The Public Protection Arrangements in Northern Ireland includes training on sexual and domestic violence as these are important aspects for social workers and other disciplines to consider when assessing risk.
- (ii) The Inter-Ministerial Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence has published a joint Action Plan for 2012/13. One of the key actions of this plan is to introduce routine enquiry in GP surgeries; this is planned to commence by September 2013.
- (iii) The joint Action Plan also introduces a new initiative of a Targeted Enquiry on domestic violence in Accident and Emergency Units. This will include training for nursing, medical and radiography staff. The training is scheduled to commence in January 2013 for two Trusts who will pilot the new procedures from April 2013.

The roll out of this training will be monitored by the Regional Strategy Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence who will ensure that training is delivered to the required standards to all relevant staff in all its member organisations.

Fire and Rescue Service: Expense Claims

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money has been paid out as a result of the improper claims highlighted in the report on whole-time expense claims in the Fire and Rescue Service.

(AQW 16540/11-15)

Mr Poots: No money has been paid out as a result of improper claims. The investigation into the wholetime recruitment overtime and expense claims indicated that there was insufficient evidence to categorise the issues identified as being actual, attempted or suspected fraud.

Out-of-hours Ambulance Cover: North Down and Ards

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what out-of-hours ambulance cover is in place in the (i) North Down Borough Council area; and (ii) Ards District Council area.

(AQW 16557/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) provides 24/7 emergency ambulance services 52 weeks a year. The shift profiles for the emergency response resources in the ambulance stations operating in North Down Borough Council and Ards District Council areas are shown in the tables below.

North Down Borough Council

Bangor Ambulance Station

Monday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 1930 to 0730hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours
Tuesday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 1930 to 0730hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours
Wednesday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 0930 to 2100hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours

Thursday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 1030 to 2200hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours
Friday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 1930 to 0730hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours
Saturday	1 x A&E 0730 to 1930hours 1 X A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 1930 to 1930hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours
Sunday	1 X A&E 0800 to 1930hours 1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours

Two rapid response vehicles (RRVs) provide 16 hours of cover daily distributed between 0700 hours and 0200 hours.

Ards District Council

Ards Ambulance Station

Monday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 0930 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 1930 to 0730hours
Tuesday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 0730 to 1930hours 1 x A&E 0930 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 1930 to 0730hours
Wednesday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 0730 to 1930hours 1 x A&E 1030 to 2200hours 1 x A&E 1930 to 0730hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours
Thursday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 1030 to 2200hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours
Friday	1 x A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 1030 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 1930 to 0730hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0800hours
Saturday	1 x A&E 0730 to 1930hours 1 X A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 1930 to 0730hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0700hours
Sunday	1 X A&E 0800 to 2000hours 1 x A&E 0730 to 1930hours 1 x A&E 1930 to 0730hours 1 x A&E 2000 to 0700hours

One RRV provides 10 hours of cover daily distributed between 0800 hours and midnight.

It is important to realise that NIAS at all times deploys the nearest available resource to emergency calls and it is quite possible that the response to an incident in either of these Council areas could be provided by a resource based in another area.

Adult Hospice Facility

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what contribution his Department is making, or intending to make, to the provision of the new adult hospice facility.

(AQW 16559/11-15)

Mr Poots: Due to budgetary constraints, no capital funding for the voluntary and community sector is available within my Department at present.

However, I have asked my officials to look urgently at the possibility of introducing a capital grant scheme.

The NI Hospice regional organisation currently receives Departmental core funding to support central administrative costs, amounting to £134k per annum. In addition, it receives funding for the provision of palliative care services from various HSC bodies. In year ending March 2011, this amounted to £3.2m.

Multiagency Support Teams

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of Multi-Agency Support Teams; and whether he intends to further the scheme.

(AQW 16588/11-15)

Mr Poots: I remain committed to providing the best possible service to those children who are most in need and the use of multi-agency and multi-disciplinary approaches is in line with policy across all Departments, where it can deliver better outcomes and where appropriate resources are available.

The Health and Social Care Board, in association with the Public Health Agency, have initiated a review of the Multi Agency / Multi Disciplinary Teams to ensure that resources are being used effectively.

That regional review is well under way and is focused on the development of a principles-based regional model. A key aim is to capture the good practice already in existence and share it across the teams in order to achieve a standardised regional service across Northern Ireland.

Mental Health: Custodial Settings for Under-18s

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for each of the last five years, to detail how many under 18s have been placed in custodial settings due to mental health issues, without having committed an offence, broken down by (i) location; (ii) year; and (iii) age.

(AQW 16590/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is assumed that this question relates to the number of persons under 18 who have been detained under the Mental Health Order (NI) 1986. Information on the number of persons detained under the Order broken down by age is not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

However, information is available on the total number of persons detained in mental health hospitals under the Order. This information is detailed in the table below.

Table 1: Compulsory Admissions Under Mental Health Order (NI) 1986 by Hospital/HSC Trust (2008/09 – 2011/12)

Hospital/HSC Trust	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Beechcroft CAMHS	11	14	14	20
Knockbracken Healthcare Park	156	167	192	89
Mater Infirmorum	40	43	41	68
Muckamore Abbey	16	38	39	24
Windsor House	41	26	47	23
Belfast HSC Trust	264	288	333	224
Causeway	13	51	45	64
Holywell	170	167	213	214
Whiteabbey PNU1	27	15	-	-
Northern HSC Trust	210	233	258	278
Ards2	119	26	-	-
Downshire	49	51	52	37
Lagan Valley PNU	36	31	46	40
Ulster MHU	-	79	75	27
South Eastern HSC Trust	204	187	173	104
Bluestone	121	124	140	184
Longstone	*	*	7	*
St Luke's	*	*	58	*
Southern HSC Trust	188	196	205	252
Gransha	76	64	*	78

Hospital/HSC Trust	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Lakeview	-	-	*	*
Tyrone & Fermanagh	67	75	60	52
Waterside	-	-	*	*
Western HSC Trust	143	139	95	134
Northern Ireland	1,009	1,043	1,064	992

- 1 Whiteabbey PNU closed 23rd December 2009.
- 2 All mental health services in the Ards Hospital were transferred to a new facility in the Ulster Hospital (Ulster MHU) on 3rd June 2009.
- 3 In order to avoid personal disclosure an '**' represents a cell count of less than 4. In addition, where the anonymised figure can be deduced from the totals, the next smallest figure has also been anonymised.

Fire and Rescue Service: Staff Cars

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many cars are supplied by the Fire and Rescue Service to staff; (ii) to list the positions of the staff who are in receipt of these cars; (iii) whether the Service has a preferred supplier of cars; and (iv) when the contract (a) was awarded; and (b) will expire.

(AQW 16603/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- Currently Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service have 101 cars allocated to members of staff.
- The attached list details the post and role of each staff member allocated with a car. See Annex A
- NIFRS does not have a preferred supplier for cars. The procurement of cars is carried out via a Further Competition under Government Procurement Service (GPS) Framework Agreement RM859.
- The current framework runs from 01February 2011 to 31January 2014.

Annex A

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service Car Allocation by Rank and Posting

Rank	Posting	Number
Chief Fire Officer	Chief Fire Officer	1
Assistant Chief Fire Officer	Support Services	1
Assistant Chief Fire Officer	Safety Services	1
Area Commander	Operations	1
Area Commander	Training and Organisational Development	1
Area Commander	Area Command, North, South, East and West	4
Group Commander	Occupational H&S and Welfare, Community Development	1
Group Commander	Operations Secretariat	1
Group Commander	Community Development	1
Group Commander	Operations Risk Management	1
Group Commander	Technical Development	1
Group Commander	Emergency Response	1
Group Commander	Training & Organisational Development	1
Group Commander	Operations	4
Group Commander	Safety	4
Group Commander	Personnel & Training	4
Group Commander	World Police & Fire Games (short-term issue)	1
Assistant Group Commander	Community Development	2

Rank	Posting	Number
Assistant Group Commander	Communications Officer	1
Assistant Group Commander	Operations Assurance	1
Assistant Group Commander	Operations Risk Management	1
Assistant Group Commander	Emergency Response	1
Assistant Group Commander	Emergency Planning	1
Assistant Group Commander	Health and Safety	1
Assistant Group Commander	Technical Development	1
Assistant Group Commander	Training & Organisational Development	1
Assistant Group Commander	Safety	4
Assistant Group Commander	District Commander	13
Station Commander	Operations	13
Station Commander	Safety	13
Station Commander	Personnel & Training	13
Station Commander	District Command	1
Multi-user	Desertcreat Project team-short term issue	1
Multi-user	Desertcreat Project team- short term issue	1
Multi-user	SRT (Specialist Rescue Team)	1
Multi-user	Estates	1
Multi-user	Regional Control Centre	1

Fire and Rescue Service: Supply of Tyres

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) whether the supply of tyres to the Fire and Rescue Service is on a contractual basis; (ii) to name the current supplier; and (iii) when the contract (a) was awarded; and (b) will expire.

(AQW 16604/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The supply of tyres to Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service is from a Framework Contract set up by the Central Procurement Directorate, Department of Finance and Personnel.
- (ii) The Framework Contract is with several suppliers:
 ATS Euromaster;
 Charles Hurst;
 Goodyear;
 Modern Tyres;
 Philip White;
 Wells Tyres.
- NIFRS currently uses several of the above suppliers based on a mix of lowest cost and then the nearest location of supplier to the vehicle/workshop requiring the tyres.
- (iii) The Framework Contract runs from 25 November 2010 to 24 November 2014.

Fire and Rescue Service: Code of Conduct

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline (i) the section of the Fire and Rescue Service Code of Conduct that allows senior personnel to receive corporate gifts; (ii) whether this section of the Code of Conduct has been changed in the last five years; and (iii) if so, when and by whom it was changed.

(AQW 16605/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) Section 6 of the NIFRS Staff Code of Conduct Code sets out guidance on the acceptance of corporate gifts, and states the following:

Integrity

- 6 Staff of the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service should not use their official position to receive, agree to accept or attempt to obtain any payment or other consideration for doing, or not doing, anything or showing favour, or disfavour, to any person. They should not receive benefits of any kind from a third party which might reasonably be seen to compromise their personal judgement and integrity. Under the Prevention of Corruption Act 1916, employees of public bodies may be required to prove that the receipt of payment or other consideration from someone seeking to obtain a contract is not corrupt.

Further guidance is also set out in the Guidance on Offers and the Acceptance of Gifts, Hospitality Awards, Prizes and Sponsorship (September 2009).

- (ii) and (iii)

NIFRS Staff Code of Conduct has not been amended since August 2006.

Liverpool Care Pathway

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any Health and Social Care Trusts or hospitals have received financial rewards for placing terminally-ill patients on the Liverpool Care Pathway.

(AQW 16641/11-15)

Mr Poots: No Health and Social Care Trust or hospital in Northern Ireland has received financial rewards for placing terminally ill patients on the Liverpool Care Pathway.

Suicide Rates

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 15479/11-15, what plans he has to facilitate the co-ordination of these services and resources.

(AQW 16651/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Public Health Agency is responsible for implementing the Protect Life Strategy. The co-ordination of suicide prevention and mental health promotion services and resources is undertaken by the Agency with the support of the Belfast Trust, and working in conjunction with local community groups.

The Public Health Agency contracts the East Belfast Community Development Agency (EBCDA) to provide support for people bereaved through suicide and to supply information on suicide prevention in East Belfast in order to increase co-ordination and joined up working in that part of the city. It has been agreed that a strategy to address suicide should be developed for East Belfast. The Agency is working with EBCDA to establish how this can best be taken forward and to determine the associated resource implications. EBCDA are hosting another public meeting on 19 November 2012 to progress this work.

Accident & Emergency Units: Card-before-you-leave Scheme

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the Card Before You Leave Scheme at Accident & Emergency sites.

(AQW 16652/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has undertaken an evaluation of the operation and effectiveness of the Card Before You Leave scheme. The report of the evaluation is expected to be completed by the end of the year. Any issues emerging from this review will be progressed through the joint Public Health Agency (PHA) and HSCB Self Harm Working Group.

Regional Health and Social Care Board

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the Regional Health and Social Care Board is pressing ahead with its preparations for the introduction of a Regional Service, given that it is still in discussion with NIPSA and that a grievance has been lodged.

(AQW 16653/11-15)

Mr Poots: The New Regional Out of Hours Emergency Social Work Service proposes moving from a model which largely relies on volunteers to provide the service outside working hours to a managed service with salaried staff. This enhances the model currently provided by the Belfast Trust, incorporates the South Eastern Trust, and extends to cover Northern Ireland. A single team, managed by the Belfast Trust, will be established, and will operate as a managed network across the 5 Trusts. This will not only provide improved governance and management arrangements, but will also provide a local presence where there is a 'call out'. These new arrangements are due to come into effect on 1 February 2013. As with any new arrangements, development has to continue in tandem with ongoing discussions with interested bodies. The lodgement of grievances must be dealt with within the grievance process.

Neurological Services: Referrals

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many referrals to neurology services have been made in each of the last three years; (ii) the average waiting time to receive a neurology appointment; and (iii) whether one neurologist is sufficient to cope with the demand for the service.

(AQW 16726/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The table below details the total number of referrals for a first consultant-led appointment in the Neurology specialty in each of the last three years.

Financial Year	Total No. of Referrals
2009/10	15,600
2010/11	15,275
2011/12	14,904

Source: Departmental Return Referrals

- (ii) Outpatient services in the Neurology specialty are provided at all HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland. Waiting times for a first outpatient appointment are collected by my Department on a quarterly basis by aggregate time band. It is therefore not possible to calculate average waiting time, but the median waiting time band, a similar statistical measure, can be provided. The median waiting time for a first outpatient appointment in the Neurology specialty at 30th June 2012, the most recent quarter for which official statistics are available was the 'greater than 6 weeks but waiting no longer than 9 weeks' (> 6 to 9 weeks) time band.

Inpatient services in the Neurology specialty are provided at the Belfast and South Eastern HSC Trusts. My Department collects waiting times for inpatient admission on a patient level basis each quarter. This allows the average waiting times to be calculated. The average waiting time for inpatient admission in the Neurology specialty at 30th June 2012, the most recent quarter for which official statistics are available was 44.4 weeks.

Data on waiting times for a first outpatient appointment and inpatient admission, presented by HSC Trust, specialty and time band, are published on a quarterly basis in the Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics publications – Outpatient Waiting Times and Inpatient Waiting Times, respectively. Data relating to the position at 30th September 2012 are available from 29th November 2012 and can be found at the following link:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats/waiting_times_main/stats-waiting-times.htm

- (iii) The Health and Social Care Board is presently undertaking an evaluation of the recommendations contained in the Review of Adult Neurology Services in Northern Ireland. A summary report on progress towards the implementation of the recommendations (May 2012) indicated that there were 22.6 Working Time Equivalent (WTE) consultant neurologists in post in HSC Trusts across Northern Ireland.

Nursing Services: Consultation

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the consultation on 'District Nursing Service for Today and Tomorrow' has not been published.

(AQW 16769/11-15)

Mr Poots: The consultation on 'A District Nursing Service for Today and Tomorrow' A Review of District Nursing in Northern Ireland has not been published to date as the consultation responses are still being considered by my Department in the context of major strategies, including 'Transforming Your Care' which were launched after the document was first developed. The final document will be issued in the New Year.

Freedom of Information Requests

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of Freedom of Information requests received by his Department in each year since 2007; (ii) the proportion of requests each year that were not answered within the time limit; (iii) the number of requests currently outstanding by more than (a) one to two months (b) three to four months; (c) five to six months; (d) seven to twelve months; and (e) more than twelve months.

(AQW 16780/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested from 2007 to 2011 is shown below.

Year	Number of FOI Requests Received by DHSSPS	% Late
2007	143	14
2008	150	15

Year	Number of FOI Requests Received by DHSSPS	% Late
2009	140	8
2010	112	8
2011	171	12

The Department currently has one Freedom of Information request outstanding by more than one to two months. There are none outstanding for the periods quoted at b), c), d) and e) above.

Abortion Guidelines

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has a publication date set for the release of the guidance document on abortion so that health professionals do not have to operate in a legal vacuum.

(AQW 16843/11-15)

Mr Poots: There is not a legal vacuum - it is not possible to confirm a publication date at this time for guidance for professionals on termination of pregnancy. I will only publish guidance when I am content that it is fit for purpose and compatible with criminal law.

Mid-Ulster Hospital: Inpatient Beds

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) acute; and (ii) non-acute inpatient beds that were available at the Mid-Ulster Hospital, at 14 November 2012; and in which wards they were situated.

(AQW 16895/11-15)

Mr Poots: At 14 November 2012, there were i) 27 acute and ii) 3 non-acute inpatient beds at the Mid-Ulster Hospital. All of these beds were situated in the MUTS (Elderly) Ward.

Department of Justice

Gerry McGeough

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether Gerry McGeough is on dirty protest; (ii) when the protest commenced; and (iii) about what he is protesting.

(AQW 16235/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): 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 Service: Code of Conduct and Discipline

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 14790/11-15, whether the document or its content has been supplied to any individual, body or agency, including the judiciary and legal representatives.

(AQW 16239/11-15)

Mr Ford: With the exception of the responses previously provided to the Member on this matter, the Northern Ireland Prison Service holds no record of the document or its contents being supplied to any other individual, body or agency, including the judiciary and legal representatives.

Prisoners: Drug Debts

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 11413/11-15, to detail (i) whether a full investigation has been conducted in relation to the allegations; (ii) the level of staff who carried out the investigation; and (iii) how long it took.

(AQW 16241/11-15)

Mr Ford: The allegation in question was thoroughly investigated.

The investigation was led by a Governor 3 assisted by a Governor 5 and two Principal Officers.

The investigation commenced on 27 April 2011 and concluded on 15 July 2011.

Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland: Serious Case Reviews

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he has the authority to request a serious case review of a case of serious risk, even if it does not fall within the terms of Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland guidance.

(AQW 16244/11-15)

Mr Ford: The basis for instigating a serious case review under the public protection arrangements is provided for in the guidance to agencies issued under Article 50 of the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008. That guidance requires the agencies to commission a serious case review in defined circumstances. While I could ask the agencies to hold a review, I do not believe that there are grounds for a serious case review in this instance.

Hydebank Wood: Confinement of Prisoners

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Justice to detail how many prisoners at Hydebank Wood were placed in cellular confinement for a period of seven days or more during (a) 2009; (b) 2010; (c) 2011; and (d) 2012, including instances in which a prisoner was placed in cellular confinement on more than one charge, meaning that more than seven days were spent in confinement consecutively, broken down by (i) the number of consecutive days each prisoner spent in confinement at any one time; (ii) the starting and finishing date; (iii) gender; and (iv) the adjudication reasons for the confinement in each case.

(AQW 16290/11-15)

Mr Ford:

2009

Adjudication Date	Gender	Prison Rule 38 Paragraph	Award in days
03/01/2009	Male	22 Disobeys an order	10
22/01/2009	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	10
25/01/2009	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
28/01/2009	Male	12 Unauthorised article	10
29/01/2009	Male	4 Commits any other assault	10
02/02/2009	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
24/02/2009	Male	12 Unauthorised article	10
08/03/2009	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
09/03/2009	Male	4 Commits any other assault	7
14/03/2009	Male	12 Unauthorised article	8
12/04/2009	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
21/04/2009	Male	14 Damage prison property	10
23/04/2009	Male	16 Foul and abusive	7
02/05/2009	Male	7 Endangers H&S	7
17/05/2009	Male	12 Unauthorised article	10
31/05/2009	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
31/05/2009	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
09/07/2009	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
13/07/2009	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
14/07/2009	Male	25 Attempts or incites/assists another prisoner to commit or attempt to commit an offence against Prison Discipline	14
20/07/2009	Male	25 Attempts or incites/assists another prisoner to commit or attempt to commit an offence against Prison Discipline	14
20/07/2009	Male	25 Attempts or incites/assists another prisoner to commit or attempt to commit an offence against Prison Discipline	14
20/07/2009	Male	25 Attempts or incites/assists another prisoner to commit or attempt to commit an offence against Prison Discipline	14
22/07/2009	Male	3 Assaults any other person/prisoner	7

Adjudication Date	Gender	Prison Rule 38 Paragraph	Award in days
30/07/2009	Male	25 Attempts or incites/assists another prisoner to commit or attempt to commit an offence against Prison Discipline	14
07/08/2009	Female	12 Unauthorised article	7
23/08/2009	Male	19 Prepares/manufactures/ drugs etc	7
07/09/2009	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
10/09/2009	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
17/09/2009	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
21/09/2009	Male	16 Foul and abusive	7
14/11/2009	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
24/11/2009	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
26/11/2009	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
08/12/2009	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
14/12/2009	Male	4 Commits any other assault	10
18/12/2009	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
22/12/2009	Male	14 Damage prison property	7
28/12/2009	Male	12 Unauthorised article	8
28/12/2009	Male	12 Unauthorised article	10
28/12/2009	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
Total no. of inmates - 32			

2010

Adjudication Date	Gender	Prison Rule 38 Paragraph	Award in days
16/01/2010	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
18/01/2010	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
19/01/2010	Male	14 Damage prison property	7
27/02/2010	Male	12 Unauthorised article	14
01/03/2010	Male	14 Damage prison property	7
02/03/2010	Male	3 Assaults any other person/prisoner	8
02/03/2010	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
02/03/2010	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
02/03/2010	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
06/04/2010	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
27/04/2010	Male	3 Assaults any other person/prisoner	7
30/04/2010	Male	3 Assaults any other person/prisoner	7
11/05/2010	Male	7 Endangers H&S	7
03/06/2010	Male	7 Endangers H&S	7
08/06/2010	Male	12 Unauthorised article	9
11/06/2010	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
16/07/2010	Male	14 Damage prison property	10
21/07/2010	Male	2 Assaults an officer/staff member	7
28/07/2010	Male	3 Assaults any other person/prisoner	7

Adjudication Date	Gender	Prison Rule 38 Paragraph	Award in days
30/07/2010	Male	12 Unauthorised article	10
02/08/2010	Male	7 Endangers H&S	10
02/08/2010	Male	14 Damage prison property	10
02/08/2010	Male	14 Damage prison property	10
02/08/2010	Male	7 Endangers H&S	10
19/08/2010	Male	12 Unauthorised article	14
21/08/2010	Male	14 Damage prison property	7
24/08/2010	Male	14 Damage prison property	7
25/08/2010	Male	14 Damage prison property	10
01/09/2010	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
16/09/2010	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
20/09/2010	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
23/09/2010	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
24/09/2010	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
26/09/2010	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
26/09/2010	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
27/09/2010	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
04/10/2010	Male	14 Damage prison property	7
04/10/2010	Male	14 Damage prison property	7
07/10/2010	Male	14 Damage prison property	7
24/10/2010	Male	4 Commits any other assault	10
24/10/2010	Male	7 Endangers H&S	10
01/11/2010	Male	12 Unauthorised article	10
05/11/2010	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
05/11/2010	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
11/11/2010	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
11/11/2010	Male	12 Unauthorised article	14
24/11/2010	Male	2 Assaults an officer/staff member	8
02/12/2010	Male	16 Foul and abusive	7
13/12/2010	Male	3 Assaults any other person/prisoner	10
28/12/2010	Male	12 Unauthorised article	14
29/12/2010	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	8
Total no. of inmates - 32			

2011

Adjudication Date	Gender	Prison Rule 38 Paragraph	Award in days
10/01/2011	Male	11 Fails to comply with a condition of Compassionate Temporary Release	7
11/01/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	14
26/01/2011	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	10

Adjudication Date	Gender	Prison Rule 38 Paragraph	Award in days
29/01/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	10
31/01/2011	Male	3 Assaults any other person/prisoner	7
07/02/2011	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
07/02/2011	Male	25 Attempts or incites/assists another prisoner to commit or attempt to commit an offence against Prison Discipline	10
08/02/2011	Male	24 Good order and discipline	7
25/02/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
25/02/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
08/03/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	10
14/03/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	
15/03/2011	Male	22 Disobeys an order	11
15/03/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
15/03/2011	Male	14 Damage prison property	11
15/03/2011	Male	14 Damage prison property	7
20/03/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
20/03/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
21/03/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
21/03/2011	Male	25 Attempts or incites/assists another prisoner to commit or attempt to commit an offence against Prison Discipline	7
21/03/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
22/03/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
22/03/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
28/03/2011	Male	23 Disobeys any rules/regulations	7
28/03/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
04/04/2011	Male	4 Commits any other assault	8
21/04/2011	Male	7 Endangers H&S	14
23/04/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
27/04/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
29/04/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	10
03/05/2011	Male	14 Damage prison property	7
18/05/2011	Male	25 Attempts or incites/assists another prisoner to commit or attempt to commit an offence against Prison Discipline	10
18/05/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	10
19/05/2011	Male	24 Good order and discipline	10
23/05/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
24/05/2011	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
24/05/2011	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
24/05/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
07/06/2011	Male	2 Assaults an officer/staff member	7
07/06/2011	Male	14 Damage prison property	7
13/06/2011	Male	19B Presence of Drugs	7

Adjudication Date	Gender	Prison Rule 38 Paragraph	Award in days
16/06/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	10
18/06/2011	Male	7 Endangers H&S	10
20/06/2011	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
20/06/2011	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	10
21/06/2011	Male	14 Damage prison property	7
22/06/2011	Male	14 Damage prison property	7
23/06/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
02/07/2011	Male	3 Assaults any other person/prisoner	12
02/07/2011	Male	16 Foul and abusive	7
02/07/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
11/07/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
11/07/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
20/07/2011	Male	4 Commits any other assault	10
20/07/2011	Male	4 Commits any other assault	10
21/07/2011	Male	3 Assaults any other person/prisoner	7
02/08/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	10
07/08/2011	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
14/08/2011	Male	3 Assaults any other person/prisoner	7
15/08/2011	Male	14 Damage prison property	8
20/08/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	10
23/08/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
29/08/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	10
03/01/2011	Male	14 Damage prison property	7
09/09/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	8
12/09/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
22/09/2011	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
26/09/2011	Male	2 Assaults an officer/staff member	7
03/10/2011	Male	18 Commits indecent or obscene	14
09/10/2011	Male	16 Foul and abusive	7
09/10/2011	Male	16 Foul and abusive	7
14/10/2011	Male	3 Assaults any other person/prisoner	7
14/10/2011	Male	3 Assaults any other person/prisoner	7
21/10/2011	Male	22 Disobeys an order	7
24/10/2011	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
24/10/2011	Male	16 Foul and abusive	7
03/11/2011	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
03/11/2011	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
20/11/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	10
22/11/2011	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
25/11/2011	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7

Adjudication Date	Gender	Prison Rule 38 Paragraph	Award in days
04/12/2011	Male	12 Unauthorised article	9
05/12/2011	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
05/12/2011	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
18/12/2011	Male	14 Damage prison property	7
19/12/2011	Male	3 Assaults any other person/prisoner	7
22/12/2011	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
24/12/2011	Male	19 Prepares/manufactures/ drugs etc	7
29/12/2011	Male	25 Attempts or incites/assists another prisoner to commit or attempt to commit an offence against Prison Discipline	7
Total no. of inmates - 54			

2012

Adjudication Date	Gender	Prison Rule 38 Paragraph	Award in days
02/01/2012	Male	3 Assaults any other person/prisoner	7
03/01/2012	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
03/01/2012	Male	7 Endangers H&S	7
03/01/2012	Male	7 Endangers H&S	10
15/01/2012	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
15/01/2012	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
16/01/2012	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
16/01/2012	Male	19C refuses to provide sample	7
18/01/2012	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
05/02/2012	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
07/02/2012	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
08/02/2012	Male	4 Commits any other assault	7
08/02/2012	Male	2 Assaults an officer/staff member	12
20/02/2012	Male	16 Foul and abusive	7
27/02/2012	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
27/02/2012	Male	2 Assaults an officer/staff member	10
01/03/2012	Male	2 Assaults an officer/staff member	7
01/03/2012	Male	19C refuses to provide sample	7
09/03/2012	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
09/03/2012	Male	2 Assaults an officer/staff member	7
15/03/2012	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
16/03/2012	Male	3 Assaults any other person/prisoner	8
07/04/2012	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
23/04/2012	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
25/04/2012	Male	3 Assaults any other person/prisoner	7
25/04/2012	Male	14 Damage prison property	7
27/04/2012	Male	14 Damage prison property	7

Adjudication Date	Gender	Prison Rule 38 Paragraph	Award in days
07/05/2012	Male	3 Assaults any other person/prisoner	7
22/05/2012	Male	15 Absents himself	7
02/06/2012	Male	5 Fights or Wrestles	7
06/06/2012	Male	14 Damage prison property	7
22/06/2012	Male	14 Damage prison property	7
30/06/2012	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
11/07/2012	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
19/07/2012	Male	3 Assaults any other person/prisoner	7
29/07/2012	Male	12 Unauthorised article	7
Total no. of inmates - 24			

The following tables detail the number of prisoners at Hydebank Wood who were placed in cellular confinement for a period of seven days or more on one or more occasion during 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 (up to and including 8 November 2012) together with their gender and the adjudication reason. Information in relation to the start and end date of the confinement and instances where a prisoner was placed in cellular confinement on more than one charge meaning that more than seven days were spent in confinement consecutively is not readily available and can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Prison Service: Attacks on Nurses

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) the number of attacks on nurses within the Prison Service; (ii) the penalties imposed on prisoners as a result of the attacks; (iii) the number of occasions when the panic alarms issued to nurses failed to activate; (iv) the number of the incidents which have been recorded in the accident books of prisons; (v) the number of nursing staff currently on sick leave as a result of such attacks; and (vi) what support the nurses received from management and occupational health.

(AQW 16333/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Member will wish to note that responsibility for healthcare staff transferred to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) in April 2012. The information requested has therefore been divided into the two periods, before and after this transfer.

Pre-April 2012

(i) The number of assaults on nurses within the Northern Ireland Prison Service is set out in the table below:

	Hydebank Wood YOC & Prison	Magilligan	Maghaberry
2010	0	0	2
2011	0	0	11
2012 (Jan – March)	0	0	6

(ii) Four of these assaults resulted in a prisoner being charged. Two prisoners were found guilty at adjudication and two charges were later withdrawn.

The following penalties were awarded to both prisoners found guilty at adjudication:

- loss of telephone
- loss of gym/sports
- loss of TV/video/DVD
- loss of tuckshop
- loss of cell crafts
- loss of earnings
- cellular confinement.

(iii) There are no known incidents of the panic alarm or emergency call button on a radio failing to operate.

(iv) Five incidents of assault were recorded in the accident book at Maghaberry prison.

(v) There is currently one member of staff on sick leave as a result of such assaults.

- (vi) Support available to staff involved in an assault includes:
- The services of a dedicated Welfare Officer;
 - The services of a 24 hour confidential counselling helpline; and
 - one to one counselling via the NIPS Employee Assistance Programme.

In addition, in accordance with the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Sick Absence Procedures, staff are offered ongoing support and advice from the Welfare Officer throughout their period of sick absence.

Both Maghaberry senior management, and the South Eastern Trust, have been in regular contact with the member of staff who is currently off sick as a result of an assault. The NIPS Director General has also written to the nurse to express her sympathy and to offer counselling and support during this time.

Post – April 2012

DHSSPS have advised that since 1 April 2012:

- (i) three nurses have been assaulted
- (ii) two incidents were reported to the PSNI and are being dealt with accordingly. One incident was not taken further;
- (iii) there has been one occasion when a panic alarm failed to activate;
- (iv) there have been two incidents involving South Eastern Trust nurses recorded on incident report forms;
- (v) one member of nursing staff is currently on sick leave as result of an attack and
- (vi) the following support was provided to the SET nurses involved in an assault:
 - reassurance was given by managers on duty at the time of the incident
 - first aid was offered;
 - one case was referred to Occupational Health Services;
 - Care-Call has been used by one individual through Occupational Health Services; and
 - telephone contact and support has been maintained for the member of nursing staff currently on sick leave.

In addition, all SET nursing staff have been reminded of incident reporting mechanisms and reporting procedures.

Prisons: Deaths in Custody

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to all non-natural deaths in custody in the last 10 years, including those classified as suicide, to detail the ruled cause of death in each case.

(AQW 16393/11-15)

Mr Ford: There have been 28 non-natural deaths recorded by the Northern Ireland Prison Service between 1 November 2002 and 12 November 2012. This number includes three deaths which occurred outside prison but which were recorded by the last known establishment due to the circumstances (the death of a prisoner on temporary release which occurred in police custody and two prisoners who were found at their homes after having been recently released from prison).

Of the 28 non-natural deaths recorded by the Northern Ireland Prison Service the Coroner has conducted inquests into 13 of these deaths and the following table contains a breakdown of the ruled causes of death. Inquests have not yet been carried out on the remaining 15 non-natural deaths.

Ruled Cause of Death	Number of Deaths
Hanging	6
Poisoning	4
Ligature Compression of the neck and suffocation	1
Aspiration/Pneumonia	1
Suicide (hanging)	1
No verdict received	15

Having given due consideration to the families involved I have not included individual names.

Prison Service: Governor

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) whether, between 2005 and 2010, a Northern Ireland Prison Service governor was dismissed for gross misconduct and later granted ill-health retirement on the recommendation of the Prison Service; (ii) the date of dismissal and retirement; (iii) the nature of the gross mis-conduct; and (iv) any criminal convictions, court proceedings or informal police action taken,.

(AQW 16396/11-15)

Mr Ford: I can confirm that between 2005 and 2010 no Prison Governors were dismissed for gross misconduct and subsequently granted ill-health retirement.

Kenneth Douglas

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether convicted murderer Kenneth Douglas has been returned to custody; and why this was deemed necessary.

(AQW 16398/11-15)

Mr Ford: Mr Douglas was returned to custody on Sunday 28 October 2012 after he was arrested and charged with a number of criminal offences.

Interpreting Service

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice to detail whether any foreign nationals have been released from custody following the lack of access to a suitable interpreting service.

(AQW 16400/11-15)

Mr Ford: No foreign national prisoner has been released from custody due to the lack of access to a suitable interpreting service.

Grooming of a Child for Sexual Purposes

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many cases currently in the court system involve charges in relation to the grooming of a child for sexual purposes, broken down by (i) court division; and (ii) court level.

(AQW 16431/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below sets out the number of cases involving charges relating to the grooming of a child for sexual purposes currently before the Crown Court and Magistrates' Courts broken down by County Court Division.

Courty Court Division	Cases before the Crown Court	Cases before the Magistrates' Court	Total
Belfast	5	1	6
Fermanagh & Tyrone	1	0	1
Total	6	1	7

Prisons: Supporting Prisoners at Risk

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) how many staff have been trained in Supporting Prisoners at Risk since its inception; (ii) whether the training is available for all Prison Service staff; (iii) whether the training is updated as and when required; and (iv) who delivers the training.

(AQW 16432/11-15)

Mr Ford: Since its launch in 2009, Supporting Prisoners At Risk (SPAR) training has been delivered to over 600 staff. All new entrants to the Prison Service receive SPAR training and it is also included in other training programmes for existing staff.

SPAR training has been subject to significant review and has been updated on a number of occasions. It is delivered by NIPS Training Officers and, on occasions, line managers.

Prisons: Body Orifice Security Scanner

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he has the powers, under the Justice and Security (NI) Act 2007, to authorise or operate Body Orifice Security Scanner chair equipment as an alternative to full body searches in HMP Maghaberry, given that it is a high security facility.

(AQW 16440/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Body Orifice Security Scanner (BOSS) chair has been in use within Maghaberry Prison since 2010 as part of a multi-layer approach to searching. It is not an alternative to full body searching.

The authority to search prisoners derives from the Prison Act (NI) 1953 and Prison Rules.

Prison Service: Protection Scheme

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice how many Prison Service staff have required security measures through the Prison Service Protection Scheme in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16442/11-15)

Mr Ford: As the question refers to the personal security of prison staff it would not be appropriate to provide details.

Prison Service: Protection Scheme

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice how many Prison Service staff applications for security measures through the Prison Service Protection Scheme were refused in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16443/11-15)

Mr Ford: As this question refers to the personal security of prison staff it would not be appropriate to provide details.

Prison Service: Security Measures for Staff

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice how many Prison Service staff have had security measures withdrawn in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16457/11-15)

Mr Ford: As this question refers to the personal security of prison staff it would not be appropriate to provide details.

Maghaberry Prison: Protests

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many types of protests are underway in HMP Maghaberry Roe House; and how many prisoners are taking part in each protest.

(AQW 16465/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is one protest ongoing in Roe House, Maghaberry which includes 11 republican prisoners currently on a dirty protest.

Prisons: Compensation for Deaths in Custody

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how much has been paid in compensation to the families of prisoners who died by suicide whilst in custody, in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 16467/11-15)

Mr Ford: The total amount of compensation paid to the families of prisoners who committed suicide whilst in custody in Northern Ireland over the last 10 years is £65,000.

To provide a more detailed breakdown of this figure, which may lead to the identification of the families and the amount received by them, would be in breach of the first Data Protection Principle of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Prisons: Body Orifice Security Scanner

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice why the BOSS scanning equipment was piloted in HMP Magilligan and HMP Hydebank but not in HMP Maghaberry, which was the source of the initial criticism by the Roe House inmates; and which legislation applies to this decision.

(AQW 16469/11-15)

Mr Ford: A BOSS chair has been in use in Maghaberry Prison since 2010.

Two separate Millimetre Wave pilots are being conducted in Magilligan and in Hydebank Wood. The objective of the pilots is to determine whether advances in technology can lessen the need for full body searches in favour of effective and less intrusive methods, consistent with the PRT recommendation 8, for the benefit of all prisoners and prison staff across all three establishments, and to develop a multi-layered approach to searching and prison security.

Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse: Action Plans

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Justice what financial provision he (i) made available to support the Tackling Violence at Home: Action Plan 2010-2011; and (ii) is making available to support the Tackling Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse: Action Plan 2012-2013.

(AQW 16549/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice and the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety jointly lead on the domestic and sexual violence strategies and their associated action plans. The Department of Justice primarily supports the Protection and Justice Strand of the action plans.

Departments allocate funding on a financial year basis. It should be noted that the Tackling Violence at Home Action Plan covered an eighteen month period from October 2010 until March 2012. During this period my department made available £637,500 to support the Action Plan.

The joint Tackling Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Action Plan also covers a period of eighteen months, from April 2012 until September 2013. For this period my Department has presently made available £731,000 to support the Action Plan.

The Member will be aware that the development and delivery of identified projects and programmes frequently cross a number of funding years. It is only when work commences to deliver the actions within the Action Plan that it is possible to obtain a clear understanding of the exact costs and timeframe for delivery. As a result actual spend may not equate to that which was first allocated.

Police and Criminal Evidence Regime

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Justice whether he intends to keep Northern Ireland in line with the Police and Criminal Evidence regime in England and Wales.

(AQW 16567/11-15)

Mr Ford: Before the devolution of justice, the Police and Criminal Evidence regimes in Northern Ireland and England and Wales developed largely in parallel. However, most of the subject matter of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 is now the responsibility of the Assembly and, whilst there is certainly merit in maintaining a degree of parity with England and Wales, there is also scope to develop policy, with consultation and Assembly scrutiny, to meet specific local requirements.

Prison Service: Security of Retired Staff

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how the serving and retired staff of Her Majesty's Prison Service are notified of an increased terrorist threat to them; and how this differs from the system used to inform retired members of the PSNI and RUC.

(AQW 16573/11-15)

Mr Ford: As this question concerns the personal security of prison staff it would be inappropriate to provide the details requested.

Prison Officers: Security

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the protection afforded to Prison Officers who are supervising prisoners in hospitals; and whether any review has taken place to enhance security and the role of PSNI officers following the murder of David Black.

(AQW 16789/11-15)

Mr Ford: The security of prison staff, both on and off duty, is kept under constant review. The Prison Service continues to liaise closely with PSNI regarding the implications for staff safety when prison staff are required to undertake external escort duties.

Police Officers: Injury on Duty Pension

Ms Brown asked the Minister of Justice how many police officers receive an Injury on Duty pension, broken down by age group.

(AQW 16800/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below provides details of the number of police officers in receipt of an Injury on Duty pension, broken down by age group.

Age group	Number of recipients
30-40	19
40-50	485
50-60	850
60-70	608
70-80	205
80-90	33
90+	2

Information provided by PSNI Pensions Branch

Prison Officers: Notices

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice why notices have appeared on staff and security information boards in prisons and on the Oasis system threatening prison officers with dismissal if they make contact with MLAs or other public representatives.

(AQW 16833/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am unaware of any notices appearing in prisons, or on the Oasis system, that have threatened prison officers with dismissal if they make contact with MLAs or other public representatives.

Prison officers, as indeed any member of the public, are at liberty to contact their local MLA or other public representative.

Department for Regional Development

Car Parks: Exchange Rate

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the current exchange rate offered to people who pay in Euros at car parks; (ii) when this rate was set; and (iii) how often the rate is reviewed, (AQW 16390/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Officials from my Department's Roads Service have advised that, for those Pay and Display machines which accept Euro coins, the exchange rate which applies is 1.769 Euro to £1 sterling. This rate, which has applied since 2005, is programmed into the machines and has not been subject to periodic review.

When Euro coins are inserted into a Pay and Display machine, the amount of parking time which can be purchased is displayed on the machine before the transaction is completed.

Following the recent commencement of a new parking enforcement and car park management contract, Roads Service intends to review the Pay and Display euro exchange rate in the near future.

Winter Weather: Foyle Constituency

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department has taken to ensure that it has sufficient resources in the Foyle constituency to deal with winter weather. (AQW 16391/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has adequate resources to deal with the forthcoming winter period. Roads Service receives meteorological forecasts from the Met Office and this is supplemented by information from a number of weather stations, specifically designed to provide information on winter conditions.

With regard to the Foyle Constituency, the salting of the primary route network is served by the Woodburn Depot in Londonderry. Seven gritters operate from this Depot and are supported by 29 members of staff, who are deployed on a rota basis after working hours, from the end of October 2012 until the middle of April 2013. Over 3,000 tonnes of rock salt is available in the Depot, which can be regularly replenished, ensuring that adequate stock levels are maintained throughout the winter season.

In order to facilitate members of the public in potentially difficult areas that are not part of a salting route, Roads Service has distributed 255 grit/salt boxes in urban areas and 1,116 grit/salt piles in rural areas. These are available for use on a self help basis. In addition, arrangements are also in place to mobilise additional resources from private contractors, farmers and other agencies, to remove snow from the public highway, should conditions dictate.

Throughout the winter period, an on-call Lead Communicator within Roads Service, will provide details of road conditions to the media to ensure that the public are kept informed of any changing circumstances.

Badger Setts: Derrygowan Road, Randalstown

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development how his Department has dealt with any badger setts at the Derrygowan Road, Randalstown, in each of the last five years. (AQW 16401/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has carried out carriageway repairs at a badger sett, at one location on the Derrygowan Road, in the last five years.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency, issued a licence under the Wildlife Order 1985, in September 2012, and Roads Service carried out its repairs in October 2012.

Parking: Double Yellow Lines

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the legal status of double yellow lines where there is no 'T' bar at the end; and the legal advice given to parking adjudicators in assessing whether double yellow lines meet the legal requirements. (AQW 16415/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that double yellow lines are prescribed under the Traffic Signs Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1997, and indicate a prohibition on waiting at any time on that side of the road. However, the legal status of the end marking is not referred to.

The end marking is solely intended to indicate where the prohibition starts and ends. Its presence, or indeed absence, does not affect the meaning of the double yellow lines in indicating a prohibition on waiting.

I should advise that my Department does not give legal advice to the adjudicators in the Northern Ireland Traffic Penalty Tribunal.

Public Appointments

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail all the public appointments made during the last Assembly mandate, broken down by community background.

(AQW 16446/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Between May 2007 and May 2011 17 ministerial appointments were made. Seven of these appointees were Protestant and ten were Catholic; none of the appointees declared a community background of neither or not known.

The figures are based on first appointments of non-executive board members and board Chairs made during the period. They do not include councillor appointments.

Details of the community background of the full range of public appointments made each year in the Department for Regional Development are included in the Public Bodies and Public Appointments Annual Report published each year by OFMDFM.

Translink: Procurement Procedure

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline Translink's procurement procedure for the use of external contractors.

(AQW 16471/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink advise that procurement standards are applied to all external contracts in N I Railways, Ulsterbus and Citybus (Metro) to enable a consistent approach across Translink.

Translink is a Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE), appointed and monitored by the Procurement Board for Northern Ireland. CoPE status is granted by the Procurement Board following a third party accreditation exercise that assesses the extent to which CoPEs meet the high standards of good practices. Translink must satisfy a set level of procurement competency against set criteria which include Best Value for Money, Best Practice, People Procurement Expertise and Regulatory Compliance. Translink is expected to comply with best practice principles for public procurement.

For the purposes of procurement legislation, Translink operates under the Utilities Contracts Regulations 2006. This legislation states how procurement is to be carried out over certain threshold values which are:

Services/Supplies	£348,000
Works	£3,600,000

Contracts above these values are subject to the procedures in the Regulations, including the requirement to be advertised in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU).

Procurement requirements for items over an estimated value of £30,000 are advertised on esourcingni and also on the Translink website to facilitate open competition. Translink standards are used to pre-qualify, invite to tender and evaluate submitted tenders; all of which is subject to an internal approval process.

Further information on Translink tenders and procurement policy can be found on the website. www.translink.co.uk.

Translink: Age of Fleet

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the impact on services as a result of the age of the Translink fleet.

(AQW 16474/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Both the Ulsterbus and Metro fleets are currently projected to be ahead of the Regional Transportation Strategy targets set for fleet age by 31 March 2013. This reflects past investment in new buses. Average bus fleet ages in Translink now compare favourably with the average elsewhere in England, Scotland and Wales. Further investment in the future will be required to maintain in this position. Translink continues to provide its full network of services and allocates its current fleet to maximise accessibility and quality of service.

E-car Charging Points

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development when each E-car charging point became operational; and how many times each point has been used.

(AQW 16496/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The 41 22kw AC public charge posts, each with 2 charge points, were installed by the ecar project in March 2012 and commissioned during March and April 2012. One charge post, in Corporation Square Car Park in Belfast, has since been removed because of vandalism.

Launch events were held in the relevant council areas to officially launch and publicise the charge posts in each area.

Belfast	29 March 2012
Armagh	18 April 2012

Newry	18 April 2012
Larne	2 May 2012
City of Derry	10 May 2012

Three rapid 50kw DC charge posts, which can charge a suitable electric vehicle to 80% in 20-25 minutes, were also installed in March. Following testing and the resolution of some technical issues, these were commissioned in April and May 2012. A fourth rapid charge point was installed and commissioned in August 2012.

The total number of charging events for each charge post is only available from July, when the Charge Point Management System became live. The number of charging events from July to 30 September 2012 is contained in the attached table.

Number of Charging Events to 30 September 2012

Charge Point Location	Charge Point Name	ID number	Number of events
Belfast	Little Victoria Street Car Park	SC22	1
Belfast	Corporation Square Car Park	SC24	
Belfast	Little Donegall Street	SC23	1
Belfast	Cromac Street Car Park	SC33	
Belfast	Hope Street North	SC3	3
Belfast	Adelaide Street on street	SC19	15
Belfast	Dublin Road on street	SC8	1
Belfast	Lower Crescent on street	SC21	
Belfast	Central Station car park	SC9	4
Belfast	Cairns Hill Park and Ride	SC35	2
Armagh	Linenhall Street car park	SC2	1
Armagh	Lonsdale Street car park	SC15	
Armagh	Cathedral Road Recreational Centre	SC40	
Armagh	Palace Demense	SC4	1
Newry	Bagenal's Castle	SC5	1
Newry	Bridge Street car park	SC28	1
Newry	Basin Walk car park	SC10	1
Newry	Monaghan Street car park	SC32	
Newry	Hill Street on street	SC30	
Newry	Canal Court Merchants Quay	SC37	2
Newry	Newry Train station	SC41	2
Londonderry	Victoria Market car park	SC27	
Londonderry	Bishop Street car park	SC39	
Londonderry	Railway Yard	SC6	
Londonderry	Strand Road	SC7	
Londonderry	Carlisle Road on street	SC25	
Londonderry	The Diamond on street	SC34	3
Londonderry	Templemore Leisure Centre	SC26	
Fermanagh	Down/Market/Cross Street	SC18	1
Fermanagh	Eden Street	SC13	7
Fermanagh	Quay Lane North	SC11	1

Charge Point Location	Charge Point Name	ID number	Number of events
Fermanagh	Wellington Street	SC16	5
Fermanagh	Queen St, Carpark, Enniskillen	SC17	
Fermanagh	Cross Street, Carpark, Lisnaskea	SC31	2
Fermanagh	Main Street, Irvinestown – DRD	SC29	
Fermanagh	Main Street, Belleek – DRD	SC12	
Larne	Narrow Gauge Road	SC14	1
Larne	Agnew Street	SC20	2
Larne	Riverdale	SC1	
Larne	Carnlough Havelock Place	SC36	1
Cookstown	Southwest College	SC38	1
Dungannon	Rapid Charge Point		6
Maghera	Rapid Charge Point		15
Newry	Rapid Charge Point		28
Portrush (from August 2012)	Rapid Charge Point		7

Ballysallagh/Conlig Reservoirs

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development why the angling leases for the Ballysallagh and Conlig Reservoirs are being put up for renewal.

(AQW 16544/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the angling lease for the Ballysallagh and Conlig reservoirs, currently held by Bangor Angling Club, is valid for two years and expires on 31 March 2013. NIW is not obliged to automatically renew the lease with Bangor Angling Club.

NIW is currently considering outsourcing the management of fishing at its reservoirs to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) which wishes to increase its public fishing estate. DCAL has the capacity and expertise to manage fishing on all available NIW reservoirs and, if outsourcing is agreed, DCAL will become responsible for the renewal of leases.

Ballysallagh/Conlig Reservoirs

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has for the Ballysallagh and Conlig Reservoirs.

(AQW 16545/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that Ballysallagh and Conlig Reservoirs are surplus to its requirements and will be disposed of at some time in the future. In disposing of surplus assets, NIW must ensure that it obtains the best price, achieves value for money and maintains high standards of propriety. Any sale is dependent on a number of factors, not least the market conditions at the time of the sale and the level of expressions of interest.

NIW has not yet identified a timeframe for offering Ballysallagh and Conlig Reservoirs to the market.

Translink: Staff Uniforms

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost to Translink for providing staff uniforms in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16546/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink advise that the cost of providing staff uniforms in each of the last three years is as detailed in the table below:

April 2011/March 2012	£565,286
April 2010/March 2011	£611,071
April 2009/March 2010	£661,403

Taxi Parking Spaces, Derry City Area

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development how many taxi parking spaces are available in the Derry City area. (AQW 16623/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there are 28 taxi parking spaces in the Londonderry city area.

Press Officers

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many press officers his Department employs. (AQW 16706/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Four Information (Press) Officers are employed in my Department.

Street Lighting, Belfast: Repairs

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline any delays in the repairing of street lighting in the Belfast constituencies. (AQW 16761/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there has been a delay in awarding a number of street lighting contracts covering the Belfast area, arising from a challenge received during the procurement process. Regrettably, this has led to a delay in repairing some street lighting defects, although I should stress that emergency repairs continued to be attended to.

I understand that the contracts were awarded on 25 October 2012, and arrangements are currently being made to clear insurances and health and safety plans to allow this important work to proceed.

EU Presidency: Infrastructure Projects

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the possible enhanced opportunities for funding of our infrastructural projects arising from Ireland having the EU Presidency from January to June 2013. (AQO 2877/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Hosting the Presidency of the Council of the European Union is an important role for any Member State. It comes with a lot of responsibility, as the host nation must undertake a number of functions that are essential for the smooth operation of the European Union as a whole. However, the Presidency does not have operational responsibility for EU funding programmes. Responsibility for the operation of EU funding programmes rests with the appropriate managing authorities, the European Commission and its agencies.

During its six month term the hosting Member State is Chair of the Council of the European Union meetings. The Presidency organises these meetings and has the responsibility of moving Council work forward as much as possible by helping Member States reach agreement that supports the interests of the EU as a whole.

The Member State hosting the Presidency has a duty to act as an honest broker as well as a responsibility to be impartial on all matters.

However, while recognising that the Irish Government's Presidency will not directly enhance funding opportunities for infrastructural projects, it undoubtedly comes at an opportune time to help progress shared priorities emanating from EU proposals, which have similar implications for the transport sector in both jurisdictions.

A5 Western Transport Corridor: Construction Jobs

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has had any engagement with representatives of the construction sector in relation to the A5 Western Transport Corridor project and the associated jobs being put on hold. (AQO 2878/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The ongoing legal challenge to the A5 Western Transport Corridor project has delayed construction, which was intended to commence in October 2012. While some preliminary works are ongoing, I cannot say when the main construction will start as this is entirely dependent on when the courts decide on the legal challenge.

In relation to jobs being put on hold, I am acutely aware that this delay is adding to the current pressure on construction jobs across Northern Ireland. I am, however, aware of concerns within the wider construction sector and from organisations such as CBI, CEF and QPANI.

Cullybackey Train Station: Park-and-ride Scheme

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development, given his commitment to park and ride schemes to encourage people to use trains, what plans and funding he intends to put in place to ensure that Cullybackey Train Station has a park and ride scheme. (AQO 2879/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department recently published a report following a Strategic Review of Park & Ride and has now established a Park and Ride Programme Board which co-ordinates the work of the Department and Translink in identifying and providing suitable new Park & Ride facilities for both rail and bus service users.

The Park and Ride Programme Board are currently finalising the details of those schemes which are to be delivered up to 2015. Whilst some funding has been secured in my Department's budget, the implementation of Park and Ride schemes will take place in a constrained budgetary context and this may impact on the ability to deliver the priority projects identified.

I understand that you have already raised the issue of Cullybackey in correspondence directly with Translink. I have been advised that following a feasibility study, Translink has identified a potential site for Park and Ride facilities near the train station. However, as this would require capital funding to take forward, it is unlikely that Translink would be in a position to progress this project in the near future due to funding constraints. As you are no doubt aware, Park and Ride facilities are available at both Ballymena and Ballymoney.

However, you are correct to highlight the importance of focusing on ways of increasing rail users. In fact the Strategy pursued in investing in new trains, track investments and minimising fares has been hugely successful. Rail passenger journeys have increased to over 10 million last year, a level not seen since 1967.

Unadopted Roads

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Regional Development for his initial assessment of the report from the Committee for Regional Development on Unadopted Roads.

(AQO 2880/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As the Member will be aware, I was recently provided with an advanced draft of the Committee for Regional Development's report on Unadopted Roads which, I understand, is due to issue in final form in the coming days. This is an important issue and I sympathise with homeowners who are left with unfinished or inadequate private roads and sewerage systems.

When it is published, I will examine its findings and recommendations in conjunction with my officials and carefully consider what needs to be done in light of those findings.

Motorbike Racing: Admission Charges

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on his Department's consideration of introducing admission charges for motor bike racing events.

(AQO 2881/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that discussions are ongoing with motor sport representatives and officials are due to meet with representatives from the 2&4 Wheel Motorsport Steering Group Limited, on 26 November, to hear details of their proposals for enabling admission charges to be levied.

My officials will contact you when they are ready to formally consult on any proposed amendments to The Roads Races Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1986.

Unadopted Housing Developments and Roads

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department has received any proposals to deal with the plethora of unadopted housing developments and roads.

(AQO 2882/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service works within current legislation to achieve the satisfactory completion of roads within new housing developments. To achieve this, my officials liaise with developers and other responsible parties, as required, to agree proposals to have the works completed and, when appropriate, will use the available legal enforcement powers.

As you will be aware, the Committee for Regional Development has recently been conducting an Inquiry into Unadopted Roads in Northern Ireland. When the Inquiry report is published, I will examine its findings and I will carefully consider what needs to be done in light of those findings.

Car Parking: Lagan Valley

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of how the moratorium on car parking charges will assist businesses in the Lagan Valley constituency.

(AQO 2883/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am pleased to have announced the Executive decision to freeze car parking charges within the current budget period. I believe this will be to the benefit of traders and shoppers in towns and cities across Northern Ireland, including those in Lagan Valley.

I believe that the freeze on car-parking charges, combined with the package of measures to support retailers and consumers I announced on 5 November, will give a much-needed boost to our local economy and encourage people to get the most out of our town and city centres, particularly in the run-up to Christmas.

These recent announcements complement and augment my decision in September of last year not to introduce on-street parking charges to around 30 towns and cities across Northern Ireland. Taken together, these measures will provide a confidence boost to traders and those who shop and work in our towns and cities.

Strangford to Portaferry Bridge

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Regional Development how his Department's recent estimate for the cost of a Strangford to Portaferry bridge was collated.

(AQO 2884/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Department's recent cost estimate of £300 million for a Strangford to Portaferry Bridge was based on the cost of recently proposed or constructed bridges of a similar nature worldwide. The estimate includes for infrastructure linkages, such as viaducts and other improvements.

As well as costs associated with the engineering and structural elements of such a project, additional resources would need to be directed towards dealing with the related environmental issues. In my response to one of your recent Assembly questions on this subject (AQW 15495/11-15 refers), I outlined the many and various environmental designations held by the Strangford Lough area, and the likelihood that an Article 6 Assessment, under the terms of the EU Habitats Directive, would be required as part of any scheme to build a bridge across the lough.

A5: Funding

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps have been taken to ensure that funding for the A5 road scheme has been ring-fenced.

(AQO 2885/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As you will be aware, the Department for Regional Development was served with an Originating Summons on 10 September 2012, seeking a legal review on the decision to proceed with the A5 scheme. Whilst it was originally anticipated that the construction phase of this scheme would commence in mid-October 2012, the exact timing of the works will now be dependent on legal process.

My Department will robustly defend this action and has instructed Senior Counsel. A preliminary hearing has been scheduled for 29 November 2012.

I can assure the Member that my Department's officials are liaising closely with their counterparts in the Department of Finance and Personnel, regarding the financial implications of a delayed start to the scheme.

Department for Social Development

Benefit Uptake Campaign 2011-12

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Social Development how many pensioners benefited from his Department's Benefit Uptake Campaign 2011-12; and how this number compares to the previous three years.

(AQW 16227/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The table below shows the number of older people (aged 60 or over) who have benefitted from Benefit Uptake Programmes since 2008/09.

Year	Older people benefitting
2008/09	3,602
2009/10	1,558
2010/11	1,369
2011/12	4,098
Total	10,627

Since 2005 my Department has delivered annual Benefit Uptake Programmes, involving a range of direct and indirect targeting approaches. These are delivered in partnership with the independent advice sector and with a range of community based organisations.

In 2008/09, a direct targeting exercise was supplemented by a significant mailshot exercise targeting all State Pension recipients not receiving State Pension Credit to encourage a claim for State Pension Credit. This involved over 69,000 households.

In 2011/12 the "Make the Call" advertising campaign was added to the range of approaches. This involved widespread media publicity of a Freephone service for older people inviting them to have a benefit entitlement check.

I remain committed to the uptake of benefits and recently announced the 2012/13 Make the Call Benefit Uptake Programme. This will involve further direct targeting, the Make the Call advertising campaign, innovation and partnership working. I also intend to bring forward a three year Strategy for Improving Benefit Uptake by the end of the year.

Woodlands/Parks in Towns: Funding

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what funds or grants are available through his Department to help create woodlands or parks in towns.

(AQW 16237/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There is no specific funding or grant scheme for this purpose but where such amenities are part of an agreed plan for an area they may attract funding from the Department.

The development and greening of public spaces is a significant feature of the Department's regeneration work. The Department owns and maintains parks, other public spaces and woodlands at a number of locations in town, city centres and Neighbourhood Renewal areas.

The Department also funds organisations that encourage and facilitate volunteering. Volunteers play a significant role in the creation and maintenance of open spaces in their communities.

Volunteering

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the value of volunteering.

(AQW 16240/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The tremendous value of volunteering is reflected in almost every aspect of everyday life – the communities we live in, our physical environment, our sport and leisure activities, where we work and worship, our schools and hospitals all benefit from volunteers. Altogether the economic value of formal volunteering with organisations is estimated to be worth around £500M annually. Volunteering is of immense value to society and to the volunteers themselves who are motivated for many different reasons and personally benefit in many different ways.

I recognise the remarkable contribution made by volunteers in our society. I am strongly committed to encouraging the growth of volunteering and in March 2012 my Department published Join in, get involved: Build a better future which is the first ever Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Public Realm Improvement Scheme: Comber

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the level of support nominally allocated and related by his officials to Comber Town Regeneration Committee regarding funding for 'Public Realm Improvements and Traffic Management Scheme for Comber Town'; and to detail the level of commitment to funding he will make towards this scheme.

(AQW 16248/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Plans for a public realm improvement scheme in Comber are still at an early stage of development and no funding has been committed to the scheme at this stage. However, my Department has included £1 million in its forward work programme for a public realm scheme in Comber during 2013/15, subject to funding being available and all necessary approvals being in place.

Housing Executive: New Regional Offices

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development where the three new regional offices will be located as a result of structural changes within the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

(AQW 16275/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has confirmed that their three new regional offices will be located as follows:-

- Belfast Regional Office: 32-36 Great Victoria Street, Belfast;
- South Region has two locations: Strangford House, Newtownards, and Marlborough House, Craigavon; and
- North Region also has two locations: Twickenham House, Ballymena, and Richmond Chambers, Londonderry.

Employment and Support Allowance: Work Capability Assessments, Foyle

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of claimants from the Foyle constituency who (i) received no points at their Work Capability Assessment for Employment and Support Allowance; and (ii) had the decision overturned on appeal.

(AQW 16303/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

- i) Since the introduction of Employment and Support Allowance in October 2008 a total of 117,554 customers have participated in the Work Capability Assessment process. It is not possible, due to system limitations, to detail how many customers in the Foyle constituency from 2008 scored zero points.

Following implementation of the Medical Services Referral System it became possible to provide this information from June 2011 to October 2012. During this period 1,850 customers in the Foyle constituency were awarded zero points following an examination for Employment and Support Allowance.

- ii) It is not possible, due to system limitations, to detail how many customers in the Foyle constituency who scored zero points in their Work Capability Assessment subsequently had the decision overturned following an appeal.

Employment and Support Allowance: Work Capability Assessments

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of claimants who (i) received no points at their Work Capability Assessment for Employment and Support Allowance; and (ii) had the decision overturned on appeal. (AQW 16305/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

- i) Since the introduction of Employment and Support Allowance in October 2008 a total of 117,554 customers have participated in the Work Capability Assessment process. It is not possible, due to system limitations, to detail how many of the customers from 2008 scored zero points.

Following implementation of the Medical Services Referral System it became possible to provide this information from June 2011 to October 2012. During this period 27,380 customers were awarded zero points following an examination for Employment and Support Allowance.

- ii) It is not possible, due to system limitations, to detail how many customers scored zero points in their Work Capability Assessment and subsequently had the decision overturned following an appeal.

Universal Credit: Housing Payments

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development whether, following welfare reform, housing payments of universal credit that are made in error, or due to fraudulent activity, will be reclaimed from landlords. (AQW 16320/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Welfare Reform Bill provides for regulations which will enable overpayments paid direct to the landlord to be recoverable from the landlord in specific circumstances. These are where the tenant has left the property and the landlord has failed to inform the Department; any universal credit housing element has been overpaid and is above the rental liability or the landlord has misrepresented or failed to provide information, which has led to the overpayment occurring.

Personal Independence Payment: Contract for Assessments

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail each of the differences in the tender documentation for the contract for assessing Personal Independence Payments and between those in Great Britain; and whether he can give an assurance that the successful tender will have sufficiently reflected Northern Ireland's unique mental health pressures. (AQW 16325/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The tender documentation used for the Personal Independent Payment assessment service for Northern Ireland was issued as a specific Lot within a single set of tender documents which sought responses across 4 lots/ regions of the United Kingdom.

Social Security Agency officials were involved in the development and approval of the tender documentation for Northern Ireland to ensure that all Northern Ireland differences in legislation and policies were fully reflected.

In Lot 4 which was about services in Northern Ireland responses bidders were asked to detail how their solution identified and took account of the management of specific customer needs and barriers including mental health and were asked to provide specific information on the role of mental health champions. The champion's role is to provide advice and support to Health Professionals on health conditions and disabilities affecting mental, cognitive, intellectual and behavioural function.

This was in addition to a range of questions which were common across all four Lots.

Social Fund

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many applications have been made to the Social Fund in each of the last three years, broken down by constituency. (AQW 16337/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Due to system limitations it is not possible to provide figures for all elements of the Social Fund scheme. However it is possible to provide figures on the numbers of applications for the 'discretionary' element of Social Fund by parliamentary constituency. Discretionary Social Fund includes Budgeting and Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants. The numbers of these applications by constituency for the last three financial years are set out in the table below.

Constituency	Financial Year		
	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10
Belfast East	16,045	17,334	16,857
Belfast North	45,936	45,518	42,207
Belfast South	15,411	15,969	15,111
Belfast West	43,867	44,866	46,283
East Antrim	16,013	14,536	14,623
East Londonderry	17,622	16,873	14,161
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	12,661	13,099	13,691
Foyle	34,655	35,822	33,453
Lagan Valley	10,219	9,772	8,969
Mid Ulster	13,125	13,501	13,447
Newry And Armagh	18,790	18,245	18,439
North Antrim	14,915	14,657	13,349
North Down	9,065	9,478	8,856
South Antrim	10,797	10,816	10,581
South Down	17,029	17,936	17,385
Strangford	11,064	10,751	10,542
Upper Bann	22,066	22,321	23,003
West Tyrone	18,161	17,908	17,320
Unknown	7,865	8,137	8,241

Welfare Reform: New Job Creation

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions he has had with his officials to assess the number of new jobs that will need to be created to address the reduction in disposable income in the economy as a result of Welfare Reform. (AQW 16341/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I have not had any discussions with my officials on this subject as my Department is not responsible for assessing the number of new jobs that are needed in the Northern Ireland economy. My Department has not taken forward any work on projecting whether there will be any reduction in disposable income as a consequence of Welfare Reform.

Housing Benefit

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development how many (i) employed; and (ii) unemployed people are in receipt of Housing Benefit. (AQW 16345/11-15)

Mr McCausland: At 1 October 2012 based on a total housing benefit caseload of 164,724, the number of people employed who were in receipt of Housing Benefit was 15,458. At the same date the number of people unemployed who were in receipt of Housing Benefit was 23,588.

Homelessness

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are deemed homeless. (AQW 16359/11-15)

Mr McCausland: For the period 1 April to 30 June 2012, the number of cases presenting as homeless was 5047 with 2001 being accepted as statutorily homeless. These are the most up to date figures available from the Housing Executive.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development how many application forms for the current Boiler Replacement scheme have been (i) requested from; and (ii) sent out by the Housing Executive. (AQW 16363/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Boiler Replacement Scheme commenced on the 3rd September 2012.

As of Friday the 2nd November 2012, the Housing Executive has received 20,683 enquiries and issued 12,821 application forms.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development how many phone calls have been received by the Boiler Replacement Scheme application helpline.

(AQW 16364/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Since my announcement in May 2012 of the Boiler replacement Scheme commencing in September 2012 a total of 21,777 telephone calls have been received to the application helpline.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development how many completed application forms have been received for the current Boiler Replacement Scheme.

(AQW 16365/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As of Friday the 9th November 2012 a total of 6,131 completed application forms have been received for the Boiler Replacement Scheme. In addition the Housing Executive have had to return more than 600 application forms that were not completed correctly.

Boiler Replacement Grants

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development how many boiler replacement grants have been issued since September 2012.

(AQW 16366/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As of Friday the 9th November 2012 the Housing Executive has issued 642 approvals to commence boiler replacement works.

Pay-as-you-go Oil Pilot Scheme

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Pay-As-You-Go Oil Pilot Scheme; and whether he plans to implement this scheme.

(AQW 16367/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Officials from my Department have been working with Kingspan Renewables and Carillion Energy Services to test a Pay as You Go for Oil scheme. I am very keen for this technology to be rolled out and my officials have been having on-going discussions with both Kingspan Renewables and Carillion Energy Services around the development of the product which could be rolled out in future energy efficiency schemes. I have asked officials to progress this important initiative as quickly as possible as I believe the installation of Pay as You Go for Oil systems would significantly help households who struggle to pay for a fill of oil.

I am disappointed that it is taking so long to get this up and running but there are important issues to be resolved including the cost of the product and running costs.

Volunteering Strategy

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the long term development of a volunteering strategy.

(AQW 16368/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I recognise the tremendous contribution made by volunteers in our society and I remain strongly committed to encouraging the growth of volunteering. My Department published the first ever Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland in March 2012. The new Strategy called Join in, get involved: Build a better future has five key objectives:

- Recognising the value and promoting the benefits of volunteering
- Enhancing the accessibility and diversity in volunteering
- Improving the volunteering experience
- Supporting and strengthening the volunteering infrastructure
- Delivering the Volunteering Strategy

The Volunteering Strategy is accompanied by an Action Plan that sets out a programme of work that is currently underway to achieve these objectives. It is envisaged that a Volunteering Strategy Steering Group will be established comprising key volunteering stakeholders which will monitor the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan.

Housing Executive: Evictions

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive tenants have been evicted for non-payment of rent in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16403/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The number of Housing Executive tenants that have been evicted for non-payment of rent in each of the last three years is as follows:-

2009/10	9
2010/11	25
2011/12	12

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Social Fund: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many applications from North Down have been made to the Social fund in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16404/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Due to system limitations it is not possible to provide figures for all elements of the Social Fund scheme. However it is possible to provide figures on the number of applications for the 'discretionary' element of Social Fund in the North Down constituency. Discretionary Social Fund includes Budgeting and Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants. The numbers of these applications in the North Down constituency for the last three financial years are set out in the table below.

Year	Discretionary Social Fund Applications
2011/12	9,065
2010/11	9,478
2009/10	8,856

Pension Credit

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of new applicants for pension credit in each of the last five years.

(AQW 16410/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is set out in the table below.

Year	Number of State Pension Credit Applications Received
2011-2012	8515
2010-2011	11225
2009-2010	12539
2008-2009	14262
2007-2008	8240

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development to explain the delay in sending out application forms for the boiler replacement scheme.

(AQW 16425/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I launched the Boiler Replacement Scheme in September with a budget of £12m available over the next 3 years. This equates to about 5,500 boiler replacements each year and the Housing Executive's Grant Office were resourced to deal with these numbers.

The scheme has been very popular and already 20,683 enquiries have been received in less than 2 months. I have instructed NIHE to allocate additional resources, both in terms of budget and staff available to deal with the huge number of enquiries. NIHE have advised that they anticipate the effect of the additional staff will be evident in 3-4 weeks. To date, 12,821 application forms have been issued and 5,149 have been returned. These are very large numbers compared to the anticipated 5,550 cases per year.

NIHE have confirmed to me that the Grants Offices are reducing the backlog of enquiries awaiting the issue of application forms and this will accelerate as the additional staff are added to the offices. However, enquiries continue to be received at the rate of approximately 1,000 per month.

NIHE have assured me that they continue to issue application forms to enquirers as soon as possible and any additional funding required will be allocated to the scheme.

Volunteering Projects: Ballymena

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development to list the volunteering projects that his Department has promoted, in each of the last three years, which are specific to the Ballymena council area.

(AQW 16426/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department currently provides funding of £1M for a number of volunteer centres across Northern Ireland to promote, support and develop volunteering. Under this funding Volunteer Now provides support to volunteer involving organisations in the Ballymena council area. In addition the Department's Small Grants Programme has provided funding of almost £24K in the past 3 years in the Ballymena council area to help support volunteers in small local organisations with, for example, volunteer expenses, training costs and running costs. Small Grants have been issued to the following groups in the Ballymena council area:

Small Grants Programme - 2009/10

Ballykeel 2 Residents Association	£800
Ballymena & District Carers Group	£700
Ballymena Citizens Advice Bureau	£700
Ballymena Evergreens Club	£1,000
Bannside Community Safety Group	£1,100
Carnlough Community Association	£800
Cloney Rural Development Association	£800
Glenarm Youth Club	£1,100
Shopmobility Ballymena Ltd	£800
The Rectory Residents Association	£700

Small Grants Programme - 2010/11

Ballykeel 2 Residents Association	£600
Ballymena & District Carers Group	£600
Ballymena Evergreens Club	£960
Ballymena ME & Fibromyalgia Support Group	£660
Carnlough Community Association	£1,038
Glenarm Youth Club	£966
Harryville Partnership Initiative	£1,100
Rectory Residents Association	£1,050
Shopmobility Ballymena Ltd	£1,050

Small Grants Programme - 2011/12

Antrim Coast Lions Club	£1,500
Ballymena Area Children's Contact Service	£1,102
Carnlough Community Association	£1,500
Cullybackey Development Agency	£1,000
Glenarm Village Committee	£1,500
Rectory Residents Association	£450

Volunteering Projects: Ballymoney

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development to list the volunteering projects that his Department has promoted, in each of the last three years, which are specific to the Ballymoney council area.

(AQW 16429/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department currently provides funding of £1M for a number of volunteer centres across Northern Ireland to promote, support and develop volunteering. This includes Causeway Volunteer Centre which provides support to volunteer involving organisations in the Ballymoney Council Area. In addition the Department's Small Grants Programme has provided funding of £11K in the past 3 years to help support volunteers in small local organisations with, for example, volunteer expenses, training costs and running costs. Small Grants have been issued to the following groups in the Ballymoney council area.

2010/2011

Road of Hope	£500
Asian Over 50's Club	£511
Carnany Community Association	£500
Stranocum & District Development Group	£380
Glebeside Community Association	£650
Ballybogey Community Association	£600

2011/2012

Ballybogey Community Association	£300
Rasharkin Community Association	£1000
Glebeside Community Association	£750
Cloughmills Community Action Team	£1045

2012/2013

Dervock & District Community Association	£300
Balnamore Community Association	£500
Armoy Community Association	£400
Glen Rural Community Group	£380
Armoy Community Association Over 55's	£400
Stranocum & District Community Association	£330
Stranocum & District Development Group	£410
Glebeside Community Association	£400
Castle Youth Club	£380
Castle Community Association	£450
Carnany Community Association	£350

Volunteering Projects: Moyle

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development to list the volunteering projects that his Department has promoted, in each of the last three years, which are specific to the Moyle council area.

(AQW 16430/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department currently provides funding of £1M for a number of volunteer centres across Northern Ireland to promote, support and develop volunteering. Under this funding Causeway Volunteer Centre provides support to volunteer involving organisations in the Moyle council area. In addition the Department's Small Grants Programme has provided funding of almost £5K in the past 3 years in the Moyle council area to help support volunteers in small local organisations with, for example, volunteer expenses, training costs and running costs. Small Grants have been issued to the following groups in the Moyle council area:

010/2011

- Good Morning Ballycastle £500
- Ballycastle Concern Group £600
- Bushmills Residents & Environmental Forum £500

2011/2012

- Good Morning Ballycastle £750
- Ballintoy Young at Heart Club £300
- Mother Goose Community Playgroup £500

2012/2013

- Ramoan Friendship Group £500
- Bushmills Traders Association £455
- Solas Moyle £500

Housing Executive Properties: Fibre Insulation

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive properties contain fibre insulation; and how many of these properties are known to be damp and sunken.

(AQW 16434/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not collate figures relating to the number of its dwellings which contain fibre insulation. They also do not record repair issues which relate to insulation materials and they are therefore unable to confirm how many dwellings where such materials may be damp and sunken.

However, the Housing Executive has confirmed that most of their dwellings would have had wall insulation carried out during the 1980s and 1990s. Their Home Energy Conservation Strategy Annual Progress Report (2012) indicated that 91% of Housing Executive homes have some form of wall insulation with 9%, mainly solid dwellings, having none.

Housing Executive: House Condition Survey

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development how many walls have a boroscope inserted to check the condition of the insulation during a housing condition survey.

(AQW 16435/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I assume the Member is referring to the Housing Executive's House Condition Survey, in which case there would be no boroscopic inspections as it is a non-intrusive survey.

Boiler Scrappage Scheme

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development how many new boilers have been installed under the Boiler Scrappage Scheme.

(AQW 16436/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As of the 9th November 2012 there has been 642 approvals issued to householders to start boiler replacement works with householders allowed up to 3 months to have the work completed. Householders are being encouraged to have replacement works carried out as quickly as possible once approval has been received. The number of boiler replacements should increase rapidly over the coming months as more approvals are issued and completions carried out.

Personal Independence Payment: Contract for Assessments

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the procurement process for the award of a contract to the Personal Independent Payment assessors, to outline any variations between the contract being tendered for in Northern Ireland and the contract being tendered for in Great Britain.

(AQW 16438/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Invitation to Tender documentation for the Personal Independence Payment Assessment Service for Northern Ireland was issued as a specific Lot within a single set of tender documents which sought responses across 4 lots/regions of the United Kingdom. The service requirement and supporting Terms and Conditions contained in the tender documentation are the basis of the complete contract.

Social Security Agency officials were involved in the development and approval of the tender documentation to ensure they fully reflected all of the differences in Northern Ireland legislation and policies.

When completing their tender responses, bidders were asked to respond to a number of generic questions across all Lots together with Lot specific questions.

In Lot 4, which covered services to be provided in Northern Ireland, bidders were asked to detail how their solution identified and took account of the management of specific customer needs and barriers including the use of mental health and other condition specific champions, the staff resource needed to deliver and manage the Assessment Service and how they would source sufficient, appropriate and accessible premises for Assessments.

Disability Living Allowance/Employment and Support Allowance: Appeals Service

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development whether the appeals service for Employment and Support Allowance and Disability Living Allowance is moving to the Court House in Derry; and if so, for what reasons.
(AQW 16439/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Appeals Service has increased utilisation of Londonderry Courthouse in addition to the continued use of a number of other local venues. The use of courthouses for social security benefit appeals is not unusual, as hearings can be and are already heard in courthouses throughout Northern Ireland. Business levels are increasing and will continue to rise with the advent of Welfare Reform.

The Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service is now responsible for the operational effectiveness of The Appeals Service and it is incumbent upon them to ensure maximum utilisation of the courts estate and efficient use of public funds. Londonderry Courthouse provides an independent and dignified environment with informal facilities suitable for benefit appeal hearings.

Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (Northern Ireland) Order 1985

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on his review of The Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (NI) Order (1985); and whether any amendments are proposed to the legislation to relax the law in line with other parts of the UK.
(AQW 16485/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am currently completing a review of the gambling law within Northern Ireland and expect to bring proposals to the Executive in the near future. Any proposal to change the law will depend upon the agreement of my Executive colleagues.

Housing Executive: Gardens

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what requirements there are on the Housing Executive to ensure that gardens are in a good state of repair before a property is handed over to a tenant.
(AQW 16489/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive currently applies the common practice that gardens are tidied and grass cut if overgrown when a change of tenancy occurs. The current Housing Executive Maintenance Repairs Policy Manual sets out lettable standards which include the following in respect of gardens:-

- Gardens – grass and hedges to be trimmed if appropriate.

Sexual and Domestic Violence and Abuse

Ms Brown asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the training measures his Department provides to Housing Executive employees to increase awareness and detection of sexual and domestic violence and abuse.
(AQW 16504/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has been implementing the Child Safeguarding Policy over the past two years. During this time procedures have been set up to support staff and third parties to report abuse and this has been supplemented by an intense staff training programme with over 100 separate courses delivered to 1,800 staff. To complement Child Safeguarding, the Housing Executive's Board recently approved a Vulnerable Adult Safeguarding policy which they are currently in the process of implementing. In relation to domestic violence, the Housing Executive's homelessness strategy aims to put in place all practical measures towards the elimination of domestic violence and abuse.

Through their employee relations policies, the Housing Executive aims to support and assist staff who may be/or who have experienced sexual and /or domestic violence on a personal basis.

Sexual or Domestic Violence and Abuse: Rehousing

Ms Brown asked the Minister for Social Development how many families have been rehoused in social housing as a result of sexual or domestic violence and abuse since 2007; and of those rehoused, how many were directly detected by Housing Executive staff.
(AQW 16505/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not record the reason for an applicant being rehoused. They have also advised that it is not possible to determine how many cases of sexual or domestic violence and abuse were directly detected by their staff.

However, the table below details applicants who presented and were accepted as homeless due to sexual or domestic violence since 2006/07: -

Homeless Due to Sexual and Domestic Violence

Year	Presenting as Homeless	Accepted as Homeless
2006/07	767	645
2007/08	783	635
2008/09	891	698
2009/10	906	800
2010/11	1010	829
2011/12	896	697

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St Patrick's Barracks, Ballymena

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development whether the St Patrick's Barracks will have been transferred to his Department by 11 November 2012.
(AQW 16551/11-15)

Mr McCausland: No, St Patrick's Barracks did not transfer to my Department on 11 November 2012. However, the legal processes for the conveyance of the former military housing from OFMDFM to my Department is well underway and should be completed in the coming weeks.

St Patrick's Barracks, Ballymena

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the reasons for the delay in the transfer of St Patrick's Barracks to his Department.
(AQW 16553/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The transfer and development of significant parcels of surplus public sector land such as St Patrick's Barracks are subject to a number of stages that can, on occasion, result in a protracted process prior to completion.

These processes include undertaking necessary valuations, site investigations and negotiations between all interested parties; the preparation and approval of business cases to authorise the level of public expenditure; and the development and agreement of the appropriate concept or masterplan frameworks. I understand that a number of queries regarding site contamination, leases and a right of way have impacted on these processes however, as I outlined in my response to AQW 16551/11-15, the transfer of 47 military houses to my Department is due to complete in the coming weeks.

Housing Executive: Gardens

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what is the Housing Executive's policy in relation to the preparation of gardens before re-letting to a new tenant.
(AQW 16555/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I would refer the Member to the answer in AQW 16489/11-15

Volunteering Projects: North Down/Ards

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to list the volunteering projects that his Department has promoted, in each of the last three years, which are specific to the (i) Ards; and (ii) North Down council areas.
(AQW 16556/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department currently provides funding of nearly £1M for a number of volunteer centres across Northern Ireland in order to promote, support and develop volunteering. Under this funding Volunteer Now provides support to volunteer involving organisations in the Ards and North Down council areas. In addition the Department's Small Grants Programme has provided funding of almost £43K in the past 3 years in the Ards and North Down council areas to help support volunteers in small local organisations with, for example, volunteer expenses, training costs and running costs. Small Grants have been issued to the following groups in the Ards and North Down council areas:

North Down 29k	
Small Grants Programme - 2009/10	
Bangor & North Down Samaritans	£1,100
Bangor Abbey Players	£1,100

Bangor Drama Club	£1,100
Fibromyalgia North Down & Ards	£1,100
Loughview & Redburn Forum	£1,100
North Down & Ards Samaritans	£1,100
Oi Yin Women's Group	£1,100
Recon	£1,100
The Square Centre	£1,100
Small Grants Programme - 2010/11	
Bangor & North Down Samaritans	£1,100
Bangor Abbey Players	£1,100
Bangor Drama Club	£1,100
Fibromyalgia Support North Down & Ards	£1,100
Growing Connections	£1,100
North Down & Ards Council of Trade Unions	£1,100
Redburn Loughview Community Forum	£1,100
The Recon Group	£1,100
The Square Centre	£1,100
Small Grants Programme - 2011/12	
Bangor Abbey Players	£1,500
CRUSE Breavement Care (North Down & Ards)£1,500	
Fibromyalgia Support North Down & Ards	£1,500
Growing Connections NI	£1,497
North Down & Ards Road Safety Committee	£1,000
Redburn Loughview Community Forum	£1,500
Square Centre Kilcooley	£1,000
ARDS 14K	
Small Grants Programme - 2009/10	
Comber Youth for Christ	£1,100
Conlig Village Association	£1,100
Movilla Abbey Senior Citizens	£1,100
North Down Council for Trade Unions	£1,100
Chirpy Chicks Playgroup	£1,100
Small Grants Programme - 2010/11	
Movilla Abbey Coffee House and Senior Citizens Luncheon Club	£1,100
Movilla Abbey Tots	£1,100
Small Grants Programme - 2011/12	
2nd Donaghadee Scout Group	£1,425
Home-Start Ards Comber & Peninsula Area	£1,236
Kiltonga Christian Centre	£722
Millisle Youth Forum	£1,500
Movilla Abbey Coffee House and Senior Citizens Luncheon Club	£1,000

Neighbourhood Renewal: Funds

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development whether money allocated for salaries from Neighbourhood Renewal funds can be used to pay for staff to take higher education courses that are funded by that programme; and how many people in the Foyle area have availed of this provision in the last five years.

(AQW 16558/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Money allocated for salaries from the Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund must only be used towards salaries and associated costs including, where appropriate, Employer National Insurance Contributions and Pension contributions.

My Department is unaware of any instances where Neighbourhood Renewal funding, allocated to a project for the payment of salaries, has been used to pay for people in the Foyle area to take higher education courses.

Housing: Greater Dungannon Area

Ms McGahan asked the Minister for Social Development for a breakdown of the assessment of need in terms of housing in the greater Dungannon area.

(AQW 16578/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The housing need projection for five years to 2017 has identified a need for 397 units across the Dungannon District as outlined in the table below. Projections are calculated using waiting list trends, supply trends and other demographic and local information. Please note that Dungannon 1 comprises the area principally to the north of Dungannon town and part of the town centre. Dungannon 2 comprises the remaining area to the south of Dungannon town.

Summary of Social Housing Need Assessment for Dungannon by Settlement

Settlement	Social Housing Need (Units) 5 Year Projection (2012-17)
District Town:	
Dungannon 1	247
Dungannon 2	0
Moygashel	8
Local Town:	
Coalisland	80
Villages:	
Ackinduff/ Sheer's Place	2
Augher	2
Aughnacloy	0
Ballygawley	2
Benburb	2
Bush	4
Caledon	0
Cappagh	4
Castlecaulfield	6
Clogher	6
Donaghmore	15
Fivemiletown	0
Granville/ Brantry	0
Killyman/ Laghey	6
Mountjoy	2
Moy	7
Newmills	4
Total Social New Build Requirement Dungannon District	397

Kitchen Replacement Schemes

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 15874/11-15, how many dwellings, out of the 80 that were removed from the Kitchen Replacement Scheme, have already been surveyed; and when the kitchen replacement work on these dwellings will commence.

(AQW 16586/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It was necessary to withdraw the 80 dwellings from the scheme prior to the Contractor's Date of Possession as the Housing Executive did not have asbestos surveys carried out for them. The Housing Executive has prioritised asbestos surveys for these properties in order that they are reinstated in the kitchen scheme and the speed with which they can achieve this will depend on their asbestos consultant's success in gaining access to the properties to carry out the surveys.

The Housing Executive assures me that they are confident that the kitchen replacement works for these 80 dwellings will be completed within the current scheme duration.

Employment and Support Allowance: Assessments

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development (i) whether ATOS pays for travelling expenses incurred when an Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimant cannot attend an assessment centre due to the unsuitability of the premises; (ii) how many ESA claimants have had to be assessed at an alternative centre; (iii) the total cost of providing transport to alternative centres; (iv) the name of each taxi company that has carried out this work; and (v) the total paid to each taxi company for the provision of these services in each month since the introduction of the Work Capability Assessment.

(AQW 16593/11-15)

Mr McCausland:

- (i) Any customer travelling to any Medical Examination Centre for assessment in relation to benefit claims may claim travelling expenses for their journey. Atos Healthcare makes the payment to the customer and customer expenses are then reclaimed by Atos from the Social Security Agency on a monthly basis.
- (ii) Less than 4% of assessments have had to be assessed at an alternative centre (1,375 out of 37,497). This figure includes Employment and Support Allowance and Incapacity Benefit Reassessment customers as it is not possible to distinguish between the two sets of customers.
- (iii) The total cost of providing transport to alternative centres up to 31 October 2012 was £21,987.
- (iv) To date, Atos Healthcare has used a number of taxi firms to transport customers to assessment centres depending on the customer's address and locality of the centre to be attended. The companies used to date are:
 - Fonacab, Belfast;
 - TC Taxis, Ballymena;
 - Kare Kabs, Bangor;
 - S B Taxis, Portadown; and
 - City Cabs, Foyle.
- (v) The total paid to each individual taxi company for the provision of these services cannot be provided as contractual arrangements with the MSS Supplier deem this as commercially sensitive information.

Public Realm Scheme: Waterloo Place, Derry

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development why space for a bus stop was not included in the public realm scheme in Waterloo Place, Derry.

(AQW 16609/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A bus stop has been provided as part of the public realm scheme in Waterloo Place in Londonderry. During the design work on the public realm scheme, the provision of a lay-by at this bus stop was considered. However, following consultation with interested parties, it was decided that this feature should not be included. This was because it was felt that including a bus lay-by would detract from the overall aesthetic appearance of the scheme and would encourage illegal parking, which is one of the issues which the scheme aimed to address. In addition, it can be difficult for buses parked in lay-bys to pull back into the traffic stream, which can lead to timetabling delays. A further benefit of the final design is that it helps to ensure that the local traffic, for which the road is primarily provided, moves through this well used pedestrian area in a slow and safe manner giving priority to pedestrians as necessary.

The bus route has been in operation for almost 2 years and there is no evidence that the bus stop is causing undue delay to other road users.

Winter Fuel Payment

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the eligibility criteria for the Winter Fuel Allowance.

(AQW 16610/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A Winter Fuel Payment is paid to eligible customers each winter to provide help with fuel bills. This year customers are eligible if they were born on or before 5th July 1951 and are ordinarily resident in Great Britain or Northern Ireland for at least 1 day in the qualifying week. The qualifying week for 2012 is 17th-23rd September.

Customers who are resident in a European Economic Area outside the United Kingdom who acquired entitlement to a United Kingdom Winter Fuel Payment prior to moving, retain their entitlement.

Winter Fuel Payment

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development when the Winter Fuel Allowance payments will be due.
(AQW 16611/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A Winter Fuel Payment is paid to eligible customers each winter to provide help with fuel bills. Release of payments started on the 3rd November and will continue to the 18th November 2012 with payments crediting to customers accounts by 27th November. The specific release dates are determined by the benefit the customer is entitled to.

For the small amount of customers who are applying for the payment for the first time, the Winter Fuel Payment Centre will make these payments during the period 17th November and 9th December to successful applicants who made their claim before 21st September 2012. Payments will be issued during the period 9th February to 2nd May 2013 for successful applications received after 21st September and before the closing date of 31st March 2013.

Disability Living Allowance/Employment and Support Allowance: Appeals

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development why Disability Living Allowance and Employment Support Allowance appeals are being heard at the Derry City Court House.
(AQW 16697/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service is now responsible for the operational effectiveness of The Appeals Service and it is incumbent upon them to ensure maximum utilisation of the courts estate and efficient use of public funds. Londonderry Courthouse provides an independent and dignified environment with informal facilities suitable for benefit appeal hearings.

The Appeals Service has increased utilisation of Londonderry Courthouse in addition to the continued use of a number of other local venues. The use of courthouses for social security benefit appeals is not unusual, as hearings can be and are already heard in courthouses throughout Northern Ireland. Business levels are increasing and will continue to rise with the advent of Welfare Reform.

Benefits: Sporting and Leisure Pursuits

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Social Development whether he can guarantee that people with special needs can take part in sporting and leisure pursuits knowing that their participation will not affect the benefits that they receive.
(AQW 16732/11-15)

Mr McCausland: An individual's entitlement to a social security benefit depends on the evidence submitted in support of their claim and whether they continue to meet the eligibility criteria for the particular benefit. I am fully supportive of those individuals with special needs engaging in sporting and leisure activities to enable them to lead full and independent lives. Participation in such activities will have no effect on benefit entitlement except where this is inconsistent with the evidence submitted in support of a claim.

Welfare Reform: Letter from Iain Duncan Smith

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQO 2639/11-15, to provide a copy of the letter from the Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith, and any letter which was sent in response.
(AQW 16735/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is not normal practice to routinely publish correspondence between Ministers. I can confirm that I did receive a letter from the Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith on Welfare Reform on the 24th May 2012 in which he re-iterated the financial implications under the Statement of Funding Policy of any increased costs being accrued to the Exchequer and the UK Government's position on this matter.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 30 November 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Bans on Owning a Dog

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether people who have been banned from owning a dog can live in a house with someone who has a dog.

(AQW 16249/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Neither the Dogs Order 1983 nor the Welfare of Animals Act 2011 explicitly prevent a person who has been banned from owning a dog living in a house with someone who has a dog. However, disqualification under the Welfare of Animals Act 2011 is from keeping an animal, participating in the keeping of an animal and being in a position to influence the control of an animal. Depending on the precise arrangements under which the dog is kept, if a disqualified person participates in the keeping of an animal they may be guilty of an offence. Whether this is the case, in any particular situation, would be a matter for the courts to decide.

Ministerial Directions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, since May 2011, how many decisions with spending implications have been made as a result of ministerial directions.

(AQW 16628/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I have issued one Ministerial Direction to my Department since May 2011. This was in relation to carrying out an appraisal to consider the viable options for relocating my Department's headquarters to the former military site, Shackleton Barracks, in Ballykelly.

Forest Service: Operations

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what actions her Department intends to take to increase the benefits that communities derive as a result of Forest Service operations.

(AQW 16635/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The establishment and maintenance of working partnerships with local government will be a key action for Forest Service to increase the benefits of forests to local communities.

This is in line with my vision is for improved partnership working with local government and other bodies to make sure that forests play as full a role as possible in supporting regional and local recreational and tourism agendas.

Good progress has been made with several councils in the development of partnership arrangements, expressed in the form of memoranda of understanding and development licences and this has led to the improvement of recreation and tourism facilities within forests.

In the continuation of this work my officials in Forest Service will continue to meet senior council officials across the north of Ireland to discuss their respective recreation and tourism agendas and the type of agreements that may be used to deliver tourism and social use benefits in individual tourism destination areas.

Animals Exported for Slaughter

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the number of live animals that have been exported for slaughter in each of the last four years, including the destinations; (ii) the number of animal welfare inspections that were carried out on live exports by her Department during this period; (iii) the number of violations the inspections discovered; and (iv) whether her Department has any policy regarding the slaughter of exported livestock in a manner which is illegal in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 16636/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:**(i) Cattle Exported for Direct Slaughter**

	GB	South of Ireland	Other	Total
2008	7,685	14,175	0	21,860
2009	10,166	7,008	0	17,174
2010	8,380	3,413	0	11,793
2011	5,675	10,602	0	16,277
2012	7,211	8,542	0	15,753

Note: Figures for 2012 are not for the full Calendar Year.

Sheep Exported for Direct Slaughter

	GB	South of Ireland	Other	Total
2008	13,806	249,397	0	263,203
2009	2,293	251,941	0	254,234
2010	2,664	363,279	0	365,943
2011	580	488,807	0	489,387
2012	2,813	377,025	0	379,838

Note: Figures for 2012 are not for the full Calendar Year.

Pigs Exported for Direct Slaughter

	GB	South of Ireland	Other	Total
2008	4,089	6,790	0	10,879
2009	14,883	1,016	0	15,899
2010	9,661	4,524	0	14,185
2011	14,448	5,116	0	19,564
2012	20,170	5,477	0	25,647

Note: Figures for 2012 are not for the full Calendar Year.

(ii) The number of Animal Welfare Inspections carried out on consignments of live exports is - 10,881 - broken down:-

- 2009 - 2758
- 2010 - 2900
- 2011 - 2289
- 2012 - 2934

(iii) The number of violations inspections discovered is - 136 - broken down

- 2009 - 19
- 2010 - 40
- 2011 - 37
- 2012 - 40

(iv) Animals being exported directly for slaughter have only been consigned to Britain or the South of Ireland in recent times. For both this internal and intra-Community trade, the policy is governed by EC trade & welfare legislation.**Freedom of Information Requests**

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the number of Freedom of Information requests received by her Department in each year since 2007; (ii) the proportion of requests each year that were not answered within the time limit; (iii) the number of requests currently outstanding by more than (a) one to two months (b) three to four months; (c) five to six months; (d) seven to twelve months; and (e) more than twelve months.

(AQW 16644/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

Year	Requests Received	Proportion of Requests not Answered within Time Limit
2007	239	7.5%
2008	289	4.8%
2009	276	1.4%
2010	310	2.6%
2011	292	5.1%
	Number of Requests Currently Outstanding	
1-2 months	1	
3-4 months	0	
5-6 months	0	
7-12 months	0	
More than 12 months	0	

DARD responds to information requests in line with two pieces of legislation – The Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR). The figures provided above are for the total number of requests received under both legislative regimes.

Wind Farms: Forest Service Property

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps her Department intends to take to ensure that communities will derive benefits from the establishment of wind farms on Forest Service property.
(AQW 16649/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I remain committed to finding a way in which forest assets can be used to help provide benefits to support rural communities. My Department has not yet received formal approval from DFP on the Outline Business Case for the development of wind farm opportunities on my Department's lands. However, pending approval I remain determined to explore all options to ensure that communities derive the benefits from the establishment of wind farms on Forest Service property and will examine all progressive proposals.

Single Farm Payments

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of Single Farm Payments in each of the last five years.
(AQW 16668/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The number of Single Farm Payments claimed in the last five years are as follows:

Scheme Year	Number of Applications Received
2008	38,648
2009	38,451
2010	38,181
2011	37,873
2012	37,583

Countryside Management Scheme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 15090/11-15, to detail (i) the reasons for each of the 2011 appeals; and (ii) the current status of each appeal.
(AQW 16685/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) The reasons for each of the appeals received in 2011 are summarised in Table 1.
- (ii) The current status of each appeal received in 2011 is summarised in Table 2.

Table 1. The reasons for each of the appeals received in 2011

Category of appeal	Number of appeals
FBR over-declaration only	7
Enhancement Measure over-declaration	7
Habitat over-declaration only	3
FBR & Habitat over-declaration	3
Scheme non-compliance	3
Late claim (Force Majeure)	1
Total	24

Explanatory notes for Table 1.

FBR is Field Boundary Restoration.

Over-declaration is where a claimant has not completed some or all of the work claimed. For example the completed length of FBR, or area of habitat being managed by the claimant is less than that claimed.

Enhancement Measure funding is for capital items that help scheme participants meet the requirements of their management plan.

Scheme non-compliance is where a claimant has not completed an aspect of the work in their management plan to the standard required.

Force Majeure is exceptional circumstances outside the farmer's control which could not have been avoided except at the cost of excessive sacrifice.

Table 2. The current status of each appeal received in 2011

Status	Number of appeals
In progress	2
Appeal rejected	16
Appeal successful	6
Total	24

Conservation of Priority Habitats

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department will continue to conserve priority habitats, in particular peatland habitats, given the cuts of over £40 million to agri-environment funds since 2010.

(AQW 16715/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department continues to help to conserve a wide range of priority habitats, including peatlands, through the on-going delivery of agri-environment schemes. There are 12,100 farmers participating in DARD schemes who manage some 450,000 ha of land. This represents 44% of the agricultural area, with approximately £25m paid out to farmers in agri-environment schemes each year. My Department works closely with the NI Environment Agency (NIEA) to implement Habitat Action Plans for priority habitats which helps landowners to undertake appropriate management plans aimed at conservation of these habitats.

Despite a reduction in funding available under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2007- 2013, the agri-environment budget is £180m and my Department has progressed new applications to the NI Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS) which have the highest environmental value. Some 549 new agreements were signed this year and a further 200 applications will be offered agreements with a start date of 1 January 2013. In addition, my Department is focusing on helping existing participants to make the most of their schemes to benefit the countryside and we are working to develop a new agri-environment scheme for the next RDP for 2014 – 2020. The reform of Europe's Common Agricultural Policy is ongoing, and the outcome of this process will shape the parameters of the future agri-environment programme. It is envisaged that funding will be made available to manage priority habitats, such as peatlands under the next RDP.

Countryside Management Scheme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 15090/11-15, to detail (i) the reasons for each of the 2012 appeals; and (ii) the current status of each appeal.

(AQW 16742/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (iii) The reasons for each of the appeals received in 2012 are summarised in Table 1.
- (iv) The current status of each appeal received in 2012 is summarised in Table 2.

Table 1. The reasons for each of the appeals received in 2012

Category of appeal	Number of appeals
FBR over-declaration only	12
Enhancement Measure over-declaration only	8
Habitat over-declaration only	3
FBR & Habitat over-declaration	3
FBR & Enhancement Measure over-declaration	2
Payment related appeal	2
Land ownership appeal	3
Appeal to withdraw claim	1
Total	34

Explanatory notes for Table 1.

FBR is Field Boundary Restoration.

Over-declaration is where a claimant has not completed some or all of the work claimed. For example the completed length of FBR, or area of habitat being managed by the claimant is less than that claimed.

Enhancement Measure funding is for capital items that help scheme participants meet the requirements of their management plan.

Scheme non-compliance is where a claimant has not completed an aspect of the work in their management plan to the standard required.

Table 2. The current status of each appeal received in 2012

Status	Number of appeals
In progress	7
Appeal rejected	25
Appeal successful	2
Total	34

Cider Products: Regulations

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development who has responsibility for the regulations regarding the manufacture and sale of cider products.

(AQW 16758/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has no responsibility for the regulations regarding the manufacture and sale of cider products.

Single Farm Payments

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farms in each constituency are in receipt of single farm payments.

(AQW 16790/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The number of farm businesses in each constituency that submitted a Single Farm Payment (SFP) application in 2011 is as follows:

Constituency	Number of Applicants to the 2011 Single Farm Payment Scheme
Belfast East	127
Belfast North	82

Constituency	Number of Applicants to the 2011 Single Farm Payment Scheme
Belfast South	150
Belfast West	34
East Antrim	1152
East Londonderry	2393
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	6100
Foyle	309
Lagan Valley	1684
Mid Ulster	4386
Newry and Armagh	4350
North Antrim	3616
North Down	233
South Antrim	1671
South Down	3832
Strangford	1534
Upper Bann	1343
West Tyrone	4479
Others *	398

* The constituency information is drawn from the postcodes of businesses that submitted a SFP in 2011. The "Other" figure represents farm businesses that either do not have a valid postcode recorded against their business or are businesses where the addresses held is outside the 18 constituencies listed above.

Farms

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of farms, broken down by constituency. (AQW 16791/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The 2011 Agricultural Census found farms by constituency as follows:

Table 1: Number of Farms at June 2011

Constituency	Number of Farms
Belfast East	28
Belfast North	9
Belfast South	24
Belfast West	9
East Antrim	802
East Londonderry	1,543
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	4,279
Foyle	175
Lagan Valley	864
Mid Ulster	2,860
Newry & Armagh	3,027
North Antrim	2,199
North Down	119
South Antrim	1,036
South Down	2,606

Constituency	Number of Farms
Strangford	880
Upper Bann	737
West Tyrone	3,239
Total	24,436

Prompt Payment

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what practices, protocols and measures are in place within the Department and its arm's-length bodies to ensure prompt payment to contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers. (AQW 16796/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department and ALBs take very seriously their obligations in relation to prompt payment to all their suppliers.

We are legally bound to meet the terms of the Late Payment of Commercial debts (Interest) Act 1988 as amended and supplemented by the Late Payment of Commercial Debts Regulations 2002. Payment should be made within agreed terms or if no terms have been agreed, 30 days after receipt of a valid invoice.

In line with DFP guidance we are committed to paying as many suppliers as we can within 10 (working) days.

In relation to my Department and its Agencies, 10 day prompt payment performance is sent to senior management for review each month for them to take action as appropriate. Additionally, my Departmental Board reviews performance each quarter and annual performance is recorded in the annual report.

My ALBs who make payments also have mechanisms in place to monitor and report on their performance.

Payments from contractors to their sub-contractors are not the responsibility of my department and ALBs.

Equality Impact Assessments: Cost

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the cost to her Department, over the last three financial years, of undertaking equality impact assessments. (AQW 16858/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Section 75 statutory duties make equality and good relations central to the whole range of public policy decision-making. Therefore the cost of carrying out Equality Impact Assessments are not maintained separately and cannot readily be disaggregated

Infected Saplings

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how long landowners are given to destroy infected saplings after being served with destruction notices. (AQW 16941/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Statutory Plant Health Notices specify a time by which action must be completed. The Inspector's primary consideration is the plant health risk which Chalara dieback poses and control is achieved by destroying affected plants and plant material. It is important we move quickly to remove infected plants. Currently, inspectors allow up to 7 days for compliance, although it is desirable that action takes place as quickly as possible. For that reason, I am currently making Forest Service assistance available to help landowners comply with notice requirements, and this offer has been taken up by all landowners so far.

Ash Dieback Disease

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what interaction she has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in relation to ash dieback disease. (AQW 16944/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: On Monday 19 November, I took part in a teleconference, chaired by DEFRA Secretary of State Owen Patterson MP, and attended by the Scottish and Welsh Agriculture Ministers, to discuss ongoing co-operation on matters of common significance. During this meeting, I updated the Ministers on the situation relating to Ash Dieback in the north of Ireland and our policy of containment and eradication. We agreed to remain in close co-operation between the devolved administrations and particularly between Ireland, north and south.

Ash Dieback Disease

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what interaction she or her Department has had with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs or his Department following the discovery of ash dieback disease in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 16945/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: On Monday 19 November, I took part in a teleconference, chaired by Owen Patterson MP, and attended by the Scottish and Welsh Agriculture Ministers, to discuss ongoing co-operation on matters of common significance. During this meeting, we also discussed the issue of Ash Dieback and agreed that the best way forward remained the close co-operation between all Devolved administrations and through north and south co-operation.

Following confirmation of Ash dieback findings, my officials have been in regular discussions with colleagues in DEFRA. My Department is represented on the Chalara Outbreak Management Team and has taken part in the recent COBR meetings, which were chaired by the DEFRA Secretary of State, Owen Paterson MP.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Irish Language: Armagh

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the number of Irish speakers in the Armagh City area; and (ii) what programmes or organisations her Department has funded in the Armagh City area for the promotion of the Irish language. **(AQW 14990/11-15)**

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The Department does not hold the information pertaining to the number of Irish speakers in the Armagh City area.

The 2011 Census included a question on the Irish language. The statistics will be published within the next few months.

The Líofo 2015 initiative was launched by myself to encourage more people to speak Irish. The Líofo Gaeltacht Bursary Scheme programme was available to everyone in the North during the summer of 2012.

Foras na Gaeilge the Irish Language Agency of the North South Language Body is jointly funded by the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure and the Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht. In the Armagh City area Foras na Gaeilge fund the following programmes and organisations to promote the Irish language:

- | | |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| ■ Summer Camps Scheme 2012 | ■ Armagh Pipers – Secondary School day |
| ■ Youth Events Scheme 2012/2013 | ■ The Armagh Rhymers Educational & Cultural Organisation |
| ■ 18th William Kennedy Piping Festival | ■ Patrún an Oirghialla (Gaeltacht Oirdheiscirt Uladh) |
| ■ Cairde Teo | ■ Gael-Linn |
| ■ Bunscoil Ard Naomh Cairtriona | |

Civil Servants: Criminal Offences

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) whether any departmental staff have been charged with criminal offences; and (ii) what is her Department's position regarding staff employment whilst court proceedings are pending. **(AQW 15284/11-15)**

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL has no record of any Departmental staff having been charged with criminal offences.

DCAL's position is in accordance with paragraph 26.1 of the NICS Standards of Conduct Policy staff are required to report to their employing Department if they are arrested, charged, or convicted by a Court of any criminal offence (except a traffic offence with a private vehicle for which the penalty has not included imprisonment or disqualification from driving). Failure to do so may be treated as a disciplinary matter which is dealt with in accordance with section 6 of the NICS Policy on Discipline. The policy includes provision for the person exercising formal disciplinary powers, if the circumstances warrant it, to pursue formal disciplinary action without waiting on the outcome of any police investigation and disposal of any resulting criminal proceedings.

World Police and Fire Games 2013

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her Department plans to promote the World Police and Fire Games in advance of August 2013; and what cultural significance will be highlighted in the promotional material. **(AQW 15311/11-15)**

Ms Ní Chuilín: 2013 World Police and Fire Games Limited have a Communication Strategy in place to ensure that the 2013 Games are promoted locally, nationally and internationally.

A number of specific promotion mechanisms are in place, including the Games website, which is the primary communications channel to carry all information regarding the 2013 Games. Other promotional methods include social media such as

Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, electronic newsletters, printed marketing, regular local and national PR activity and international Services-specific PR.

An advertising campaign is ongoing as part of the volunteer recruitment programme and in the lead up to the Games next year a further advertising campaign is planned to promote the Games to the public.

Furthermore, an event plan has been designed to promote the Games locally and further afield. These events are a mix of pre-existing events to relevant industry sectors, or events that have been specifically arranged by 2013 World Police and Fire Games Limited to promote the Games.

In terms of cultural content in World Police and Fire Games promotional material, a range of cultural information will be considered, not least given Derry's role as City of Culture 2013. However, it is intended that there will be a diverse and varied cultural programme on offer to visitors for the Games.

2013 World Police and Fire Games Limited will, through its communication media, highlight and provide links to cultural events that will take place across the north of Ireland during the period of the Games. Additionally it is encouraging local Councils to consider organising additional events during and around the Games to further enhance the cultural offer.

Sport NI: Board

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the reasons for the delay in appointing a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson to the Board of Sport NI.

(AQW 15375/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Following the statement made by the Minister for Regional Development in relation to a fair employment tribunal case involving public appointments, I requested the postponement of all processes in relation to public appointments within the Department for a period, while advice was sought in relation to procedural matters. This postponement included the process relating to the appointment of Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson to the Board of Sport NI.

Press Releases

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether there is a ban in place on the issuing of press releases by staff in her Department, or its arm's-length bodies, to the Press Association.

(AQW 15401/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There is no ban in place on issuing of press releases to the Press Association.

Boat Patrols: Antrim Coast

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many boat patrols her Department has performed off the coast of Antrim in the last 12 months.

(AQW 15519/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There have been 7 boat patrols carried out by DCAL Fisheries Protection Officers off the Antrim coast in the last 12 months.

Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the support provided by her Department, and its arm's-length bodies, to Sandy Row Boxing Club between May 2007 and May 2011.

(AQW 16123/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI is responsible for the distribution of funding to sport in the north of Ireland and for providing advice and guidance to clubs and governing bodies on the development of their sports. In the period May 2007 to May 2011, Sport NI received no applications for funding from Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club (SRABC) and consequently the club was not considered for any funding support. In that time, however, and following a request from SRABC to the then Minister, Nelson McCausland MLA, the Minister and Sport NI met with representatives of the club to discuss their concerns over alleged sectarianism within the sport. At this meeting it was agreed that Sport NI would raise the matter with the Ulster Provincial Boxing Council (UPBC) and the County Antrim Board (CAB). As a result of this, Sport NI contacted SRABC in December 2010 to offer the services of a neutral advisor to facilitate discussions between the club, the UPBC and the CAB. This offer of support was refused by SRABC on 29 December 2010.

National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what contact she has had with the National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts in relation to seeking additional inward support.

(AQW 16680/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Nesta is actively seeking to reinvigorate its presence and impact in the north of Ireland and my Department is supporting this through ever increasing liaison. This has included officials participating in Nesta briefings and discussions on digital education and its recently launched Plan 1 – which sets the case for innovation led growth.

My Department is working with partners across government, such as DETI and Invest NI, and with the wider creative and cultural sector to increase awareness of Nesta programmes and opportunities for collaboration.

In 2009/10 NESTA piloted a Creative Credits programme in Greater Manchester which enabled small to medium sized companies to acquire support from a local creative business. DCAL has advocated a similar scheme locally, via the Executive's Jobs in the Economy initiative should funding be available, to harness the expertise and innovative potential of the creative industries to support wider business growth.

I understand that Nesta is considering a 'road-show' in the north of Ireland in March 2013. This coincides with Creativity Month and a Nesta event would therefore benefit from an enhanced promotional platform and related activities taking place at that time. My officials are liaising with Nesta to this effect.

Salmon Consultation

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when her decision on actions to be taken following the salmon consultation will be announced.

(AQW 16682/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am currently considering the outcomes of the public consultation, together with scientific and other advice, and I will decide on what actions are required to provide robust protection of wild Atlantic salmon stocks in the DCAL jurisdiction.

I would anticipate making a statement on this matter to the Assembly during December.

Department of Education

Pupils: Expulsions and Suspensions

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to list the number of pupils who have been (i) suspended; and (ii) expelled in each of the last five years, broken down by (a) school sector; and (b) Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 16990/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The information requested is provided in the tables below.

I am unable to provide you with a breakdown of figures by school sector or Board area as to do so would not comply with the Statistics Authority Code of Practice on Official Statistics, in particular Principle 5, relating to confidentiality. It is inappropriate therefore to publish the expulsion statistics in any more detail since the risk of individual pupils being identified is unacceptably high, due to the small numbers involved.

Pupils Suspended in Last 5 Years - Broken Down by School Sector

School Sector	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Primary Schools	212	196	248	179	200
Secondary Schools	4,185	3,936	3,903	3,530	3,134
Grammar Schools	711	540	568	466	460
Special Schools	82	86	60	65	85
Total	5,190	4,758	4,779	4,240	3,879

Pupils Suspended in Last 5 Years – Broken Down by Board Area

Board Area	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
BELB	1,067	888	942	835	816
WELB	895	890	798	746	753
NEELB	1,290	1,067	1,234	1,045	866
SEELB	863	1,016	1,004	879	828
SELB	1,075	897	801	735	616
Total	5,190	4,758	4,779	4,240	3,879

Notes to tables:

- 1 The figures include pupils in Key Stage 1-4 in primary, post-primary and special schools.
- 2 The figures refer to the number of pupils suspended. The total number of suspensions is likely to be higher since a pupil can be suspended more than once.

Pupils Expelled in the Last 5 Academic Years

Year	Number of expulsions
2007/08	25
2008/09	36
2009/10	22
2010/11	38
2011/12	24

Preschool Places

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many children received a pre-school place in each of the last three years, broken down by (i) type; and (ii) Education and Library Board.

(AQW 17027/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The tables below show the number of children in DE funded pre-school education places in each of the last three years:

2009/10

Type	BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	TOTAL
Voluntary and Private Pre-School Education Centres¹	523	1,225	1,696	1,372	1,928	6,744
Nursery Schools						
Full-time	1,563	473	338	811	811	3,996
Part-time	-	310	1,031	207	313	1,861
Total Nursery Schools Pupils	1,563	783	1,369	1,018	1,124	5,857
Primary Schools Nursery Class Pupils						
Full-time	1,158	934	523	495	1,384	4,494
Part-time	177	829	1,120	1,412	262	3,800
Total Nursery Class Pupils	1,335	1,763	1,643	1,907	1,646	8,294
Primary: reception	1	90	115	91	279	576
Total Primary Pupils	1,336	1,853	1,758	1,998	1,925	8,870
Total	3,422	3,861	4,823	4,388	4,977	21,471

2010/11

Type	BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	TOTAL
Voluntary and Private Pre-School Education Centres¹	614	1,321	1,903	1,652	2,109	7,599
Nursery Schools						
Full-time	1,569	467	341	812	84	4,033
Part-time	-	314	1,038	209	312	1,873
Total Nursery Schools Pupils	1,569	781	1,379	1,021	1,156	5,906
Primary Schools Nursery Class Pupils						

Type	BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	TOTAL
Full-time	1,241	994	528	527	1,539	4,829
Part-time	129	821	1,136	1,405	182	3,673
Total Nursery Class Pupils	1,370	1,815	1,664	1,932	1,721	8,502
Primary: reception	2	78	91	102	218	491
Total Primary Pupils	1,372	1,893	1,755	2,034	1,939	8,993
Total	3,555	3,995	5,037	4,707	5,204	22,499

2011/12

Type	BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	Total
Voluntary and Private Pre-School Education Centres¹	650	1,338	2,140	1,781	2,240	8,149
Nursery Schools						
Full-time	1,515	471	312	812	871	3,981
Part-time	-	313	1,094	210	313	1,930
Total Nursery Schools Pupils	1,515	784	1,406	1,022	1,184	5,911
Primary Schools Nursery Class Pupils						
Full-time	1,289	1,020	575	597	1,662	5,143
Part-time	128	791	1,092	1,357	158	3,526
Total Nursery Class Pupils	1,417	1,811	1,667	1,954	1,820	8,669
Primary: reception	1	87	101	107	148	444
Total Primary Pupils	1,418	1,898	1,768	2,061	1,968	9,113
Total	3,583	4,020	5,314	4,864	5,392	23,173

BELB - Belfast Education and Library Board

WELB - Western Education and Library Board

NEELB - North Eastern Education and Library Board

SEELB - South Eastern Education and Library Board

SELB - Southern Education and Library Board

1 Voluntary and Private centres funded under the Pre-School Education Programme

Schools: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what schools in North Down have been identified as in need of repair; and for an estimate of the cost to make the necessary repairs.

(AQW 17163/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: According to the Education and Library Boards' estate management system, the following schools in the North Down area have been identified as being in need of repair. The estimated cost of these repairs (maintenance backlog at 26 November 2012) is detailed below:

School	Maintenance Backlog (£)
Bangor Nursery	53,545
Hollywood Nursery	1,500
Trinity Nursery	63,920
Ballymagee Primary	3,290
Ballyvester Primary	28,550

School	Maintenance Backlog (£)
Bloomfield Road Primary	313,680
Clandeboye Primary	274,395
Crawfordsburn Primary	20,450
Donaghadee Primary	139,580
Grange Park Primary	154,940
Hollywood Primary	138,769
Kilcooley Primary	219,047
Millisle Primary	125,235
Rathmore Primary	367,230
Redburn Primary (Closed)	604,405
Saint Anne's Primary	29,615
Saint Comgall's Primary	5,190
Saint Malachy's Primary	210,786
Saint Patrick's Primary	298,945
Bangor Central Integrated Primary	53,850
Glencraig Integrated Primary	62,775
Saint Columbanus College	527,685
Priory College	561,685
Bangor Grammar School	4,791,098
Clifton Special	5,100
Killard Special	8,355
Total	9,063,620

There is a programme of planned maintenance across the schools' estate that impacts on the level of maintenance backlog. In addition, reactive maintenance is carried out to address unexpected emergency issues such as a heating system failure. The cost of emergency work is not reflected in the maintenance backlog figure.

As I am sure you are aware the new build for Bangor Grammar School is now nearing completion. The maintenance backlog for the school, as detailed above, reflects the condition of the old school at College Avenue.

Education and Skills Authority: Responsibilities

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what powers the Education and Skills Authority will have over the selection and intake of pupils to post-primary schools.

(AQW 17167/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Under Article 16 of the Education (NI) Order 1997 (N.I.5) the Board of Governors of each grant-aided school must draw up criteria to be applied, in the event of oversubscription, in order to select children for admission to the school. This will not change in the move to the Education and Skills Authority.

Voluntary Grammar Schools

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 16834/11-15, at what stage of the approvals process is this matter; and how long before the process is complete.

(AQW 17179/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The approval process is at the information gathering stage. An extensive exercise will be necessary and it is likely that the process will take a number of months to complete.

Department for Employment and Learning

Prompt Payment

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what practices, protocols and measures are in place within the Department and its arm's-length bodies to ensure prompt payment to contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers.

(AQW 16730/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Unless otherwise stated in a contract, the Department aims to make payments to suppliers and contractors within 30 days of receipt of goods or services, on presentation of a valid invoice or similar demand, whichever is later. This is in accordance with the Confederation of British Industry's prompt payment code and British Standard BS 7890.

In November 2008, Finance Minister Nigel Dodds set a target for all Northern Ireland Departments to pay supplier invoices within 10 working days of receipt in order to help local business in the current economic climate.

In order to promote awareness within the Department, prompt payment policy forms part of the Department's financial procedures. The policy is applied in partnership with Account NI, the financial shared service centre, which performs transaction processing on behalf of the Department, including payment.

The Department monitors its own performance against both 10 day and 30 day targets on a monthly basis and takes action accordingly. Information on prompt payment performance is also included in the Department's annual resource accounts, as required by the FReM (Financial Reporting Manual).

In the year ended 31 March 2012, 96% of invoices from suppliers were paid by the Department within 30 days, and 87% within 10 days.

The Department has given guidance on prompt payment to its arm's-length bodies. These bodies have processes in place to ensure adherence to prompt payment for all their suppliers (including contractors and sub-contractors).

First Start

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the timescale for the proposed scheme to provide 1700 young people with six months paid employment.

(AQW 16748/11-15)

Dr Farry: This initiative, known as 'First Start', will support 1,700 jobs, each lasting for a minimum of six months, for unemployed 18 to 24 year olds. First Start will support an initial tranche of 500 jobs in this financial year. A further 600 opportunities will be supported during both 2013/14 and 2014/15. While these jobs may, initially, be temporary it is anticipated that in many cases they may lead to permanent employment.

Economy and Jobs Initiative

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what steps will be taken to ensure that the additional training and employment schemes envisaged in the Executive's Economy and Jobs Initiative will be distributed equitably.

(AQW 16749/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Executive's Economy and Jobs Initiative announced earlier this month is a package of measures in response to the current economic circumstances faced by Northern Ireland. The new measures are intended to ensure that those out of work have access to the right training, skills and education opportunities and are particularly focused on the needs of young people and other disadvantaged groups.

A number of the new measures outlined within the Economy and Jobs Initiative will be delivered through my Department's Steps to Work (StW) programme. They include 'First Start' offering waged employment opportunities for young people, 'Step Ahead 50+' offering temporary paid employment in the community and voluntary sector and 'Public Sector Work Placements'

These measures will be offered to people from all backgrounds throughout Northern Ireland. The distribution of 'Public Sector Work Placements' will be dependent on the availability/locations of work experience placements within public sector organisations but again will be open to people from all backgrounds. My Department is committed to offering placements and a number of these will be available in the network of 35 Jobs & Benefits Offices and Job Centres across Northern Ireland.

Apprenticeships

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the timescale for the introduction of the proposed scheme for an additional 900 apprenticeship places for young people.

(AQW 16750/11-15)

Dr Farry: Through the Youth Employment Scheme we will encourage further employer engagement with the objective of bringing an additional 900 young people onto the ApprenticeshipsNI programme. As you are aware, the programme is demand-led with employers employing the apprentice and my Department meeting the full cost (in the case of 16 to 24 yr olds) for the "off the job" training.

It is intended that a significant number of those young people who participate on the Youth Employment Scheme will transfer directly to ApprenticeshipsNI. To help facilitate this, the Jobs and Economy Initiative has allocated an additional £0.2m in 2013/14 and a further £0.7m in 2014/15 to ApprenticeshipsNI.

Step Ahead 50+

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the timescale for the introduction of the scheme to provide temporary employment for 1100 people aged over fifty.

(AQW 16751/11-15)

Dr Farry: The initiative to provide temporary employment for 6 months for 1,100 people aged 50 or over, which will be known Step Ahead 50+, is scheduled to be introduced in early January 2013 as part of the Steps to Work programme. It is proposed that Step Ahead 50+ will initially support 300 temporary jobs in this financial year with a further 400 temporary jobs supported during both 2013/14 and 2014/15.

Stranmillis University College, Belfast: Budget Reclassification

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to explain the £0.9 million budget reclassification of Stranmillis University College, Belfast, referred to in Table E of the Minister of Finance and Personnel's statement to the Assembly on 12 November 2012.

(AQW 16775/11-15)

Dr Farry: Stranmillis University College have revised their expenditure profiles for 2012/13 and requested that £0.9 million Resource DEL be reclassified to Capital DEL to progress their capital programme, including the Dunseverick Accommodation En Suites project. This was actioned in the recent October Monitoring Round.

Training Organisations: West Belfast

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many young people in West Belfast are in training organisations.

(AQW 16806/11-15)

Dr Farry: Steps to Work (StW) is my Department's main adult return to work programme and is delivered by contracted providers. At June 2012 (the latest date for which statistics are available) there were 169 people aged 18 – 24 years old on the StW programme with the contracted provider in West Belfast.

My Department, through its Training for Success (TfS) Programme, guarantees a training place for all unemployed young people in the 16-17 age group. At 20 November 2012 there were 631 participants on TfS with contracted suppliers based in West Belfast.

The Programme-Led Apprenticeship (PLA) programme assists young school leavers who have been unable to find the requisite employed status during the economic downturn to train as an apprentice. At 20 November 2012 there were 1,421 young people participating on the PLA programme with the contracted suppliers based in West Belfast.

ApprenticeshipsNI is my Department's flagship training programme for those in employment. There are over 100 frameworks covering apprenticeships in a diverse range of occupational areas. At 20 November 2012, there were 1,128 young people placed with training organisations in West Belfast, following an ApprenticeshipsNI framework.

Apprenticeships

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to list the apprenticeship schemes offered by his Department; and to detail how each scheme operates for those involved and the payment they receive.

(AQW 16808/11-15)

Dr Farry: ApprenticeshipsNI is my Department's flagship training programme for those in employment. There are over 100 frameworks covering apprenticeships in a diverse range of occupational areas. ApprenticeshipsNI provides apprentices with the opportunity to achieve an industry approved Level 2/Level 3 Framework and is open to those who have reached school leaving age, are either entering or are already in employment, and contracted to work a minimum of 21 hours a week.

As a minimum, employers with apprentices in the ApprenticeshipsNI programme must adhere to the National Minimum Wage Act 1998. However, under ApprenticeshipsNI guidelines, they are encouraged to pay their apprentice a wage commensurate with the industry rate for the job.

ApprenticeshipsNI training is delivered by contracted training suppliers throughout Northern Ireland. It is a demand-led provision and the number of apprenticeship places is determined by employers meeting their business needs. For apprentices aged 16-24 directed training costs are met by my Department and for apprentices aged 25 plus, 50% funding is available if they are undertaking an apprenticeship in an economically important sector. Funding ranges from £2,600 to £10,800 determined by the level and occupational area of study. On completion, an incentive bonus of up to £1,500 is paid to the employer.

Programme-Led Apprenticeships (PLA) assist young school leavers who have been unable to find the requisite employed status to train as an apprentice during the economic downturn. Entry to the programme may be by self-referral, referral

from Careers Service or progression from Training for Success. The programme guarantees training of up to 104 weeks for unemployed 16/17 year olds who have been assessed as capable of undertaking and achieving a Level 2 Apprenticeship Framework qualification.

The qualification is identical to that offered under the employer-led ApprenticeshipsNI programme. A participant who secures paid employment in his/her framework area during PLA may transfer to ApprenticeshipNI.

PLA participants receive a weekly non-means tested Educational Maintenance Allowance of £40. In addition assistance is available towards the cost of travel, childcare and, where necessary, lodgings.

Steps 2 Success

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in light of the creative industry sector being one of the largest potential for job growth (over 11,700 jobs by 2020), why he is removing the music industry support that is available under the Steps to Work Programme from the new Steps to Success Programme.

(AQW 16850/11-15)

Dr Farry: Steps 2 Success, my Department's new employment programme is being developed to help people in receipt of benefits and removed from the labour market to find and sustain employment. A key feature of the new programme is to remove the prescriptive nature of previous employment programmes. This flexibility will allow providers to develop and tailor innovative support solutions to address clients' barriers to employment without the need to attend pre-determined provision or training. Additionally, the number of hours and/or days that a client will be required to attend will be agreed between the client and the provider. This will allow a client and their Steps 2 Success provider to work together to achieve the client's job goal at the earliest opportunity.

While music industry advice, like all other elements of Steps to Work, no longer exists as part of a set menu of provision, support should still be available via the Steps 2 Success provider. Where a client's agreed job goal includes the need for music industry support, this will be arranged by the provider who will have responsibility for ensuring that a robust supply chain is in place to meet the needs of all clients on the Steps 2 Success programme.

Youth Unemployment: Newry and Armagh Area

Ms Fearon asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department has taken to address youth unemployment in the Newry and Armagh area.

(AQW 16951/11-15)

Dr Farry: Addressing youth unemployment, in all areas of Northern Ireland including the Newry and Armagh area, is a priority.

Steps to Work (StW) is the Department's main return to work provision and in the Newry and Armagh area 551 young people are currently availing of this programme. This is a flexible programme which tailors provision to the individual's need with the aim of assisting participants to find and sustain employment.

The Department's Pathways to Work programme assists people with health conditions and disabilities move into employment and presently 122 young people in the Newry and Armagh area are involved in this programme.

In addition to this, in the period April to October 2012 my Department helped 566 young people move from welfare to work in Newry and Armagh (the area served by Newry and Armagh Jobs and Benefits Offices). This is 13% above target for those areas for the period. (The target for Newry was 318 and for Armagh, 182).

My Department is also implementing the Youth Employment Scheme (YES) which was agreed by the Executive in March. The Scheme aims to help young people gain experience, acquire new skills and find employment and the Department is actively working with employers to secure as many opportunities, as quickly as possible across Northern Ireland. Opportunities under YES will be available in the Armagh and Newry areas in the coming months.

As part of the Jobs and Economy Initiative announced by the Executive, my Department has also recently implemented a new youth employment initiative within the Steps to Work programme called 'First Start'. Between October 2012 and March 2014, First Start will support 1,700 waged employment opportunities, each lasting a minimum of six months, for young people aged 18 to 24 who have been in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance for at least six months. First Start opportunities will be available in the Newry and Armagh area in the coming months.

Finance: Pre-hearing Deposits

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many pre-hearing deposits there have been in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16972/11-15)

Dr Farry: The table provided sets out statistics from the Office of Industrial Tribunals and the Fair Employment Tribunal concerning pre-hearing deposits in the previous three full reporting years and to date this year.

Table: Pre-hearing deposits – April 2009 to November 2012

	Listed for hearing	Heard	Deposit ordered	Deposit paid
April 2009-March 2010	-	-	-	-
April 2010-March 2011	3	3	-	-
April 2011-March 2012	20	8	6	-
April 2012-November 2012	31	13	13	5

Disparities between numbers listed for hearing, heard, deposits ordered and deposits paid reflect situations where a case (or relevant part of it) has been conciliated or otherwise settled, withdrawn, postponed or dismissed

South Eastern Regional College and Down District Council

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether any partnership arrangements exist between the South Eastern Regional College and Down District Council.

(AQW 16975/11-15)

Dr Farry: South Eastern Regional College has advised that it does not have formal partnership arrangements with Down District Council. The college has, however, worked in partnership with the council on a series of joint projects and activities, including:

- 'Driving Your Way to Success' - which provides vocational training opportunities for 30 local young people (while also offering an opportunity to receive driving lessons and undertake a driving test);
- the annual Dermot Curran Enterprise Awards - which recognises young entrepreneurs;
- the Beyond Project - which supports local businesses;
- a joint promotion strategy for Essential Skills; and
- World Host, Retail and Hospitality Business - which was delivered during 2011/12, in association with Down Business Centre.

Ministerial Directions

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many decisions with spending implications he has made on foot of ministerial direction since coming into office.

(AQW 17024/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have not given any ministerial directions required by Managing Public Money since taking up office.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Farms: Use of Recycled Gypsum

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the issues and dangers on farms caused by the use of recycled gypsum for bedding; and what steps her Department has taken in relation to this matter, including any regulatory measures.

(AQW 16571/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): HSENI, in conjunction with the HSE and the Environment Agency in GB, has commissioned research into the influence of gypsum in animal slurry systems. The results of this research are due next year and will be used to help inform national policy.

Environmental legislation (enforced by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, NIEA), does not permit the use of waste plasterboard or waste gypsum as animal bedding.

The NIEA has issued a regulatory position statement and contacted suppliers of re-cycled gypsum to ensure that they inform farmers that re-cycled gypsum must not be used for bedding livestock.

In the mean time, HSENI continues to advise farmers through the press and visits that they should not use gypsum in animal bedding. The farming press in Northern Ireland has reported widely on the potential issues of using gypsum and that the use of gypsum for animal bedding is illegal. HSENI has recently re-issued advice on this matter to the farming industry through the press.

Caleb Foundation

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 15673/11-15, to outline the issues raised by the Caleb Foundation at the meeting on 2 March 2010.

(AQW 16616/11-15)

Mrs Foster: A range of issues were discussed with the Caleb Foundation at the meeting on 2 March 2010.

Hempire Building Materials

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action is being taken to reclaim any of the £25,000 paid under the Small Firms Merit Award for Research and Technology Programme to NCR Fibre Solutions, later known as Hempire Building Materials; and why her Department is reclaiming this money.

(AQW 16642/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI will always consider reclaiming financial assistance from any company that has been in receipt of Invest NI grant assistance and fails to comply with the conditions of the Letter of Offer.

In the case of Hempire Building Materials (Hempire) this occurred through the cessation of trading and as a result Invest NI is entitled to seek recovery of the full amount paid in the preceding three years. That amount is £25,252.03 and not £25 million as claimed in the question.

The project's Technology Executive and Client Executive are currently considering whether it would be appropriate to instigate procedures to reclaim grant paid under the SMART programme.

Ministerial Directions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, since May 2007, how many decisions with spending implications have been made as a result of ministerial directions.

(AQW 16684/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Since May 2007 two decisions with spending implications have been made as a result of Ministerial Directions.

Patton Group: Subcontractors

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what contact her Department has had with major clients of the Patton Group in relation to those clients paying sub-contractors directly for works that have already been completed or substantially completed.

(AQW 16714/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has had no contact with the clients of Patton Group in relation to those clients paying sub-contractors directly.

The ability of any client of the Patton Group to make payment directly to a sub-contractor can only be informed by the terms and conditions of the contractual arrangements that exist between the Patton Group, as the main contractor, the sub-contractors and the Patton clients to which we are not party.

Prompt Payment

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what practices, protocols and measures are in place within the Department and its arm's-length bodies to ensure prompt payment to contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers.

(AQW 16728/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP), has instructed all Departments, their agencies and Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) to take steps to support the Northern Ireland Civil Service 10 day prompt payment target.

All Departments operate through the Account NI platform which ensures a consistent approach to invoice payment and supplier management that supports the 10 day prompt payment target.

Additionally, within the Department there are a number of processes in place to complement and support the Account NI approach, including: centralised monitoring of the invoice approvals process to minimise the risk of delays; provision of monthly key performance indicators at branch level which include performance against the 10 day target; reasons for late payments analysed with a focus on actions that can be taken to prevent re-occurrences; reporting of monthly prompt payment performance, including that of NDPBs, to the Departmental Board.

The Department has received assurances from its NDPBs that they are committed to the 10 day prompt payment target and that they will continue to review supplier relationships, invoice validation and approval processes to minimise any delays in the payment process and address areas for improvement.

In relation to sub-contractor payments, DFP Procurement Guidance Note 06/12 states that where the contractor enters into a subcontract for the provision of any part of the Services, the contractor shall ensure that a term is included in the subcontract

which requires the Contractor to pay all sums due to the subcontractor within a specified period, not exceeding 30 days from the date of receipt of a valid invoice.

Farms: Grants

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether grants for farms have been linked to health and safety risk, such as, the provision of guards and alarms; and if not, whether this is an option for the future.

(AQW 16746/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Although grants for farms are a matter for the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), my Department's Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI) has worked with DARD to include equipment which promotes safer working practices under the Farm Modernisation Programme. However, current EU rules do not permit grants to farm businesses to be used for items which replace or repair or to meet statutory requirements, such as the replacement of broken power shaft safety covers.

HSENI is of the view that many of the risks on farms can be managed with little or no cost to the farmer. However, HSENI has been working with DARD, through the Farm Safety Partnership, to develop an action plan looking at specific actions to address the poor health and safety record within the agricultural industry. Any recommendations relating to providing financial assistance to farmers to improve health and safety on farms will be considered both by DARD and my Department.

Invest NI: Foreign Direct Investment

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether InvestNI has conducted a survey on foreign direct investors to ascertain the main reasons for them investing here and the most important attraction factors they use when considering investment in any area or country.

(AQW 16752/11-15)

Mrs Foster: While Invest NI has not conducted a formal survey with its Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) companies, the agency gains knowledge and understanding from the feedback from companies as part of the inward visit programmes and negotiation process (for first time investors). In addition, the ongoing client management of externally owned companies also provides feedback on the key issues and drivers for investment growth and sustainability.

Invest NI has conducted extensive research on the typical requirements of an internationally mobile FDI project and has also compared Northern Ireland's capability to meet those requirements against the capability of its competitors.

As a result, Invest NI has a firm understanding of the reasons investors have for locating in Northern Ireland.

Youth Unemployment

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the recent unemployment figures for young people, what further steps are being taken to ensure that job promotion, skills based training, and other associated measures are being targeted in the most cost effective way.

(AQW 16814/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI is acutely aware of the particular difficulties facing young people and has developed a comprehensive range of Business Solutions including employment grants and skills development support which benefit young people and indeed older people alike.

A specific measure within Invest NI's Jobs Fund is the NEET (not in employment, education or training) business start grant which provides an incentive grant of £1,500 to businesses started up by young people aged 16-24 not in employment, education or training.

I am also aware that Invest NI with the support of DEL and other key stakeholders, has organised a pilot event in Limavady specifically to help young people find out how to gain work experience, develop additional skills and get recognised relevant qualifications that will help them secure a job or to start their own business.

Invest NI will continue to work closely with all government departments and local economic development stakeholders to promote its Business Solutions and to ensure that the support available to business from Invest NI and to individuals and young people through other partners such as DEL is working effectively.

Farming: Enforcing Authorities

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether (i) any farmers or farming representatives have been given the opportunity to engage with the enforcing authorities or have input into awareness campaigns; and (ii) any assessments have been carried out on the effectiveness of previous campaigns and activities.

(AQW 16849/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI) has and continues to, engage with the farming community in developing initiatives and campaigns. This has included extensive discussions with the Ulster Farmers Union along with advice obtained from other members of the Farm Safety Partnership and the farming representative on the Board of HSENI.

Plans for a farm safety awareness campaign due to launch in March 2013 are being developed using research being collected from farm related stakeholders groups.

Campaign evaluations that encompass both market research testing and media evaluation activity have taken place post-campaign to establish their effectiveness.

Farms: Health and Safety

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to farm health and safety issues, whether her Department has focused on either advice and guidance or enforcement.

(AQW 16873/11-15)

Mrs Foster: During the farm safety visits, HSENI inspectors focus on providing information and advice to farmers on the key health and safety risks encountered on farms. However, in accordance with their statutory remit, if during visits inspectors observe activities which will involve a risk of serious personal injury they may take appropriate enforcement action.

Invest NI: Business Park, Strabane

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the development of the InvestNI Business Park in Strabane and specifically to outline (i) when enabling works will be completed to allow potential tenants to begin the process of seeking planning permission for the development of new build premises, (ii) how many expressions of interest have been received to date in locating business enterprises on this site and (iii) what efforts have been made by InvestNI to proactively seek potential investors/business tenants to locate on this site.

(AQW 16896/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI has acquired 40 acres of land at Melmount Road for the purposes of developing a new business park to support economic development in the Strabane District Council area.

The first phase of construction works, which will see the release of nine acres of new serviced land, is expected to complete in early 2013. To date Invest NI has recorded seven interests from businesses in respect of acquiring sites.

Once construction of the first phase has completed, and the land is available, Invest NI will proactively market the Park to both foreign and indigenous investors as an investment location. It is important to note, however, that the final decision on location rests solely with the investor.

Invest NI will continue to engage proactively with Strabane District Council in progressing this important development.

Ulster Way: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department intends to take to promote further the Ulster Way in North Down,

(AQW 16954/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The revised route for The Ulster Way was officially launched by then Environment Minister Edwin Poots MLA on 16 September 2009 at Crawfordsburn Country Park.

My Department, through the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, and Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland currently promote The Ulster Way in North Down on www.discovernorthernireland.com and www.walkni.com.

The two websites have received over one million visitors in the last six months, showing how important these websites are in promoting Northern Ireland.

My Department is also working with the World Police and Fire Games Company to promote Northern Ireland, including North Down, tourism to the competitors and spectators of the Games.

Tourism: Conlig

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action her Department intends to take promote further the lead mines at Conlig as a tourist destination in North Down.

(AQW 16955/11-15)

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.

Within this context, neither my Department nor the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has any plans to promote further the lead mines at Conlig as a tourist destination at this stage.

Farms: Health and Safety

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what officer resource is available for health and safety work on farms; and whether this is linked to the perceived risks within the farming sector.

(AQW 16957/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Currently 10 inspectors are available to work on farm safety inspections on a permanent basis/all year round, with more available to carry out targeted farm safety visits for shorter time bounded initiatives. Additional staff were made available this year due to the worsening situation regarding fatal accidents in the farming sector.

Farms: Health and Safety

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether there is an inspection programme for health and safety on farms.

(AQW 17003/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I can confirm that HSENI intends to carry out 1000 farm inspection visits between April 2012 and March 2013.

UK City of Culture 2013

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the success to date of the marketing campaign for the City of Culture 2013.

(AQW 17021/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am confident that NITB and Tourism Ireland marketing plans will provide the platform to promote Londonderry as the UK City of Culture across all of our major markets.

The marketing plans aim to raise the profile and positive awareness of Londonderry, drive tourism numbers and maximise awareness of Londonderry as an investment location. The array of events recently announced covering theatre, music, dance, visual arts, architecture and film will have a wide appeal for all our potential visitors.

The news that Londonderry has been named the fourth best city in the world to visit next year by Lonely Planet is an important accolade and provides a further marketing opportunity for the city in 2013.

Wi-Fi Scheme: Newcastle

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) for her assessment of the pilot Wi-Fi scheme in Newcastle town centre; and (ii) whether her Department has shared the post-project evaluation with Down District Council.

(AQW 17034/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The wi-fi pilot project in Newcastle Town Centre ran for one year between April 2009 and March 2010. The purpose of the pilot was to: -

- examine if the installation of a mesh network could stimulate sufficient broadband use and take-up in a town with a tourism focus to lead to the emergence of a commercially sustainable service;
- examine the relative merits of the external mesh network over the more traditional internal "hot-spots" model;
- promote environmental sustainability in terms of encouraging mobile working; and
- assist visitors to the town by providing reliable, cost-effective "pay-as-you-go" access to a broadband service.

A local community forum expressed some concerns over the project which had an impact on the delivery. However, by working closely with Down District Council, the project was delivered on time and within budget, leading to a commercially available service. After the pilot had concluded, it is understood that the District Council entered into an agreement with the service provider Air-Net Wireless Ltd to support the network for a further year.

The project was useful in that it allowed for comparison between a wireless mesh network (effectively a router network covering a geographic area) and the traditional 'hotspot' model (where host businesses are wi-fi enabled to allow them to offer connectivity to customers). It was found that the wireless mesh approach offers greater flexibility allowing access to services for longer periods of time. From DETI's perspective the pilot project was successful.

I believe that although the network remains in place, it is no longer operating due to diminishing commercial interest.

My Department has not yet shared the Post-Project Evaluation for the initiative with Down District Council. However, pursuant to my response to AQW 15586/11-15, my officials will make the evaluation report available should the Council wish to receive a copy.

Presbyterian Mutual Society

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when the Department will conclude its submissions to the Ombudsman on the draft report on her Department's handling of Presbyterian Mutual Society issues.

(AQW 17095/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My officials have provided all information requested by the Ombudsman.

Department of the Environment

Stewart's Place, Hollywood

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of the Environment what action is being taken to protect and restore 1 Stewarts Place, Hollywood.

(AQW 16222/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): NIEA's Historic Buildings Unit has been in regular contact with the owners of 1 Stewarts Place 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 Structures Notice by Building Control and a warning letter from NIEA, some urgent repair works were carried out.

Following this first intervention, an application for grant-aid was made to NIEA to carry out further urgent repairs, and also non-urgent works to conserve and restore the building. A letter of offer was made on 3 October 2011, however this was not taken up by the owners. Nonetheless, they repaired the roof, removed vegetation, loose render was taken down and repairs to the gutters were undertaken. It appeared that the minimum amount of work necessary to secure the building and protect the fabric had been carried out. This reflected the level of work that would have been required to be carried out under an Urgent Works Notice, had one been issued around that time.

A site visit on 9 May 2012, in better weather, revealed previously unidentified 'new' problems. A window head to the ground floor was of concern, and the gutters and render needed further work. During subsequent contact with the owners, they agreed to carry out further repair work as required. As part of this process, the owner agreed to provide NIEA with an engineer's assessment of the building. To date this has not been forthcoming.

NIEA has, however, sought its own engineering assessment of the property. An initial site inspection and informal evaluation was made on 12 October. NIEA has subsequently written to the owners, to seek their own engineer's report, and to gain access to the property to enable further assessment to be carried out. In this correspondence NIEA has again reminded the owners of its statutory powers under Article 80 of the Planning Order (NI) 1991, i.e. to undertake urgent works to prevent further deterioration of the property, and seek recompense for the costs incurred.

NIEA is continuing to monitor the condition of this building and will take action if and as appropriate – in keeping with the legislation established policy and in line with PPS6.

Planning Applications: Enforcement Cases

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment, in each of the last five years, how many enforcement cases were allowed to continue while a valid planning application for the same development was under consideration.

(AQW 16268/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Information is not recorded on the Department's database in such a way as to identify enforcement cases that were allowed to continue while a valid planning application for the same development was under consideration.

The Department's general policy approach to dealing with breaches of planning control is contained in Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 9 – The Enforcement of Planning Control. Whilst enforcement action may be held in abeyance while a planning application or appeal is being determined, if a case is well advanced or when the unauthorised activity/development is considered to be unacceptable enforcement action is likely to proceed immediately.

Protracted negotiations will not be allowed to hamper or delay whatever formal enforcement action may be required to make the development acceptable on planning grounds, or to compel it to stop. I have also made it clear to Planning that there needs to be a step change in enforcement going forward, that planning applicants cannot frustrate enforcement by serial planning applications and that on a case by case basis, enforcement should be pursued where proper, independent of planning status.

Indeed, I have asked planning to assess the opportunity to apply for injunctions in appropriate cases, to escalate enforcement practice.

Experience to date has however shown that courts may adjourn enforcement proceedings if a retrospective planning application has been submitted by the offender to regularise the unauthorised development or where the offender has appealed the enforcement notice.

Council Property or Trees, South Antrim: Destruction of

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 9206/11-15, whether any prosecutions were sought against businesses or companies for the destruction of council property or trees in South Antrim.

(AQW 16536/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Neither Antrim nor Newtownabbey Borough Council has sought any prosecutions against businesses or companies for the destruction of council property or trees in South Antrim.

Illegal Dumping of Agricultural Carcasses

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 14741/11-15, how many of the agricultural carcasses recovered had ear tags removed.

(AQW 16554/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Some Councils had either not collected any carcasses or did not record the information. Each of the ten Councils that did record such detail (Ballymena, Coleraine, Craigavon, Down, Dungannon, Larne, Lisburn, Moyle, Omagh, Strabane) reported that all the carcasses they collected had their ear tags removed.

Recycled Gypsum

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment what steps her Department has taken, or intends to take, to prohibit the sale of recycled gypsum as farm bedding; and what regulation is being applied to wholesalers or retailers to prohibit sales.

(AQW 16572/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The NIEA has adopted a Quality Protocol for recycled gypsum but it does not include animal bedding as an approved end use. During the development of the Quality Protocol, there was no risk assessment carried out into the use of waste gypsum as animal bedding. The Quality Protocol however permits the use of gypsum as a soil conditioner.

The use of recycled gypsum as animal bedding without a waste authorisation is an offence. NIEA will not authorise the use of these materials until there is clear scientific evidence to demonstrate that they do not pose a risk to animals, humans or the environment, in particular from hydrogen sulphide generation.

The NIEA issued a Regulatory Position Statement (RPS) in June 2012 and it can be found on:

<http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/gypsum-plaster-2012.pdf>.

There are currently two licensed waste facilities processing waste plasterboard in Northern Ireland. The Agency has contacted these operators to ensure that they inform farmers that recycled gypsum must not be used for bedding livestock. NIEA staff have also visited a number of farmers who received the recycled gypsum to confirm what end use they put this material to.

Freedom of Information Requests

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the number of Freedom of Information requests received by his Department in each year since 2007; (ii) the proportion of requests each year that were not answered within the time limit; (iii) the number of requests currently outstanding by more than (a) one to two months (b) three to four months; (c) five to six months; (d) seven to twelve months; and (e) more than twelve months.

(AQW 16666/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The information requested is as follows:-

YEAR	Requests Received	Proportion of Requests not Answered within Time Limit
2007	1009	4.6%
2008	634	6%
2009	599	4.3%
2010	561	9.3%
2011	428	10.3%
	Number of Requests Currently Outstanding	
1-2 months	Nil	
3-4 months	Nil	
5-6 months	Nil	
7-12 months	Nil	
More than 12 months	Nil	

The information requested in points (i) and (ii) has been published in a series of FOI Annual Reports which can be accessed from the OFMDFM website site at: http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/improving-public-services/information_management_and_central_advisory_branch/annual-reports-and-statistics.htm

Illegal Dumping of Waste

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment (i) whether illegal dumping of waste has ceased, and (ii) what measures he has put in place to ensure that the illegal dumping of waste does not occur and that it can be easily detected.

(AQW 16719/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Illegal dumping of waste and other types of illegal waste management have not ceased. The profits available to those involved in the illegal waste industry are significant, meaning that this form of criminality will continue for the foreseeable future. Many waste offenders are known to be involved in other types of criminality and are involved in waste offending due to the huge opportunities for profit that are involved.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency's Environmental Crime Unit continues to investigate those who are involved in the illegal waste industry, to bring them to court for environmental offences and on conviction, to seek to deprive them of their criminal benefit through the use of the Proceeds of Crime Act. There has been success in this regard, with a range of ongoing and serious Environmental Crime Unit investigations. That said, I believe the importance of the Environmental Crime Unit and the scale of demand on its work means the Environmental Crime Unit needs to be expanded. I have asked my Permanent Secretary to assess and advise how this can be achieved.

Vacant Listed Buildings

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what responsibility Departments have to protect and maintain vacant listed buildings in their estate.

(AQW 16721/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Executive requires all government departments and agencies to set a good example in the care of their historic estate. This includes listed buildings.

In June this year I launched a new Northern Ireland specific version of the 'Protocol for the Care of the Government Historic Estate', endorsed by the Executive, which updates previous UK guidance from 2003.

This sets out twelve points which should be followed by all departments. In regard to vacant buildings, points 4 to 7 are most relevant ie: 'commission regular condition surveys; implement a planned programme of repairs and maintenance; protect heritage at risk' and 'work to keep buildings in active use'. For example, a meanwhile use for a currently vacant building can help improve its security and ensure that it remains well ventilated and heated. A report on progress is to be laid in front of the Environment Committee during September 2013.

If you would like to find out more about the Protocol you can download a copy from NIEA's website at:-

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/builthome/information/protocol_for_the_care_of_the_government_historic_estate.htm

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment how much the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan has cost since the beginning of its development.

(AQW 16723/11-15)

Mr Attwood: To date the cost to the Department since the formal commencement of the Belfast Metropolitan Plan in January 2001 has been in the region of £9.3 million.

This does not include the costs incurred by other departments such as OFMDFM, who are largely responsible for funding the Planning Appeals Commission, or costs to individuals and other bodies, including Councils, who have participated in the plan process.

It is estimated that a further £0.25 million will be incurred between now and adoption at the end of March 2013. This includes both staff costs and costs incurred in printing the Adoption Statement and the revised Written Statement and Maps.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment whether there is public access to the details of payments made to landowners in regard to the protection of Areas of Special Scientific Interest.

(AQW 16724/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There is no formal mechanism for public access to details of payments made to landowners in regard to the protection of Areas of Special Scientific Interest. However, an individual may make a request to the Department for information about such payments. Any such request would be considered within the relevant provisions of the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and, particularly, the Data Protection Act 1998.

Sheepand Coast Area of Special Scientific Interest

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what action is being taken to ensure that the landowner of the Sheepand area of special scientific interest is meeting the obligation to protect the site.

(AQW 16725/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Sheepland Coast Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) was declared on 27th June 2007.

According to Departmental records there are currently 45 individual landowners within Sheepland Coast.

The question posed does not specify which landowner in question the member is referring to but he can be assured that all ASSIs including Sheepland Coast are routinely monitored on a regular basis. Any identified non-compliance within an ASSI is thoroughly investigated and acted upon in accordance with NIEA enforcement policy.

Prompt Payment

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment what practices, protocols and measures are in place within the Department and its arm's-length bodies to ensure prompt payment to contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers.
(AQW 16727/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In the current economic climate, I recognise the importance of cashflow for many contractors and suppliers. My Department is committed to the prompt payment of valid invoices and continues to monitor performance to ensure all contractors and suppliers are paid as promptly as possible.

To ensure a focus on prompt payment performance, the Department has deployed a number of mechanisms and practices to monitor and improve performance including:

- Provision of training to over 300 staff within the past 18 months, highlighting the importance of the prompt payment of invoices;
- Dissemination of monthly prompt payment performance statistics to business areas;
- Quarterly reporting of prompt payment performance to senior management;
- Monitoring mechanisms to ensure departmental staff are processing invoices promptly and to facilitate timely resolution of potentially disputed invoices; and
- Oversight monitoring arrangements are in place for the Department's arms-length bodies.

During 2011-12, the Department's prompt payment performance increased from 70% to 85% of valid invoices paid within 10 days. Within the first six months of the current financial year, the Department has paid 92.1% of valid invoices within the 10 day target.

In addition, I have raised a series of questions with local Councils in relation to prompt payment or otherwise of invoices. I shall be pursuing further this matter.

Road Safety Campaigns

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment how much his Department has spent on road safety campaigns in each of the last three years.
(AQW 16737/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As part of the current road safety campaign programme, there is an extensive portfolio of public information advertisements which are run on a regular basis, addressing many negative road user behaviours. The total amount spent on road safety campaigns over the last three financial years is as follows:

Financial Year	Amount
2009-10	£1,749,113
2010-11	£1,999,470
2011-12	£3,036,492

The figures provided above cover all aspects of our road safety campaign work such as development research, creative development, production and airtime. The increase in the 2011-12 budget was primarily due to the production of two new television campaigns, "Just Because" and "Excuses".

The most recent independent study by Oxford Economics isolates the importance of the role of DOE advertising and have calculated that from 1995 – 2011, 21,977 men, women and children in Northern Ireland have been saved from death and serious injury on our roads. This prevention of death and serious injury concludes that the economic payback is £10 per £1 invested by DOE excluding the human costs, but £42 per pound invested including human cost.

The impact of the road safety campaign is carefully monitored; the evidence shows that they are consistently rated as the most important influence on road user behaviour, and therefore are an important element of the Department's work to reduce casualties on our roads, with the aim of achieving zero deaths.

Administration Costs

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment why there has been a 17.9 percent increase in administration costs in just 6 months in 2012/13, as revealed by Table H of the Minister of Finance and Personnel's statement of 12 November 2012.

(AQW 16762/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There are two main factors contributing to the increase in the DOE's Net Administration budget in 2012-13.

Firstly, the Department secured an additional £2.1 million of funding, as part of the Executive's Invest to Save Scheme, for an early retirement / severance scheme for planners. This funding is to facilitate the restructuring of the planning service, in preparation for its transfer to local government and the return of planners from redeployments to other departments and organisations.

Secondly, Table H of the Finance Minister's Statement to the Assembly on the October Monitoring Round shows the change in departments' Net Administration budgets. The Net Administration budgets exclude administration costs funded from income generated from fees and charges.

DOE, unlike most other departments, generates a significant amount of income from fees and charges which is netted off its total Administration budget. Whenever there is a reduction in administration income, there is a need to reduce administration costs and, in some cases, it may be necessary to divert funding from the non administration budget to cover the shortfall in income.

This has been the case in respect of planning income, where over the past number of years, my Department has faced a significant and dramatic fall in the level of planning income. This reduction has been managed through reducing the costs of the planning function, mainly through the redeployment of staff, and, due to the scale of the reduction in income, through subsidising the planning function from other programmes within the Department.

However, my Department's Gross Administration budget has actually decreased by 9% between the opening budget for 2010-11 (£72.1 million) and the opening budget for 2012-13 (£65.6 million). During this period there has also been a corresponding reduction in the Department's overall staff complement by some 283 staff.

Presenting departments' administration budgets on a net basis, not only understates the level of spend on administration costs by excluding those costs funded through fees and charges, but can also distort increases and/or decreases in departments' administration spend.

Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council: Waste Repatriation Schemes

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment what liaison has taken place with Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council on the waste repatriation schemes at Seskinore and Eskra.

(AQW 16784/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has not formally liaised with local Councils as Councils have not been involved in the repatriation of waste programme. However, as a matter of course NIEA liaises directly with local Councillors and MLAs on important local issues such as haul roads, mud on roads and other potential impacts of the works. NIEA, in conjunction with the contractor and environmental consultants, develops a method statement for each repatriation site which identifies and puts in place the necessary mitigation measures to protect the environment and minimise and any adverse impacts on the local community. My officials also liaise with PSNI and Roads Service to develop road traffic management programmes to ensure that the works are carried out in a safe and effective manner.

Environmental Crime Unit

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how many complaints have been made to the Environmental Crime Unit in each of the last three years, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 16792/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Environmental Crime Unit records information received about environmental offending by Council area rather than constituency. These figures are set out below. The scale of this confirms in my view that the Environment Crime Unit needs to be developed and resourced. I have previously asked the DOE Permanent Secretary to take this work forward and to bring forward advice.

The number of items of information received by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's Environmental Crime Unit in each of the last three years, broken down by Council area

Council area	2010	2011	2012 (to end Oct)
Antrim	32	18	12
Ards	56	39	27
Armagh	45	31	36
Ballymena	13	24	18
Ballymoney	16	6	5

Council area	2010	2011	2012 (to end Oct)
Banbridge	21	17	8
Belfast	37	22	25
Carrickfergus	6	4	7
Castlereagh	9	7	1
Coleraine	17	19	17
Cookstown	10	10	14
Craigavon	27	17	17
Derry	22	15	23
Down	51	39	37
Dungannon and South Tyrone	67	33	32
Fermanagh	37	24	14
Larne	23	12	9
Limavady	16	13	15
Lisburn	35	28	32
Magherafelt	15	13	8
Moyle	15	7	3
Newry and Mourne	46	33	26
Newtownabbey	22	17	26
North Down	11	3	6
Omagh	21	10	9
Strabane	22	24	8
Total	692	483	435

Planning Service: Budget

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment why, after six months of the current budget, has Planning Service required an additional £2.6m for running costs by way of redistribution of resources.

(AQW 16802/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The redistribution of running costs totalling £2.6 million to Planning Service, as detailed in Table D in the Finance Minister's Statement to the Assembly on the 2012-13 October Monitoring Round, relates to the reallocation of corporate services overhead costs.

This relocation was necessary to properly align budgets as a consequence of organisational restructuring since the budget was originally determined as part of Budget 2010; a rationalisation of corporate services across the Department and its agencies; and the apportionment of administration costs to all business areas.

Since Budget 2010, there has not been an opportunity for the Department to realign its budget to reflect the above changes. Moving forward, these costs will be reallocated to all business areas, including planning, as part of the next Budget realignment process and will therefore not need to be transferred during the monitoring process for future years.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency: Budget

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment why, after six months of the current budget, has the Northern Ireland Environment Agency required an additional £2.2m for running costs by way of redistribution of resources.

(AQW 16803/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The redistribution of running costs totalling £2.2 million to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), as detailed in Table D in the Finance Minister's Statement to the Assembly on the 2012-13 October Monitoring Round, relates to the reallocation of corporate services overhead costs.

This relocation was necessary to properly align budgets as a consequence of organisational restructuring since the budget was originally determined as part of Budget 2010; a rationalisation of corporate services across the Department and its agencies; and the apportionment of administration costs to all business areas.

Since Budget 2010, there has not been an opportunity for the Department to realign its budget to reflect the above changes. Moving forward, these costs will be reallocated to all business areas, including NIEA, as part of the next Budget realignment process and will therefore not need to be transferred during the monitoring process for future years.

Local Government: Transition Committees

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment, given that he has previously stated that Statutory Transition Committees would be in place by May 2013, when they will be in place; and what powers they will have, (AQW 16817/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As part of the management of the reform programme, the Department is continually reviewing elements of the timetable and is now working to provide for Statutory Transition Committees as soon as possible in 2013. I intend using enabling powers in the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Act 2010 to make regulations to establish Transition Committees on a statutory footing.

My intention is that the Statutory Transition Committees will have powers to enable them to aid the process of convergence and take forward the work required around governance, corporate and financial planning, arrangements for service delivery, transferring functions, community planning, capacity building and the appointment of senior staff. I believe this will help create certainty and leadership, as well as drive the reform process.

Local Government: Shadow Councils

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment what powers Shadow Councils will have. (AQW 16819/11-15)

Mr Attwood: It is anticipated that, with the Secretary of State's agreement, elections to the new councils will take place in mid-2014. Following the election of the new councillors, the eleven new councils will operate in shadow form until 1 April 2015, when they will adopt their full range of functions and powers.

During the shadow period, the new councils will take the key decisions necessary to ensure their establishment and effective operation from the beginning of the 2015/16 financial year. Some key tasks that will be completed during the shadow period are:

- striking of the rate for 2015/16;
- agreeing a budget for the new councils;
- deciding upon the name and status of the new councils; and
- agreeing key documents such as the Corporate and Business Plan of the new councils.

Primary powers in relation to shadow arrangements will be included in the Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill. Subordinate legislation will provide for the role of the new councils during the shadow period. Both the Bill and the subordinate legislation will be presented to the Assembly for scrutiny in due course.

Lisburn/Castlereagh Statutory Transition Committee

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration he has given to the membership of the Lisburn/Castlereagh Statutory Transition Committee, given that this cluster is unique because of the transfer of a significant amount of population and assets to the new Belfast City Council. (AQW 16820/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The unique situation regarding the transfer of parts of Lisburn and Castlereagh into Belfast was discussed at the first meeting of the Regional Transition Committee on 24 April 2012 and subsequently during my visit to the Lisburn and Castlereagh Voluntary Transition Committee on 13 June 2012.

I can assure the Member that, in light of the issues surrounding boundary changes and asset transfer, consideration has already been given to the impact of this on both Statutory Transition Committees representing Lisburn and Castlereagh and Belfast. The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010, under which the Statutory Transition Committees will be established, provides that members of Lisburn City Council and Castlereagh Borough Council will have membership on the Belfast Statutory Transition Committee.

National Parks

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment how many people or organisations from North Antrim and East Antrim have contacted him or his Department supporting a National Park in their area. (AQW 16872/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department conducted a consultation exercise in 2011 to take forward proposals for national park legislation. Three organisations from North Antrim and East Antrim responded to this consultation to voice broad support for enabling legislation for national parks. That said, as is the case in politics and community life, there are voices, who do not go to public meeting, who support proposals. I believe it is important that this is recognised, including by those who oppose national parks.

Road Safety Council

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of the Environment why the Road Safety Council is not receiving any government funding. (AQW 16877/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Following a third highly critical independent review of the Road Safety Council (RSC) in 2008, the then DOE Minister took the decision to withdraw core funding from the Road Safety Council and to channel funding direct to the front line road safety activities of local committees; this decision was implemented in 2009. The Department was also tasked with carrying out a fundamental policy review of how it should engage with the wider voluntary and community sector.

In April 2010, following a review of road safety funding to the voluntary & community sector, the decision was taken by the DOE Minister at that time, to appoint an Intermediary Funding Body (IFB) and open up funding to the wider voluntary and community sector rather than all available funding going to the Road Safety Council.

Subsequently, the Department engaged with Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) to initiate an open tender competition to appoint an IFB to design and manage a road safety funding programme on its behalf.

The funding programme was designed to direct funding to frontline road safety activities and enable the Department to engage effectively with local communities and the wider voluntary & community sector in addressing local road safety concerns.

The principal aims of the funding programme are to:

- fund projects which support the achievement of the objectives of the Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy;
- direct funding to frontline road safety activities which provide direct benefits to the community; and
- enable the Department to engage effectively with the wider local voluntary and community sector in the promotion of road safety.

The Community Transport Association (CTA) currently holds the contract to administer the Road Safety Grant Funding Programme on behalf of the Department.

The Road Safety Grant Funding Programme is open to the voluntary and community sector, including the Road Safety Council and local Road Safety Committees. To date no application for funding has been received from the Road Safety Council but a number of local Road Safety Committees have applied for funding with some success.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing: Applications

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the announcement by the Westminster Government that Post Offices in England will now process Driver and Vehicle Licensing applications, whether his Department intends to make the same arrangements here. (AQW 16893/11-15)

Mr Attwood: On 13 November 2012 the Secretary of State for Transport announced that the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (Swansea) (DVLA) is awarding a new contract to Post Office Limited to provide DVLA's services from the post office network with effect from 1 April 2013.

The current DVLA front office counter services contract is operated by Post Office Limited and is due to expire on 31 March 2013.

DVLA has responsibility, on behalf of the Department for Transport, for the collection of vehicle excise duty across the UK and the contract with Post Office Limited in relation to vehicle licensing services includes service provision at post offices in Northern Ireland.

Customers in Northern Ireland can renew their vehicle tax at 155 post office branches; however customers here do not have access to the wider range of services available to customers in Britain, including online and enhanced services through the post office. DVLA are developing a fully integrated IT system that would bring vehicle licensing services in Northern Ireland into line with those in Britain, including the enhanced services available to customers. These enhanced services and any additional services to be delivered through the new contract with Post Office Ltd will be available to customers in Northern Ireland once an integrated IT system is delivered.

DVLA plan to have an integrated IT system ready by June 2013 but its implementation is tied into proposals for the future of vehicle licensing services here. Following recent Ministerial changes at Westminster I have again written to the Secretary of State for Transport acknowledging the proposed expansion of improved services for customers here but emphasising my opposition to any reduction in jobs in NI as a consequence. I have had meetings with the previous Secretary of State for NI and the then Parliamentary Under – Secretary for Transport and further meetings are planned with the new Ministers. I have been assured that no decision will be made without further consultation with me.

The DVLA contract with Post Office Limited includes the provision of some driver licensing services; however driver licensing services in NI are not included in the DVLA contract as responsibility for driver licensing rests with my Department. While DVA provides an extensive driving licence application service, there are plans for the current driver licensing IT system to be replaced and the Agency will consider the use of external customer service providers when assessing future delivery plans.

Public Service Vehicles: Licensing Process

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment what provisions are in place to speed up the Public Service Vehicle licensing process, given that taxi drivers are losing earnings during a waiting period; and what immediate provisions he can put in place to speed up the process, particularly in the Foyle area.

(AQW 16898/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Taxi drivers are advised to apply for public service vehicle licences, including taxi plates, well in advance of the expiry of their existing licences. Provided this advice is followed, it should be possible to have vehicles tested and licences issued prior to the expiry of existing licences. DVA issues reminders to taxi drivers at least 6 weeks prior to the expiry of their licences and information contained, both on application forms and on existing licences, advises drivers to make application well in advance of when the licence is needed.

The process for issuing licences and taxi plates is working well throughout Northern Ireland and the set targets for the issue of such licences are constantly being met.

DVA is currently running a pilot scheme aimed at further speeding up the process for clearing a vehicle for test. Indications are that this works well and should reduce the time taken to clear vehicles for testing. The new system will be rolled out to all test centres within the next 6 weeks.

It is also proposed that in future taxi plates will be issued from test centres, following successful public service vehicle testing. This change will be introduced next year in parallel with the introduction of new style taxi plates which will be displayed in new roof signs.

I would welcome further information as to how and where the process is failing.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Land Registry: Computer System Supplier

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much the Land Registry computer system supplier has been paid each year since the contract was signed; and how much are the annual payment obligations.

(AQW 16513/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The Landweb Contract with BT was signed in July 1999 and payments to the supplier commenced in 2000. In 2007 the Department changed its accounting systems to Account NI. Financial records prior to this date were not migrated to the new system. Records in the table below prior to 2007 have been extracted from the former Land Registry's Agency Annual Report and Accounts.

Financial Year	Amount
1999-00	£ 185,000
2000-01	£1,258,000
2001-02	£2,560,000
2002-03	£4,309,000
2003-04	£6,733,000
2004-05	£7,038,000
2005-06	£7,850,000
2006-07	£8,605,000
2007-08	£7,752,000
2008-09	£5,611,883.70
2009-10	£4,559,907.03
2010-11	£4,209,321.95
2011-12	£4,261,674.47
2012-13	£2,387,624.58 - Oct

BT is paid on a transaction basis ie when applications are lodged in the Land Registry. The amount of transactions lodged, completed and generating a fee in any year is not known in advance since registration activity is entirely dependent on the property market. All the initial capital and implementation costs of the IT system were borne by BT and it continues to incur ongoing maintenance costs. BT recoups its initial investment by receiving a portion of the fee each time a chargeable

transaction is completed using the system. However, not all transactions incur a payment to BT. As evidenced by the table above, annual payments to BT have decreased in recent years in line with the fall in the property market.

Treasury: Unspent Resources

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he has taken to prevent money having to be returned to the Treasury at the end of the financial year.

(AQO 2937/11-15)

Mr Wilson: At this stage in the financial year the key risk that I have to manage is the risk that unspent resources might have to be returned to HM Treasury. In this current financial year a major concern in relation to spending profiles is the ongoing delay to the A5 road scheme. Members will be aware that for each month of delay there will be around £10 million of capital funding made surplus. This would normally then need to be spent in this financial year to avoid this funding going back to HM Treasury.

Since the remaining amounts involved are very significant – potentially up to £50 million – I recently put a proposal to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury which sought some additional flexibility in terms of our RRI borrowing facility. I am pleased to say that the Chief Secretary has now agreed my proposal. This means that the Executive can now choose to borrow up to £50 million less in this financial year, against an equal increase in borrowing in 2014-15 when this A5 funding is likely to be needed. This also means that the funding to take forward the A5 road scheme remains secure.

There is therefore now significantly less risk that resources might be lost to HM Treasury at year-end.

Corporation Tax

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline whether, during the negotiations with the Treasury, agreement was reached that increases in National Insurance and Income Tax will be netted off in calculating the Corporation Tax cost to the Block Grant.

(AQO 2938/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The ability of the Northern Ireland Executive to retain the wider tax benefits from a reduction in the rate of corporation tax was one of the main issues for discussion at the final meeting of the Joint Ministerial Working Group on Rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy, which took place on the 18th October.

Unfortunately the Joint Ministerial Working Group was unable to reach agreement on this matter, with the result that the issue will now be raised with the Prime Minister.

A5 Road Project: Finance

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline what negotiations, if any, he has had with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on addressing the financial consequences of the delay in the A5 Project.

(AQO 2939/11-15)

Mr Wilson: At this stage in the financial year the key risk that I have to manage is the risk that unspent resources might have to be returned to HM Treasury. In this current financial year a major concern in relation to spending profiles is the ongoing delay to the A5 road scheme. Members will be aware that for each month of delay there will be around £10 million of capital funding made surplus. This would normally then need to be spent in this financial year to avoid this funding going back to HM Treasury.

Since the remaining amounts involved are very significant – potentially up to £50 million – I recently put a proposal to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury which sought some additional flexibility in terms of our RRI borrowing facility. I am pleased to say that the Chief Secretary has now agreed my proposal. This means that the Executive can now choose to borrow up to £50 million less in this financial year, against an equal increase in borrowing in 2014-15 when this A5 funding is likely to be needed. This also means that the funding to take forward the A5 road scheme remains secure.

There is therefore now significantly less risk that resources might be lost to HM Treasury at year-end.

Government Assets

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the findings of the Audit Office that management of Government property assets is highly fragmented and is some way from maximising value for money, what steps he proposes to rectify the situation.

(AQO 2940/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The potential to drive greater efficiencies from government property assets has previously been recognised and in January 2011 the Executive endorsed the establishment of the Asset Management Unit (AMU), which has been mandated by the Executive to introduce a more strategic approach to asset management across all aspects of central government. This unit sits within the Strategic Investment Board and reports to the Executive every 6 months. The Asset Management Unit is also working with the Permanent Secretaries Asset Management sub group to introduce property controls which will apply across government.

I would also note that the NIAO report recognises that over the last three years significant progress has been made in consolidating the office estate managed by DFP. The report identifies savings of £4m per annum since 2009 through reductions in rent, rates and service charges and estimates an additional £1m per annum saving associated with reduced maintenance costs.

Economy and Jobs Initiative

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the departmental slippage that led to the recently announced £200 million Economy and Jobs Initiative.

(AQO 2941/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Executive's £200 million Jobs and Economy Initiative was funded from a range of sources, with the main factor being unallocated Barnett consequentials resulting from the UK Government's recent Budget and Autumn Statements.

In addition, £37 million of reduced requirements were made available to the Executive for redistribution in the recent October Monitoring Round. Whilst details of these reductions were provided to the Assembly in my statement on 12 November, I can remind the Member that the main easements were within DETI, DSD and OFMDFM.

Carbon Price Floor

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he has made any representations to the Treasury on the ramifications of continuing to implement a carbon floor tax.

(AQO 2942/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I have raised the very significant concerns that the Enterprise Minister and I have about the impact the Carbon Price Floor would have in Northern Ireland with the Treasury on numerous occasions since it was first proposed in a Government consultation in December 2010. Most recently I spoke to the Chief Secretary on the 8 November 2012 and wrote to the Economic Secretary on the 13 November 2012.

We believe that if implemented locally, the Carbon Price Floor would make our electricity generators uncompetitive in the Single Electricity Market (SEM), damage our security of supply and would increase not lower carbon emissions. We have made a very strong case to the Treasury that a full derogation for Northern Ireland is needed.

I have asked to meet the Chief Secretary again on this in the very near future.

Budget: Underspend

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if his Department's target, to avoid overspend and ensure a less than 1.5 percent underspend in its budget, is to be met this year.

(AQO 2944/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The complexities within the DFP budget make it impossible to be certain that the target will be met in any given year, particularly in relation to underspend.

However, my Department will continue to monitor its spending and make every effort to meet its target whilst continuing to ensure that its spending provides value for money for the public purse.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Pooled Budgets: Legislative Barriers

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any legislative barriers which would prevent his Department from establishing a pooled budget, and which prevent the Health and Social Care Board from jointly commissioning services with other Departments or agencies from other Departments.

(AQW 16532/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Legislation has not been passed which would enable the establishment of a pooled budget. Notwithstanding this, my Department and the Health and Social Care Board work collaboratively with other Departments on a range of joint initiatives in order to address common needs and objectives.

Parenting Classes

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department is responsible for providing parenting classes for first time parents; and to what extent parenting classes for first time parents are currently being provided.

(AQW 16534/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department is responsible for setting the policy direction for the delivery of health and social care services in Northern Ireland. It has a number of strategies and policies which aim to support all parents including Families Matter strategy, Healthy Child, Healthy Future and the Maternity Strategy which include parenting and family support programmes as

key components of the strategies. However, it does not play a role in the commissioning or delivery of these services as this is the role of the HSC Board and associated HSC bodies.

It is important that all parents are supported and for some families, particularly first time parents, that support often needs to be more targeted and intensive to meet individual needs. This can be through individual or group support.

The services that are provided include universal provision of services such as antenatal classes, health visitors and family nurses. In addition to the universal provision, there are a wide range of other interventions available across the region for first time parents with additional needs.

I am advised that the HSC Board and PHA are currently working to develop a regional suite of evidence based parenting education and family support programmes which will include the Family Nurse Partnership and New Parent Programmes which provide support and education to first time parents.

Paediatric Cardiac Services

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what impact the decision by the British Secretary of State for Health, to accept the Independent Reconfiguration Panel's assertion that the Safe and Sustainable Team's recommendations on Children's Congenital Heart Services were flawed, will have on the way ahead here.

(AQW 16637/11-15)

Mr Poots: The work of the Independent Reconfiguration Panel (IRP) that is currently underway in England is aimed at reviewing the decisions of the Joint Committee of Primary Care Trusts (JCPCT) regarding the configuration of paediatric cardiac services.

The Health and Social Board is aware of the review in England and has advised that it is not considered to have any direct influence on its consultation process for the 'Future commissioning of Paediatric Cardiac Surgery and Interventional Cardiology for the population of Northern Ireland'.

The consultation underway in Northern Ireland provides everyone with the opportunity to give their views on the draft service specification including the standards that are proposed for the future commissioning of this service, as well as a number of options for the future delivery of this service. The consultation is being carried out by the Health and Social Care Board and will run until 21 December 2012, following which I will take a decision on the future provision of this service for Northern Ireland.

Trafficked Children

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many trafficked children have been cared for by Health and Social Care Trusts since 2009; (ii) how many of these children have been allocated a guardian ad litem; (iii) for how many trafficked children have the Trusts established parental responsibility; and (iv) how many trafficked children are missing.

(AQW 16676/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is not held centrally in the Department.

The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has provided the information in Table 1 below. Due to the small numbers involved, the figures are shown for the region overall to avoid personal disclosure.

Table 1 - Trafficked or suspected trafficked children in NI January 2009 – September 2012 (non-NI nationals)

January 2009 – September 2012	Total
No. of Trafficked or suspected trafficked children cared for by Health and Social Care Trusts	8
No. allocated a Guardian Ad Litem	6
No. for whom HSC Trusts established parental responsibility	6
No. of trafficked children that are missing	3

The information provided is based on information returns submitted by Health and Social Care Trusts to the HSCB. Information returns seek clarity on whether trafficking has been confirmed or suspected and that trafficking concerns have been addressed as part of the assessment process. The information provided includes both categories of trafficked children.

Where the Trust has instigated legal proceedings the young person has an appointed Guardian Ad Litem.

Ministerial Directions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, since May 2011, how many decisions with spending implications have been made as a result of ministerial directions.

(AQW 16678/11-15)

Mr Poots: Since May 2011, only one decision with spending implications has been made as a result of a Ministerial Direction.

I issued a Direction in September 2012 to facilitate the provision of temporary funding for the Integrated Services for Children and Young People project until the end of March 2013. This was necessary to secure the scope needed to take better decisions about its future whilst maintaining service provision.

Prompt Payment

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what practices, protocols and measures are in place within the Department and its arm's-length bodies to ensure prompt payment to contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers.

(AQW 16687/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department and its Arms Length Bodies (ALBs) are committed to ensuring that all suppliers, contractors and sub contractors are paid as quickly as possible and have a range of measures in place, including:

- Issuing guidance to ALBs which sets out their duty in relation to prompt payment (including requirements of Managing Public Money NI, the Late Payment of Commercial Debts Act and the 10 day prompt payment commitment);
- Monitoring the monthly prompt payment performance of both the Department and ALBs;
- Reporting monthly performance to the Departmental Board, raising formally at ALB accountability meetings and reporting overall performance for the year in the annual statutory accounts;
- Targeted interventions, such as performing internal audit reviews of compliance with the guidance, providing awareness sessions to staff to improve the payments process and providing clearer instructions to managers and suppliers on submission of invoices;
- Looking forward, the introduction of new financial systems as part of the Business Services Transformation Programme is expected to have a positive impact on the prompt payment performance of trusts and other ALBs and the Department will include specified objectives for inclusion in the ALB's business plans for future years;
- The Department requires Contractors to comply with the 'Code of Practice for Government Construction Clients and their Supply Chains'. The Code includes a 'Model Fair Payment Charter' which sets out the values and arrangements relating to payments practices, both between the Department as lead contractor and also throughout the supply chain; and
- Contractors have to provide access to accounts to enable verification of the timeliness of payments to subcontractors and suppliers. In addition, from January 2012, the Contractor has to provide a monthly update on the payment status of subcontractors.

Agenda for Change

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many employees in each Health and Social Care Trust are awaiting backpay and travel pay as a result of Agenda for Change.

(AQW 16701/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are 26 Health and Social Care staff, 18 in the South Eastern Trust and 8 in the Northern Trust, out of nearly 70,000 staff that have been through the Agenda for Change process, now waiting for back payments. Trusts are continuing with the Agenda for Change Job Evaluation process. This will affect 1,663 staff and any arrears due to those staff, as a result of that process, will be calculated and paid as soon as possible after any new grading is known. The Agenda for Change agreement did not change the payments made to staff for business travel.

Invest to Save

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the McCollum report showing that £2.27 million could be saved by reducing unplanned neuromuscular condition admissions, whether he plans to invest funding in neuromuscular services under Invest to Save.

(AQW 16720/11-15)

Mr Poots: I welcomed the publication of the McCollum report in June this year and again during the recent debate focusing on its recommendations I have undertaken to respond fully to the report's 15 recommendations before Christmas and I will include my assessment of this particular issue in that response.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust: Missed Appointments

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many hospital appointments in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area have been missed in the last twelve months; and (ii) how many of these have been missed because of transport issues.

(AQW 16836/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) Information on the number of number of consultant led appointments missed by the patient (Did Not Attend), in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, in each quarter of the last twelve months, is shown in the table below.

Quarter Ending	No. of Missed Appointments
December '11	4,329
March '12	4,649
June '12 ^P	4,242
September '12 ^P	3,915
Total	17,135

Source: Quarterly Outpatient Activity Return (QOAR) Part 1

^P Data that relate to the June 2012 and September 2012 quarters are currently provisional

- (ii) A missed appointment is one in which the patient failed to attend, and did not give advance notice to the hospital (including patients who cancelled their outpatient appointment on the same day on which the appointment was scheduled). Consequently, information on the reason for a patient missing an appointment is not collected by the Department.

Electronic Cigarettes

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assessment he has made of the (i) use; and (ii) health side effects of electronic cigarettes.

(AQW 16838/11-15)

Mr Poots: Electronic cigarettes are currently unregulated. The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) consulted publically in 2010 on whether to bring all non-tobacco nicotine containing products, including electronic cigarettes, within the medicines licensing regime. Following the consultation, further scientific and market research was carried out to explore the levels of nicotine which have a significant physiological effect and to gain a better understanding of the impact of potential regulation on public health and on business. The MHRA is expected to make a final decision on how electronic cigarettes will be regulated in 2013.

My Department has not made a separate assessment of the health side effects of electronic cigarettes as this would duplicate the work of the MHRA. At present, my Department has not made any assessment of the scale of use of electronic cigarettes in Northern Ireland.

Electronic Cigarettes

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why pharmacies continue to sell electronic cigarettes within a health care setting, even though there is a poisons warning on the back of the product.

(AQW 16839/11-15)

Mr Poots: Advice from a number of professional organisations is that pharmacists should consider the appropriateness of selling such products, in view of their safety and efficacy not having been established. Pharmacists should consider whether these transactions would satisfy the Regulator's standards of conduct, ethics and performance.

A coordinated programme of scientific and market research is being carried out to assess the physiological effect, and any health risks, of these products and to gain a better understanding of the impact of potential regulation on public health and on business. This work is being informed by the advice of an expert working group of the Commission on Human Medicines which is expected to report in spring 2013.

I intend to await the results of this research before determining my Department's policy on these products in terms of both their potential to contribute to smoking cessation and their safety.

Electronic Cigarettes

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why there is no clear guidance on the use of electronic cigarettes for patients or hospital staff within the hospital environment.

(AQW 16840/11-15)

Mr Poots: The use of electronic cigarettes is not illegal under the current smoke-free legislation, which prohibits smoking in enclosed or substantially enclosed public and work places. Therefore, it is a matter for individual businesses or premises, including hospitals, schools, restaurants, bars, offices or public transport companies, to address through their own workplace smoking policies, if they wish to do so.

Abortion Guidelines

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the recent death of Mrs Savita Halappanavar in a Galway hospital from septicaemia after being refused an abortion, what action he will take to expedite guidelines on abortion for health professionals to avoid a similar case here.

(AQW 16841/11-15)

Mr Poots: It would not be appropriate to surmise on issues that occurred in Ireland based on media reports and I will not rush my deliberations on the guidelines given the importance of the subject.

Hospitals: Interim Contracts for Supplies

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the process for approving an interim contract for supplying soap and sanitising products to hospitals whilst waiting for a full tender process to be carried out.

(AQW 16851/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health and social care organisations in Northern Ireland are able to access the supply of goods from NHS Supply Chain. As part of a contracting programme being undertaken by BSO, this facility has been accessed in respect of a range of soaps and sanitising products. The decision to use the NHS Supply Chain as a source of product is taken only where cost reductions are achievable, and it is expected that this procurement will yield savings of approximately £17k per annum. The process was approved by BSO as the parent organisation of the Procurement and Logistics Service.

As with all contracts for the supply of goods to HSC facilities, supplier performance will be subject to monitoring and any necessary action will be taken to address performance failures.

The procurement of soaps will be conducted via a mini competition through the NHS Supply Chain framework. This approach has been agreed with HSC Trusts as being the most cost effective route, and the timetable will be agreed with NHS Supply Chain.

The procurement of sanitising products will be by competitive tender, to be let by BSO Procurement and Logistics Service with a July 2013 commencement date.

Hospitals: Contracts for Supplies

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will ensure that future contracts are more cost effective and able to deliver an efficient service, so that wards are not left without essential products or with faulty equipment.

(AQW 16852/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health and social care organisations in Northern Ireland are able to access the supply of goods from NHS Supply Chain. As part of a contracting programme being undertaken by BSO, this facility has been accessed in respect of a range of soaps and sanitising products. The decision to use the NHS Supply Chain as a source of product is taken only where cost reductions are achievable, and it is expected that this procurement will yield savings of approximately £17k per annum. The process was approved by BSO as the parent organisation of the Procurement and Logistics Service.

As with all contracts for the supply of goods to HSC facilities, supplier performance will be subject to monitoring and any necessary action will be taken to address performance failures.

The procurement of soaps will be conducted via a mini competition through the NHS Supply Chain framework. This approach has been agreed with HSC Trusts as being the most cost effective route, and the timetable will be agreed with NHS Supply Chain.

The procurement of sanitising products will be by competitive tender, to be let by BSO Procurement and Logistics Service with a July 2013 commencement date.

Hospitals: Supplies

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the formal tender process for supplying soap and sanitising products to hospitals will be completed.

(AQW 16853/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health and social care organisations in Northern Ireland are able to access the supply of goods from NHS Supply Chain. As part of a contracting programme being undertaken by BSO, this facility has been accessed in respect of a range of soaps and sanitising products. The decision to use the NHS Supply Chain as a source of product is taken only where cost reductions are achievable, and it is expected that this procurement will yield savings of approximately £17k per annum. The process was approved by BSO as the parent organisation of the Procurement and Logistics Service.

As with all contracts for the supply of goods to HSC facilities, supplier performance will be subject to monitoring and any necessary action will be taken to address performance failures.

The procurement of soaps will be conducted via a mini competition through the NHS Supply Chain framework. This approach has been agreed with HSC Trusts as being the most cost effective route, and the timetable will be agreed with NHS Supply Chain.

The procurement of sanitising products will be by competitive tender, to be let by BSO Procurement and Logistics Service with a July 2013 commencement date.

Southern Health and Social Care Trust: Intensive Home Support Unit

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any planned changes to the work of the Intensive Home Support Unit within the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 16870/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Southern Trust advises that it has developed initiatives which will make existing services more effective and person centred. The Trust is working with service users and carers on development of these initiatives.

As part of those service improvements the Intensive Domiciliary Care Support Team, currently providing services in the Armagh/Dungannon area, is being reviewed.

Whatever the outcome of that review, the Trust remains committed to meeting the needs of those currently receiving services from that team and to fully utilising the skills of the team across the Trust area.

These reviews are in line with the recommendations set out in Transforming Your Care.

Health and Social Care Trusts: Services

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether Health and Social Care Trusts have ceased providing shopping and cleaning services to clients who have been assessed as needing these services.

(AQW 16885/11-15)

Mr Poots: Older people are assessed for Domiciliary Care Services in accordance with the Departmental Circular ECCU 2/2008: Regional Access Criteria for Domiciliary Care. . It is recognised that preventative 'low level' interventions can avoid deterioration in an individual's situation. Where services are not directly provided, trusts work in partnership with the individual, their family, carers, and the voluntary and independent sector. The HSC is in the process of rolling out reablement programmes aimed at helping individuals regain their independence. This approach is in keeping with the concept of Transforming Your Care and developing enhanced community and voluntary partner capacity within community settings, to support individuals remaining independently in their home.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: Services

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he is aware that older people in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust area have been informed that the Trust will no longer provide shopping and cleaning services as part of their care packages.

(AQW 16886/11-15)

Mr Poots: Within the South Eastern Trust older people are assessed for Domiciliary Care Services in accordance with the Departmental Circular ECCU 2/2008: Regional Access Criteria for Domiciliary Care. Due to demographic pressures and increasing demand for Community Care Services priority is given to older people who meet the critical and substantial levels of need.

The Trust acknowledges however that support with low level needs is important in helping older people to remain at home. The Trust has commissioned a range of services from the Voluntary/Community organisations to provide support which will help maintain older people's independence.

Trust Staff are aware that entitlement to benefits should not be taken into account in decisions about the provision of Community Care Services.

Transforming Your Care: Services

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the removal of shopping and cleaning services for clients marries with the concept of the home as the hub of care in Transforming Your Care.

(AQW 16887/11-15)

Mr Poots: Older people are assessed for Domiciliary Care Services in accordance with the Departmental Circular ECCU 2/2008: Regional Access Criteria for Domiciliary Care. . It is recognised that preventative 'low level' interventions can avoid deterioration in an individual's situation. Where services are not directly provided, trusts work in partnership with the individual, their family, carers, and the voluntary and independent sector. The HSC is in the process of rolling out reablement programmes aimed at helping individuals regain their independence. This approach is in keeping with the concept of Transforming Your Care and developing enhanced community and voluntary partner capacity within community settings, to support individuals remaining independently in their home.

Transforming Your Care: Services

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what actions he will take to ensure the retention of shopping and cleaning services for older people which, by providing low intensity practical support services, as cited in Transforming Your Care, allow people to remain in their homes and thus reduce the need for hospital attendance, emergency admissions and institutional care.

(AQW 16888/11-15)

Mr Poots: Older people are assessed for Domiciliary Care Services in accordance with the Departmental Circular ECCU 2/2008: Regional Access Criteria for Domiciliary Care. . It is recognised that preventative 'low level' interventions can avoid deterioration in an individual's situation. Where services are not directly provided, trusts work in partnership with the individual, their family, carers, and the voluntary and independent sector. The HSC is in the process of rolling out reablement programmes aimed at helping individuals regain their independence. This approach is in keeping with the concept of Transforming Your Care and developing enhanced community and voluntary partner capacity within community settings, to support individuals remaining independently in their home.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: Services

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why clients in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, who are having cleaning and shopping services removed from their care packages, are being advised to use their Attendance Allowance or Disability Living Allowance to pay for these services, given that it is contrary to departmental guidance which states that receipt of Attendance Allowance or other disability benefits should not be taken into account in decisions about the provision of community care services.

(AQW 16889/11-15)

Mr Poots: Within the South Eastern Trust older people are assessed for Domiciliary Care Services in accordance with the Departmental Circular ECCU 2/2008: Regional Access Criteria for Domiciliary Care. Due to demographic pressures and increasing demand for Community Care Services priority is given to older people who meet the critical and substantial levels of need.

The Trust acknowledges however that support with low level needs is important in helping older people to remain at home. The Trust has commissioned a range of services from the Voluntary/Community organisations to provide support which will help maintain older people's independence.

Trust Staff are aware that entitlement to benefits should not be taken into account in decisions about the provision of Community Care Services.

Mid-Ulster Hospital: Minor Injuries Unit

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients were taken by ambulance to the Mid-Ulster Minor Injury Unit in 2012.

(AQW 16897/11-15)

Mr Poots: Between 1st January and 31st October 2012, 1 patient was taken by ambulance to the Mid Ulster Minor Injuries Unit.

Deep Brain Stimulation

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the current availability of Deep Brain Stimulation for the management of motor function symptoms in patients with movement disorders.

(AQW 16909/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board has advised me that Deep Brain Stimulation is not currently available in Northern Ireland. Where patients require this highly specialised service, the Board considers requests for the transfer of patients to providers outside Northern Ireland.

The Board has also advised me that neurology staff in the Belfast Trust have expressed an interest in developing this service locally.

School of Dentistry: Waiting Times

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the waiting time for treatment of children who are referred from primary care for paediatric restorative dental services at the School of Dentistry in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 16934/11-15)

Mr Poots: The table below outlines the number of patients currently waiting for a first outpatient appointment for paediatric restorative dentistry services at the School of Dentistry.

	Waiting time (in weeks)							Total Waiting
	0-6	6-9	9-13	13-18	18-21	21-26	>26	
School of Dentistry	3	1	4	4	0	1	0	13

Source: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Binding Silence Agreements

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many binding silence agreements were (i) signed; and (ii) broken in (a) 2009; (b) 2010; and (c) 2011; and what actions were taken as a result of an agreement being broken.

(AQW 16967/11-15)

Mr Poots: A system of openness and transparency should underpin public accountability in the use of public funds. My Department's policy is that there are no binding silence agreements made in cases where public money is used in a negotiated financial settlement.

Fire and Rescue Service: International Trade Fair

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to state the purpose of the visit by representatives of the Fire and Rescue Service to an International Trade Fair, held on 3 to 6 November 2009 at Messe, Dusseldorf in Germany; (ii) who attended; (iii) the cost of the visit; (iv) to detail any contracts that were agreed.

(AQW 16977/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The purpose of NIFRS' attendance at the international Trade Show in Messe was to research a range of tools, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and operational equipment for ensuring health and safety, and security, in the workplace.
- (ii) NIFRS' Stores Manager attended the Trade Show.
- (iii) The total cost of the trip was £1159.02.
- (iv) NIFRS is not aware of any contracts agreed as a result of this visit.

Fire and Rescue Service: Investigations

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the outcomes from the recent investigations into (i) the disposal of wood materials by the Fire and Rescue Service; and (ii) other items that were reported as missing.

(AQW 16982/11-15)

Mr Poots: The outcome from the investigation into the disposal of wood materials by the Fire and Rescue Service and into the other items that were reported as missing will be reported when the investigation is concluded.

Direct Payment Scheme

Mr B McCreagh asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what proportion of people who are eligible, are in receipt of Direct Payments.

(AQW 16984/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is not available. However, information on the number of direct payments paid during the quarter and the amount paid can be found on the DHSSPS website at the following address:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-cib/statistics_and_research-cib-guide/statistics_and_research-cib-direct-payment.htm

Senior 2 Podiatrists

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 14036/11-15, why Senior 2 Podiatrists in the Southern sector were able to use the Enablement process to raise their banding to Senior 1 when this option was not available to staff in the Northern sector.

(AQW 16997/11-15)

Mr Poots: All HSC non-medical staff are on Agenda for Change terms and conditions of employment and there is no Enabling Agreement within these employment arrangements. The Southern sector is not a recognised area within the HSC; I believe that you are referring to the Southern HSC Trust area. I understand that appointments to Band 6, Senior 1 Podiatrist posts in that trust area were filled by open competition.

Altnagelvin Area Hospital: Services

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 16102/11-15, to detail all the current proposals for the removal of services from Altnagelvin Hospital.

(AQW 16999/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are no plans to remove particular services from Altnagelvin Area Hospital at this time.

Altnagelvin Area Hospital: Abdominal Aortic Aneurysms

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether operations for Abdominal Aortic Aneurysms are performed in Altnagelvin Hospital.

(AQW 17013/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Western Health and Social Care Trust that the Trust stopped performing planned abdominal aortic aneurysm surgery in October 2010. All patients requiring this procedure are transferred to Belfast.

Flu Vaccine: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the uptake of the most recent flu vaccine in the North Down area.

(AQW 17014/11-15)

Mr Poots: Uptake rates for flu vaccine in the North Down area are not available. The closest available rates are for the South Eastern Local Commissioning Group area. Their uptake rates to 31 October 2012 were:

- Patients aged 65 years and over: 62.7%,
- Patients under 65 years in "at risk" groups: 64.6%
- Pregnant women: 52.4%

It should be noted that these figures show the uptake up to the end of October, and the vaccination programme is continuing, so the final uptake figures will be higher. These figures are very similar to those from the same time last year, when one of the highest uptake rates ever was subsequently achieved across Northern Ireland. All figures produced part way through the flu vaccination campaign should be regarded as provisional.

GPs: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many GPs are practising on a permanent basis in North Down.

(AQW 17017/11-15)

Mr Poots: Figures provided by the Family Practitioner Services Information and Registration Unit in the HSC Business Services Organisation, show that as at November 2012, there were 49 GPs working in practices located in North Down Local Government District. The figure includes principal and salaried GPs only, locums are not included.

Bangor Community Hospital: Minor Injuries Unit

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have used the Minor Injury Unit in Bangor over the last three years.

(AQW 17018/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on how many people have used the Minor Injury Unit in Bangor over the last three years is not available. However, information on the number of attendances at the Bangor Minor Injury Unit is published on an annual basis and is available to view or download at:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats/emergency_care-3/emergency-care-stats.htm

Prisoners: GPs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether a prisoner's GP is contacted on their arrival to a facility to verify a any illness or health conditions, and to ascertain what medication the prisoner has been prescribed; or whether this information is relayed to Northern Ireland Prison Service staff by the prisoner.

(AQW 17046/11-15)

Mr Poots: If a newly committed prisoner is registered with a general practitioner in the community, a member of healthcare will contact that GP to ascertain which drugs are currently being prescribed. The prisoner will also be given the opportunity to discuss medical conditions, chronic disorders and any outstanding hospital or GP appointments. The prison GP will then consult with the prisoner and prescribe and order treatment as appropriate. Whether or not a prisoner consents for prison healthcare staff to share or seek any health-related information with another individual or organisation would be entirely at his or her own discretion.

Organ Donation

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what actions his Department has taken on the issue of organ donation following the Assembly debate on 21 February 2012; and whether he has any plans to introduce an opt-out system of organ donation.

(AQW 17069/11-15)

Mr Poots: Organ donation is an issue that I have a keen interest in and I am still exploring all options for increasing organ donation in Northern Ireland, including the introduction of an opt-out system.

I have established a Northern Ireland Committee for Organ Donation, which is made up of commissioners, clinicians, NHS Blood and Transplant representatives and the voluntary sector. The remit of the group is to take forward the work of the former Northern Ireland Organ Donations Task Force Implementation Group to ensure the momentum of progress in the field of organ donation is maintained and built upon following the final report of the Organ Donation Taskforce. My Department is also represented on national groups, who are working towards increasing organ donation and transplantation on a national level, and is liaising with the Department of Health, Social Services and Children in Wales which is in the process of introducing an opt-out system.

Nursing and Residential Homes

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the (i) statutory; and (ii) independent; (a) nursing homes; and (b) residential homes that are located within the (1) Larne Borough Council; (2) Carrickfergus Borough Council; and (3) Newtownabbey Borough Council areas; and the number of registered places each provides.

(AQW 17100/11-15)

Mr Poots: This information is not available in the format requested and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Information is available for the Northern HSC Trust, the area in which the three Borough Councils fall. This information was requested from the Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) and is detailed in the tables below.

At 23rd November 2012, there were no Statutory Nursing homes located in the Northern HSC Trust.

Table 1: List of Independent* Nursing Homes Located in the Northern HSC Trust, at 23rd November 2012

Name of Home	Town	Number of Registered Places
Abbeylands	Belfast	87
Antrim Care Home	Antrim	53
Ashwood House	Glengormley	36
Ballyclare Nursing Home	Ballyclare	34
Ben Madigan Care Home	Newtownabbey	64
Bohill House	Coleraine	104
Braefield	Ballymena	50
Broadways Private Nursing Home	Larne	33
Brooklands	Antrim	62
Brooklands	Magherafelt	55
Brookmount	Coleraine	48
Camphill	Ballymena	72
Castlehill	Castledawson	34
Castleview	Carrickfergus	36
Cherry Tree House	Carrickfergus	56
Chester	Whitehead	43
Clareview House	Ballyclare	35
Clonlee	Antrim	45
Craigdun	Cullybackey	35
Cromore House	Portstewart	40
Drapersfield House	Cookstown	45
Drummaul House	Randalstown	43
Dunanney Care Centre	Newtownabbey	40
Edenmore	Whiteabbey	47
Fairfields Care Centre	Cookstown	70
Galgorm	Ballymena	35

Name of Home	Town	Number of Registered Places
Garvagh Care Home	Coleraine	67
Gillaroo Lodge	Larne	25
Glendun	Cushendun	46
Glenkeen House	Randalstown	40
Hamilton Care Home	Ballyclare	24
Jordanstown	Jordanstown	53
Karina Lodge	Kilrea	15
Kingscourt	Templepatrick	19
Kintullagh Care Home	Ballymena	62
Ladyhill Lodge	Antrim	31
Lakeview	Crumlin	42
Larne Care Centre	Larne	83
Leabank	Ballycastle	52
Madelayne Court	Portstewart	64
Magherafelt Manor	Magherafelt	64
Maine Nursing Home	Randalstown	25
Marina Care Centre	Ballyronan	42
Massereene Manor	Antrim	74
Milesian Manor	Magherafelt	34
Moneymore	Moneymore	41
Prospect	Ballymena	52
Queenscourt	Ballyclare	43
Ratheane Private Nursing Home	Coleraine	79
Rathmena	Ballyclare	29
Ravenhill	Greenisland	38
Rivervale Country	Cookstown	20
Rose Martha Court	Ballymena	100
Rylands	Ballymena	59
Slemish House	Ballymena	45
Tamlaght	Carrickfergus	45
The Cottage	Coleraine	41
The Court Care Home	Ballymoney	45
The Glebe Care Centre	Newtownabbey	38
The Martin Residential Trust	Glengormley	19
The Model Care Centre	Ballymoney	36
The Montague Care Home	Portstewart	54
Three Islands	Toomebridge	40
Weavers House	Cookstown	65
Whiteabbey	Newtownabbey	59
Whitehead Nursing Home	Whitehead	41
Total: 66		Total: 3,153

Source: Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA)

* Independent refers to both private and voluntary providers.

Table 2: List of Statutory Residential Homes Located in the Northern HSC Trust, at 23rd November 2012

Name of Home	Town	Number of Registered Places
Clonmore House	Newtownabbey	42
Ellis Court Respite Unit	Carrickfergus	6
Greenisland House	Carrickfergus	31
Hollybank	Magherafelt	9
Joymount House	Carrickfergus	44
Lisgarel	Larne	41
Moylinney EMI Unit	Whiteabbey	38
Pinewood	Ballymena	36
Rathmoyle	Ballycastle	39
Rosedale	Antrim	38
The Brook	Coleraine	6
The Roddens	Ballymoney	29
Westlands	Cookstown	29
Total: 13		Total: 388

Source: Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA)

Table 3: List of Independent* Residential Homes Located in the Northern HSC Trust, at 23rd November 2012

Name of Home	Town	Number of Registered Places
Andena	Ballymena	36
Anniscliff House	Maghera	17
Ard Na Grainde	Randalstown	3
Benbradagh	Maghera	22
Bluegate Lodge	Garvagh	5
Bridgeview	Ballymena	3
Carnmoyne	Ahoghill	16
Carn-vaddy	Ballymena	3
Castle Lodge Care Home	Antrim	39
Clairville	Rasharkin	17
Clanrye	Larne	17
Colebrooke House	Larne	12
Croft Lodge	Ballymena	5
Edenmore	Coleraine	15
Englewood	Larne	3
Fairways	Portrush	21
Garryduff House	Ballymoney	7
Glens	Cushendall	16
Hillview	Ballycastle	3
Hob Green Country Home	Ballymoney	9
Innisfree	Broughshane	22
Karingmore	Carnlough	16
Karuna Home	Carrickfergus	9

Name of Home	Town	Number of Registered Places
Kirkhill Manor	Ballymoney	3
Knockan Lodge	Ballymoney	25
Marriott House	Magherafelt	13
Mountview	Magherafelt	9
Naroon House	Crumlin	12
Oriel House	Antrim	6
Redford	Cullybackey	18
Rosemary Lodge Care Home	Antrim	44
Ross Lodge / Ross House	Ballymoney	13
Rowandale	Carnlough	15
Seabank	Portrush	37
SENSE	Carrickfergus	10
Strawberry Fields	Randalstown	6
The Cara	Rasharkin	18
The Gables	Antrim	10
Victoria House	Rasharkin	11
York House	Portrush	32
3 Manor Downs	Magherafelt	3
41 Mount Street	Coleraine	1
9 Gortead Park	Maghera	1
Total: 43		Total: 603

Source: Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA)

* Independent refers to both private and voluntary providers.

Liverpool Care Pathway

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the Liverpool Care Pathway is practised by any Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 17102/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department published 'Living Matters:Dying Matters a Strategy for Palliative and End of Life Care in Northern Ireland in March 2010. The Strategy recommends the use of improvement tools to improve the quality of care in the last few days of life. The Liverpool Care Pathway (LCP) which was developed by Marie Curie Cancer Care is such a tool. It is an established and respected tool that is recommended by NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) and it has been used in all Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland for a number of years.

The LCP is initiated by clinicians who are trained and competent to do so. The use of the LCP is discussed with patients, if appropriate, and with relatives/carers before use. No Health and Social Care Trust or hospital in Northern Ireland has received financial rewards for placing terminally ill patients on the Liverpool Care Pathway.

Dialysis Treatment: Northern Health and Social Care Trust Area

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people living in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust catchment area travel outside the Trust area for dialysis treatment.

(AQW 17180/11-15)

Mr Poots: We assume that this question relates to patients receiving dialysis as regular attenders.

A regular day/night attender is a patient who is admitted electively and regularly for a planned sequence of days or nights and who returns home for the remainder of the 24 hour period. This method of admission is particularly common for renal dialysis.

During 2011/12, there were 62 patients living in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust catchment area who travelled outside the Trust area for dialysis treatment as a regular attender in a hospital setting. This information has been taken from the Hospital Inpatient System.

Transforming Your Care: Residential Care

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on proposals for residential care in the Transforming Your Care consultation.

(AQO 2949/11-15)

Mr Poots: The proposal in respect of statutory residential care is one of a series of proposals emerging from Transforming Your Care which is currently the subject of public consultation which is open until January 15th 2013. On conclusion of the consultation the results will be analysed and the findings will be published. Therefore, it is not possible to provide an update on any of the proposals at present.

Neurological Services: Funding

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline any plans he has for reform of funding for neurological services.

(AQO 2947/11-15)

Mr Poots: Currently, I have no plans to reform funding for neurological services. However, on 1 October I opened the new 23 bed Neurology Unit at Musgrave Park Hospital at a cost of £4.94m, which provides neuro-palliative care, assessment, rehabilitation, and respite care for patients with neurological conditions.

Waiting Lists

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline how the additional money he received in the October monitoring round will be used to tackle waiting lists.

(AQO 2955/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department was allocated additional funding of £9 million in October monitoring respect of elective care. This is in addition to the £10 million which was allocated in the June monitoring round. This is a welcome investment and will allow the HSC to make significant progress this year in reducing lengthy waiting times in a number of key specialties. The two allocations will enable the HSC Board to deliver almost 30,000 additional treatments this year in some of the specialties with the highest waiting lists, including orthopaedics, general surgery, ophthalmology, gynaecology and dermatology. This will help to reduce waiting times across these specialties.

Accident and Emergency Departments: Waiting Times

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why there has been an increase in waiting times in a number of A&E departments despite his commitment to reducing them.

(AQO 2956/11-15)

Mr Poots: There has been significant improvement in waiting times in Emergency Departments across Northern Ireland since the establishment of the Emergency Department Improvement Action Group in April this year, particularly in relation to the number of people waiting longer than 12 hours. Some progress has also been made against the 4 hour standard, although not to the same extent, as the focus has been on eliminating the longest waits.

The improvement in waiting times is a welcome improvement and it is important that this performance is sustained and built upon throughout the winter months which can be challenging for all of us. I am aware that some hospitals have been experiencing an increase in numbers attending emergency Departments. The HSCB is monitoring the position closely with the Trusts and I look to the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) to continue its significant work with the Trusts to ensure that a focus remains on improving the performance of our emergency departments.

Health: Research and Development

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what he is doing to support the need for increased Research and Development in health matters.

(AQO 2958/11-15)

Mr Poots: Earlier this year, I was very pleased to announce our contribution to the funds for the research programmes of the National Institute for Health Research, thereby increasing directly, by up to 25%, our annual investment in health and social care research. This gives our researchers an opportunity to compete with colleagues UK-wide for very significant funding. Their track record in recent years has been to attract to Northern Ireland over £4 in R&D funding for every £1 that we allocate directly.

The very important MoU on 'Connected Health and Prosperity' which the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I signed jointly last year will contribute to the Programme for Government commitment to support £300 million investment by businesses in R&D. On 24th October in Boston, I announced a further £4.7 million investment in health research by InvestNI which is an early confirmation of this.

Another focus is on ensuring increased drawdown of EU Commission R&D funding. From our own HSC R&D Fund we are providing researchers with initial support to undertake preliminary work and develop competitive applications. We are working

closely with other Departments to enable effective collaborations among HSC researchers, academics and the business community.

Good research leads to innovation and the delivery of more effective health and social care services. Our work in Connected Health, for which R&D is essential, will make a vital contribution to the success of Transforming Your Care.

Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children: MRI Scanner

Mr Givan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what impact the recently announced new MRI scanner services in the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children will have on health outcomes for patients.

(AQO 2959/11-15)

Mr Poots: My recent announcement to provide £2.75m capital investment for the provision of MRI services within the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children will: enhance the existing comprehensive range of regional paediatric specialist services available at the hospital; help meet increasing demand for MRI services; and, reduce the need for paediatric patients to share adult facilities. My Department's investment will be enhanced by a £2m contribution being made by the MRI Scanner Appeal charitable organisation and I would like to thank all those who have been involved in fund raising for this much needed service.

Territorial Army Field Hospital

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the contribution made by 204 Territorial Army Field Hospital.

(AQO 2960/11-15)

Mr Poots: 204 (North Irish) Field Hospital (Volunteers) Regiment will be deploying a Hospital Squadron to Afghanistan early in the New Year under the auspices of Operation HERRICK in support of 3 Medical Regiment and will be commanding the medical unit in Camp Bastion. 204 will be the lead unit and in this period will be commanding the Medical Unit in Camp Bastion. Camp Bastion is like a large town with population of 28,000. A contingent of medical teams from USA and Denmark will also be deployed at Camp Bastion at this time.

Casualties are not restricted to coalition forces but also include the Afghan National Army and Taliban, as well as civilians being caught between warring factions.

The Deployment has been planned well in advance and staff have been released to allow minimal impact on delivery of HSC services. The staff deploying include nurses, surgeons, physicians, paramedics, AHPs and managers and are spread across HSC Trusts.

As part of the training for the deployment 204 have participated in hospital exercise assessment to identify skills that need updated or refreshed. Training has included,;

- Military operational surgical training for surgeons, theatre nurses and operation department practitioners (ODP).
- Battlefield advance trauma life support for all staff. This is similar to Advanced Life Support training in the HSC.
- ALERT training – a multi-professional course to train staff in recognising patient deterioration and act appropriately in treating the acutely unwell.

They have also undertake routine training on military skills, team building and leadership.

The skills and knowledge gained from this experience will be invaluable as the 21 staff return to work in the HSC Trusts.

Department of Justice

Prison Service: Code of Conduct and Discipline

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 14503/11-15, to detail the legislation that authorised the Secretary of State's private secretary to approve any aspect of the NIPS Code of Conduct and Discipline provided for in the Prison and Young Offenders Rules (NI) 1995.

(AQW 16541/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The Secretary of State's private secretary did not have the power to approve any aspect of the NIPS Code of Conduct and Discipline.

Grooming of a Child for Sexual Purposes

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many people have been convicted of grooming of a child for sexual purposes in each of the last five years,

(AQW 16542/11-15)

Mr Ford: Offences of 'Meeting a child following sexual grooming' may be prosecuted under the Section 15 (1) of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and Article 22 of the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008.

The table below gives the number convicted for the calendar years 2005 -2009, the latest year for which figures are currently available.

Number of convictions for meeting a child following sexual grooming

Year	Convictions
2005	0
2006	2
2007	0
2008	1
2009	0

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Data from 2007 onwards are not directly comparable with previous years.

Prison Service: Training

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16049/11-15, 16052/11-15 and AQW 16165/11-15, to detail (i) where the training was conducted; and (ii) who carried out the training.
(AQW 16563/11-15)

Mr Ford: Records indicate that the training took place at the Prison Service College by qualified Staff Training Officers.

Internet Sexual Offending Treatment Programme

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the format of the new internet sex-offender treatment programme, including who developed the programme and how it is delivered.
(AQW 16612/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Internet Sexual Offending Treatment Programme (I-SOTP) was developed by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). It is offered in two formats: group-work or one to one. PBNi introduced this programme in 2008 for adult male offenders convicted of offences such as possession, making or distributing indecent images of children. Offenders with an IQ of 80 or more and no mental health or substance abuse problems can participate in the programme. The purpose of the programme is to reduce the likelihood of further sex offending.

The format of the group programme is 35 sessions of two hours duration weekly, which is 70 hours of treatment over a nine month period. It is delivered by specially trained probation officers at Probation offices throughout Northern Ireland.

The I-SOTP is offered to the Court as an additional requirement of court orders and post-custody licences.

Prison Service: Supporting Prisoners at Risk

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16049/11-15, AQW 16052/11-15 and AQW 16165/11-15, to detail (i) what accreditation is given to staff who take part in Supporting Prisoners at Risk training; and (ii) whether Supporting Prisoners at Risk can be used in any prison facility, regardless of where the training is delivered.
(AQW 16613/11-15)

Mr Ford: I can confirm that staff who take part in Supporting Prisoners At Risk (SPAR) training do not receive accreditation. The SPAR training can be used in any prison facility, regardless of where the training is delivered.

Prison Service: Regional Clinical Governance Committee

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice why Northern Ireland Prison Service staff who were invited to the Regional Clinical Governance Committee meetings have not been attending; and how many meetings they have missed.
(AQW 16614/11-15)

Mr Ford: A Prison Service Governor attended two of the last four quarterly meetings of the Regional Clinical Governance Committee.

NIPS, in partnership with the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SET), recently reviewed the effectiveness of such meetings and it was agreed that the prison healthcare meeting structure would be revised to ensure that the appropriate officials attend relevant meetings.

A Strategic Health Board has now been established and this is attended by the Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, a Prison Service Director, the Chief Executive of the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust and the Director of Prison Healthcare.

Governors and Prison Healthcare management now attend a monthly Operational Management meeting and, where appropriate, issues raised at this meeting will be brought to the attention of the Regional Clinical Governance Committee.

Prison Service: Investigations

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 9151/11-15, to detail (i) the number of Northern Ireland Prison Service staff who are experienced investigators, broken down by grade; (ii) the extent and nature of the training provided to the investigators in each of the last five years; and (iii) the duration and the provider of the training.

(AQW 16619/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are currently 44 governor grade staff within the Northern Ireland Prison Service who are authorised to conduct investigations in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Conduct and Discipline (COCD).

Specific training is not provided. However, a number of managers have received specific training to conduct harassment investigations.

With effect from the New Year, following the establishment of a Professional Standards Unit, all investigations will be conducted by professionally trained staff.

Prisoners: Drug Debts

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 11413/11-15, in the absence of any investigation, how the conclusion was reached that the allegations published were without foundation.

(AQW 16620/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prisoner Assessment Unit investigation was not reopened because there was no new credible evidence presented.

None of the staff or prisoner witnesses interviewed during the PAU investigation made any mention of any other drugs debts being paid in the manner suggested in the Sunday World article. In addition, the Sunday World article was considered by senior management at Maghaberry Prison but there was not deemed to be any evidence which would have warranted staff and prisoners being re-interviewed.

Tony Taylor

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the circumstances surrounding the assault of Tony Taylor, a prisoner in Roe House, where he sustained a broken wrist while awaiting transport to court; (ii) the Prison Service reasons for the incident; (iii) whether, as has been mooted, Mr Taylor began the altercation, how he did so when handcuffed and connected to a chain which meant that he could not lift his hands; and (iv) whether any prison officers have been charged by the PSNI or reprimanded by the Prison Service in relation to misconduct.

(AQW 16622/11-15)

Mr Ford: Following an investigation into the circumstances surrounding this incident, it was found that the prisoner became aggressive when refused permission to bring documents to court.

Under the Data Protection Act (1998) it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the specific details of the investigation other than to confirm that the prisoner has been informed that no evidence has been found to support his complaint that he was assaulted by a member of prison staff.

Civil Servants: Bonuses

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) what extra duties departmental staff carried out to receive bonus payments; and (ii) how many staff received a bonus in (a) 2009/10; (b) 2010/11; and (c) 2011/12.

(AQW 16631/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) In line with the Northern Ireland Civil Service policy, the extra duties departmental staff carried out to receive bonus payments fall into the following categories:
- Exceptional performance in particularly demanding tasks;
 - Exceptional performance in particularly demanding situations; and
 - Good performance achieved under particularly adverse conditions.
- (ii) The numbers were:

Year	Number of Staff
2009/2010	285
2010/2011	420
2011/2012	329

Prison Officers: Absences

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many prison officers have taken sick leave due to depression and stress in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16632/11-15)

Mr Ford: The number of prison officers who have taken sick leave due to depression and stress in each of the last three years is shown in the table below:

Dates	Number of prison officers
16 November 2009 – 15 November 2010	118
16 November 2010 – 15 November 2011	113
16 November 2011 – 15 November 2012	125

These figures include Governors, Principal Officers, Senior Officers, Main Grade Officers, Prison Custody Officers, Custody Officers, Night Custody Officers, and Operational Support Grades.

Prisons: Cost of Repairs

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost to the Prison Service of repairing the damage to prisons caused by dissident republican prisoners in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16633/11-15)

Mr Ford: The cost to the Northern Ireland Prison Service in relation to repairing damage caused by separated republican prisoners in each of the last three years is £1,122,720. The costs are broken down as follows:

Year	Period	Amount
2010-11	April 2010 – March 2011	307,420
2011-12	April 2011 – March 2012	435,100
2012-13	April 2012 – October 2012	380,200
Total		1,122,720

Thompson House, Belfast

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, for each of the last 10 years, to detail how many people placed at Thompson House, Belfast, have (i) breached the rules of their release; (ii) re-offended whilst a resident; and (iii) been returned to custody.
(AQW 16695/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is not possible to provide this information without incurring disproportionate cost.

Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 14945/11-15, (i) whether he will review his decision to disclose the information, given that he does not have to identify the resident and that Legal Aid is paid from the public purse; and (ii) to detail the reasons for withholding the information requested.

(AQW 16698/11-15)

Mr Ford: Article 24 of the Legal Aid, Advice and Assistance (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 prohibits the disclosure of information relating to both an application for and the grant of civil legal aid without the consent of the applicant. The disclosure of such information is an offence.

Consequently I am unable to disclose any information relating to legal aid in this matter.

Bangor Courthouse

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice whether a decision has been made to close Bangor Courthouse; and what responsibility his Department will have in making sure the building is secure and protected as a listed building after its closure.
(AQW 16717/11-15)

Mr Ford: My decision on the future of the five court hearing centres in Northern Ireland was announced on 22 November. Following consideration of responses to the consultation exercise, I have decided that Bangor Courthouse will be closed by April 2013 and that the business will be transferred to Newtownards Courthouse. Until such times as Bangor Courthouse is disposed of, my Department will retain responsibility for ensuring that it is appropriately maintained and secure.

As my Department has no alternative plans for Bangor Courthouse, it will be offered to other Departments and public sector bodies to utilise and, if not required, may be placed on the open market. I would be happy to consider alternative uses for the community provided they are cost neutral for my Department.

Bangor Courthouse

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department will work with the local community to ensure that a use can be found for Bangor Courthouse which will be of benefit to the community, if the building becomes vacant.

(AQW 16718/11-15)

Mr Ford: My decision on the future of the five court hearing centres in Northern Ireland was announced on 22 November. Following consideration of responses to the consultation exercise, I have decided that Bangor Courthouse will be closed by April 2013 and that the business will be transferred to Newtownards Courthouse. Until such times as Bangor Courthouse is disposed of, my Department will retain responsibility for ensuring that it is appropriately maintained and secure.

As my Department has no alternative plans for Bangor Courthouse, it will be offered to other Departments and public sector bodies to utilise and, if not required, may be placed on the open market. I would be happy to consider alternative uses for the community provided they are cost neutral for my Department.

Prompt Payment

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Justice what practices, protocols and measures are in place within the Department and its arm's-length bodies to ensure prompt payment to contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers.

(AQW 16729/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice (DOJ), its agencies and arm's length bodies meet their obligations to pay invoices promptly in order to comply with the following measures:

- 1 The Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1988 which provides suppliers with a statutory right to claim interest on late payment of commercial debt. Payment is regarded as late if made outside the agreed terms, or 30 days after receipt of a valid invoice where no terms are agreed; and
- 2 The 10 day administrative target introduced by the Finance Minister in 2008 as a commitment to speed up the payments process.

The DOJ, its agencies and arm's length bodies have put in place practices and protocols that are appropriate to the size and complexity of each organisation to ensure that:

- staff are aware of the payment targets and the importance placed on meeting these targets;
- invoices and all supporting documentation is validated and checked promptly so that invoices are authorised for payment as quickly as possible;
- approved invoices are released for payment without unnecessary delay;
- systems and processes are reviewed to identify where improvements to the efficiency of the payment process can be made; and
- management information systems are used to target underperforming areas and the necessary corrective action taken.

From July 2012, Account NI provides shared financial services to the Core Department, four agencies (Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service, Youth Justice Agency, Compensation Agency and Forensic Science Northern Ireland) and two Executive NDPBs (Probation Board for Northern Ireland and Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland). As a result, these organisations comply with the relevant Account NI procedures for paying suppliers and there is a particular focus on using the Purchase Order Solution as the most efficient method of meeting the prompt payment targets.

DOJ agencies and arm's length bodies provide monthly 10 day prompt payment performance statistics to the Core Department and this is reported at Board level. Since April 2010, the Department has consistently achieved more than 90% compliance against the 10 day target as outlined below. This provides evidence that the processes and protocols in place are operating effectively:

Financial Year	Number of Invoices paid	% of invoices meeting the 10 day target
2010-11	167,952	90.3%
2011-12	155,702	90.2%
2012-13 (6 months to September)	71,799	91.4%

Prisoners: Deaths in Custody

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16108/11-15 and AQW 16046/11-15, (i) why the figures were omitted from the annual reports; (ii) who approved the omission and why; and (iii) in light of the increase in non-natural deaths in custody and concern about prisoners at risk, whether the figures will be included in all future relevant reports.

(AQW 16743/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the member to my previous answer to AQW 16046/11-15, dated 8 November 2012.

The format of the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) Annual Report and Accounts was revised following the publication of the 2009/10 Annual Report with a view to streamlining the content of the report. The decision was taken to rationalise a number of appendices, including the one referred to in the question. The revised format was approved by the Director General of NIPS and the Acting Director General of NIPS in the 2010/11 and 2011/12 reports respectively.

Whilst information relating to self-inflicted injuries and deaths in custody in Northern Ireland prisons was not included as a separate appendix, information relating to deaths in custody, including the number of deaths recorded during the reporting year, was contained in the Statement on Internal Control in both of these reports and will be included in the 2012/13 report.

In addition, NIPS 2012-13 Business Plan sets a specific Key Performance Target (KPT) for the Service for reducing the number of instances of self harm and the 2012/13 Annual Report will provide information on performance against this KPT.

Prison Service: Staff Training

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) for his assessment of the compliance of senior management in the Northern Ireland Prison Service with the Council of Europe-Committee of Ministers on the European Prison Rules in terms of staff training, particularly staff who work with prisoners that are (a) mentally ill; (b) vulnerable; (c) at risk of self-harm or suicide; (d) women; (e) juveniles; and (f) foreign nationals; and (ii) whether the training needs of staff are being met in relation to these issues.

(AQW 16744/11-15)

Mr Ford: Although the Northern Ireland Prison Service is not bound by the European Prison Rules, the European minimum requirements are taken into account when amending Prison Rules. In training staff in relation to the areas highlighted in the question, management seeks to ensure compliance with Prison Rules and best practice.

Trafficked Children

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many trafficked children have been identified since 2009/10.

(AQW 16753/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Police Service of Northern Ireland has provided the information below.

Year	Number of potential child victims of human trafficking
2009/10	4
2010/11	3
2011/12	8
1 April 2012 to 15 November 2012	1

Legal Aid

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 14945/11-15, for an estimate of the total cost of such a High Court case.

(AQW 16783/11-15)

Mr Ford: In 2011/12 the average costs paid in respect of Judicial Review cases in which Legal Aid was granted was £4,443.

Indecent Behaviour

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether the charge of indecent behaviour is classed as a sexual offence.

(AQW 16785/11-15)

Mr Ford: Indecent behaviour is an offence under section 9 of the Criminal Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 1968. This offence covers a range of behaviour, some of which is not considered to be of a sexual nature, for example, it is generally used to cover urination in the street. The offence is not listed in Schedule 3 to the Sexual Offences Act 2003 which sets out the offences for the purposes of sex offender notification requirements in Part 2 of that Act.

Prison Service: Governors

Lord Morrow asked inister of Justice, pursuant to AQW13948/11-15, to detail (i) the number of Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) Governors, broken down by grade, who are on secondment to prison services outside Northern Ireland; (ii) the dates of the commencement and expected return to NIPS; (iii) the reasons for each secondment; (iv) each secondment post and prison establishment; (v) whether any of these Governors was promoted or temporarily promoted; and (vi) the cost to his Department.

(AQW 16786/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are currently no Governors on secondment to prison services outside Northern Ireland.

Misconduct in Public Office

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 14677/11-15, whether this figure includes case 12/066430.

(AQW 16787/11-15)

Mr Ford: The figures provided in response to AQW 14677/11-15 did not include case 12/066430 as this case was dealt with by way of an order to spilt the Bill of Indictment before the answer was prepared. Two new cases (12/107901 and 12/109721) are currently before Newry Crown Court, one is awaiting sentence and one is listed for trial.

Equality Impact Assessments: Costs

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost to his Department over the last three financial years of undertaking equality impact assessments.

(AQW 16823/11-15)

Mr Ford: The costs of undertaking Department of Justice (DOJ) Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) is mainstreamed within DOJ business processes. It is not possible therefore to disaggregate staff costs or those associated with internal processes. There were no non-staff costs, such as advertising or publication, outside business processes.

Prison Service: Museum

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what progress has been made in creating a permanent home for the Prison Service museum which was previously located in Millisle.

(AQW 16844/11-15)

Mr Ford: A collection of historical documents and artefacts from the Prison Service is currently located at the prison service college in Millisle.

NIPS is continuing to explore its legal obligations with respect to the material held at the college and has conducted a number of meetings with stakeholders, and in particular with the Public Records Office Northern Ireland (PRONI) in order to determine how the documents and artefacts should best be managed and located in the future, including identifying what material might be offered on loan to museum locations.

This work is still ongoing.

Bangor Courthouse

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to outline the plans or proposals for the future usage of the Bangor Courthouse building.

(AQW 16845/11-15)

Mr Ford: Bangor Courthouse will be closed by April 2013 and, having confirmed there is no requirement for it within the Department of Justice estate, will be offered to other Departments and the wider public sector to utilise.

Malicious Communications (Northern Ireland) Order 1988

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many (i) prosecutions; and (ii) convictions there have been under the Malicious Communications (NI) Order.

(AQW 16881/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Malicious Communications (Northern Ireland) Order was brought into legislation in 1988. It contains a number of offences which may be prosecuted summarily:

- Sending article conveying indecent or offensive message
- Sending article conveying a threat
- Sending article conveying false information
- Sending article of indecent or offensive nature

The table below gives the number prosecuted and convicted for the calendar years 1993 (the earliest year for which figures are currently available) to 2006 and the number convicted for the calendar years 2007 to 2009 (the latest year for which figures are currently available). It is not possible to provide prosecution data for 2007 to 2009.

Number of prosecutions and convictions for Malicious Communications, 1993-2009

Year	Prosecution	Convictions
1993	5	4
1994	0	0
1995	1	1
1996	2	2
1997	1	1
1998	1	1
1999	2	1
2000	0	0
2001	0	0
2002	0	0
2003	0	0
2004	0	0
2005	0	0
2006	0	0
2007	N/A	1
2008	N/A	1
2009	N/A	0

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Thompson House, Belfast

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Justice what alternative facilities were examined for the placement of the sex offenders due to be located at Thompson House, Belfast.

(AQW 16890/11-15)

Mr Ford: Thompson House has been in operation for 30 years providing accommodation for offenders, including sex offenders. There has been no change in that role, other than to modernise and upgrade the facilities, including the security measures. In view of this, the issue of alternative facilities does not arise.

Thompson House remains an important facility in the provision of effective public protection from the risk posed by a variety of offenders, including sex offenders.

Strabane Courthouse

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Justice (i) when the Equality Screening Process into the proposed closure of Strabane Courthouse will be completed and (ii) in light of the responses to the consultation process, whether a full Equality Impact Assessment will be conducted.

(AQW 16899/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Equality Screening process was reviewed and re-performed in advance of my announcement on 22 November that Strabane Courthouse would remain open pending the development of a Department of Justice Estate Strategy.

The Equality Screening document (which is available on www.courtsni.gov.uk) explains that the screening panel assessed the overall impact as minor and concluded that a full Equality Impact Assessment was not necessary.

Fine Collection Scheme

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Justice how much it cost to implement the Fine Collection Scheme.

(AQW 16901/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Fine Collection Scheme was implemented in May 2009 and incurred one off capital costs of £6,850 for the purchase of IT equipment and running costs which are currently £149,200 per annum. This figure does not include office accommodation costs in Lagside Courts.

Civilian-based Fines Enforcement Service

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Justice what are the estimated costs of establishing and maintaining a civilian-based fines enforcement service.

(AQW 16902/11-15)

Mr Ford: My current estimate of establishing and maintaining a civilian-based fines enforcement service is £1.4 million in the first year with an anticipated annual running cost of around £1 million per year thereafter.

A project is being established, an early task for which will be to review these estimates.

Fines

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the proposal to extend to Northern Ireland arrangements that have been implemented in England and Scotland, that a certain amount of fine income be retained locally to assist resourcing new procedures, what proportion of costs can be retained.

(AQW 16903/11-15)

Mr Ford: The retention of any fine income revenue to assist with the funding of a civilian-based fines enforcement service will be the subject of discussion with the Department of Finance and Personnel and Her Majesty's Treasury in due course.

Royal Ulster Constabulary: Records

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Justice (i) on whose authority were Royal Ulster Constabulary records of the Teebane massacre destroyed due to asbestos contamination; (ii) when the records were destroyed; (iii) what records were destroyed; (iv) whether any contaminated records survived; (v) what type of asbestos was involved; and (vi) whether any attempt was made to copy the records before destruction or to examine them using personal protective equipment.

(AQW 16904/11-15)

Mr Ford: The management of Royal Ulster Constabulary records 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.

Thompson House, Belfast

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Justice why sex offenders are being located at Thompson House, Belfast, which is close to five schools and next to a facility for vulnerable young adults, against the wishes of the local community.

(AQW 16920/11-15)

Mr Ford: Hostel accommodation provides for a high level of protection to the public, as those housed there can be closely monitored and their behaviour supervised by staff and relevant public protection agencies. Such facilities also help offenders deal with the "real life" situations they will face when they leave and, by so doing, reduce the prospect of reoffending.

Without such a facility, the safety of the community would be reduced if the same offenders lived in private rented accommodation or social housing.

Thompson House has, for 30 years, been providing an important facility in the effective management of risk posed by a variety of offenders. I am unaware of any incidents of further sexual offending against children by its residents.

The recent refurbishment of Thompson House provides for more effective public protection with the provision of much improved and modernised security measures.

Magilligan Prison

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice when he intends to make an announcement on the future of Magilligan Prison, following the consultation on the future of the prisons estate.

(AQW 16964/11-15)

Mr Ford: My interim statement to the Assembly of 26 November set out my view that a convincing case might be made for the retention of a prison in the North West on the Magilligan site, subject to NIPS providing evidence that the challenges around maintaining family links and providing adequate employment and rehabilitation opportunities can be addressed.

My officials are continuing to work on these issues, and I have indicated that I intend to return to the Assembly to announce my final decision on the future of Magilligan Prison in the New Year.

Arm's-length Bodies: Funding

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of Justice to detail the arm's-length bodies that have received direct or indirect funding from his Department since the start of this mandate.

(AQW 16965/11-15)

Mr Ford: The following arm's-length bodies of the Department of Justice (DOJ) have received direct or indirect funding from the Department since 12 May 2011:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| ■ Police Service of Northern Ireland | ■ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland |
| ■ Northern Ireland Policing Board | ■ Northern Ireland Law Commission |
| ■ Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland | ■ Policing Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust |
| ■ Northern Ireland Police Fund | ■ Prisoner Ombudsman |
| ■ RUC George Cross Foundation | ■ Independent Monitoring Boards |
| ■ Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission | ■ Independent Assessor for PSNI Recruitment Applications |
| ■ Probation Board Northern Ireland | |

These arm's-length bodies may in turn have provided indirect funding to other organisations that have no direct link to the DOJ.

Maghaberry Prison: Protest

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Justice to detail the weekly costs associated with the dirty protest at Maghaberry Prison by 41 dissident prisoners.

(AQW 17002/11-15)

Mr Ford: Between 1 April 2012 and 31 October 2012 Maghaberry has incurred approximately £16,296 per week in costs associated with the protest by the 41 separated prisoners.

Thompson House, Belfast

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Justice what steps are taken when a sex offender fails to return to Thompson House, Belfast, including the timescales and the agencies that are informed.

(AQW 17004/11-15)

Mr Ford: In the event of a sex offender breaching the conditions of his licence by failing to return to a hostel, the hostel staff would immediately notify the Probation Board. The actions open to the Board, depending on the individual circumstances of the case, range from a warning, in the event of a late return, to initiating applications for immediate return to custody. If such applications, either to the court or for executive recall, were successful, the PSNI would aim to locate the offender and return him to custody. If the offender had breached a Sexual Offences Prevention Order (SOPO) by failing to return to the hostel as required, the PSNI would also be immediately advised by the hostel staff. A breach of SOPO gives the police the power of immediate arrest.

Interpreting Services

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice to detail the minimum standard his Department requires for interpreting services provided by outside organisations; and how the Department assesses whether the interpreters are trained to this standard.

(AQW 17065/11-15)

Mr Ford: The standard the Department requires for interpreting services is set out in the interpretation contract for criminal justice agencies. Interpreters must be "fully competent in the task assigned to them, through qualification and proven experience." Foreign language interpreters must possess, as a minimum, Open College Network Level 3 accreditation in community interpreting and be fluent in both English and the language/s they are offering to interpret. Sign language interpreters must be a member of the Register of Sign Language Interpreters.

The Contractor is required to provide appropriate training for all interpreters engaging with the criminal justice organisations. Training may be generic or unique to the main users of the contract and is laid out in the specification schedules of the contract.

The Contractor must provide and routinely update criminal justice organisations with information about how the professional development, accountability and quality of interpreters are being managed. Performance monitoring is conducted by the Contract Manager together with the Contractor and takes place bi-annually or more often if required. Issues such as performance of interpreters and queries regarding standards of training may be addressed at these monitoring meetings.

Prison Officers: Security

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what level of protection his Department provides for Prison Officers who are under threat from dissident republicans.

(AQW 17113/11-15)

Mr Ford: As this question refers to the personal security of Prison Service staff, it would not be appropriate to provide specific details of the measures in place.

Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Justice to outline the management of contractual arrangements, service level agreements or commercial transactions between the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust and private sector companies which have recruited agency, consultancy or associate staff for the PSNI since 1 April 2007.

(AQO 2986/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust does not have any contractual arrangements, service level agreements or commercial transactions with private sector companies which have recruited agency, consultancy or associate staff for the PSNI since 1 April 2007.

Policing: Interface Areas

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Justice to outline the cost of policing at interfaces between April and September 2012 compared with the equivalent periods in 2010 and 2011.

(AQO 2981/11-15)

Mr Ford: The PSNI does not hold specific information on the cost of policing at interfaces.

Dealing with interface areas engages a complex set of issues. These areas are among the highest ranked in terms of multiple deprivations. This in itself is a challenge, but when added to sectarianism, violence or the fear of violence, and the legacy of the past, the challenge is even greater.

As the Chief Constable indicated in his report to the Policing Board on 4 October, a significant investment is made to police disputes between communities, resources which undoubtedly impact on their ability to provide an even more enhanced service to deal with issues of greatest concern to local communities, such as drug dealing and anti-social behaviour.

That is why I am pleased to highlight the Executive commitment on interfaces. The Department of Justice are leading on the delivery of that commitment, through a collaborative approach from Departments, statutory agencies, community and voluntary groups. The key element, of course, is engagement with communities.

The need to deal with issues such as crime and anti-social behaviour is also recognised in my Community Safety Strategy, Building Safer, Shared and Confident Communities.

Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Justice how many former police officers have availed of the provision of funding and services from the Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust, broken down by gender and community background.

(AQO 2984/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust (PRRT) does not provide funding to any of its clients.

It provides training and education, personal development, psychology and physiotherapy services to retired, retiring officers and a support service to serving officers. PRRT makes no distinction as to a client's employment status so does not record whether a client is a retired, retiring or serving officer.

The total number of clients to whom PRRT provided services since 1 April 2007, was 7200. The information prior to 1 April 2007 is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Also a breakdown of clients' gender is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost and PRRT do not collect or record information regarding community background as there is no requirement on it to do so.

PSNI: Agency, Consultancy and Associate Staff

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the Audit Office finding, on the use of agency, consultancy and associate staff by the PSNI, that 'there is potential for conflicts of interest to arise', particularly in PSNI investigations of legacy cases.

(AQO 2985/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Audit Office report found that there is potential for conflicts of interest to arise within the Historical Enquiry Team. It recognised that there are established procedures for identifying potential conflicts of interest but stopped short of making any recommendations.

I believe the proportionate use of agency staff can be justified in cases where there is a clear business need and I await the recommendations of the PAC report, which is due in early 2012.

As I have previously stated in the Assembly, the awarding and management of contracts by the Police Service is an operational matter for the Chief Constable, for which he is accountable to the Policing Board.

Sentencing: Murder

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the review of sentencing legislation for murder.

(AQO 2988/11-15)

Mr Ford: Research work on the review is underway and is considering arrangements in other jurisdictions, including England and Wales, but, while it is useful to learn from other models, I do not necessarily want to replicate these, but to find a way forward that is right for Northern Ireland.

The Court of Appeal has been asked by the Director of Public Prosecutions to consider the tariffs set for Wootton and McConville for the murder of Stephen Carroll, on the grounds of undue leniency. Lord Justice Girvan himself commented that the current sentencing guidelines in this area require reconsideration. The PPS referrals would provide the opportunity for the Court to do so.

I understand that Wootton and McConville have lodged appeals against their convictions. Any Court of Appeal consideration of tariffs will, of course, have to await the outcome of their appeals.

As the review will need to reflect any reconsideration of guidelines, timing of the publication of the recommendations of the review, following Justice Committee consideration, will be dependent on Court of Appeal findings.

PSNI: Agency, Consultancy and Associate Staff

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the tax avoidance issues raised by the Audit Office in its investigation into the use of agency, consultancy and associate staff by the PSNI.
(AQO 2989/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Audit Office found that some temporary staff engaged by PSNI are being paid as limited companies. The issue was discussed at the recent PAC hearing on the NIAO report of the PSNI's Use of Agency Staff.

The Northern Ireland Treasurer of Accounts informed the PAC hearing that DFP have been working on the issue with colleagues in the Treasury over the past six months and are re-surveying Departments and public bodies to find out whether any of those arrangements exist. In addition, they are looking at situations, such as this case, in which the arrangements may not be with a public body but with an employment agency or other intermediary body. They are working with CPD to look at additional requirements that could be placed into contracts to protect against any tax avoidance.

It is important to note that the staff are not employed by PSNI, but by Grafton.

I recognise the Chief Constable's concerns, quoted in the NIAO report, that the sustainability of HET could be placed at risk, at least in the short to medium term, if individuals' contracts were to be cancelled. I also note his comments to the PAC that there would be a legal challenge if he tried to interfere in private taxation arrangements, particularly those paid through a limited company.

I welcome the Chief Constable's comments to PAC, when he said that PSNI will comply with any HM Treasury and DFP guidance which may issue.

As I have conveyed to the Assembly on numerous occasions previously, the awarding and management of contracts by the Police Service is an operational matter for the Chief Constable, for which he is accountable to the Policing Board.

PSNI: Grafton Recruitment

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Justice when the PSNI first notified his Department about the proposal to proceed with a Direct Award Contract with Grafton Recruitment for the retention of agency, consultancy and associate staff within the PSNI beyond December 2013.
(AQO 2990/11-15)

Mr Ford: The PSNI's existing contract expires in December 2012.

The PSNI first shared a draft of the business case, to continue employing temporary staff, with my Department in July 2012.

In the knowledge that there was a live NIAO investigation into the PSNI's Use of Agency Staff, my officials advised the PSNI that it was inappropriate to review the business case until after the report had been published and the PAC hearing had taken place. That being the case, my officials agreed with PSNI that the only appropriate course of action available to PSNI was to enter a Direct Award Contract (DAC) with Grafton, if PSNI were to have a contract in place beyond December 2012.

My officials also advised at that time that in the unique circumstances, the Departmental Accounting Officer, whose approval is required before any DAC may awarded, would consider any such request from the Chief Constable favourably.

It is important that any recommendations made by PAC are considered and, if appropriate, included within any new contract.

The PSNI has not submitted an updated draft since the initial PAC hearing.

Department for Regional Development

Water and Sewerage Infrastructure

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how much of the water and sewerage infrastructure is not fit for purpose. (AQW 16472/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that approximately £1.3 billion of capital has been invested in the water and sewerage infrastructure since 2007. This investment along with operational commitment on the ground means Northern Ireland currently has the highest ever level of drinking water quality and the best wastewater discharge consent compliance. However, there are still areas of the water and sewerage infrastructure which require investment to achieve compliance or achieve compliance due to restrictions imposed on development.

For the calendar year 2011, the measure of drinking water quality (Mean Zonal Compliance – MZC) achieved was 99.80% against a target set in the DRD Social & Environmental Guidance 2010-13 (agreed by the Executive on 15 April 2010) of 99.7%. For the calendar year 2011, approximately 96% of the population were served by a wastewater treatment works which was compliant with the discharge consent set by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. For the calendar year 2011, approximately 93% of wastewater treatment works complied with their discharge consent. The difference comes from some treatment works serving large population numbers but overall it represents a good performance by NIW.

Over the last 10 years Northern Ireland has made significant progress on compliance due to investment in the water and sewerage infrastructure. This investment will need to continue to maintain these high levels of compliance, to address areas of non-compliance and to continue to deal with areas of development and new environmental requirements.

Rail Network

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department has any plans for further improvements to the rail network (AQW 16543/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There are plans for improvements to the rail network already agreed within the current budget up to 2015. Given the pressures on the railway capital budget and other priority railway projects, resources for new projects have not been identified within the period of the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland.

I plan to carry out a public consultation in the coming months on what should be our priorities for future railways investment. The responses to this consultation will be used to inform future budget decisions within the policy prioritisation framework to be developed under the new approach to Regional Transportation Strategy.

Translink: Maintenance Costs

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost to Translink for maintaining their buses in each of the three financial years. (AQW 16547/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink have advised me that the relevant costs for the last 3 years are as follows:-

	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10
Total Engineering Costs £	20,105,528	19,501,728	19,033,042

It should be noted that this represents an increase of less than 3% per year and overall costs per vehicle in use are currently £14209 per year.

Traffic Wardens

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Regional Development whether traffic wardens know the specific provisions of the regulations that they enforce. (AQW 16587/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that a Traffic Attendant's role is to provide enforcement of the parking restrictions that are in place on public roads and in Roads Service car-parks. Traffic Attendants are not required to be aware of the specific legislative details relating to parking restrictions.

Car Parking Charges: Economy and Jobs Initiative

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what implications the Executive's economy and jobs initiative will have for car parking charges.

(AQW 16621/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Executive decision announced on 7 November 2012 means there will be no further increases to car parking charges for the remainder of the current budget period, i.e. until the end of March 2015.

Parking: Waterloo Road, Derry

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will intervene to allow eligible taxis to stop for five minutes, where possible, in Waterloo Place to pick up passengers at new retail outlets without the taxis being automatically moved on by NSL enforcement officers.

(AQW 16625/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: All vehicles, including taxis, are required to comply with the parking restrictions that are in place at Waterloo Place, Londonderry. These restrictions are contained in The Parking Places and Loading Bays on Roads (Londonderry) Order (Northern Ireland 2010). This Order can be viewed at: http://www.drndi.gov.uk/index/freedom_of_information/management_and_policy/mp-doc-details.htm?docid=6666

The role of Traffic Attendants is to provide enforcement of the restrictions which are in place. Where a driver is present with a vehicle which is parked in contravention of restrictions, a Traffic Attendant may request that the vehicle be moved, rather than issue a Penalty Charge Notice immediately.

Car Parking Charges: Bangor Town Centre

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration has been given to suspending car parking charges in Bangor town centre during the Christmas shopping period.

(AQW 16630/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There have been no suspensions of charges in Roads Service car parks in Bangor in previous years in the run up to Christmas, and I am not considering any such proposal for this year.

Charging in Roads Service car parks helps to prevent all-day parking, which means that parking spaces are more likely to be available for shoppers and visitors. This is important for town centres and traders, particularly in the run-up to Christmas.

As you will also be aware, following my announcement of September 2011, free limited on-street parking still continues to be available in Bangor.

Door-2-Door Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 15811/11-15, what strategy his Department will pursue to increase the number of people in North Down using the Door-2-Door Service.

(AQW 16664/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Door-2-Door services are provided across Northern Ireland on the basis of agreed contract terms with relevant providers. Eligible members can book services from such providers but clearly some resource constraints apply. Members are of course free to use alternative Public Transport services.

Currently there are 1351 members of the Door-to-Door scheme in the North Down area (1128 in Bangor and 223 in Holywood), however our figures (AQW 1158/11-15) show the actual number of users compared to the number of members is quite low. The Consumer Council is currently undertaking a customer satisfaction exercise on Door to-Door schemes across all of Northern Ireland which includes the North Down area. The results from this exercise, due early in 2013, will give an indication of how passengers view the service provided. There is also an on-going consultation exercise regarding eligibility criteria for the Door-to-Door service; when this is completed the Department will be considering how best any future service should be provided.

Door-2-Door Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 15811/11-15, whether his Department has an explanation for the reduction in the number of people in North Down using the Door-2-Door Service.

(AQW 16665/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Statistics for this year show that 267 members used the scheme from 1 April 2012 to 30 September 2012. The average number of users at 30 September over the last three years was 240. This would suggest that user numbers may actually be higher this year than in the last few years. Department officials have not received any persistent complaints about the level or quality of service in the area.

Ministerial Directions

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development, since May 2011, how many decisions with spending implications have been made as a result of ministerial directions.

(AQW 16681/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise that, since May 2011, no decisions with spending implications have been made as a result of ministerial directions within my Department.

Prompt Payment

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development what practices, protocols and measures are in place within the Department and its arm's-length bodies to ensure prompt payment to contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers.

(AQW 16690/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department and its arms length bodies adopt a pro active approach to ensuring suppliers are paid as quickly as possible.

My Department and its arms length bodies, Northern Ireland Water (NIW) and the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company (NITHC) are committed to the prompt payment of bills for goods and services received with payment generally due within 10 working days of receipt of a valid invoice.

In addition, my Department and its arms length bodies are bound by the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1988 as amended by the Late Payment of Commercial Debts Regulations 2002 which requires that payment should be made within agreed terms or if no terms have been agreed, 30 days after receipt of a valid invoice.

Performance against the 10 day and 30 day requirements is monitored on an ongoing basis.

With regard to the payment of sub-contractors, when the Department or its arms length bodies enter into contracts with suppliers for construction projects, all contracts include clauses relating to economic sustainability. Main contractors are required to:

- pay subcontractors and suppliers promptly and ensure that the payment terms within subcontracts match those of the main contract;
- verify timeliness of payments to subcontractors; and
- comply with the Code of Practice for Government Construction Clients and their Supply Chains.

A6 Dualling Project

Mr Molloy asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the public inquiry on the A6 dualling project.

(AQW 16691/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that I will announce my decision on the February 2012 Inquiry into the Annaghmore Road/Bellshill Road junction, at Castledawson, in early December 2012.

Following my announcement, notices will be published in the local press to inform the public of the decision and where both my decision and the Inspector's report can be viewed.

Roads Service: Emergency Calls

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what telephone number MLAs should use to make emergency calls to Roads Service during the Christmas period.

(AQW 16704/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that the contact telephone numbers that should be used to make emergency calls to Roads Service during the Christmas period are detailed below.

<p>Northern Division</p> <p>County Hall, Castlerock Road, Coleraine, BT51 3HS Tel: 0300 200 7891 Tel: (028) 7035 3202 (24 Hours)</p>	<p>Southern Division</p> <p>Marlborough House, Central Way, Craigavon, BT64 1AD Tel: 0300 200 7892 Emergency After Hours (028) 3752 9500</p>
<p>Eastern Division</p> <p>Hydebank, 4 Hospital Road, Belfast, BT8 8JL Tel: 0300 200 7893 Tel: (028) 9025 3000 (24 Hours)</p>	<p>Western Division</p> <p>County Hall, Drumragh Avenue, Omagh, BT79 7AF Tel: 0300 200 7894 Emergency After Hours (028) 8224 1999</p>

These numbers are also listed on the NI Direct website at the following address:

<http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/ice-and-snow-on-roads-and-streets>

In addition, the contact numbers are included in the Roads Service 'Winter Service Information Leaflet', which is currently being distributed to all homes in Northern Ireland. This leaflet can be viewed online at the following web address:

http://www.drndni.gov.uk/5352_ws_info_leaflet_2012__2_.pdf

Advertising: Costs

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail how much his Department has spent on advertising in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16707/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: AQW 16707/11-15

The amount spent by the Department on advertising in each of the last three years is detailed as follows:

Year	Spend (£'000)
2009 – 2010	538
2010 – 2011	674
2011 – 2012	587

The majority of advertising expenditure (80%) relates to Roads Service public notices. The Department has a statutory obligation to inform the public of temporary or permanent road closures, works being carried out or speed restrictions.

The other 20% relates to Public Recruitment Notices and Campaign Advertising, such as the development of the 'Travelwise Sustainable Transport' advertising campaigns.

Grit Lorries

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many grit lorries are operated by his Department.

(AQW 16709/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that my Department's Roads Service operates 132 gritting vehicles.

Winter Weather: Derry City Council

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development what arrangements his Department has put in place with Derry City Council to deal with the clearing of any ice and snow on footpaths this winter.

(AQW 16711/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has agreed a Memorandum of Understanding with Derry City Council, in respect of the clearing of snow and ice from footways. A copy of this document has been placed in the Library.

Economy and Jobs Initiative

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Regional Development where on the Antrim Coast Road the funding detailed in the Economy and Jobs Initiative will be spent.

(AQW 16754/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: AQW 16754/11-15

My Department's Roads Service has advised that additional funding secured in the October Monitoring Round, that was announced in conjunction with the Economy and Jobs Initiative, is to be spent on the scaling and netting of rock faces at Garron Point, Carnlough.

Questions for Written Answer: Alex Easton

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Regional Development for an estimate of the cost to his Department from answering Written Assembly Questions from Alex Easton MLA since May 2011; and what proportion of the questions relate to matters where the information is already available in the public domain.

(AQW 16755/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Department for Regional Development does not routinely estimate the cost of answering Assembly Questions.

The preparation of responses to Assembly Questions is an intrinsic part of the responsibilities of civil servants and has, therefore, not traditionally been separated out from other duties for costing purposes. Such costs would also vary in line with, for example, the nature of the question, the number of individual members of staff involved in preparing the reply and the involvement of other Departments or bodies in providing information.

From May 2011 to 16 November 2012 my Department received 1596 Written Assembly Questions from MLAs of which 199, or 12.5%, were asked by Alex Easton, MLA. During the period 1 July 2012 to 16 November 2012, Alex Easton asked 84 of the 353 questions received, some 23.8% of questions. Some of the information requested was already available in the public domain.

The Department does not routinely monitor the types of Questions asked; where information requested is already in the public sector, Members are directed to appropriate sources.

British-Irish Council

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 2898/11-15, to outline any actions of the Sub-Group of British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference has taken in relation to the mutual recognition of concessionary fare schemes throughout the UK.

(AQW 16756/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The mutual recognition of concessionary fare schemes by administrations throughout the United Kingdom is being taken forward by the Accessible Transport Sub-Group of the British-Irish Council. This Sub-Group has carried out a study and reported to a summit of Ministers on 22 June 2012.

The Sub-Group's report expressed concerns about differing financial burdens on administrations, about the technological challenges for a common clearing system and about the possibility of EU legal implications. It also identified a need to standardise eligibility arrangements across administrations and, in some cases, with local authorities. It concluded that the goal of mutual recognition remains a desirable aim but recommended that, in the prevailing economic climate, it is not feasible at this time to pursue its introduction. The Sub-Group, however, believed that when circumstances allow, the issues should be re-examined.

BIC Ministers noted these conclusions and recommendations and proposed that a review of the issues should be undertaken in three years time.

Concessionary Fare Schemes

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he has taken to pursue the mutual recognition of concessionary fare schemes throughout the UK.

(AQW 16757/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My officials chair a working group, which has been considering the mutual recognition of concessionary fares in schemes operated by the different administrations and local authorities throughout the UK.

The issue has been the subject of a study by the Accessible Transport Sub-Group of the British-Irish Council (BIC). At a summit in Stirling in June 2012, BIC Ministers noted the conclusions of the study that the introduction of mutual recognition is not feasible at this time but agreed that a review of the issues should be undertaken in three years' time.

My officials continue to chair the Accessible Transport Sub-Group, which will include in its work programme for 2013 the possible future interoperability of smartcard technology. The technological challenge of administering a common clearing system was identified as one of the barriers to mutual recognition of concessionary fares. I fully support the endeavors of the Sub-Group.

Street Lights

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of contracts for street light repair; (ii) how many of the contracts are (a) filled; and (b) out to tender; (iii) how many street light faults were noted or reported in each of the last 12 months, broken down by council area; (iv) how many street light faults were repaired in each of the last 12 months, broken down by council area; and (v) what is the (a) target time; and (b) average time for the repair of a street light from when it is reported.

(AQW 16766/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised me that:

- (i) There are 10 contracts for street lighting repairs across Northern Ireland;
- (ii) All of the contracts are currently filled, and none are out to tender;
- (iii) Details of the number of street lighting faults noted or reported in each of the last 12 months, broken down by council area, are provided in Appendix A, a copy of which has been placed in the Library. Please note that the quantities given may include multiple reports of the same defect in some instances;
- (iv) Details of the number of street lighting faults repaired in each of the last 12 months, broken down by council area, are provided in Appendix B, a copy of which has also been placed in the Library;
- (v) Roads Service has a range of target response times for different categories of street lighting defects, depending on the nature of the fault. In general terms, it aims to repair individual street lighting defects within five working days of discovery, unless the fault is due to a failure in the electricity supply, when the repair may depend on the response of the electricity transmission and distribution company.

The majority of routine repairs are undertaken within 5 days. However, the overall average repair time for all street lighting defects over the past 12 months, which includes all categories of repairs such as cable faults, supply failures etc., is 5.56 days.

Portaferry to Strangford Ferry

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what are the running costs to his Department of the Portaferry to Strangford ferry service.

(AQW 16770/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that running costs for the Strangford Lough Ferry Service, for the last three financial years, are shown in the table below:

Year	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Costs	£1,312,465	£1,429,619	£1,856,818

* Figures for running costs incorporate staff, fuel and operations and maintenance costs but exclude indirect and notional costs.

Portaferry to Strangford Ferry

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many passengers have used the Portaferry to Strangford ferry service in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16771/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the passenger numbers on the Strangford Lough Ferry Service, for the last three financial years, are detailed in the table below:

Financial Year	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Number of Passengers	575,448	561,400	554,982

These passenger numbers have been taken from the Strangford Ferry Passenger Counting System, and exclude crew members.

Portaferry to Strangford Ferry

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many cars have used the Portaferry to Strangford ferry service in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16776/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Roads Service maintains records of the number of vehicles carried on the Strangford Ferry Service but does not maintain figures specifically relating to cars. However, for the purpose of this answer, the ticket class "Vehicles less than 6m" has been identified as the measure that provides the best indicator of the numbers of cars using the ferry.

I should also advise that Ferry customers are entitled to concession vehicle fares when either the driver or passenger in a vehicle holds a valid Blue Badge.

Officials have advised that vehicle numbers on the Strangford Lough Ferry Service, for the last three financial years, are detailed in the table below:

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Vehicles less than 6m	170,075	156,198	150,296
Vehicles greater than 6m	4,486	3,803	3,577
Motorcycles	3,984	3,738	3,167
Concession vehicles	15,560	16,663	15,444
Total	194,105	180,402	172,484

Portaferry and Strangford: Ferries

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the costs of maintaining the two ferries operating between Portaferry and Strangford.

(AQW 16777/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that the Strangford Lough Ferry Service operates with three vessels. The main vehicle ferry is the MV Portaferry II. The MV Strangford is the backup vehicle ferry, and is used during particularly busy periods and when the main vessel is undergoing maintenance. The service also has a passenger-only ferry, MV Rachlyn, which provides cover for the very rare occasions when neither of the vehicle ferries are available for service.

My Department's Roads Service has advised that the ferry maintenance costs for the Strangford Lough Ferry Service, for the last three financial years, are detailed in the table below:

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
MV Portaferry II			
Routine Maintenance	£139,789	£134,845	£124,281
Annual Refit	£101,406	£122,524	£81,801
MV Strangford			
Routine Maintenance	£12,899	£8,337	£152,352
Annual Refit	£93,472	£71,332	£119,869
Exceptional Maintenance	£0	£0	£323,000
MV Rachlyn			
Routine Maintenance	£6,795	£0	£1,200
Annual Refit	£0	£2,594	£5,778
Total	£354,361	£339,632	£808,281

Freedom of Information Requests

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of Freedom of Information requests received by his Department in each year since 2007; (ii) the proportion of requests each year that were not answered within the time limit; (iii) the number of requests currently outstanding by more than (a) one to two months (b) three to four months; (c) five to six months; (d) seven to twelve months; and (e) more than twelve months.

(AQW 16781/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Department for Regional Development received a total of 1,713 information requests between 1 January 2007 and 31 December 2011. 35 of these requests were not answered within the time limits set by the legislation.

The breakdown for 2007-2011 is as follows:

Year	Requests Received	Proportion of Requests not Answered within Time Limit
2007	300	0%
2008	360	0%
2009	306	1% (2 requests)
2010	377	4% (14 requests)
2011	370	5% (19 requests)

The figures for DRD include information requests made under both the Environmental Information Regulations (2004) and the Freedom of Information Act (2000).

None of the requests for information currently being processed by the Department are outstanding by one month or more.

	Requests Currently Outstanding
1-2 months	0
3-4 months	0
5-6 months	0
7-12 months	0
More than 12 months	0

Gritting

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development what tonnage of road grit is currently available for the winter road gritting schedule; and what was the comparable amount on the same date in 2011.

(AQW 16788/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the tonnage of Rock Salt available to Roads Service on the 16 November 2012 was approximately 110,000 tonnes. The amount available on the same date in 2011 was approximately 111,000 tonnes.

Street Lighting

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will liaise with the authorities in Sheffield regarding their replacement of street lighting with LED lighting, which is estimated to result in a 40 percent cost saving, to establish whether a pilot project in Northern Ireland could be considered.

(AQW 16813/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has been maintaining a keen interest in the ongoing development and use of LEDs for street lighting over recent years, through contacts with other roads authorities, professional organisations, manufacturers and contractors. In April of this year, senior officials in Roads Service attended a presentation on LED street lighting by Amey, the contractor who won Sheffield City Council's PFI contract for highways maintenance, which includes the renewal and maintenance of street lighting using LED lanterns.

The use of LEDs for street lighting undoubtedly offers great promise of long life and reduced operational and maintenance costs. However, LED lanterns are still substantially more expensive than conventional options and, despite their lower running costs, payback periods do not make a compelling case for such investment at this time.

Roads Service already has a number of modest trials of LED lighting under way, and hopes to expand and learn from such trials and from the experience of other users before proceeding to wider use of LEDs. I readily acknowledge that LED technology is developing very rapidly, and my Department's Roads Service will continue to monitor developments in LED technology and seek to adopt the use of LED equipment more widely when the benefits and costs warrant such use.

Equality Impact Assessments: Costs

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost to his Department over the last three financial years of undertaking equality impact assessments.

(AQW 16822/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The costs of undertaking DRD's Equality Impact Assessments are mainstreamed within the Department's business process. It is not therefore possible to identify separately the staff costs associated with carrying out Equality Impact Assessments.

The figures below set out publishing and other costs incurred on Equality Impact Assessments. They include costs incurred as part of wider consultations where it has not been possible to disaggregate figures.

Financial Year	EQIAs Costs £
2009/10	£22,844.86
2010/11	£ 7,893.19
2011/12	£ 6,443.26

Parking for Taxis: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many taxi parking spaces are available in North Down.

(AQW 16842/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by my Department's Roads Service that there are two formal taxi ranks in the North Down Council area, both of which are located at Abbey Street, Bangor. While these ranks are not sub-divided into individual parking spaces, officials estimate that they could accommodate approximately 12 taxis.

A5: Public Inquiry

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he will act in accordance with the clear, unequivocal findings and recommendations of the A5 Public Inquiry regarding the exceptional and untoward impact of the proposed A5 WTC route upon the homes of dwellings of residents of Glenfinn Park.

(AQW 16900/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As indicated at our meeting with the Glenfinn Park residents on Tuesday 20 November 2012, I am aware of and appreciate the substantial impact that the proposed A5 Western Transport Corridor scheme would have on them. However, recommendations arising out of the Public Inquiry process must be considered in light of current legislation and policies to ensure that all property owners are treated fairly and equitably.

As advised at the meeting I intend to visit Glenfinn Park and then give the matter further consideration.

Door-2-Door Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how much his Department has spent on the Door-2-Door service in each of the last five years.

(AQW 16923/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The information requested is as follows:-

2007/2008	£2,427,732
2008/2009	£2,868,292
2009/2010	£2,959,185
2010/2011	£2,729,587
2011/2012	£2,905,490

Tourism Signs

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to amend the criteria for the erection of brown tourism signs, given the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's recommendations on the proposed changes.

(AQW 16927/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that it is my intention to amend the tourist signing policy to reflect the changing nature of the industry. Any changes to the policy will be largely based on the recommendations recently received from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

Cherrymount Link, Enniskillen

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development how much, per week, the delay to the work on the Cherrymount Link, Enniskillen, has cost to date due to the work on the crannog.

(AQW 17000/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, to date, the estimated cost per week, of the delay to the work on the Cherrymount Link Road arising from the archaeological excavation of the crannog, is £50,000. This estimate includes the cost of archaeological excavation work, costs incurred by the contractor and supervision costs incurred by Roads Service.

Door-2-Door Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the rationale behind the proposals to restrict the categories under which people can avail of the Door-2-Door service.

(AQW 17007/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have recently published a consultation document setting out the rationale for proposals arising from a review of the Door to Door scheme. The aim of these proposals is to target resources towards those people who experience the greatest difficulty in accessing mainstream public transport, as a result of their age or disability.

Gritting: Ebrington Site, Derry

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development whether the Ebrington site in Derry will be gritted this winter.

(AQW 17223/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Ebrington site is not part of the public road network and consequently is not included in its gritting schedule.

Department for Social Development

Traveller Sites

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development to publish a map of the location of the permanent, temporary and halt traveller sites in each district council area; and the number of sites available at each location.

(AQW 16131/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The location of Traveller sites of all types by council area and with the number of associated units at each location can be seen below. A site map for further illustration can be located in the Assembly Library:

Group Housing		
Tattykeel, Omagh	District Council	8 units
Hillhead, Toomebridge,	Antrim Borough Council	5 units
Monagh Road	Belfast City Council	21 units
Briar View	Belfast City Council	6 units
Ballyarnett	Derry City Council	10 units
Ballinamullan	Omagh District Council	6 units
Fr Cullen Park, Bessbrook	Newry & Mourne District Council	6 units (under construction)
Serviced Sites		
Acorn Grove,	Craigavon Borough Council	7 pitches
The Glen, Coalisland	Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	16 pitches
Glen Road Heights	Belfast City Council	10 units (site vacant)
Greenbrae	Strabane District Council	8 pitches (7 vacant)
Daisyfield	Derry City Council	6 units (4 vacant)
Transit Sites		
Daisyfield	Derry City Council	6 units (Site vacant)
Ballyarnett	Derry City Council	11 units
Glen Road Heights	Belfast City Council	6 units (site vacant)
Emergency Halting Site		
Legahory Close	Craigavon Borough Council	8 units (6 vacant)
Co-Operated Site		
Glen Road,	Belfast City Council	6 units

Neighbourhood Renewal Areas: Volunteering Projects

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail any volunteering projects which have been promoted by his Department in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas.

(AQW 16242/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department, through its Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund supports a number of projects which specially relate to volunteering. I have attached a table detailing the projects and the Areas in which they work. In addition to these there are projects, which do not primarily seek to promote volunteering but do seek to engage communities in volunteering activities.

Furthermore, my Department's Voluntary and Community Unit provides funding to support a local volunteering infrastructure comprising a number of Volunteer Centres across Northern Ireland. The funding contracts for these Centres include a clause to increase the number of volunteers and placement organisations with a particular focus on Neighbourhood Renewal Areas.

Name of NRA	Name of Project/Group Supported	Brief description of volunteering project and key aims and outcomes	Year(s) during which volunteering project was promoted/ supported	Amount of funding, where appropriate
Upper Springfield Whiterock	Children, Young People & Families Theme - Upper Springfield Development Trust	Youth Programme delivering support and detached youth services. DSD/BRO funds the post of a Detached/Volunteer Development Worker. Key aim: provide volunteer training for 15 young men and women aged 15 to 18 years to enable them to provide peer support/mentoring through the youth programme.	01 April 2012 to 31 March 2015	£77,839.08

Name of NRA	Name of Project/Group Supported	Brief description of volunteering project and key aims and outcomes	Year(s) during which volunteering project was promoted/ supported	Amount of funding, where appropriate
Greater Falls	Social Environment - Springfield Charitable Association	Provides range of community services from, day care facility for older people, advice centre providing independent advice and information and training in retail, Health and Social Care and Administration. Key Aim to employ 60 people directly to volunteer work and provide advice to 3750 people over the 3 year period	01 April 2012 to 31 March 2015	£53,823.96
Colin	Community Development Theme - Colin Neighbourhood Partnership	The Colin Volunteer Empowerment Project is part of the Live and Learn Neighbourhood Empowerment Project managed by Colin Neighbourhood Partnership The Project aims to: Increase and support volunteering activities; increase opportunities for learning, skills development and employability through volunteering and to enhance community involvement, active citizenship and ownership of the Live and Learn project. There are over 300 volunteers supporting statutory, community and voluntary organisations. 19 organisations are actively promoting volunteering opportunities through the Project. There is a variety of	01 April 2014 to 31 March 2015	£28,640.00
		volunteer roles: youth workers, befrienders for older people, fundraisers, environmentalists, administrators, personal tutors, women's and men's support workers and community safety workers. To date, the project has recruited over 100 new volunteers since January 2010 and continues to recruit 2-3 new volunteers per week. The project provides on-going support and development to individuals and to groups and organisations in the Colin area and has the capacity to develop new and innovative volunteer led projects.		
Colin	Health Theme -(Good Morning Colin) Colin Neighbourhood Partnership	Good Morning Colin is a telephone support service for elderly and vulnerable adults (twice daily) 365 days per year. It uses volunteers as "telephone carers". The main aim of the projects is to address the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour through offering daily telephone calls to vulnerable people living in the Colin area checking on their feelings of well being and health. The twice daily calls (morning and evening) results in a reduction in fear of crime, isolation, vulnerability, and promotes social Inclusion providing advice and information regarding relevant services and other community activity for clients every day.16 Volunteers at present and 3 Bank Volunteers. Clients are through referrals. Services 250 clients Volunteers are trained and vetted.	01 April 2012 to 31 March 2015	£94,323.96
West, North & South Belfast	Health Theme -(Belfast Good Morning Services)	Good Morning Services Belfast is a telephone support service for elderly and vulnerable adults (twice daily) 365 days per year. It uses volunteers as "telephone carers". The main aim of the projects is to address the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour through offering daily telephone calls to vulnerable people living in the areas covered checking on their feelings of well being and health. The twice daily calls (morning and evening) results in a reduction in fear of crime, isolation, vulnerability, and promotes social Inclusion providing advice and information regarding relevant services and other community activity for clients every day. Clients are through referrals.	01 June 2012 to 31 December 2012	£109,314.00

Name of NRA	Name of Project/Group Supported	Brief description of volunteering project and key aims and outcomes	Year(s) during which volunteering project was promoted/ supported	Amount of funding, where appropriate
Inner East Belfast	East Belfast Community Development Agency(EBCDA)	EBCDA has run a volunteer project in Inner East Belfast since 01/09/2006. This project is now part of a collaborative proposal for the Inner East Neighbourhood Renewal Community Development Programme. The main aims of the project are as follows: To raise awareness of the benefits of volunteering and promote good practice; to build links between groups that use volunteers and encourage co-operation; to help groups in the NRA to recruit new volunteers; to create a solid "bank" of volunteers to support groups in the NRA; to facilitate links with volunteering/support schemes such as Volunteer Development Agency(VDA), Business in the Community and Belfast City Council Prohelp scheme and Voluntary Service Belfast (VSB); to ensure a wide range of opportunities and to contribute to New Targeting Social Need.	01/09/06-31/08/08 01/09/08-31/03/11 01/04/11-31/03/12 01/04/12-31/03/14	£63,563, £86,317, £90,545 and £51,473
Craigavon	Health Improvement Project (run by Southern Health and Social Care Trust)	Promotion of volunteering initiatives - establish a Volunteer Network - develop a core programme to recruit, train and support a network of volunteers to work with (a) older people and (b) Men's Health. Male volunteers to be trained as Male Health Educators in each locality. Establish network of volunteers to provide a good neighbour scheme across the 3 Neighbourhood Renewal areas. This includes a Male cancer awareness accredited programme provided to 6 male volunteers.	1 April 2012 to 31 March 2014.	£30,000.00
Triax	Gasyard Wall Feile - Volunteer Investment Project	The aim of the project is to promote active citizenship through engagement with individuals living in the Triax NR area. This project professionalises volunteering through a structured recruitment process, provides accredited training, policies and procedures for volunteers and a clear definition of roles and responsibilities. Volunteers are given the opportunity to participate in the Millennium Volunteers Programme where they can obtain a nationally recognised Award of Excellence. This project addresses community renewal through increasing the number of residents involved in volunteering and social renewal through providing alternatives to anti-social behaviour and crime within the Triax Action Plan.	2006/2007 2007/2008 2008/2009 2009/2010 2010/2011 2011/2012 2012/2013	£5,879.83 £24,479.21 £10,537.33 £11,474.07 £28,913.33 £29,425.35 £29,463.20
		The objectives and outcomes are to increase the numbers and diversity of volunteers within the VIP throughout the Triax NR Area, to provide diversity of volunteer roles to encourage maximum participation, to enhance the quality of the volunteering experience with training and mentoring support tailored to the needs of individuals and groups, to increase the skills and knowledge of volunteers to improve opportunities for employment and quality of life and to achieve sustainability as an accredited training provider.		

Belfast Regeneration Office: Sites Acquired

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how much has been spent to date on the sites acquired by the Belfast Regeneration Office; (ii) to list the sites that have been acquired; and (iii) how each site has been developed. (AQW 16560/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The aim of Belfast Regeneration Office is to help regenerate the most deprived areas of Belfast by acquiring and redeveloping sites in line with my Department's priorities. Since April 2009 Belfast Regeneration Office has acquired 10 sites which are listed below. However due to the current market conditions which are limiting private sector interest it has not been possible to develop any of these sites to date. My Department has spent a total of £102,500 on maintenance costs on these sites since acquisition.

Sites Acquired Since April 2009

2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Land at Alliance Crescent	42-48 Shankill Road	Land to rear of 141 Shankill Rd	2 Connswater Street
Land at North Howard Link		Land at Denmark St	
		12-14 Castlereagh Street	
		Craven St Youth Club	
		3 Stormount Lane	
		Ainsworth Community Centre	

Universal Credit

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development for the exact definition of exceptional circumstances when determining frequency of payments.

(AQW 16594/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In my statement to the Assembly on 22 October (please see link below) I said I had tasked my officials to develop and consult public representatives and voluntary sector representatives on a set of guidelines for determining the circumstances when the Universal Credit payment should be split or made on a twice-monthly basis.

I launched the exercise to develop criteria for flexible payments at a Welfare Reform engagement event, to which MLAs were all invited, in the Long Gallery on 15 November. This was the start of comprehensive engagement with public representatives and the voluntary and community sector to ensure development of local criteria.

I hope to agree the criteria which will set out the definition of exceptional circumstances by Spring 2013.

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Official-Report/Reports-12-13/22-October-2012/#1>

Welfare Reform: Savings

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the proposed savings associated with Welfare Reform in each of the first three years after implementation.

(AQW 16595/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The work that my Department has undertaken on the financial implications of Welfare Reform shows that overall spending on social security benefits on Northern Ireland is expected to continue to increase over the SR10 and 14 periods, with welfare reform controlling the rate of the increase. This spending relates directly to those social security benefits funded directly by HM Treasury and does not include any funding managed by the Northern Ireland Executive.

Early estimates indicate that spending controls from Welfare Reform for the first three years 2013-14, 2014-15 and 2015-16 are in the region of £36 million, £86 million and £166 million.

This excludes the overall impact of Universal Credit which is expected to result in an increase in social security spending, Housing Benefit Reform, increased Benefit Uptake or measures such as Social Fund Reform and Housing Benefit Rates Relief Rebate, where spending will move from Annually Managed Expenditure and into Departmental Expenditure Limits.

These estimates will continue to be updated as further information becomes available and work is progressed.

Welfare Reform: Underoccupancy

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the current level of under occupancy in (i) publicly; and (ii) privately owned houses in which the residents are in receipt of housing benefit.

(AQW 16650/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested because in the private rented sector Housing Benefit is based on the actual number of occupants in the dwelling irrespective of its actual size so it is not possible to identify levels of under-occupation in this sector.

With regard to the social rented sector the Housing Executive advise the table below details levels of under-occupancy among working age tenants on Housing Benefit. Pensioners are exempt from the planned legislation on this matter and no information is currently available for this group.

Under occupancy in the social rented sector

	NIHE Tenants	Housing Association Tenants	Total
Under occupied by 1 bedroom	18,850	5,046	23,896
Under occupied by 2 bedrooms or more	7,318	1,216	8,534
Total	26,168	6,262	32,430

Welfare Reform

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of the recent media reports about the problems being experienced by the Department for Work and Pensions with the Welfare Reform programme in Great Britain, what impact this will have on the issue here.

(AQW 16657/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Welfare Reform programme involves significant changes to the existing social security system including the introduction of new benefits and reform of other benefits. Many of these reforms involve either new or upgraded IT systems which are progressing in accordance with the timelines for the reforms.

I am aware there has been recent media coverage with regard to delays with the Department for Work and Pensions' IT systems required for delivery of Universal Credit. I am being kept fully apprised on developments and my officials are continuing to work with Department for Work and Pensions officials to take forward the launch of Universal Credit for Northern Ireland in April 2014. The costs of implementing the programme of Welfare Reform continue to be reviewed taking account of implementation dates.

Emigration: Benefits Savings

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Social Development how much has been saved in benefits payments in the last three years as a result of the emigration of people under the age of 25 years.

(AQW 16663/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Information is not held in the format requested.

Welfare Reform: Software

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development (i) whether the Welfare Reform concessions afforded to Northern Ireland will require a rewrite of the relevant software; (ii) how much this rewrite will cost; and (iii) how long it is likely to take.

(AQW 16670/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The payment flexibilities which I have secured for Northern Ireland following detailed discussions with Lord Freud will require new software to be developed to deliver the specific changes for Northern Ireland. They will also require amendments to the existing Universal Credit core systems for integration purposes.

Officials have now commenced detailed engagement with the Department for Work and Pensions' to design, build and test the required software. This process will continue through to Autumn 2013 at the earliest. The full costs will not be available until that work has been completed. It is still intended that Universal Credit will be launched in Northern Ireland in April 2014.

Welfare Reform: Software

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development (i) whether there will be a delay in writing the software for Welfare Reform; (ii) how long of a delay; and (iii) whether such a delay will lead to increased costs in implementing Welfare Reform.

(AQW 16671/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Welfare Reform programme involves significant changes to the existing social security system including the introduction of new benefits and reform of other benefits. Many of these reforms involve either new or upgraded IT systems which are progressing in accordance with the timelines for the reforms.

I am aware there has been recent media coverage with regard to delays with the Department for Work and Pensions' IT systems required for delivery of Universal Credit. I am being kept fully apprised on developments and my officials are continuing to work with Department for Work and Pensions officials to take forward the launch of Universal Credit for Northern Ireland in April 2014. The costs of implementing the programme of Welfare Reform continue to be reviewed taking account of implementation dates.

Liquor Licences

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of liquor licences.

(AQW 16675/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department is responsible for liquor licensing legislation. The Northern Ireland Courts Service is responsible for the granting of all liquor licences and the maintenance of any relevant data. The latest data furnished to my Department by the Courts Service is for 2011. The relevant data for 2012 is not yet available. The latest available data shows that the number of licences in force at 31 December 2011 was as follows:

Type of Premises (Article 5(1) The Licensing (NI) Order 1996)	
Public Houses	1426
Off-licences	500
Hotels	157
Guest Houses	46
Restaurants	563
Conference Centres	17
Higher Education Institutions	16
Places of Public Entertainment	16
Refreshment Rooms	10
Seamen's Canteens	1
Non-seagoing Vessels	2
Indoor Arenas	1
Total Number of Liquor Licences in Northern Ireland in force at 31 December 2011:	2755

Ministerial Directions

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, since May 2011, how many decisions with spending implications have been made as a result of ministerial directions.

(AQW 16683/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There have been no Ministerial Directions in my Department since May 2011.

Prompt Payment

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development what practices, protocols and measures are in place within the Department and its arm's-length bodies to ensure prompt payment to contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers.

(AQW 16689/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Dear Accounting Officer letter 12/08 re-issued by the DFP Treasury Officer of Accounts to Departments in February 2010, drew to attention the need to ensure that all possible steps are taken by NICS departments, their agencies and their public bodies, to pay suppliers as promptly as possible and to seek to meet the 10 day prompt payment commitment made in response to the economic position.

The Department for Social Development is committed to paying all suppliers promptly in accordance with these requirements. Payments are made through the Account NI Shared Service Centre and, where practical, by raising requisitions and purchase orders up-front, to allow invoices to be sent by suppliers direct to Account NI for processing. Cost centre managers are given monthly management information to allow them to monitor performance in relation to prompt payment and take corrective action if required. This is also monitored at Directorate level.

Boiler Replacement Scheme: Foyle Constituency

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in the Foyle constituency have (i) registered for the new Boiler Replacement Scheme; (ii) been sent their application forms; and (iii) been awarded a grant.

(AQW 16699/11-15)

Mr McCausland: To date there has been 904 enquiries from Foyle constituency residents and 869 application forms issued, with 1 approval been granted. The Housing Executive have received an unprecedented number of enquires to the scheme and their Londonderry Grants Office who also deal with Magherafelt, Strabane and Limavady councils have received a total of 2,882 enquiries, issued 1,7000 application forms and issued 37 approvals to replace their old boilers. They have allocated additional staff to reduce the backlog and also to assist in providing advice and guidance to a lot of applicants who have sent in incomplete forms.

Housing Executive: Rehoused Tenants

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive tenants, in each constituency, have been rehoused over the past three years due to incidents of hate crime.

(AQW 16700/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested because the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Parliamentary constituency and nor do they collate information on tenants rehoused due to incidents of hate crime.

Employment and Support Allowance

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development how many Employment and Support Allowance medicals have been carried out as 'home visits'; and how this figure compares to (i) England; (ii) Scotland; and (iii) Wales.

(AQW 16736/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Atos Healthcare began providing medical assessments on behalf of the Social Security Agency on 20 June 2011. Since June 2011, there have been 306 Employment and Support Allowance medicals carried out as home visits.

The Social Security Agency does not hold information in relation to Employment and Support Allowance medical assessments carried out as home visits in (i) England;(ii) Scotland and (iii) Wales.

Housing Executive: Waiting Lists

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development how many families with complex needs and requiring four or more bedrooms are on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive waiting list to be rehoused in (i) South; and (ii) East Belfast.

(AQW 16798/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive currently has seven complex cases that require four or more bedrooms and have chosen to be rehoused in a common landlord area within South or East Belfast.

Neighbourhood Renewal: Belfast

Mr Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development how much finance and resources have been used under Neighbourhood Renewal in Belfast in the last twelve months.

(AQW 16809/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are fifteen Neighbourhood Renewal Areas across Greater Belfast which receive support through the Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund (Annex A). To oversee and support the delivery of Neighbourhood Renewal in Belfast the Department also supports 5 Area Partnership Boards and maintains 3 local departmental Development Offices.

The accounting methodology employed by the Department cannot provide details on a rolling basis. Figures have therefore been provided for the financial year ending 31 March 2012.

Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund	£13,330,504
Belfast Area Partnership Boards	£ 1,065,441
Development Offices – Salaries and associated costs	£ 1,164,360

Annex A

Belfast Neighbourhood Renewal Areas

- Inner East Belfast
- South West Belfast
- Greater Shankill
- Greater Falls
- Upper Springfield/Whiterock
- Crumlin/Ardoyne
- Tullycarnet
- Inner South
- Lenadoon (Outer West)
- Colin
- Inner North
- Upper Ardoyne/Ballysillan
- Ligoniel
- Rathcoole
- Andersonstown

Neighbourhood Renewal: West Belfast

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister for Social Development how much finances and resources have been used under Neighbourhood Renewal in west Belfast in the last twelve months.

(AQW 16810/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are five Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRA) which fall within the remit of the West Belfast Development Office; Greater Falls, Andersonstown, Lenadoon (Outer West), Colin and Upper Springfield/Whiterock.

The Greater Shankill Neighbourhood Renewal Area also covers areas across west and north Belfast and falls within the remit of the North Belfast and Greater Shankill Development Office. Therefore for completeness I have provided information on the West Belfast NRAs and all of the Greater Shankill NRA.

To oversee and support the delivery of Neighbourhood Renewal in west Belfast and Greater Shankill the Department also supports 2 Area Partnership Boards.

The accounting methodology employed by the Department cannot provide details of finance on a rolling basis; therefore figures have been provided for the financial year ending 31 March 2012.

Neighbourhood Renewal Investment Fund 31 March 2012

West Belfast NRA	£3,949,427
Greater Shankill NRA	£1,110,656
Area Partnership Boards	£451,417
Development Offices salaries and costs	£249,000

Neighbourhood Renewal: Transfer of Resources

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development how much finances and resources will be transferred under Neighbourhood Renewal to Belfast City Council.

(AQW 16811/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Executive has agreed that functions which transfer from central to local government under the local government reform programme should be fit for purpose, sufficiently funded and cost neutral to the ratepayer at the point of transfer. DSD is currently working with the DOE-established Transfer of Functions Working Group to firm up the detail around the resources to be transferred. This group is advisory and ultimately final decisions on the resourcing of all transferring functions will be a matter for individual Ministers and the Executive.

Neighbourhood Renewal: Transfer of Resources

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development (i) to outline the terms of reference that have been established for the transfer of finance and resources from Neighbourhood Renewal to Belfast City Council; (ii) who produced the terms of reference; and (iii) who signed off on the terms of reference.

(AQW 16812/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Executive has agreed that functions which transfer from central to local government under the local government reform programme should be fit for purpose, sufficiently funded and cost neutral to the ratepayer at the point of transfer. DSD is currently working with the DOE-established Transfer of Functions Working Group to firm up the detail around the resources to be transferred. This group is advisory and ultimately final decisions on the resourcing of transferring functions will be a matter for individual Ministers and the Executive.

Boiler Replacement Scheme: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in North Down have (i) registered for the new Boiler Replacement Scheme; (ii) been sent their application forms; and (iii) have been awarded a grant.

(AQW 16856/11-15)

Mr McCausland: For the North Down Council area there have been 409 enquiries registered for the boiler replacement scheme and 373 applications issued. There have been 14 approvals issued to commence boiler replacement works with one being completed. Household holders have up to 3 months to have the work completed and they are being encouraged to have replacement works carried out as quickly as possible once approval has been received.

High Streets Task Force

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the findings of the High Streets Taskforce consultation meeting that was held in Strabane; and what actions his Department will take to help further regenerate local town centres in the district.

(AQW 16892/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Earlier this year my Department organised a series of meeting across Northern Ireland to review the support which it provides to city and town centres and to ascertain the views of traders and high street business on matters of concern to them. A meeting attended by approximately one dozen local businesses and council officials was held in Strabane on 22nd May 2012.

Attendees raised a number of concerns relating to; vacant premises in the town centre, out-of town planning, car parking, non-domestic rates, the appearance of the town centre streets, the location of the Translink Bus depot, DSD involvement in the SCORE site and coordination of Government Departments.

My Department published the Strabane Town Centre Masterplan in September 2010. The Masterplan, which was prepared in conjunction with Strabane District Council and other statutory agencies sets out recommendations for the development of the town centre over a 15-20 year period. The recommendations have been prioritised and work to implement them has begun.

In the current financial year, the Department is funding a £335,000 Public Realm scheme on Castle Place and part of Lower Main Street in partnership with the Department for Regional Development's Road Service. In addition, tenders will be invited shortly for the appointment of a consultant to prepare a development brief for the SCORE site in Strabane and the Department is working with Council officials to progress the Strabane Community Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge project.

The Department is also working with Strabane District Council to design town centre revitalisation schemes for implementation in 2013 and later years subject to the availability of the necessary funding. It is also assisting the Council to prepare terms of reference for the appointment of a team to design and manage the implementation of a major public realm scheme focusing on Market Street, Abercorn Square, Castle Street, Leeper's Brae and part of Railway Street. This project, of which the Department is likely to be the main funder, is expected to commence during the 2013/14 financial year and be phased over several years.

The Department's Urban Development Grant Scheme is also available to assist projects in Strabane town centre. With regard to the regeneration of other towns in the Strabane District, these would fall outside my Department's urban remit and would therefore be primarily the responsibility of the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Social Security Agency: Bank Liaison Section

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW15888/11-15, for an update on the co-location of Bank Liaison team.

(AQW 16998/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As part of the Social Security Agency's Modernisation Programme and in preparation for Welfare Reform, the Payment Management Service is to be co-located in Belfast alongside other financial services. The co-location has impacted 14 staff from Administrative Assistant to Executive Officer 2 from the Bank Liaison team in Lisahally.

To date 4 staff are being relocated to the Pension Centre, Carlisle House and another 2 staff are due to relocate to the North West Development Office, Orchard House. Work is ongoing to redeploy the 8 remaining staff whilst taking account of the individual circumstances and business needs.

Energy Efficiency Measures in Homes

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the budget that has been set aside to cover the proposals to boost economic activity through the retro-fitting of energy efficiency measures in homes.

(AQW 17080/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department has a budget of £35.8 million available to improve the energy efficiency of homes. This resource funds the Warm Homes Scheme, the Boiler Replacement Scheme and the Housing Executive's Heating Replacement Scheme.

My Department is awaiting further information on the commitment made in the recent Economy and Jobs Initiative announced by the Northern Ireland Executive to fund the retro-fitting of energy efficiency measures in homes.

Energy Efficiency: Green New Deal Group

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development whether, in considering options for energy efficiency retro-fitting, he will pro-actively engage with representatives from the Green New Deal Group.

(AQW 17081/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Before I can assess the options for energy efficiency retro-fitting I am seeking further information on the commitment made in the recent Economy and Jobs Initiative announced by the Northern Ireland Executive to fund the retro-fitting of energy efficiency measures in homes.

Energy Efficiency Measures in Homes

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development when he will publish the proposals for the retro-fitting of energy efficiency measures in homes.

(AQW 17082/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Before I can assess the options for energy efficiency retro-fitting I am seeking further information on the commitment made in the recent Economy and Jobs Initiative announced by the Northern Ireland Executive to fund the retro-fitting of energy efficiency measures in homes.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department can take to ensure that all Winter Fuel Payments are paid before December 2012.

(AQW 17131/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A Winter Fuel Payment is paid to eligible customers each winter to provide help with fuel bills. During 2012, payments started on the 3rd November and continued up to the 18th November with the last payments crediting to customers accounts by 27th November. The specific payment dates are determined by the benefit the customer is entitled to.

For the small amount of customers who applied for the payment for the first time and made their application before 21st September 2012, the Winter Fuel Payment Centre will make payments to successful applicants by the 9th December.

Payments will therefore have been made to over 300,000 customers before Christmas.

For the few remaining successful applications received after 21st September and before the closing date of 31st March 2013, payments will be issued during the period 9th February to 2nd May 2013. Last year this amounted to just over 1,000 customers.

Co-ownership Housing Scheme

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses have been purchased under the co-ownership scheme from 2011/12 to date as a result of the extra money that has been made available.

(AQO 2933/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In the 2011/12 financial year the total funding of £28.25 million made available to the Co-Ownership Scheme supported the purchase of 643 homes.

While it is too early in the current year to identify the purchases supported from specific funding streams, it is expected that the scheme will deliver an additional 375 homes from the additional funding provided this year.

Revised Written Answers

This section contains the revised written answers to questions tabled by Members. The content of the responses is as received at the time from the relevant Minister or representative of the Assembly Commission, and it has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process or changed.

Revised Written Answers

Environment

In Bound Volume 78, page WA 165, please replace AQW 14845/11-15 with:

Marine Bill: Sellafield

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment (i) why Sellafield Nuclear Plant has not been included in the proposed Marine Bill; (ii) whether he will include the plant in the Bill; and (iii) whether a report on the plant will be produced, including the effects on the eco-system and public health.

(AQW 14845/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment):

- (i) Nuclear energy and nuclear installations are excepted matters under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and, as such, are not within the Department's remit. Moreover, the Marine Bill covers the marine area 0-12 nautical miles, with Sellafield outside that limit;
- (ii) Consequently the Sellafield site will not be included in the Marine Bill – to do so would be beyond the competence of the NI Assembly and will be until such times as the power is transferred. The Department will continue its programme of monitoring the effect of radioactive discharges from nuclear installations on the Northern Ireland coastline; and
- (iii) A joint report, Radioactivity in Food and the Environment (RIFE), is published annually by Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Environment Agency, Food Standards Agency, and Northern Ireland Environment Agency. This report gathers the results of radiological monitoring and demonstrates that, in Northern Ireland, food is safe and the public's exposure to ionising radiation from discharges is insignificant.

Finance and Personnel

In this Bound Volume, page WA 64, please replace AQW 15675/11-15 with:

Non-domestic Rates Initiatives: Lurgan and Portadown

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many businesses in (i) Lurgan; and (ii) Portadown town centres have benefited from the recent non-domestic rates initiatives.

(AQW 14845/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): You recently asked, in assembly question AQW 15675/11-15, how many businesses in (i) Lurgan; and (ii) Portadown centres have benefited from the recent non-domestic rates initiatives. In my answer I stated that "As at 21st October 2012, there were 360 businesses in Craigavon Borough Council which have benefited from the recently introduced 20% rate of Small Business Rate Relief. To date no properties in Craigavon Borough Council has benefited from either the Empty Premises Relief or the Shop Window Display relief which also commenced on 1st April 2012."

My officials have recently carried out some validation checks on these figures and have discovered that the numbers of properties were incorrectly stated. I apologise that the information you received was incorrect.

Given the interest expressed in this topic, the table below provides corrected and updated information on properties getting Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) at 20% and Empty Premises Relief for all 26 District Council areas.

Table 1: Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) at 20% and Empty Premises Relief by District Council area as at 31st October 2012

District Council	No of properties getting:	
	Empty Premises Relief	SBRR (20%)
Antrim	0	244
Ards	1	318
Armagh	2	258
Ballymena	0	302
Ballymoney	1	124

District Council	No of properties getting:	
	Empty Premises Relief	SBRR (20%)
Banbridge	0	194
Belfast	5	1,628
Carrickfergus	1	131
Castlereagh	0	241
Coleraine	0	294
Cookstown	1	191
Craigavon	2	359
Derry	7	513
Down	2	360
Dungannon & South Tyrone	0	313
Fermanagh	1	311
Larne	1	106
Limavady	1	131
Lisburn	1	581
Magherafelt	2	201
Moyle	0	70
Newry & Mourne	5	467
Newtownabbey	2	357
North Down	3	391
Omagh	3	251
Strabane	2	157
Northern Ireland	43	8,493

I have copied this letter to the Speaker and all MLAs. A copy has also been placed in the library.

Finance and Personnel

In this Bound Volume, page WA 67, please replace AQW 15813/11-15 with:

Non-domestic Rates Initiatives: Bangor and Holywood

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many businesses in (i) Bangor; and (ii) Holywood town centres have benefitted from the recent non-domestic rates initiatives.

(AQW 15813/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): You recently asked, in assembly question AQW 15813/11-15, how many businesses in (i) Bangor; and (ii) Holywood town centres have benefitted from the recent non-domestic rates initiatives. In my answer I stated that "As at 21st October 2012, there were 392 businesses in North Down Borough Council which have benefitted from the recently introduced 20% rate of Small Business Rate Relief. To date a single business in North Down Borough Council has benefitted from Empty Premises Relief, whilst no businesses have taken advantage of the Shop Window Display relief."

My officials have recently carried out some validation checks on these figures and have discovered that the numbers of properties were incorrectly stated. I apologise that the information you received was incorrect.

Given the interest expressed in this topic, the table below provides corrected and updated information on properties getting Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) at 20% and Empty Premises Relief for all 26 District Council areas.

Table 1: Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) at 20% and Empty Premises Relief by District Council area as at 31st October 2012

District Council	No of properties getting:	
	Empty Premises Relief	SBRR (20%)
Antrim	0	244
Ards	1	318
Armagh	2	258
Ballymena	0	302
Ballymoney	1	124
Banbridge	0	194
Belfast	5	1,628
Carrickfergus	1	131
Castlereagh	0	241
Coleraine	0	294
Cookstown	1	191
Craigavon	2	359
Derry	7	513
Down	2	360
Dungannon & South Tyrone	0	313
Fermanagh	1	311
Larne	1	106
Limavady	1	131
Lisburn	1	581
Magherafelt	2	201
Moyle	0	70
Newry & Mourne	5	467
Newtownabbey	2	357
North Down	3	391
Omagh	3	251
Strabane	2	157
Northern Ireland	43	8,493

I have copied this letter to the Speaker and all MLAs. A copy has also been placed in the library.

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Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 5 November 2012

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Matter of the Day

2.1 Murder of Prison Officer David Black

The Rt Hon Peter Robinson made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the Murder of Prison Officer David Black. Other Members were also called to speak on the matter. Members observed one minute's silence.

3. Public Petitions

3.1 New Build for Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim

Mr Trevor Clarke was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition relating to the new build for Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim.

3.2 Proposed Closure of Artillery Youth Centre, Belfast

Mr Alban Maginness was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition relating to the proposed closure of Artillery Youth Centre, Belfast.

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 Statement - Northern Ireland Employment Law Review

The Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry, made a statement regarding the Northern Ireland Employment Law Review, following which he replied to questions.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

4.2 Further Consideration Stage: Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill (NIA 15/11-15)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, moved the Further Consideration Stage of the Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill.

No amendments were tabled to the Bill.

The Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill stood referred to the Speaker for consideration in accordance with section 10 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

5. Committee Business

5.1 Motion - Muscular Dystrophy and Related Neuromuscular Conditions

Proposed:

That this Assembly welcomes The McCollum Report: Access to specialist neuromuscular care in Northern Ireland; is concerned about the lack of specialised neuromuscular services revealed in the report; believes that a lead for muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions should be appointed from within Health and Social Care; recognises that significant funds are being wasted on unplanned emergency admissions to hospital; notes that investing small amounts in the development of specialised neuromuscular services can lead to a reduction in these unplanned emergency admissions; further recognises the vital evidence provided by the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign's Northern Ireland Muscle Group during the All Party Group on Muscular Dystrophy Inquiry; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to act on the recommendations in the report.

Chairperson, Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Debate ensued.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

6. Question Time

6.1 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 Jennifer McCann, also answered a number of questions.

6.2 Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots.

7. Question for Urgent Oral Answer

7.1 Security of Prison Officers

The Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford, responded to a Question for Urgent Oral Answer, tabled by Mr Paul Givan.

8. Committee Business (Cont'd)

8.1 Motion - Muscular Dystrophy and Related Neuromuscular Conditions (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

9. Private Members' Business

9.1 Motion - Support for Councillor Sammy Brush

Proposed:

That this Assembly extends support, without qualification, to Samuel Brush, a DUP councillor, who, while working as a postman, was shot and survived an assassination attempt by the convicted terrorist Gerry McGeough; stands by the victims of terrorism; and expresses revulsion at those who side with would-be murderers rather than an innocent public servant.

Rt Hon P Robinson

Lord Morrow

Mrs A Foster

9.2 Amendment**Proposed:**

Insert after 'qualification, to':

'all elected representatives, and their families, who have been targeted by paramilitaries throughout the troubles, including'

Mr M Nesbitt

Mr T Elliott

Mr R Swann

The Speaker took the Chair.

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** (Division 1).

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** (Division 2).

10. Adjournment**Proposed:**

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 6.21pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

05 November 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

5 November 2012

Division 1

Support for Councillor Sammy Brush - Amendment

Proposed:

Insert after 'qualification, to':

'all elected representatives, and their families, who have been targeted by paramilitaries throughout the troubles, including'

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 66

Noes: 27

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr McGlone, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr P Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Elliott and Mr Nesbitt.

NOES

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Molloy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McCartney and Mr Mitchel McLaughlin.

The Amendment was **made**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

5 November 2012

Division 2

Support for Councillor Sammy Brush - Motion as amended

Proposed:

That this Assembly extends support, without qualification, to all elected representatives, and their families, who have been targeted by paramilitaries throughout the troubles, including Samuel Brush, a DUP councillor who, while working as a postman, was shot and survived an assassination attempt by the convicted terrorist Gerry McGeough; stands by the victims of terrorism; and expresses revulsion at those who side with would-be murderers rather than an innocent public servant.

The Question, as amended, was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 66

Noes: 27

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Byrne, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Durkan, Mr Easton, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr McGlone, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McQuillan, Mr A Maginness, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr P Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Rogers, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Clarke and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr Brady, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Molloy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McCartney and Mr Mitchel McLaughlin.

The Motion, as amended, was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 24 October - 05 November 2012

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

- Superannuation Bill (As Amended at Consideration Stage) (NIA 6/11-15)

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Belfast Education and Library Board Annual Report 2011-12 (DE)

5. Assembly Reports

- Report on the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill (NIA Bill 7/11-15) (Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister) (NIA 79/11-15)
- The Northern Ireland Assembly Members' Pension Fund Annual Report and Accounts for the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012 (NIA 76/11-15)
- Fourth Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules (Session 2012-13) (NIA 78/11-15)

6. Statutory Rules

(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

- S.R. 2012/379 The Smoke Control Areas (Excepted Fireplaces) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
- S.R. 2012/383 The Bluetongue (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)
- S.R. 2012/384 The Materials and Articles in Contact with Food Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
- S.R. 2012/385 Electricity (Priority Dispatch) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DETI)
- S.R. 2012/387 The Welfare of Animals (Docking of Working Dogs' Tails and Miscellaneous Amendments (Regulations) Northern Ireland 2012 (DARD)
- S.R. 2012/390 The Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Automatic Enrolment) (Amendment No.3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
- S.R. 2012/391 Legal Aid (General) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOJ)
- S.R. 2012/394 The Social Security (Credits) (Amendment No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
- S.R. 2012/395 The Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004 (Amendment) Regulations 2012 (DOJ)
- S.R. 2012/397 Fisheries (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DCAL)
- Draft S.R. 2012/ The General Register Office (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DFP)

For Information Only:

- S.R. 2012/373 The Tenancy Deposit Schemes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
- S.R. 2012/382 The Off-Street Parking (Amendment No.5) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
- S.R. 2012/386 (C.36) The Welfare of Animals (2011 Act) (Commencement No.3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

- Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (DHSSPS)

8. Consultation Documents

- Consultation on the Proposed Changes to the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation (NIRO) and Supplementary Consultations (DETI)
- Consultation on the proposal for the reintroduction of a Fixed Penalty for an offence related to Goods Vehicle Licensing (DOE)
- Consultation on Revising the Northern Ireland Waste Management Strategy (DOE)
- Reviewing Support for Repair and Improvement in the Private Housing Sector (DSD)

9. Departmental Publications

- Southern Health and Social Care Trust Charitable Trust Fund Accounts 2011-12 (DHSSPS)
- Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Health and Social Care Trust Charitable Trust Fund Accounts 2011-12 (DHSSPS)
- South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust Charitable Trust Fund Accounts 2011-12 (DHSSPS)
- Department of Finance and Personnel Memorandum on the Tenth Report from the Public Accounts Committee Mandate 2011-2015 - Safe Guarding Northern Ireland's Listed Buildings (DFP)

10. Agency Publications

- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Mineral Development Account for the year ended 31 March 2012 (NIAO)
- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment Petroleum Production Account for the year ended 31 March 2012 (NIAO)
- General Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland – 2012 (NIAO)
- Commission for Victims and Survivors Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2012 (CVS)

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 6 November 2012

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Assembly Business

2.1 Motion - Suspension of Standing Order 20(1)

Proposed:

That Standing Order 20(1) be suspended for 6 November 2012.

Mr R Swann

Mr P Weir

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement - North South Ministerial Council Plenary Meeting

The deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council Plenary meeting, held on Friday 2 November, following which he replied to questions.

3.2 Statement - Putting Pupils First: Improving Outcomes, improving Opportunity

The Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd, made a statement regarding 'Putting Pupils First: Improving Outcomes, Improving Opportunity', following which he replied to questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

3.3 Further Consideration Stage - Superannuation Bill (NIA 6/11-15)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, moved the Further Consideration Stage of the Superannuation Bill.

No amendments were tabled to the Bill.

The Superannuation Bill stood referred to the Speaker for consideration in accordance with section 10 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

3.4 Final Stage - Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill (NIA 15/11-15)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, moved that the Final Stage of the Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill (NIA 15/11-15) do now pass.

Debate ensued.

The Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill passed Final Stage with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

The sitting was suspended at 12.44pm.

Following the agreement of the Business Committee, the sitting resumed at 4.00pm, with the Speaker in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Agriculture and Rural Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

4.2 Regional Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

5. Private Members' Business

5.1 Motion - Voting Age

Proposed:

That this Assembly believes that the voting age should be reduced to sixteen for all elections and referendums; and calls on the Westminster Government to introduce legislation to accommodate this change.

Mr S Agnew

Ms M Fearon

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** (Division).

6. Adjournment

Ms Maeve McLaughlin spoke to her topic on the delay in key planning applications in the Foyle constituency.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 7.03pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

06 November 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

6 November 2012

Division

Voting Age - Motion

Proposed:

That this Assembly believes that the voting age should be reduced to sixteen for all elections and referendums; and calls on the Westminster Government to introduce legislation to accommodate this change.

Mr S Agnew

Ms M Fearon

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 51

Noes: 29

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Beggs, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hussey, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Mr McClarty, Ms McCorley, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Nesbitt, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Agnew and Ms Fearon.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

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

The Motion was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 06 November 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
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules

(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

 - S.R. 2012/398 The Education (Student Support) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009 (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DEL)
 - S.R. 2012/400 The Plant Health (Wood and Bark) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
 - Proposals for Changes to Permitted Development Rights for Agricultural Buildings and Plant (DOE)
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 6 November 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
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12				
Superannuation Bill NIA Bill 6/11-15	12.03.12	26.03.12	28.09.12	26.09.12	22.10.12	06.11.12		
Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill NIA Bill 7/11-15	12.06.12	25.06.12	26.10.12	24.10.12				
Business Improvement Districts Bill NIA Bill 9/11-15	25.06.12	17.09.12	13.12.12					
Criminal Justice Bill NIA Bill 10/11-15	25.06.12	03.07.12	14.12.12					
Charities Bill NIA Bill 11/11-15	02.07.12	11.09.12	23.10.12	23.10.12				
Welfare Reform Bill NIA Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	27.11.12					
Education Bill NIA Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	03.12.12					

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
/Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill 15/11-15	08.10.12	16.10.12	N/A	N/A	22.10.12	05.11.12	06.11.12	

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
Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill 12/11-15	02.07.12	25.09.12	13.11.12					

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 12 November 2012

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Assembly Business

2.1 Motion - Extension of sitting on Monday 12 November 2012 under SO 10(3A)

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 12 November 2012 be extended to no later than 8.00pm.

Mr P Ramsey

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement - Public Expenditure 2012-13 October Monitoring Round and the 2013-14 and 2014-15 Budget Realignment

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, made a statement regarding the Public Expenditure 2012-13 October Monitoring Round and the 2013-14 and 2014-15 Budget Realignment, following which he replied to questions.

3.2 Motion - Draft Local Government (Indemnities for Members and Officers) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012

Proposed:

That the draft Local Government (Indemnities for Members and Officers) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

Minister of the Environment

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Committee Business

4.1 Motion - Extension of Committee Stage: Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 15 February 2013, in relation to the Committee Stage of the Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill (NIA Bill 12/11-15).

Chairperson, Committee for Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5. Private Members' Business

5.1 Motion - Funding for Boxing

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the recent announcement by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure in relation to funding for boxing; acknowledges the boxing strategy being developed by Belfast City Council, in conjunction with Sport NI, and the club development plan being produced by the Ulster Provincial Boxing Council; recognises that there is a need to develop boxing in working class Protestant areas; and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to ensure that the funding is allocated equitably across communities to fill identifiable gaps in provision for the sport, in keeping with her Department's section 75 responsibilities.

Miss M McIlveen

Mr P Weir

Mr S Douglas

Mr W Humphrey

5.2 Amendment No.1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'notes' and insert:

'with concern the findings of Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club's (SRABC) recent report; further notes the recent announcement by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure in relation to funding for boxing; acknowledges the boxing strategy being developed by Belfast City Council, in conjunction with Sport NI, and the club development plan being produced by the Ulster Provincial Boxing Council, but regrets the Council's failure to address the issue of sectarianism highlighted in the report by SRABC; recognises that there is a need to develop boxing in working class Protestant areas; calls for a Northern Ireland Amateur Boxing Association to be established in order to afford boxers from Northern Ireland the opportunity to compete for the UK at international level; and further calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to ensure that the funding is allocated equitably across communities to fill identifiable gaps in provision for the sport, in keeping with her Department's section 75 responsibilities.

Mr J Allister

5.3 Amendment No.2

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'develop boxing' and insert:

'; and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to ensure that the funding is allocated on the basis of need to fill identifiable gaps in provision for the sport, in keeping with her Department's section 75 responsibilities and to ensure that all clubs uphold the highest standards of Good Relations and the Equality Standards in sport.'

Mr D Bradley

Mrs K McKeivitt

Debate ensued.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

6. Question Time

6.1 Social Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland.

6.2 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

7. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

7.1 Motion - Funding for Boxing (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Question being put, Amendment No.1 was **carried** (Division 1).

Amendment No. 2 was not put.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** (Division 2).

7.2 Motion - Construction Industry

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the current plight of the construction industry; and calls on the Executive to prioritise the proposed maintenance and capital spending plans of each Department, to stimulate the local economy and support jobs within the construction industry.

Mr P McGlone

Mr J Byrne

Dr A McDonnell

7.3 Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'Department,' and insert:

'to encourage and facilitate more investment in public private infrastructure projects during this Assembly mandate, and to lobby Her Majesty's Treasury for a reduced rate of VAT for the repair, maintenance and improvement of existing dwellings to stimulate the local economy and support jobs within the construction industry.'

Mrs S Overend

Mr M Nesbitt

Debate ensued.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

7.4 Motion - Diabetes Strategy

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the increase in the number of people diagnosed with Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes; further notes the specific increase in Type 1 diabetes amongst children; acknowledges the cost to the Health Service of managing diabetes; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to introduce urgently a properly resourced diabetes strategy.

Mr P Ramsey

Mr T Buchanan

Mr F Molloy

Mr R Beggs

Mr S Dickson

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 7.23pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

12 November 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

12 November 2012

Division 1

Funding for Boxing - Amendment No. 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'notes' and insert:

'with concern the findings of Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club's (SRABC) recent report; further notes the recent announcement by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure in relation to funding for boxing; acknowledges the boxing strategy being developed by Belfast City Council, in conjunction with Sport NI, and the club development plan being produced by the Ulster Provincial Boxing Council, but regrets the Council's failure to address the issue of sectarianism highlighted in the report by SRABC; recognises that there is a need to develop boxing in working class Protestant areas; calls for a Northern Ireland Amateur Boxing Association to be established in order to afford boxers from Northern Ireland the opportunity to compete for the UK at international level; and further calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to ensure that the funding is allocated equitably across communities to fill identifiable gaps in provision for the sport, in keeping with her Department's section 75 responsibilities.

Mr J Allister

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 47

Noes: 42

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr I McCreagh, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Allister and Mr McNarry.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Eastwood and Mr Ó hOisín.

The Amendment was **made**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

12 November 2012
Division 2

Funding for Boxing - Motion as amended

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes with concern the findings of Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club's (SRABC) recent report; further notes the recent announcement by the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure in relation to funding for boxing; acknowledges the boxing strategy being developed by Belfast City Council in conjunction with Sport NI and the club development plan being produced by the Ulster provincial boxing council but regrets the council's failure to address the issue of sectarianism highlighted in the report by SRABC; recognises that there is a need to develop boxing in working-class Protestant areas; calls for a Northern Ireland amateur boxing association to be established in order to afford boxers from Northern Ireland the opportunity to compete for the UK at international level; and further calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to ensure that the funding is allocated equitably across communities to fill identifiable gaps in provision for the sport, in keeping with her Department's section 75 responsibilities.

The Question, as amended, was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 48

Noes: 42

AYES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Eastwood and Mr Ó hOisín.

The Motion, as amended, was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 07 - 12 November 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
 - Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division Annual Report on Decision Making 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012 (DSD)
 - Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service Trust Fund Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2012 (DHSSPS)
 - Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute 2011-2012 Annual Report and Statement of Accounts (DARD)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules

(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

 - S.R. 2012/393 Superannuation (Commission for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DFP)
 - S.R. 2012/399 The Smoke Control Areas (Authorised Fuels) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
 - Draft S.R. 2012. The Single Use Carrier Bags Charge Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
 - Draft S.R. 2012. The Licensing (Irresponsible Drinks Promotions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
 - Draft S.R. 2012. The Registration of Clubs (Irresponsible Drinks Promotions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)

For Information Only:

 - S.R. 2012/330 (C.29) The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (2007 Order) (Commencement No.7) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
 - S.R. 2012/388 (C.37) Commissioner for Older People Act 2011 (Commencement) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (OFMDFM)
 - S.R. 2012/402 The County Court (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOJ)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
 - Announcement of the Executive's Economy and Jobs Initiative (OFMDFM)
8. Consultation Documents
 - Taxis Act (NI) 2008 Special Occasion and Novelty Vehicles (DOE)
9. Departmental Publications
 - Attorney General for Northern Ireland Annual Report 2011/12 (OFMDFM)
 - Property Asset Management in Central Government (NIAO)

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

- Mental Health (Approval Functions) Act 2012 Chapter 18
- Infrastructure (Financial Assistance) Act 2012 Chapter 16
- European Union (Approval of Treaty Amendment Decision) Act 2012 Chapter 15
- Local Government Finance Act 2012 Chapter 17
- Correction to Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 Chapter 10

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 13 November 2012

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Public Petition

2.1 Development of a strategic plan for athletics as a priority sport

Mr Steven Agnew was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition relating to the development of a strategic plan for athletics as a priority sport.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 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, held on 31 October 2012, following which he replied to questions.

4. Private Members' Business

4.1 Motion - Inspection Report into Schools

Proposed:

That this Assembly acknowledges the recent report by the Chief Inspector of Schools into the leadership and management of schools in Northern Ireland; notes, with concern, the under performance of some managers and teachers; and calls on the Minister of Education to give greater leadership, and to introduce more stringent measures, to increase confidence in the system of schools management.

*Mr J Craig
Mr M Storey*

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The sitting was suspended at 12.41pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) in the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 Culture, Arts and Leisure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

5.2 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd.

6. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

6.1 Motion - Legacy of the 2012 Paralympic Games

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the magnificent success of our athletes at the 2012 Paralympic Games in London; and calls on the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure and Disability Sport NI to secure the support of district councils and the relevant Departments to ensure a lasting legacy of the games and to increase the number of sporting opportunities available to people with disabilities at all levels of sport in every area.

Mr O McMullan

Ms R McCorley

Mr C Ó hOisín

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

7. Adjournment

Mr Jimmy Spratt spoke to his topic on Special Needs Provision in Taughmonagh.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 4.57pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

13 November 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

**Papers Presented to the Assembly on
13 November 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
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules

(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

For Information Only:

7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly Legislation:

Stages in Consideration of Public Bills

First Stage: Introduction of Bill.

Second Stage: General debate of the Bill with an opportunity for Members to vote on its general principles.

Committee Stage (Comm. Stage): Detailed investigation by a Committee which concludes with the publication of a report for consideration by the Assembly.

Consideration Stage (CS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, the details of the Bill including amendments proposed to the Bill.

Further Consideration Stage (FCS): Consideration by the Assembly of, and an opportunity for Members to vote on, further amendments to the Bill.

Final Stage: Passing or rejecting of Bill by the Assembly, without further amendment.

Royal Assent.

Proceedings as at 13 November 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
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12				
Superannuation Bill NIA Bill 6/11-15	12.03.12	26.03.12	28.09.12	26.09.12	22.10.12	06.11.12		
Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill NIA Bill 7/11-15	12.06.12	25.06.12	26.10.12	24.10.12				
Business Improvement Districts Bill NIA Bill 9/11-15	25.06.12	17.09.12	13.12.12					
Criminal Justice Bill NIA Bill 10/11-15	25.06.12	03.07.12	14.12.12					
Charities Bill NIA Bill 11/11-15	02.07.12	11.09.12	23.10.12	23.10.12				
Welfare Reform Bill NIA Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	27.11.12					
Education Bill NIA Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	03.12.12					

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
/Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill NIA Bill 15/11-15	08.10.12	16.10.12	N/A	N/A	22.10.12	05.11.12	06.11.12	

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
Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill NIA Bill 12/11-15	02.07.12	25.09.12	15.02.13					

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 19 November 2012

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Assembly Business

2.1 Motion - Suspend Standing Orders

Proposed:

That Standing Orders 10(2) to 10(4) be suspended for 19 November 2012.

Mr P Weir

Ms C Ruane

Mr R Swann

Mr P Ramsey

Mr S Dickson

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support *nemine contradicente*.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 First Stage - Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill (NIA 16/11-15)

The Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy, introduced a Bill to enable the Department for Regional Development to continue to make payments to water and sewerage undertakers for a limited period; and to make provision requiring certain notices to be registered in the Statutory Charges Register.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

3.2 Final Stage - Superannuation Bill (NIA 6/11-15)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, moved that the Final Stage of the Superannuation Bill (NIA 6/11-15) do now pass.

Debate ensued.

The Superannuation Bill passed Final Stage.

4. Committee Business

4.1 Motion - Report on complaints against Mr Jim Wells MLA

A valid Petition of Concern was presented in relation to this motion under Standing Order 28, on Friday 16 November (Appendix 1).

Proposed:

That this Assembly, in consideration of the report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges (NIA 71/11-15), imposes upon Mr Jim Wells MLA the sanction of exclusion from proceedings of the Assembly for a period of seven days beginning on the day after the resolution.

Deputy Chairperson, Committee on Standards and Privileges

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **negatived** on a cross-community vote (Division 1).

4.2 Motion - Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements - Welfare Reform Bill

Following receipt of valid Petitions of Concern (see Appendix 2 and Appendix 3), under Standing Order 28, Members were informed that the votes would be taken on Tuesday 20 November.

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 35(10)(a) and (b)(i), the Welfare Reform Bill be referred to an Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements; and that the Ad Hoc Committee shall consider and report only whether the provisions of the Bill are in conformity with the requirements for equality and observance of human rights.

Chairperson, Committee for Social Development

4.3 Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after '35(10)(a);' and insert:

'and (b)(ii), the Welfare Reform Bill be referred to an Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements; and that the Ad Hoc Committee shall, in addition to considering and reporting on those matters, carry out the role of the statutory committee in relation to the Bill.'

Mr G Campbell

Ms P Bradley

An explanatory statement was made by the Member who proposed the motion and by a Member who opposed it.

The Amendment was **not moved**.

The Speaker advised Members that the Business Committee motion to establish an Ad Hoc Committee, which was the next item on the Order Paper, could not be moved until the vote took place on the motion to refer the Bill.

The sitting was suspended at 2.25pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.30pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 Regional Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy.

5.2 Employment and Learning

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry.

6. Private Members' Business

6.1 Motion - Child Poverty Action Plan

Proposed:

That this Assembly takes account of the recently published Annual Child Poverty Report; notes that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is falling far short of the targets contained within the Child Poverty Act; and calls on the First Minister and deputy First Minister to publish an action plan for the Child Poverty Strategy.

*Mr M Nesbitt
Mr D Kinahan*

6.2 Amendment No.1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'Report;' and insert:

'notes that the child poverty targets set in the UK wide legislation are challenging and that all regions across the UK are struggling to meet the targets, given the current international economic downturn; and calls on the Executive to work with the devolved administrations and the UK Government to identify actions to meet the statutory targets and reduce poverty.'

*Mr S Moutray
Mr G Robinson
Mr S Hamilton*

6.3 Amendment No.2

Proposed:

At end insert:

'and to identify additional funds associated with limiting the damage of the recession for use in combating child poverty.'

Mr D McNarry

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, Amendment No.1 was **made** (Division 2).

The Question being put, Amendment No.2 was **made** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

6.4 Motion: Concern about the Consultation on Cross Border Education

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes, with concern, the consultation on cross border education; recognises that there are circumstances in which parents living close to the border may wish to send their children to a school in the neighbouring jurisdiction; further notes that this only happens in a small minority of cases; expresses concern that this consultation, on an issue of potentially significant consequence for the future of education, was confined to a narrow geographical area; and calls on the Minister of Education to reflect on his priorities and address the outstanding issues which he is already facing such as, area planning, finding an equitable solution on selection and tackling educational inequality.

*Mr D Kinahan
Mrs J Dobson*

6.5 Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after first 'notes' and insert:

'the consultation on cross border education; recognises that there are circumstances in which parents living close to the border may wish to send their children to a school in the neighbouring jurisdiction; and calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that this consultation is robust and is included as part of the area planning process.'

Mr S Rogers

Mr D Bradley

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** (Division 3).

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** (Division 4).

6.6 Motion: Reform of Employment Law

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises that the national Government has undertaken a review of employment law to reduce the regulatory burden on businesses; and urges the Minister for Employment and Learning to ensure that Northern Ireland does not fall behind the rest of the UK in terms of reforms.

Mr A Ross

Mr P Weir

6.7 Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'Assembly' and insert:

'notes that the Minister for Employment and Learning has initiated a wide-ranging review of employment law in line with the commitment made in the Economic Strategy; endorses a modern, efficient and integrated employment law system that works in the interests of business, helps our economy to grow, attracts investment and encourages companies to recruit new staff, and at the same time provides sufficient protection for the rights of employees, with opportunities for redress; and calls on the Minister to have due regard to changes in employment law in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.'

Mr C Lyttle

Mr S Dickson

Mr K McCarthy

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made** without division.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

7. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 8.48pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

19 November 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

Appendix 1

The undersigned Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly presented a petition of concern, in accordance with Standing Order 28, on Friday 16 November in relation to the following motion.

Report on complaints against Mr Jim Wells MLA

That this Assembly, in consideration of the report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges (NIA 71/11-15), imposes upon Mr Jim Wells MLA the sanction of exclusion from proceedings of the Assembly for a period of seven days beginning on the day after the resolution.

- Mr Sydney Anderson
- Ms Paula Bradley
- Ms Pam Brown
- Mr Thomas Buchanan
- Mr Gregory Campbell
- Mr Trevor Clarke
- Mr Jonathan Craig
- Mr Sammy Douglas
- Mr Gordon Dunne
- Mr Alex Easton
- Mr Paul Frew
- Mr Paul Girvan
- Mr Paul Givan
- Mrs Brenda Hale
- Mr Simon Hamilton
- Mr David Hilditch
- Mr William Humphrey
- Mr William Irwin
- Mr Nelson McCausland
- Mr Ian McCrea
- Mr David McIlveen
- Miss Michelle McIlveen
- Mr Adrian McQuillan
- Lord Morrow
- Mr Stephen Moutray
- Mr Robin Newton
- Mr Edwin Poots
- Mr George Robinson
- Mr Jimmy Spratt
- Mr Mervyn Storey
- Mr Peter Weir
- Mr Sammy Wilson

Northern Ireland Assembly

Appendix 2

The undersigned Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly presented a petition of concern, in accordance with Standing Order 28, on Monday 19 November in relation to the following motion.

Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements - Welfare Reform Bill

That, in accordance with Standing Order 35(10)(a) and (b)(i), the Welfare Reform Bill be referred to an Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements; and that the Ad Hoc Committee shall consider and report only whether the provisions of the Bill are in conformity with the requirements for equality and observance of human rights.

- Mr Daithí McKay
- Ms Jennifer McCann
- Mrs Michelle O'Neill
- Mr Gerry Kelly
- Mr Cathal Ó Hoisín
- Ms Rosaleen McCorley
- Mr Francie Molloy
- Ms Bronwyn McGahan
- Ms Megan Fearon
- Mr Phil Flanagan
- Mr Chris Hazzard
- Mr John O'Dowd
- Mr Alex Maskey
- Ms Caitriona Ruane
- Mr Raymond McCartney
- Ms Maeve McLaughlin
- Mr Barry McElduff
- Mr Mickey Brady
- Mr Sean Lynch
- Mr Cathal Boylan
- Ms Michaela Boyle
- Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
- Ms Carál Ní Chiulín
- Ms Sue Ramsey
- Mr Pat Sheehan
- Mr Oliver McMullan
- Mr Declan McAleer
- Mr Mark H Durkan
- Mr Pat Ramsey
- Mr Colum Eastwood
- Mrs Dolores Kelly
- Mr Sean Rogers
- Mr John Dallat
- Mrs Karen McKeivitt
- Mr Conall McDevitt
- Mr Alban Maginness
- Mr Dominic Bradley
- Mr Patsy McGlone
- Dr Alasdair McDonnell
- Mr Joe Byrne

Northern Ireland Assembly

Appendix 3

The undersigned Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly presented a petition of concern, in accordance with Standing Order 28, on Monday 19 November in relation to the following amendment.

Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements - Welfare Reform Bill

Leave out all after '35(10)(a);' and insert:

'and (b)(ii), the Welfare Reform Bill be referred to an Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements; and that the Ad Hoc Committee shall, in addition to considering and reporting on those matters, carry out the role of the statutory committee in relation to the Bill.'

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| ■ Ms Jennifer McCann | ■ Mr Cathal Boylan |
| ■ Mrs Michelle O'Neill | ■ Ms Michaela Boyle |
| ■ Mr Gerry Kelly | ■ Mr Mitchel McLaughlin |
| ■ Mr Cathal Ó Hoisín | ■ Ms Carál Ní Chiulín |
| ■ Mr Francie Molloy | ■ Ms Sue Ramsey |
| ■ Ms Bronwyn McGahan | ■ Mr Pat Sheehan |
| ■ Mr Daithí McKay | ■ Mr Oliver McMullan |
| ■ Ms Rosaleen McCorley | ■ Mr Mark H Durkan |
| ■ Ms Megan Fearon | ■ Mr Pat Ramsey |
| ■ Mr Declan McAleer | ■ Mr Colum Eastwood |
| ■ Mr Phil Flanagan | ■ Mrs Dolores Kelly |
| ■ Mr Chris Hazzard | ■ Mr Sean Rogers |
| ■ Mr John O'Dowd | ■ Mr John Dallat |
| ■ Mr Alex Maskey | ■ Mrs Karen McKeivitt |
| ■ Ms Caitriona Ruane | ■ Mr Conall McDevitt |
| ■ Mr Raymond McCartney | ■ Mr Alban Maginness |
| ■ Ms Maeve McLaughlin | ■ Mr Dominic Bradley |
| ■ Mr Barry McElduff | ■ Mr Patsy McGlone |
| ■ Mr Mickey Brady | ■ Dr Alasdair McDonnell |
| ■ Mr Sean Lynch | ■ Mr Joe Byrne |

Northern Ireland Assembly

19 November 2012

Division 1

Report on complaints against Mr Jim Wells MLA - Motion

Proposed:

That this Assembly, in consideration of the report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges (NIA 71/11-15), imposes upon Mr Jim Wells MLA the sanction of exclusion from proceedings of the Assembly for a period of seven days beginning on the day after the resolution.

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 49

Noes: 51

AYES

Nationalist:

Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Molloy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

OTHER:

Mr Agnew, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Eastwood and Ms Ruane.

NOES

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, 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 McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

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

Total votes	100	Total Ayes	49	[49.0%%]
Nationalist Votes	41	Nationalist Ayes	41	[100.0%%]
Unionist Votes	51	Unionist Ayes	0	[0.0%%]
Other Votes	8	Other Ayes	8	[100.0%%]

The Motion was **negatived** (cross-community vote).

Northern Ireland Assembly

19 November 2012

Division 2

Child Poverty Action Plan - Amendment No. 1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'Report;' and insert:

'notes that the child poverty targets set in the UK wide legislation are challenging and that all regions across the UK are struggling to meet the targets, given the current international economic downturn; and calls on the Executive to work with the devolved administrations and the UK Government to identify actions to meet the statutory targets and reduce poverty.'

Mr S Moutray

Mr G Robinson

Mr S Hamilton

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 58

Noes: 36

AYES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr I McCrea, Ms McGahan, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Molloy, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuillín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Douglas and Mr G Robinson.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Cree, Mr Dickson, Mrs Dobson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Elliott, Mr Ford, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Mrs D Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCallister, Mr McCarthy, Mr McClarty, Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGimpsey, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr McNarry, Mr A Maginness, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McCallister and Mrs Overend.

The Amendment was **made**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

19 November 2012

Division 3

Concern about the Consultation on Cross Border Education - Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after first 'notes' and insert:

'the consultation on cross border education; recognises that there are circumstances in which parents living close to the border may wish to send their children to a school in the neighbouring jurisdiction; and calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that this consultation is robust and is included as part of the area planning process.'

Mr S Rogers

Mr D Bradley

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 48

Noes: 43

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mr Rogers.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, 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, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Dobson and Mr Kinahan.

The Amendment was **made**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

19 November 2012

Division 4

Concern about the Consultation on Cross Border Education – Motion, as amended

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the consultation on cross-border education; recognises that there are circumstances in which parents living close to the border may wish to send their children to a school in the neighbouring jurisdiction; and calls on the Minister of Education to ensure that this consultation is robust and is included as part of the area planning process.

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 48

Noes: 43

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Byrne and Mr Rogers.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, 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, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mrs Dobson and Mr Kinahan.

The Motion, as amended, was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 14 - 19 November 2012

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
 - Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill (NIA 16/11-15) (DRD)
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
5. Assembly Reports
 - Review into Bovine Tuberculosis (NIA 83/11-15) (Agriculture and Rural Development Committee)
 - Inquiry into Unadopted Roads in Northern Ireland (NIA 44/11-15) (Regional Development Committee)
6. Statutory Rules

(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

 - S.R. 2012/408 The Civil Registration Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DFP)

For Information Only:

 - S.R. 2012/404 The Parking Places on Roads (Belfast) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
 - 2013 World Police and Fire Games Limited Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2012 (DCAL)
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
 - Mental Health (Approval Functions) Act 2012 Chapter 18
 - Infrastructure (Financial Assistance) Act 2012 Chapter 16
 - European Union (Approval of Treaty Amendment Decision) Act 2012 Chapter 15
 - Local Government Finance Act 2012 Chapter 17
 - Correction to Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 Chapter 10
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 20 November 2012

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Committee Business

2.1 Motion - Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements

The motion was debated on 19 November 2012. A valid Petition of Concern was presented under Standing Order 28 on 19 November 2012 in relation to the motion. The vote on the motion was therefore taken on 20 November 2012.

The Speaker informed Members that, because a valid Petition of Concern was tabled on the motion, Standing Order 60(4) applied.

Proposed:

That, as provided for in Standing Order 60(4), the Welfare Reform Bill may proceed without reference to an ad hoc committee on conformity with Equality Requirements.

Speaker

The Question being put, the Motion was **negatived** (Division 1).

3. Assembly Business

3.1 Motion - Establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements - Welfare Reform Bill

Proposed:

That, as provided for in Standing Orders 53(1) and 60(1), this Assembly establishes an ad hoc committee to examine and report on whether the provisions of the Welfare Reform Bill are in conformity with the requirements for equality and observance of human rights.

Composition: DUP 4
Sinn Féin 3
UUP 2
SDLP 1
Alliance 1

Quorum: The quorum shall be five members.

Procedure: The procedures of the Committee shall be such as the Committee shall determine.

*Mr P Weir
Ms C Ruane
Mr R Swann
Mr P Ramsey
Mr S Dickson*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 Consideration Stage: Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill (NIA 7/11-15)

The junior Minister, Mr Jonathan Bell, moved the Consideration Stage of the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill.

79 amendments were selected.

Clauses

After debate, Amendment 1 to Clause 1 was **negatived** (Division 2).

The sitting was suspended at 12.37pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) in the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster.

5.2 Environment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood.

6. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

6.1 Consideration Stage: Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill (NIA 7/11-15) (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the motion.

After debate, Amendment 2 to Clause 1 was **negatived** without division.

After debate, Amendment 3 to Clause 1 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 4 was not moved.

After debate, Amendment 5 to Clause 1 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 6 to Clause 1 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 7 to Clause 1 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 8 to Clause 1 was **made** without division.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

After debate, Amendment 9 to Clause 1 was **negatived** (Division 3).

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 1, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendments 10 to 14 to Clause 2 were **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 2, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendments 15 and 16 to Clause 3 were **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 3, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendments 17 to 19 to Clause 4 were **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 4, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 20 to Clause 5 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 21 to Clause 5 was **negatived** without division.

After debate, Amendment 22 to Clause 5 was **negatived** without division.

After debate, Amendment 23 to Clause 5 was **made** without division.

As Amendment 22 was not made, Amendments 24 and 25 were not called.

After debate, Amendment 26 to Clause 5 was **made** without division.

As Amendment 22 was not made, Amendments 27 and 28 were not called.

After debate, Amendment 29 was not moved.

As Amendment 22 was not made, Amendment 30 was not called.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 5, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendments 31 and 32 to Clause 6 were **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 33 to Clause 6 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 34 to Clause 6 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 35 to Clause 6 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 6, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 36 to Clause 7 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendments 37 to 39 to Clause 7 were **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 40 to Clause 7 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 7, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 41 to Clause 8 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendments 42 to 44 to Clause 8 were **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 8, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendments 45 to 48 to Clause 9 were **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 49 to Clause 9 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 9, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 10 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 50, inserting new Clause 10A after Clause 10, was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 51, inserting new Clause 10B after Clause 10, was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 52, inserting new Clause 10C after Clause 10, was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 53 to Clause 11 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 54 to Clause 11 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 55 to Clause 11 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 56 to Clause 11 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 57 to Clause 11 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 11, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 58 to Clause 12 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 59 to Clause 12 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 12, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendments 60 to 63 to Clause 13 were **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 13, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 64 to Clause 14 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 65 to Clause 14 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 14, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 15 to 17 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 66 to Clause 18 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 67 to Clause 18 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 68 to Clause 18 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 18, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 69 to Clause 19 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 19, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 70 to Clause 20 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 20, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 71 to Clause 21 was **negatived** without division.

After debate, Amendment 72 to Clause 21 was **made** without division.

As Amendment 2 was not made, Amendment 73 was not called.

After debate, Amendment 74 to Clause 21 was **made** without division.

As Amendment 2 was not made, Amendment 75 was not called.

After debate, Amendment 76 to Clause 21 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 77 to Clause 21 was **made** without division.

After debate, Amendment 78 to Clause 21 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 21, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 22 and 23 stand part of the Bill.

Long Title

After debate, Amendment 79 to the Long Title was **made** without division.

The question being put, the Long Title, as amended, was **agreed** without division.

Bill NIA 7/11-15 passed Consideration Stage and stood referred to the Speaker.

6.2 Consideration Stage: Charities Bill (NIA 11/11-15)

The Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland, moved the Consideration Stage of the Charities Bill.

Three amendments were tabled to the Bill.

Clauses

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 1 and 2 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 1, inserting new Clause 2A after Clause 2, was **made** without division.

After debate, the question that Clause 3 stand part of the Bill was **negatived** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 4 and 5 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 2 to Clause 6 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 6, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 7 and 8 stand part of the Bill.

After debate, Amendment 3 to Clause 9 was **made** without division.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clause 9, as amended, stand part of the Bill.

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Clauses 10 and 11 stand part of the Bill.

Schedules

The question being put, it was **agreed** without division that Schedules 1 and 2 stand part of the Bill.

Long Title

The question being put, the Long Title was **agreed** without division.

Bill NIA 11/11-15 passed Consideration Stage and stood referred to the Speaker.

6.3 Legislative Consent Motion: Small Charitable Donations Bill**Proposed:**

That this Assembly endorses the principle of the extension to Northern Ireland of the Small Charitable Donations Bill and that its operation be made an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Minister for Social Development

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

7. Private Members' Business

7.1 Motion - Energy Strategy**Proposed:**

That this Assembly notes that approximately 99 percent of primary energy needs are met from imported fossil fuels, which costs approximately £2.3 billion annually; recognises the need to improve energy security and energy independence; further notes the importance of reducing the cost and our exposure to price fluctuations in fossil fuels, while creating Northern Ireland based jobs through the expansion of indigenous renewables and low carbon energy sources; and calls on the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in conjunction with the Executive, to develop a long-term energy strategy for a low carbon future.

Ms A Lo

Mr T Lunn

Mr K McCarthy

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

8. Adjournment

Ms Anna Lo spoke to her topic on Multiple Deprivation in the Belvoir area of South Belfast.

The Speaker took the Chair.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 8.13pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

20 November 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

20 November 2012

Division 1

Motion - Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements - SO 60(4) (vote on the motion without further debate)

Proposed:

That, as provided for in Standing Order 60(4), the Welfare Reform Bill may proceed without reference to an ad hoc committee on conformity with Equality Requirements.

Speaker

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 41

Noes: 52

AYES

Unionist:

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Other:

Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dickson, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Ms Lo, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms P Bradley and Ms Brown.

NOES

Nationalist:

Mr Attwood, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lynch, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Molloy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Mr Rogers, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan.

Unionist:

Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Elliott, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hussey, Mr Kinahan, Mr McCallister, Mr B McCrea, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mr Swann.

Other:

Mr Agnew.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr Durkan and Ms Ruane.

Total Votes	93	Total Ayes	41	[44.1%%]
Nationalist Votes	39	Nationalist Ayes	0	[0.0%%]
Unionist Votes	46	Unionist Ayes	34	[73.9%%]
Other Votes	8	Other Ayes	7	[87.5%%]

The Motion was **negatived** [by parallel consent.]

Northern Ireland Assembly

20 November 2012
Division 2

Consideration Stage: Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill (NIA 7/11-15) - Amendment 1

Proposed:

Clause 1, Page 1, Line 5

At beginning insert -

'Subject to this section,'

Mr Colum Eastwood

Mr Conall McDevitt

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 22

Noes: 70

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Allister, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Ford, Mrs D Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McClarty, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mrs McKeivitt and Mr Rogers.

NOES

Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr M McGuinness, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Ms Ni Chuilin, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Ms Fearon and Mr G Robinson.

The Amendment was **negatived**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

20 November 2012
Division 3

Consideration Stage: Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill (NIA 7/11-15) - Amendment 9

Proposed:

Clause 1, Page 1, Line 16

At end insert -

'(6) Without prejudice to any finding it may make in its final report, the inquiry panel may publish an interim report on the requirement or desirability for redress to be provided by the Executive to victims of historical institutional abuse.'

Mr Colum Eastwood

Mr Conall McDevitt

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 21

Noes: 70

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr D Bradley, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Mr Eastwood, Mr Ford, Mrs D Kelly, Ms Lo, Mr Lunn, Mr Lyttle, Mr McCarthy, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McGlone, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Durkan and Mrs McKeivitt.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms P Bradley, Mr Brady, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Craig, Mr Cree, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Ms Fearon, Mr Flanagan, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Gardiner, Mr Girvan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr G Kelly, Mr Kennedy, Mr Kinahan, Mr Lynch, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McClarty, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Ms McGahan, Mr McGimpsey, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McKay, Ms Maeve McLaughlin, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr Maskey, Mr Moutray, Mr Nesbitt, Mr Newton, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Overend, Mr Poots, Ms S Ramsey, Mr G Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Mr Sheehan, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McAleer and Mr G Robinson.

The Amendment was **negatived**.

Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill

Marshalled List of Amendments

Consideration Stage

Tuesday 20 November 2012

Amendments tabled up to 9.30am Thursday, 15 November 2012 and selected for debate
The Bill will be considered in the following order-
Clauses and Long Title

Amendment 1**Clause 1**, Page 1, Line 5

At beginning insert -

'Subject to this section,'

*Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr Conall McDevitt*

Amendment 2**Clause 1**, Page 1, Line 5

Leave out from 'as' to the end of line 7 and insert -

- (a) to examine the arrangements in place in institutions in Northern Ireland for the protection of children from abuse during the period between 1922 and 1995;
- (b) to examine if there were systemic failings by institutions or the state in their duties towards children in their care during the period between 1922 and 1995;
- (c) to make relevant findings and recommendations, including recommendations to ensure that abuse is prevented effectively in the future.'

Mr Jim Allister

Amendment 3**Clause 1**, Page 1, Line 7

Leave out '31st May' and insert '18th October'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 4**Clause 1**, Page 1, Line 7

At end insert -

'(2A) The inquiry may report recommendations on changes to law, practice and procedure to prevent future abuse.'

*Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr Conall McDevitt*

Amendment 5**Clause 1**, Page 1, Line 8

Leave out 'amend the terms of reference of the inquiry at any time' and insert 'at any time amend the terms of reference of the inquiry by order'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 6**Clause 1**, Page 1, Line 9

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 7**Clause 1**, Page 1, Line 10

At end insert 'if a draft of the order has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, the Assembly'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 8****Clause 1**, Page 1, Line 12

Leave out '1945' and insert '1922'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 9****Clause 1**, Page 1, Line 16

At end insert -

'(6) Without prejudice to any finding it may make in its final report, the inquiry panel may publish an interim report on the requirement or desirability for redress to be provided by the Executive to victims of historical institutional abuse.'

*Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr Conall McDevitt***Amendment 10****Clause 2**, Page 1, Line 21

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 11****Clause 2**, Page 2, Line 5

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 12****Clause 2**, Page 2, Line 8

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 13****Clause 2**, Page 2, Line 9

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 14****Clause 2**, Page 2, Line 10

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 15****Clause 3**, Page 2, Line 41

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 16

Clause 3, Page 2, Line 42

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 17

Clause 4, Page 3, Line 11

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 18

Clause 4, Page 3, Line 13

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 19

Clause 4, Page 3, Line 16

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 20

Clause 5, Page 3, Line 21

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 21

Clause 5, Page 3

Leave out lines 23 to 33

Mr Jim Allister

Amendment 22

Clause 5, Page 3, Line 23

Leave out 'a notice given to the presiding member' and insert -
'an order made'

*Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr Conall McDevitt*

Amendment 23

Clause 5, Page 3, Line 23

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 24

Clause 5, Page 3, Line 25

Leave out 'a notice' and insert 'an order'

*Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr Conall McDevitt*

Amendment 25

Clause 5, Page 3, Line 26

Leave out 'notice is sent' and insert 'order is made'

*Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr Conall McDevitt*

Amendment 26

Clause 5, Page 3, Line 28

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 27

Clause 5, Page 3, Line 29

Leave out 'give a notice' and insert 'make an order'

*Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr Conall McDevitt*

Amendment 28

Clause 5, Page 3, Line 31

Leave out 'set out in the notice' and insert 'publish'

*Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr Conall McDevitt*

Amendment 29

Clause 5, Page 3

Leave out lines 32 and 33

*Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr Conall McDevitt*

Amendment 30

Clause 5, Page 3, Line 33

At end insert -

'(5) No order shall be made under subsection (1)(b) unless a draft of the order has been laid before, and approved by resolution of, the Assembly.'

*Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr Conall McDevitt*

Amendment 31

Clause 6, Page 3, Line 37

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 32

Clause 6, Page 3, Line 39

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 33**Clause 6**, Page 3, Line 40

At end insert -

'(2A) Subject to any provision of rules under section 18, a statement made to the inquiry on oath by a person outside Northern Ireland through a live link is to be treated for the purposes of Article 3 of the Perjury (Northern Ireland) Order 1979 as having been made in Northern Ireland.'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 34****Clause 6**, Page 4, Line 2

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 35****Clause 6**, Page 4, Line 3

At end insert -

'(4) In this section "live link" means a live television link or other arrangement whereby a person, while absent from the place where the inquiry is being held, is able to see and hear, and be seen and heard by, a person at that place.

(5) For the purposes of subsection (4) any impairment of sight or hearing is to be disregarded.'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 36****Clause 7**, Page 4, Line 5

After 'Subject to' insert 'subsection (3) and'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 37****Clause 7**, Page 4, Line 6

Leave out 'presiding member' (in both places) and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 38****Clause 7**, Page 4, Line 14

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 39****Clause 7**, Page 4, Line 15

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 40****Clause 7**, Page 4, Line 16

At end insert -

'(3) The proceedings of that part of the inquiry described in its terms of reference as the Acknowledgment Forum are to be held in private and references to the inquiry in subsection (1) do not include that part of the inquiry.'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 41**Clause 8**, Page 4, Line 21

At end insert -

'(c) disclosure or publication of the identity of any person'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 42****Clause 8**, Page 4, Line 23

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 43****Clause 8**, Page 4, Line 27

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 44****Clause 8**, Page 5, Line 1

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 45**

Clause 9, Page 5, Line 19

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 46****Clause 9**, Page 5, Line 27

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 47****Clause 9**, Page 6, Line 1

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 48****Clause 9**, Page 6, Line 4

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 49****Clause 9**, Page 6, Line 8

At end insert-

'(7) The powers conferred by this section are exercisable only in respect of evidence, documents or other things which are wholly or primarily concerned with a transferred matter.

(8) In subsection (7) "transferred matter", in relation to a power conferred by this section, means a matter which, when the power is exercised, is a transferred matter within the meaning of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 50**New Clause**

After clause 10 insert -

*'Reports***Submission of reports**

- 10A.—(1) The chairperson must deliver the report of the inquiry to the First Minister and deputy First Minister at least two weeks before it is published (or such other period as may be agreed between the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly and the chairperson).
- (2) In this section "report" includes an interim report.'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 51**New Clause**

After clause 10 insert -

'Publication of reports

- 10B.—(1) The chairperson must make arrangements for the report of the inquiry to be published.
- (2) Subject to subsection (3), the report of the inquiry must be published in full.
- (3) The chairperson may withhold material from publication to such extent—
- (a) as is required by any statutory provision, enforceable EU obligation or rule of law, or
 - (b) as the chairperson considers to be necessary in the public interest, having regard in particular to the matters mentioned in subsection (4).
- (4) Those matters are—
- (a) the extent to which withholding material might inhibit the allaying of public concern;
 - (b) any risk of harm or damage that could be avoided or reduced by withholding any material;
 - (c) any conditions as to confidentiality subject to which a person acquired information which that person has given to the inquiry.
- (5) Subsection (4)(b) does not affect any obligation of a public authority that may arise under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- (6) In this section—
- "public authority" has the same meaning as in the Freedom of Information Act 2000;*
- "report" includes an interim report.'*

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 52**New Clause**

After clause 10 insert -

'Laying of reports before the Assembly

- 10C. Whatever is required to be published under section 10B must be laid before the Assembly by the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly, either at the time of publication or as soon afterwards as is reasonably practicable.'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 53**Clause 11**, Page 6, Line 21

Leave out 'OFMDFM may award such amounts as it' and insert 'The chairperson may, with the approval of OFMDFM, award such amounts as the chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 54****Clause 11**, Page 6, Line 26

After 'where' insert 'the chairperson with the approval of'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 55****Clause 11**, Page 6, Line 30

Leave out 'attending the inquiry to give evidence or' and insert 'giving evidence to the inquiry or attending the inquiry'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 56****Clause 11**, Page 6, Line 32

Leave out 'OFMDFM' and insert 'the chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 57****Clause 11**, Page 6, Line 35

After 'OFMDFM' insert 'and notified by OFMDFM to the chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 58****Clause 12**, Page 7, Line 1

At end insert -

'(1A) OFMDFM must pay any amounts awarded under section 11.'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 59****Clause 12**, Page 7, Line 8

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 60****Clause 13**, Page 7, Line 22

Leave out from 'fails' to the end of line 24 and insert 'without reasonable excuse—

- (a) contravenes a restriction order; or
- (b) fails to do anything which that person is required to do by a notice under section 9, is guilty of an offence.'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 61****Clause 13**, Page 7, Line 39

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 62**Clause 13**, Page 8, Line 1

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 63****Clause 13**, Page 8, Line 3

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 64****Clause 14**, Page 8, Line 13

Leave out 'a notice under section 9 or a restriction order' and insert ', or acts in breach of, a notice under section 9 or an order made by the chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 65****Clause 14**, Page 8, Line 15

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 66****Clause 18**, Page 9, Line 24

At end insert -

'(1A) Rules under subsection (1)(a) may in particular—

- (a) provide that evidence given for the purposes of any particular part of the inquiry must not be disclosed—
 - (i) in the proceedings of any other part of the inquiry unless the chairperson so orders; or
 - (ii) in any criminal or civil proceedings in Northern Ireland unless it is necessary to avoid a breach of Convention rights (within the meaning of the Human Rights Act 1998);
- (b) make provision for orders similar to witness anonymity orders within the meaning of section 86 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009.'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 67****Clause 18**, Page 9, Line 28

Leave out 'inquiry panel' and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 68****Clause 18**, Page 9, Line 28

Leave out 'panel' in the second place where it occurs and insert 'chairperson'

*The First Minister and deputy First Minister***Amendment 69****Clause 19**, Page 9, Line 34

After 'Northern Ireland' insert 'except as provided by subsection (2).

(2) The powers conferred by section 9 are not exercisable so as to require any evidence, document or other thing to be given, produced or provided by or on behalf of Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, the Scottish Ministers or the Welsh Ministers.'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 70

Clause 20, Page 10, Line 1

Leave out subsection (2)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 71

Clause 21, Page 10, Line 10

At end insert -

“abuse” includes physical or mental violence, injury, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse;

Mr Jim Allister

Amendment 72

Clause 21, Page 10, Line 11

At end insert -

“chairperson” means chairperson of the inquiry;

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 73

Clause 21, Page 10, Line 11

At end insert -

“child” means any person less than 18 years old;

Mr Jim Allister

Amendment 74

Clause 21, Page 10, Line 12

At end insert -

“harm” includes death or injury;

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 75

Clause 21, Page 10, Line 13

At end insert -

“institution” means any body, society or organisation having responsibility for the care, health or welfare of children in Northern Ireland which, during the period between 1922 and 1995, provided residential accommodation and took decisions about and made provision for the day to day care of children;

Mr Jim Allister

Amendment 76

Clause 21, Page 10, Line 15

At end insert -

“member” includes chairperson;

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 77

Clause 21, Page 10

Leave out line 18

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 78

Clause 21, Page 10, Line 22

Leave out 'presiding member' and insert 'chairperson'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Amendment 79

Long Title

Leave out '1945' and insert '1922'

The First Minister and deputy First Minister

Charities Bill

Marshalled List of Amendments

Consideration Stage

Tuesday 20 November 2012

Amendments tabled up to 9.30am Thursday, 15 November 2012 and selected for debate
The Bill will be considered in the following order-
Clauses, Schedules and Long Title

Amendment 1
New Clause

After clause 2 insert -

'Debt relief orders, debt relief restrictions orders and bankruptcy restrictions orders

2A.—(1) The 2008 Act shall be amended as follows.

- (2) In section 33 (power to act for protection of charities), in subsection (4)(a) at the end of sub-paragraph (ii) there shall be added "or
- (iii) having previously been the subject of a debt relief order, has been discharged from all the qualifying debts under the debt relief order;"
- (3) In section 86 (persons disqualified for being trustees of a charity)—
- (a) in subsection (1)—
- (i) in paragraph (b), after the word "discharged" there shall be inserted the words "or D is the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order";
- (ii) after paragraph (g) there shall be added the following paragraph—
- “(h) D is subject to—
- (i) a moratorium period under a debt relief order; or
- (ii) a debt relief restrictions order.”;
- (b) in subsection (2)—
- (i) in paragraph (b), for the words "or the sequestration" there shall be substituted the words ", the sequestration or the making of the bankruptcy restrictions order";
- (ii) in paragraph (d), for "(g) there shall be substituted "(h)";
- (c) in subsection (3), after "subsection (1)(b)" insert "or (h)".
- (4) In section 87 (person acting as charity trustee while disqualified), in subsection (2)(b) for "or (g)" there shall be substituted ",(g) or (h)".

Minister for Social Development

Clause 3

The Minister for Social Development gives notice of his intention to oppose the question that clause 3 stand part of the Bill.

Minister for Social Development

Amendment 2

Clause 6, Page 3, Line 35

Leave out 'and section 5(2) or, as the case may be, section 5(1)' and insert 'or, as the case may be, subsection (1) or (2) of section 5'

Minister for Social Development

Amendment 3

Clause 9, Page 4, Line 21

At end insert -

'(5) Any other order under this section is subject to negative resolution.'

Minister for Social Development

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 20 November 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
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules

(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

- S.R. 2012/407 The Juries (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOJ)
- S.R. 2012/413 The International Recovery of Maintenance (Hague Convention 2007 etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOJ)

For Information Only:

- S.R. 2012/405 (C.39) Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) (2011 Act) (Commencement No.4) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
- S.R. 2012/414 The Magistrates' Courts (Civil Jurisdiction and Judgements Act 1982) (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOJ)
- S.R. 2012/415 The Magistrates' Courts (Amendment No.2) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOJ)

7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
 - Corporate Plan for Education 2012-2015 and DE Business Plan 2012-2013
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 20 November 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
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12				
Superannuation Bill NIA Bill 6/11-15	12.03.12	26.03.12	28.09.12	26.09.12	22.10.12	06.11.12	19.11.12	
Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill NIA Bill 7/11-15	12.06.12	25.06.12	26.10.12	24.10.12	20.11.12			
Business Improvement Districts Bill NIA Bill 9/11-15	25.06.12	17.09.12	13.12.12					
Criminal Justice Bill NIA Bill 10/11-15	25.06.12	03.07.12	14.12.12					
Charities Bill NIA Bill 11/11-15	02.07.12	11.09.12	23.10.12	23.10.12	20.11.12			
Welfare Reform Bill NIA Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	27.11.12					
Education Bill NIA Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	03.12.12					

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
/Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill NIA Bill 15/11-15	08.10.12	16.10.12	N/A	N/A	22.10.12	05.11.12	06.11.12	
Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill NIA Bill 16/11-15	19.11.12							

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
Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill NIA Bill 12/11-15	02.07.12	25.09.12	15.02.13					

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 26 November 2012

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Assembly Business

2.1 Motion - Extension of sitting on Monday 26 November 2012 under SO 10(3A)

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 10(3A), the sitting on Monday 26 November 2012 be extended to no later than 8.30pm.

*Mr P Weir
Ms C Ruane
Mr R Swann
Mr P Ramsey
Mr S Dickson*

The Question being put, the Motion was carried without division.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement - Update on Financial Corrections by the European Commission and Departmental Response

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill, made a statement regarding an update on Financial Corrections by the European Commission and Departmental Response, following which she replied to questions.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

3.2 Statement - Northern Ireland Prison Service Outline Estate Strategy

The Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford, made a statement regarding the Northern Ireland Prison Service Outline Estate Strategy, following which he replied to questions.

3.3 Statement - Non-domestic rating: Extending support to business through the rating system

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, made a statement regarding Non-domestic rating: Extending support to business through the rating system, following which he replied to questions.

3.4 Statement - Public Service Pensions Proposals

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, made a statement regarding Public Service Pensions Proposals, following which he replied to questions.

The Speaker took the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Finance and Personnel

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson.

4.2 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.

5. Question for Urgent Oral Answer

5.1 Fire at Altnagelvin Hospital

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, responded to a Question for Urgent Oral Answer, tabled by Ms Maeve McLaughlin.

6. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

6.1 Statement - Public Service Pensions Proposals (Cont'd)

Questions resumed on the statement.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

7. Committee Business

7.1 Motion - Extension of Committee Stage: Education Bill (NIA 14/11-15)

Proposed:

That, in accordance with Standing Order 33(4), the period referred to in Standing Order 33(2) be extended to 8 April 2013 in relation to the Committee Stage of the Education Bill (NIA 14/11-15).

Chairperson, Committee for Education

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

7.2 Motion - Awareness of Small Business Research Initiative

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls upon the Executive to actively promote and raise awareness and understanding of the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) across the public sector; and further calls upon the Executive to put in place appropriate measures to increase uptake of the SBRI by Departments and the wider public sector to help stimulate and drive innovation, especially in local micro-businesses and small and medium-sized enterprises.

Chairperson, Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

7.3 Motion - Review into Bovine Tuberculosis

Proposed:

That this Assembly approves the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development's report on its Review into Bovine Tuberculosis; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to bring forward a timetable for implementing the recommendations contained in the report.

Chairperson, Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

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 6.35pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

26 November 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 21 - 26 November 2012

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
 - Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill (NIA 7/11-15) (as amended at Consideration Stage) (OFMDFM)
 - Charities Bill (NIA 11/11-15) (as amended at Consideration Stage) (DSD)
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
5. Assembly Reports
 - Report on Statutory Committee Activity on European Issues NIA 81/11-15 (Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister)
6. Statutory Rules

(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

 - S.R. 2012/403 Mental Health (Private Hospitals) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DHSSPS)
 - S.R. 2012/416 Cattle Identification (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)
 - S.R. 2012/419 The Legal Advice and Assistance (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOJ)

For Information Only:

 - S.R. 2012/406 (C.40) The Civil Registration (2011 Act) (Commencement No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DFP)
 - S.R. 2012/409 The Off-Street Parking (Amendment No.6) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
 - S.R. 2012/410 The Roads (Speed Limit) (No.4) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
 - S.R. 2012/411 The Control of Traffic (Apsley Street, Belfast) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
 - S.R. 2012/412 The Bus Lanes (East Bridge Street and Cromac Street, Belfast) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
 - S.R. 2012/418 The Cycle Routes (Amendment No.6) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
 - Consultation on Proposals to Amend - The Weights and Measures (Miscellaneous Foods) Order (Northern Ireland) 1989, The Weights and Measures (Miscellaneous Foods) Order (Northern Ireland) 1989 and The Weights and Measures (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 (DETI)
 - Consultation on Proposed Increases to Contributions for Members of the NI Teachers' Pension Scheme (DE)
 - Consultation Paper – Apartments (NI Law Commission)

9. Departmental Publications

- Libraries NI Annual Report and Accounts 2011-12 (DCAL)

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 27 November 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 Statement - North South Ministerial Council Meeting in Agriculture Sectoral Format

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council meeting in agriculture sectoral format, held on 31 October, following which she replied to questions.

2.2 Second Stage - Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill (NIA 16/11-15)

The Minister for Regional Development, Mr Danny Kennedy, moved the Second Stage of the Water and Sewerage Services Bill (NIA 16/11-15).

Debate ensued.

The Water and Sewerage Services Bill passed Second Stage without division.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion - EU funding for 2014-2020

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Regional Development to work in partnership with the Irish Government to advance the 'pre identified' projects list for inclusion in the next round of EU funding for 2014-2020.

*Mr S Lynch
Mr D McAleer
Mr C Ó hOisín*

3.2 Amendment No.1

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'Development' and insert:

'to work with his counterparts in the Irish, Scottish, Welsh and British Governments in seeking the maximum amount of EU funding available for transport; and further calls on the European Commission to recognise Northern Ireland's variance in terms of transport needs and existing infrastructure.'

*Mr S Dickson
Mr K McCarthy*

3.3 Amendment No.2

Proposed:

At end insert:

‘; and, under the auspices of the NSMC transport sector which has responsibility for reviewing and updating the transport policy for the island, to co-ordinate the transport aspects of EU cross-border programmes and develop plans for specific cross-border transport projects.’

Mr J Dallat

Mr C Eastwood

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.29pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the First Minister, Rt Hon Peter Robinson. The junior Minister, Mr Jonathan Bell, also answered a number of questions.

4.2 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford.

5. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Motion - EU funding for 2014-2020 (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Question being put, Amendment No. 1 was **made** without division.

Amendment No. 2 was not put.

The Question being put, the Motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

6. Adjournment

Mr Ross Hussey spoke to his topic on the future of the St Lucia site, Omagh.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 4.00pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

27 November 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 27 November 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
 - The Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Records 2011-12 (PRONI/DCAL)
 - An Independent Review of the Work Capability Assessment - Year Three and DSD's
 - Response to the Report (DSD)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules

(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

For Information Only:
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
 - A Joint Consultation on Draft Regulations - Repeal of the Pedlars Acts (UK-wide), and Changes to Street Trading Legislation in England and Wales and Northern Ireland (DSD)
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 27 November 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
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12				
Superannuation Bill NIA Bill 6/11-15	12.03.12	26.03.12	28.09.12	26.09.12	22.10.12	06.11.12	19.11.12	
Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill NIA Bill 7/11-15	12.06.12	25.06.12	26.10.12	24.10.12	20.11.12			
Business Improvement Districts Bill NIA Bill 9/11-15	25.06.12	17.09.12	13.12.12					
Criminal Justice Bill NIA Bill 10/11-15	25.06.12	03.07.12	14.12.12					
Charities Bill NIA Bill 11/11-15	02.07.12	11.09.12	23.10.12	23.10.12	20.11.12			
Welfare Reform Bill NIA Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	27.11.12					
Education Bill NIA Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	03.12.12					

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
/Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill NIA Bill 15/11-15	08.10.12	16.10.12	N/A	N/A	22.10.12	05.11.12	06.11.12	
Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill NIA Bill 16/11-15	19.11.12	27.11.12	29.01.12					

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
Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill NIA Bill 12/11-15	02.07.12	25.09.12	15.02.13					

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.

