
OFFICIAL REPORT

(HANSARD)

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NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 14 November 2008

Written Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Country of Origin Labelling

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline her position on country of origin labelling. (AQW 1986/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): Primary responsibility for food labelling rests with the Food Standards Agency. However, my Department is responsible for the EU-wide Beef Labelling Regulations which require all operators in the supply chain down to retail level, but excluding food service, to label their beef with specified traceability and origin information. This includes the country, or countries, in which the animal was born, reared and slaughtered. These regulations are enforced by DARD inspectors in meat plants and by local authority Environmental Health Officers in retail outlets.

Although origin labelling of beef in the food service sector lies outside the Beef Labelling Regulations, I am keen that all consumers should be provided with clear reliable information about the origin and provenance of the beef they purchase. My officials are monitoring developments in the South and are also working closely with the Food Standards Agency on an EU proposal for a new regulation on the provision of food information to consumers, which may support developments in this area. My Department, in conjunction with the food service sector and the LMC, is taking forward a voluntary labelling pilot scheme in a number of local restaurants. While I have not ruled out the introduction of compulsory origin labelling of beef in the food service sector, I want to give the voluntary scheme time to become established, so that we can make a proper assessment of the best way forward.

Overflowing of the River Loop

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she has taken to ensure that the people who suffered damage from flooding, due to the overflowing of the River Loop at Castlereagh Road, will not suffer from flooding in the future. (AQW 2048/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I am pleased to confirm that the Rivers Agency has completed a comprehensive study of the Loop River system and identified a viable flood alleviation scheme for the Loop River, including the reaches in the vicinity of Castlereagh Road and Ladas Drive. The Agency is aiming to commence the scheme in the 2010/2011 financial year. Rivers Agency, in cooperation with DRD Roads Service, proposes interim maintenance / silt cleaning works on watercourse culverts in the vicinity to reduce risk until the main scheme is in place. The main scheme will provide a high degree of flood protection consistent with the Agency's standards for urban areas, however it is not possible to guarantee immunity from flooding in all circumstances.

Location of Public Sector Jobs

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to set out her Department's plans to decentralise Departmental employment and operations of its agencies to locations outside Belfast. (AQW 2172/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Following publication of the Bain Review, I will give consideration along with Executive Colleagues to the relocation of DARD HQ as suggested in the report. Also consideration may be given to the relocation of individual posts should business needs require this.

DARD already has a number of offices and posts in various locations throughout the North of Ireland.

Transfer of Rural Development Measures

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans her Department has to transfer responsibility for the delivery of rural development measures to local government and social partners. (AQW 2212/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I have introduced subordinate legislation to enable councils to form themselves into Joint Committees for the purposes of their role with the newly formed local action groups implementing Axes 3 and 4 of the NI Rural Development Programme 2007-13. In fulfilling this role they act as agents for my Department and will have both an important administrative and governance role in the financial assistance to projects under Axes 3 and 4 of the Programme. This is not a transfer of a responsibility as DARD remains accountable for programme funds.

However Local Government and the Social Partners are represented on the Local Action Groups and it is they who will make the decisions about where the funds should be distributed.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Irish Colleges Funding

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) what contact his Department has had with the Republic of Ireland Government on its plans to cut funding for Irish colleges; and (ii) what effect this will have on the Irish language service that the Gaeltacht provides for people in Northern Ireland. (AQW 1988/09)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr G Campbell): My Department has not had any contact with the Government of the Irish Republic on its plans to cut funding for Irish colleges. The Department is not in position to assess at this stage what effect this might have for people in Northern Ireland.

Public Appointments

Ms Purvis asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail, for each of the last 3 years, (i) all public appointments filled by his Department; (ii) public appointments still outstanding; and (iii) the grounds on which some appointments were not made; for his assessment of (a) the process adopted for public appointments; and (b) the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments guidance; and what action he is taking to ensure more efficient application of the procedures. (AQW 2019/09)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure:

(i) Set out below are all public appointments made by my Department since January 2005.

Year	Body	Number of Appointments Made (Including Reappointments)
2005	Armagh Observatory & Planetarium	1
	Arts Council of Northern Ireland	1
	Fisheries Conservancy Board	12
	Northern Ireland Screen Commission	1
	Total	15

Year	Body	Number of Appointments Made (Including Reappointments)
2006	Armagh Observatory & Planetarium	3
	National Museums & Galleries of Northern Ireland	12
	Northern Ireland Museums Council	9
	Total	24
2007	Architecture & the Built Environment Ministerial Advisory Group	9
	Arts Council of Northern Ireland	15
	Fisheries Conservancy Board	1
	Northern Ireland Events Company	3
	Northern Ireland Screen Commission	6
	Total	34
2008 (to 31/10/08)	Architecture & the Built Environment Ministerial Advisory Group	1
	Arts Council of Northern Ireland	1
	Fisheries Conservancy Board	5
	National Museums & Galleries of Northern Ireland	15
	Northern Ireland Screen Commission	6
	Sport Northern Ireland	15
	Total	43

- (ii) My Department recently conducted appointment processes for the positions of Chair to NI Screen, Chair to the New Northern Ireland Library Authority and Board Membership of the Armagh Observatory & Planetarium Management Committee. I am currently considering the outcome of these processes. In the near future the Department will be completing competitions for the following public appointments: Chair to the National Museums & Galleries of Northern Ireland, Vice-Chair to Sport Northern Ireland and Board membership of the New Northern Ireland Library Authority.
- (iii) Where an appointment has not been made this has been due to the process failing to produce a sufficient range of candidates from which to make a choice. In these instances the process has been extended with the aim of identifying a larger pool of suitably qualified candidates.
- (a) All DCAL public appointments have been made in line with the Code of Practice as set out by OCPA NI. This guidance stems from the Nolan Principles of Public Life which ensure an appointments process built on the merit principle.
- OCPA NI Kitemarks used in advertisements for all appointments, publicly demonstrate my Department's commitment to the OCPA Code of Practice and the merit principle.
- Independent scrutiny has been applied to all public appointments made within my Department.
- (b) OCPA NI is currently overseeing the development of a new Code of Practice. DCAL, along with other Departments and stakeholders will fully engage with, and contribute, to the review process.
- My Department conducts all public appointment processes in line with the OCPA NI Code of Practice and supplements this with guidance set out by Central Appointments Unit, OFMdfM.

Location of Public Sector Jobs

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to set out his Department's plans to decentralise Departmental employment and operations of its agencies to locations outside Belfast. (AQW 2201/09)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: As the Member will be aware, there has already been significant debate around the relocation of public sector jobs outside of Belfast. As recently as the 21 October the Assembly discussed this issue in the context of the findings of the Bain report on Public Sector jobs which was published on 30 September 2008.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel has recently written to Ministerial colleagues seeking their initial views on the report and I understand will be considering all responses.

Professor Bain's report on this matter provides a useful framework around which to discuss this important issue. The report lists the Northern Ireland Library Authority as one of a pool of candidates which presents an opportunity for consideration in terms of the location of public sector jobs.

Consideration of a permanent location for the Northern Ireland Library Authority will commence during 2009, and government policy on location of public sector jobs, the business needs of the service, and equality considerations will provide the context for that decision.

It is anticipated however that a range of administrative functions of the Northern Ireland Library Authority will continue to be located in existing major libraries or library buildings across Northern Ireland, and the Headquarters will remain small, possibly 30-35 posts. In this way a degree of dispersal of posts across the main towns will remain a feature of the service.

Achievement of Rathfriland Motor Club Ltd

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he will host an event in Parliament Buildings to recognise the achievement of Rathfriland Motor Club Ltd, which has been awarded the top prize in the 2008 JLT Sport MSA Club of the Year awards. (AQW 2207/09)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am aware of the recent achievements of Rathfriland Motor Club Ltd in winning the 2008 JLT Sport MSA Club of the Year Award and I have asked my officials to bring forward proposals for the most appropriate way to recognise this achievement.

EDUCATION

School Leavers

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of pupils who left school with no qualifications, as a percentage of the total number of school leavers, in the East Belfast constituency, for each of the last 5 years. (AQW 825/09)

The Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Please see the table below.

Percentage of school leavers resident in the East Belfast parliamentary constituency achieving no formal qualifications 2001/02 to 2006/07

	East Belfast constituency		Northern Ireland	
	Number	%	Number	%
2006/07	32	3.5	744	3.0
2005/06	25	2.8	817	3.2
2004/05	38	4.0	873	3.5
2003/04	50	5.2	1,268	4.9
2002/03	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2001/02	58	5.8	1,308	5.2

Source: School Leavers Survey. Due to technical problems in schools no data for the 2002/03 academic year are available.

Primary School Pupils

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage, of primary school pupils educated in the (i) maintained sector; (ii) controlled sector; (iii) integrated sector; (iv) gaelscoileanna (Irish medium) sector; (v) other. (AQW 853/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Management type	Primary ¹		Post primary	
	Number of pupils	Percentage of total	Number of pupils	Percentage of total
Maintained	76,321	45.8	40,763	27.6
Controlled	78,037	46.8	47,996	32.4
Integrated	7,620	4.6	11,247	7.6
Irish Medium ²	2,132	1.3	506	0.3
Other	2,529	1.5	47,430	32.1
Total	166,639	100.0	147,942	100.0

Source: School census 2007/08

Note:

1. Primary includes nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
2. The Irish Medium sector includes one Irish Medium controlled school with an enrolment of 71 pupils and one Irish Medium Catholic maintained of 159 pupils.
3. Enrolments by school management type are available on the DE website at http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch_pg/32-statistics_and_research_statistics_on_education_pg/32_statistics_and_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils_pg/32_statistics_and_research-northernirelandsummarydata_pg.htm

Post-Primary School Pupils

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage, of post-primary school pupils educated in the (i) maintained sector; (ii) controlled sector; (iii) integrated sector; (iv) gaelscoileanna (Irish medium) sector; (v) other. (AQW 854/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sa tábla thíos.

The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Management type	Primary ¹		Post primary	
	Number of pupils	Percentage of total	Number of pupils	Percentage of total
Maintained	76,321	45.8	40,763	27.6
Controlled	78,037	46.8	47,996	32.4
Integrated	7,620	4.6	11,247	7.6
Irish Medium ²	2,132	1.3	506	0.3
Other	2,529	1.5	47,430	32.1
Total	166,639	100.0	147,942	100.0

Source: School census 2007/08

Note:

4. Primary includes nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
5. The Irish Medium sector includes one Irish Medium controlled school with an enrolment of 71 pupils and one Irish Medium Catholic maintained of 159 pupils.
6. Enrolments by school management type are available on the DE website at http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch_pg/32-statistics_and_research_statistics_on_education_pg/32_statistics_and_research-numbersofschoolsandpupils_pg/32_statistics_and_research-northernirelandsummarydata_pg.htm

Primary Pupils

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Education to detail the average amount spent per primary 7 pupil in (i) controlled sector schools; and (ii) Irish language schools, in the 2007-2008 school year. (AQW 1445/09)

The Minister of Education: Faoin Fhoirmle Comh-mhaoinithe, faigheann gach scoil a bhfuil imthosca comhchosúla acu na leibhéil chéanna maoinithe, chun dul i ngleic le riachtanas atá sainaitheanta.

Under the Common Funding Formula all schools with similar circumstances receive similar levels of funding, to address identified need. Irish-medium schools have additional costs associated with their particular type of provision and the Common Funding Formula provides for extra support for these schools to reflect the costs associated with the development of curriculum materials and to recognise the additional costs incurred in teaching English at Key Stage 2 in Irish-medium primary schools. As an emerging sector, Irish-medium schools have smaller enrolments than average enrolments across controlled schools, and receive higher levels of curriculum support funding for smaller schools. This is reflected in higher average per pupil funding levels in Irish-medium schools.

It is not possible to provide figures based on an academic year, nor is it possible to say how much is spent on a specific year group as under the Common Funding Formula schools and their Boards of Governors determine the needs and priorities of their school.

Information in relation to the average per pupil funding delegated to schools is not broken down into year groups. The average funding attracted by a primary 7 pupil is the same as the funding attracted by pupils in primary years 1 to 6.

The information shown below refers to the average funding per primary pupil, (including funding allocated directly to schools from the Children and Young People Funding Package) made available for controlled sector schools and Irish-medium schools in the 2007/08 financial year under the Local Management of Schools (LMS) Common Funding Formula arrangements. The figures exclude those schools with nursery classes or special units, as funding allocations for a nursery class or special unit pupil cannot be disaggregated from the funding allocations for a primary pupil in these schools.

	Average amount per primary pupil
Controlled Sector Schools	£2,509
Irish-medium Schools	£3,025

Irish Language Medium Schools

Mr Burnside asked the Minister of Education to detail, in the last two years, the administrative expenses in her Department and associated bodies, for the operation of Irish language medium schools. (AQW 1994/09)

The Minister of Education: Níl an Roinn Oideachais ábalta na costais riaracháin a bhaineann le feidhmiú na nGaelscoileanna a dhíchomhbhailiú.

The Department of Education cannot disaggregate the administrative costs associated with the operation of Irish language medium schools.

The Department of Education funds Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, the Council for Irish Medium schools, to undertake a range of activities in relation to Irish Medium Education. While again it is not possible to disaggregate the amount expended by Comhairle in relation to the operation of Irish Medium schools, its overall administrative budget for the years in question was:

	2006/07 £	2007/08 £
Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta	525,000	591,000

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education for an update on the review of services that her Department has responsibility for under Neighbourhood Renewal; and when the findings will be made public. (AQW 2000/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá m'óifigigh ag ullmhú tuairisce i ndiaidh athbhreithnithe a rinneadh ar na seirbhísí a bhí aitheanta ag an DSD mar chuid de na freagrachtaí a bhaineann le mo roinn. Nuair a bheidh ábhair na tuairisce seo measúnaithe agam, tabharfaidh mé comhairle don DSD dá réir sin.

My officials are preparing a report following a review of the services that DSD has identified as being the responsibility of my department.

Once I have considered the content of this report I will advise DSD accordingly.

Teacher Vacancies

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many job vacancies there are for teachers in the maintained sector. (AQW 2020/09)

The Minister of Education: The Department seeks information on teacher vacancies from all grant-aided schools on an annual basis. The information provides a “snapshot” of vacancies at a specific date each year. The latest information available identifies vacancies at 2 November 2007, and details for the maintained and integrated sectors are set out below:

	No. of vacancies still to be filled during the 2007/08 academic year in the integrated sector ¹			at 2nd November 2007
	Full-time, Permanent	Part-time, Permanent	Full-time, Temporary	Part-time, Temporary
Primary	2	1	0	1
Post-Primary	4	0	1	0
Total	6	1	1	1

1. Includes Controlled Integrated and Grant Maintained Integrated.

	No. of vacancies still to be filled during the 2007/08 academic year in the integrated sector ¹			at 2nd November 2007
	Full-time, Permanent	Part-time, Permanent	Full-time, Temporary	Part-time, Temporary
Primary ²	30	2	8	3
Special	0	0	0	0
Post-Primary	13	0	3	1
Total	43	2	11	4

1. Includes Catholic Maintained and excludes Other Maintained

2. Primary includes nursery, primary and preparatory departments of grammar schools.

Tá an Roinn ag iarraidh sonraí a fháil ó scoileanna faoi láthair maidir leis na folúntais do mhúinteoirí atá ann ar 3 Samhain 2008.

The Department is currently seeking data from schools on teacher vacancies which exist at 3 November 2008.

Teacher Vacancies

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many job vacancies there are for teachers in the integrated sector. (AQW 2021/09)

The Minister of Education: The Department seeks information on teacher vacancies from all grant-aided schools on an annual basis. The information provides a “snapshot” of vacancies at a specific date each year.

The latest information available identifies vacancies at 2 November 2007, and details for the maintained and integrated sectors are set out below:

	No. of vacancies still to be filled during the 2007/08 academic year in the integrated sector ¹			at 2nd November 2007
	Full-time, Permanent	Part-time, Permanent	Full-time, Temporary	Part-time, Temporary
Primary	2	1	0	1
Post-Primary	4	0	1	0
Total	6	1	1	1

3. Includes Controlled Integrated and Grant Maintained Integrated.

	No. of vacancies still to be filled during the 2007/08 academic year in the integrated sector ¹			at 2nd November 2007
	Full-time, Permanent	Part-time, Permanent	Full-time, Temporary	Part-time, Temporary
Primary ²	30	2	8	3
Special	0	0	0	0
Post-Primary	13	0	3	1
Total	43	2	11	4

4. Includes Catholic Maintained and excludes Other Maintained

5. Primary includes nursery, primary and preparatory departments of grammar schools.

Tá an Roinn ag iarraidh sonraí a fháil ó scoileanna faoi láthair maidir leis na folúntais do mhúinteoirí atá ann ar 3 Samhain 2008.

The Department is currently seeking data from schools on teacher vacancies which exist at 3 November 2008.

Balmoral High School

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Post Project Evaluation report into the Balmoral High School PFI/PPP project. (AQW 2072/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá an obair mheasúnaithe fós le tabhairt chun críche. Tabharfaidh mé an t-eolas nuair a bheas sé ar fáil.

The evaluation work has still to be completed. I will provide the information when it is available.

Classroom Assistants

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail her Department's policy on the delivery of training for classroom assistants who are supporting children with complex communication needs. (AQW 2119/09)

The Minister of Education: Níl beartas sonrath ag an Roinn Oideachais maidir le soláthar oiliúna do chúntóirí ranga a thugann tacaíocht do pháistí a bhfuil riachtanais chasta cumarsáide acu.

The Department of Education does not have a specific policy regarding the delivery of training for classroom assistants who are supporting children with complex communication needs.

There is, however, a target in each Education and Library Board's Resource Allocation Plan that requires Boards to ensure that arrangements for necessary training of teachers and classroom assistants are in place when a school is named in a statement of special educational need.

Enrolment for Post Primary Schools

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Education if her Department has considered increasing enrolment for post primary schools to create super schools of 2000-3000 pupils; and if so, (i) how advanced are discussions; and (ii) which constituencies are involved. (AQW 2146/09)

The Minister of Education: Níl aon phleananna ann ‘scoileanna ollmhóra’ a chruthú a bhfuil rolluithe de 2,000-3,000 dalta acu.

There are no plans to create ‘super schools’ with enrolments of 2,000-3,000 pupils. It should be noted however that area based planning of post-primary provision could potentially result in proposed arrangements for post-primary provision which might necessitate the Department of Education reviewing the way in which numbers are managed at individual schools to encourage and facilitate growth in collaborative working in support of the Entitlement Framework.

Current Census Exercise

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 1874/09, when data for the 2006/07 and 2007/08 school years, being collected as part of the current census exercise, will be made available to the public. (AQW 2151/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá sonraí ar thinreamh do na scoilbhlianta 2006/07 agus 2007/08 á mbailiú faoi láthair mar chuid de dhaonáireamh na scoile.

Attendance data for the 2006/07 and 2007/08 school years are currently being collected as part of the school census. The data will then be subject to extensive validation and it is hoped that initial outputs will be available at the end of February 2009.

EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Further Education Lecturers Pay Dispute

Mr Butler asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the Further Education lecturers pay dispute, in light of the comments by the Chief Secretary of the Treasury in relation to the 2% pay limit; and what steps he is taking to address this matter. (AQW 1847/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): I plan to meet with the Minister for Finance and Personnel to discuss the comments made by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. However, the Department of Finance and Personnel has indicated that the 2008-09 pay round continues to be constrained by a 2% basic award limit, which is included within a 3.75% earnings growth threshold.

In accordance with the Executive’s pay policy, public sector staff groups must adhere to these limits unless there is a strong evidence-based case for setting them aside. Such a case might involve factors such as a contractual entitlement or labour market distortion. These factors do not apply in determining the pay of Further Education lecturers in Northern Ireland. A labour market argument has already been tested but was rejected by the Public Sector Pay Committee in February 2007.

Further Education Centres of Excellence

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has to engage with the private sector about the development of centres of excellence for (i) vocational; (ii) professional; and (iii) technical education. (AQW 2032/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: In conjunction with Further Education Colleges, my Department has commissioned a review of Further Education Centres of Excellence. The completion of this review included extensive consultation with a range of interested groups, including local employers and employer representative bodies. The final report on the review is expected shortly and will inform the way forward for

this initiative. Employers, and other stakeholders, will be invited to comment on any proposals for change to the existing Centres of Excellence arrangements.

Location of Public Sector Jobs

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail his Department's plans to decentralise departmental employment and/or operations of its agencies, to locations outside of Belfast. (AQW 2092/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department for Employment and Learning has no immediate plans to further decentralise to locations outside the Belfast area. The Department already delivers public services across Northern Ireland with approximately fifty per cent of staff (949 of 1889) working in thirty one offices outside the greater Belfast area. Of those based in the Belfast area, 29% (270) are delivering frontline services to the public, with a relatively small core providing support in Headquarters buildings.

I am however supportive of the prudent relocation of public sector posts to regional areas in the interests of promoting economic stability and sustainability.

North West Regional College

Mrs McGill asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if there is a day to day senior manager employed on site at the (i) Strabane campus; and (ii) Limavady campus, of the North West Regional College. (AQW 2107/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The North West Regional College (NWRC) has informed me that its Limavady campus has a full-time manager, on site.

I understand, also, that there is provision for a full-time manager on the site of the Strabane campus. This post is vacant following a resignation and the process for appointing a successor is now under way, in the meantime interim arrangements are in place.

North West Regional College

Mrs McGill asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if the full review of the North West Regional College estate been completed and submitted to his Department. (AQW 2109/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department continues to work with the North West Regional College to review the Estates Strategy for all its campuses including Limavady and Strabane. While the full review has not yet been completed, good progress has been made. In order to conclude the Estates Strategy and any accommodation development proposals that may arise from it the College has begun a tender exercise to secure professional advice. I look forward to the receipt of the review upon its completion.

North West Regional College

Mrs McGill asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if there is an annual budget for marketing the Strabane campus of the North West Regional College and to detail the amount for the academic year 2008/09. (AQW 2110/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department provides a recurrent block grant allocation for each of the Further Education Colleges to meet all of the recurrent costs of the college, including marketing. For the 2008/09 academic year the North West Regional College will receive £22,637,800 and it is the role of the Governing Body to determine how this funding is expended in support of activities permitted under the Further Education (NI) Order 1997.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Waste Management Projects

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail which waste management projects (i) have received money from Invest NI, including the amount and date received; and (ii) have applied for but did not receive funding from Invest NI. (AQW 2003/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): The amount offered through Direct Invest NI since 2002 equates to £998,551, of which £423,693 has been drawn down.

Under the Department of Environment Waste Management Industry Fund which is administered by Invest NI, £ 1,049,462 has been offered of which £ 371,089 has been drawn down.

EREF

Following a competitive selection process for the Environment and Renewable Energy Fund DETI transferred eight projects to Invest NI in June 2007 for further assessment. Of these, three projects have been approved and a further project is in the final stages of appraisal. As several of the projects are currently negotiating private sector funds specific details of the Invest NI offers are commercially sensitive and cannot be provided at this stage. None of the projects have received any funding from Invest NI to date.

Envirowise Programme

Invest NI also funds the Envirowise programme. Envirowise is a government-funded programme providing free, confidential advice to UK businesses to help increase profitability and improve resource efficiency through reducing environmental impact. Waste management/minimisation and clean technology are key themes of the Envirowise programme which is funded locally by Invest NI. Since 1994, Envirowise has helped UK industry to save more than £1 billion.

Invest NI has funded the delivery of Envirowise in Northern Ireland by providing £661,562 of funding from April 2003 to March 2008. An additional £190,255 of DEFRA funding also supported the programme in Northern Ireland over this period.

The current contract for programme delivery in 2008/09 is for £621,000, of which £228,000 has been paid to date.

The Social Entrepreneurship Programme has helped five waste start-up companies by providing them each with a £5,000 start up grant.

The attached tables give a break down of Invest NI Assistance and those applicants who were unsuccessful.

INVEST NI ASSISTANCE WASTE MANAGEMENT INDUSTRY FUND

Client	Amount Offered	Date of Offer	Paid to Date
Asset Management Ireland Limited	14,000	27-Mar-03	12,999
Traynors Ltd	30,405	16-Apr-03	24,567
Michael Dorman	10,980	30-Apr-03	3,698
Patrick Durkan	100,000	09-May-03	97,026
S N Lennox Ltd	50,000	23-Jun-03	47,799
Greenacre Composting Enterprises Ltd	100,000	15-May-03	
Kosmos Glass Recycling Limited	158,750	11-Jul-03	155,000
Felix Mc Parland & Co Ltd	50,000	31-Mar-04	30,000
Natural World Products Ltd	45,000	31-Mar-04	0
Harry, Philip, Alan and Geoffrey Crozier	55,500	08-Jun-04	0
Benny O'Neill	27,000	01-Jun-04	0
Patrick McCartan	21,600	14-Jun-04	0

Client	Amount Offered	Date of Offer	Paid to Date
Robert Delaney	72,750	01-Jun-04	0
Eastwood Limited	94,500	14-Jun-04	0
Chris Moran	4,200	22-Jun-04	0
Curran Environmental Recycling Limited	14,777	23-Jul-04	0
Clearway Disposals Ltd	200,000	13-Oct-04	0
Totals	1,049,462		371,089

WASTE MANAGEMENT SELECTIVE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Client	Amount Offered	Date of Offer	Paid to Date
Robert Delaney T/A Organic Waste Recycling	93,165	01-Jun-04	16,431
Greenacre Composting Enterprises Ltd	101,965	15-May-03	56,425
Amber Merchants Limited	53,000	28-Jan-04	14,278
Eastwood Limited	118,043	14-Jun-04	83,530
Patrick Durkan	28,050	31-Mar-03	23,184
Patrick Durkan	100,000	09-May-03	10,000
Asset Management (Ireland) Limited	9,620	27-Mar-03	4,029
Asset Management (Ireland) Limited	6,912	11-Mar-04	6,210
Asset Management (Ireland) Limited	14,000	25-Apr-05	14,000
Asset Management (Ireland) Limited	11,480	06-Oct-06	7,544
Asset Management (Ireland) Limited	33,096	11-Jul-08	0
Enva (NI) Limited	1,096	22-Apr-02	1,096
Enva (NI) Limited	19,250	14-Aug-02	5,250
African Clothing Exports Ltd	40,000	05-Aug-03	40,000
Bailey Waste Recycling	1,096	2-Apr-02	0
Bailey Waste Recycling	9,600	06-Sep-02	9,600
F Mc Parland & Co Ltd	2,250	09-Jul-03	2,250
F Mc Parland and Company	23,200	31-Mar-04	20,000
Menabb Brothers (Waste Disposal) Ltd	1,940	03-Aug-04	1,940
Miceal Haughey	4,225	10-May-04	42,25
Natural World Products Ltd	68,155	31-Mar-03	52,911
Natural World Products Ltd	10,037	17-Mar-04	750
Natural World Products Ltd	15,000	31-Mar-04	11,563
Natural World Products Ltd	1,200	22-Jul-04	999
Natural World Products Ltd	6,400	01-Nov-06	0
NWP Recycling Ltd	3,375	30-Apr-02	3,375
NWP Recycling Ltd	39,200	11-Oct-05	0
NWP Recycling Ltd	24,831	08-Dec-06	0
NWP Recycling Ltd	18,800	13-Aug-08	0
Patrick McCartan	29,150	14-Jun-04	0

Client	Amount Offered	Date of Offer	Paid to Date
Paul O'Meara	1,100	12-Dec-02	1,100
Paul O'Meara	15,300	31-Mar-03	6,000
R 4 Limited	5,638	21-Jan-03	5,638
R 4 Limited	10,000	20-Aug-03	10,000
Regen Waste Ltd	16,480	17-Feb-05	15,590
Regen Waste Ltd	36,328	01-Mar-05	0
Enviroways Technologies Ltd	12,480	29-Oct -08	0
Safety Solutions NI Ltd	13,089	23-Oct-07	0
Totals	998,551		423,693

WASTE MANAGEMENT INDUSTRY FUND UNSUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS

ADCO Recycling	K & T Clarke Gases
Adrian Cathers	Kinturk Compost
All Ireland Environmental Solutions Ltd	MacNabb Bros (Waste Disposal) Ltd
Allen Johnston	Macskips
Allied Wastes Industry	MacWaste Ltd
ALR Waste Management Ltd	Marin McLaughlin
Atlas Environmental (NI) Ltd	MC Reclamation
Aughrim Engineering & Skip Services	McCaffrey Recycling Ltd
BPF Recycling Plastics	McGurk Recycling Ltd
Bryson House Enterprises Ltd	McKelvey Recycling Ltd
Capital Fuels Ltd	Montupet UK Ltd
Capper Trading Ltd	Newco Ltd
City Industrial Waste Ind	NIPAK Ltd
Clinty Regen Ltd	P & V McKavanagh
Colin Glen contractors	Pallets Direct
Conway Bros	Park Ferguson
Damien Mulholland	Paul O'Meara
Delft Geotechnics Ireland Ltd	Practical Waste Solutions Ltd
Donald Montgomery	R J Maxwell & Son
Echemsco Recycling	Re-Spin
Eco Waste Recycling & Disposal Ltd	ROF Services
Eglinton (Timber Products) Ltd	Rooney Tyre Recycling Ltd
Elaine McConnell	S C L Onyx
Environmental Systems & Solutions Ltd	Short Brothers
Enviros Consulting Ltd	Sprenky Recycling
Erne Worm Farm	Stephen McLarnon
Euro-Recycle	Sterile Technologies
G Molloy Automobile Mercedes & Parts	Superjet
Glassdon Waste	Thomas Hamill & Sons

Grass Roots	Transco Waste
Grease Trap Services	Waste Beater Recycling
Greenpak Cardboard Cartons	Waste Not
Haughey Metals	William Little
Irish Polymers	William Thompson
Irish Waste Services Ltd	Wilson Waste Management Ltd
JA Graham Renewable Energy Services	
James Slevin	
Jim McIlroy	
Joe Beattie	

Rose Energy Project

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to provide a copy of the (i) full commercial appraisal of the Rose Energy project completed in February 2008; and (ii) review of the commercial appraisal completed in October 2008. (AQW 2004/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The full commercial appraisal and review have been the subject of a Freedom of Information (FOI) request to Invest NI. A response to this is due by the 24th November. When Invest NI issues the response, I will provide you with the same copies of both documents, redacted as necessary under FOI legislation. I will also arrange for copies of both to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Rose Energy Project

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to the answer to AQW 1017/09, to detail (i) the updated project costs for the Rose Energy plant; and (ii) the amount of public money being requested by the company. (AQW 2005/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I cannot disclose the project costs of this plant until the commercial negotiations between Invest NI and the promoters are completed. I have not been informed of the amount of public money being requested by the company nor would it be appropriate for me to be informed until the appropriate stage in the approval process is reached. If the project is successful in the process, once a legal agreement has been completed between Invest NI and the promoters, this information may be released.

Ballycastle to Campbeltown Ferry Service

Ms Purvis asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the plans to reopen the Ballycastle to Campbeltown ferry service; and when she last discussed this matter with her Scottish counterpart. (AQW 2018/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The consultants, jointly funded by my Department and the Scottish Government to undertake a fresh economic appraisal of the case to restore the Ballycastle to Campbeltown ferry service, have now reported. As previously agreed with my Scottish counterpart, we will meet to discuss the outcome of the appraisal and decide on the way forward.

Campsie Business Park

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to her answer to AQW 7417/08, to provide details of the original terms and conditions of the rental contract for the vacant rented unit at Campsie Business Park; and to place a copy of the original rental agreement in the Assembly Library. (AQW 2059/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The terms and conditions of the lease for the office at Campsie Industrial Estate can be viewed in their entirety in the certified copy of the lease which will be provided by Invest NI.

A certified copy of the lease has been requested from Land and Property Services and will be placed in the Assembly Library as soon as received.

The lease, which was signed in 1992, was inherited by Invest NI from the Department of Economic Development through the Industrial Development Board.

Invest NI

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the cost to Invest NI of co-sponsoring the International Renewable Energy Conference and Exhibition to be hosted by Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute Conference on 29 and 30 October 2008 at the Slieve Donard Hotel. (AQW 2116/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: As one of seven co-sponsors, Invest NI contributed £3,000 towards the cost of the first International Renewable Energy Conference and Exhibition.

Invest NI

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether she and her officials were aware that Invest NI was co-sponsoring an event in partnership with Rose Energy and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, and which is being organised by Morrow Communications, who are working as public relations consultants for Rose Energy. (AQW 2117/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My officials were aware that Invest NI was one of seven sponsors associated with the Agri-Food and Bio-Sciences Institute (AFBI) International Renewable Energy Conference and participated with the objective of showcasing its work in the renewable energy sector. I was not advised of the event nor did I have cause to be as the provision of sponsorship, such as this, is a routine operational matter.

The event provided Invest NI with the opportunity to present identified business opportunities and share European Best Practice with a substantial audience. I understand that Morrow Communications was selected as the event management company by AFBI following a competitive procurement exercise run by the agency in strict adherence to CPD guidelines. Morrow Communications had no responsibility for raising sponsorship. All sponsorship negotiations by Invest NI were undertaken directly with AFBI staff.

Invest NI sponsored a speaking slot to promote the business opportunities in the renewables sector and outline some of Invest NI's work in building a Northern Ireland Renewables Sector. The agency chose and organised for Dean Marcejla, from the EU Renewable Energy Centre to speak on this issue. The total cost incurred by Invest NI was £3,000.

Invest NI

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assessment she has made of the possible conflict of interest in relation to Invest NI co-sponsoring the International Renewable Energy Conference and Exhibition, given the involvement of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Rose Energy and Morrow Communications, who are organising the conference and working as public relations consultants for Rose Energy on its incinerator proposal. (AQW 2132/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I do not consider that there was any conflict of interest in relation to Invest NI co-sponsoring Agri-Food Bio-sciences Institute's (AFBI) International Renewable Energy Conference and Exhibition. Invest NI was one of seven sponsors associated with the event and participated with the objective of showcasing its work in the renewable energy sector. The event provided Invest NI with the opportunity to present identified business opportunities and share European Best Practice with a substantial audience.

I understand that Morrow Communications was selected as the event management company by AFBI following a competitive procurement exercise run by the agency in strict adherence to **Central Procurement Directorate** (CPD) guidelines. Morrow Communications had no responsibility for raising sponsorship. All sponsorship negotiations by Invest NI were undertaken directly with AFBI staff.

Invest NI

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if public money provided by Invest NI for the Rose Energy Incinerator proposal could be used by Rose Energy to cover costs for hiring public relations and public affairs consultants to promote the project. (AQW 2133/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI has offered no public money towards the Rose Energy Ltd project. The negotiations and case for support are still in progress between Invest NI and the promoters. Consequently, any public money that may be provided by Invest NI towards the Rose Energy Ltd Waste to Energy project in the future could not be used to cover these costs retrospectively.

In this case no public relations or promotional costs have been included in the business plan submitted by the promoters.

Location of Public Sector Jobs

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to set out her Department's plans to decentralise Departmental employment and operations of its agencies to locations outside Belfast. (AQW 2173/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Approximately 140 staff of the Department and its agencies are currently located outside Belfast. This includes Consumer Affairs, Invest NI, Health and Safety Executive NI, Tourism Ireland and Intertrade Ireland, which, collectively, have staff in the following towns:

Armagh, Ballymena, Coleraine, Cookstown, Craigavon, Enniskillen, Londonderry, Newry and Omagh.

The recent report by Professor Sir George Bain on Location of Public Sector Jobs did not identify any additional areas of the Department or its agencies for relocation. The issue of dispersal is a complex matter and future location decisions will be informed by, and will take account of, a range of factors, including proximity to customers and stakeholders, as well as the Executive's response to the Bain recommendations.

Renewable Energy Technology

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what grants are available to encourage members of the public to install renewable energy technology in their homes. (AQW 2208/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The UK-wide Low Carbon Building Programme offers grant support of up to £2,500 per property to domestic households for the installation of renewable energy technologies. The programme is set to remain open until 2010 and households in Northern Ireland are eligible to apply.

Additionally, there is a reduced rate of VAT at 5% for small scale renewable technologies and for those technologies generating electricity, Renewable Obligation Certificates are available.

ENVIRONMENT

Wind Turbines

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment the number of (i) wind turbines; and (ii) applications for additional wind turbines, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 1493/09)

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment the number of (i) wind turbines; and (ii) applications for additional wind turbines, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 1493/09)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson): To date my Department has granted planning permission for 33 wind farms, incorporating 280 turbines. A further 50 wind farm applications are in the system and those propose an additional 458 turbines. The breakdown of wind farm applications by parliamentary constituency is as follows:

Parliamentary Constituency	Approved applications	Proposed applications
Belfast East	0	0
Belfast North	0	0
Belfast South	0	0
Belfast West	0	0
East Antrim	0	0
East Londonderry	3	7
South Tyrone	7	10
Foyle	1	2
Lagan Valley	0	0
Mid Ulster	0	3
Newry & Armagh	0	0
North Antrim	7	4
North Down	0	0
South Antrim	0	3
South Down	0	1
Strangford	0	0
Upper Bann	0	0
West Tyrone	15	20
Total	33	50

Since 1st April 2007 my Department has approved 101 applications for domestic wind turbines and wind turbines associated with a farm, incorporating 102 wind turbines. A further 5 applications for wind turbines are currently in the system. The breakdown of wind turbine applications by parliamentary constituency is as follows:

Parliamentary Constituency	Approved applications	Proposed applications
Belfast East	0	0
Belfast North	0	0
Belfast South	0	0
Belfast West	0	0
East Antrim	4	0
East Londonderry	6	0
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	2	0
Foyle	0	0
Lagan Valley	4	0
Mid Ulster	6	1
Newry & Armagh	16	0

Parliamentary Constituency	Approved applications	Proposed applications
North Antrim	6	1
North Down	2	0
South Antrim	11	1
South Down	25	2
Strangford	9	0
Upper Bann	2	0
West Tyrone	8	0
Total	101	5

These figures have been extracted from a live database which is continuously updated and validated. They should therefore be regarded as indicative only at this point in time and should not be compared with any previous figures published by the agency.

Employment Opportunities

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of the Environment to detail any significant planning applications currently in the system which would create employment opportunities. (AQW 2001/09)

The Minister of the Environment: For the purposes of answering this particular question, a significant planning application is interpreted as one which represents a large scale investment proposal for Northern Ireland. At the present time, there are approximately 70 such applications in the planning system. The majority, if not all, of these applications are considered to offer employment opportunities for local people and businesses – either during the construction phase of the development, the operational phase or both.

Details relating to these applications are attached as annex 1.

ANNEX 1

Planning Application Ref	Location	Nature of Proposal
T/2006/0629	Antrim	Retail Development
T/2007/0251	Antrim	Retail Development
T/2007/0656	Antrim	Commercial Development
U/2006/0377	Ballyclare	Residential Development
U/2007/0153	Ballyclare	Retail Development
U/2007/0264	Ballyclare	Mixed Use Development
R/2007/0853	Ballynahinch	Retail Development
W/2008/0294	Bangor	Residential Development
W/2008/0302	Bangor	Residential Development
W/2008/0456	Bangor	Mixed Use Development
W/2008/0749	Bangor	Residential Development
Z/2000/0520	Belfast	Mixed Use Development
Z/2003/0437	Belfast	Mixed Use Development
Z/2004/2377	Belfast	Mixed Use Development
Z/2004/2742	Belfast	Retail Development
Z/2006/2018	Belfast	Retail Development

Planning Application Ref	Location	Nature of Proposal
Z/2008/0599	Belfast	Mixed Use Development
Z/2008/0692	Belfast	Retail Development
Z/2008/0832	Belfast	Mixed Use Development
Z/2008/0830	Belfast	Mixed Use Development
Z/2008/0829	Belfast	Mixed Use Development
Y/2008/0227	Belfast	Retail Development
Z/2008/1963	Belfast	Mixed Use Development
Z/2008/2152	Belfast	Retail Development
Z/2008/1548	Belfast	Mixed Use Development (Titanic Quarter)
Z/2008/1428	Belfast	Tourist/Leisure Development (Titanic Quarter Signature Project)
Z/2008/1058	Belfast	Office Development (Titanic Quarter Financial Services Campus)
E/2007/0075	Bushmills	Tourist/Leisure Development
E/2008/0200	Bushmills	Tourist/Leisure Development
Y/2007/0612	Carryduff	Mixed Use Development
N/2005/0253	Craigavon	Retail Development
T/2008/0079	Crumlin	Industrial Development
R/2008/0439	Downpatrick	Commercial Development
R/2008/0441	Downpatrick	Office Development (Call Centre)
F/2006/0131	Larne	Mixed Use Development
F/2007/0455	Larne	Mixed Use Development
F/2008/0114	Larne	Retail Development
S/2004/1757	Lisburn	Retail Development
S/2007/1482	Lisburn	Mixed Use Development
S/2008/0192	Lisburn	Residential Development
S/2008/0400	Lisburn	Residential Development
S/2008/0482	Lisburn	Residential Development
S/2008/0485	Lisburn	Residential Development
S/2008/0527	Lisburn	Residential Development
S/2008/0537	Lisburn	Mixed Use Development
A/2004/1251	Londonderry	Office Development
A/2006/0180	Londonderry	Retail Development
A/2007/0145	Londonderry	Retail Development
A/2008/0648	Londonderry	Retail Development
U/2005/0070	Newtownabbey	Retail Development
X/1999/0030	Newtownards	Residential Development
X/1999/0842	Newtownards	Residential Development
X/2000/0414	Newtownards	Residential Development
X/2001/0457	Newtownards	Residential Development
X/2004/1800	Newtownards	Retail Development

Planning Application Ref	Location	Nature of Proposal
X/2005/0653	Newtownards	Retail Development
X/2005/1156	Newtownards	Retail Development
P/2008/1103	Newry	Retail Development
K/2008/0779	Omagh	Mixed Use Development
G/2008/0240	Randalstown	Tourist/Leisure Development
J/2006/0616	Strabane	Mixed Use Development
T/1999/0376	Templepatrick	Templepatrick
P/2008/0926	Warrenpoint	Warrenpoint
T/2001/0517	Randalstown	Randalstown
B/2005/0329	Dungiven	Dungiven
S/2008/0630	Glenavy	Glenavy

Employment Opportunities

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of the Environment what action he is taking to ensure that significant planning applications, currently within the system which would help to create employment opportunities, are dealt with in an expedient manner. (AQW 2002/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The Programme for Government refers to a six month target being applied to large scale planning proposals. These are proposals which are considered to have significant economic or social implications for the whole or a substantial part of Northern Ireland. They will be handled by the Strategic Projects Division of Planning Service and the six month target will apply provided there have been pre-application discussions with an agreed outcome.

Within the Strategic Projects Division I have agreed to the creation of two multi-disciplinary teams – teams which are comprised of planning staff as well as professionals from other relevant disciplines – to help to further enhance the efficiency of the service that is provided. I am hopeful these multi-disciplinary teams will be in place by the early part of next year.

In addition a planning circular was issued to Planning Service staff in July 2006 to provide guidance for prioritising applications. It clarified that priority be given to applications on which grant-aid may depend and certain commercial, industrial, social and infrastructure proposals with clear strategic, employment, community or public interest dimension.

My officials have also published guidance for prospective developers/applicants on pre-application discussions. This will assist in the development of procedures for meaningful pre-application engagement between the Planning Service, our key consultees – some of whom will be represented in our multi-disciplinary teams – and applicants. As part of the pre-application discussions, an indicative timescale for processing the application will be provided. Clearly, if this is to be a success in terms of speeding up the process there will be obligations on everyone involved in the planning process, including agents, through a mutual commitment to improve the quality of applications and maximise the prospects of getting through the statutory process quickly.

PPS 14

Mr Ross asked the Minister of the Environment when the revised draft PPS 14 will be published. (AQW 2030/09)

The Minister of the Environment: I hope the Executive will consider the Revised draft PPS 14 at the earliest opportunity. If there is no agreement, I will shelve the revised draft and we will live with the existing policies.

This would mean residential development in rural areas continuing to be hampered by restrictive planning policy, and planning policy on farm diversification continuing to lag behind rural development policies.

Development Control

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of the Environment to outline a timescale for the transfer of development control to local authorities. (AQW 2085/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The programme of work, which includes primary legislation, to transfer planning functions to the responsibility of local councils is being taken forward on the same timeline as the overall reorganisation of local government, with an implementation date of May 2011.

Location of Public Sector Jobs

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his Department's plans to decentralise departmental employment and/or operations of its agencies, to locations outside of Belfast. (AQW 2091/09)

The Minister of the Environment: Almost 50% of my Department's staff are already employed at locations outside the Belfast area and I have no current plans for further decentralisation. The Executive will, however, need to consider the recommendations in the Bain Report on the scope for decentralisation and on the specific candidates cited in the report, including the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

Ministerial Correspondence

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the correspondence he has exchanged, including that with MLAs, during 2008 in relation to (i) the processing of any development plans now at (a) Issues Paper stage; and (b) draft plan stage; and (ii) the implications of Mr Justice Weatherup's judgement in the Seaport Investments case, the related appeal, and the reference to the European Court of Justice, on the progressing of those development plans. (AQW 2246/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The Departmental records indicate that during 2008 I have responded to a total of 46 items of correspondence, including Assembly Questions and invitations to meet, in relation to the Development Plans currently being prepared by my Department and the litigation associated with a number of these plans. The major issues raised in the correspondence relate to the timing of key process stages for the various development plans and the delay associated with ongoing legal proceedings. I have also responded to queries in relation to the costs of preparation for the development plans and the associated litigation. Finally I have addressed a number of queries regarding the subject matter of, or site specific issues relating to, individual plans. A list setting out the items of correspondence is attached.

ANNEX 1 CORRESPONDENCE, ASSEMBLY QUESTIONS AND INVITATION CASES

Date	Ref No	Name	Area Plan	Subject
Oct	COR/786/08	Ian Paisley Jnr	Antrim, Ballymena and Larne	Delays due to Appeal and ways of overcoming legal issues to speed up process
July	COR/541/08	Samuel Gardiner	Ards and Down	Slow progress in finalising and adopting plan
June	COR/499/08	Margaret Ritchie	Ards and Down	Lack of progress and timescale for adoption
June	COR/498/08	Jim Wells	Ards and Down	On behalf of Keith Toner re delays in adoption
June	COR/483/08	Willie McCrea	BMAP	Proposal in BMAP to build an estate adjacent to Doagh Village and statutory requirement re public consultation.
April	COR/294/08	Margaret Ritchie	Ards and Down	Timescale for publishing
Jan	COR/51/08	Eddie McGrady	Banbridge, Newry and Mourne	Timescale for progress
Jan	COR/26/08	Eddie McGrady	Ards and Down	Reasons for delay in publishing report
Nov	AQW/2029/09	Alastair Ross	Larne	When the draft plan will be published

Date	Ref No	Name	Area Plan	Subject
Oct	AQW/1879/09	Jim Shannon	Ards and Down	If the implementation of plan will be delayed due to the requirement for PPS 14 legislation to be passed through the Assembly
Oct	AQW/1878/09	Jim Shannon	Ards and Down	If the plan will be (i) finalised; and (ii) released to the public.
Oct	AQO/914/09	Kieran McCarthy	Ards and Down	Update on the plan
Sept	AQW/918/09	Jim Wells	Ards and Down	(i) explain the delay in the publication of the plan; and (ii) confirm when it will be published.
Sept	AQW/688/09	Jim Wells	BMAP	Update of the Belfast Metropolitan area urban and rural windfall figures, in relation to the statistics provided to the BMAP inquiry in January 2007, which only covered the period 1 April 2003 to 31 April 2006
Sept	AQO/335/09	Sean Neeson	BMAP	Update on the plan.
Sept	AQW/414/09	Ian Paisley Jnr	Antrim, Ballymena and Larne	When the draft plan will be published; and to detail the reasons for the 7 year delay in its publication
July	AQW/8859/08	Trevor Clarke	Ards and Down	Delay in adopting plan, and what steps are being taken to have the plan finalised and adopted.
July	AQW/8878/08	Ian Paisley Jnr	Magherafelt	How much has been spent on the litigation of the plan; and what the estimated full legal cost will be.
July	AQW/8877/08	Ian Paisley Jnr	Northern	How much has been spent on the litigation of the plan; and what the estimated full legal cost will be.
July	AQW/8836/08	Ian McCrea	Legal costs for each Plan in last 5 yrs	What legal fees have been incurred for each area plan over the last five years.
May	AQW/7238/08	Willie Clarke	Ards and Down	When will the Planning Service publish a statement with the adopted plan, outlining the decisions that it has reached
May	AQO/3658/08	Barry McElduff	West Tyrone	Current status of the plan
May	AQO/3581/08	Alex Easton	BMAP	Number of new homes required for North Down under BMAP
May	AQW/6771/08	Jim Shannon	Ards and Down	Outcome of the plan finding for light industrial land between Kiltonga and Milecross Road, Newtownards
May	AQW/6770/08	Jim Shannon	Ards and Down	When the findings of the plan will be made available to (i) the public; and (ii) elected representatives, in light of a potential economic recession
May	AQW/6769/08	Jim Shannon	Ards and Down	Action being taken to ensure that the plan is announced urgently.
April	AQO/3176/08	Kieran McCarthy	Ards and Down	To confirm when the Plan Inquiry will be published.
April	AQW/5664/08	Jim Shannon	Ards and Down	Timescale within which the PAC decision on the plan will be fed into the present planning process in Downpatrick
April	AQW/5663/08	Jim Shannon	Ards and Down	What steps are being taken to ensure that the PAC completion of the plan is considered for current planning decisions at Downpatrick
April	AQW/5435/08	Mervyn Storey	Northern	Update on the draft Plan
April	AQW/5369/08	Peter Weir	BMAP	What action is being taken to update the figures that were provided in a paper to the BMAP Inquiry in January 2007 in relation to the count of windfall approvals achieved in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Urban and Belfast Metropolitan Area Rural areas over the period 1 April 2003 – 31 August 2006.

Date	Ref No	Name	Area Plan	Subject
April	AQW/5311/08	Peter Weir	BMAP	Assessment of the impact of the introduction of a two tier system of housing forecasts on the BMAP's receipt of a certificate of conformity
April	AQW/5286/08	Alastair Ross	Larne	When the plan will be published
April	AQW/5237/08	Pat Doherty	West Tyrone	Timeframe for the completion of the plan.
Feb	AQW/4431/08	Jim Shannon	Ards and Down	Timescale for the declaration of the plan.
Feb	AQW/3611/08	Allan Bresland	West Tyrone	Timetable within which the plan will be published.
Jan	AQW/3290/08	Alasdair McDonnell	BMAP	Confirm whether or not targets set for new housing developments in Carryduff, under the BMAP have been met
Jan	AQW/3289/08	Alasdair McDonnell	BMAP	Number of applications for (i) single housing developments; and (ii) multiple housing developments, that have been approved for Carryduff since the adoption of BMAP.
Jan	AQW/3209/08	Willie Clarke	Ards and Down	Update on when the plan will available.
Jan	AQW/3036/09	Jim Shannon	Ards and Down	Reasons for a 3 month delay in the announcement of the plan.
Jan	AQW/2833/08	Daithi McKay	Northern	Timescale within which the plan will be finalised and adopted.
Jan	AQW/2807/08	Mervyn Storey	Northern	Update on the plan
July	INV/409/08	Margaret Ritchie	Ards and Down	Meeting to discuss finalising and publishing the plan
June	INV/298/08	Tommy Morrow	BMAP	Request to discuss an ATC in the village Area of South Belfast
May	INV/284/08	David McCammick	Antrim, Ballymena and Larne	Council request to discuss delays in publishing
July	INV/378/08	Iris Robinson	Ards and Down	Publication of the plan and site in Killyleagh

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Penny Product

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) to indicate the discrepancy between the estimated penny product and the actual penny product for each District Council in 2007/8; and (ii) where the discrepancy is greater than 1%, to account for the discrepancy, in each case.[R] (AQW 1195/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr N Dodds): Land and Property Services provides the Estimated Penny Product figures to councils to assist them in the consideration of striking a rate. The figures are estimates based on information available some 16 to 18 months in advance of the close of the financial year in question. Councils are free to use or to disregard the estimate in finalising a rate. There will always be variances between the initial estimate and final outcome, this is a natural part of the process caused by, for example, properties going into and out of occupation, and revisions to the tax base.

Set out in the attached tables are the differences between the Estimated Penny Product and the Actual Penny Product for 2007/08 in two categories – Councils where the difference was less than 1% and Councils where the difference was greater than 1%.

TABLE 1
SHOWING THOSE COUNCILS WHERE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE ESTIMATED PENNY PRODUCT AND THE ACTUAL PENNY PRODUCT FOR 2007/2008 WAS LESS THAN 1%.

Council	Variance %
Ards Borough Council	-0.52
Ballymoney Borough Council	+0.02
Banbridge District Council	+0.98
Castlereagh Borough Council	-0.26
Coleraine Borough Council	-0.17
Down District Council	+0.40
Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council	+0.90
Fermanagh District Council	+0.80
Moyle District Council	-0.27
Newtownabbey Borough Council	+0.93
Omagh District Council	+0.60
Strabane District Council	-0.92

TABLE 2
SHOWING THOSE COUNCILS WHERE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE ESTIMATED PENNY PRODUCT AND THE ACTUAL PENNY PRODUCT FOR 2007/2008 WAS MORE THAN 1%.

Council	Variance %
Antrim Borough Council	+2.54
Armagh City and District Council	-1.23
Ballymena Borough Council	+1.88
Belfast City Council	-4.94
Carrickfergus Borough Council	-4.48
Cookstown District Council	+2.55
Craigavon Borough Council	+2.21
Derry City Council	-2.36
Larne Borough Council	-1.52
Limavady Borough Council	+2.78
Lisburn City Council	+1.82
Magherafelt District Council	+6.27
Newry and Mourne District Council	-1.33
North Down Borough Council	-5.90

Differences between the Estimated Penny Product and the Actual Penny Product arose for a variety of reasons. For those councils where the discrepancy was greater than 1%, the reasons were:

- Lack of growth in the council tax-base, or significant growth in the council tax-base.
- Significant growth in the council tax-base off-set by increased vacancy discharges.
- Increased vacancy discharges, particularly in the domestic sector.
- Increases in cost of collection to implement rating reforms.
- Increases in Landlord Allowances from 10% to 15%.
- Introduction of the CAP reduced income.

Townland Names

Mrs O'Neill asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what action his Department is taking to promote townland names. (AQO 1203/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Department of Finance and Personnel recognises the historic, cultural and linguistic importance of Townland names and uses them when it is appropriate to do so.

In addition, Land & Property Services maintains the Pointer product which is a definitive address database for Northern Ireland. Every address within Pointer is allocated to its appropriate Townland and the system also records the history and alternative spellings of the name, based on information provided by the Northern Ireland Place-Name Project. The Pointer product is available to all public servants in Northern Ireland under the terms of the Northern Ireland Mapping Agreement and is increasingly used across Government. It therefore provides Townland names for all addresses to all public servants, and public sector mailings created from Pointer will include the Townland name in each address.

The latest editions of the 1:50 000 Discoverer Map series produced by my Department also include Townlands.

Cardiac Conditions

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of people aged between 14 and 35 who have died from cardiac conditions in each of the last 3 years, broken down by Health and Social Services Board area. (AQW 2213/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Cause of death statistics are classified by the International Classification of Diseases, the number of deaths due to all circulatory diseases¹ has been provided in the tables attached by Health and Social Services Board for those aged 14 to 35 years for registration years 2005 to 2007.

¹International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision code I00-I99 – this includes ischaemic heart disease as well as other conditions such as stroke, pulmonary heart disease and other forms of heart disease.

TABLE 1
NUMBER OF DEATHS REGISTERED WHERE THE UNDERLYING CAUSE OF DEATH WAS A CIRCULATORY DISEASE, FOR PERSONS AGED 14 TO 35, BY HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICE BOARD, REGISTRATION YEAR 2005

Cause of Death	ICD10 ¹ Code	Eastern HSSB	Northern HSSB	Southern HSSB	Western HSSB	Northern Ireland
Ischaemic heart disease	I20-I25	-	2	-	1	3
Pulmonary heart disease	I26-I28	-	2	-	1	3
Other heart disease	I30-I52	2	1	2	2	7
Cerebrovascular disease	I60-I69	1	-	-	1	2
Other diseases of the circulatory system	I70-I99	4	-	1	-	5
All Circulatory Diseases	I00-I99	7	5	3	5	20

¹ The tenth revision of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases, Injuries and Causes of Death (ICD10) is used in Northern Ireland to code cause of death.

TABLE 2
NUMBER OF DEATHS REGISTERED WHERE THE UNDERLYING CAUSE OF DEATH WAS A CIRCULATORY DISEASE, FOR PERSONS AGED 14 TO 35, BY HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICE BOARD, REGISTRATION YEAR 2006

Cause of Death	ICD10 Code	Eastern HSSB	Northern HSSB	Southern HSSB	Western HSSB	Northern Ireland
Chronic rheumatic heart disease	I05-I09	-	-	1	-	1
Ischaemic heart disease	I20-I25	2	-	2	-	4
Other heart disease	I30-I52	1	2	2	1	6

Cause of Death	ICD10 Code	Eastern HSSB	Northern HSSB	Southern HSSB	Western HSSB	Northern Ireland
Cerebrovascular disease	I60-I69	-	1	-	1	2
Other diseases of the circulatory system	I70-I99	2	1	-	-	3
All Circulatory Diseases	I00-I99	5	4	5	2	16

1 The tenth revision of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases, Injuries and Causes of Death (ICD10) is used in Northern Ireland to code cause of death.

TABLE 3: NUMBER OF DEATHS REGISTERED WHERE THE UNDERLYING CAUSE OF DEATH WAS A CIRCULATORY DISEASE, FOR PERSONS AGED 14 TO 35, BY HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICE BOARD, REGISTRATION YEAR 2007P

Cause of Death	ICD10 Code	Eastern HSSB	Northern HSSB	Southern HSSB	Western HSSB	Northern Ireland
Hypertensive disease	I10-I15	1	-	-	-	1
Ischaemic heart disease	I20-I25	5	2	1	1	9
Pulmonary heart disease	I26-I28	2	1	-	-	3
Other heart disease	I30-I52	2	2	3	1	8
Cerebrovascular disease	I60-I69	4	3	-	1	8
Other diseases of the circulatory system	I70-I99	-	1	-	2	3
All Circulatory Diseases	I00-I99	14	9	4	5	32

1 The tenth revision of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases, Injuries and Causes of Death (ICD10) is used in Northern Ireland to code cause of death.

P Provisional data.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Locum Staff Grade Anaesthetists

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) highest hourly rate paid to a locum staff grade anaesthetist; and (ii) average hourly rate paid to locum staff grade anaesthetists, in each hospital, for each of the last 3 years. (AQW 1465/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): Two Trusts have reported using locum staff grade anaesthetists. The information provided relates to the rates paid to this group of staff through locum agencies. The details are set out in the table below.

Trust	Hospital	Average Hourly Rate			Highest Hourly Rate		
		2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Northern	Causeway	None	£58.42	£58.65	None	£58.42	£75.00
Western	Erne	£57.25	None	None	£67.24	None	None

Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many reports on the Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service have been conducted by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, in the last 5 years. (AQW 1635/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In the last five years, the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency have completed three full inspection reports on the Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service – in March 2004, April 2006 and April 2008.

Portstewart Fire Station

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will guarantee the future of the Portstewart Fire Station for at least the next 10 years. (AQW 1717/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The future of Portstewart Fire Station is entirely a matter for the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service which has an Integrated Risk Management Process in place to assess the level of fire and rescue coverage required.

The proposal to withdraw the second pumping appliance from Portstewart Fire Station was published for public consultation on 1 October. No final decisions will be taken on the second appliance at Portstewart until the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service has had an opportunity to consider the responses to that consultation.

Community Pharmacy

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of rejection by the Pharmacy Practices Committee of the Western Health and Social Services Board, of an application to establish a community pharmacy in an area of high deprivation in the Bogside area of Derry/Londonderry. (AQW 1996/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A pharmacist wishing to open a pharmacy must apply to the relevant Health and Social Services Board to join the pharmaceutical list. The decision making role is delegated to the local Pharmacy Practices Committee (PPC) of each Board who must decide whether it is 'necessary or desirable' to approve the application in order to secure the adequate provision of pharmaceutical services, taking into account relevant socio-economic factors.

The decision making process of the PPC is independent of the Department and the Minister. Therefore it would be inappropriate for me to comment on individual cases. The PPC must follow procedures set out in Schedule 4 to the Pharmaceutical Services Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1997. The regulations can be accessed at this web address; http://www.opsi.gov.uk/sr/sr1997/nisr_19970381_en.pdf

If an applicant is dissatisfied with the decision of the PPC then they have the right of appeal to the National Appeal Panel.

Pharmacy Provision

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail the current level of pharmacy provision in the Derry/Londonderry area, including locations; and (ii) if this provision meets the needs of the region, particularly in the socially deprived wards. (AQW 1997/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information provided by the Central services Agency show that there are 34 pharmacies currently located in the Derry Local Government District. Of these, 22 pharmacies (65%) are situated in census output areas which are among the 20% most deprived areas in Northern Ireland.

The decision making process followed by the Pharmacy Practices Committee (PPC) of each Health and Social Services Board in relation to applications to join the pharmaceutical list is independent of the Department and the Minister. The PPCs take into account socio-economic factors. The procedures set out in Schedule 4 to the Pharmaceutical Services Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1997 must be followed by all of the Board PPCs. The regulations can be accessed at the following website address;

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/sr/sr1997/nisr_19970381-en.pdf

Pharmacy Practices Committee

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the processes followed by the Pharmacy Practices Committee of the Western Health and Social Services Board carrying out its deliberations. (AQW 1998/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Pharmacy Practices Committee of the Western Health and Social Services Board follows the same processes as the Pharmacy Practices Committees in the other three Area Boards. Those procedures are set out in Schedule 4 to the Pharmaceutical Services Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1997. These can be viewed at www.opsi.gov.uk/sr/sr1997/nisr_19970381_en.pdf

Services for Deaf People with Mental Health Problems

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the resources he is allocating for people who (i) are deaf; and (ii) have mental health problems. (AQW 2033/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the resources allocated to services for deaf people with mental health problems is not held centrally. Part of the £3.9m planned expenditure relating to aids, adaptations and audiology within the Physical and Sensory Disability Programme of Care will be incurred on those that are deaf.

Although deaf people with a mental illness have access to the full range of mental health services, many are treated by a specialist team established to address their specific needs.

Osteoporosis

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his future plans for the treatment and prevention of osteoporosis. (AQW 2053/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: From September 2008, osteoporosis has been included in the General Medical Services Contract as a Directed Enhanced Service. This new service will target female patients aged 50 and over who have suffered a fragility fracture. This target group has been varied from my previous Answer on this topic (which indicated the target would be all patients aged 65 and over), in order to provide enhanced treatment, diagnosis and prevention for those patients at greatest risk of osteoporosis.

My Department supports osteoporosis prevention through the promotion of regular exercise, a balanced diet, smoking prevention/cessation and a responsible approach to alcohol consumption.

Osteoporosis

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for the number of osteoporosis nurse positions in the Health Service. (AQW 2054/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are 9 (7.12 Whole-Time Equivalent) posts for Osteoporosis Nurses within the Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Trusts. All of these posts are currently filled.

Health and Social Services Provision

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his Department is undertaking a review of Health and Social Services provision and when the results will be published. (AQW 2062/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I received a total of £3.3bn over the 10 years of the Investment Strategy 2008, against a bid of £5.8bn. A major element of this investment has already been contractually committed, reducing further the availability of capital resources needed to modernise our healthcare infrastructure after many years of under investment.

In light of these funding constraints I commissioned on 31 May 2008 a Review of Capital Priorities. I am currently considering the report, which has already highlighted that some very difficult decisions will need to be taken in order that the limited funding available to me will be allocated to areas of highest need across all Programmes of Care, and optimise the benefits for the entire population of Northern Ireland.

I have recently announced the allocations that will be made to NIFRS, NIAS and ICT and hope to be in a position to finalise the HSC Trust allocations within the coming weeks.

Health and Care Facilities

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what priority he has given to the cityside health and care facility for Derry/Londonderry. (AQW 2064/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The development of primary and community care infrastructure, along with all other Trust priorities across Northern Ireland, will be considered in the context of funding constraints.

I received a total of £3.3bn over the 10 years of the Investment Strategy 2008, against a bid of £5.8bn. A major element of this investment has already been contractually committed, reducing further the availability of capital resources needed to modernise our healthcare infrastructure after many years of under investment.

This funding is not enough to meet all of the demands within the Health and Social Care estate. As a result I commissioned a review of capital investment priorities which reported to me at the end of September. I am in the process of completing my deliberations and will make an announcement on capital investment, in the Western Trust, in the coming weeks.

Health and Care Facilities

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for assurances that commitments made for hospital projects in the West will not displace investments in health and care facilities. (AQW 2065/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The development of primary and community care infrastructure, along with all other Trust priorities across Northern Ireland, will be considered in the context of funding constraints.

I received a total of £3.3bn over the 10 years of the Investment Strategy 2008, against a bid of £5.8bn. A major element of this investment has already been contractually committed, reducing further the availability of capital resources needed to modernise our healthcare infrastructure after many years of under investment.

The recently completed review of priorities, which I am currently considering, will ensure that the limited funding available to me will be allocated to areas of highest need across all Programmes of Care, in order to optimise the benefits for the entire population of Northern Ireland.

Hospital Cleanliness

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the action he has taken to address the issue of hospital cleanliness, following a meeting with a constituent on 15 September 2008. (AQW 2069/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: On 14 October I advised the Assembly that I had accepted all the recommendations contained in the reports of the RQIA review of the outbreak of *Clostridium difficile* in Northern Trust Hospitals. These include a region-wide baseline review of all HSC Trust cleaning arrangements against current standards and methodologies.

At the meeting on 15 September with Mr George Robinson MLA and his constituent, a number of concerns were raised with me about hospital cleanliness. Subsequent to that meeting I wrote to the Chief Executive of the Belfast Trust. He has now replied to me and I shall be writing to Mr Robinson and his constituent shortly on foot of that reply.

Medical Reports

Mrs McGill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if parents of children under 18 years old should be liable for payment of ‘statement of fact’ letters from GPs, given that medical information of crucial importance to the child should, in all cases, be shared by the relevant educational institutions.

(AQW 2111/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The provision of medical reports or ‘statement of facts’ letters outlining details of a patient’s medical condition for purposes other than the diagnosis, management and ongoing care and treatment of a patient is not considered to form part of essential services under the General Medical Services contract, nor are GPs remunerated for conducting such work within any of the funding streams of the contract.

As independent contractors, it is for each GP practice to decide if they wish to seek a fee for making available medical information for purposes other than the provision of health care, including making such information available to educational institutions.

Medical Reports

Mrs McGill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to ensure that medical information, that is crucial to the wellbeing of children under the age of 18, is shared with primary and post-primary institutions.

(AQW 2112/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Patient information held by a GP practice is generally held under legal and ethical obligations of confidentiality that prevent the pro-active sharing of information without consent. If medical information is required from a GP practice by primary and post-primary educational institutions this should be specifically requested by the relevant educational institution or if appropriate the parents of the child, and will always require the necessary consent.

My Department currently has no plans to revise the current arrangements within the General Medical Services contract regarding the provision of information for purposes other than the provision of health care; to do so would require negotiation with the relevant bodies representing the medical profession and wider consultation with the general public.

Greenfield Residential Care Home

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if Greenfield Residential Care Home in Strabane will remain open.

(AQW 2165/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Health and Social Care Trust have advised that proposals on the future of Greenfield Residential Care Home have been submitted to the Western Health and Social Services Board as part of an overall review of statutory residential provision in the area. These proposals were discussed with residents, their families, and staff at a meeting in Greenfield on November 10th. The Trust will also be launching a 12 week public consultation on December 15th, and no decision on the future of Greenfield will be taken until after the outcome of the consultation is known.

Greenhaw Lodge Daycare Centre

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he is aware of the current proposal by the Western Health and Social Care Trust to move the learning disability day care service, currently at Greenhaw Lodge in Londonderry/Derry, into an institutional environment at Gransha Park. (AQW 2171/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am aware of the current proposal to move to the Evergreen Centre which provides services for people with a learning disability and is located at Gransha Park.

The decision to temporarily relocate to available accommodation at the Evergreen Centre on the Gransha Park site has been made to enable continuance of the service provided to the 24 people on the Greenhaw register. This will not result in any diminution of service.

Location of Public Sector Jobs

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to set out his Department's plans to decentralise Departmental employment and operations of its agencies to locations outside Belfast.

(AQW 2174/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am currently considering the implications of Professor Bain's recent report *The Independent Review of Policy on Location of Public Sector Jobs* for my Department and the Health and Social Care sector in regard to location decisions arising from the proposed reforms.

I will also be considering the Report's longer-term implications with my Executive colleagues.

Greenhaw Lodge Daycare Centre

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of whether the current proposal by the Western Health and Social Care Trust, to move the learning disability day care service, currently at Greenhaw Lodge in Londonderry/Derry, into an institutional environment at Gransha Park, contravenes the Trust's draft report 'Modernising and Reforming Day Services for Adults with a Learning Disability 2008-2013'.

(AQW 2176/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Health and Social Care Trust (the Trust) has advised me that the temporary relocation of day services to the Evergreen Centre on the Gransha Park site will not result in any diminution of service. The Trust will be identifying a more long term solution to ensure a safe and effective service delivery which will continue to meet the individual needs of people who avail of day services, against the background of the regional and local strategic direction set by the Bamford Review.

The Trust remains committed to implementing the recommendations of the Western Health and Social Services Board review of day opportunities for adults with severe learning disability "Opportunities for Change 2007".

Musgrave Park Hospital

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 1724/09, to explain why an elected MLA did not receive a written response to the question by the due date but the information sought was disclosed to a journalist and subsequently appeared in the Irish News on 28 October 2008.

(AQW 2180/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As the Member is aware, I issued a holding response to Priority Written AQ 1724/09 on the 23 October 2008 as I was unable to answer his question fully within the short timescale allowed.

This question was one of 62 questions tabled for answer in the week preceding Recess and of these 14 were Priority Written Questions. Whilst I do endeavour to answer as many questions on time as possible, occasionally it is not possible to answer each question appropriately within the timeframe requested by Members.

It is my understanding the information in the Press was not obtained from the Department and I will be in contact with the Trust about this matter.

Home Start

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to sustain the Home Start outreach schemes after March 2010.

(AQW 2209/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department will continue to fund until March 2009 all of those projects formerly supported by the Children's Fund that are primarily health and social care-focused, including the locally-based Home Start schemes. Decisions about which projects will continue to receive funding after this date will be based on a review of their performance, and the contribution that they continue to make to children's service planning priorities in their areas. Arrangements for this review are currently being put in place with Children and Young People's Committees in each Health & Social Services

Board area. I am keen that the review is completed before the end of the year, and that projects are notified speedily thereafter of its outcome.

Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the funding in place to help families of people with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder; (ii) for his assessment of the work carried out by the Northern Ireland ADD Charity; and (iii) what funding he will provide to this charity.

(AQW 2218/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Services for children with ADHD are provided by Child & Adolescent Mental Health services. A breakdown of the funding allocated for ADHD is not held and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. My Department has provided £25k funding to Northern Ireland Attention Deficit & Hyperactivity Disorder (NI-ADD) Support Centre in each of the last 5 years.

I appreciate the value of the work of NI-ADD for this particular group and my Department will continue to fund the NI-ADD Support Centre by providing £25k in 2009/2010. Decisions beyond then will be subject to the outcome of the Department's review voluntary sector funding.

Nursing Care

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the necessary ratio of nursing staff to patients required to deliver satisfactory care; and (ii) how levels of care will affect both patients and nurses by the proposed removal of 700 nurses.

(AQO 935/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There is no single applicable ratio of nurses to patients. The clinical need of the individual determines the appropriate treatment and care and the levels of nursing, medical or social care intervention.

In relation to proposals to reduce the number of nursing posts, I must stress that, at this stage, key proposals require consultation. Only when I have considered the results of consultations will I be in a position to take decisions. However, I must stress that my fundamental principle is that all patients and clients must receive safe and effective treatment and care. Any reconfiguration of services or reductions in nursing posts will not impact adversely upon patient safety.

Bamford Review

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what actions he has taken to implement the Bamford Review's recommendations.

(AQO 1018/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department is leading on and playing its part in the Executive-wide response to the Bamford Review. The Executive has accepted the broad thrust of the Bamford Review. A public consultation on the Executive's response to Bamford closed on 3 October and Departments are now considering carefully the responses received. We expect to publish a cross-departmental Action Plan early in 2009 in the light of the consultation process.

Sexual Health Strategy

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the Sexual Health Strategy.

(AQO 991/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has developed a Sexual Health Promotion Strategy and Action Plan which, due to the cross-departmental nature of its actions, requires approval by the Executive prior to its publication.

The Executive was invited to endorse the publication of the Strategy at its meeting scheduled for 3rd July. However this meeting did not take place and there have been no subsequent meetings of the Executive. As a result it has not been possible to publish the Strategy.

Binge Drinking

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, following his recent visit to the Odyssey Arena with the Ambulance Service, if he will address the issue of binge drinking with Belfast City Council. (AQO 989/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has already held discussions with representatives from Belfast City Council and the Northern Ireland Office, in relation to measures both to address underage and binge drinking, and to reduce alcohol related anti-social and risk-taking behaviour. I intend to build on this work through the Young People's Drinking Action Plan.

I believe that it is imperative that we work in partnership with local Government across a range of key health issues, and I anticipate that the new administration arrangements for public health will strengthen their role.

Patients Diagnosed with Glaucoma

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the clinical monitoring and management of patients diagnosed with glaucoma. (AQO 1013/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The monitoring and management of patients diagnosed with glaucoma is a matter for individual clinicians taking into account the patient's individual condition and the best available evidence about treatment and management options.

Generally speaking, most patients with stable glaucoma would be seen at 6-12 month intervals, but some may be seen more frequently or less frequently depending on their individual circumstances.

Ambulance Provision in North Antrim

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his Department is considering the withdrawal of any ambulance provision in North Antrim. (AQO 1037/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is for the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) to plan the appropriate level of emergency care cover to meet local demand, and allocate resources accordingly.

In response to the Northern Ireland Executive's requirement that all Departments should produce 3% efficiency savings, NIAS has set out efficiency savings proposals which include increasing the number of hours of single paramedic Rapid Response Vehicle cover and reducing the number of A&E ambulance hours. This will not reduce emergency care provision but will in fact result in an increase of around 61,000 hours of paramedic cover across Northern Ireland.

In NIAS's Northern Division, which includes north Antrim, the proposals will entail a reduction of some 2,085 hours of A&E ambulance cover and an increase of 11,064 hours of Rapid Response cover, providing a net gain of almost 9,000 hours of paramedic cover.

Health Provision in Ballycastle

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on health provision in Ballycastle. (AQO 997/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am committed to the continuation of high quality healthcare services in Ballycastle – as elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

The issue of Ballycastle Health Centre was the subject of an adjournment debate in this House on 30 September. During the debate I acknowledged that the current facilities at the Health Centre are unacceptable. Both the Northern Board and Trust are currently considering what work could be undertaken to improve the facilities in Ballycastle Health Centre within budgetary constraints.

Prevention of Suicide and Self Harm

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made in bringing forward an implementation plan for all 26 recommendations contained in the Assembly Health Committee's Report into the Prevention of Suicide and Self Harm. (AQO 1035/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Assembly motion tabled by the Chair of the Health Committee on 19 May 2008 asked for the Executive to bring forward a timeframe for implementing the recommendations of the Report on the Inquiry into the Prevention of Suicide and Self Harm.

My Department has prepared a draft response and time frame for implementation of the 26 recommendations. This was to be discussed at the Executive meeting scheduled for 3 July, however, this meeting did not take place and there have been no subsequent meetings of the Executive. It has not therefore been possible to bring forward an implementation plan.

Second Fire Appliance in Portstewart

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will make a final decision on the future of the second fire appliance in Portstewart. (AQO 1001/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The decision about the future of the second pumping appliance at Portstewart is for the Chief Fire Officer and the Board of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service to make after considering responses to the current public consultation on this matter.

Unavailability of Treatments

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what financial assistance is available to patients who have to travel abroad to attend hospitals and clinics due to the unavailability of treatments in Northern Ireland. (AQO 955/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer you to the answer I gave to AQW 7859/08 on 23 June 2008.

Fire and Rescue Service

Mr Cobain asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his plans for capital investment in the Fire and Rescue Service. (AQO 996/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As I indicated in my announcement of 16 October, I plan to invest £168 million over the next 10 years in Fire and Rescue Services. This is subject to approval of the NI Fire & Rescue Service Strategic Investment Plan which details proposals for investment in fire stations, fire appliances, fire fighting equipment, and modern information technology systems.

In the 10 year period the service intends to replace 26 fire stations, including the purchase of 22 new sites, and refurbish a further 10. The funding also includes £30 million towards the planned new Public Sector Training College at Desertcreat near Cookstown which is being developed by the NI Fire & Rescue Service, the PSNI and the NI Prison Service.

£26 million of the £168 million will be invested in the current 3 year budget period. This will, subject to the requisite approvals, complete a new fire station in Armagh and provide 4 new stations in areas of the highest need. The NI Fire & Rescue Service will also be looking to purchase suitable sites in other high priority locations across Northern Ireland.

11 frontline fire appliances will be replaced each year as part of an agreed rolling fleet replacement programme, and all fire appliances will be equipped with modern mobile data technology including satellite navigation so that firefighters have access to critical risk information at incidents to enable them to carry out life saving work in modern, reliable vehicles.

Attacks on the Emergency Services

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the number of attacks on the emergency services in the last 12 months. (AQO 993/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Violent attacks against healthcare staff have been formally monitored by the Department since April 2004 and are recorded on a 6 monthly basis (1 April -30 September and 1 October – 31 March). Figures for 2007-2008 indicate that there were 4363 physical attacks reported by HSC staff. This represents an increase of 80 from the previous year. However, the rate of increase has reduced from 700 in the previous two years.

In the 12 months to 30 September 2008 there were 249 reported attacks on Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service vehicles and personnel resulting in injury to 3 firefighters.

Bamford Review

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on his Department's implementation of the Bamford Review's recommendations. (AQO 1016/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department is leading on and playing its part in the Executive-wide response to the Bamford Review. The Executive has accepted the broad thrust of the Bamford Review. A public consultation on the Executive's response to Bamford closed on 3 October and Departments are now considering carefully the responses received. We expect to publish a cross-departmental Action Plan early in 2009 in the light of the consultation process.

Mental Health and Learning Disability Provision

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's plans for mental health and learning disability provision over the next three years. (AQO 1020/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Department's plans for mental health provision over the next 3 years are:

- By 2009, a 13 week minimum wait for some psychotherapy services.
- By 2011, a reduction of 10% in those resident in mental health hospitals.
- By 2011, a reduction of 10% in mental health hospital admissions.
- By 2011, an additional 200 multi-professional staff for community mental health teams.
- Improved services for people with personality disorders.
- Additional psychotherapists to improve access to such services.
- Better advice and advocacy services for service users and carers.
- A refeeding centre for people with eating disorders (4 beds)
- By 2011 and thereafter, 2,000 additional dementia respite weeks per year.

The Department's plans for learning disability provision over the next 3 years are:

- Resettle some 80 long stay learning disability hospital clients and support them in the community.
- Ensure that no child is resident in a learning disability hospital by 2009.
- Provide 200 residential respite packages and improve transition services through alternatives to day care.
- Improve diagnosis and provision of interventions for children and adults with autism through training and recruitment of additional Psychiatrists, and support for AHPs.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Cullybackey By-Pass

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed Cullybackey by-pass. (AQW 1984/09)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): My Department's Roads Service has been involved in discussions with potential housing developers, as part of a planning application on the line of the throughpass, and I can advise that an agreed housing layout, which includes the construction of the central portion of the throughpass, has now received planning approval.

To date the developer has not started this housing development, and there is no indication when this might progress.

The completion of the throughpass is not included in any current major works programme. However, Roads Service has stated its commitment to the completion of the remainder of the route and has progressed preliminary design of the throughpass. Roads Service is currently assessing how this scheme might be delivered, which could possibly be in two phases, following on from the section being constructed by the developer.

As with all proposed works, the delivery of the throughpass will be subject to the programming of schemes on a priority basis, the successful acquisition of lands and the availability of funding.

A43 Route Study

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development when (i) Section 28 (Tuftarney Road); (ii) Section 29 (Craigdunloof Road); and (iii) Section 30 (Glenravel Road/Craigdunloof), of the A43 Route Study, will be completed. (AQW 1987/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the works, relating to the provision of traffic signs and renewal of road markings, at Section 28 (Tuftarney Road) and Section 29 (Craigdunloof Road), of the A43 Route Study have been completed.

With regard to Section 30, the layout of the junction of the Craigdunloof Road with Glenravel Road is currently being examined to consider options to improve the present bus stop arrangements.

Traffic Flows for High Street, Holywood

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the average daily traffic flows for High Street in Holywood. (AQW 2015/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it collects data from approx 300 automatic traffic census sites located throughout the North's road network. Unfortunately, none of these automatic traffic census sites are currently situated on either the Donaghadee Road, Bangor or High Street in Holywood. Therefore, it is not possible to provide the current average daily traffic flows for these locations.

Traffic Flows for Donaghadee Road, Bangor

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the average daily traffic flows for the Donaghadee Road in Bangor. (AQW 2016/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it collects data from approx 300 automatic traffic census sites located throughout the North's road network. Unfortunately, none of these automatic traffic census sites are currently situated on either the Donaghadee Road, Bangor or High Street in Holywood. Therefore, it is not possible to provide the current average daily traffic flows for these locations.

Performance of Crystal Alliance

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development, considering the shortfall and overcharging of Northern Ireland Water customers, who is monitoring Crystal Alliance's performance. (AQW 2036/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the Director of Customer Services is the Senior Responsible Officer for the customer billing and contacts management element of the Crystal Alliance contract awarded in January 2006. He is therefore responsible for monitoring Crystal Alliance's performance in this area.

Translink

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the total number of people currently employed by Translink, broken down by (i) grade; and (ii) job category. (AQW 2038/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: Translink have informed me that a formal grade structure does not exist, except in the area of clerical employees who comprise less than 10% of the organisation.

The table below details the total number of people Translink currently employs by job category:

Job Category	Number
Managers	78
Professional/Technical/Administrative	124
Clerical	372
Engineering Supervisors	47
Inspectors/Supervisors	205
Placement Students	12
Bus Drivers	1970
Train Drivers/Trainee Train Drivers	126
Train Managers/Conductors/Trainee Conductors	119
Other Operating Staff	374
Engineering Staff	597
Infrastructure	169
Total	4193

Northern Ireland Water Redeployment Programme

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the compliance of the current redeployment programme undertaken by Northern Ireland Water with employment law. (AQW 2040/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the redeployment of staff is part of a wider programme to improve efficiency and reduce costs. NIW is satisfied that the processes used to redeploy employees comply fully with current employment legislation.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the necessity for Northern Ireland Water to employ the services of 18 consultants for Industrial Pollution Prevention Control, considering its current financial pressures. (AQW 2041/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it is required under the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations to obtain permits from the Northern

Ireland Environment Agency for a number of its wastewater treatment works. However, NIW does not have the in-house specialist knowledge and expertise required to complete the permit applications which require modelling for odour, noise and vibration assessment. It was therefore considered necessary to engage consultants to assist with the process.

Permits were required initially for 9 wastewater treatment works and it was considered best value for money to use the consultants employed on the design of these works, as they had ready access to the technical information required. A further 12 works have recently been identified for inclusion and a firm of consultants was appointed in September 2008 to prepare these applications.

Smartpass Scheme

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the (i) current position; and (ii) future, of the over 60's Smartpass scheme. (AQW 2043/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: Free travel for people aged 60 to 64 was introduced on 1 October 2008, and provides free bus and rail travel, without time restrictions, on most scheduled public transport services within the North. The decision to provide free travel for people aged 60 to 64 was taken by the Executive. The resources have been made available and are being safeguarded. I remain committed to providing this important concession.

Northern Ireland Railways

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he is taking to improve the infrastructure of the Northern Ireland Railways' Enterprise service. (AQW 2044/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Transport sectoral group of the North South Ministerial Council received a joint presentation from NIR and Iarnrod Eireann setting out issues relating to the short and medium term options for improving services on the Belfast to Dublin rail link. That work is being developed and I will be considering it further with my Southern counterpart as part of our discussions of transport matters of mutual interest.

In addition, work started in February of this year to construct a new railway station at Newry costing £14.6m. Planning is also underway to relay an 11 mile stretch of the track between Knockmore and Lurgan, with work programmed to start in 2009.

My Department has also approved a £950,000 capital programme to overhaul the Enterprise Trains. The new corporate livery for the service has been completed and work on various engineering and safety measures is still being undertaken.

Northern Ireland Railways

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what criteria would be used in his determination on the withdrawal of services on Sundays by Northern Ireland Railways. (AQW 2045/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: There are no plans to withdraw Northern Ireland Railways Sunday services.

Work is currently being carried out to consider options which might address possible financial issues as part of a budget exercise for the next two years. This exercise involves all departments. In that context, Translink and DRD have been considering the financial position of Northern Ireland Railways. Before any consideration would be given to changing the level of service provision, options to be considered would be to explore ways to increase available revenue support both from my department and internally generated; to increase revenue from passenger growth; and to introduce efficiency measures.

Northern Ireland Railways

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the reasons behind the recent press stories on the proposed withdrawal of Northern Ireland Railways' services on Sundays. (AQW 2047/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: There is no proposed withdrawal of NIR services. NIR may face financial pressures in relation to the level of the Public Service Obligation revenue subsidy from government and the revenue raised from passengers over the next two years. This has been communicated to the Department of Finance and Personnel as part of the current stocktake of departmental budgets. Addressing any shortfall would involve considering a range of possible options: those which would involve additional means of revenue generation and making efficiency savings would be considered before any option which would impact on levels of service.

Office Relocation

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the representations he has made to have the Strangford constituency included in his office relocation plans. (AQW 2056/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department is already one of those with the highest proportions of staff dispersed to work locations outside the Belfast area. This reflects the need to manage and maintain the regional road network, which strongly influences location. In this respect, 11 Roads Service staff are based at locations within the Strangford constituency.

I wrote to Professor Bain earlier this year, expressing my full support for the decentralisation of jobs. Whilst scope for further dispersal of DRD jobs to the Strangford constituency or any other area is limited, my Department will continue to explore any opportunities for relocation, even if on a relatively small scale, where they arise.

Financial Controls at Northern Ireland Water

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the controls Northern Ireland Water plans to put in place to ensure the current financial situation does not arise in the future. (AQW 2071/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the introduction of new financial reporting systems is supporting more accurate forecasting and monitoring. The company will continue to review the integrity and validity of the underlying data, applied assumptions and the projections used in its billed income and forecasting processes, in order to ensure that they are as accurate and reliable as possible. Nevertheless, it must be recognised that projections, by their nature, can also be affected by unpredictable factors such as the impact on consumption of an unusually wet summer and/or a downturn in the housing market.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development, apart from the customer service director, who else was aware of the financial shortfall and overcharging of Northern Ireland Water customers. (AQW 2074/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the error in the application of standing charges to non-domestic customer bills, which regrettably resulted in some customers being over or undercharged, was identified in early 2007. A number of staff at different levels within NIW and its billing partners Crystal Alliance were aware of the error from its discovery and they worked to remedy the issue until the matter was brought to the attention of the Chief Executive by the Director of Customer Services in early October 2008. The key stakeholders were subsequently informed.

A potential shortfall in the income projection for 2008/09, which is not related to the over/undercharging issue, was identified by NIW during a routine mid-year forecasting exercise. The exercise involved a number of staff at different levels within NIW and drew on information provided by Crystal Alliance. The Director of Finance and Regulation notified the Chief Executive of the potential shortfall in early October 2008. Key stakeholders were subsequently informed.

The company has advised me that it is currently reviewing its procedures for escalating issues of concern in a more timely manner.

Northern Ireland Water Front Line Services

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development what effect the financial shortfall will have on the front line services of Northern Ireland Water. (AQW 2080/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the financial shortfall will have no effect on front line services.

C84 Corkey Road and Coolkeeran Road Route Study

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the amount spent implementing the C84 Corkey Road and Coolkeeran Road Route Study. (AQW 2086/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, all works relating to the improvement and replacement of warning signs and lining along the route, were completed at a cost of £10,800.

Location of Public Sector Jobs

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his Department's plans to decentralise departmental employment and/or operations of its agencies, to locations outside of Belfast. (AQW 2090/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: Overall some 65% of staff in DRD are based in locations outside the district council areas of Belfast, Newtownabbey and Castlereagh. DRD is one of the Departments with the highest proportions of staff dispersed to work locations outside Belfast. This reflects that most of them are attached to Roads Service, where the need to manage and maintain the regional road network strongly influences location.

Scope to disperse more jobs is therefore limited and, apart from the considerations currently being given to the location of the new NIW headquarters, it is not surprising that no other candidates from within the DRD remit were proposed for relocation in Professor Bain's report of the review on the location of public sector jobs.

Despite the limited scope to relocate DRD staff we will continue to explore opportunities for relocation, even if on a relatively small scale, where they arise. By way of example of this, in the recent past a number of new jobs for processing Parking Enforcement work were allocated to Omagh.

Roads and Footway Bonds

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the total bond given by a developer to his Department to ensure that roads will be finished after homes are built. (AQW 2106/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the total bond required for roads and footways, which have been determined under the Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980, is calculated on a site by site basis, using Roads Service Contract Rates. The value of each bond is dictated by the length, width and types of road, as well any roads-related structures or features that are provided.

Public Realm Scheme

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development what improvements his Department will make to Ballyclare town centre as part of the recently announced Public Realm scheme; and to outline a timescale for these improvements. (AQW 2135/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the environmental improvement scheme in The Square, Ballyclare, includes replacing the existing footway and kerbing with granite paving and granite kerbs, new street lighting and improved pedestrian facilities.

The scheme will be jointly funded by the Department for Social Development, Department for Regional Development and Newtownabbey Borough Council and will be constructed in two stages, with a break during December 2008. It is anticipated that the scheme will be completed for Spring 2009.

Traffic Volume on the Woodburn Road, Carrickfergus

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the latest available traffic volume figures for the Woodburn Road in Carrickfergus. (AQW 2154/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the latest available traffic volume figures for the Woodburn Road, Carrickfergus were taken on Friday 2 May 2008. This temporary 12 hour survey was carried out 300 metres south of the junction of Woodlawn Court, between 7.00 am and 7.00 pm and showed two-way traffic volume figures of 19,016 for this 12-hour period.

Pedestrian Area of Limavady Town Centre

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development his Department's plans for repaving the pedestrian area of Limavady town centre. (AQW 2187/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has no plans for the repaving of the pedestrian area of Limavady Town Centre.

Such Environmental Improvement Schemes are usually initiated and funded by other Agencies, such as the Department for Social Development, or promoted by Town Centre Management or District Councils. Roads Service is not aware of any proposal being taken forward in this regard. However, if such a scheme were initiated, Roads Service would seek to be involved from an early stage to ensure that future maintenance issues can be resolved and a planning application is developed which can be supported by Roads Service.

I can also advise that Northern Ireland Water intend to carry out significant watermain replacement in the town centre area during the course of next year, and this will impinge on any proposal to carry out environmental works.

Bramblewood Development

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 2610/08, for an update on the Bramblewood development in Crumlin; and what legal action his Department will take against the developers, given their failure to improve roads and sewers to an adoptable standard. (AQW 2220/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is currently estimating the costs of remedial works required to bring the streets within the development up to adoption standards, as the developer is not in a position to complete the necessary roadworks. Roads Service will shortly initiate proceedings, under the Private Streets (NI) Order 1980, against the developer to ensure completion of the streets.

Northern Ireland Water (NIW) has advised that the necessary remedial work has now been completed by the developer to bring the sewers at Bramblewood up to an acceptable standard for adoption. NIW is at present liaising with the developer to finalise the adoption procedure of the sewers.

Translink

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to the answer to AQW 1861/09, if he will ensure that Translink addresses the gender equality issue as a priority. (AQW 2225/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I refer to my previous answer AQW 1861/09 and would like to add the following.

Train announcements are an operational detail and it is the responsibility of Translink to consider the content of such announcements in relation to equality legislation.

Translink are fully compliant with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, (the 1998 Act) and operate within their Equality Scheme as required under Schedule 9 of the 1998 Act. The Scheme has been approved by the Equality Commission.

Northern Ireland Railways

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development, given the terms of Regulation (EEC) No. 1191/69, that an alternative service will be provided if Northern Ireland Railways withdraws Sunday services. (AQW 2226/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: There are no proposals for the withdrawal of Sunday services.

In compliance with Regulation (EEC) No. 1191/69 Article 14 paragraph 2(c), under the Public Service Obligation (PSO) contract, if NIR considered that the schedule of passenger services should be altered, proposals would have to be put to DRD in advance of any changes being made. It would also be necessary to consider any legal requirements arising from the provisions of the Transport Act (NI) 1967 which relate to the adequacy of rail services or the procedures for the discontinuance of rail services. If I were to receive such a proposal from NIR, I would expect to see a review of alternative bus services currently in place and how they might be augmented.

This overall approach would be consistent with Regulation (EEC) No. 1191/69 Article 4 paragraph 2 which indicates that any application from a transport undertaking to terminate part of the PSO may include a proposal for the substitution of some other form of transport.

Translink

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the potential risk to Translink, if Sunday services are withdrawn and alternative bus and train services are not provided, as per Regulation (EEC) No 1191/69, of losing the £20m public service obligation grant it receives for running these services. (AQW 2227/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: in compliance with Regulation (EEC) No. 1191/69 Article 14 paragraph 2 (e), the PSO contract with NIR includes a clause where a 10% retention may be enacted if all conditions in the letter of offer are not complied with to DRD's satisfaction. Therefore, if NIR were to alter services without DRD approval, a 10% penalty would be enforced rather than complete removal of the PSO subsidy. However for the reasons set out above, it is not envisaged this will be necessary.

Location of Public Sector Jobs

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the representations he has made in the North Down constituency in relation to his office relocation plans. (AQW 2268/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department is already one of those with the highest proportion of staff dispersed to work locations outside the Belfast area. This reflects the need to manage and maintain the regional network, which strongly influences job location.

I wrote to Professor Bain earlier this year in the context of his review on the location of public sector jobs, expressing my full support for the decentralisation of jobs.

Despite the limited scope to relocate DRD staff, my Department will continue to explore opportunities for relocation and will give full consideration to the many factors involved in the relocation of jobs, where such opportunities arise, even if on a relatively small scale.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development when he became aware that the apportionment of water costs by Northern Ireland Water between domestic and non-domestic customers contravened EU

Regulations; and what assurance he can give that this will not lead to an additional cost burden on domestic customers. (AQO 966/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I assume that the Member is referring to the requirements set out in Article 9 of the Water Framework Directive. This Article, which is given a statutory basis in Regulation 10 of the Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003, requires that by 1 January 2010 costs should be disaggregated across at least industry, households and agriculture and that adequate contributions should be raised from these groups.

As the date for meeting the requirements of the Regulations is still in the future the water company cannot have contravened them. However, the apportionment of costs will enable the company to fulfil the requirements of the Directive. It is also a requirement of the company's Licence that costs be fairly allocated between domestic and non-domestic customers.

The change to cost apportionment earlier in the year corrected inaccurate assumptions about the consumption level of non-domestic customers.

A number of mitigation measures, including additional efficiencies and reduced capital maintenance spend, were implemented in order to minimise the impact of reapportionment and it remains my intention to drive down costs to the benefit of all customers.

The reapportionment did not increase the cost burden on domestic customers in 2008/09 as no additional contributions were sought this year. For the future, the cost burden on both the domestic and non-domestic customer groups will be appropriate to the demands they make on the services.

Public Transport

Mr Ford asked the Minister for Regional Development what extra provision he will provide on public transport for people with disabilities. (AQO 1011/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I am pleased to be able to tell you that at present, 83% of the existing Metro bus fleet is wheelchair accessible. In terms of Ulsterbus, 54% of the fleet is fully accessible and I understand that Translink is working hard to meet the target of achieving 100% accessibility by 2012.

In relation to trains, all of Translink's trains are accessible. Indeed, the newer C3K trains feature many additional accessible measures, including passenger ramps, dedicated space for wheelchair users and their companions, Braille signage at toilets, doors and at emergency and safety notices, audible and visual passenger information on board, accessible toilets, high contrast interiors, emergency call buttons, and conductors on board who can assist people with disabilities if necessary.

My Department also funds Door-to-Door transport in the main towns and cities in the North, a fully accessible service for elderly and disabled people who find it difficult to use mainstream public transport. In the rural areas, my Department, through the Rural Transport Fund, supports transport services for people who are socially isolated.

Development of Lands at Glenmona

Mr Adams asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the progress made in creating an inter-departmental steering group to oversee the future development of lands at Glenmona and adjacent sites in West Belfast. (AQO 1054/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I met with the Minister for Social Development and agreed that as a preliminary step her department would host a statutory workshop to discuss a way forward for the Glen Road sites. A senior official from my department attended the workshop in September.

I have written to the Minister for Social Development advising her of my particular concerns for the area and the need for a co-ordinated approach. I intend to meet with the Minister for Social Development again to further discuss the development of these lands.

Water and Sewerage Services

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister for Regional Development what impact the failure of the Executive to meet is having on the deferral of charges for water and sewerage services. (AQO 973/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have already expressed my preference for a deferral of the Executive's proposal to introduce additional household payments next year. A number of other Ministers have expressed similar views. As a result, my current working assumption, in the absence of an agreed Executive decision, is that additional household payments will be deferred for 2009/10. I have assessed the budgetary implications of this and have identified them to the Department of Finance and Personnel as part of the current Budget Stocktake exercise.

This will be an important agenda item at the next Executive meeting, when political circumstances allow that to happen.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development what discussions his Department has had with Northern Ireland Water in relation to the recently announced job cuts. (AQO 961/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I met with the Chairman and Acting Chief Executive of NIW on 30 September to discuss the company's ongoing change programme which is intended to improve efficiency and services. This discussion included issues such as the implementation of the Mobile Work Management Programme and the Depot Rationalisation proposals.

Departmental officials have also been briefed by representatives of the company on a number of occasions on NIW's proposals to deliver the agreed efficiency targets.

Between the Bridges 2009 Run

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the nature and the purpose of the 'Between the Bridges' 2009 run, to take place on the Westlink. (AQO 1056/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: The "Between the Bridges" event is a charity event which will mark the significant milestone of the completion of the improvement works on the M1/Westlink and is to be held in aid of the Northern Ireland Hospice. It will comprise a 10 kilometre road race and a 5 kilometre fun run along the new road.

I plan to take part myself and would ask my fellow MLA's to encourage as many people as possible to participate. If you do not want to run, I hope you will support those who do.

The event is scheduled to take place on the 8 March 2009. Anyone wishing to register to participate in the run can do so by logging on to the website "www.betweenthebridges.org.uk", in November 2008.

I would take this opportunity to thank all the organisations and individuals for their support and expertise in preparation for this event. I include in this, Belfast City Council, SportNI, the Community Relations Council, the Contractor for the works - HMC, Belfast City Marathon Company and our lead community partner Cumann Spóirt an Phobail.

I look forward to raising much needed funds for this very worthwhile local charity.

Development of the Westlink

Mr Molloy asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide an update on the development of the Westlink and proposals for the event to mark its opening. (AQO 1030/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that good progress continues to be made on the M1/Westlink scheme. It is planned that the third lane of the M1 motorway and Westlink will be opened to traffic, in each direction, by the end of November 2008. The overall scheme remains on target for completion by March 2009, which is some six months ahead of programme.

It is intended to mark this milestone with a charity fun run event. This event entitled “Between the Bridges” will comprise a 10 kilometre road race and a 5 kilometre fun run along the new road, and will be in aid of the Northern Ireland Hospice. I plan to take part myself and would ask fellow MLAs to encourage as many people as possible to participate. The run is scheduled to take place on the 8 March 2009 and everyone will be able to register to participate by logging on to the website “betweenthebridges.org.uk” in November 2008.

I would like to take this opportunity to formally thank all the organisations and individuals for their support and expertise in preparation for this event.

Business and Construction Industries

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the engagements he has had with representatives of the business and construction industries, in relation to the economic slowdown being experienced in these sectors. (AQO 1043/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: The attached list sets out the engagements by way of meetings, conferences and dinners I have had with representatives of the business and construction industries since May 2007.

In addition I have held numerous meetings with the Department’s associated bodies, NIW and NITHCO, the Trust Ports and Airports.

The economy and the developing economic slowdown have been covered to a greater or lesser extent in all these engagements.

- Advice Northern Ireland
- Aer Lingus
- Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union
- Banbridge Community Forum
- Belfast Harbours User Group
- BMF Business Services
- *Banbridge* Regeneration Agencies Network
- Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce
- Belfast City Centre Management Company
- Carvill Group
- CBI
- CEI Collins Engineers Ltd
- Chamber of Trade and Commerce
- Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy
- Coalition Against Water Charges
- Construction and Property Group
- Construction Employers Federation
- Consumer Council
- Derry Chamber of Commerce
- Derry Junior Chamber of Commerce
- Dundalk Chamber of Commerce
- Economic Development Forum
- Highway Management Consortium
- IBEC-CBI Joint Council
- Irish Central Border Area Network
- Institute of Chartered Ship Brokers
- Institute of Directors
- Institute of Highways and Transportation
- International Centre for Local and Regional Development

- Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- Markets Development Association
- Northern Ireland Environment Link
- Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance
- North Belfast Taxi Association
- Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations
- Phoenix Natural Gas
- Port of Waterford
- Public Affairs Ireland
- Quarry Products Association
- Rathlin Island Group
- Regeneration Civic Forum
- St Mary's University College – Cultural Economy Conference
- Stena Line
- The Wright Group
- Transport Salaried Staffs' Association
- UNITE
- US Northern Ireland Conference Centre
- Utility Regulator
- Water Group of Trade Unions
- West Belfast and Greater Shankill Enterprise Council
- West Belfast Taxi Association
- West Belfast Traders Forum
- Wrightbus

Irish Language

Mr Butler asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide examples of the practical application of the European Charter on Minority Languages in relation to the Irish language within his Department's operations and those of its arms length bodies. (AQO 1047/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have recently reviewed compliance by my Department and its agency, Roads Service, with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and implemented the following changes to promote the use of the Irish language:

- The translation of all Ministerial forewords to Plans, Reports and Consultation documents into Irish;
- The translation of all new or revised information leaflets into Irish;
- The launch on 29 September 2008 of a multi-lingual website for the Department;
- The publication of significant departmental announcements in an appropriate Irish language newspaper;
- The use of bilingual headings in the advertising of all departmental public notices;
- The identification of Irish speakers in DRD to help handle telephone calls in Irish ; and
- The issue of revised Codes of Courtesy on Irish and Ulster Scots to all staff.

In addition, my Department has prepared a draft policy for the introduction of a range of bilingual road signs in response to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Translink has recently launched a range of new Irish language passenger materials. This includes:

- bus-shelter timetable and route information;
- a Bus Rules for Safety leaflet and poster targeting school children;
- a 'See Belfast by Metro' Guide to the city's main landmarks and attractions; and

- a Travelling with Translink guide to using public transport in Northern Ireland including bus and railway route maps.

NITHCo/Translink, the Port of Belfast, Londonderry Port and Harbour Commissioners, Warrenpoint Harbour Authority, and Northern Ireland Water all fulfil their requirements under the Charter. They allow users of regional or minority languages to submit a request in these languages, provide translation or interpretation as may be required, and allow the use or adoption of family names in the regional or minority languages at the request of those concerned.

Development of Lands at Glenmona

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Regional Development what consultations he has had with Executive colleagues in relation to the future development of lands at Glenmona and adjacent sites in West Belfast.

(AQO 1050/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I met with the Minister for Social Development and agreed that as a preliminary step her department would host a statutory workshop to discuss a way forward for the Glen Road sites. A senior official from my department attended the workshop in September.

I have written to the Minister for Social Development advising her of my particular concerns for the area and the need for a co-ordinated approach. I intend to meet with the Minister for Social Development again to further discuss the development of these lands.

Road Projects

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development if any proposed road projects have been affected by the announcement of the Budget in the Republic of Ireland.

(AQO 1022/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I can confirm that proposed road projects contained in the Investment Delivery Plan, including the A8 Belfast to Larne and the A5 Western Transport Corridor, will not be affected by the Irish Government's recent budget announcement and that development work is proceeding as planned.

Bridge at Narrow Water

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development when his Department will publish its findings on the proposed bridge at Narrow Water.

(AQO 959/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: The proposal for a bridge at Narrow Water is being taken forward by Louth County Council and their Consultant, Roughan O'Donovan. My Department's Roads Service has no direct involvement in this project.

Roads Service is at present undertaking a feasibility study for a Newry Southern Relief Road, which would provide improved access between the A2 Warrenpoint dual carriageway and the A1 Belfast to Dublin road.

It has been agreed that Roads Service and Louth County Council will share information from the technical studies on these two projects when they have been completed.

Closure of Roads Undergoing Repairs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his Department's policy on the closure of roads undergoing repairs and resurfacing in relation to (i) notifying the public; (ii) selecting alternative routes; and (iii) avoiding roads remaining closed when they are usable.

(AQO 980/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service policy and procedures for road closures have been developed with the aim of, maximising the safety of the public and the workforce undertaking the road repairs, as well as, minimising traffic disruption to the public and securing good value for money.

As way of background, I should explain that Roads Service's power to close roads is contained in the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. Article 7 provides that the Department may, upon application, grant a Temporary Regulation Order to restrict or prohibit traffic on a road.

Roads Service seeks to co-ordinate with utilities and contractors when planning works on the road network. Although the majority of road works are carried out with traffic management signing and lane closures, for safety reasons road closures are sometimes unavoidable. However, I can assure the member that every request for a road closure is scrutinised, and no road closure will be granted unless Roads Service is satisfied that it is absolutely necessary for carrying out the works. Road closures will not be given if, for example, an alternative means of traffic control or reasonable alterations to the existing road is possible.

Where a road closure is deemed necessary, Roads Service will agree and approve a suitable diversionary or alternative route. This route would be clearly signed with temporary diversion signs, until traffic has been diverted back onto the original route. The choice of this diversionary or alternative route is usually determined only after Roads Service has considered the following factors:

- the expected traffic inconvenience;
- the possible traffic congestion; and
- the local road conditions of the proposed diversionary route.

In some cases remedial repairs may be necessary in order to bring the diversionary route up to a satisfactory standard.

Where a road closure is likely to remain in force for more than two weeks duration, the road to be closed must be advertised in the local newspapers.

Roads Service endeavours to ensure that the general public, and in particular those frontagers most affected, are given advance notification of the necessary works and/or road closures before the works commence. This may involve organising local meetings, letter drops, leaflets, advance warning or information signs and advertisements in the local press. It is also normal practice that the PSNI, emergency services, schools, school bus services etc are consulted, prior to the start of the works, and their views generally taken into account. Local Councils are generally made aware of the planned resurfacing schemes through normal consultative procedures.

Roads do not remain closed for any longer than is absolutely necessary. Extensions of time, to road closures, are not normally granted unless there are extenuating circumstances.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Housing Association

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the discussions her Department has had with bankers on borrowing money by Housing Associations; and what assurance she can give that best value will be sought in all transactions. (AQW 1951/09)

The Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): The ability of Housing Associations to attract Private Finance is an important part of their role in helping deliver the Social Housing Development Programme.

Whilst Housing Associations are responsible for their own Private borrowing, it is in both the Department's and Associations' interest that this borrowing is at appropriate and competitive rates.

Last year my Department hosted a seminar in Belfast between leading representatives of the Council of Mortgage Lenders and registered Housing Associations to encourage leading banks and lenders to support the work of our Housing Associations here in Northern Ireland.

As part of my Department's regulation and inspection process, Housing Associations are required to submit quarterly accounts where 'gearing' and 'lending ratios' are carefully examined to ensure the Housing Association has the ability to repay their debts and ensure their borrowing does indeed represent value for money.

Department's Procurement Strategy

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development what assurance she can give that her Department's procurement strategy will not adversely affect smaller contractors. (AQW 1993/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Procurement Strategy is designed to further mainstream good practice into the procurement of social housing. The delivery of this strategy will require full compliance with the wider government procurement objectives and EU procurement policy.

The Procurement Strategy, particularly the creation of four procurement groups and separate consultant and contractor frameworks, will enable small and medium contractors to come together in consortiums to bid for work.

Smoke Alarms

Mr Butler asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive dwellings currently (i) have; and (ii) do not have, smoke alarms fitted. (AQW 2073/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive currently has 87,263 tenanted properties of which, at October 2008, 68,426 have hard wired smoke alarms. The Housing Executive installs hard wired smoke alarms where dwellings' electrical systems are being upgraded, through its planned improvement and maintenance programme. Each year, the Housing Executive advises tenants who have yet to have a 'hard-wired' smoke alarm fitted to buy one or more of the battery smoke alarms, and some of the remaining 18,837 tenants may have done so.

Developer Contributions

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the timescale for the introduction of Developer Contributions to assist with housing affordability, in line with the Semple Report. (AQW 2084/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Legal responsibility for the implementation of Article 40 agreements requiring developer contributions for social and affordable housing rests with the Department of the Environment.

I met with the Environment Minister in early September to press for the introduction of developers' contributions. On 30 October I wrote to him again asking him to urgently release resources to move forward the necessary work which will allow contributions to be introduced. I expect it will take around eight months to finalise the policy once the Department of the Environment actively engages with officials in my Department.

Housing Functions

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development what housing related functions she is proposing to (i) transfer to local authorities in 2011; and (ii) retain within the Housing Executive. (AQW 2087/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The housing related functions which will transfer to the new local councils under the Review of Public Administration are:-

- Houses in Multiple Occupation
- Unfitness
- Travellers transit sites
- Energy conservation

The functions being retained within the Northern Ireland Housing Executive that were originally to transfer are:

- Urban Renewal Areas
- Private sector grants
- Group repair
- Supporting people

Social Housing

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development to set out a comparison of the Housing Executive's 'Assessment of Need' and her Department's targets for new social housing, for the financial years (i) 2008/9; (ii) 2009/10; and (iii) 2010/11. (AQW 2088/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive's 2007/08 Housing Need Assessment determined a need for 2721 new dwellings annually. I have set targets to start 1500 new units of social housing in 2008/09, 1750 in 2009/10, and 2000 in 2010/11 in accordance with the budget which I have been allocated. The 2008/09 Housing Need Assessment is currently underway.

Code for Sustainable Homes

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the timescale for all new properties to achieve (i) Level 4; and (ii) Level 6 on the 'Code for Sustainable Homes'. (AQW 2089/09)

The Minister for Social Development: As part of the New Housing Agenda, I have introduced Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes as the minimum standard all new build social housing must now comply with. This rating replaces and indeed surpasses the previous Eco homes rating of "Very Good."

Whilst I have made it clear that I want to develop more environmentally friendly and sustainable housing, I am conscious that there are cost and technology issues associated with moving to higher levels of the Code. Given that we have just moved to Code 3, I want to fully evaluate this further before committing to a specific date to move beyond our current level of Code 3.

Town Centre Regeneration in Derry/Londonderry

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development what money her Department has spent on town centre regeneration in Derry/Londonderry in each of the last 10 years. (AQW 2095/09)

The Minister for Social Development: For the purposes of answering this question, the Town Centre has been defined as the City Centre Retail Core together with the Waterside Business District as defined by Planning Service.

The Department for Social Development was established in 1999 but only holds accounts as that entity from April 2001. Therefore, the figures available relate to the last 7 years only. Prior to this, financial records were held by the Department of the Environment and are no longer available.

Town Centre Regeneration in Derry/Londonderry is carried out by my Department through the North West Development Office and spend is reported on that basis. The figures provided for Environmental Improvement and Public Realm programmes contain small elements of funding that have been spent in Strabane, Limavady and the wider Council areas of all three towns. The provision of a breakdown of figures for each individual town and area would be at a disproportionate cost.

The table below shows details of payments made across all programmes administered by my Department. The table also shows full costs for Ilex, the Urban Regeneration Company for Derry/Londonderry. The total spend for all programmes across the North West region over the 7 year period for which figures are available, together with full Ilex running costs amounts to £27,795,978.00.

The Peace II figures are reported in the calendar year in which they were incurred in line with the EU accounting convention. All other programme figures relate to the financial year in which spend occurred.

AQW 2095/09 TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION DERRY/LONDONDERRY

	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	Total
Grant								
EI								
Total	1,651	544,397	574,128	494,273	393,817	181,603	126,335	2,316,203

	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	Total
UDG								
Total	2,077,170.00	780,760.00	778,452.00	183,158.00	271,203.00	1,436,485.00	1,396,741.00	6,923,969.00
Public Realm								
Total	0	0	0	0	475,629.00	540,051.00	945,741.00	1,925,420.00
Integrated Development Fund								
Total	0	0	0	0	0	-	192,055.00	192,055.00
Site Acquisition(Fort George)								
Total				11,900,000	100,000			12,000,000.00
Illex								
Total			210000	644000	739000	957,000.00	1,712,000.00	4,262,000.00
Total Central Government Funding								27,619,647
Peace II								
Total			2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	
Total			41,341.00	26,318.00	-	19,373.00	89,300.00	176,331.00
Total EU Funding								176,331.00
Overall Total								27,795,978

Town Centre Regeneration in Belfast

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development what money her Department has spent on town centre regeneration in Belfast in each of the last 10 years. (AQW 2096/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The figures requested are outlined in the table below:

TABLE 1. EXPENDITURE ADMINISTERED BY DSD ON TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION IN BELFAST IN EACH OF THE LAST 10 YEARS (COMMENCING 1ST APRIL 1998) *

Year	Departmental Expenditure (£)	EU Funding (£)	Total Expenditure (£)
1998/99	10,951,637	1,278,845	12,230,482
1999/00	9,702,582	1,953,827	11,656,409
2000/01	9,035,463	13,566	9,049,029
2001/02	10,377,373	738,400	11,115,773
2002/03	10,179,506		10,179,506
2003/04	7,383,745	1,229,250	8,612,995
2004/05	10,156,520		10,156,520
2005/06	10,076,724		10,076,724
2006/07	10,227,100		10,227,100
2007/08	10,626,513		10,626,513

* The Belfast City Centre statutory area set out within the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan has been used as the basis for assembling the expenditure figures for the answer to this question. The Belfast City Centre area includes the Main Shopping Area, part of the Laganside designated area and those neighbourhood renewal areas with boundaries located within Belfast City Centre.

Ministry of Defence

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many houses owned by the Ministry of Defence in Springfarm, Antrim are surplus to their requirements; (ii) if she has asked the Ministry of Defence to release houses to the Housing Executive to relieve pressure on the waiting list in Antrim; and if so, what was its response. (AQW 2101/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Whilst my Department is pursuing the possibility of acquiring surplus military housing in several locations, I am not aware of any surplus military housing in Springfarm itself. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive already has provision for addressing housing need across Antrim and a former parcel of Ministry of Defence land has already been acquired and developed to meet the housing needs of up to 114 families in Antrim.

Housing Executive Property

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development how many people are on the waiting list for Housing Executive property in the Antrim Borough Council area. (AQW 2102/09)

The Minister for Social Development: At 30 September 2008 there were 1051 applicants on the waiting list for social housing in the Antrim Borough Council area.

Public Realm Scheme

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Social Development what improvements her Department will make to Ballyclare town centre as part of the recently announced Public Realm scheme; and to outline a timescale for these improvements. (AQW 2136/09)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department is working with the Department for Regional Development and Newtownabbey Borough Council to take forward an improvement scheme around the Town Hall Square. Work to replace the existing footway and kerbing with granite paving and granite kerbs, new street lighting and improved pedestrian facilities began on 3 November and is due to be completed in Spring 2009.

Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings Scheme

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail, for each of the last 5 years, (i) how many applications were made to the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings scheme; and (ii) the total payments made under the scheme. (AQW 2149/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The attached table shows the number of applications made and total payments made under the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings scheme over the past 5 years.

Financial Year	Applications Received	Total Payments
2003/04	261	£44,598,284
2004/05	123	£7,132,021
2005/06	120	£10,172,504
2006/07	62	£3,242,200
2007/08	60	£4,963,290
Total	626	£70,108,299

Renovation Scheme

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister for Social Development what consideration the Housing Executive is giving to a renovation scheme to replace windows in the Dunliskin area of Carrickfergus. (AQW 2153/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Approximately 50% of properties in the Dunloskin area of Carrickfergus had their windows replaced as part of a Northern Ireland Housing Executive improvement scheme which was completed in 2003. All of the properties have been surveyed and the remaining window units found to be of a generally satisfactory condition.

Location of Public Sector Jobs

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to set out her Department's plans to decentralise Departmental employment and operations of its agencies to locations outside Belfast. (AQW 2175/09)

The Minister for Social Development: There are about 8,100 people working in my Department, 31% of whom (2,500) are currently dispersed to locations outside Belfast.

This figure rises to around 37% if the workforce of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is taken into account.

Current analysis indicates that 50% of the Department's business functions are dispersed to locations outside Belfast.

The Department is currently considering the recommendations identified in the Bain Report and future plans for decentralisation will be developed in line with the principles set out in the report.

Social Housing Waiting List

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how many children are in families on the social housing waiting list. (AQW 2217/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive does not record the information in the format that has been asked. However the total number of households with children on the social housing waiting list at 30th September 2008 was 12,686.

Population Growth in Crumlin

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development if she is aware of the rapid population growth in the village of Crumlin; and if so, does she have any plans to invest in the social infrastructure in Crumlin. (AQW 2231/09)

The Minister for Social Development: I am aware of the growth of population in Crumlin. However, it is not currently defined as urban by DFP's NI Statistics and Research Agency and therefore cannot avail of the urban programmes of my Department. However, it does benefit from a range of my Department's community development programmes – most notably the Community Support Programme delivered in partnership with the local council.

Community and Recreational Facilities

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development if she is aware of the lack of community and recreational facilities in Crumlin and; if she could detail what measures the Department intends to take to address this deficit. (AQW 2233/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Responsibility for community and recreational facilities rests with District Councils under the Northern Ireland Local Government Act 1972 (Chapter 9).

It would be the responsibility of Antrim Borough Council to identify any additional need for community and recreational facilities in Crumlin and to take steps to address any identified need.

My Department does however provide assistance to District Councils through the Community Support Programme.

Crumlin Community Centre attracts the highest level of community centre expenditure from Antrim Council with an average yearly expenditure of £146,011.

Social Housing

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the strategies she has in place to address the deficit in social housing in Crumlin; and in the adjoining areas of South Antrim. (AQW 2234/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The annual Housing Needs Assessment, based on March 2008 waiting list figures, calculates the housing requirement for Crumlin. Crumlin includes Crumlin town and its surrounding area. At present, the Social Housing Development Programme for 2008/09 – 2012/13 includes 4 schemes totalling 80 dwellings for the Crumlin area.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of the continuing fluctuations in home heating costs, if the provision of dual heating systems and the installation of other systems such as wood pellet burners are being considered under the Warm Homes Scheme. (AQW 2282/09)

The Minister for Social Development: A number of proposed changes to the Warm Homes Scheme are currently out for public consultation. One of the proposed changes to the Scheme is the introduction of some renewable technologies, such as wood pellet boilers, for hard to treat properties. My officials are currently working with Housing Executive colleagues to agree a new technical specification for heating installations and are discussing the feasibility of dual heating systems. The public consultation exercise will run until 19 December 2008.

Bridge at Grainger's Mill

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 184/09, for an update on the removal of the bridge at Grainger's Mill, Antrim. (AQW 2286/09)

The Minister for Social Development: I understand that the recent Rivers Agency's investigation into flooding at Sixmilewater River in August has determined that normal river flows and flood flows up to 1:50 years are unlikely to be affected by the bridge. A NI Water pressure sewer traverses the bridge and it may also have some built heritage value. In the circumstances my Department has no plans to demolish the bridge.

Winter Fuel Allowance

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Social Development how many elderly people her Department expects to take their Winter Fuel Allowance. (AQO 1025/09)

The Minister for Social Development: I can tell you that in 2007/08 Winter Fuel Payments were made to an estimated 301,000 people over 60, benefiting around 221,000 households. While I do not know precisely how many people will take their payments this year, I anticipate similar numbers will benefit. To increase uptake of the Winter Fuel Payment, I have recently launched an advertising campaign to increase awareness of the payment for newly eligible customers. I am determined to continue the good work done to raise uptake of Winter Fuel Payment and a wide range of other benefits, especially those designed to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in our community.

Tackling Benefit Fraud

Mr Cree asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of problems in recruiting and retaining staff in those units that are tasked with tackling benefit fraud; and what action she is taking to remedy this situation. (AQO 1002/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The primary responsibility within my Department for investigating benefit fraud lies with the Social Security Agency's Benefit Investigation Service. Whilst in the past there have been some difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff, there are no longer any significant problems in this area, a point acknowledged by the Northern Ireland Audit Office in its report on Social Security Benefit Fraud and Error published in January 2008.

Social Security Agency

Mr Attwood asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the recent performance of the Social Security Agency. (AQO 970/09)

The Minister for Social Development: In the past year, the Social Security Agency has delivered its best performance ever. Year on year more demanding targets have been set and the Agency has delivered improved operational performance against most of its key target areas, including improvements in financial accuracy and clearance time performance. At the same time, the Agency has delivered a considerable number of modernisation and change initiatives. These achievements have been delivered against the backdrop of a major efficiency programme which saw a 2.5% per annum reduction in its budgets and a headcount reduction of 674 posts.

I would also highlight that the Agency's adherence to a rigorous benefit security strategy has resulted in the lowest ever estimated losses attributable to Fraud and Error, a reduction of 55% over the last 5 years to now arrive at only 1.3% of benefit expenditure.

Although some will always use the Agency for a cheap headline, let me repeat it. The SSA has delivered its best year ever and I would like to pay tribute to the staff of the Agency for their hard work and dedication.

Phoenix Gas

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions her Department has had with Phoenix Gas in relation to the levy charged for gas meters to residents in Social Fold Accommodation. (AQO 1063/09)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department has not had discussions with Phoenix Gas in relation to the levy charged for gas meters.

Positive Steps Report

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Social Development what action she is taking to implement the Positive Steps Report. (AQO 1023/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Since Positive Steps was published in 2005, Government has been working to implement the recommendations for action. I have taken an active interest and chair the Positive Steps Implementation Group, which is comprised of key senior officials from all government departments. The Group meets twice a year to monitor the implementation of the Positive Steps commitments and address any issues arising from these.

There has been considerable progress with the majority of Positive Steps commitments being achieved. A small number of important and relatively complex commitments have not yet been fully implemented. However, government has plans in place to examine the complexities of these outstanding commitments and to identify options for ensuring full implementation as soon as possible.

Some evidence of the significant progress made since 2005 includes:

Changing the regulation of charities in Northern Ireland. The Charities Act has been introduced and the appointment of the first Charity Commissioners for Northern Ireland will be announced in due course.

The £5 million Community Investment Fund in DSD for the 3 year period 2006 to 2009 is providing more strategic support for community development activity.

Rollout of the £18 million Modernisation Fund to help support and facilitate change is ongoing;

Departmental leads have been identified and strategic developments have been taken forward in key cross-cutting policy areas to do with Disability, Youth, Women and Rural Services.

I am confident that the significant progress made in implementing Positive Steps will have a long-term and beneficial impact on the sector and, most importantly, those it serves. Government and the voluntary and community sector, working together, can deliver the small number of Positive Steps commitments that remain to be fully implemented.

Absent Parents

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of how absent parents could increase their financial contribution towards the maintenance and welfare of their children. (AQO 942/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Since I took office in May 2007, the number of children benefiting from child maintenance has steadily increased to just over 20,000 at the end of September. However, one of the biggest obstacles to progress in securing money for children has been the unwillingness, indeed refusal, of some Non-Resident Parents to take financial responsibility for their children. We need to change the mindset that it's ok not to support your child. That's why on 10 September, I launched an Enforcement Campaign to target those parents who are failing to meet in full, their financial responsibility towards their children. This campaign is about changing societal attitudes. It is about sending out the simple message that not supporting your children is wrong.

Fuel Poverty

Mr Neeson asked the Minister for Social Development what consultations she has had with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in relation to fuel poverty. (AQO 1026/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Fuel Poverty Task Force which I set up in May 2008 to look urgently at the issue of fuel poverty included officials from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. I also wrote to the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment seeking a meeting to discuss fuel poverty. However, due to diary commitments, a date could not be arranged prior to the Task Force completing its work. Following the circulation of my paper on Tackling Fuel Poverty to ministerial colleagues, I received feedback from Minister Foster. When seeking clearance to bring forward my proposals under the Urgent Procedure I attended a meeting with the Minister for Finance and Personnel and the Minister for Health and a draft Action Plan, detailing required actions and lead responsibility, has been circulated to all Ministerial colleagues. A further meeting is planned in the near future and the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment has been invited to attend this meeting.

Housing Legislation

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Social Development if she is bringing forward housing legislation during this Assembly session. (AQO 964/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Yes, I intend to bring forward a Housing Bill during this Assembly session. The proposal for the Bill has been waiting for a decision by the Executive Committee since 3 July and the failure of the Executive to meet has led to a serious delay in progressing the Bill. If the Bill does not proceed there will be consequences for social landlords and homeless people; social landlords will, for example, continue to face problems repossessing abandoned tenancies and will be unable to seek possession where tenants are guilty of using the house for immoral or illegal purposes; homeless people will have no statutory right to appeal against decisions made in respect of homelessness applications and more significantly no right to appeal to the Courts on points of law. Because of this, I wrote to the First Minister and deputy First Minister on 26 August seeking approval to proceed under the Urgent Procedure in accordance with the Ministerial Code.

Housing Legislation

Mr Cobain asked the Minister for Social Development what impact the failure of the Executive to meet is having on the draft Housing Bill. (AQO 1015/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Yes, I intend to bring forward a Housing Bill during this Assembly session. The proposal for the Bill has been waiting for a decision by the Executive Committee since 3 July and the failure of the Executive to meet has led to a serious delay in progressing the Bill. If the Bill does not proceed there will be consequences for social landlords and homeless people; social landlords will, for example, continue to face problems repossessing abandoned tenancies and will be unable to seek possession where tenants are guilty of using the house for immoral or illegal purposes; homeless people will have no statutory right to appeal against decisions made in respect of homelessness applications and more significantly no right to appeal to the Courts

on points of law. Because of this, I wrote to the First Minister and deputy First Minister on 26 August seeking approval to proceed under the Urgent Procedure in accordance with the Ministerial Code.

Improvement Schemes

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Social Development if improvement schemes approved for Ardcarne Park, Newry, will go ahead as planned. (AQO 1048/09)

The Minister for Social Development: There are currently three improvement schemes within the Housing Executive's planned improvement programme for Ardcarne Park, Newry. A kitchen replacement scheme is planned for April 2009 and an Environmental Improvement Scheme is planned for August 2009. The third scheme is the buy back of one sold property and the demolition of void and fire damaged dwellings with the cleared site to be redeveloped in a future new build scheme. The demolition is currently planned for the 2008/09 financial year, subject to completion of the acquisition the owner-occupied property.

Programme for Government Targets

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development what impact the failure of the Executive to meet is having on the Programme for Government targets set for her Department. (AQO 1017/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The work of my Department is being impacted on a number of fronts.

Developer Contributions is a fundamental part of delivery of social and affordable housing. In the absence of a decision on PPS 14, a matter for the Department of the Environment, which has been with the Executive Committee since June this year, the target to identify new initiatives to ensure the provision of 10,000 social and affordable houses by 2013 could be compromised.

Implementation of measures to combat Fuel Poverty is also being delayed. This could threaten the achievement of the Fuel Poverty target in Public Service Agreement 7, impacting on the most vulnerable in our society.

Delays could also be experienced with Comprehensive Development Schemes (Public Service Agreement 12) as the Executive's endorsement of a protocol agreed between my Department and the Department for Regional Development on the disposal of non-surplus car parks is required.

I am pursuing decisions as appropriate through use of the "Urgent" or "Written" Procedure.

The reallocation of monies from September Monitoring was recently agreed by Urgent Procedure, and was announced last Monday. Part of my bid for additional money to cover the shortfall in house and land receipts has been met. Nonetheless, it is regrettable that given the importance of this in the Programme for Government, I had to wait so long for an answer.

Shared Future Agenda

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on her Department's work to promote a shared future. (AQO 982/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The shared future agenda is at the heart of all my work in the Department. It is an agenda that presents challenges, particularly in terms of our segregated social housing stock, but long term it can only complement our core objective of tackling disadvantage and building communities.

When I launched my New Housing Agenda earlier this year, I made it clear that I wanted to provide housing solutions that would start to bring our people together rather than continue to keep them apart. A recent survey found that eight out of ten people want to live in mixed communities, yet only half feel Government is doing enough to promote this.

That is why in August 2008, I was pleased to launch the Shared Neighbourhoods Programme, which will be delivered by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and will support 30 shared neighbourhoods across Northern Ireland over the next 3 years.

This will complement our delivery of new social housing developments and good progress has been made on new schemes at Sion Mills, Loughbrickland, Ballygowan, Banbridge, and Magherafelt. I expect to launch these in the coming months

Every scheme we now include on the Social Housing Development Programme is considered for shared future status.

Newry Social Security Office

Mr Brady asked the Minister for Social Development what plans he has to reduce frontline staffing levels in Newry Social Security office; and what is her assessment of the impact this reduction would have on the provision of social security grants. (AQO 1057/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Social Security Agency uses its Integrated Complementing System to determine the appropriate staffing levels within each Social Security Office/Jobs & Benefits office. This is based on the volume of work received in an office and the time taken to process that work, using a scientific, HM Treasury approved methodology. Currently Newry office is fully complemented and at this stage there are no plans to reduce frontline staffing levels.

The Agency is carrying out a Strategic Business Review to examine how best to deliver local office services to the public in the future. While there will be no impact on provision of service to customers, the options under consideration involve consolidation of back office functions and this may necessitate some relocation of staff. However, as no decisions have been made yet on the numbers and locations of the back office processing centres, it is not possible to say which local offices will be impacted.

Decentralisation of Government Offices

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the decentralisation of government offices to locations outside greater Belfast. (AQO 969/09)

The Minister for Social Development: I very much support the recommendations of Sir George Bain's Report and I urge my Ministerial colleagues to act quickly to address the issue of balanced economic growth across Northern Ireland. I fully support the proposals in the Report in relation to Ballymena, Craigavon, Coleraine, Omagh, Newry and Derry. I would hope that the Executive will pursue the Report's recommendations with an active policy of decentralisation and action by relevant Ministers to address the access problems caused by inadequate infrastructure and poor public transport which Bain identified for the 3 "next tier" centres of Enniskillen, Cookstown and Downpatrick.

Housing Association

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Social Development if a purchaser of a Housing Association property sells before their five year contract is complete, is the full discount that a social tenant may have secured under the right to buy scheme payable, or is there an incremental decrease in the discount to pay back each year of the tenancy of the contract. (AQW 2356/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Tenants entitled to purchase their home under the House Sales Scheme must normally repay the full discount initially received if their property is resold within a 5-year period. There is no incremental decrease.

Housing Association

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Social Development if discount repayments can be waived in exceptional circumstances, in the case of a purchaser of a Housing Association property deciding to sell before their five year contract is up. (AQW 2357/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Any tenant entitled to purchase their home under the House Sales Scheme, must repay the full discount initially received if their property is resold within a 5-year period. There is no incremental decrease.

However, if a property is sold for any of the following reasons, no repayment is sought:

- (a) disposal between joint purchasers or spouses;
- (b) disposals between members of the same family who have lived together throughout the six month period ending with the disposal;
- (c) disposals where the dwelling has been compulsory purchased or where compulsory powers would have been used if the dwelling had not been acquired voluntarily;
- (d) disposals not involving the residential part of a dwelling;
- (e) disposals in pursuance of an order under Article 26 of the Matrimonial Causes (Northern Ireland) Order 1978;
- (f) disposals under Article 4 of the Inheritance (Provision for Family and Dependents) (Northern Ireland) Order 1979;
- (g) disposals vesting in a person taking under a will or an intestacy.

Right to Buy Scheme

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the duty of care Housing Associations have for people who have taken part in the Right to Buy scheme and are still within their contracts. (AQW 2358/09)

The Minister for Social Development: When a property is sold under the House Sales Scheme, the Housing Association, as the former owner, ceases to have any further obligations towards that property. However, where a Service Charge continues to be payable for communal maintenance activities, the Housing Association must continue to take responsibility for that.

Housing Association

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Social Development what are the responsibilities of a Housing Association if one of its tenants is convicted of a criminal act towards a neighbour who is not a tenant of the Housing Association. (AQW 2360/09)

The Minister for Social Development: If a tenant of a Registered Housing Association is convicted of a criminal act towards a neighbour the Association can take action against that tenant under the terms of the Tenancy Agreement which all tenants are required to sign prior to the commencement of the tenancy.

ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Assembly Grade 8 Competition

Mr Attwood asked the Assembly Commission to detail (i) the number of applicants for the recent Assembly grade 8 competition; (ii) the number of applicants deemed appointable; (iii) the validity of applicants sitting tests, given that a number of them had sat the same test in an unrelated NICS competition; (iv) the total cost of the recruitment competition; and (v) total cost of the test. (AQW 2093/09)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr R Coulter):

- (i) There were 289 applications for the current Assembly Grade 8 recruitment competition.
- (ii) One hundred and ninety applicants will be invited to interview. Until the selection interviews, which are scheduled to begin week commencing 17 November, have been completed, the number of applicants deemed suitable for appointment will not be known. However there are currently 50 vacancies within the Secretariat at this grade and it is hoped to fill all of these as a result of this competition.

- (iii) The test papers being used in the Assembly Grade 8 competition have been supplied by a third party supplier, SHL. Such papers are used across the UK and the Assembly has no way of determining whether the papers have previously been used by other applicants within Northern Ireland or indeed whether applicants for the Assembly competition have previously sat such tests. However should you be referring to the NICS Executive Officer 2 competition, which was held in October 2007, the Assembly has been assured by experts in this field that such a timescale would not advantage any applicants for the Assembly Grade 8 competition who sat a similar test, or indeed the same test, at that time.

All applicants for the Assembly competition were issued with practice leaflets which are designed to help applicants to become familiar with the testing regime, particularly for those who have never taken the tests before. By providing these leaflets, all Assembly applicants are placed on an “equal footing” prior to the assessment day.

- (iv) The total cost of the recruitment competition will not be known until all interviews have been completed and appointments made. It is likely that the first offers of appointment will issue in mid-January 2009.
- (v) As the tests have not concluded, the total cost cannot yet be determined at this time.

CORRIGENDA

Written Answer Booklet of 17 October 2008
(Volume 34, No WA1)

In page WA46, col 1, AQW 946/09, was answered by Mr Nigel Dodds, the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

Written Answer Booklet of 24 October 2008
(Volume 34, No WA2)

In page WA145, col 1, AQW 1550/09, was answered by Mr Gregory Campbell, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure

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