
OFFICIAL REPORT

(HANSARD)

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Northern Ireland Assembly, Printed Paper Office,
Parliament Buildings, Stormont, Belfast, BT4 3XX
Tel: 028 9052 1078

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NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 12 December 2008

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Location of Public Sector Jobs

Mr Durkan asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to set out the Department's plans to decentralise Departmental employment and operations of its agencies to locations outside Belfast. (AQW 2202/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): We are currently considering the content and implications of Professor George Bain's Independent Review on the Location of Public Sector Jobs alongside various other relevant issues and public policy considerations.

Local Statutory Agencies and Communities

Mr O'Dowd asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what support and assistance it has offered local statutory agencies and local communities in overcoming the effects of recent violence on community life in the Brownlow area of Craigavon. (AQW 2870/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: On 18th November, Junior Minister Donaldson and Junior Minister Kelly met with representatives from local government, local statutory bodies, Department of Education and PSNI officers about the disturbances involving young people over recent months in and around the Craigavon/Brownlow area.

Ministers were briefed on the disturbances in order that they could identify issues where they could facilitate or support efforts to put in place appropriate responses in order to reduce tensions.

Ministers are continuing to monitor the situation in Craigavon and will meet with local representatives in this area to ascertain how the local initiatives are progressing and are reducing tensions.

Department's Staff Annual Report

Mr Simpson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many staff in its Department did not receive an acceptable mark in their annual report for the last reporting year. (AQW 2981/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: No member of staff received an unacceptable mark in their annual report for the last reporting year.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Mr P Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what contribution it has made or will be making to the consultation by the UK Department of Work and Pensions on reservations to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities. (AQW 2995/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: In December 2006, officials from the Department of Work and Pensions contacted our officials about the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the

Convention). OFMDFM assumed lead responsibility for progressing this issue and wrote to other Departments on 2 January 2007 to ask them to scrutinise their legislation, policies, practices and procedures to check their compatibility with the provisions of the Convention. This was to enable the UK Government to make an informed decision about the ratification of the Convention and to identify any need for reservations or interpretative declarations.

Further, on the 26 September 2008, Departments were asked to confirm whether they had any difficulty with the areas of competency covered by the Convention and to confirm how they had arrived at their policy position. Officials concluded that, based on a working knowledge of their respective Department's policies, practices and legislation and their Department's statutory duties and compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended, and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Convention was unlikely to impose any additional requirements.

Finally, we will be bringing forward a paper to the Executive next month to inform them of the progress made in ratifying the convention.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Mr P Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what preparations it has made for the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (AQW 2997/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Since January 2007, officials within OFMDFM have taken the lead in preparing for implementation here of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the Convention). The preparations have included:-

- Asking Departments to scrutinise their legislation, policies, practices and procedures to check their compatibility with the provisions of the Convention and to confirm whether they had any difficulty with the areas of competency covered by the Convention and how they had arrived at their policy position;
- Conducting formal and informal discussions with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) about being designated jointly as a Monitoring Body as required by Article 33 (2) of the Convention;
- Ongoing formal and informal discussions with relevant officials from the Office of Disability Issues (which is within the Department of Work and Pensions) (ODI); and with representatives from NIHRC and ECNI; and representatives from Disability Action on wider implementation issues.

Finally, our officials are intending to organise an event, in conjunction with Disability Action and ODI, early in the New Year to discuss the Convention with interested parties.

Banking Sector

Mr W Clarke asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when it meets with the local banking sector, if it would consider discussing lowering (i) loan charges for small businesses experiencing difficulties; and (ii) mortgage payments for people. (AQW 3141/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: As part of our series of 'Cost of Living' meetings we met with the representatives of the local Banking sector on 21st July 2008. The purpose of this meeting was to gather information on the impact of the present difficult financial situation on local social and economic interests.

We are committed to doing all we can to minimise the impact of the economic downturn on local people and businesses. We are examining all of the possible measures at our disposal. While banking is a reserved matter we are also prepared to have further meetings with the local banks if necessary. In such an event we will raise the matters you have raised.

Positive Relations Project

Mr McKay asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide an update on the Positive Relations project that was submitted by Loughgiel Community Association. (AQW 3174/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We have been requested to consider 5 project applications which have been referred by the Special European Union Programmes Body under delegated authority requirements. These relate to PEACE III, Priority 1.1 (Building positive relationships at the local level).

These are under active consideration, which includes a review of the full economic appraisals, and we shall reply to SEUPB at the earliest opportunity.

European Commission

Mr B McCrea asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what meetings it has had with representatives of the European Commission since restoration of devolution. (AQO 1505/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: There is an ongoing positive relationship between the Department's Ministers and officials and the European Commission. Commission President Barroso visited Belfast shortly before restoration and announced the establishment of a Task Force that will help us make the most of the opportunities that the EU offers. Since then, Ministers from our Department have met with Commissioners or senior Commission officials 8 times in Brussels and 3 times in Belfast. There has also been extensive engagement between our officials and Commission officials as the Task Force report, and the Action Plan that sets out our response to it, are developed. We aim to secure Executive agreement to the Action Plan early next year and hope to visit Brussels in the New Year to present the document to the European Commission.

We are committed to increasing our engagement with all the European Institutions, including the European Parliament, whose President, Hans-Gert Pöttering, visited here two weeks ago.

A list of meetings between OFMDFM and representatives of the European Commission will be sent to the Member and a copy placed in the library of the House.

Investment Strategy

Mr Brolly asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the roll-out of the Investment Strategy will be accelerated to provide opportunities for the construction industry. (AQO 1606/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The present difficulties that are affecting the construction industry are a key concern to the Executive at this time, as was made clear to the Assembly two weeks ago during a debate on this issue.

We commissioned the Strategic Investment Board to advise us on how we could best use the Investment Strategy to provide practical help to the construction industry at this time. SIB has now reported its findings and we are urgently examining the range of options open to us to accelerate projects within the available funding envelope.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel will shortly be advising the Executive on the December monitoring round, including his assessment of the amount of capital funding available for the remainder of 2008-09. With the advice we have now received from SIB, we are prepared to bring forward worthwhile projects if funding becomes available through the surrender of reduced requirements by departments.

We are also looking at the position for 2009-10 and beyond in the context of the Strategic Stocktake.

As part of December Monitoring and the Strategic Stocktake we will also consider the opportunities to make use of the flexibility to accelerate up to £86.5 million funding for investment in the local economy over the next two years as a result of the Chancellor's Pre Budget Report.

Northern Ireland MEPs

Mr Cobain asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many times it has met with Northern Ireland elected MEPs since restoration of devolution. (AQO 1513/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: A list of meetings between OFMDFM and MEPs is set out in the following tables.

Minister	MEP	Date	Purpose / context
Ian Paisley, Martin McGuinness	Jim Nicholson	19 July 2007	Briefing on Task Force
Ian Paisley, Martin McGuinness	Bairbre de Brún	19 July 2007	Briefing on Task Force
Ian Paisley, Martin McGuinness	Jim Nicholson, Bairbre de Brún	10 September 2007	Breakfast meeting with European Parliament Regional Development Committee
Ian Paisley, Martin McGuinness	Jim Nicholson	10 November 2008	Potential for greater engagement between NI Executive and the EU

OFMDFM OFFICIALS MEETINGS WITH MEPS

MEP	Date	Purpose / context
Jim Allister	8 May 2007	Meeting with InvestNI team in Brussels
Jim Nicholson	13 June 2007	Visit of Sir Reg Empey, MLA
Jim Nicholson	29 June 2007	Meeting with NSMC Secretariat
Jim Nicholson, Bairbre de Brún	10 September 2007	Briefing by NSMC Secretariat to European Parliament Regional Development Committee.
Jim Allister	22 November 2007	Northern Ireland Task Force – NICS visit to Brussels
Jim Nicholson	22 November 2007	Northern Ireland Task Force – NICS visit to Brussels
Bairbre de Brún	22 November 2007	Northern Ireland Task Force – NICS visit to Brussels
Jim Nicholson	19 March 2008	To discuss ONIEB premises in Brussels.
Jim Allister	11 June 2008	Introduce new team member
Jim Nicholson	11 June 2008	Introduce new team member

In addition to these meetings, OFMDFM officials working in the Executive's Office in Brussels are in regular, less formal contact with the MEPs, for example when they address groups of visitors from Northern Ireland or support functions that are hosted in the Executive's office in Brussels.

Strategic Investment Board

Mr Boylan asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the process for appointing replacements to the Strategic Investment Board. (AQO 1555/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are presently considering the appointment of replacements to the Board of the Strategic Investment Board.

President of the European Parliament Visit

Mr W Clarke asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the visit by the President of the European Parliament to Parliament Buildings on Monday 24 November 2008. (AQO 1602/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We were very pleased to welcome European Parliament President Hans Gert Pöttering to Belfast on 23 and 24 November 2008.

President Pöttering met representatives of many different faiths and heard their experiences of bringing communities together. We had a very useful discussion with President Pöttering covering a wide range of issues including cultural integration, the current economic challenges, our particular task of resolving the education transfer issue and our response to the European Commission Taskforce on Northern Ireland. President Pöttering demonstrated great interest in what has happened in Northern Ireland and indicated his willingness to help us in whatever way he can.

President Pöttering addressed the Northern Ireland Assembly and expressed himself honoured to do so as head of one of the three institutions of the European Union. President Pöttering highlighted the importance of the

European project in contributing to the process of peace. His speech also covered the challenges for the European Union in the areas of economic stability, climate change and ratification of the Lisbon Treaty.

We were delighted to be able to show good examples of peace and reconciliation work to President Pöttering by facilitating project visits in Belfast and Lisburn and by hosting an evening reception when the President was able to talk to many representatives of civil society who have done excellent work throughout Northern Ireland. The primary themes of the President's visit were inter-parliamentary and inter-cultural dialogue with an emphasis on work with young people.

We regard this as a very significant visit and a very successful one. President Pöttering has told us how impressed he was with what he saw and heard during his visit. He has also given us a firm indication of his support for our European objectives, in particular as we progress to implement the recommendations of the European Commission Taskforce on Northern Ireland. This includes our wish to share with others our experiences in peace and reconciliation. We intend to avail of this offer of support as we develop our proposals for such a facility.

Child Poverty

Mr Durkan asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action it is taking to deal with the implications of rising energy costs on targets to eradicate child poverty. (AQO 1531/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We continue to be concerned at the impact of all recent cost increases, including rising energy costs, although it is not possible at present to assess precisely what those impacts will be. However, work is in progress which will examine how the purchasing power of different households has changed as a result of recent increases in retail prices. This work is due to report in early January 2009.

The Executive remains determined however to meet our PFG commitments to:

- work towards the elimination of child poverty in Northern Ireland by 2020 and reducing child poverty by 50% by 2010; and
- to work towards the elimination of severe child poverty by 2012.

To take this work forward, a cross departmental group has recently been established. The aim of the cross-departmental group is to ensure a comprehensive and cohesive focus on the issue of Child Poverty in Northern Ireland.

More specifically, the sub-group's work will include the consideration of the social and economic policies needed to reduce child poverty taking account of the current economic climate. The sub-group will also give careful consideration to the recommendations emerging from the OFMDFM Committee's Inquiry into Child Poverty.

The sub-group is chaired by a senior official from OFMDFM and will meet for the second time in early December. Officials will report its conclusions to the Ministerial Sub Committee for Children and Young People.

The Executive recently adopted the 'Lifetime Opportunities' strategy to tackle poverty and social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective social need. Actions on child poverty will be monitored as part of the implementation process for 'Lifetime Opportunities'.

West Belfast and Greater Shankill Taskforce Report

Ms S Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions it has held with Ministerial colleagues on ensuring that its policy commitment to the West Belfast and Greater Shankill Taskforce Report is honoured fully. (AQO 1597/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are presently considering a paper from the Minister of Enterprise Trade and Investment which proposes bringing forward an Executive paper on the way forward on the West Belfast/Greater Shankill initiative.

Business Trip to Washington

Mr Burnside asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what meetings it will hold during the business trip to Washington DC and to confirm if it will meet with the incoming President-elect's transition team. (AQO 1484/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: The main purpose of our mission to the US was to promote the local economy and to attract further inward investment. In Washington we met with President Bush and the Director of the National Security Council Stephen Hadley and we addressed top executives at the Fortune 500 Forum dinner on the benefits of investing here. We also met with the British and Irish Ambassadors and visited Annapolis where we met with Martin O'Malley, the Governor of Maryland. During our visit to New York we participated in a series of high level political and business meetings aimed at promoting the local economy and securing further investment.

The President-elect has stated that it is not appropriate for his incoming transition team to meet with representatives of foreign governments until after the Inauguration

Civil Service

Mr K Robinson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, following the announcement on 11 November on the need to transform public services, what plans it has to privatise any of the services offered by the Northern Ireland Civil Service or other government agencies. (AQO 1485/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: A key priority in our Programme for Government is to deliver modern, high quality and efficient public services and we are currently taking forward the most wide ranging reform of public services for a generation. This includes key reform programmes in areas such as health, education, water, planning and local government. At the heart of this reform programme is a commitment to world class public services which meet the needs of the economy and wider society.

Modernising the infrastructure and processes of the Civil Service is a key part of our reform programme. This aims to reduce costs and cut out bureaucracy by sharing key corporate services such as human resources, finance and ICT across departments. This will realise significant savings which will be redirected to delivering key services direct to the public.

In relation to the Northern Ireland Civil Service Reform Programme, there are no current plans to change the delivery mechanisms for any of the projects in order to pursue a higher level of outsourcing or privatisation of these services. The only project where a contract is still to be awarded is Workplace 2010, which envisages the transfer to the private sector of some messenger and facilities management work currently undertaken by civil servants. However, the procurement of Workplace 2010 is currently suspended.

Asylum Seekers

Ms Anderson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if it will make representations to the UK Government to improve holding conditions in Northern Ireland for asylum seekers and their children. (AQO 1547/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: Under schedule 2 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 asylum and the status and capacity of persons in the United Kingdom who are not British citizens are excepted matters and are the responsibility of the Minister of State for Borders and Immigration. Accordingly queries about specific holding conditions for asylum seekers and their children need to be addressed to the Minister of State for Borders and Immigration, Mr Phil Woolas MP.

We do however recognise that immigration matters have substantial implications for government here, and for people living here under immigration control, and are thus a legitimate concern of the devolved administration. As a member of the OFMDFM Committee you will be aware of our recent correspondence with the Committee on these issues and our continuing engagement with the UK Border Agency (UKBA) over matters of specific concern, including those relating to asylum seekers.

These matters are important and in the interests of all people living here, especially those who are most vulnerable, including people who are seeking asylum, we want to ensure that they can avail of their rights and that they are treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect. This is at the forefront of our engagement with the UKBA.

Child Poverty

Mr D Bradley asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the importance of childcare provision in a strategy to tackle child poverty; and to confirm when it will produce a strategy for childcare. (AQO 1526/09)

The First Minister and deputy First Minister: We recognise that many of the children here living in poverty are in workless lone parent families or in workless couple households. We believe for many of these families employment is the best route out of poverty and lack of quality, affordable childcare is undoubtedly one of the major barriers to this.

Childcare is an issue which cuts across the remit of a number of departments and at the last meeting of the Ministerial Sub-Committee for Children and Young People it was agreed that an additional cross departmental sub-group would be established to focus on child poverty. The group will make recommendations including on childcare provision.

This group is expected to report in the Spring of 2009.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Farm Nutrient Scheme

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farm businesses were awaiting approval for an offer for the Farm Nutrient scheme at 15 November 2008. (AQW 2720/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): At the 15 November, 133 FNMS applicants still had to provide information so their approvals could be issued. Seven have since submitted the information required and have had their approvals issued. The Department cannot approve the remaining 126 as in these cases it still awaits information from the applicants, e.g. planning/NIE approvals and revised quotations, before processing their approvals.

Fair Pricing

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she places fair pricing at the centre of her Department's retail policies. (AQW 2756/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Retail pricing is a reserved matter under the NI Act 1998 and therefore not within my remit. However, I do agree with the concept of fair pricing and consider that I have a role to encourage and facilitate a mutual understanding of the challenges facing each part of the food chain. As part of that process, I have visited a number of retailers, as well as producers and food processors, to encourage discussion of the challenges facing each part of the food chain, particularly the economic pressures on producers. I believe that all partners in the supply chain have an important role to play and all need to share in the profits.

Beef Farms

Mr McQuillan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, how the figure of 20% of the Republic of Ireland's beef farms being economically viable, compares with statistics for beef farms in Northern Ireland. (AQW 2762/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: There is no standard definition of farm viability. Whether a farm might be regarded as viable, i.e. will continue to operate, will be determined by the particular circumstances and preferences of, and choices exercised by, the individual farmer and members of the farm household. These will vary over time. Therefore, viability is not necessarily related to farm size or any other statistical measure. Consequently, DARD cannot offer an objective view on the proportion of beef farms that might be regarded as viable or not viable any given point in time. DARD, however, offers a range of services and support mechanisms which are available to beef farmers whatever their individual circumstances.

Tuberculosis in Cattle

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to tuberculosis in cattle, to detail (i) the cost of testing; (ii) the cost of veterinary fees for testing; and (iii) the number slaughtered but found to be disease free, in 2008. (AQW 2765/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

- (i) We do not record separately the costs of all the activities involved in testing of animals and samples for bovine TB. However the bulk of testing work relates to the costs we record for the Veterinary Science Laboratory at AFBI (VSD), to PVP costs, Staff Costs under the TB programme, and the costs of Tuberculin, and this amounted to £12.5 million for the year ending 31 March 2008. Total costs for the Tb programme are attached.
- (ii) The cost of PVP fees for conducting a comparative skin test in that year was £6.3 million.
- (iii) The tests currently in use confirm the presence of disease but cannot confirm its absence. Between January and June 2008, 4009 animals were removed under the TB Programme of which 3036 did not have disease confirmed.

Cost of the DARD TB Programme 2007/2008

VSD Costs	PVP Costs	Compensation	Staff Costs	DARD Funded Research	Haulier Costs	Misc	Tuberculin	Salvage	Total Expenditure
740,061	6,311,631	8,547,534	4,700,904	526,786	169,918	183,916	793,476	-738,509	21,235,717

Rural Communities

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps her Department is taking to assist elderly people in rural communities. (AQW 2774/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department is taking action to assist elderly people in rural communities in a number of ways.

Under the Rural Development Programme the six 'quality of life measures' of Axis 3 are designed to strengthen the social and economic infrastructure of the entire rural community. Worth up to £100 million, delivery is through a bottom up approach by seven local council clusters, each in partnership with a newly formed local action group. In preparation of the local development strategy for each area, the cluster/local action group partnership was required to include initiatives under the six measures which focus on a range of commitments to key Government cross-cutting strategies including Ageing in an Inclusive Society.

I have also secured a further £10m budget to address rural Poverty and Social Exclusion, a number of key actions in respect of Fuel Poverty, Community Development, Transport and Access to services have been identified. To date my department has collaborated with DSD to ensure that delivery of the Warm Homes Scheme to rural areas can be maximised this year. This includes supporting the installation of central heating to householders over 60 and in receipt of certain benefits.

Further anti-poverty actions are being developed and will be available next year. Already my department plan to support travel for the elderly in rural areas and target direct actions to identify and support the elderly in the most deprived and excluded rural areas.

BSE and Tuberculosis Testing

Mr Burnside asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farms are closed due to BSE and tuberculosis testing. (AQW 2779/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: As at 27 November 2008 there were a total of 2963 herds with TB related movements restrictions applied. I can confirm that there are no herds closed for BSE.

Family Farm Options Scheme

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers have taken up the Family Farm Options Scheme in Mid-Ulster, in each of the last three years. (AQW 2783/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Approximately 5,500 members of farm households participated in the Farm Family Options Scheme over the three year period 2004/05, 2005/06 and 2006/07. Information on a constituency basis is not held by the Department.

Supply Chain Partnership Training

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farmers in Mid-Ulster have taken up supply chain partnership training, in each of the last three years. (AQW 2787/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: A pilot Supply Chain Development Programme, designed to provide support for farmers and growers working collaboratively to improve rewards from their supply chain, was promoted and delivered during 2006 – 2008. Seven groups comprised of almost 100 farmers and growers applied to take part in the Programme. None of the groups who participated in the programme were located in the mid-Ulster area. Provision for a new Supply Chain Development Programme has been made in the NI Rural Development Plan and is due to open for applications early in 2009.

Prior to the Supply Chain Development Programme, DARD offered a Supply Chain Awareness Programme which was available between 2003 and 2007 and attracted some 1335 participants. The programme improved communications and integration between producers, processors and multiple retailers throughout the supply chain by developing an awareness of market requirements, best practice methods and the capability to access and interpret information. The programme was delivered to a total of 98 farmers from the Mid Ulster area over the 4 years as follows; 03/04 (30), 04/05 (19), 05/06 (26), 06/07 (23).

Fishing Waters

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what she is doing to address the parasite gyroclerlyhn, in fishing waters. (AQW 2859/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I am not aware of a parasite with that name. The Member may be referring to the parasite *Gyrodactylus salaris* (GS) which causes the serious notifiable disease Gyrodactylosis. I can confirm that GS is not present in fishing waters in the North of Ireland.

The European Commission has granted the North of Ireland additional guarantees to help safeguard against the introduction of the parasite. As a result imports of salmonids from areas which are not free of GS are prohibited. GS is notifiable under the conditions of fish culture licences granted by DARD, and the Department also has a contingency plan in place in the event of suspicion or confirmation of the disease.

Flood Management Legislation

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what plans she has to introduce flood management legislation similar to that in other European countries. (AQW 2971/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The approach and legislative requirements for flood risk management in Europe is being driven by the EU Directive on the assessment and management of flood risk (Floods Directive). DARD, Rivers Agency as the competent authority in the North of Ireland has plans in place to transpose this Directive into the North legislation by the EU deadline of 25 November 2009.

The Agency also has programmes in place to meet Floods Directive obligations on assessment, mapping and production of flood risk management plans within the required timescales.

Animal Cruelty

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to the answer to AQW 2257/09, to outline the general nature of offences for which neither the maximum disqualification nor maximum imprisonment were handed down for cases of animal cruelty, in each of the last five years. (AQW 2982/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Since Questions 2982/09 and 2984/09 refer to the same subject matter, this response deals with both questions together.

The general nature of offences for which neither the maximum disqualification nor the maximum imprisonment sentences were handed down for cases of animal cruelty, in the last five years, is as follows:-

- Causing, procuring or permitting unnecessary suffering to animals or causing unnecessary pain or distress to animals;
- Failing to comply with the farm animal welfare standards set out in the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (NI) 2000, as amended;
- Failing to comply with animal welfare transport requirements or transporting animals in a way likely to cause injury or unnecessary suffering;
- Cruelly ill-treating animals;
- Failing to comply with pet shop welfare requirements;
- Abandoning animals causing unnecessary suffering; and
- Being in custody of animals in contravention of disqualification order.

With regard to why only one person received the maximum disqualification and two people received the maximum imprisonment for animal cruelty in the last five years, this is a matter for the Courts.

Animal Cruelty

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to the answer to AQW 2257/09, to detail the reasons why only one person received the maximum disqualification and two people received the maximum imprisonment for animal cruelty offences, in the last five years. (AQW 2984/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Since Questions 2982/09 and 2984/09 refer to the same subject matter, this response deals with both questions together.

The general nature of offences for which neither the maximum disqualification nor the maximum imprisonment sentences were handed down for cases of animal cruelty, in the last five years, is as follows:-

- Causing, procuring or permitting unnecessary suffering to animals or causing unnecessary pain or distress to animals;
- Failing to comply with the farm animal welfare standards set out in the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (NI) 2000, as amended;
- Failing to comply with animal welfare transport requirements or transporting animals in a way likely to cause injury or unnecessary suffering;
- Cruelly ill-treating animals;
- Failing to comply with pet shop welfare requirements;
- Abandoning animals causing unnecessary suffering; and
- Being in custody of animals in contravention of disqualification order.

With regard to why only one person received the maximum disqualification and two people received the maximum imprisonment for animal cruelty in the last five years, this is a matter for the Courts.

Divisional Veterinary Offices

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development where the gateway to 'Fortress Ireland' would be situated if the proposal to close the veterinary offices in Larne is accepted. (AQW 3016/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Should the Larne Divisional Veterinary Office be re-located as part of the roll-out of DARD Direct, the Department will maintain its portal inspectorate facilities in Larne. Checks on imported livestock, animal products and personal imports of risk animal based foodstuffs will continue to be carried out from these facilities. All imported livestock are recorded on APHIS and restricted on the destination farm pending follow up sampling, where appropriate. DARD has devised generic contingency plans that will be activated if a serious epizootic disease is confirmed in Britain or Europe. The proposed relocation of the Larne Divisional Veterinary Office will not impact on control measures or on the local risk.

Divisional Veterinary Offices

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the impact to the farming community in East Antrim, in terms of marginalisation, if proposals to close the Divisional Veterinary Office in Larne proceed with potential relocation to either Antrim or Ballymena occurs. (AQW 3017/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on the DARD Direct proposal provides a vehicle through which all impacts on DARD staff, Section 75 and agri-food industry stakeholders can be identified and actions proposed to mitigate against negative impacts.

To facilitate this we sought views from these stakeholders as well as all Councils and MLAs during the public consultation. We received 31 responses of which 29 were received within the timeframe to allow consideration within the EQIA. Responses were received from staff, the agri-food industry, rural and S75 stakeholders as well as from some Councils, MPs and MLAs.

You may be aware the ARD Committee, UFU (Ulster Farmers' Union) and NIPSA (NI Public Service Alliance) provided views on the final draft EQIA report last week and I am currently considering these. Once I have done so, the EQIA will be completed and published.

Divisional Veterinary Offices

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she will consider the negative impact on the rural community should proposals to close the Divisional Veterinary Office in Larne be presented, as indicated by the meeting held on 28 November 2008, in Larne Library. (AQW 3018/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on the DARD Direct proposal provides a vehicle through which all impacts on DARD staff, Section 75 and agri-food industry stakeholders can be identified and actions proposed to mitigate against negative impacts.

To facilitate this we sought views from these stakeholders as well as all Councils and MLAs during the public consultation. We received 31 responses of which 29 were received within the timeframe to allow consideration within the EQIA. Responses were received from staff, the agri-food industry, rural and S75 stakeholders as well as from some Councils, MPs and MLAs.

You may be aware the ARD Committee, UFU (Ulster Farmers' Union) and NIPSA (NI Public Service Alliance) provided views on the final draft EQIA report last week and I am currently considering these. Once I have done so, the EQIA will be completed and published.

Divisional Veterinary Offices

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of how the proposed closure of the Divisional Veterinary Office in Larne will affect farmers in East Antrim, particularly in Islandmagee. (AQW 3021/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on the DARD Direct proposal provides a vehicle through which all impacts on DARD staff, Section 75 and agri-food industry stakeholders can be identified and actions proposed to mitigate against negative impacts. To facilitate this we sought views from these stakeholders as well as all Councils and MLAs during the public consultation. We received 31 responses of which 29 were received within the timeframe to allow consideration within the EQIA. Responses were received from staff, the agri-food industry, rural and S75 stakeholders as well as from some Councils, MPs and MLAs.

Feedback from the pilot project in Fermanagh has indicated that the availability of a full range of services at one location and improved quality of service has increased customer satisfaction with DARD's service delivery. Along with the availability of other means of transacting business with DARD this has helped reduce the impact of additional travel distances.

However, no final decision yet been taken on the location of the remaining DARD Direct offices. You may be aware the ARD Committee, UFU (Ulster Farmers' Union) and NIPSA (NI Public Service Alliance) provided views on the final draft EQIA report last week. I am currently considering these and once I have done so, the EQIA will be completed and I hope to be in a position to make an announcement on the location of DARD Direct offices.

Divisional Veterinary Offices

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many people used each Divisional Veterinary Office, per month, in each of the last five years. (AQW 3022/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Prior to June 2007 no such data was collated. However since then customer information is being collated on a rolling basis, using a quarterly survey, as part of a DARD wide Customer Service Improvement Programme.

The information in the attached Annexes shows usage statistics at the relevant DARD Offices.

Divisional Veterinary Offices

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how far farmers would have to travel, by road, to get to their closest Divisional Veterinary Office, if the Larne office is closed. (AQW 3023/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The distance farmers have to travel to their Divisional Veterinary Office is dependent on their location within the DVO catchment area. Currently for Larne DVO this can be up to 40 miles for farmers in the South Antrim area near Moira, 30 miles from Lisburn, 25 miles from Cushendall and 33 miles from Toome. Farmers at the northernmost point of Islandmagee (Ballylumford) could travel up to 15 miles due to the geography of the island.

Under the proposals for DARD Direct, farmers will be able to access veterinary services at any DARD Direct office. The current proposals are for Veterinary Services to be available from DARD Direct offices in Ballymena and Antrim. Within this model, typical travel distances to the closest veterinary services would be Moira to Antrim - 20 miles; Lisburn to Antrim - 18 miles; Toome to Antrim - 12 miles; Islandmagee to Antrim - 32 miles; Carrickfergus to Antrim 20 miles; Larne to Ballymena - 21 miles and Cushendall to Ballymena - 20 miles.

However, final decisions have not been taken on the locations of the remaining DARD Direct offices. You may be aware the ARD Committee, UFU (Ulster Farmers' Union) and NIPSA (NI Public Service Alliance) provided views on the final draft EQIA report last week and I am currently considering these.

Meat Processing Companies

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the correspondence she has had with meat processing companies in relation to the low prices they pay to local farmers, despite higher prices paid to farmers in other part of the UK.[R] (AQW 3045/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Pricing is a reserved matter under the NI Act 1998. I have not, therefore, corresponded with meat processing companies on this matter.

However, I do share your concern and feel that I have a role to encourage and facilitate dialogue to increase understanding of the challenges facing each part of the food chain to ensure everyone gets a fair return.

As part of that process I have met with representatives of the NI Meat Exporters Association and with a number of major retailers to express my concerns about the pressures being faced by producers, and to emphasise the importance of everyone in the supply chain sharing in the profits.

Women's Groups

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what funding has been made available by her Department to each women's group for the 2008-09 financial year; and what programme each group is funded under. (AQW 3179/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The Department has provided funding of £135,560 to the NI Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) under the EU Building Sustainable Prosperity Programme (BSP) for the period 1 April 2008 to 30 November 2008; and £67,456 for the period 1 December 2008 to 31 March 2009 under the Community Development element of the Anti-Poverty and Social Exclusion Framework.

Pork Crisis

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many farms affected by the Irish Republic's pork crisis have been farm quality assured. (AQW 3423/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Nine of the 12 farms affected by the crisis are members of the NI Farm Quality Assurance Scheme.

Pork Crisis

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what contact she has had with (i) the Ulster Farmers Union; (ii) European Commission officials; (iii) Executive colleagues; (iv) members of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development; and (v) Republic of Ireland government officials, since the beginning of the Republic of Ireland's pork crisis on Friday, 5 December 2008. (AQW 3425/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

- (i) I have had no direct contact with the UFU. However contact took place, at official level, with UFU representatives;
- (ii) I have had no direct contact with the European Commission. However, the DARD official based in Brussels has linked into all relevant discussions there;
- (iii) I discussed the dioxins in animal feeding stuffs issue with Executive colleagues on Monday 8 December;
- (iv) A Senior official briefed the Chair of the Assembly Agriculture and Rural Development Committee on Monday 8 December.

I made a Statement in the Assembly on the same day and participated in the subsequent question and answer session which involved Members of the Committee. I also responded to a Private Notice Question on Tuesday 9 December at which Members of the Committee had a further opportunity to participate in a question and answer session; and

- (v) I spoke to Mr Brendan Smith in the Department of Fisheries and Food in Dublin on Sunday 7 December.

You may wish to note that contact took place with representatives of the farming and meat processing industries at official level. My officials have also been liaising closely with the Food Standards Agency, Invest NI, NI Meat Exporters' Association (NIMEA) and the Departments of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

I continue to remain in close contact with the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

Pork Crisis

Mr Savage asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why it took her Department two days to contact the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to inform them of the public health risks surrounding pork sourced in the Republic of Ireland. (AQW 3426/09)

The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department were first made aware of concerns around pork sourced in the South late afternoon on Friday 5th December. At the same time the authorities in the South advised that potentially affected feed had gone to 9 premises here. The immediate concern at that time was

to place restrictions on those premises to ensure that no further potentially infected meat could enter the food chain. My staff were in touch with the Food Standards Agency on Friday and over the weekend to advise them of the situation.

My understanding is that in the event of any incident of this nature which may have public health implications, the FSA would raise the issue with DHSSPS. However, as a matter of courtesy I did speak to Health Minister Michael McGimpsey on Sunday to ensure that he was fully aware of the actions my Department were undertaking.

CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Sport Northern Ireland

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the money that has been allocated to date by Sport Northern Ireland to cricket clubs for ground safety improvements. (AQW 2946/09)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr G Campbell): Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) is responsible for the development of sport including the distribution of funding. SNI has advised that no cricket club has applied for funding specifically for ground safety improvements. However, the table below details awards that have been made to clubs and elements of these relate to ground safety.

Cricket Club	Year	Amount	Project
Downpatrick CC	2000	£10,600	Purchase of equipment
Lisburn CC	2000	£25,000	Provision of 5 new grass pitches
NI Civil Service Sports & Social Club	2000	£200,000	Upgrade of pavilion
Bready CC	2007	£1,692,451	Development of ground and construction of a cricket centre of excellence
Waringstown CC	2007	£40,000	Development of the pitch and associated equipment
Donemana CC	2007	£60,000	Construction of second pitch

Delhi 2010 Commonwealth Games

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the funding available from his Department and Sport Northern Ireland for athletes preparing for the Delhi 2010 Commonwealth Games. (AQW 2947/09)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Responsibility for assisting athletes preparing for the Delhi 2010 Commonwealth Games rests, in the first instance, with the governing bodies of the sports. Sport Northern Ireland, however, which is responsible for the development of sport including the distribution of funding, administers the Athlete Support Programme which provides athletes with financial support to train, compete and access a range of support services such as coaching, sports science and sports medicine.

Irish and Ulster Scots Language

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to the answer to AQO 1182/09 and AQW 2067/09, for his assessment of (i) the degree to which the use of Irish and Ulster Scots has become politicised and divisive; and (ii) the remedial work required to tackle divisiveness in any future language strategy. (AQW 2980/09)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: It is difficult to assess to what degree the use of Irish and Ulster-Scots has become politicised and divisive.

In developing a Strategy for Indigenous or Regional Minority Languages I am seeking to ensure that both languages are given equal respect and recognition. These languages are a shared part of our cultural heritage and the strategy will seek to protect, enhance and develop both Irish and Ulster-Scots for those who wish to use them.

The strategy should also increase awareness of the background to the languages and create a framework where the languages can be shared by all who wish to use them.

Capital Projects

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what actions his Department is taking to bring forward the delivery of capital projects to help redress the economic downturn. (AQW 3104/09)

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I share the Member's concern about the current state of the economy. My Department is endeavouring to implement DCAL's capital programme as effectively and efficiently as possible. The DCAL Capital Programme Management Board continually monitors the capital programme and budget and is working closely with the Arms Length Bodies (ALBs) to develop robust delivery plans and a steady flow of projects and expenditure.

Work is currently progressing or planned in the near future on a number of key projects with a combined project cost of over £90m. Work on the Ulster Museum refurbishment and the Crescent Arts Centre (Botanic area) is already well underway. We also have a number of major projects coming forward later this financial year: Lyric Players' Theatre, the MAC (Metropolitan Arts Centre), and redevelopment of Tollymore Mountain Centre near Newcastle. In addition site work commenced on 24 November on the new PRONI Headquarters in Titanic Quarter, which represents a £30m public sector investment.

Due to the long lead in times for new capital programmes the Department is not in a position in this first year of the Investment Strategy to bring forward additional projects.

However, I want to reaffirm that I and my Department will continue to do all we can to ensure that the Department's ALBs deliver DCAL's capital programme within the shortest possible timeframe.

EDUCATION

School Meals

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Education what plans she has to introduce free school meals for children with no EU status. (AQW 1727/09)

The Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Bíonn na socruithe reatha ag dul i mbun béilí scoile saor in aisce a sholáthar do pháistí nuair atá a dtuismitheoirí oiriúnach de réir na gcritéar ábhartha incháilithe. Seo iad mar a leanas:

The current arrangements provide for free school meals to be awarded to children whose parents meet the relevant eligibility criteria. These are:

- i. he/she or the parent is in receipt of Income Support or Income based Jobseeker's Allowance; or
- ii. he/she or the parent is in receipt of Income related Employment and Support Allowance; or
- iii. the parent receives the Child Tax Credit; and is ineligible for the Working Tax Credit because he/she works less than 16 hours per week; and has an annual taxable income not exceeding an amount as determined by the Department (currently £15,575); or
- iv. the parent receives the Guarantee element of State Pension Credit; or
- v. he/she has a statement of special educational needs and is designated to require a special diet; or
- vi. he/she is a boarder at a special school; or
- vii. he/she is the child of an asylum seeker supported by the Home Office National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

Children with no EU status are, therefore, currently not eligible for free school meals. I can confirm, however, that officials are reviewing the position.

To date, they have considered the position in the South, and sought the advice of the Human Rights Commissioner (HRC). In the South, meals are provided through the Urban Schools Meals scheme, and the School Meals Local Projects scheme. Both schemes are aimed at schools rather than pupils. However, the nationality of the children in the schools has no bearing on provision.

The HRC advised that persons with no EU status may, like asylum seekers, require a separate category within the existing arrangements, as criteria (i)-(iii) are not suited to assessing their income. I have advised officials to make temporary arrangements from now to feed affected children until a policy line is considered.

Attacks on Teaching Staff

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of attacks on teaching staff in the North Down area, in each of the last five years. (AQW 2270/09)

The Minister of Education: Ní bhailíonn an Roinn Oideachais an t-eolas a iarradh.

The Department of Education does not collect the information requested.

However, statistics on the reasons for suspension and expulsion are gathered each school year from Education and Library Boards. The table below provides the number of occasions where pupils were suspended for physical attacks on staff, in the North Down Parliamentary Constituency, in each of the last five years that information is available.

2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
12	27	18	15	8

Recruiting Teachers

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the North Eastern Education and Library Board spending £63,694 on recruiting teachers through recruitment agencies during the academic year 2007/08. (AQW 2637/09)

The Minister of Education: As of 1 September 2006, all substitute teaching staff employed in schools must have their names on the Substitute Teachers Register (NISTR); and as from 1 August 2008 substitute teachers paid through the Departmental payroll must also be booked on-line via NISTR. Schools may in exceptional circumstances use employment agencies to recruit and remunerate substitute teachers, provided that this offers value for money and the teachers are registered with NISTR.

Áfach, ní mholann an Roinn an cleachtas seo. Impím ar gach údarás fostíochta lena chinntiú go mbíonn a gcuid scoileanna ag cloí le himlitreacha na Roinne (2006/7 agus 2008/10) maidir le fostaíocht mhúinteoirí ionaid.

However, this practice is not encouraged by the Department. I would urge all employing authorities to ensure that their schools comply with the Department's circulars (2006/7 and 2008/10) on the employment of substitute teachers.

Investment Delivery Plan

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education to report on the development of her Department's Investment Delivery Plan. (AQW 2843/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá Plean mo Roinne um Sholáthar Infheistíochta le fáil ar láithreán gréasáin na Roinne ag an nasc seo thíos.

My Department's Investment Delivery Plan is available on the Department's internet site at the link below.

http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/8-admin_of_education_pg/pdsu_de_investment_delivery_plan.htm

Broadbridge Primary School

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education (i) for her assessment of the progress on the delivery of a new school for Broadbridge Primary School in Eglinton; (ii) to detail any delays that have occurred; and (iii) when the project will be completed. (AQW 2910/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá Staidéar Fiúchais faoi bhreithniú ag an Roinn agus chomh luath agus a bheidh comhaontú ann, tabharfar faoi mheasúnú eacnamúil le CCMS agus na hIontaobhaithe ionas go socrófar an rogha molta don scéim chaipitil.

A Feasibility Study is with the Department for consideration and once it has been agreed, an economic appraisal will be undertaken with CCMS and the Trustees to determine the recommended option for a capital scheme. It is a requirement for consideration for capital funding that there is an agreed appraisal in place, and as that is not the position for this school I cannot indicate when a scheme would be completed.

Broadbridge Primary School

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education what is the value of the new school build project for Broadbridge Primary School in Eglinton. (AQW 2911/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá Staidéar Fiúchais faoi bhreithniú ag an Roinn agus chomh luath agus a bheidh comhaontú ann, tabharfar faoi mheasúnú eacnamúil le CCMS agus na hIontaobhaithe ionas go socrófar an rogha molta don scéim chaipitil.

A Feasibility Study is with the Department for consideration and once it has been agreed, an economic appraisal will be undertaken with CCMS and the Trustees to determine the recommended option for a capital scheme. It is a requirement for consideration for capital funding that there is an agreed appraisal in place, and as that is not the position for this school I cannot indicate when a scheme would be completed.

School Leavers

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many school leavers without an upper secondary qualification went into (i) further education; (ii) training; and (iii) employment, for each academic year since 2004-05, broken down by parliamentary constituency. (AQW 2926/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh mionsonraithe sna táblaí thíos:

The information requested is detailed in the tables below:

NUMBER OF SCHOOL LEAVERS LEAVING WITHOUT AN UPPER SECONDARY QUALIFICATION BY DESTINATION FOR EACH PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY 2004/05

Parliamentary Constituency	Number of school leavers not achieving an upper secondary qualification	Number of school leavers not achieving an upper secondary qualification entering further education	Number of school leavers not achieving an upper secondary qualification entering employment	Number of school leavers not achieving an upper secondary qualification entering training
Belfast East	396	135	58	131
Belfast North	571	98	115	242
Belfast South	295	61	45	125
Belfast West	817	137	183	383
East Antrim	433	113	72	185
East Derry	526	223	57	182
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	485	181	67	205
Foyle	713	362	94	167
Lagan Valley	438	154	52	173
Mid Ulster	576	165	107	250

Parliamentary Constituency	Number of school leavers not achieving an upper secondary qualification	Number of school leavers not achieving an upper secondary qualification entering further education	Number of school leavers not achieving an upper secondary qualification entering employment	Number of school leavers not achieving an upper secondary qualification entering training
Newry And Armagh	590	239	78	224
North Antrim	553	173	93	231
North Down	304	154	41	74
South Antrim	469	153	82	177
South Down	633	176	68	324
Strangford	476	204	72	151
Upper Bann	571	260	61	196
West Tyrone	315	117	38	120
Missing or Invalid Postcodes	201	52	40	74
	9362	3157	1423	3614

NUMBER OF SCHOOL LEAVERS LEAVING WITHOUT AN UPPER SECONDARY QUALIFICATION BY DESTINATION FOR EACH PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY 2005/06

Parliamentary Constituency	Number of school leavers not achieving an upper secondary qualification	Number of school leavers not achieving an upper secondary qualification entering further education	Number of school leavers not achieving an upper secondary qualification entering employment	Number of school leavers not achieving an upper secondary qualification entering training
Belfast East	360	112	57	141
Belfast North	586	108	118	285
Belfast South	282	83	44	123
Belfast West	718	147	197	304
East Antrim	432	135	67	174
East Derry	531	270	71	149
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	443	165	78	175
Foyle	646	227	109	216
Lagan Valley	452	144	83	193
Mid Ulster	517	168	104	200
Newry And Armagh	588	256	49	236
North Antrim	569	217	86	220
North Down	309	167	49	61
South Antrim	337	118	72	118
South Down	613	189	66	329
Strangford	461	243	66	116
Upper Bann	595	225	89	208
West Tyrone	501	124	56	282
Missing or Invalid Postcodes	194	52	43	68
	9134	3150	1504	3598

NUMBER OF SCHOOL LEAVERS LEAVING WITHOUT AN UPPER SECONDARY QUALIFICATION BY DESTINATION FOR EACH PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY 2006/07

Parliamentary Constituency	Number of school leavers not achieving an upper secondary qualification	Number of school leavers not achieving an upper secondary qualification entering further education	Number of school leavers not achieving an upper secondary qualification entering employment	Number of school leavers not achieving an upper secondary qualification entering training
Belfast East	371	122	84	119
Belfast North	526	70	118	221
Belfast South	294	73	43	144
Belfast West	666	116	160	272
East Antrim	413	100	86	173
East Derry	501	254	64	140
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	437	198	96	108
Foyle	718	351	101	189
Lagan Valley	420	125	87	153
Mid Ulster	434	122	97	171
Newry And Armagh	512	220	57	204
North Antrim	487	181	87	175
North Down	338	168	62	63
South Antrim	441	162	95	131
South Down	579	123	74	350
Strangford	448	228	94	88
Upper Bann	563	232	89	185
West Tyrone	416	199	50	130
Missing or Invalid Postcodes	190	46	40	74
	8754	3090	1584	3090

Notes:

1. The data are taken from the annual School Leavers Survey.
2. The data exclude special and independent schools.
3. The data are based on the residential postcode of each individual pupil.
4. In approximately 2% of cases there are pupils for whom valid postcodes are not held.
5. An upper secondary qualification has been classified as at least 5 GCSE's at grades A*-C (including equivalents).

Blind and Partially Sighted Children

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education the timescale for all books in the education system to have an accessible format for blind and partially sighted children. (AQW 2954/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá tugtha le fios dom ag Príomhfheidhmeannaí na mBord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (ELBanna) go mbíonn fáil ag ELBanna ar ábhair agus ar théacsleabhair do dhaltaí atá dall agus do dhaltaí a bhfuil drochradharc acu ó réimse leathan d'acmhainní speisialta, an National Blind Children's Society, an Royal National Institute for Blind People (RNIB) agus an RNIB National Library Service san áireamh.

I have been advised by the Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) that ELBs currently access material and textbooks for blind and partially sighted pupils from a wide range of specialist sources, including, the National Blind Children's Society, the Royal National Institute for Blind People (RNIB) and the RNIB National Library Service.

Each ELB provides textbooks and materials from selected publishers and locally accessed materials such as providing photographic services or adaptive technology services in response to the needs of specific children and young people who are blind or visually impaired.

I recognise that the expediency with which material can be accessed by children and young people is an area where further enhancements to service delivery could be made. In response to the RNIB campaign, "Where's My Book?", DE established a scoping project, which was led by the Education and Library Boards and on which RNIB was represented. The aims of the project were to consider and scope the scale of the local difficulties in making available materials in the correct format. In conclusion, the scoping study research has found the main conclusion of the RNIB's research "Where's my Book", to be justified and recommends that consideration be given to the establishment of a regional centre which can respond quickly to school requests.

The ELB Regional Strategy Group for Special Educational Needs (RSG) established a working group which is dedicated to the specialist area of visual impairment. The aim of the group is to promote a consistent approach across the five ELBs in relation to service delivery. The working group has consulted the voluntary sector, statutory sector and parents as well as children. The RNIB has had an active role in this consultation process. The Group has recently reported its findings to RSG and the key recommendation of the report was that the consultation process produced a consensus view that, in the context of an overall strategy of achieving full educational inclusion and of improving levels of educational attainment amongst children and young people with visual impairment, a resource base for the north of Ireland should be established.

Under the direction of the RSG the Working Group is currently considering the strategic proposals and is in the process of preparing a detailed options appraisal which will be submitted to DE as soon as possible. The Department of Education will consider the proposals in due course.

Blind and Partially Sighted Children

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education to outline her proposals for increasing educational attainment for blind and partially sighted people in the education system. (AQW 2956/09)

The Minister of Education: Taispeánann an Suirbhé um Lucht Fágála Scoile 2007 go raibh ar a laghad 5 GCSEanna nó níos mó ar ghrád A* - C bainte amach ag 58.3% de na fágóirí scoile a bhí dall nó a raibh drochradharc acu i gcomparáid le 71.2% de na fágóirí scoile nach raibh SEN acu .

The 2007 School Leavers Survey indicates that 58.3% of blind or visually impaired school leavers achieved at least 5 or more GCSEs at A* - C as compared to 71.2% of non SEN school leavers. The Survey also indicates that of those school leavers who are blind or have a visual impairment, approximately 36% have an additional special educational need.

The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) advise me that they are satisfied that all children with a visual impairment have their needs assessed and met on an individual level. This provision includes a range of teaching methods, peripatetic and classroom support and equipment that includes a range of IT applications. I recognise, however, that the expediency with which reading material can be accessed by children and young people is an area where further enhancements could be made.

The ELB Regional Strategy Group for Special Educational Needs (RSG) has established a Visual Impairment Working Group . The aim of the group is to promote a consistent approach across the five ELBs in relation to service delivery. The Working Group has consulted with the Voluntary and Statutory Sectors and parents as well as children. The Royal National Institute for Blind People has had an active role in this consultation process and has met with Working Group to discuss outcomes. The Group has recently reported its findings to RSG and the key recommendation is that a regional resource base is needed, in the context of an overall strategy of achieving full educational inclusion and of improving levels of educational attainment amongst children and young people with a visual impairment.

Under the direction of the RSG the Working Group is currently considering the strategic proposals and is in the process of preparing a detailed options appraisal which will be submitted to DE as soon as possible. The Department of Education will consider the proposals in due course.

Pupils with Special Educational Needs

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Education how many and what percentage of pupils with statemented special educational needs have received permanent exclusion from (i) maintained; and (ii) controlled school sectors in each Education and Library Board, in each of the last five years, broken down by gender in both primary and secondary level schools. (AQW 2960/09)

The Minister of Education: Information on pupil expulsions, which the Department collects annually from Education and Library Boards, specifies if a pupil has special educational needs (SEN), however it does not specify if the pupil has a written SEN statement. A pupil does not become 'statemented' until he/she has reached stage five of the SEN statementing process.

I understand from the Education and Library Boards that a very small number of pupils with a SEN statement have been expelled. Due to data protection and confidentiality, it would be inappropriate for me to provide the level of detail requested.

However, the table below provides the number of pupils with SEN expelled from schools by management type over the last five school years. The data has not been provided by Education and Library Board as this would have necessitated suppression of the majority of these small figures.

	No. of pupils with SEN expelled from controlled schools	No. of pupils with SEN expelled from catholic maintained schools	No. of pupils with SEN expelled from 'other' schools	Total no. of pupils with SEN expelled from all schools	Total no. of pupils expelled
2002/03	Data on pupils with SEN was not collected at this time				
2003/04	7	#	*	15	71
2004/05	#	10	*	22	63
2005/06	*	9	*	16	54
2006/07	8	5	5	18	45

Notes:

1. Includes pupils at Key Stage 1-4 only.
2. The 'other' category is used for statistical purposes during data collection and includes grant maintained and controlled integrated schools, voluntary grammar schools and other maintained schools.
3. * denotes figures fewer than five.
4. # denotes a figure ≥ 5 which has been treated to prevent disclosure of small numbers elsewhere.

Tá anailís dheiridh á déanamh ar líon na ndaltaí ar cuireadh ar fionraí agus ar díbríodh ón scoil iad sa scoilbhliain 2007/2008 agus foilseofar uair éigin sna seachtainí atá romhainn í.

Statistics on suspensions and expulsions for the 2007/08 school year are undergoing final analysis and will be published in the coming weeks.

Secondary School Places

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education what is the number of secondary school places in the Waterside area of Londonderry/Derry, broken down by (i) State; (ii) Catholic; and (iii) Integrated sectors. (AQW 2991/09)

The Minister of Education: Táispeántear sa tábla thíos líon na n-áiteanna mheánscoile i gceantar Thaobh an Uisce i nDoire, agus miondealú orthu ó thaobh (i) na Stáite de (ii) an Chaitlicigh de agus (iii) na hearnálacha imeasctha de.

The number of secondary school places in the Waterside area of Derry, broken down by (i) State; (ii) Catholic; and (iii) Integrated sectors are provided in the table below.

Sector / School	Approved Enrolment No. 2008/09 School Year	Approved Admissions No. 2008/09 School Year
(i) State (Controlled) Sector		
Lisneal College	960	178

Sector / School	Approved Enrolment No. 2008/09 School Year	Approved Admissions No. 2008/09 School Year
(ii) Catholic (Maintained) Sector		
Immaculate Conception College	565	105
St Patrick's & St Brigid's College, Claudy	500	100
(iii) Integrated Sector		
Oakgrove Integrated College	800	130

Catholic Secondary Education

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education to outline development plans for Catholic secondary education in the Waterside area of Londonderry/Derry. (AQW 2992/09)

The Minister of Education: Tuigim gur chuir na hIontaobhaithe tús le tionscadal athbhreithnithe ar iarbhunscolaíocht chun iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar sholáthar Caitliceach-bhainistithe do cheantar Chathair Dhoire agus Chlóidí.

I understand that the Trustees have established a post-primary review project to examine Catholic-managed provision for the Derry City and Claudy area. Provision in the Waterside is being considered within this review. Work is continuing and no decisions have been made on a proposed way forward for the schools covered by the review.

Pupils with Special Educational Needs

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Education how many and what percentage of pupils with statemented special educational needs have received fixed period exclusions from (i) maintained; and (ii) controlled school sectors in each Education and Library Board; (a) once; and (b) twice; (c) more than twice; and (d) more than five times, in each of the last five years for both primary and secondary level schools. (AQW 2999/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá socraithe agam go gcuirfean an t-eolas a iarradh i Leabharlann an Tionóil.

I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Pupils Excluded from School

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Education how much has been spent by each Education and Library Board in providing alternative full-time education for pupils that have been (i) temporarily; and (ii) permanently; excluded from school in each of the last 5 years. (AQW 3001/09)

The Minister of Education: Ní bhailíonn an Roinn an t-eolas seo.

The Department does not collect this information.

The Department allocates earmarked funding to the Education and Library Boards, which they can augment from their block grant, for a range of interventions for pupils with challenging behaviour. Each Education and Library Board decides how to allocate this funding to best meet the needs of the young people in their area.

If a young person is suspended from school, the school is responsible for providing suitable school work during the period of suspension. Education and Library Boards take responsibility for young people who cannot attend school on a temporary basis, due to a range of reasons including physical or mental health, behavioural or emotional difficulties and those who are permanently excluded from school or who have disengaged from mainstream education. The Boards provide a range of 'Education Other Than at School' (EOTAS) provision to meet specific pupil needs, including for example:

- full time placement in alternative education provision;
- full time placement in an intensive support unit;
- temporary placement in a special school or behavioural unit;
- a mixture of tuition and school placement;

- home tuition or hospital tuition; or
- placement in a pupil referral unit.

I understand from the Education and Library Boards that it is not possible to differentiate expenditure on alternative education between those pupils who have been suspended or expelled from school. Nor is it possible to separate expenditure on EOTAS for pupils who are excluded and for others who need to access alternative provision for another reason such as illness or emotional difficulties.

System of Selection at Age 14

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education what estimate she has made of the costs associated with moving to selection at 14. (AQW 3020/09)

The Minister of Education: Sna tograí a chuir mé faoi bhráid an Choiste Feidhmiúcháin ar 15 Bealtaine 2008 moladh próiseas ‘roghnaithe eolasaigh’ ag 14 bliain d’aois, seachas próiseas ina mbíonn roghnú acadúil ag 14 bliain d’aois i gceist leis.

The proposals I brought before the Executive on 15 May 2008 allow for a process of ‘informed election’ at age 14, rather than a process that involves selection at age 14. I have therefore made no estimate of the costs involved in a system of selection at age 14.

Kindle Primary School

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to question AQW 2621/09, how many pupils transferred from Kindle Primary to (i) Curran Primary; and (ii) St Joseph’s Primary, Tyrella, in September 2008. (AQW 3058/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá curtha in iúl ag Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlaine an Oirdheiscirt (i) gur aistrigh 21 dalta chuig Curran Primary agus (ii) gur aistrigh 3 dhaltacha chuig St Joseph’s Primary School i mí Mheán Fómhair 2008 ó Kindle Primary School.

The South-Eastern Education and Library Board have advised that (i) 21 pupils transferred to Curran Primary and (ii) 3 pupils transferred to St Joseph’s Primary School in September 2008 from Kindle Primary School.

Teaching Vacancies

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education how many teaching vacancies there are in each school, in the Mid Ulster constituency. (AQW 3070/09)

The Minister of Education: Bíonn an Roinn ar lorg eolais faoi fholúntais múinteoirí ó gach scoil dheontaschúnta ar bhonn bliaintúil. Soláthraíonn an teolas alagraf na bhfolúntas ar dháta ar leith gach bliain. Táispeánann an teolas is déanaí atá ar fáil na folúntais a bhí ann ar 2 Samhain 2007, agus leagtar amach thíos na sonraí an bhaineann leis an toghcheantar Lár-Uladh.

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 Mid Ulster constituency are set out below:

NO. OF VACANCIES STILL TO BE FILLED DURING THE 2007/08 ACADEMIC YEAR AT 2ND NOVEMBER 2007 IN SCHOOLS IN THE MID ULSTER PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

School Name	School Ref	Full-time, Permanent	Part-time, Permanent	Full-time, Temporary	Part-time, Temporary
Knockloughrim Ps	3016283	1	0	0	0
Greenlough Ps (St Mary’s)	3032275	1	0	0	0
St Brigid’s Ps	3036103	1	0	0	0
Edendork Ps	5032585	1	0	0	0

School Name	School Ref	Full-time, Permanent	Part-time, Permanent	Full-time, Temporary	Part-time, Temporary
Little Flower Nursery School	5136627	1	0	0	0
St Pius X College	3230168	1	0	0	0

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

Funding Awarded to 'Love for Life'

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education to detail the total funding awarded to 'Love for Life' by the North Eastern Education and Library Board. (AQW 3117/09)

The Minister of Education: Tugann Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirthuaiscirt le fios nach bhfuil aon chuntas aige ar dháileadh mhaoinithe chuig 'Love for Life'.

The North Eastern Education and Library Board advises that it has no record of allocating any funding to 'Love for Life'.

Class Sizes

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education for the average size of (i) P1; (ii) P2; and (iii) P3, classes in the South Eastern Education and Library Board; and to detail the schools that have classes in excess of her Department's maximum guideline of 30 pupils. (AQW 3136/09)

The Minister of Education: Tá an teolas a iarradh sna táblaí thíos.

The information requested is contained in the tables below.

AVERAGE CLASS SIZE FOR YEAR 1, 2 AND 3 CLASSES IN SCHOOLS IN THE SOUTH EASTERN EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA – 2007/08

Year	Average class size
1	22
2	24
3	24

Primary schools that have Year 1, 2 or 3 classes exceeding 30 pupils in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area – 2007/08

School name

- Crawfordsburn Ps
- Ballyholme Ps
- Braniel Ps
- Fort Hill Ps, Lisburn
- Downpatrick Ps
- St Patrick's Boys' Ps, Downpatrick
- St Joseph's Ps, Carryduff
- St Bernard's Ps, Belfast
- St Macartan's Ps, Drumanness
- St Aloysius Ps, Lisburn

- All Children's Integrated Ps, Newcastle

Source: Annual school census

Note: Figures do not include classes that are composite with any other year group.

I have provided funding to ensure that, for the first time, all pupils in Years 1 and 2 have access to classroom assistance.

Language Support

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what language support is available in the South Eastern Education and Library Board, to parents of children whose first language is not English. (AQW 3182/09)

The Minister of Education: The Inclusion and Diversity Service brought together services across the five Education and Library Boards in relation to the education of all newcomer pupils, whose first language is not English. The aim is to strengthen and improve support to all such pupils, their parents and teaching staff, primarily working through schools by using a number of new services and approaches available on a regional basis. Whilst the service works with schools, it also offers specific help to parents whose first language is not English. In particular, parents can have access to interpreters for initial parent/teacher interviews, parent consultation interviews, critical incidents and pastoral care issues. In addition, schools have access to 10 generic school policies and a number of key letters translated into 15 languages for issue to parents in their own language.

In response to a need to inform the parents of newcomer children about our education system, the Inclusion and Diversity Service created a multi-lingual website for parents in 15 languages, as well as Irish and English. This website can be accessed at www.education-support.org.uk. All of these services are available to all schools.

Tá curtha in iúl ag an Aire Fostaíochta agus Foghlama dom go soláthraíonn coláistí breisoideachais cúrsaí atá oiriúnaithe chun Béarla a theagasc d'oibrithe ó thíortha eile.

I am advised by the Minister for Employment and Learning that further education colleges provide courses specifically tailored to teaching English to migrant workers.

Our Lady and St Patrick's College

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Education the reason for the delay of over six years, on work commencing on building a new school on the site of Our Lady and St Patrick's College Knock, and to give her assessment of (i) exactly when work will commence; and (ii) the expected completion date. (AQW 3202/09)

The Minister of Education: Ní raibh moill 6 blianta ar an tionscadal cé gur thóg sé níos mó ama ná mar a bhí réamh-mheasta.

The project has not been delayed for six years though it has taken longer than anticipated. Approval of funding was given in 2002 following which there are a number of necessary stages to be completed before the construction stage, as for all such projects. Since the approval a delay arose with a change in the scope of the project from extension and refurbishment to a replacement school. There have also been particular site issues for the project, involving a protracted planning process. Full planning approval was achieved in June 2008. Following this approval there was a judicial review period of three months. The Project Board expect to submit the latest information for the Full Business Case to the Department before the end of the year. Subject to the approval of the business case it is estimated that work could commence on site in Spring 2009 and be completed within two years.

Funding to Protestant Schools

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education what discussions she has had with her counterpart in the Republic of Ireland about the decision to cut funding to Protestant schools. (AQW 3242/09)

The Minister of Education: Is ceist í seo a bhaineann leis an Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta i mBaile Átha Cliath. Ní raibh aon phlé agam leis an Aire i ndeisceart na hÉireann faoin cheist seo.

This is a matter for the Department of Education and Science in Dublin. I have had no discussions with my counterpart in the south of Ireland about this issue.

EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Major Capital Building Programmes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline his Department's major capital building programmes, for the next three years. (AQW 2740/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): The Department for Employment and Learning will spend around £232m on capital projects in the higher and further education sectors in the next three years.

On specific projects in Northern Ireland's higher education institutions, the Department has an allocation of £75.4m across the current Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) period. The projects are funded from the Department's Learning and Teaching Capital (£25.5m), Research Capital Investment Fund (£33.85m), the Universities Strategic Capital Investment Fund (£13.8m) and the University Colleges Strategic Capital Investment Fund (£2.25m) budget. However, the individual projects belong to the institutions and must fit within their overall strategic direction and business constraints. They cannot be described as being part of the Department's capital building programme.

Turning to the further education sector, there are currently six projects at construction stage at a total cost of £83m, which are all scheduled to be completed by August 2010. These projects are located at: the Lisburn, Downpatrick/ Ballynahinch/ Newcastle and Newtownards campuses of the South Eastern Regional College (total cost: £49m); the Enniskillen Campus of South West College (£9m); the Newtownabbey campus of Northern Regional College (£9m); and the Strand Road campus of North West Regional College (£16m).

In addition, other major projects totalling £74m are anticipated to come forward later this financial year, including projects at the Bangor Campus of South Eastern Regional College (£13m), and the Titanic Quarter campus and Springvale centre for Belfast Metropolitan College (£61m).

Further Education

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the learning opportunities that exist for those who are currently economically inactive; and are unlikely to gain employment, for various reasons. (AQW 2799/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Further Education Colleges offer a wide ranging curriculum through their main campuses and community outreach centres. Colleges are committed to meeting the learning needs of all those of working age, to improve their prospects of employment. Colleges also offer learning opportunities for senior citizens. Provision includes courses in essential skills, professional and technical training, leisure and hobby activities and tailored courses for students with learning difficulties or disabilities.

In addition, the Department is also funding a £3 million per annum Learner Access and Engagement Pilot Programme. This programme will allow FE colleges to contract with third party organisations to provide learner support. This support is directed at those 'hard to reach' adults who are economically inactive, disengaged from the labour market, and with few or no qualifications.

Teacher Training

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the religious breakdown of students applying for teacher training, for each of the last three years. (AQW 2806/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Information on religious background is not collected for students applying for teaching training. This information is gathered solely for enrolments in the Higher Education Institutions.

Government Grants

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to compare the government grants available to (i) post graduate students; and (ii) students in apprenticeships. (AQW 2832/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: While both areas of learning attract government support, the funding criteria reflect the respective skills and disciplines required. Post graduate funding is aimed at higher level skills and research and provides support for research and taught studentships of up to £12,940 per annum for the current academic year. In relation to apprenticeships, it is a requirement that all apprentices are in permanent remunerative employment from the first day of the provision, and the Department requires that employers pay them the going rate for the job. Consequently, the Department does not provide any additional grants to apprentices due to their employed and remunerated status.

Apprentices

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline what additional assistance will be available from his Department to those in apprenticeships, during the 2009-10 financial year. (AQW 2833/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: I refer you to the answer that I provided to you in my response to AQW 2834/09 which sets out in detail the assistance that is already available to apprentices.

I would already consider that the Department provides significant levels of additional assistance to apprentices, to enable them to complete their training. If, however, the need for additional specific assistance becomes apparent, the Department will of course consider its introduction.

Apprentices

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what consideration he is giving to bringing into line the assistance available to apprentices with that available to students in full time education. (AQW 2834/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Under the Department's ApprenticeshipsNI provision, apprentices with a disability or learning difficulties can avail of support from specialist providers to assist in their training. This is in place to ensure that apprentices with additional support needs are given every opportunity to overcome their difficulties and develop using the most appropriate support mechanisms. Specialist Support Providers can, for example, help apprentices to increase and improve confidence, self-esteem and value.

The Department will also pay a supplement to Training Suppliers, if an apprentice has a disability. This supplement enables the Training Supplier to provide significant additional input of resources in terms of training time, equipment or support in order for the apprentice to benefit fully from training.

All apprentices also have access to the Department's Careers Service which can provide them with pre-entry guidance whilst they are still in school, and Careers information, advice and guidance that is appropriate to each participant's needs throughout their training period.

Every apprentice is also provided with a Personal Training Plan which provides a clear pathway towards achieving the apprentice's training objectives and the specific actions that will be undertaken to achieve these, as well as addressing any assessed learning needs.

Higher Education Students can avail of a range of assistance from the local Higher Education Institutions, which includes pastoral care and support, chaplains, student mentors, study advisers and the students' union. Similarly, the six Further Education Colleges offer a range of pastoral and other services to students, including careers advice, learning support and counselling.

I would therefore consider that the range of general assistance that is available to apprentices is already in line with that which is in place for students in full time education. If, however, the Department becomes aware of a need for further specific assistance to be introduced, then we will of course give consideration to this.

Sector Skills Councils

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) the Sector Skills Councils that have received project funding to support employer engagement; (ii) the amount of funding provided in each case; and (iii) the criteria used by his Department to measure value for money. (AQW 2905/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Sector Skills Councils receive their 'core funding' from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills. The bulk of this funding is provided by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, with contributions from the devolved administrations. The funding is provided to enable the Sector Skills Councils to carry out their core remit, which includes employer engagement, across the United Kingdom. In addition to this my department works with the Sector Skills Councils and supports Northern Ireland specific projects which generally require the involvement of employers in that sector. Employer engagement can take a variety of forms including; labour market research, employer forums or project involvement. A table has been placed in the library setting out details on current funding provided by my department to the Sector Skills Councils:

My Department completes an Economic Appraisal for each project funding application received from a Sector Skills Council. The Economic Appraisal will consider at least 3 options, including the 'Status Quo' or do nothing option; an alternative such as reduced funding or an alternative project provider; and the application submitted by the SSC. It will also evaluate the aims and objectives of the project to ensure they are in compliance with those of the Department in relation to skills issues. During the course of a project the Department evaluates progress by receiving interim reports and prior to final payment will receive a complete evaluation of the project.

SME Employers

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning when he will make a decision on the relevance of a skills pledge by SME employers. (AQW 2969/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Skills Pledge is a public and voluntary commitment made by employers in England to support all their employees to develop the essential skills of literacy and numeracy, and work towards relevant, valuable qualifications to at least Level 2 (equivalent to five good GCSEs). The objective is to ensure that all staff are skilled, competent and able to make a full contribution to the success of the organisation.

Not all companies in the UK have signed up to the Skills Pledge, as it is a voluntary agreement Northern Ireland companies are free to commit to the Pledge if they wish.

Capital Projects

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to report on what actions his Department is taking to bring forward the delivery of capital projects, to help address the economic downturn. (AQW 3011/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning:

Officials from my Department are working closely with Colleges, Universities and the Strategic Investment Board to progress major capital works.

In further education there are 6 major projects under construction, with a total capital value of £83m and it is anticipated that contracts for another three projects, totalling £74m, will be signed later this financial year.

In the higher education sector work is progressing to ensure that capital spend is advanced as quickly as possible. This includes £20m in the current year and £55m in the following two years.

You will appreciate the inherent difficulty in bringing forward major capital projects due to National and European procurement regulations. However, my officials are conscious of the concerns of the construction industry and will proceed with all business cases without any undue delay.

Student Loans

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what rate of interest is being paid on student loans and how often this is changed or varied each year. (AQW 3042/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: Student loans are issued on the basis that borrowers should repay broadly the same amount, in real terms, as they borrowed. Therefore the interest rate is linked only to the rate of inflation which is calculated annually using the Retail Price Index (RPI). For the academic year 2008/09 the interest rate is set at the current RPI rate of 3.8%. This represents a decrease from 4.8% in 2007/08 and may continue to fluctuate year on year according to the rate of inflation.

Further Education

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the assistance his Department is giving to students entering further education from a disadvantaged socio-economic background. (AQW 3043/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Department provides Further Education Colleges directly and through the Education and Library Boards with funding to provide financial support to Further Education students, including those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, through a number of earmarked initiatives detailed below.

Support Funds (Discretionary) are specifically earmarked for the purpose of providing assistance for students in particular financial hardship and who are inhibited by financial considerations from accessing and participating in Further Education, or who, for whatever reason including physical or other disabilities, face financial difficulties. In the 2008/09 academic year £2.5m is available for this purpose.

Further Education Awards are administered by the Western Education and Library Board and provide financial assistance to full time students in respect of courses approved by the Department. Awards can include assistance toward tuition fees, support for living costs, childcare and Disability Student's Allowance. In the 2008/09 academic year £3.25m is available for this purpose.

Care to Learn NI Scheme – in the 2008/09 academic year £400k is made available to Further Education Colleges to provide financial assistance for childcare support to 16 to 20 year-old parents who may be inhibited by financial considerations from accessing and participating in Further Education.

Educational Guidance Service for Adults

Mr Attwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he plans to suspend the proposed adult guidance tender process and continue to provide funding for the Educational Guidance Service for Adults beyond March 2009, so it can meet the needs of the increased number of people made redundant and seeking advice in the current economic difficulties. (AQW 3283/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: The Educational Guidance Service for Adults currently receives funding to support my Department in the provision of educational guidance services to adults and to introduce adults to learning.

The need to clarify the services required by the Department's customers and to ensure that these services are appropriately provided and demonstrate value for money is particularly crucial in the current economic climate.

My Department is currently scoping a tender to take account of the current economic situation and proposed changes to adult guidance services in Great Britain. I have no plans to suspend the tender process although the timing may be affected by the scoping exercise and the delay in the launch of the Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance Strategy and Implementation Plan.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr Lunn asked the the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the causes of delay in the provision of the education maintenance allowance. (AQW 3328/09)

The Minister for Employment and Learning: There is currently no delay in the provision of education maintenance allowance. All applications received have been processed. To date over 22,000 applications have been received and over 17,000 have been approved for payment, a further 1,000 have been deemed ineligible.

There are currently some 4,000 applications which are unable to be processed due to insufficient information. These students have been contacted and asked to supply the missing evidence.

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Electricity Generation

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) the electricity generated in each of the last 5 years; and (ii) the anticipated amount of electricity to be generated (a) this year; and (b) next year; and what is the current margin between anticipated demand for electricity and generating capacity, allowing for maintenance and intermittent generation. (AQW 2836/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): The System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI) has provided the following information in respect of electricity generation within Northern Ireland for use in Northern Ireland. The information represents the generation output required to meet Northern Ireland demand.

(I) ELECTRICITY GENERATED IN EACH OF THE LAST 5 YEARS

Year	Generated Energy (GWh)
2003	8608
2004	8800
2005	8937
2006	9050
2007	9183

(II) THE ANTICIPATED AMOUNT OF ELECTRICITY TO BE GENERATED (A) THIS YEAR; AND (B) NEXT YEAR

Year	Forecast Generated Energy (GWh)
2008	9343
2009	9466

(III) THE CURRENT MARGIN BETWEEN ANTICIPATED DEMAND FOR ELECTRICITY AND GENERATING CAPACITY, ALLOWING FOR MAINTENANCE AND INTERMITTENT GENERATION:

GENERATION SURPLUS:

Electricity Demand	Generator Availability	2009	2010
Medium	High	446MW	586MW

Electricity Generation

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans she has to change the sources and means of electricity generation over the next 10 years. (AQW 2837/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department is currently reviewing Northern Ireland's generation mix as part of the development of a revised Strategic Energy Framework for Northern Ireland. Continued reliance on fossil fuels for 94% of power generation within Northern Ireland is not sustainable.

The All Island Grid Study jointly developed by my Department and its Irish counterpart, the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, concluded that it was technically feasible for up to 42% of power generation to come from renewable sources. Wind represented the most cost effective technology.

It is likely therefore that onshore wind will continue to be the main source of future renewable electricity generation but I do expect other renewable resources, such as offshore wind and marine energy to make a greater contribution over the medium to longer term.

Start A Business Programme

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the adverse impact on the economy in the Derry/Londonderry area of the decision to remove the grant for the Start A Business Programme (SABP) and to detail what steps she intends to take to redress this impact. (AQW 3234/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The decision to remove the £400 grant from the Start A Business Programme was as a result of the recommendations of an independent evaluation which highlighted serious concerns surrounding value for money and the fact that a majority of participants indicated that they would have completed the Programme without grant.

The removal of the one off payment of £400 came into effect in April 2008 and, given the short period of time that has elapsed, and the often long lead times for applicants to progress through the Programme, it is too early to assess the full impact of this decision both across Northern Ireland and within the Londonderry area. The impact of the grant withdrawal is also likely to be “masked” by the economic downturn which may deflate confidence levels for those contemplating starting a business.

I have asked for the participation levels on the current Programme to be kept under review and, in the absence of grant support from the Programme, there are still a number of financial support options available to those considering starting a new business.

The Enterprise NI Loan Fund, for example, is one obvious source of finance, which has been under utilised in recent years, and we will be encouraging Enterprise NI to raise the profile of this option. The Prince’s Trust also operates a loan fund (supported by Invest NI) for young entrepreneurs from disadvantaged backgrounds and the Department for Employment and Learning provides an allowance to those pursuing the Steps to Work self-employment route, the majority of whom will have previously been unemployed or economically inactive.

Start A Business Programme

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she will reinstate the grant for the Start A Business Programme (SABP), in light of the conclusions by North West Marketing Ltd. which estimate that the removal of the grant will lead to a reduction of 185 start ups this year at a cost of up to 333 jobs and the loss of an economic contribution of £5.9m to the Derry/Londonderry economy. (AQW 3235/09)

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The decision to remove the £400 grant from the Start A Business Programme was as a result of the recommendations of an independent evaluation which highlighted serious concerns surrounding value for money and the fact that a majority of participants indicated that they would have completed the Programme without grant.

The removal of the one off payment of £400 came into effect in April 2008 and, given the short period of time that has elapsed, and the often long lead times for applicants to progress through the Programme, it is too early to assess the full impact of this decision both across Northern Ireland and within the Londonderry area.

I cannot comment on the research undertaken by North West Marketing as I have not had sight of the report or the criteria used. On-line monitoring by Invest NI, although indicating some reduction in numbers, does not show a significant decline in enquiries and it is difficult to say whether any decline is due to grant removal or to the depressing effect of the harsh economic climate.

The decision to remove the grant remains in place, however in view of the current economic conditions, I have asked for the participation levels on the current Programme to be kept under review over the coming months.

In the absence of grant support from the Programme, there are still a number of financial support options available to those considering starting a new business. The Enterprise NI Loan Fund, for example, is one obvious source of finance, which has been under-utilised in recent years, and we will be encouraging Enterprise NI to

raise the profile of this option. The Prince's Trust also operates a loan fund (supported by Invest NI) for young entrepreneurs from disadvantaged backgrounds and the Department for Employment and Learning provides an allowance to those pursuing the Steps to Work self-employment route, the majority of whom will have previously been unemployed or economically inactive.

ENVIRONMENT

Planning Policy Statements

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the timescale for revisions to (i) Planning Policy Statement 12; and (ii) Planning Policy Statement 14. (AQW 2167/09)

The Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson): Draft PPS 21 (which replaces draft PPS14) was published for consultation and with immediate effect on Tuesday 25 November. Now that it has issued, I look forward to beginning work on PPS12.

Illegally Dumping Waste

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment how many (i) individuals; and (ii) companies; were fined for illegally dumping waste originating in the Republic of Ireland, and the amount of these fines, in each of the last three years. (AQW 2772/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) prepares prosecution cases for illegal dumping under the Waste and Contaminated Land (NI) Order 1997. The charges brought under this Order do not relate to the origin of the waste, but to its illegal deposit.

The following fines were imposed against named offenders over the past three years, in relation to illegal deposit of waste from the Republic of Ireland:

- 2006, £52,250 in fines against 10 offenders;
 - 2007, £113,900 against 11 offenders;
 - between January and October 2008, £50,000 against 3 offenders;
- making a total of 24 offenders over the last three years.

No limited companies have been prosecuted during the past three years; any other sole traders or partnerships operating under trading names would have been prosecuted as individuals.

ASDA Superstore

Mr Burnside asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the status of the planning application for the ASDA superstore at Junction One, Antrim, which has been in the system for several years. (AQW 2778/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The application was submitted to the Department on 31 July 2006 and was designated as a major application under the Article 31 procedures.

Further information received on 13th October 2008 was subject to consultation and publicity and is currently under consideration. The application will be processed as quickly as it is possible to do so.

Planning Service

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment how many representations his predecessor as Minister of the Environment, made to the Planning Service during her tenure. (AQW 2792/09)

The Minister of the Environment: A search of Planning Service records shows that Arlene Foster MLA, as the former Minister of the Environment, did not make any representation to the Agency during her period in office.

North Foreshore Site

Mrs Long asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the environmental issues relating to the North Foreshore site as a possible location for arc21's proposed Energy from Waste (EfW) facility. (AQW 2824/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The Waste Management Groups, working on behalf of the councils and in line with their responsibilities to provide waste facilities, are operationally responsible for considering the suitability of specific sites. No planning application has been submitted for an Energy from Waste plant in the North Foreshore area of Belfast. I am aware of the proposed consultation by Belfast City Council for a proposed EfW plant at this site.

If an application is submitted to the Department, the Planning Service will be required to formally assess environmental issues in the planning process and take a balanced, measured decision. It would not be appropriate for me as Minister to usurp their role in this regard.

Flood Relief

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment what is the monetary value of the 131 claims that have been forwarded by Craigavon Borough Council to his Department for flood relief; and when payment is likely to be made for these claims. (AQW 2865/09)

The Minister of the Environment: Craigavon Borough Council has submitted a claim to the Department, dated 14 November 2008, seeking reimbursement of expenditure totalling £133,297.63 incurred under the "Scheme of Emergency Financial Assistance to District Councils".

129 payments of £1,000 were made to individual householders by the Council and £129,000, which is a part-payment, is currently being processed. The Council has been asked to provide clarification on some aspects of the balance of £4,297.63 and once this information is received, reimbursement of the remaining eligible costs will also be made.

Planning Service

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the representations to the Planning Service by (i) Members of Parliament; and (ii) MLAs, in support of the application to build a GAA sports complex on the Burrenbridge Road, Castlewellan. (AQW 2873/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The Divisional Office currently holds records of one letter of support dated 2 April 2008 from Councillor Margaret Ritchie MLA.

Climate Change

Mr McKay asked the Minister of the Environment what has he done to combat climate change since taking up office. (AQW 2875/09)

The Minister of the Environment: Since taking up office, my Department has:-

- provided input to many EU, UK and Northern Ireland policies that will ultimately lessen the impact of climate change; and
- raised awareness of the impacts and effects of climate change through partnership working.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment to detail Planning Service's policy of consultation with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board on tourism planning applications; and to explain why the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has not been consulted in relation to planning application P/2008/0408/F. (AQW 2878/09)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department will consult Northern Ireland Tourist Board on tourism applications on a case by case basis based on the location and size of the proposal. In addition to consulting the NITB, my Department must be satisfied that a full assessment against the relevant policy has been carried out for all tourism proposals. Any proposal located in the countryside must be assessed against the development plan and the relevant policies contained in A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland and draft PPS 21 – Sustainable Development in the Countryside and any other material considerations.

Given the small scale of planning application P/2008/0408/F which is for the retention of 2No. 1 bedroom holiday cottages the Divisional Planning Office deemed it not necessary to consult with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board on this occasion.

Planning Applications

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to planning application P/2008/0408/F, if he will provide copies of photographs referred to in the case officer's reports that are currently being withheld. (AQW 2881/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The Ordnance Survey photographs referred to in the case officer's report on planning application P/2008/0408/F have now been released and a copy sent to the applicant's solicitor as required.

Planning Service

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment to explain the Planning Service's definition of 'presumption against planning permission'. (AQW 2882/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The planning system exists to regulate the development and use of land in the public interest. Paragraph 59 of PPS 1: General Principles clearly states that my Department's guiding principle in determining planning applications is that development should be permitted having regard to the development plan and all other material considerations therefore there is a presumption in favour of development unless the proposed development would cause demonstrable harm to interests of acknowledged importance. In such cases my Department has the power to refuse planning applications. Operational planning policy is drafted to seek to ensure that interests of acknowledged importance are protected in the determination of planning applications. The general presumption against development in Green Belts and Countryside Policy areas in the former Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland has now been removed with the publication of draft PPS 21, with the exception of limited areas of very high scenic value.

Planning Service

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment to explain the Planning Service's definition of 'presumption in favour of planning permission'. (AQW 2883/09)

The Minister of the Environment: Further to my answer to AQW 2882/09 the planning system exists to regulate the development and use of land in the public interest. Paragraph 59 of PPS1: General Principles states that the Department's guiding principle in determining planning applications is that development should be permitted, having regard to the development plan and all other material considerations therefore there is a presumption in favour of development unless the proposed development will cause demonstrable harm to interests of acknowledged importance. In such cases my Department has the power to refuse planning applications. Operational planning policy is drafted to seek to ensure that interests of acknowledged importance are protected in the determination of planning applications.

Planning Service

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment to explain the Planning Service's definition of 'substantially built up road frontage', in the context of infill sites. (AQW 2884/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The term 'substantially built up road frontage' is contained within Policy CTY8 of draft PPS 21, 'Ribbon Development' which replaced draft PPS14 on Tuesday 24 November 2008.

In the context of infill development this term relates to a situation where it may be appropriate to develop a small gap site for up to two houses, within an otherwise substantial and continuously built up frontage, provided certain planning and environmental criteria are met.

This is normally where there are a significant number of dwellings side by side fronting onto a road. It may be appropriate to allow infilling of small gap in such a frontage in accordance with the above policy. However, individual planning applications will be assessed in accordance with the merits of the application site.

Audit Committee

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment which Councils have yet to agree to the establishment of an Audit Committee; and to detail the reasons for the delay in this matter. (AQW 2894/09)

The Minister of the Environment: Whilst it is not a statutory requirement for district councils to establish Audit Committees, it is considered good practice.

21 district councils have Audit Committees in place and the first meeting of Strabane District Council's Audit Committee is planned for February 2009.

The Department has been advised that Carrickfergus Borough Council has subsumed the audit function within its Corporate Governance Committee and that Lisburn City Council has incorporated the audit function within its Corporate Services Committee. Moyle District Council has recently established an Audit and Governance Working Group, as the Council does not operate a formal committee system. Magherafelt District Council does not have an Audit Committee.

Rural Communities

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of the Environment to detail (i) the settlements that have been designated as 'dispersed rural communities'; and (ii) the criteria for this designation. (AQW 2906/09)

The Minister of the Environment: In my recent speech to the Assembly, on the Launch of PPS 21 Sustainable Development in the Countryside, I outlined that I propose to re-instate Dispersed Rural Communities (DRC) as a policy designation in rural areas. I also indicated that there are currently twelve such settlements in adopted Area Plans these are:

Fermanagh Area Plan 2007

- Aghadrumsee, Aghakillymaud, Boho, Cashel, Coa, Cooneen, Corraney, Derrygannon, Knock, Mullaghdund and Mulleek

Cookstown Area Plan 2010

- Broughderg and Davagh Upper.

There is a further DRC proposed in the draft Magherafelt Area Plan 2015 at Carntogher. This will not be confirmed until the plan is adopted following the Independent Examination which opens in February.

I have attached as Annex 1 the relevant section of PPS 21 which gives the criteria for the designation of a DRC.

Annex 1

Extract From Public Consultation Draft PPS 21 Sustainable Development in the Countryside Dispersed Rural Communities

4.5 In the interests of promoting rural regeneration, and in recognition of the strong sense of belonging and sense of place in certain rural areas the Department, through the development plan process, will identify and designate Dispersed Rural Communities (DRC) after consultation with District Councils, local communities and the public. The development plan may also bring forward local policies, to amplify and complement regional policy, on matters specific to the local circumstances which exist within particular DRCs.

4.6 The criteria for designation as a DRC includes:

- location in a remoter rural area and away from areas of development pressure close to existing towns;

- association with a traditional focal point, where there is convincing evidence of local community activity; with the existence of social and recreational facilities, such as a church, hall, school, community centre or sports club;
- other facilities or services, such as a shop, public house or sewage treatment works;
- a strong community identity. This could manifest itself through a local community association, church organisation or sports club; and
- a locally significant number of dwellings that have been built over time. Although these places are not nucleated settlements, they will have to be more than just open countryside. A build-up or cluster of recently built houses will normally not be considered as fulfilling this criterion.

4.7 A limit of development will not necessarily be drawn round the existing dispersed settlement pattern, as this may be an unnecessary obstacle to promoting the regeneration of the community and gives no indication of the availability of housing or other sites.

Planning Service

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications in the Omagh district have been deferred; and if his Department (i) has allocated; or (ii) is planning to allocate, additional personnel resources to the western division of Planning Service to expedite the reassessment exercises in the Omagh district. (AQW 2907/09)

The Minister of the Environment: There are currently 330 deferred applications in Omagh District. 217 of these applications have been recommended for refusal under dPPS14 and await reconsideration under dPPS21 which was introduced on 25 November 2008.

The 113 non dPPS14 deferrals are subject to ongoing negotiation with applicants and agents on such matters as amended design.

The 217 dPPS 14 deferrals constitute an historic backlog which will be re assessed chronologically. This exercise, which has begun and should be completed by June 2009, is being undertaken by the Omagh District Planning Team and a Principal Planning Officer. No new staff resources have been allocated to this work.

Road Safety Strategy

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on developments in the review of the Road Safety Strategy. (AQW 2915/09)

The Minister of the Environment: A replacement for the current road safety strategy is planned for introduction in 2010. A small team in DOE is coordinating the preparation of the new strategy and taking forward supporting preparatory reports and research projects.

A project board comprising senior officials from the statutory road safety partners has also been set up to oversee the development of the strategy. The Board held its inaugural meeting in October 2008.

Reports on the existing strategy, general progress and the current road safety position in Northern Ireland are being finalised for circulation in the New Year.

A number of research projects are also in progress and contracts are expected to be awarded early in 2009. These include:

- consideration of whether there is a link between child pedestrian casualties and deprivation;
- a road safety benchmarking exercise;
- an investigation into riders' and drivers' behaviours and attitudes to motorcycling safety; and
- a review of relevant road safety research and identification of any gaps.

Preparations for workshops with statutory stakeholders, planned for February 2009, are under way. These will be followed by engagement with external stakeholders, which I would anticipate beginning in April/May 2009.

Road Fatalities

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the financial cost of each road fatality. (AQW 2917/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The latest figures supplied by the Department for Transport indicate that each death on the roads costs £1,648,390.

Road Traffic Accidents

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the financial cost of injuries resulting from road traffic accidents. (AQW 2918/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The latest figures supplied by the Department for Transport indicate that each serious injury on the roads costs £185,220 and each slight injury £14,280.

Cycling Proficiency Scheme

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment to breakdown the per capita costs to his Department of the Cycling Proficiency Scheme in schools; and the comparable figures in (i) England; (ii) Scotland; and (iii) Wales. (AQW 2919/09)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has responsibility for road safety, and Road Safety Education Officers promote and deliver a range of road safety initiatives, including cycle training, in schools. The time spent by Road Safety Education Officers on individual road safety initiatives is not recorded because they often cover more than one road safety topic when visiting a school. Consequently, it is not possible to provide a precise per capita cost of the Cycling Proficiency Scheme.

I can confirm that the annual cost of delivering the scheme is around £84K plus staff costs, and this figure includes the payment to individual teachers who provide instruction to pupils, and the cost of producing the teaching resource pack, which includes a DVD. Since 2004, retail group Centra has sponsored the scheme, and the current level of sponsorship is just under £6K per annum. In 2007, 596 primary schools, out of around 885 primary schools in Northern Ireland, participated in the scheme, and just over 8,500 children were trained. The Cycling Proficiency Scheme involves up to 12 hours of training activity, including a two-hour test. The suggested maximum pupil/instructor ratio is 12:1. The scheme is playground based but schools are actively encouraged to provide an element of on-road training where appropriate. The number of schools involved in the Cycling Proficiency Scheme has increased over the last five years from just over 500 to the current figure.

I understand that the Department for Transport (DfT), which has responsibility for encouraging sustainable transport and cycling to school initiatives, is providing £140M over 3 years to local authorities to encourage the development of Bikeability in England. The Bikeability scheme operates at three levels. Level 1 consists of three hours off-road tuition delivered in one or more sessions with a ratio of one instructor to 15 trainees or less. Level 2 consists of five sessions with a maximum of 12 children and includes four 90-minute sessions on local roads with a pupil/instructor ratio of 6:1. Level 3 is usually taught 1:1 in a two hour session. The grant provided by DfT is based on £40 for each child trained up to Level 2 standard. DfT does not provide financial assistance for Level 3. Approximately fifty per cent of local authorities have introduced Bikeability. The remainder are continuing with the Cycling Proficiency Scheme.

Road Safety Scotland produces cycling material and encourages the take up of the Scottish Cycle Training Scheme. However, all instructors are volunteers, who receive no financial support directly or indirectly from Road Safety Scotland. The Scottish scheme is very similar to the Northern Ireland scheme with the vast majority of children receiving off road training only, although participation in on road training is increasing. Data on the number of children trained has not been recorded until recently and will not be available until 2009. Road Safety Scotland has taken a firm decision not to introduce Bikeability.

The Department is aware that the Welsh Assembly has provided a grant to encourage participation in Bikeability but it has not been possible to obtain details of the amount of grant awarded or the conditions attached.

You will note from the above that it is not possible to make direct comparisons between the different areas in the United Kingdom. Also, those providing cycle training are doing so for different reasons. From the Northern

Ireland perspective, my Department must have regard to its statutory duty, which is to promote road safety in order to reduce the number of people killed and seriously injured on Northern Ireland's roads. Resources are therefore targeted primarily at addressing the main causes of road traffic casualties.

Cycling casualties have been falling for a number of years. Figures for the period up to 3 December 2008 show that two pedal cyclists have been killed so far this year compared with two for the same period in 2007 and none in 2006. There have been no child cyclist fatalities since 2005. Over the last three years, 10 children, on average, have been seriously injured on bikes. This represents a reduction of over 64% on the average of 28 for the baseline period of 1996-2000. The figures suggest that while there is no room for complacency the current approach to the delivery of cycle training for children is working.

Planning Applications

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment if Planning Service is required to take the proximity of utilities into account, when assessing a planning application; and will he clarify when a planning application is submitted for a building that is not a safe distance from Extra High Tension cables, he has the authority to refuse the application. (AQW 2993/09)

The Minister of the Environment: While there is no specific policy for the assessment of planning applications in close proximity to high tension cables, my Department ensures that Northern Ireland Electricity plc (NIE) are consulted on all individual planning applications on land crossed by existing overhead power lines. NIE advise Divisional Planning Offices and developers on operational safe clearances for such proposals. The advice given by NIE with regard to the necessary clearance at a specific location is dependent on a number of factors. This includes the location of the line passing over and the lines' construction, design and operating voltage. Operators of overhead power lines are required to maintain safe conditions in compliance with legislation which are administered by my colleague Arlene Foster's Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI).

Paragraph 59 of PPS 1: General Principles clearly states that my Department's guiding principle in determining planning applications is that development should be permitted having regard to the development plan and all other material considerations unless the proposed development would cause demonstrable harm to interests of acknowledged importance. In such cases my Department has the power to refuse planning applications.

PPS21

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment to detail what consultation his Department has had with the Council of Mortgage Lenders on PPS21. (AQW 3056/09)

The Minister of the Environment: My Department has had no consultation with the Council of Mortgage Lenders on Draft PPS21. The Council has however been advised of the publication of the new policy and will therefore have the opportunity like all others during this public consultation phase, to comment on all aspects of the document.

New Down High School

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment to explain the reasons for the delay in approving the planning application for a new Down High School at a site on the Strangford Road, Downpatrick. (AQW 3063/09)

The Minister of the Environment: The South Eastern Education and Library Board is proposing, subject to the granting of planning permission, to construct a new 1,100 pupil High School at Strangford Road, Downpatrick.

The proposal is at pre-application discussion stage and a series of meetings have been held with planning officials from the Strategic Projects Division which have proven to be extremely productive in terms of identifying and exploring the key issues associated with the proposal. To date a planning application has not been submitted.

I understand that the Education Board is currently compiling the necessary information in order to submit a planning application. Indications are, at this stage, that it may be submitted early 2009.

Should a planning application be forthcoming my officials will process it as quickly as it is possible to do so.

PPS14

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of the Environment the reasons why his Department did not carry out a strategic environmental assessment on PPS21 given that the Department for Regional Development considered this assessment was required under the strategic environmental assessment directive for PPS14. (AQW 3158/09)

The Minister of the Environment: Draft PPS21 is neither a plan nor a programme under the terms of the relevant EC Directive. Consequently a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required.

Ministerial Visits

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to the answer to AQW 2568/09, to detail the number of occasions when he has used (i) public transport; and (ii) any form of transport other than his ministerial car, when carrying out official visits. (AQW 3168/09)

The Minister of the Environment: Since taking up office I have carried out a few visits using my own car.

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Energy from Waste Plant

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the impact on domestic rates for householders across the arc21 group of councils, if a suitable location for a proposed Energy from Waste (EfW) plant is not agreed. (AQW 2825/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr N Dodds): Any speculation around the potential impact on ratepayers is purely hypothetical and clearly it is important to ensure that ratepayers are not caused any needless concern, particularly given the pressures on household budgets at this time.

Meanwhile, my Department will continue to work closely with DOE, arc21 and Local Councils on this important matter.

Capital Programme

Mr O'Loan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the known and anticipated changes to the funds available for the capital programme of the Executive for 2008-9, since the budget was agreed. (AQW 2827/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The funds available for the capital programme of the Executive consist of Capital Department Expenditure Limits (DEL), funded via the block grant from the Treasury, and borrowing under the Reinvestment and Reform Initiative. This may be further supplemented by capital receipts income.

Since the Budget 2008-11 was published, the main change to Capital DEL has been the addition of the £100 million draw down of End Year Flexibility, which was agreed with the Treasury as part of the CSR settlement. There have also been adjustments to reflect the Chancellor's Budget and Pre Budget Report additions of £1.8 million and transfers to GB departments of £2.6 million.

The Pre Budget report also allowed the Executive the option of accelerating £9.4 million of capital expenditure from 2010-11 into 2008-09. This will be considered as part of the December Monitoring process.

The majority of capital receipts identified in the Budget were expected to come from the disposal of surplus assets. The level of receipts from this source has obviously been affected by the downturn in the local property market and this will in turn impact on the capital funds available for the Executives investment programme. The largest single instance of this has been the delay of the Workplace 2010 project which has resulted in the potential £175 million capital receipt not being realised in this financial year.

The in-year capital position will be considered in detail during the December Monitoring round the outcome of which will be the subject of a statement to the Assembly on 15 December.

Carbon Neutral Government Estate

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if his Department is still on course to deliver a carbon neutral government estate by 2015. (AQW 2879/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The strategy being implemented to create a carbon neutral government estate is based on reducing the amount of office space occupied by the NICS, improving the energy efficiency of the buildings occupied and sourcing energy from low and zero carbon technologies where this is commercially viable. Ultimately carbon offsetting will be required for the remaining emissions.

The move to a Workplace 2010 compliant office estate will provide a major contribution towards the implementation of the strategy to create a carbon neutral estate. The current suspension of the procurement has the potential to impact on the strategy and will be reviewed in early 2009.

Location of Public Sector Jobs

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if there will be a green book cost and benefit analysis for each proposal for the decentralisation of public sector jobs. (AQW 2913/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The recommendations of Professor Bain's independent review have to be carefully considered by government before any decisions on a way forward can be reached. On 21 October 2008, during the Assembly debate on the location of public sector jobs, I gave an assurance to the Assembly that I would in due course report to the Executive on how the issue of relocation should be addressed. That assurance included a commitment to consider value for money.

To date, I have written to Executive Ministers asking for their views on location and on receipt of their responses, I will put these together with the views of the Finance and Personnel Committee and the points raised during the debate, and will bring my proposals to the Executive in the New Year. An important part of my deliberations will be the issue of affordability, the deployment of resources and the level of priority that should be attached to the value-for money case.

Location of Public Sector Jobs

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to report on the conclusions that he has drawn in relation to the potential relocation of public sector jobs, from the de facto freezing of the similar process in the Republic of Ireland. (AQW 2914/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Professor Bain's report takes account of the experience of relocation of public sector jobs in the Irish Republic and the other jurisdictions in the United Kingdom. He has concluded from his research that relocation in Northern Ireland should be modest and that we should proceed with caution. He has also proposed that relocation should be considered in the context of pilot projects and that any initiatives should be phased. I will be considering his recommendations carefully, as well as the lessons learned from elsewhere, when putting my conclusions to the Executive in the New Year.

Valuation and Lands Agency

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the quality of valuation work carried out by the Valuation and Lands Agency, and Land and Property Services in 2007, on the Department for Social Development's landholding at Ballee, Ballymena. (AQW 3003/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Valuation and Lands Agency (VLA), now Land and Property Services, was instructed in February 2007 by the Department of Social Development to provide a valuation of the lands at Ballee to inform the Department's discussions with the former owners of the land.

VLA was then instructed in March 2007 to undertake negotiations with Agents representing the former owners but agreement was not reached on value. Subsequently, Land and Property Services was asked to provide further updates to reflect the rapid growth in property values that the market was experiencing at the time.

This work was carried out promptly and professionally by experienced senior staff in the Agency and I am confident of the quality of both the valuations and advice provided to DSD.

eHR Project

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to state the resourcing costs of the eHR project from its launch, for (i) the management of the tendering process, including legal, consultancy and direct costs, incurred by his Department and (ii) direct input from the Northern Ireland Civil Service staff. (AQW 3033/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The costs of the eHR project from its launch in 2002/3 for the management for the tendering process are:

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
External Consultancy	£96,000	£523,000	£1,374,000	£2,032,000
Staff Costs (inc GAE)	£266,000	£523,000	£1,110,000	£1,834,000
Total	£362,000	£1,046,000	£2,484,000	£3,866,000

Implementation work on the eHR project commenced in April 2006. The costs of direct input from Northern Ireland Civil Service staff are:

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
DFP Staff Costs (inc GAE)	£1,082,000	£1,598,000	£1,818,000
Other Departments' Costs (funded by DFP)	£598,000	£1,092,000	£789,000
Total	£1,680,000	£2,690,000	£2,607,000

These costs include the planned expenditure for the remainder of the 2008/9 financial year.

Clostridium Difficile

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of death certificates that list Clostridium Difficile as the primary cause of death, from 1 January 2006 to date, broken down by year and Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 3067/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The attached table gives the number of deaths registered in Northern Ireland between 1 January 2006 and 30 June 2008, where Clostridium difficile was recorded as the underlying cause of death by year and the Health and Social Care Trust in which the deceased died.

Table: Number of deaths registered with Clostridium difficile¹ as the underlying cause of death by Health and Social Care Trust, 1 January 2006 - 30 June 2008^P

Place of Death	Registration Year		
	2006	2007 ^P	2008 (Jan-Jun) ^P
Belfast HSC Trust	8	8	9
Northern HSC Trust	9	15	13
Southern HSC Trust	4	3	2
Southern Eastern HSC Trust	12	3	5
Western HSC Trust	8	5	1
Total	41	34	30

¹ On deaths where Clostridium difficile was mentioned the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes A.04.7, A.09, A.41.4 and A.49.8 are used to identify underlying cause of death.

^P Provisional Data.

Rates Relief Scheme

Mr Poots asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what consideration his Department has given to the introduction of a small business rates relief scheme, based on the Welsh model. (AQW 3081/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: I would refer the Member to the answer I provided to Mr Simon Hamilton on 1 December in response to his question on a small business rate relief scheme for Northern Ireland, (AQO 1368/09).

I hope to be able to make an announcement shortly.

Human Resource Services

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what financial savings are expected to arise from the outsourcing of human resource services over the period of the eHR contract. (AQW 3096/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: The outsourcing of Human Resource services through the eHR Contract has resulted in financial savings being generated from the redeployment of in the region of 500 NICS staff to other duties in the NICS as well as savings achieved through the termination of existing HR services contracts. These financial savings are being used to fund the eHR service charges over the life time of the contract to deliver a modern, faster, more, effective personnel service which supports the NICS and NIO in meeting their business objectives.

Civil Service

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he is taking to combat the under-representation of women in the Senior Civil Service and in professional and specialist grades. (AQW 3119/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: My officials are currently undertaking an in-depth analysis of gender in all grades and disciplines across the Service. It is hoped that the results of this analysis will be available in the new year and we will then be in a position to consider what action is required to address areas of under representation.

In the meantime, in order to attract as wide an applicant pool as possible we will continue to make extensive use of open recruitment to fill posts in senior grades. Recruitment advertisements also include a statement welcoming applications from under-represented groups, including females. Appointments are, however, based on merit.

Government Contracts

Mr Gallagher asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQO 1387/09, to detail all of the procurement arrangements in place for the awarding of (i) major Government contracts; (ii) all other contracts dealt with on behalf of Government; and (iii) all other contracts dealt with on behalf of other public authorities. (AQW 3156/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: Public procurement activity by all NI Government Departments, their Agencies, NDPBs and Public Corporations is governed by the EU Treaty, EU Directives, the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 (PCR 2006) and NI Public Procurement Policy. All procurement activity by these bodies is conducted through the Central Procurement Directorate or a relevant Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE). There are seven CoPEs in Northern Ireland.

Given the financial importance of procurement policy, both in terms of total spend and in relation to the Executive's budget, the Procurement Board has responsibility for the development, dissemination and co-ordination of public procurement policy and practice for the Northern Ireland public sector. The Board is responsible to the Executive and accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

As Minister for Finance and Personnel I undertake the role of Chairperson to the Board. Membership of the Board comprises the Permanent Secretaries of the 11 Departments, in order to ensure that there is compliance with the agreed policies and procedures in all Departments, their Agencies, NDPBs and public corporations. Other members of the Board include the Treasury Officer of Accounts, 2 external experts without a specific

sectoral interest, the Director Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) and a representative of the Comptroller and Auditor General and of the Strategic Investment Board Ltd as observers.

The Procurement Board has determined that all contracts shall be awarded on the basis of objective criteria which ensure compliance with the EU Treaty principles and which guarantee that tenders are assessed in conditions of effective competition.

Regulation 30(1) of PCR 2006 states that ‘a contracting authority shall award a public contract on the basis of the offer which (a) is the most economically advantageous from the point of view of the contracting authority; or (b) offers the lowest price’.

The Programme for Government (PSA 21) and NI Public Procurement Policy have determined that contracts are to be awarded on the basis of Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT) with any exceptions being subject to formal approval by the Head of Procurement for the relevant CoPE.

Regulation 30(2) requires a contracting authority to use award criteria linked to the subject matter of the contract to determine which offer is the MEAT. The Regulation lists the following award criteria – quality, price, technical merit, aesthetic and functional characteristics, environmental characteristics, running costs, cost effectiveness, after sales service, technical assistance, delivery date and delivery period and period of completion.

The award of grants is not included within the activity of public procurement as the legal requirements are different, particularly in the context of EU procurement law. However, public sector bodies which receive grants are expected to apply procurement policy to their expenditure, which only leaves grants to non-public bodies excluded.

As regards District Councils, the NI Executive accepts that their different and separate framework of accountability must be recognised and, under existing legislation, compliance with NI Public Procurement Policy can only be on a voluntary basis.

Civil Service

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what progress is being made to implement the new Pensions Post Award, Administration and Payroll Project. (AQW 3227/09)

The Minister of Finance and Personnel: A partnership between my Department and Capita Hartshead has resulted in the successful implementation of a new Pensions Post Award Administration and Payroll solution for Civil Service Pensions (CSP). The implementation has been completed both on time on 14 May 2008 and within budget £2.7m.

Stage 2 of the project is to implement a Web-based service which will allow pensioners to have secure access to their pension details and payslips and enable them to amend some of their personal details. It is planned that this functionality will be available by February 2009.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Management Consultants

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been paid for management consultants, in each of the last two financial years. (AQW 2639/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): The total expenditure on Management Consultancy for 2007/08 was £1,114,680.

Specific information on Management Consultancy is only held by the Department for the 2007/08 financial year and is not available before that date.

Mental Health

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assistance his Department is giving to voluntary groups to address mental health problems in the community (AQW 2713/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department supports voluntary organisations which operate on a regional basis throughout Northern Ireland. This year, over £750,000 has been allocated to support organisations that provide services for people with mental health problems. Local voluntary or community organisations can seek funding from the Health and Social Services Boards and Health and Social Care Trusts in whose areas they operate.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what funding his Department is using to meet the guidelines of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, similar to those in place in England and Wales. (AQW 2714/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There is no specific budget for the introduction of NICE guidelines here. Instead funding is labelled for, and therefore linked to, service developments. For example my Department identified additional funding of £9.28m/£20.3m/£39.1m over the CSR period for investment in specialist drugs. The funding is to meet specific PSA targets and also to improve access to specialist drugs including the introduction of effective new drug therapies recommended by NICE and endorsed by my Department.

Rural Communities

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action the Department is taking to help elderly people in rural communities. (AQW 2715/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department is committed to ensuring equality of access to health and

social care services for all the people of Northern Ireland regardless of age or geographic location, and I am investing an additional £60million over the CSR period to support at least an additional 1,500 older people in the community. The HSC offers a complete range of health and social care services to elderly people in rural communities including access to community nursing, GP services, social services, allied health professional services, day care services and domiciliary care. In addition, Trusts provide a range of local initiatives specifically tailored to the needs of local elderly populations.

Residential Care

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many residential homes there are in the Mid-Ulster constituency. (AQW 2729/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: At 30 June 2008, there were 14 residential homes in the Mid-Ulster constituency.

Nursing Home Care

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many elderly people in the Mid-Ulster constituency require nursing home care. (AQW 2732/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the form requested

Residential Care

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many elderly people in the Mid-Ulster constituency require residential care. (AQW 2733/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the form requested

Children with Autism

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline what steps his Department is taking to address the lack of service provision for children with autism in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 2735/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust have advised me that currently children with autism receive services both from within core and specialised services for example Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language, pre-school, in special schools, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Child Development Centres and general paediatric services. Children are also treated within the Multi-Agency Support teams to Schools Service.

As a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review I secured £2.02m to improve autism services over the next three years, and the ASD Strategic Action Plan which is currently available for public consultation outlines the proposed areas of autism services in which this funding should be spent.

Children with Autism

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the current waiting time is for children awaiting a diagnosis of autism, in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 2736/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not collected centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Learning Disabilities

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area have (i) a learning disability; and (ii) a severe learning disability. (AQW 2745/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information provided by the Western Health & Social Care Trust indicated that:

- (i) At 25 November 2008, 2,237 people have been assessed as having a learning disability; and,
- (ii) Information on the number of people with a severe learning disability is not currently recorded.

Learning Disabilities

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the amount of money from his Department that has gone into learning disability in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area, in each of the past five years. (AQW 2746/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department makes funding allocations to Health and Social Services Boards rather than Health and Social Care Trusts, therefore the information is not available in the format requested. However, Trust expenditure costs for learning disability services are held centrally. The latest figures my Department holds are for the financial year 2007/08. The table below provides the latest information available on the total amount of money spent by the Western Health and Social Care Trust on learning disability between 2003/04 and 2007/08.

WESTERN HSC TRUST TOTAL LEARNING DISABILITY EXPENDITURE 2003/04 TO 2006/07

Programme of Care	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Learning Disability (PoC6)	20,100,697	22,070,501	24,970,428	26,762,441	29,216,677

Sources:

1. Trust Financial Returns (Hospital, Community and PSS) 2004/05 to 2006/07
2. Western Health and Social Care Trust (2003/04 and 2007/08)

Learning Disabilities

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how many people with a learning disability are attending adult training centres, in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 2747/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information provided by the Western Health & Social Care Trust indicated that on 26 November 2008, 731 people with a learning disability were attending statutory day centres.

Care Homes

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how many residents are in (i) Ravara House, Bangor; (ii) Loch Cuan House, Newtownards; and (iii) Northfield House, Donaghadee. (AQW 2752/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information provided by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is detailed below:

- (i) Ravara House, Bangor has 29 current residents and provides 13 respite beds.
- (ii) Loch Cuan House, Newtownards has 8 current residents and provides 6 respite beds and 10 intermediate care beds. There are also 9 beds currently vacant that could be used for respite or intermediate care.
- (iii) Northfield House, Donaghadee has 24 current residents and provides 1 respite bed and 17 intermediate care beds.

Respite Care Beds

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many respite care beds are provided by (i) Ravara House, Bangor; (ii) Loch Cuan House, Newtownards; and (iii) Northfield House, Donaghadee. (AQW 2753/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information provided by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is detailed below:

- (i) Ravara House, Bangor has 29 current residents and provides 13 respite beds.
- (ii) Loch Cuan House, Newtownards has 8 current residents and provides 6 respite beds and 10 intermediate care beds. There are also 9 beds currently vacant that could be used for respite or intermediate care.
- (iii) Northfield House, Donaghadee has 24 current residents and provides 1 respite bed and 17 intermediate care beds.

Broadway Workshop

Mr Burnside asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will give an assurance that the Broadway Workshop will not be closed by the Northern Health & Social Care Trust without the matter being fully investigated, especially in respect of the needs of people with learning disabilities being able to access a range of day opportunities, designed to suit the needs of everyone who attends Broadway. (AQW 2781/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The responsibility for operational matters in the provision of services rests with the Health and Social Care Trusts within Northern Ireland.

However, the Northern Health and Social Services Trust (the Trust) have advised me that under its response to the Comprehensive Spending Review it is proposing to reduce the current level of statutory day care provision and seek to provide alternative day opportunities for clients. This is in keeping with their Day Care Strategy, "Widening Choice and Opportunities".

As the Trust are currently consulting on their proposals, engaging with all interested parties and will discuss with each client and their family/carer opportunities tailored to individual needs based within the local community, I am satisfied that the necessary steps are being taken to identify the needs of each individual who attends the Broadway Workshop.

Autism

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the number of children currently on a waiting list for autism diagnosis, in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 2784/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not collected centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Autism

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the number of staff currently working with children with autism, in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 2785/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is not possible to quantify the number of staff working with children with autism as a large number of staff have varying degrees of involvement dependant on the child's specific circumstances. This includes Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational therapists, Paediatricians, school nursing, community dental service, Children's Challenging Behaviour Service, Transition Service and Educational Psychologists.

Patients Travelling Abroad for Treatment

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of patients in the Mid-Ulster constituency, who have had to travel abroad for treatment. (AQW 2786/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of patients in the Mid-Ulster constituency that have had to travel abroad for treatment is not collected centrally by the Department. Provision of such data by Health and Social Service Boards and Health and Social Care Trusts would incur a disproportionate cost.

Lagan Valley Hospital

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of the latest public consultation that the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has launched regarding the closure of maternity services in Lagan Valley Hospital. (AQW 2800/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not available as the Trust's consultation on a proposal to transfer consultant-led inpatient obstetric services from Lagan Valley Hospital is ongoing.

Health Service Dentists

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Health Service dentists are available; and how many vacant patient places there are, in the Lagan Valley constituency. (AQW 2801/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: At 26th November 2008, Central Services Agency figures show that there were 42 dentists¹ registered to provide Health Service dental treatment in the Lagan Valley parliamentary constituency². As the general dental services is a demand led service there is no quota of patient places and therefore information on vacant places is not available.

Notes:

1. Figures include Principal dentists only - excludes assistants and Vocational Dental Practitioners.
2. Statistics are at 26th November 2008 and are based on the location of the dental surgery where the dentist is employed.

Energy from Waste Facility

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety his assessment of public health issues relating to arc21's proposals for an Energy from Waste (EfW) facility. (AQW 2823/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department is not aware of any detailed proposals from arc21 relating to an energy from waste facility at this time.

Investment Delivery Plan

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to report on the development of his Department's Investment Delivery Plan. (AQW 2844/09)

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, just under £700m of which is in the CSR, against an identified need of £7.8bn. A major element of this investment has already been contractually committed.

In light of the funding constraints I commissioned a Review of Capital Priorities over the next 10 years. I am currently considering the report, which was completed on 30 September 2008. It has 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.

Only once I have considered the report in full will my Department be in a position to publish its Investment Delivery Plan.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money his Department contributed to the delivery of Neighbourhood Renewal in (i) Lurgan; (ii) Brownlow; and (iii) Portadown, in each of the last three years. (AQW 2853/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No funding has been provided by my Department to Neighbourhood Renewal in Lurgan, Brownlow or Portadown in the last three years.

Lurgan Hospital

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what services will be retained at Lurgan Hospital; and (ii) are there any plans to enhance the range of services, in the next five years. (AQW 2869/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Lurgan Hospital will continue to have a lead role in Care of the Elderly services, including the assessment and rehabilitation of older people. The day hospital

will continue to provide support and rehabilitation for patients on discharge, as well as facilitating medical and falls clinics.

The Southern Health and Social Care Trust is in the process of establishing a multidisciplinary, one stop assessment centre for older people at Lurgan Hospital and an early supported discharge and stroke community rehabilitation team in the Craigavon/Banbridge locality. The Trust is also exploring options to facilitate the expansion of its breast screening programme over the next 3-5 years; these will include options based on the Lurgan Hospital site.

Bipolar Disorder

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people have been diagnosed with bipolar disorder. (AQW 2893/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not available.

Major Capital Building Programmes

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's major capital building programmes, for the next three years. (AQW 2921/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I would refer the Member to the reply I gave Alex Easton for AQW2192/09.

Clostridium Difficile

Mr Bresland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he intends to include the recent outbreak of Clostridium Difficile in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area, within the remit of the public inquiry on the outbreak of Clostridium Difficile in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 2927/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I advised the Assembly on 14 October 2008 that the purpose of the public inquiry is to establish how many deaths resulted from the Clostridium difficile outbreak in Northern Trust hospitals and to examine the experiences of patients and others who were affected by that outbreak. I have no plans to change the scope of this inquiry.

I fully expect that there will be lessons to be learned from this inquiry, and all Trusts will be expected to act on these.

All five Trusts are already acting on lessons learned from Northern Trust outbreak. The report of the independent review by RQIA contained 53 recommendations. These are being implemented by my Department and the Trusts.

Until ribotyping results are received it is not known whether the three cases of C. difficile reported by the Western Trust on 20 November were an outbreak.

Prince's Gardens Children's Home

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how did his Department arrive at the decision to close Princes Gardens Childrens Care Home. (AQW 2939/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: No decision has been made to close Prince's Gardens. The Trust has proposals out for consultation. The Trust has advised that the first phase of the consultation exercise started on 23 October 2008 and will end on 19 December 2008. A second phase with the results of the Equality Impact Assessment is expected to start on 7 January 2009 and end on 4 March 2009.

Prince's Gardens Children's Home

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if a financial evaluation was carried out for children's homes other than the Princes Gardens Children's Home, in Larne. (AQW 2940/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The decision to propose efficiencies in one area of Trust activity rather than another requires the application of financial appraisal principles rather than necessarily full formal evaluation. Furthermore, since proposals in respect of Princes Gardens are also subject to public consultation, everyone will have their say.

While the unit is registered with RQIA, it is not seen as being "fit for purpose" as a 21st century Children's home. The building requires significant investment to meet and maintain current standards for children who require residential care provision. This needs to be taken into account in determining the way ahead.

Prince's Gardens Children's Home

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much investment has his Department put into the Princes Gardens Children's Home, over the last ten years. (AQW 2941/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A number of schemes have been carried out on Princes Gardens Home in the last ten years:

Initiative	Cost	Year
Structural Fire Precautions	£17,476.80	2002
Replacement Porch	£4,989.89	2003
Fire Code Works (Estimated to start January 2009)	£25,500.00	2008/09
Ongoing maintenance and upkeep from 1 January 1999 to date, including external painting and roof repairs	£ 33,904.00	
Total	£81,870.69	

Prince's Gardens Children's Home

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what improvements are required to the Prince's Gardens Children's Home to bring it up to standard. (AQW 2942/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Trust has advised in relation to the existing premises considerable improvements are needed to the physical external and internal condition of the house which includes major work to the roof. Other areas which require attention relate to Fire and Health and Safety issues and functional suitability including the provision of a disabled bathroom.

Service Users

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to enshrine the right of service users to be involved throughout any consultation process, including the drafting of the final report, so that Health Service consultation is on service users rather than on medical professional, and to ensure a move from a medical to a patient based model in any reforms of the Health Service. (AQW 2949/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Health and Social Care (Reform) Bill, currently in its legislative passage through the Assembly, has provisions which require the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Regional Health and Social Care Board, the Regional Agency for Public Health and Social Well-being, Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts and special agencies to prepare a consultation scheme within a specified period. Each body's consultation scheme must make it clear how the Patient and Client Council, persons to whom care is being or may be provided and the carers of persons are consulted on specific HSC matters.

Rainbow Project

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what funding it has given to the Rainbow Project and to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community; and what plans it has to allocate future funding to this Section 75 group. (AQW 2965/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has provided funding, in the form of grants, to The Rainbow Project since it was established in 1994. In 2008/09 my Department has made available funding of £31,652 towards the organisation's central administration costs.

In addition, my Department made available funding of £48,486 in the current financial year to voluntary organisations supporting issues relating to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

Regarding future funding, subject to the availability of resources, assessment and monitoring procedures, it is anticipated that the Department will make available funding to meet its existing funding commitments, including to those organisations in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Voluntary and community organisations may apply in the future should the Department invite project funding applications through public advertisement.

Healthcare Acquired Infections

Mrs I Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he is aware that there was a call for the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point Protocol to be applied to the field of Healthcare Acquired Infections by both the Chief Medical Officer, Sir Liam Donaldson, for England and Wales, and the Chair of the National Patient Safety Council, Sir Philip Hunt. (AQW 2967/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am aware that this methodology was mentioned in the 2003 report 'Winning Ways - Working Together to Reduce Healthcare Acquired Infections' by the Chief Medical Officer for England and Wales.

Hospital Acquired Infections

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the process by which relatives are informed if patients have contracted MRSA or other hospital acquired infection, broken down for each hospital. (AQW 2978/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The process for informing patients and relatives if they have acquired MRSA or other healthcare associated infection is similar in all Trusts and is as follows.

If the patient has the capacity to understand, staff will inform the patient directly and provide them with an appropriate information leaflet if available.

The relatives of a patient with capacity to understand are informed only with consent of the patient.

If the patient does not have the capacity to understand, staff will act in the best interest of the patient. The patient's relatives will be informed and will be provided with an appropriate information leaflet if available.

Ambulances

Mr Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many ambulances are operating, broken down by each division. (AQW 2979/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below shows the average daily number of Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) accident and emergency ambulances operating, split between night and day shifts.

NIAS Division	Day Shift	Night Shift
East City	10	8

NIAS Division	Day Shift	Night Shift
East Country	14	12
North	14	12
South	13	10
West	11	10
Total	62	52

Midwives

Mr Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of midwives in each Health and Social Care Trust (i) in total; (ii) per 100 births per annum; and (iii) per head of population. (AQW 2983/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is given in the table below.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF MIDWIVES BY TRUST, PER 100 LIVE BIRTHS AND PER 1000 HEAD OF POPULATION AS AT 30TH SEPTEMBER 2008.

Trust	Number of Midwives		Midwives per 100 Live Births		Midwives per 1000 Population	
	H'count	WTE	H'count	WTE	H'count	WTE
Belfast	321	243.36	4.76	3.61	0.96	0.73
Northern	225	175.18	5.04	3.92	0.50	0.39
South Eastern	228	172.89	5.42	4.11	0.68	0.51
Southern	273	204.38	4.57	3.42	0.80	0.60
Western	232	190.38	5.70	4.68	0.79	0.65
Total	1279	986.19	5.02	3.87	0.73	0.56

Sources::

Number of Midwives: Human Resource Management System.

Birth Information: KH03A.

Population Information: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

Notes:

1. H'count = Headcount.
2. WTE = Whole-Time Equivalent.
3. The latest available birth information is the number of Live Births in 2007/08.
4. The latest available population information is the Civilian Population Mid-Year Estimate 2007.

Efficiency Savings Plans

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the bed closures under consideration in the efficiency savings plans of Health and Social Care Trusts. (AQW 2988/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is not possible to estimate reliably how many hospital beds might be affected at this time. Health and Social Care Trusts are currently consulting on a range of their efficiency proposals.

Across the CSR period I will be investing very specifically in services which keep people out of hospital when they do not need or want to be there - my Department has been tasked by the Executive with supporting more people at home as part of its Public Service Agreement. This, combined with improvements in productivity within our acute services, will lead to a reduced number of beds being needed.

Efficiency Savings Plans

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consultations took place with unions on his Department's plans for efficiency savings. (AQW 2989/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have met the Trade Unions on several occasions to discuss the process being undertaken by Trusts in seeking to identify efficiency savings. Currently, Health and Social Services Trusts and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service are taking forward consultation processes on proposals. As further detail on proposals to meet efficiency demands becomes available, it is being shared with local Trade Unions on a local and regional basis.

NURSING POSITIONS

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cuts to nursing positions that are being planned by his Department, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 2990/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I would refer the member for North Down to my answer to AQW 1423/09.

Nursing/Residential Homes

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail his Department's guidelines for consultation criteria when there is a proposal to close a nursing or residential home. (AQW 3036/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Departmental guidelines dictate that the consultation document must contain up-to-date information on the facility and the nature and consequences of the proposed closure, including:

- an explanation for the need for change;
- details of the services under consideration, including present activity levels;
- a description of the options considered, together with outline costs and advantages and disadvantages of each option for patients and clients;
- proposed timetable for implementation; and
- any proposals for alternative use or disposal of the facility concerned.

All interested parties should be invited to comment on proposals. It is, of course, of paramount importance that those residents potentially directly affected by such a proposal are kept fully informed, and that their views, health and well-being are given full and proper consideration during the process.

Nursing/Residential Homes

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consultation is planned with the residents of a residential or nursing home, when there is a proposal to close that home. (AQW 3037/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Departmental guidelines dictate that the consultation document must contain up-to-date information on the facility and the nature and consequences of the proposed closure, including:

- an explanation for the need for change;
- details of the services under consideration, including present activity levels;
- a description of the options considered, together with outline costs and advantages and disadvantages of each option for patients and clients;
- proposed timetable for implementation; and
- any proposals for alternative use or disposal of the facility concerned.

All interested parties should be invited to comment on proposals. It is, of course, of paramount importance that those residents potentially directly affected by such a proposal are kept fully informed, and that their views, health and well-being are given full and proper consideration during the process.

Care Homes

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what future consultation is planned on the proposed closure of (i) Ravara House, Bangor; (ii) Loch Cuan House, Newtownards; and (iii) Grove House, Ballynahinch. (AQW 3038/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer I gave to AQW 2750/09. In addition officials from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust have held meetings with residents of Ravara House, Loch Cuan House, Grove House and their families to discuss proposals for the future delivery of services for older people in the area.

Care Homes

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what consultation has taken place regarding the proposed closure of (i) Ravara House, Bangor; (ii) Loch Cuan House, Newtownards; and (iii) Grove House, Ballynahinch. (AQW 3039/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer I gave to AQW 2750/09. In addition officials from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust have held meetings with residents of Ravara House, Loch Cuan House, Grove House and their families to discuss proposals for the future delivery of services for older people in the area.

Health and Social Care Trusts

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if any Health and Social Care Trusts have a budget deficit. (AQW 3040/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: While all trusts are currently facing financial pressures, every trust has a statutory duty to break even.

Women's Groups

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what funding has been made available by his Department to each women's group for the 2008-09 financial year; and what programme each group is funded under. (AQW 3178/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In the financial year 2008-2009 my Department will provide core and project funding to Women's Group as listed below.

Women's Group	Funding Stream	Amount
NI Women's Aid Federation	Departmental Core Funding	£229,222
Women's Information Group	Departmental Core Funding	£17,969
Women's Information Group	Departmental Project Funding	£10,000
Women's Resource Development Agency	Departmental Core Funding	£44,752

In addition, my Department is currently funding, until March 2009, all of those projects formerly supported by the Children's Fund that support the health and social services objectives and functions of DHSSPS, including the following projects run by women's groups.

Organisation	Project Title	2008-09 Grant Offer
Ballymena Women's Aid	Domestic Violence Interagency & Community Development Worker	£37,671
Ballymurphy Women's Centre	Yahoo Project	£44,969
Causeway Women's Aid	Domestic violence & Children. A prevention and intervention project	£71,087
Cookstown & Dungannon Women's Aid	The Children's project	£42,688
Fermanagh Women's Aid	Refuge & Community based aftercare children's services	£50,500
North Down and Ards Women's Aid	Children & Domestic Violence	£12,810

Those ex-Children's Fund projects, which are the responsibility of other Departments, are currently being supported by £2 million of centrally earmarked funds until March 2009 with DHSSPS acting as the distribution point for them. They include the following women's group projects.

Organisation	Project Title	2008-09 Grant Offer
Derry Women's Centre	Moving Up Mothers (MUM)	£48,590
Falls Women's Centre	Children's Project	£35,844

Street Drinkers

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services are in place to meet the health needs of street drinkers, in the Londonderry/Derry area. (AQW 3223/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Drug and Alcohol Co-ordination Team (WDACT), through the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs (NSD), funds the Foyle Haven in Derry, a service which was specifically developed to support the needs of the street drinkers, including their health needs. The Foyle Haven provides an accessible drop-in centre where their assessed needs can be met and appropriate care and support undertaken. They provide a meals and snacks, along with laundry, showering, clothing, and personal hygiene facilities. In addition they deliver a range of activities designed to improve the self-esteem, knowledge and well-being of service users.

There is a specific Health Worker employed to facilitate clients gaining access to primary health services, and accompanies service users to GP, hospital or treatment appointments when necessary.

The "Get Your Head Down" project is also currently being implemented. This is night shelter accommodation to be provided to the homeless drinkers in a Methodist Church Hall. The WDACT has contributed £5,000 funding to facilitate the running of this service in the short term.

Street Drinkers

Ms Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what services are in place to meet the health needs of street drinkers, in the Belfast area. (AQW 3224/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Within the Belfast area there are several organisations who offer services that help meet the needs of street drinkers, including:

- **Multi-Disciplinary Homelessness Assessment Team (Extern)** – which provides an assessment service at the point of contact for those with complex needs. The team is funded by the Eastern Health and Social Services Board (EHSSB), the Probation Board for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive;
- **Homelessness District Nursing Service (Belfast Health and Social Care Trust)** - Belfast HSC Trust has a district nursing service which focuses exclusively on those sleeping rough or in temporary accommodation. It offers a crucial primary care link and gateway for those with mental, physical health or addiction issues;

- **Day Centre/Outreach Teams in Belfast (Welcome Centre and Homeplus)** - There are two services operating in the Belfast aimed at addressing the physical health needs of rough sleepers including street drinkers. They provide access for people to the homeless district nursing service;
- **Stella Maris Hostel (De Paul Trust)** - the Stella Maris Hostel is an emergency homeless hostel providing 24/7 care to long term street drinkers in the North Belfast area. It provides a range of services from single room accommodation to full catering and laundry facilities, and during residents stay they are also engaged in a key working system which allows them to gain access to welfare rights advice, health care, education and training and any other specialist services that they may need; and
- **Centenary House Crash Facility (Salvation Army)** - This facility provides emergency overnight accommodation to those sleeping rough including street drinkers allowing them to gain access to shelter, food welfare rights advice and health care.

Loch Cuan Home

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what scoring the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust used in its proposal to close Loch Cuan Home, in Newtownards. (AQW 3414/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The scoring system used by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in its proposal to close Loch Cuan Home is detailed in the consultation document available on the Trust's website: <<http://www.setrust.hscni.net>> and clicking on 'Involving You'.

Loch Cuan Home

Mr Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why is the Health and Social Care Trust considering the closure of Loch Cuan Home when the original decision was to build single independent units. (AQW 3416/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The original proposal by the legacy Ulster Community and Hospitals Trust, like the current proposal from the South Eastern Trust, was to close Loch Cuan and pursue the development of a Supported Housing project on the site. The Supported Housing project will be dependent upon capital and revenue funding being available from the Department of Social Development's Supporting People Programme.

Children with a Cleft Palate

Mrs O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children (i) have been born with a cleft palate; and (ii) are on waiting lists for corrective surgery. (AQO 1601/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Out of approximately 24,500 births in 2007/08, 29 children were born with a cleft palate or cleft palate & lip. Currently 10 children are on a waiting list for corrective surgery.

Cherry Lodge Children's Home

Mr Brolly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what examples there are of good practice in relation to the proposals by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust to replace Cherry Lodge Children's Home with 12 specialist salaried carers to extend the family based respite scheme. (AQO 1619/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Studies show that families would like choice in the type of respite care available. In cases where children have complex health care needs, families want reassurance that their carers are competent and have access to a range of specialist advice, support and training which their children's health needs require. Evidence shows that this can be achieved in a range of settings including residential, day care, family based settings and domiciliary care within the child's own home. The Trust's proposal, is currently out to a public consultation which will end on 19th December 2008. Following the consultation the Trust will need to take account of responses in determining what respite services are most appropriate to meet the needs of disabled children. An Equality Impact Assessment and further consultation on

the proposal will take place early in 2009. A final decision will not be made before March 2009 and will be made in conjunction with my Department.

New Enhanced Hospital in Omagh

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when work for the new enhanced hospital in Omagh is due to commence. (AQO 1499/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The new enhanced hospital in Omagh is currently in the process of being procured. The enabling works commenced in 2007.

I would say that I have deep concerns about the lack of support shown by the Omagh District Council for this project and asked them to confirm their support for the new hospital as planned. I have a letter from the Chief Executive of the Council confirming their endorsement and I have responded.

Drug Misuse Database

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the Drug Misuse Database April 2007 to March 2008, finding that of the clients presenting with drug misuse over a third were as a result of cocaine misuse; and what plans he has to reduce this figure. (AQO 1566/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Drug Misuse Database 07/08 did not report that over a third of clients presenting were as a result of cocaine misuse. What it in fact reported was that while cocaine (including crack cocaine) was the third most commonly reported main drug of misuse, it was only reported by 10% of individuals in that period, compared to 11% in 2006/07.

However, I am very concerned about the level of cocaine use in Northern Ireland, especially among the 25-35 age group. Under the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs work is underway to address issues relating to prevention, treatment, and enforcement of all drug misuse.

Healthcare Centres

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans his Department has to allocate priority funding for the development of new healthcare centres in (i) Carrickmore; and (ii) Fintona, Co Tyrone. (AQO 1613/09)

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, just under £700m of which is in the CSR, against an identified need of £7.8bn. A major element of this investment has already been contractually committed.

In light of funding constraints, I commissioned a Review of Capital Priorities across the entire health and social care system over the next 10 years. I am currently considering the report which has highlighted that some very difficult decisions will need to be taken in order that the limited funding available will be allocated to the areas of highest need across all Programmes of Care, including Primary & Community Care, in order to optimise the benefits for the entire population of Northern Ireland.

I have made a number of announcements recently and hope to be in a position to decide on, subject to business case approval, the HSC Trust allocations in the coming weeks.

Lagan Valley Hospital

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the public consultation issued by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust on the complete closure of maternity services at Lagan Valley Hospital, given that the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has stated that maternity services at the Mater Hospital cannot close due to lack of capacity at the Royal Victoria Hospital. (AQO 1516/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The South Eastern Trust is currently consulting on a proposal to transfer consultant-led inpatient obstetric services from Lagan Valley Hospital, not the complete

closure of maternity services at the hospital. Under the Trust's proposal, Lagan Valley will continue to provide antenatal and postnatal care.

As the consultation is under way it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the Trust's proposal at this time. I am however well aware of the pressures on maternity services. That is why I have asked the Eastern Board to review maternity services for the Greater Belfast area.

Safe Food Community Food Initiative Program

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many applications were made to the safe food community food initiative program. (AQO 1568/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There were 94 applications made to the safe food community food initiative program. The closing date for applications was 30 September 2008.

Royal Victoria Hospital

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the results of the investigation into the outbreak of listeria at the Royal Victoria Hospital. (AQO 1477/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A report is being prepared and this will be published as soon as possible after it has been finalised.

Childcare Services

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to increase the provision of adequate childcare services taking into account the impact of social security legislation on lone parents. (AQO 1572/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Responsibility for Early Years policy, which includes policy responsibility for child minding, transferred from my Department to the Department of Education in November 2006, with DHSSPS remaining responsibility for the regulation and inspection.

My Department is working with the Department of Education to review childcare registration and provision. Childcare is an issue which cuts across the remit of a number of departments and at the last meeting of the Ministerial Sub-Committee it was agreed that an additional cross departmental sub group would be established to focus specifically on this issue.

This group will undertake a short exercise to consider the potential for increasing childcare provision and will link to the sub-group on child poverty. On completion of the exercise a report will be submitted to the Ministerial Sub-Committee identifying costed options.

The Department for Social Development has advised that when a lone parent claims Jobseeker's Allowance, they will be subject to the same rules that apply to other jobseekers. An adviser will draw up a jobseeker's agreement and amongst other things will discuss the availability of suitable and affordable childcare with the lone parent. Additional flexibilities will be available in Northern Ireland where suitable and affordable childcare is not available to the lone parent.

Service Framework for Older People

Mrs M Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the service framework for Older People's Health and Wellbeing. (AQO 1560/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has commenced the development of a service framework on the Health and Wellbeing of Older People. Work is currently underway to finalise the terms of reference for the framework and to identify and confirm the most appropriate people from within the Health and Social Care service who will lead its development. I anticipate that the draft service framework for older people will be launched for consultation early in 2010.

Mental Health

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the infrastructure in place to maintain the programme to reduce the number of people with mental health illness who are in long stay hospital care, given the proposed closures of villas 1 and 2 in St. Luke's Hospital, over the next two years. (AQO 1559/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Southern Trust has developed proposals to re-settle 60 of the remaining 80 long-stay patients in St. Luke's Hospital over the next 3 years, together with plans to enhance community provision. These proposals are subject to the outcome of formal consultation commencing in December 2008.

A Project Board/Implementation Team made up of members from all the key stakeholders, has been established to oversee the resettlement programme. The Project board has been resourced to ensure all objectives are met. The individual needs of relevant patients in Villas 1 and 2 will be assessed by a multidisciplinary team and will be met in the most appropriate care environment with the full involvement of patients, their families and carers.

No patient will be discharged before the appropriate infrastructure for his/her individual needs is in place.

Autism

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what facilities exist for children with autism in West Belfast. (AQO 1564/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Belfast Health & Social Care Trust have advised me that services for children with autism are situated within the Community Child Health Services and Children's Disability Services. The services operate across the Belfast Trust. North and West Belfast are covered together. Children with ASD in West Belfast are served by a number of Community Paediatricians based in the Cupar Street Clinic, and a multi-disciplinary ASD service based in the Carlisle Wellbeing centre. The multi disciplinary ASD service also provides support for the Special Schools in the area.

Fuel Poverty

Mr Cobain asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what his Department is doing to tackle fuel poverty. (AQO 1517/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: A link between living in cold, damp conditions and a number of illnesses, including poor mental health, respiratory disease, and premature mortality has long been accepted. For this reason fuel poverty was recognised as an area for action in the public health strategy, Investing for Health.

The DSD - led Fuel Poverty Strategy encourages a partnership approach to tackling fuel poverty. Locally based Investing for Health Partnerships have been working with

a number of partners, including DSD, NIHE, Councils and energy agencies to identify the extent of fuel poverty in their respective areas and have put in place local strategies to help address the issue. This includes identifying those at risk, signposting and supporting clients to access appropriate initiatives such as energy efficiency advice, boiler replacements, whole house solutions, awareness raising sessions, referrals to grant schemes, and access to benefits. This work is ongoing.

Respite Facilities at Cherrylodge

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many families are on the waiting list to avail of respite facilities at Cherrylodge. (AQO 1605/09)

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust have indicated there are 13 families on a waiting list to avail of respite facilities at Cherrylodge.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Translink

Mr Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline what initiatives have been implemented by Translink in Banbridge to encourage the use of public transport, (i) in rural areas; and (ii) on the Belfast-Banbridge-Newry corridor. (AQW 2454/09)

The Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): I have been advised by Translink that it has implemented the following initiatives:-

Following the Ulsterbus Strategic Review (Banbridge, Newry, Craigavon, Armagh), Translink recently introduced an hourly frequency on all Banbridge town services Monday to Saturday, combined with a half-hour frequency to The Outlet shopping mall. New Sunday town services were introduced to Bridgewater Park.

Additional Newry to Belfast express services were introduced on 30 January 2006 serving Banbridge and Sprucefield park and ride.

£1.70 day tickets allowing unlimited day travel on Ulsterbus town services were introduced on 26 March 2007.

Translink

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the number of bus drivers who have been disciplined by Translink for dangerous or reckless driving; and (ii) the nature of the disciplinary action taken, in each of the last five years. (AQW 2468/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: Translink has provided me with the following information:

Year	Number of drivers disciplined for dangerous or reckless driving	Nature of disciplinary action taken
2004	Nil	-
2005	2	Final Written Warning x 2
2006	Nil	
2007	7	Final Written Warning and referred to Driving School x 1 Final Written Warning x 3 Final Written Warning and 3 days' suspension x 1 Written Warning x 1 Dismissed x 1
2008 (to date)	6	Dismissed x 1 Resigned x 2 Written Warning x 1 Final Written Warning x 2

Translink

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the process Translink follows to purchase fuel; (ii) the suppliers Translink currently purchases fuel from; and (iii) the amount Translink currently pays for a litre of fuel. (AQW 2701/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Translink that fuel procurement is carried out in accordance EU procurement legislation, under the Utilities Directive 2004/17EC, implemented in the UK by the Utilities Contracts Regulations 2006. The current supplier for ultra low sulphur diesel and gas to Translink is Nicholl Fuel Oils.

In relation to the amount paid for fuel, Translink considers that the release of this information is likely to prejudice its own commercial interests and also those of its supplier.

Southern Newry Relief Road

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development when the feasibility study for southern Newry relief road will be completed, and the findings published. (AQW 2722/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the feasibility study for a Newry Southern Relief Road is nearing completion and they expect to receive the draft report in the near future. The study will consider whether this scheme is feasible and provides Value for Money.

In addition, Louth County Council are undertaking a technical study into a possible bridge crossing at Narrow Water, and it has been agreed that they and Roads Service will share information from these two projects, when the relevant studies have been completed.

I expect to be in a position to make available the findings of the feasibility study into a Newry Southern Relief Road scheme in Spring 2009, following Roads Service's consideration of the report.

Parking Penalties

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Regional Development how much revenue has been generated from fixed and court imposed parking penalties in the last 12 months. (AQW 2738/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that £3.75 million was received through Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) in the second year of the current parking enforcement contract, for the period 13 November 2007 – 12 November 2008.

Parking Penalties

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Regional Development what proportion of the revenue gained from fixed and court imposed parking penalties is given to his Department. (AQW 2739/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: All revenue generated by the payment of PCNs is used, along with income from car-parking and other charges, to supplement the overall financing of Roads Service by Central Government.

Major Capital Building Programmes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline his Department's major capital building programmes, for the next three years. (AQW 2743/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: The two tables below list the major road capital building schemes currently under construction, along with additional schemes which are expected to commence during the current three year budget period from 2008/09 to 2010/11.

Major Road Schemes – Current Construction Programme Scheme

- M1 / Westlink upgrade - DBFO Package 1
- M2 Widening (Sandyknowes to Greencastle) - DBFO Package 1
- A1 Beech Hill to Cloghogue - DBFO Package 2
- A1 Junction Improvements - DBFO Package 2
- A4 Dungannon to Ballygawley - DBFO Package
- A4 / A5 Improvements (A4 Annaghilla and A5 Tullyvar) - DBFO Package 2
- A4 Henry Street / Sligo Road, Enniskillen
- A20 Newtownards Frederick Street link
- A20 Newtownards Southern Distributor

Major Road Schemes – Projects due to commence in next three years

- A2 Broadbridge Dualling, Derry
- A29 Carland Bridge Improvements, Dungannon
- A26 / M2 Ballee Road East, Ballymena
- A32 Cherrymount Link, Enniskillen

The major railway capital building schemes planned to continue or commence over the same period are listed below.

Railway Projects – Current Programme Scheme

- Ballymena to Coleraine Tracklife Extension
- Newry Railway Station
- Ballymena Storage Facility
- Knockmore to Lurgan Track Relay
- Extension to Platforms at Railway Stations and Halts across the network to accommodate new trains
- Coleraine to Derry Track Relay
- Ballymartin Park and Ride Facilities
- Construction of a new Train Care Facility

Translink

Mrs McGill asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the opening hours of all Translink bus depot facilities in each district council area. (AQW 2764/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been informed by Translink that the opening times for its bus depot facilities are as follows:

	Monday-Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Armagh			
Inspectors	08.00-19.00	07.00-19.00	14.00-20.30
Ticket Office	08.45 -17.15	Closed	1800-20.15
Waiting Area (Including Public Toilets)	06.00-19.00	07.00-19.00	16.30-20.30
Antrim			
Inspectors	06.00-18.30	Closed	Closed
Ticket office	09.00-17.00	Closed	Closed
Waiting Room	No Waiting Area	No Waiting Area	No Waiting Area
Ballymena			
Inspectors	06.30-19.00	07.30-15.30	Closed
Ticket Office	09.00-17.30	Closed	Closed
Waiting Room	09.00-17.30	Closed	Closed
Ballyclare			
Inspectors	06.00-15.45	06.00-15.45	06.00-15.45
Ticket Office	None	None	None
Waiting Area	06.00-18.30	06.00-18.30	06.00-18.30
Ballyclare closed from 12.15-1.30 for lunch			

	Monday-Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Bangor			
Inspectors	05.30-23.00	05.30-23.00	08.15-22.30
Ticket Office	07.00-17.00	07.45-17.00	Closed
Waiting Area (including Public Toilets)	05.30-23.00	05.30-23.00	08.15-22.30
Banbridge			
Inspectors	06.45-17.00	08.00-13.00	Closed
Ticket Office	09.00-16.45	Closed	Closed
Waiting Area (no Public Toilets)	06.45-17.00	08.00-13.00	Closed
Coleraine			
Inspectors	07.30-20.00	08.30-20.30	09.30-19.30
Ticket Office	08.00-17.50	08.00-17.50	17.00-20.30
Waiting Room	06.00-22.30	06.00-22.30	06.00-21.45
Cookstown			
Inspectors	Depot Controller	Depot controller	Depot Controller
Ticket Office			
Waiting Area	06.30-17.45	06.30-17.45	06.30-17.45
Craigavon			
Inspectors	05.45-19.30	06.30-17.30	Closed
Ticket Office	09.00-17.00	Closed	Closed
Waiting Area	N/A	N/A	N/A
Downpatrick			
Inspectors	07.00-18.00	08.00-17.00	Closed
Ticket Office	09.00-17.00	09.00-15.00	Closed
Waiting Area (including Public Toilets)	07.00-17.00	08.00-17.00	Closed
Dungannon			
Inspectors	06.00-23.30	07.00-23.00	07.00-23.00
Ticket Office	08.30-17.00	08.30-13.00	18.20-20.20
Waiting Area	06.00-23.30	07.00-23.00	07.00-23.00
Enniskillen			
Inspector	07.00-17.00	07.00-15.00	Closed
Ticket Office	09.00-17.00	Closed	Closed
Waiting Room	07.00-18.30	07.00-15.00	Closed

	Monday-Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Europa			
Waiting Area	05.00-11.00	05.00-11.00	05.50-10.15
Office Hours	06.30-20.05	06.30-20.05	
Toilets	05.00-21.30	05.00-21.30	05.00-10.15
Café Hours	08.00-18.00 Monday & Tuesday 08.00-18.30 Wednesday-Friday	08.00-18.30	09.00-17.00
Laganside			
Doors Open	06.40-18.30	Closed	Closed
Office Hours(ticket and information)	13.00-17.45 (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday) 09.45-17.45 (Wednesday)	Closed	Closed
Café Hours	09.00-16.30	Closed	Closed
Larne			
Inspectors	07.00-17.00	07.00-15.00	Closed
Ticket Office	09.00-17.00	Closed	Closed
Waiting Room	07.00-18.30	07.00-15.00	Closed
LIMAVADY			
Inspectors	06.30-18.30	Closed	Closed
Ticket Office	06.30-17.30	Closed	Closed
Waiting Room	06.30-18.15	Closed	Closed
LISBURN			
Inspector	07.00-20.00	07.00-20.00	08.00-15.00
Ticket office	09.00-17.00	09.00-16.30	Closed
Waiting Area (including Public Toilets)	07.00-20.00	07.00-20.00	08.00-15.00
Londonderry			
Inspectors	05.00-22.30	06.00-22.30	08.00-22.00
Ticket Office	06.00-18.00	06.45-18.00	07.45-18.00
Waiting Room	05.00-22.15	06.00-22.15	08.00-21.45
Magherafelt			
Inspectors	06.30-17.40	08.30-17.40	Closed
Ticket Office	09.00-17.00	Closed	Closed
Waiting Room	07.00-17.40	08.45-17.40	Closed
Newcastle			
Inspectors	07.00-18.00	07.00-17.45	Closed
Ticket Office	09.00-17.00	08.00-17.00	Closed
Waiting Room	07.00-17.00	07.00-17.00	Closed

	Monday-Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Newry			
Inspectors	06.10-20.30	06.10-20.30	11.30-20.00
Ticket Office	08.30-17.00	08.30-13.00	17.00-20.00
Waiting Room	06.10-20.30	06.10-20.30	11.30-20.00
Newtownards			
Inspectors	08.00-17.30	08.00-17.30	Closed
Ticket Office	08.00-17.00	08.00-17.00	Closed
Waiting Room	08.00-17.00	08.00-17.00	Closed
Omagh			
Inspectors	07.30-20.00	08.30-20.30	09.30-19.30
Ticket Office	07.30-17.00	07.30-12.30	15.30-19.30
Waiting room	07.30-18.00	08.30-18.30	15.00-19.30
Strabane			
Inspectors	07.00-17.00	Closed	Closed
Ticket Office	07.30-16.55	Closed	Closed
Waiting Room	07.15-16.55	Closed	Closed

Northern Ireland Water

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the work currently being carried out by Northern Ireland Water and the Roads Service, in Rasharkin; and when this work is scheduled to be completed. (AQW 2794/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is undertaking a Department of Social Development funded Environmental Improvement Scheme in the centre of Rasharkin. As part of the scheme, existing Northern Ireland Electricity and British Telecom overhead cables will be placed underground. This work will affect all footways on Main Street and Church Road between Moneyleck Road and Glebe Road, and also on Churchill Crescent. On completion of this work, the footways will be resurfaced and the Street Lighting will also be upgraded.

Central hatching and two pedestrian refuges will be installed along the stretch of Main Street between Bridge Street and Moneyleck Road. It is anticipated that these works will be completed by the end of February 2009.

I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water, that pipe-laying on the Rasharkin sewerage scheme is underway, with a section on the Moneyleck Road now complete and work continuing in adjacent fields. A short section along the Finvoy Road is scheduled for completion before Christmas, and the overall scheme will be completed by April 2009. Work on the watermain rehabilitation scheme in Rasharkin is presently in the final stages and should also be completed by Christmas.

Paint Resistant Kerbstones

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the trial of paint resistant kerbstones currently being undertaken in Lisburn. (AQW 2812/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has not undertaken a trial of paint resistant kerbstones in the Lisburn area.

However, I can advise that following concerns within the construction industry about the manual handling of very heavy concrete kerbstones, the Health and Safety Executive issued a recommendation to the construction industry, relating to the lifting and laying of concrete kerbstones.

As a result, the Section Office in Lisburn agreed to trial the use of a lightweight plastic kerb as an alternative to the traditional heavy concrete kerb. The kerbs were laid 18 months ago and to date this kerblin remains in good condition, and the plastic kerbs would appear to be performing well. The location will continue to be monitored over the coming months, before a decision will be made regarding their suitability for general use.

Park and Ride Facilities

Mr K Robison asked the Minister for Regional Development how many park and ride facilities have been provided by (i) his Department; and (ii) Translink/ Northern Ireland Railways, on the Belfast to (a) Larne line; and (b) Ballymena section of the Londonderry line; and how many cars can be located on each site.

(AQW 2821/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department provides the necessary funding to Translink for the provision of Park and Ride facilities at railway stations.

Currently Translink are providing 457 Park and Ride spaces on the Belfast to Larne line and 254 between Belfast and Ballymena on the Belfast to Derry line.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development how much money his Department contributed to the delivery of Neighbourhood Renewal in (i) Lurgan; (ii) Brownlow; and (iii) Portadown, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2854/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department has not contributed any money to the delivery of Neighbourhood Renewal schemes, in the subject areas, during any of the last three years.

Potholes

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development if he intends to review the current policy for the inspection and repair of potholes.

(AQW 2857/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that its defect maintenance standards were comprehensively reviewed and implemented in June 2000. These were subsequently reviewed and updated in 2005, with the revisions coming into operation in April 2006.

In the circumstances, I have no plans to instigate a further review of Roads Service's maintenance standards at this time.

Translink

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans Translink has to build a rail halt in central Craigavon.

(AQW 2867/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: Translink's Corporate Plan identifies planned projects to be taken forward in line with the Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan and the provisions in the Budget and the Investment Strategy. At this time there are no plans to build a railway halt in Craigavon.

Roads Service

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the representations to the Roads Service and his Department by (i) Members of Parliament; and (ii) MLAs, in support of the application to build a GAA sports complex on the Burrenbridge Road, Castlewellan.

(AQW 2874/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: The only representation received by my Department from a MP or MLA, in respect of this application, has been from Mr Eddie McGrady, MP, on 3 September 2008. Mr McGrady also met with Roads Service officials regarding the proposal, on 7 August 2008.

Water Charges

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development to report on the scale of the budgetary pressures to be addressed in relation to the 2009/10 and 2010/11 financial years arising from the loss of anticipated revenue from water charges as a consequence of the Executive's decision to defer the payment of water charges in both of those years. (AQW 2929/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Executive has taken into account the current economic circumstances and agreed not to impose additional household payments for 2009/10.

As a result of deferral and the consequent loss of anticipated revenue to Northern Ireland Water the Executive will have to increase the subsidy paid to the Company for 2009/10. This could amount to an additional £180 million under existing arrangements. My Department is currently working with the Department of Finance and Personnel to assess the budgetary implications of this and other issues.

Maintenance on the A2 Road

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the amount spent on maintenance on the A2 road, in each of the last five years. (AQW 2943/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service does not record details of total annual expenditure on individual roads. I am, therefore, unable to provide the requested information.

Zebra Crossings

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many zebra crossings are in North Down. (AQW 2944/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there are three zebra crossing facilities in the North Down area. These are located at:-

1. High Street, Holywood – between Downshire Road and Sullivan Place;
2. Hamilton Road, Bangor – near its junction with Springfield Avenue; and
3. Quay Street, Bangor – near its junction with High Street.

Dual Carriageway Schemes

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the (i) current indicative budget; (ii) current timescale; and (iii) updated progress for the A6 Derry/Londonderry to Dungiven by pass dual carriageway scheme, and to make a statement. (AQW 2950/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the current indicative budget for the A6 Londonderry to Dungiven dual carriageway scheme is in the region of £320 million. I hope to announce the 'preferred Route' for this scheme in spring 2009. Work on the scheme could possibly commence in 2012/13 subject to:

- satisfactory progress through the statutory processes;
- economic appraisal;
- the availability of funding through the normal budgetary process; and
- satisfactory progression through the procurement process.

Dual Carriageway Schemes

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the (i) current indicative budget; (ii) current timescale; and (iii) updated progress for the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson dualling upgrade scheme, and to make a statement. (AQW 2951/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: The current indicative budget for the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson dual carriageway scheme is in the region of £100 million. It is anticipated that work could commence on site in 2011, with completion in 2014, subject to:

- economic appraisal;
- the availability of funding through the normal budgetary process; and
- satisfactory progression through the procurement process.

Dual Carriageway Schemes

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development what category standard of dual carriageway is planned for (i) the A6 Derry/Londonderry to Dungiven by pass scheme; and (ii) the A6 upgrade scheme between Randalstown and Castledawson. (AQW 2953/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I can advise that the A6 Londonderry to Dungiven and the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson dual carriageway schemes will be high standard category six dual carriageways with grade separated junctions, left in-left out minor junctions and no central reserve cross-overs.

Permeable Paving

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of permeable paving; and what plans he has to ensure this type of paving is used by Roads Service, especially in areas that are liable to flooding. (AQW 2973/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: Permeable paving is one technique used in the design of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDs). My colleague, Sammy Wilson MP, MLA, the Minister of the Environment, has advised me that Annex C of Planning Policy Statement 15 'Planning and Flood Risk' contains information on SuDs, and on some of the benefits and constraints which influence their use. It advises that SuDs techniques may in certain circumstances help reduce flooding, but cautions that they can, like traditional piped drainage systems, be overwhelmed during extreme rainfall events.

My Department's Roads Service has advised that porous asphalt surface materials are available for road surfacing. The primary purpose of using this material is to reduce spray and noise generated from the interaction of the tyre and the road surface, and to facilitate the drainage of the surface water from the road. However, the Specification for Highway Works does not allow the use of these on the public road network in the North, without a formal Departure from Standard being approved.

Other systems, such as thin-surfacing, also allow some penetration of rainwater below the surface, mainly to reduce spray from traffic as opposed to dealing with all the surface water run-off.

As the water permeates through these paving materials it makes the systems more susceptible to frost damage due to the possibility of water freezing within the road surface structure; hence the restriction on their use.

It is considered that the choice of surfacing material does not have a significant effect on reducing flooding, as any rainfall ultimately finds its way into the drainage system either from the top of the surface course or through the permeable paving material.

Water Rates

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development to clarify if caravan owners will have to pay water rates on their static caravans. (AQW 2985/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that individual caravan owners on caravan sites are not directly responsible for water and sewerage charges. Liability for measured non-domestic water and sewerage charges for such sites rests with the site owners.

Traffic Calming Measures

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the ranking of Olympia Drive, South Belfast, in terms of priority for traffic calming measures. (AQW 3027/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that Olympia Drive, Belfast, is currently ranked 209 on the prioritised list of sites assessed for traffic calming measures within Roads Service's Eastern Division. However, as further assessments are completed, priorities and plans may change.

Selective Vehicle Detection

Mr Spratt asked the Minister for Regional Development if Selective Vehicle Detection has been provided at all the traffic signals in South Belfast. (AQW 3028/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there are currently 52 locations where Selective Vehicle Detection (SVD) has been installed in the South Belfast Constituency. These are located at signal controlled junctions and pelican crossings on the:-

- Saintfield Rd, from its junction with Beechill Rd to Rosetta;
- Lisburn Rd, from its Junction with Black's Rd to Bradbury Place;
- Malone Rd, from its junction with Balmoral Avenue to University St (including Stranmillis Rd); and in
- Belfast City Centre.

As the SVD gives priority to buses, Roads Service and Translink are currently identifying other junctions where SVD will be of benefit to buses.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development to confirm that investigations into the flooding that occurred on the 16 and 17 August in the Hilltown/Rathfriland area are ongoing; and for his assessment of the outcomes of the meeting held at Spelga Dam on 25 November to discuss this matter. (AQW 3041/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that its investigation into the flooding at Hilltown/Rathfriland area on 16 and 17 August 2008 was completed shortly after the event. It found that the overflow system at Spelga Dam was operating normally and that the damage to property and crops was not caused as a result of any lowering of the water levels in the Dam by NIW.

At the meeting on 25 November 2008, Local Councillors, Newry and Mourne Council officials and representatives from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development were advised by NIW that it remains satisfied the overflow system at Spelga Dam did not contribute to the flooding.

Roads Service

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 2263/09, to outline any plans his Department has to upgrade the junction of the A25 with the Burrenbridge Road. (AQW 3059/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I can advise that my Department's Roads Service has considered an improvement scheme at the junction of the A25 with the Burrenbridge Road. However, it has proved difficult to achieve a value for money scheme, given the estimated high scheme costs, and taking into consideration the relatively lightly trafficked rural nature of the Burrenbridge Road. I can therefore advise that, Roads Service has no proposals to improve the junction at this time.

Buncrana Road Upgrade Scheme

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the (i) current indicative budget; (ii) current timescale; and (iii) progress on the Buncrana Road upgrade scheme in Derry/Londonderry; and to make a statement. (AQW 3064/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the current indicative budget for the Buncrana Road widening scheme is in the region of £40-50 million. I hope to be in a position to announce the 'preferred route' for the scheme in spring 2009. The scheme is currently in the ten year Investment Strategy for Roads, 2008-18, and Roads Service are planning to deliver the scheme during the later half of the plan period, subject to:

- satisfactory progress through the statutory process;
- economic appraisal;
- the availability of funding through the normal budgetary process; and
- satisfactory progression through the procurement process.

Gritting Schedule

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will include Derrybard Road, Fintona, on the gritting schedule. (AQW 3065/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: The Derrybard Road, Fintona, is a "C" class road connecting Fintona, via the Greenmount Road, to the A5. At present it does not carry a sufficient volume of traffic to warrant inclusion in the gritting schedule.

However, I can advise that the B46, one of five salted roads serving Fintona, connects to the A5 at a junction less than 2 miles further north. This is a higher standard of road, carries more traffic, and runs almost parallel to the Derrybard Road.

Road Linkages

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development when the preliminary reports commissioned on road linkages around Derry/Londonderry (i) will be completed; (ii) whether the findings will be made public; and to make a statement. (AQW 3068/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I can advise the Member that the preliminary investigations and discussions with key stakeholders, on whether sufficient need exists for connection between the A6, A5 and around the city to the A2 Buncrana Road, are ongoing. Once completed, the report will make recommendations on the future need for these connections, possible alignment corridors and any further actions required. It is unlikely that the report will be finalised by Roads Service before mid 2009. Information on the outcome of the preliminary investigation will be published on the Roads Service web site.

Railway Study

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development when the study to consider the long-term redevelopment of the railway throughout the North West will be completed. (AQW 3069/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: The tender process for the selection of the consultants to conduct the development study is underway. The award of contract is due to take place prior to the Christmas break in order to enable work to commence in early 2009. The anticipated timeframe for the study is approximately three months. Once completed, officials in my Department and other interested parties will consider the report and provide details and recommendations to me. It is envisaged that the study will be complete by early summer next year.

Capital Projects

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Regional Development what actions his Department is taking to bring forward the delivery of capital projects to help redress the economic downturn. (AQW 3101/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have presented proposals to bring forward the delivery of some DRD capital projects to the Executive for consideration in its response to the economic downturn.

I and Executive colleagues will be reviewing all departments' proposals in tackling this important issue.

Road Works

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the role of his Department in the enforcement of effective signage at road works. (AQW 3102/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: It is a legal requirement that the signing and guarding of all road works comply with the Safety at Street Works and Road Works – A Code of Practice which is issued under Article 25 of the Street Works (NI) Order 1995, and Chapter 8 of The Traffic Signs Manual.

All contractors appointed by my Department's Roads Service are required to design, install and maintain Temporary Traffic Management (including signage) in accordance with the above legal requirements. In addition, contractors are required to have quality management accreditation to National Highways Sector Scheme 12.

If a contractor fails to comply with any of the above requirements, the contract will permit Roads Service to take appropriate enforcement action.

However, the enforcement of the above legal requirements, in respect of other utilities, to ensure that road works are adequately signed, is a matter for the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 2415/09, to detail the measures that will be introduced to increase the amount of renewable energy used by Northern Ireland Water in its installations. (AQW 3107/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it aims to increase the amount of renewable energy used at its installations, where possible, through the development of additional water turbines and wind turbines to generate electricity at sites within its estate. The new incinerator at Duncrue Street, Belfast, which is scheduled to commence operations in April 2009, incorporates a steam powered turbine for generating electricity. In addition, NIW will purchase additional renewable energy through the All Ireland Single Electricity Market as it becomes available. NIW will only purchase renewables from this source where it does not entail excessive additional cost.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 2415/09 to detail the renewable sources used by Northern Ireland Water, and what volumes of energy are created by each source. (AQW 3108/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that since April 2007 to the end of September 2008 the renewable sources used for electricity generation and the volumes of energy in kilowatt hours created by each source, is as follows:-

SITE	OUTPUT (kilo watt hours)
Fofanny Water Turbine	399,994
Oaklands Water Turbine	396,760
Silent Valley Water Turbine	2,832,783

SITE	OUTPUT (kilo watt hours)
Purdysburn Water Turbine	297,447
Breda Water Turbine	28,043
Incinerator Steam Turbine	2,894,276
Contract from Airtricity	13,962,000
Contract from ESBIE	13,538,169

Location of a Passing Loop

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development when a final decision will be made on the location of a passing loop between Derry/Londonderry and Coleraine. (AQW 3128/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: In my earlier response (AQW 2500/09 refers), I advised that the work undertaken to date by Translink suggests that the passing loop should be located in the Carrowreagh area. However detailed design work must be completed and geographical and land acquisition must be addressed before the precise location can be determined. Translink expect that a final decision will be made in February 2009.

Traffic Calming Measures

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development what action is planned to introduce traffic control measures that will improve the safety of children attending St. Mary's Primary School, Downpatrick Street, Rathfriland. (AQW 3146/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: I can confirm that my Department's Roads Service recently completed an assessment for road safety features at St Mary's Primary School, Rathfriland, which will allow the school to compete for inclusion on the 2009/10 Safer Routes to Schools programme. Typical road safety measures included in this initiative would be the implementation of enhanced road markings and flashing school warnings signs.

Roads Service

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to explain the severe traffic congestion currently affecting the M2 and A8(M) city bound during the morning rush hour, particularly given long traffic queues on Monday 1 December and Tuesday 2 December. (AQW 3150/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is presently undertaking improvement works on the M2 Motorway between Sandyknowes and the Greencastle junctions. These works involve widening the Belfast-bound carriageway to three lanes between the junctions, widening the country-bound carriageway of the M2 over the Greencastle Interchange, replacing the Longlands, Hightown and Collin Bridges, and upgrading Bellevue Bridge. The scheme is specifically designed to improve journey times on this section of the M2 and the approaches to it.

The introduction of narrow traffic lanes and a temporary speed limit to facilitate these improvement works has affected traffic progression on this busy section of the M2 motorway, particularly at peak times. In addition, the cold weather conditions and high traffic volumes contributed to the traffic congestion experienced on the M2 and A8(M) on 1 and 2 December during the morning peak.

Roads Service officials will continue to actively manage traffic conditions on the M2, A8(M) and Sandyknowes junction and, if necessary, amend traffic signal timings in order to minimise delay to roads users.

I can advise that the M2 Improvement Scheme is progressing well and is currently on target for completion by March 2009, some five months ahead of the original programme.

Roads Service

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development to make a statement on the severe traffic congestion that affected the M2 and the M3 flyover during the evening rush hour, on 1 December 2008. (AQW 3151/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: Roads Service has advised that, at approximately 4:40pm on Monday 1 December, a vehicle broke down on the country-bound carriageway of the M2 motorway near the Bellevue Bridge. This obstruction resulted in severe traffic congestion and long delays on the M2 and the M3 motorways during the evening peak, with traffic queued back on the M2 motorway to York Street junction and on the M3 motorway to the Sydenham Bypass.

In response, Roads Service displayed warning signs on overhead gantries on the Westlink and both the M2 and M3 motorways. Details of the incident were also passed to radio stations and posted on the Roads Service website.

I understand that the vehicle causing the obstruction was moved to a lay-by further along the M2 at approximately 5:15pm and the traffic lane was reopened.

Traffic Assessment

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to the answer to AQW 96/09 to detail the results of the traffic assessment. (AQW 3161/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the results of the traffic assessment for Moss Road, Annaghmore are not yet available. The assessment requires data on the number of vehicles, including buses, using the road during the winter service season. This information is currently being gathered, along with the number of buses using the road, by all bus service providers.

The results of the assessment are expected in early January 2009 and I have asked Roads Service officials to inform you of the outcome of this assessment.

Gritting Schedule

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration he has given to gritting the road to Slieve Croob Inn, 119 Convaraghan, Castlewellan Road, County Down, given the large number of customers being prevented from accessing this tourist location during bad weather conditions. (AQW 3177/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Clonvaraghan Road is a C-class, road which runs between the B175 Ballylough Road, Castlewellan and the Kilnhill Road, Finnis.

Whilst the Clonvaraghan Road has not previously met the criteria for inclusion on the winter gritting schedule, Roads Service is arranging for an assessment to be carried out, to ascertain whether this route now meets the criteria.

This assessment will be undertaken at the earliest opportunity and I have asked Roads Service to write to you to advise you of the results.

Traffic Calming Measures

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Regional Development if his Department can pursue the implementation of traffic calming measures despite receiving an objection from a resident. (AQW 3222/09)

The Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is required to consider any objections it receives to a proposed traffic calming scheme within the statutory period. In addition, Roads Service may consider it necessary to hold a public inquiry.

However, I can advise the Member that the final decision to implement any scheme rests with the Department.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Mental Health

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development to detail what facilities are funded by her Department that address mental health problems affecting young people. (AQW 2325/09)

The Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): Mainstream funding of programmes addressing young people with mental health problems is primarily the responsibility of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. However, my Department funds organisations and projects through the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, the Community Investment Fund, the Community Volunteering Scheme and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive works in partnership with Health Trusts by providing “Supporting People” funding. There are currently 125 schemes aimed at people with mental health problems and 45 schemes targeting young vulnerable people.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms Anderson asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the impact of the decision to cease funding for Neighbourhood Renewal posts in Derry/Londonderry on (i) vital childcare; (ii) women’s community education; and (iii) family services. (AQW 2379/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Mainstream funding of childcare services is the responsibility of the Department of Education. Responsibility for women’s and family services is spread across a number of departments. My Department cannot be expected to fund programmes in every instance where other departments who have equal, if not greater, responsibility do not provide funding.

Neighbourhood Renewal contracts which expire and are not renewed are not considered to impact heavily on the delivery of overall Neighbourhood Renewal objectives.

Housing Executive

Mr Bresland asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to her answer to AQW 1712/09, to detail the number of full-time and part-time staff employed in each (i) district office; (ii) area office; (iii) grants office; (iv) housing benefit office; and (v) rent collection office, broken down by religious background, in the (a) Omagh District Council; (b) Strabane District Council; and (c) Derry City Council areas. (AQW 2717/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The table below gives details of staff employed by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in their offices within the Omagh District Council, Strabane District Council and Derry City Council areas. Some offices have small numbers of part-time staff from one community and therefore, to prevent possible identification of individual persons, the information is not provided for each individual office, nor disaggregated into full-time or part-time staff.

Housing Executive staff by Community:-

Location	Protestant	Roman Catholic
Omagh District Council area	18	55
Strabane District Council area	7	16
Derry City Council area	41	154

Social Housing

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development what help her Department is giving to Housing Associations to build new social homes; and to quantify the number of social homes in the Newtownards area. (AQW 2782/09)

The Minister for Social Development: At present there are approximately 4,450 Social Homes across the Newtownards area. Just under 4000 of these are managed and maintained by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the remainder by registered Housing Associations.

As part of the New Housing Agenda I have committed to delivering more social housing than ever before. Over the next 3 years Housing Associations will be supported to deliver 5,250 new homes. Four hundred and ten of these will be in the Newtownards area, spread across 23 different locations.

Community and Recreational Facilities

Mr McLaughlin asked the Minister for Social Development if she is aware of the lack of community and recreational facilities available in Crumlin; and, if so, what measures does she intend to take to address this deficit. (AQW 2803/09)

The Minister for Social Development: My Department have been engaged with community representatives from Crumlin for a number of years and is aware of the needs of the village. The fact that it is currently defined as a village means that it is only able to benefit from those DSD programmes which are not confined to urban areas.

In its role as an agent of the International Fund for Ireland, my Department is at present working with Crumlin Together Limited to bring forward a Community Property Development Scheme in the village. An application for DSD funding under the Modernisation Fund is currently being assessed.

Social Housing

Mr A Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development what action she has taken since November 2007 to encourage the provision of social housing on the Sirocco site, in Belfast (AQW 2826/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is committed to securing 20% of the residential development for social and affordable housing and is engaging with the developers to ensure this is delivered, and will include three schemes totalling 150 units in the new Social Housing Development Programme due to be published in 2009. The Housing Executive is also engaging with the Planning Service regarding planning permission.

SPED Scheme

Mr O'Loan asked the Minister for Social Development to explain the increased spending on the SPED scheme, that was funded in the September monitoring round. (AQW 2830/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Spending on the Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings scheme has increased due to a higher number of applications. During the first 8 months of this year 32 properties were purchased under this scheme at a total cost of £7.2m, compared with 22 properties during all of 2007/2008 at a cost of £4.96m.

In the majority of cases applicants do not specify the reasons behind their Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings application. The detail of the intimidation is a matter for the Chief Constable of the Police Service for Northern Ireland.

Location of Public Sector Jobs

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the current distribution and location of public sector jobs within her Department. (AQW 2846/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Details of the current distribution and location of public sector jobs within this Department are as follows:

City / Town	DSD	NIHE	City / Town	DSD	NIHE
Antrim	51	35	Enniskillen	49	53

City / Town	DSD	NIHE	City / Town	DSD	NIHE
Armagh	80	28	Kilkeel	19	0
Ballycastle	0	9	Larne	37	18
Ballyclare	0	13	Limavady	26	15
Ballymena	61	220	Lisburn	46	77
Ballymoney	31	11	Londonderry	830	285
Ballynahinch	16	0	Lurgan	49	21
Banbridge	45	16	Magherafelt	33	14
Bangor	44	36	Newcastle	21	0
Belfast	5795	1496	Newry	61	54
Carrickfergus	25	20	Newtownabbey	41	83
Coleraine	106	109	Newtownards	40	215
Cookstown	30	16	Omagh	96	73
Craigavon	0	189	Portadown	58	22
Downpatrick	38	32	Strabane	44	23
Dungannon	58	20	Total	7830	3203

Social Housing

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to provide a breakdown by parliamentary constituency (i) how much has been invested into the maintenance budget for social housing; and (ii) the period the maintenance budget will cover. (AQW 2852/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive does not record this information by Parliamentary Constituency. As the question does not specify a particular period, the information has been provided for the last two financial years, by Housing Executive District Office.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive District Office	2006/07 £	2007/08 £
Belfast West (D1)	1,813,055	3,618,751
Belfast East (D2)	4,744,039	3,155,611
Belfast West (D3)	4,540,193	3,353,897
Belfast North (D4)	4,871,638	6,253,652
Belfast Shankill	4,914,173	5,004,593
Belfast North (D6)	4,625,683	3,513,776
Belfast South (D7)	5,295,208	4,830,416
Belfast Grounds Maintenance	1,979,724	2,005,105
Belfast Total	32,783,713	31,735,801
Bangor District Office	2,932,772	1,924,700
Newtownards District	4,162,288	3,617,109
Castlereagh District Office	2,375,904	3,385,946
Lisburn District 1	2,572,284	3,156,908
Lisburn District 3	2,278,894	2,374,283
Downpatrick District	2,902,565	2,302,681

Northern Ireland Housing Executive District Office	2006/07 £	2007/08 £
South East Grounds Maintenance	1,606,066	1,530,366
South East Total	18,830,773	18,291,993
Banbridge District	2,053,099	2,010,887
Newry District	2,842,138	3,270,543
Armagh District	1,440,851	1,956,683
Lurgan District	3,252,894	2,824,924
Portadown District	1,225,385	1,592,073
Dungannon District	2,179,440	1,232,545
Fermanagh District	2,472,578	2,894,577
South Grounds Maintenance	1,548,182	1,506,121
South Total	17,014,567	17,288,353

Northern Ireland Housing Executive District Office	2006/07 £	2007/08 £
Ballymena District Office	3,078,072	3,661,528
Antrim District Office	2,273,630	2,791,808
Newtownabbey District 1 Office	2,372,472	3,601,170
Newtownabbey District 2 Office	1,708,755	1,944,622
Carrickfergus District Office	2,702,318	1,344,470
Larne District Office	1,534,406	1,772,910
Ballycastle District Office	635,588	763,784
Ballymoney District Office	1,469,560	1,499,883
Coleraine District Office	3,627,265	2,332,052
North East Grounds Maintenance	2,403,101	2,416,847
North East Total	21,805,167	22,129,074
Waterloo Place District	2,409,995	2,680,335
Waterside District	2,227,601	2,281,899
Collon Terrace District	3,428,474	2,496,519
Limavady District	1,450,324	1,616,356
Magherafelt District	949,707	1,482,942
Strabane District	2,369,870	2,056,205
Omagh District	2,258,445	1,780,157
Cookstown District	883,595	1,459,275
West Grounds Maintenance	1,610,356	1,447,849
West Total	17,588,367	17,301,537
Overall Total	108,022,587	106,746,758

Housing Associations

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development what funding she is giving to Housing Associations to purchase homes on a single home purchase basis. (AQW 2860/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The most common single home purchase is the “Existing Satisfactory Purchase” where existing dwellings are purchased by the Housing Associations from the property market at current market value. If the Northern Ireland Housing Executive supports the purchase of a property to meet social housing need and no suitable social house is available, approval is given and the Housing Executive awards grant funding to the Housing Association up to the current level of Total Cost Indicator costs for the area. The Housing Association will lever in Private Finance for the remainder. The average funding in the current financial year for an Existing Satisfactory Property is £164,721.

Game Licences

Mr Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development what is the Department’s current position on the issue of game licences, as they have been removed in other parts of the UK. (AQW 2861/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Whilst my Department has a legal duty to manage the Northern Ireland game licensing system, the legislation governing the conservation and hunting of game species is primarily the responsibility of DOE. As the member may be aware, a proposal to abolish the existing game licensing system was consulted upon earlier this year under the DOE Review of Wildlife law. Responses to the consultation are currently being analysed by DSD and DOE officials. An announcement on the way forward will be made in due course.

Liquor Licences

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Social Development how many alcohol and intoxicating liquor licences have been refused, in each council area, in the last five years. (AQW 2863/09)

The Minister for Social Development: While my Department is responsible for promotion of the law on liquor licensing, the administration of the licensing system is a matter for the Courts. My Department does not hold records of applications refused by the Courts.

Housing Executive

Mr O’Dowd asked the Minister for Social Development when the planned redevelopment of Moyraverty shops/flats complex in Craigavon will take place. (AQW 2868/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is currently reviewing the long term future of the Moyraverty shops/flats complex and has appointed consultants to assist with the preparation of an economic appraisal and strategy for the complex and the wider Moyraverty neighbourhood. The Housing Executive is continuing to consult with Land and Property Services with a view to bringing proposals forward by the end of March 2009. The Housing Executive will also consult and engage fully with local residents, their representatives and other stakeholders before finalising any strategy for the future of Moyraverty.

Armagh Confederation of Voluntary Groups

Mr Irwin asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to support financially the Armagh Confederation of Voluntary Groups after March 2009, given its funding deficit. (AQW 2909/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Armagh Confederation of Voluntary Groups received financial support from 2001-2007 through the EU Building Sustainable Prosperity Programme. My Department has provided a further £160,000 over the last two financial years through the Community Support Programme. The award of £80,000 for the current year was made on the clear understanding that it was a final year’s funding. It was designed to give the Confederation time to find alternative sources of funding and to strengthen efforts to achieve long term sustainability. Regrettably, having already provided two extensions, the Department is not in

a position to provide another extension of funding to cover the 2009-10 period. This is consistent with the view expressed to the Confederation at that time.

Housing Executive

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what criteria are used when prioritising external work schemes for Housing Executive properties. (AQW 2931/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive's main criteria in formulating the external work schemes programme are the date of previous works and physical need. External maintenance and repair works are normally carried out through the Housing Executive's external cyclical maintenance programme.

Housing Executive

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development if the (i) age; (ii) condition; and (iii) profile, of a Housing Executive property is taken into consideration when deciding when a work scheme will commence. (AQW 2934/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The physical condition and age of stock are key factors which prompt dwellings to be surveyed for planned improvement and repair works.

Pensioners' Bungalows

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development if funding is in place to start the scheme to improve pensioners' bungalows on Ballyree Drive, Bloomfield Estate. (AQW 2936/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive currently has an improvement scheme for the Ballyree bungalows programmed for May 2009.

Community Workers

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development if her Department will continue to fund the community worker for the Bloomfield Estate, Bangor, for the 2009-10 period. (AQW 2938/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive funds the community worker post in the Bloomfield Estate in Bangor. The one year contract commenced in April 2008 and will be reviewed on an annual basis. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive understands that the Bloomfield Community Association will make an application to fund the worker for the financial year 2009/2010. The Housing Executive will make a decision in March 2009 regarding the continuation of funding.

Social Security Agency

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the projected number of Social Security Agency staff, broken down by grade, that will be employed at each Jobs and Benefits Office and Social Security Office if proposed organisational changes, arising from the Strategic Business Review, are implemented in full. (AQW 3025/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Implementation of the Strategic Business Review is proposed to commence in October 2009 and conclude around October 2012. Therefore it is not possible at this time to detail the projected number of Social Security Agency staff, broken down by grade that will be employed at each Jobs & Benefits Office and Social Security Office at full implementation. However, based on current volumes of work the overall projected number of Social Security Agency posts would be as follows – it should be noted that these figures are purely indicative.

SOCIAL SECURITY AGENCY POSTS

Location	Indicative SSA Front Office Posts	Indicative SSA Back Office Posts	Indicative SSA Posts - Total
Andersonstown	19	94	113
Antrim	6	40	46
Armagh	6	46	52
Banbridge	5	0	5
Bangor	9	0	9
Ballymena	9	0	9
Ballymoney	5	0	5
Ballynahinch	4	0	4
Carrickfergus	5	0	5
Coleraine	7	87	94
Cookstown	5	0	5
Corporation Street	17	174	191
Downpatrick	7	43	50
Dungannon	7	36	43
Enniskillen	6	44	50
Falls Rd	10	0	10
Foyle	14	111	125
Hollywood Rd	8	55	63
Kilkeel	4	0	4
Knockbreda	7	0	7
Larne	5	0	5
Limavady	4	0	4
Lisburn	5	37	42
Lisnagelvin	6	18	24
Lurgan	8	0	8
Magherafelt	4	40	44
Newcastle	5	0	5
Newtownabbey	6	0	6
Newtownards	9	94	103
Newry	8	94	102
Omagh	6	55	61
Portadown	6	26	32
Shaftesbury Square	10	76	86
Shankill	10	0	10
Strabane	10	0	10

Figures do not include staff belonging to the Dept for Employment and Learning based in the existing 25 Jobs & Benefits Offices.

Social Security Agency

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development if the Equality Impact Assessment element of the Social Security Agency Strategic Business Review Consultation will take into account the current disparities in public sector jobs in each District Council Area. (AQW 3026/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Consultation on the Social Security Agency's Strategic Business Review proposals was launched on 27 November 2008 and runs over two phases until late April 2009. I will await the findings of the consultation process before making a full assessment of the impacts. The Equality Impact Assessment element of the consultation will reflect the fact that the key objective of the Strategic Business Review is to secure the future delivery of modern, efficient and more accessible service delivery for customers of the local office network..

Social Security Agency

Mr Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the equality implications of the proposal in the Social Security Agency Strategic Review to (i) further downgrade its Strabane District office to provide 'front office only services'; and (ii) re-deploy the majority of staff elsewhere, given that Strabane already has the lowest base of public sector jobs. (AQW 3031/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Public consultation on the Strategic Business Review proposals was launched recently on the 27 November 2008 and is planned to run in two stages until late April 2009. I will await the findings the consultation process before completing my assessment of the equality implications for Strabane District office and the staff currently employed there. I would highlight the fact that, irrespective of the proposed changes to back-office processing functions, there has been no previous downgrade to the service to customers provided by Strabane District office.

Construction Industry Jobs

Miss McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to introduce a scheme similar to that announced by the UK Chancellor in his pre-budget Report where additional construction industry jobs are being provided through the insulation of homes in the private and public sectors. (AQW 3066/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Schemes announced by the UK Chancellor are funded through the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target programme (CERT). CERT is not available in Northern Ireland and cannot be mirrored here as the funding is ultimately paid by consumers through higher energy bills. Northern Ireland already has the highest levels of fuel poverty in the UK. My department funds the Warm Homes Scheme which provides heating and insulation measures. I intend to use all available resources to reduce the Warm Homes Scheme waiting list so that I can assist those people in greatest need. I have submitted a bid as part of December monitoring for additional resources to help clear the Warm Homes Scheme waiting list.

Benefit Offices

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of how many staff working in benefits offices are at risk of losing their jobs as a result of modernisation plans by her Department. (AQW 3082/09)

The Minister for Social Development: There is no risk of staff working in benefit offices losing their employment.

Energy Relief Scheme

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development what (i) legal powers she has at her disposal to introduce her proposed energy relief scheme, as outlined in the Irish News on 26 November 2008; (ii) costings have been estimated for her proposals and how finance will be acquired; and (iii) potential exists for her to introduce legislation to enable her to financially assist those in fuel and energy poverty. (AQW 3125/09)

The Minister for Social Development: I submitted an Executive Paper on Tackling Fuel Poverty in September and followed this up with a further paper in October, which took account of comments from Ministerial colleagues. As yet the Executive has not had these papers on its agenda. Protocol prevents me from commenting in detail until the Executive has considered my proposals. I can state however, that any proposal for an energy credit payment is merely one element in a package which is designed to encourage the Executive to adopt a collective position on the crucially important issue of fuel poverty.

Community Investment Fund

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how the 14 women's centres were selected for funding from the Community Investment Fund; and to detail the reasons why no women's centres based in county Down and Fermanagh were selected as part of this process. (AQW 3129/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Community Investment Fund (CIF) opened for applications in April 2006. The application process was competitive, and some 137 applications were received. After a rigorous process of assessment and Economic Appraisal some 34 organisations working with disadvantaged communities were awarded funding. This includes 13 Women's Centres and Women's organisations. There were no applications to the CIF received from Women's organisations in County Fermanagh, and only one from an organisation in County Down. This organisation was screened out at an early stage in the assessment process.

Community Investment Fund

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development when the review of the Community Investment Fund within the women's sector was completed and who was consulted as part of this review. (AQW 3133/09)

The Minister for Social Development: There has been no review of the Community Investment Fund within the women's sector.

Women's Centre Regional Partnership

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of the review of the women's centre regional partnership, how her Department will ensure transparency and inclusiveness in the funding process for the women's sector. (AQW 3134/09)

The Minister for Social Development: DSD has policy responsibility for women living in disadvantaged areas. It does not have responsibility for funding the 'women's sector'. The Women's Centres Regional Partnership (WCRP) is funded under the Department's Regional Infrastructure Programme to provide support to women's centres working in disadvantaged areas across Northern Ireland. The WCRP project which runs to 31st March 2009 is currently being evaluated in accordance with established departmental procedures.

Women's Centre Regional Partnership

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development when the review of the women's centre regional partnership will be completed and what groups will be consulted as part of the process. (AQW 3135/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The review of funding to the Women's Centres Regional Partnership (WCRP) under the Regional Infrastructure Programme will be completed by the end of December 2008. Officials from my Department, WCRP staff and management and a representative sample of women's centre stakeholders will be consulted during the review.

Social Housing

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 716/08, to give an update on plans to build (i) 32 social housing units at Mullacreevie, Armagh; and (ii) 12 social housing units for the elderly

at Ballynahonemore, Armagh; and if a suitable site has been found for 16 single person units in Armagh. (AQW 3163/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Following a recent review of the Social Housing Development Programme, it is now proposed to build 44 units at Mullacreevie, Armagh and 24 units at Ballynahonemore, Armagh. A suitable site has not yet been identified for the 16 unit single non-elderly person scheme.

Social Housing

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Social Development when work will commence on the 32 social housing units at Mullacreevie, Armagh. (AQW 3164/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The revised Social Development Programme due to be published by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in January 2009 indicates that the Mullacreevie Phase 1 scheme for 22 units will start in 2012/13, and the Mullacreevie Phase 2 scheme for 22 units will start in 2013/14.

Social Housing

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Social Development which Housing Association will be partnering the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in building the 32 social housing units at Mullacreevie, Armagh. (AQW 3165/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Following a recent review of the Social Housing Development Programme, it is now proposed to build 44 units at Mullacreevie, Armagh. Fold Housing Association has been nominated to develop the Mullacreevie Phase 1 scheme for 22 units. The Mullacreevie Phase 2 scheme for 22 units has not yet been allocated to a Housing Association.

Social Housing

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Social Development if planned social housing to be built at Mullacreevie, Armagh, can be brought forward in her Department's works schedule to assist the difficulties currently being faced by the construction industry. (AQW 3166/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The revised Social Development Programme due to be published by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in January 2009 indicates that the Mullacreevie Phase one scheme for 22 units will start in 2012/13 and the Mullacreevie Phase two scheme for 22 units will start in 2013/14. It is not possible to bring these schemes forward in the Social Housing Development Programme at this stage, as a number of issues regarding the development of the site, including zoning and open space provision, have to be addressed, and planning permission will have to be obtained.

Social Housing

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Social Development whether she can confirm that local labour is used in the construction of 32 social housing units at Mullacreevie, Armagh. (AQW 3167/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The source of labour for the proposed schemes at Mullacreevie will be a matter for the successful contractor.

Benefit Fraud

Mr Armstrong asked the Minister for Social Development what problems have been experienced with recruiting and retaining staff for units engaged with tackling benefit fraud; and what action she is taking to remedy the situation. (AQW 3196/09)

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. In the past there had been

some difficulties recruiting and retaining staff because of the nature of the work which involved unsocial hours, covert surveillance and court attendance. There was also a high turnover of staff as a result of promotions and leavers from the Agency. Following a number of initiatives to attract and retain staff, however, 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 Staff

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of Social Security Agency staff currently employed in the Foyle constituency, broken down by (i) grade; and (ii) location. (AQW 3236/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The table below details the number of Social Security Agency staff currently employed in the Foyle constituency, by (i) grade and (ii) location as at 03/12/08.

Foyle Constituency	Foyle	Lisnagelvin	State Pension Credit (Carlisle House)	Lisahally	Richmond Chambers	Total
GRADE 7	0	0	1	0	0	1
DP	1	0	3	0	0	4
SO	1	1	7	3	0	12
EO1	8	2	19	6	1	36
EO2/SSO1	36	20	116	35	3	210
AO/SSO2	65	31	160	135	0	391
AA	7	1	18	35	1	62
TAA	14	6	6	4	0	30
SGB2	8	2	5	2	0	17
CSGB2	2	1	0	0	0	3
SEC GUARD	2	0	0	1	0	3
TYPYST	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	145	64	335	221	5	770

Social Security Agency Staff

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development how many Social Security Agency staff will be located in the proposed (i) Income Support Benefit Processing Centres; and (ii) Centralised National Insurance Number Processing Centres, broken down by (a) grade; and (b) location. (AQW 3237/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Implementation of the Strategic Business Review is proposed to commence in October 2009 and conclude around October 2012. Therefore it is not possible at this time to detail the projected number of Social Security Agency staff, broken down by grade that will be employed at each of the proposed Income Support Benefit Processing Centres and Centralised National Insurance Number Centres. However, based on current volumes of work the overall projected number of posts at each would be as follows - it should be noted that these figures are purely indicative at this stage.

SOCIAL SECURITY AGENCY POSTS

Location	Benefit	*Indicative SSA Back Office Posts	*Indicative SSA Front Office Posts
Andersonstown	IS	94	19
Coleraine	IS	87	7

Location	Benefit	*Indicative SSA Back Office Posts	*Indicative SSA Front Office Posts
Corporation Street	IS	84	17
Foyle	IS	99	14
Newtownards	IS	94	9
Newry	IS	94	8
Lisnagelvin	NINO	18	6
Portadown	NINO	26	6
Shaftesbury Square	NINO	27	10

* These figures exclude any DEL staff employed in the locations in question.

Areas at Risk Pilot Programme

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development if she plans to extend the number of areas included under the Areas at Risk Pilot Programme, and if she will make a statement. (AQW 3284/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Consideration is currently being given to extending the Areas at Risk Pilot Programme to include a number of new areas under a possible 3rd phase. A decision will be made over the coming weeks and a statement announcing the outcome will be made early in the New Year.

Department's Budget and Expenditure

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) all budget under spends; and (ii) the bids that have yet to be met for which money is available. (AQW 3356/09)

The Minister for Social Development: (i) I refer the Member to my written answer 2292/09 on 24 November, which detailed the Department's budget and expenditure figures for each of the last 3 years and highlighted the areas of underspend accordingly. The final position for 2008-09 will not be known until after the year end.

(ii) This Department bid for additional funding in the December monitoring round to reflect known pressures. However, money to meet Departmental bids is held centrally by the Department of Finance & Personnel, so I have no knowledge of what is available.

ILEX Corporate Plan

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development how soon there will be tangible evidence of regeneration at the two ILEX sites in Derry/Londonderry. (AQO 1522/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The current ILEX Corporate Plan for 2008 - 2012 envisages 40% of the Ebrington site and 30% of the fort George site being built out or under construction by March 2011. In addition, ILEX estimates construction of the new Foot & Cycle Bridge, which will link Ebrington to the city centre, commencing in late 2009.

Masterplans have been produced for both sites and some preliminary site clearance and demolition works is underway.

Under Direct Rule, regeneration in Derry did not move forward with sufficient pace and enthusiasm. I am confident that this has changed under devolution and that together with OFMDFM, Ilex and Derry City Council and other important stakeholders we can start to make real progress.

Social Housing

Mr Neeson asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to use Departmental underspends to build social houses. (AQO 1592/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Departmental underspends occurring at the year end cannot be reallocated within the Department but are instead held centrally by the Department of Finance & Personnel. The Department of Finance & Personnel controls any easements in Departmental expenditure during the year, including approval to reallocate to other areas of work. For example, in the September monitoring round, we secured approval to utilise £15.5m from other Departmental sources to address pressures in the Housing budget, which have arisen due to the shortfall in house and land sale receipts.

I can assure the member that DSD runs a tight ship against its budgets. We will spend our capital right up to its limits and could do with more. On the revenue side, we will have underspends – not because of failure to deliver programmes – but because of tight management of costs, particularly staff and administration costs. We are in constant engagement with DFP to get approval to use out hard-earned efficiency savings to deliver more programmes outcomes.

Ulster GAA Community Development Unit

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Social Development if the invitation she received to attend the second annual meeting of the Ulster GAA Community Development Unit was issued to her in her official capacity as Minister. (AQO 1487/09)

The Minister for Social Development: I was invited to the second Ulster GAA Club and Community Development Conference as Minister for Social Development. The theme of this year's Conference was "Strengthening community cohesion through the development of GAA clubs and volunteers". This theme clearly addresses my Ministerial priority of building communities, tackling disadvantage and encouraging social responsibility. I was asked to jointly launch the new Ulster GAA Community Development Unit, a dedicated unit for volunteer development, for strategic development and for community outreach initiatives. I am committed to encouraging and supporting this type of work.

Foot and Cycle Bridge

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the proposed foot and cycle bridge in Derry/Londonderry City Centre. (AQO 1569/09)

The Minister for Social Development: As part of its current regeneration plan for Derry, ILEX has proposed the construction of a foot and cycle bridge linking the Ebrington site with the city centre. The project is expected to cost £13 million and funding had been requested from the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) under the Peace 3 programme.

On 17 October, the SEUPB issued a letter of offer for £13.3 million to ILEX for the foot and cycle bridge. This offer was accepted by the ILEX board at its meeting on 14 November.

ILEX has now proceeded to the design and construct tender stage and hopes to select a preferred contractor early in 2009. Subject to the necessary planning approvals, ILEX anticipates construction commencing in late 2009.

Fuel Poverty

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development for a progress report on the fuel poverty proposals she circulated to the Executive for consideration. (AQO 1520/09)

The Minister for Social Development: I had submitted my paper on Tackling Fuel Poverty for consideration by the Executive in September. As no Executive meeting took place I sought clearance to bring forward my proposals under urgent procedure. No decision was made on this. The Executive is now meeting. I hope that my paper will be considered in its entirety at the earliest opportunity as we are running out of time if our ambition is to make a difference this Winter.

Child Maintenance

Mrs D Kelly 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 1523/09)

The Minister for Social Development: Since I took office in May 2007, the number of children benefiting from child maintenance has steadily increased to well over 20,000 at the end of October 2008. However, one of the biggest obstacles to progress in securing money for all 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 2008 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 failure to support your children is wrong.

Former Site of Andersonstown RUC Barracks

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development the reasons why a second commercial developer was chosen to work on the former site of Andersonstown RUC barracks. (AQO 1586/09)

The Minister for Social Development: A second commercial developer was not chosen.

Orange Community Network

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the Orange Community Network's performance in achieving community development and cohesion, following her meeting with the group earlier this year. (AQO 1518/09)

The Minister for Social Development: My meeting of 6 June with the Orange Community Network and Brookmount Cultural and Education Society was an opportunity for the Orange Community Network to outline the work they have been engaged over the last two years and for me to hear, first hand, the positive impact their work has had on one particular group, Brookmount Cultural and Education Society. While it is difficult to fully assess any organisation's work in one visit, I was impressed with the commitment, vision and enthusiasm shown by the staff of Orange Community Network. It is clear that they are working hard with a growing number of local people.

Fuel Poverty

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development to outline her priorities to counter fuel poverty this winter. (AQO 1527/09)

The Minister for Social Development: In response to the rising cost of fuel I established the Fuel Poverty Task Force in May 2008. The Task Force produced recommendations which I compiled into an Executive paper and circulated to the Executive in September. As of 7 December 2008 the Executive has not adopted a collective position on fuel poverty. I hope that Executive colleagues will endorse the proposals contained in my Fuel Poverty paper.

Another primary tool in tackling fuel poverty is the Warm Homes Scheme. The Scheme offers insulation and heating measures to eligible applicants living in privately rented or privately owned accommodation. I have bid for additional resources as part of the December monitoring round in an attempt to try and clear the current waiting list.

Fuel Poverty

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the impact on fuel poverty of the failure of the Executive to meet for 5 months. (AQO 1595/09)

The Minister for Social Development: In response to the rise in energy prices I established the Fuel Poverty Task Force to look at how we could assist those people most affected this Winter. I brought a paper on Tackling

Fuel Poverty to the Executive in September 2008 seeking their endorsement of a number of recommendations emanating from the Task Force. The Executive has yet to form a collective view on fuel poverty. Had the Executive done so, these recommendations could have been progressed more quickly.

Winter Fuel Allowance

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of fluctuating fuel prices, what action she is taking to ensure the Winter Fuel Allowance is appropriate. (AQO 1508/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Westminster Government introduced the Winter Fuel Payments Scheme in January 1998 as part of its commitment to alleviate fuel poverty.

The Winter Fuel Payment is not intended to cover the total cost of a household's fuel bills, but to provide a significant contribution. The payment was £20 when it was first made in 1998. This increased to £100 in 1999/2000. An additional £100 for households with someone aged 80 or over was introduced in 2003/2004.

For 2008/2009 there is to be a one-off increased payment of £200 - £250 for those aged 60 or over and one of £300 - £400 for those aged 80 and over.

I met recently with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, James Purnell MP, and impressed on him my view that the Winter Fuel Payment should be increased and refocused to help those in greatest need.

Social Housing

Mr Burns asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to build an increased number of social houses on land already in public ownership. (AQO 1538/09)

The Minister for Social Development: When land in public ownership is declared surplus, it must first be offered across the other Public Bodies who may have an interest in acquiring it. My Department has already purchased a number of sites through this process to deliver social housing in areas where it is needed most.

Winter Fuel Allowance

Mr Cree asked the Minister for Social Development what plans she has to extend the Winter Fuel Allowance to people suffering from cancer. (AQO 1509/09)

The Minister for Social Development: The Winter Fuel Payments Scheme was introduced in January 1998 to alleviate fuel poverty by providing help specifically to older people towards their winter fuel bills. Older people are targeted as they are more vulnerable to the effects of cold weather during the winter months than other groups. There are no plans to extend the Winter Fuel Allowance to people suffering from cancer.

However, depending on an individual's circumstances, a range of social security benefits is available to people suffering from illness or disability including disability living allowance, attendance allowance, employment and support allowance, incapacity benefit and income-related benefits, such as income support and pension credit.

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Attendance Allowance (AA) are paid as a contribution towards the extra costs faced by people with cancer, or any other progressive disease.

In cases of terminal illness the qualifying period is waived and the highest rate of AA or DLA care component is awarded automatically.

I met recently with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, James Purnell MP, and impressed on him my view that the Winter Fuel Payment should be increased and refocused to help those in greatest need.

ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

Energy Efficient Light Bulbs

Mr McKay asked the Assembly Commission if energy efficient light bulbs are used throughout all of the buildings used by the Assembly. (AQW 2922/09)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr R Coulter): The Assembly Commission works closely with the Department of Finance and Personnel's Energy Conservation Branch and the Carbon Trust to improve energy efficiency.

Energy-saving bulbs are used wherever feasible throughout Parliament Buildings and in all cases where new light fittings are being installed.

One exception to this is the Great Hall where it has been accepted by the Carbon Trust that it would not be appropriate to replace the existing light bulbs used in the chandeliers with energy saving bulbs. These lights are turned off at all times when not required.

In addition to energy saving bulbs, many offices in Parliament Buildings have motion sensor lighting that turns off when the office is unoccupied.

Motion sensor lighting was also installed in the Gent's Toilets in the Basement during the recent summer recess and, where installation costs are not prohibitive; there are plans to install motion sensor lighting in other areas of the building.

With regard to the temporary accommodation at Annexe C, fluorescent tubing strips are used throughout the offices and the toilets are lit with 2D fluorescent lights, all of which are deemed to be energy efficient. All lights are turned off when the building is not in use.

Assembly Waste

Mr McKay asked the Assembly Commission what percentage of the total waste from the Assembly is recycled. (AQW 2923/09)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr R Coulter): Waste and recycling for Parliament Buildings and the Stormont Estate is currently managed by the Department of Finance and Personnel's Estate Maintenance Division.

I attach a previous response to a similar question AQW 3487/08 which details the percentage of waste recycled monthly from Parliament Buildings from October 2006 to December 2007.

The table below details the percentage of waste recycled monthly from Parliament Buildings and Annexe C from January 2008 to September 2008.

The figures include paper, plastic, cardboard and tins but do not include glass, which is recycled by a different contractor. Approximately 250kg of glass is recycled weekly.

Month	% Recycled
January 2008	26
February 2008	23
March 2008	21
April 2008	34
May 2008	30
June 2008	31
July 2008	35
August 2008	33
September 2008	32

In addition, printer and fax cartridges and other computer consumables are recycled as is the waste cooking oil from the kitchen.

It may also be helpful to note that monthly recycling figures are published on the Assembly website, AssISt. <http://assist.assemblyni.gov.uk/services/ok/works/recycling.htm>

PowerPoint Presentations

Mr Ross asked the Assembly Commission what consideration it has given to ensuring that all committee rooms are fully fitted with audiovisual equipment and projectors to allow for PowerPoint presentations.

(AQW 2970/09)

The Representative of the Assembly Commission (Rev Dr R Coulter): Powerpoint presentations can be made in committee rooms at present. However, the presentation is normally projected onto the meeting room wall meaning that it can be difficult to see. The Chairpersons' Liaison Group has accepted a recommendation to install plasma screens in committee rooms and the Assembly Commission is content for expenditure to be incurred on this project. It is proposed to integrate computing facilities into the screens to allow them to support presentations without the need for projectors, display screens, etc. It is planned for the installation to take place before the end of the current financial year i.e. before 31 March 2009.

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