
OFFICIAL REPORT

(HANSARD)

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NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 30 January 2009

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Programme for Government

Mr M Storey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consideration each Department has to take of the priority given to the economy in the Programme for Government, when implementing its policies. (AQW 4136/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): The Programme for Government sets out the Executive's policy and spending priorities for 2008-2011. Growing a dynamic innovative economy is our top priority. However, the five priority areas set out in the Programme are interconnected and we recognise that we cannot grow the economy in isolation from determined efforts to transform our society and enhance our environment.

Under each of the priority areas the Programme for Government sets out a range of key goals and commitments for the Executive collectively to deliver. These are, in turn, supported by a detailed framework of 23 cross-cutting Public Service Agreements (PSAs) which confirm the key actions and targets departments will take forward over the next three years in support of the Executive's priorities and in line with budget allocations. Departments have also worked together to develop detailed delivery agreements for each PSA. These set out in more detail how departments intend to ensure delivery of the targets and actions set out in the PSA framework and provide the basis upon which the Executive will monitor and report on progress at departmental level.

Much has changed since the Executive's Programme for Government was launched on 28 January 2008. As a result of developments in the global economy, we find ourselves in a more difficult and uncertain environment than any of us could have anticipated. However, the priorities we set out in the Programme for Government and, in particular, our decision to make the economy our top priority remain valid.

Current economic conditions and developments in the financial markets clearly present us with significant challenges. However, this makes it more important than ever that the Executive collectively and individual departments remain focused on delivering on the commitments in our Programme for Government.

Poverty Levels

Dr A McDonnell asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the work it is carrying out, in conjunction with the UK Government, to alleviate the effects on poverty levels in the current economic downturn. (AQO 1861/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Despite the difficulties associated with the current economic downturn, the Executive remains committed to its Programme for Government commitment to proactively change existing patterns of social disadvantage by using increased prosperity and economic growth to tackle ongoing poverty here.

This commitment has recently been re-stated in the Executive's decision to adopt the broad 'architecture' and principles of 'Lifetime Opportunities' as the basis of our strategy to tackle Poverty, Social Inclusion and patterns of deprivation, based on social need.

The Executive has agreed to establish an Executive Sub-Committee on poverty and social inclusion, which will be chaired by OFMDFM Ministers. This Committee will identify and agree a number of key actions which would contribute most to achieving the goals set out in Lifetime Opportunities and which would be at the 'core' of the Executive Strategy.

It is generally accepted that these goals can only be achieved through a combination of both devolved and reserved policies.

To this end, our officials are in regular contact with their counterparts in administrations across these islands.

The economic downturn was discussed at the plenary session of the North South Ministerial Council last Friday, and it is a matter that we will want to raise at the upcoming meeting of the British Irish Council. In addition, we have written to Gordon Brown seeking an urgent meeting to press the case that local depositors in the Presbyterian Mutual Society are protected from the consequences of the Society's current financial difficulties.

We also plan to meet the Business Secretary, Peter Mandelson, in coming weeks to ensure that local businesses receive every assistance possible to weather this economic storm.

These contacts ensure that policy developments and good practice are shared and will help ensure that the British Government's commitment to work towards the elimination of child poverty by 2020, which we have adopted, can be met.

We are sure that there will be much interest in other jurisdictions in our legislative approach to tackling poverty, reflected in the Financial Assistance Bill.

The Executive is equally conscious of its need to adapt to changing priorities. We recognise that economic conditions have changed remarkably since our Programme for Government was first introduced and in light of this we will continue to review our targets to ensure they remain relevant and focused on addressing the key challenges we face in the medium to longer term.

Child Poverty

Mrs M Bradley asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide an update on the number of children who have been lifted out of poverty and to confirm if it will meet its target on this issue.

(AQO 1864/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The number of children living in relative income poverty has fallen by 39,000 since 1998/99. In 1998/99 it was estimated to be 135,000 (29% of all children). The most recent estimate for 2006/07 was 96,000 (22% of all children).

The number of children living in absolute income poverty has fallen by 82,000 since 1998/99. Then it was estimated to be 135,000, with the most recent estimate for 2006/07 being 52,600 (12% of all children).

The number of children living in material deprivation and relative income poverty combined has fallen by 12,600 since 2004/05. In 2004/05 it was estimated to be 89,100 (21% of all children). The most recent estimate for 2006/07 was 76,500 (18% of all children).

Whilst these figures reflect that progress is being made we believe that even one child living in poverty is one too many. We recognise that the targets we have set ourselves, in respect of eliminating child poverty here, are extremely challenging, particularly in light of the current economic downturn.

The Executive, however, remains totally committed to meeting this challenge by working together across government to ensure long-term sustainable progress.

This commitment has recently been re-stated in our decision to adopt the broad 'architecture' and principles of 'Lifetime Opportunities' as the basis of our strategy to tackle Poverty and also in our introduction of a Financial Assistance Bill to address situations where existing arrangements are unsatisfactory.

The comprehensive Child Poverty Inquiry report and recommendations produced by the OFMDFM Committee will also provide a useful platform for further work and the Junior Ministers will discuss the recommendations with the Committee later this week. The establishment of a cross departmental sub-group of the Ministerial Sub-Committee for Children and Young People will ensure a comprehensive and cohesive focus on the issue of Child Poverty here.

Measures to Address the Economic Downturn

Mr T Lunn asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what measures the Executive is taking to assist people in light of the global economic downturn. (AQO 1866/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: We announced a package of measures to address the economic downturn in the Assembly on 15th December 2008. We debated comprehensively the main measures in place to address problems of energy and fuel poverty; debt and unemployment; the rising cost of living for households; support for the housing and construction sectors; and support for business.

Uniquely, we are bringing forward a Financial Assistance Bill to allow us to react quickly to emerging problems and difficulties. Initially this will be used to allow us to address the most pressing problems of fuel poverty.

We also announced a funding package of almost £45m. This provided £15m – for Fuel Credit payments; £20m – for Farm Nutrient Management schemes; £4m – for Schools Maintenance; £2.5m – for Roads Structural Maintenance; £1.8m – for Public Transport Capital Works; £0.5m – for Agriculture Flooding Hardship payments; and £0.7m – for Assistance to the Fishing Industry.

We are acutely aware that this is a difficult time for local people and businesses. The Executive is monitoring the developing economic crisis and we aim to do all that we can to protect local interests from the worst effects of this economic turmoil.

Maze Site

Mr D O’Loan asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline its decision on the Maze/Long Kesh Regeneration project. (AQO 1867/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: A decision on the Maze/Long Kesh Regeneration project has not yet been made as proposals for the redevelopment of the site are still under consideration.

Maze Site

Mr P Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when it will make a decision on the Maze site. (AQO 1868/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Proposals for the regeneration of Maze/Long Kesh are still under consideration and we will make a decision on this issue as soon as possible.

Reducing Size of Department

Mr S Gardiner asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has made in reducing the size of its Department. (AQO 1869/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The size of the Department has gradually reduced from 420 staff in post towards the end of 2002 to under 400 in January 2009.

Staffing levels in the Department are regularly reviewed to ensure the work of the Department is delivered in the most efficient and effective way.

It is important to recognise that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister covers a wide range of functions, many of them conferred on it by statute and that much of our work facilitates the business of other Ministers and their departments. The cross-cutting nature of our work is very much in evidence through the work of the Office of the Legislative Counsel, the Executive Information Service, our offices in Brussels and Washington, and our support function is clearly demonstrated by the provision of administrative support to the Executive, including the North South Ministerial Council and the British Irish Council.

The Department also provides administrative support to a number of external bodies including the Planning and Water Appeals Commissions, the Commission for Victims and Survivors, and the Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland.

Crumlin Road Gaol

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans it has to regenerate Crumlin Road Gaol and Girdwood Park to combat social deprivation and poverty in North Belfast.

(AQO 1870/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Crumlin Road Gaol is owned by OFMDFM while Girdwood Park is owned by DSD. The Minister for Social Development is responsible for the regeneration of both the sites. A draft Masterplan has been produced containing proposals to bring maximum economic, social and environmental benefits to address issues of deprivation and to provide a resource to benefit all the communities in North Belfast and throughout the region. Proposals for consideration include initiatives for employment opportunities, training and skills development, housing, health, education, leisure, youth activities and a major tourist and visitor centre, as well as shops and restaurants. The draft proposals for the site are currently the subject of an Equality Impact Assessment. The public consultation on the draft Equality Impact Assessment ended on 20 January. The outcomes of the EQIA will inform the final content of the Masterplan which the Minister for Social Development wishes to discuss with us and will be published later this year.

Ethnic Minority Groups

Ms M Anderson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the support it will offer to ethnic minority groups.

(AQO 1871/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are fully committed to building a cohesive, shared and integrated society. As part of the ongoing work we recognise and value the vital role played by minority ethnic groups on the ground. In following through on this recognition we have just announced a further tranche of funding to support the minority ethnic sector in the financial year 2009/10.

To demonstrate our continued support for the sector we recently opened the application process for the minority ethnic development fund for the incoming financial year. The application process is due to close on the 2nd of February and we expect to be able to announce successful applicants by the beginning of March.

We are pleased to say the £1 million we have allocated this year represents a substantial increase on the previous annual spend prior to the restoration of devolution.

The aims of the fund align with our Programme for Government commitments by supporting work, which contributes to the promotion of good relations between people of different ethnic backgrounds, the building of community cohesion, and facilitation of integration.

Meeting with Banks

Mr D Burnside asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline what specific commitments it sought from the Banks and what guarantees the Banks gave at the meeting on 16 December 2008.

(AQO 1872/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: We had a very informative meeting with the banks on 16 December. We discussed liquidity, lending, interest rates, housing and mortgages.

We urged banks to pass on interest rate cuts and we discussed measures to improve the flow of credit to business.

Banking is, of course, a reserved matter and banks operate as publicly listed companies. In this context “guarantees” could not be sought nor given. However, we will maintain the dialogue we have started with the local banks and we will use our influence to protect and support business and households.

We remain keen to see the benefits of lower base rates feeding through to lower mortgage payments, lower financing and borrowing costs, and increased credit for local business and people.

Barroso Task Force Report

Mr A Maginness asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when it will publish the details of the Barroso Task Force Report. (AQO 1873/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The European Commission published its 'Report on the Northern Ireland Task Force' on 7 April 2008. The report has stimulated a considerable work programme and exchanges between government departments and the European Commission's services. The Executive's response, which will take the form of an action plan, is well under way and we hope to deliver its publication in the near future.

Commemorating the Centenary of the Home Rule Crisis

Mr S Moutray asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions the Executive has had in relation to commemorating the centenary of the Home Rule Crisis. (AQO 1874/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: It is not our practice to disclose details of Executive business. The content of Executive papers and all aspects of Executive business are confidential.

Shared Future Triennial Action Plan

Mrs D Kelly asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if it has reviewed the Shared Future Triennial Action Plan 2006-2009 and, if so, what lessons have been learnt. (AQO 1875/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Improving relationships between, and within, communities here remains a long-term goal for Government. The need to monitor the impact of policy and strategic direction of good relations over the long-term is an important part of achieving that goal.

The Department has developed a comprehensive set of Good Relations Indicators to inform the monitoring and evaluation process and has published updates on its website against baseline data established in 2007.

Programme for Government

Mr D McNarry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action it has taken to reprioritise the Programme for Government to better respond to the current economic downturn and address the loss of jobs in the construction sector. (AQO 1876/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The welfare of local people is our primary concern. The Executive is committed to doing all that it can to protect and support local people and businesses from the worst effects of the current economic crisis and increases in the cost of living. In this respect we have already acted. On 15 December we announced a package of measures to help ordinary people and businesses cope with the difficult economic times in which we find ourselves.

We announced a number of measures specifically aimed at supporting the construction sector. Departments are fully focused on delivering the Investment Strategy. Substantial progress is being made with expenditure this year expected at around £1.5bn, up from £1.4bn in 2007-08, itself a record. Some £33m of additional construction-related expenditure was made available by the Executive as part of its credit crunch package announced in December.

We have made the economic downturn a standing item of Executive business, and have also put in place a Financial Assistance Bill, to enable us to monitor and react quickly to emerging problems. The Executive is committed to the ongoing review of the Programme for Government to take account of changing circumstances and ensure we are clearly focused on addressing the key challenges we face. Indeed the measures we have taken to date are very much part of that ongoing review of our priorities and targets.

We recognise that current economic conditions and developments in the financial markets present us with significant challenges. However, the priorities we set out in the Programme for Government and in particular our decision to make the economy our top priority remain valid. It will now be much more challenging for the Executive to deliver on what were always ambitious targets. However, during these difficult times it is more

important than ever that we provide clear leadership and work together to deliver on the commitments in our Programme for Government.

Post Primary Transfer

Mr M Storey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if the Executive has set time aside in the next month to discuss proposals on post primary transfer. (AQO 1877/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: It is not our practice to disclose details of Executive business. The content of Executive papers and all aspects of Executive business are confidential.

Consultation with Children and Young People

Mr J Shannon asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans it has to ensure meaningful engagement and consultation with children and young people after March 2009, given the resounding success of participation network. (AQO 1878/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Participation Network was set up initially as a two-year pilot scheme to support statutory agencies, local government and government departments to effectively engage with children and young people in public decision-making.

A recently completed independent evaluation recommended funding for a further year. This will allow consideration of the outcome of the Network for Youth consultation, by the Department of Education, on options to strengthen the direct voice of children and young people in all relevant aspects of government provision and how the Network would fit within the recommendations.

Play and Leisure Provision

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if its policy for play and leisure provision caters for the particular needs of 13-17 years old. (AQO 1879/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: OFMDFM led the development of a cross-departmental play and leisure policy for all children aged 0-18 years. This was produced in co-operation with a number of key stakeholders in the field of play. It will be implemented in two concurrent phases: one for 0-11 years and one for 12-18 years.

The policy is set within the context of the 10-year strategy for children and young people and will contribute to the delivery of many of our strategic aims, particularly those which relate to improved health and achievement outcomes.

It received Executive approval at the end of 2008 and we are now in the process of establishing an implementation group of around 20 members which will be tasked with drawing up implementation plans for children in the 0-11 years and 12-18 years groups.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Less-Favoured Areas Allowance

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the exchange rate used for the calculation of the Less-favoured Areas Allowance under the Rural Development Programme. (AQW 3897/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): No exchange rate was used. The rates of the LFACA payment are set out in the annual implementing Regulations in sterling at £40 per hectare Severely Disadvantaged Area and £20 per hectare Disadvantaged Area/Common Land respectively.

Fishing Fleet

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development did she gain support from DEFRA officials to assist the NI Fishing Fleet for the EU Fisheries Meeting at Brussels; and if so, what assistance was given. (AQW 3967/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: As I said in my statement to the Assembly on 12 January 2009 the approach to Council is a team effort between us and other administrations. Prior to Council, that team developed and agreed negotiating priorities and consulted with industry on these. A top priority was to resist the Commission's proposed cuts in the Nephrops TACs. That was clearly important for us given the local industry's dependence on that species. I pressed the Commission hard during negotiations and I am grateful for the strong support received from Huw Irranca-Davies, Richard Lochhead and their officials throughout the Council process.

Financial Assistance for Farmers

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what financial assistance was available to farmers to help them diversify in 2005; 2006; and 2007. (AQW 3968/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Under the 2001-2006 programme which continued to fund projects through 2007 there was no specific 'Farm Diversification' measure. However substantial support was lent to farm diversification projects and to various relevant training measures under the Leader+ Programme and the Programme for Sustainable Prosperity. It is not possible however to identify the specific elements of these Programmes which funded diversification. However, the Peace II Programme for farmers did invest some £6,725,409 in diversification of agricultural activities and activities close to agriculture to provide multiple activities or alternative incomes – and obtaining alternative employment. Under measure 5.6b of the same programme a further €3,175,193 was invested in agriculture and rural development co-operation - cross-border diversification.

It is notable that under axis 3 of the new Rural Development Programme the ring fenced support for farm diversification at £20m will be almost equal to the £21m budget for the whole of the previous leader+ programme.

Contaminated Animal Feed

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development given the belief that the dioxins found in the feed that led to the crisis in the pig and beef industries were sourced in Northern Ireland, will she offer adequate compensation immediately to affected farmers. (AQW 3977/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The source of any dioxin contaminated material is being investigated by the Garda Síochána and the PSNI. Until this investigation is concluded it would be premature of me to consider actions based on any presumption of its findings.

On 15 January the Executive announced that it had decided to continue to press strongly for the Irish Government to accept that producers and processors from the north should have access to the south's compensation scheme. Every effort will be made to achieve this and to seek to recover the full costs incurred by producers and processors here as a consequence of the dioxin-contaminated feed incident. Work to ascertain the full costs is ongoing in conjunction with stakeholders.

The Executive also announced a cull and disposal scheme to remove and dispose of animals in restricted herds which cannot enter the food chain. This approach will protect the reputation of the industry and help deal with the welfare and management problems which the owners of the animals are facing. As the scheme will only meet the costs of slaughter and rendering, all those affected are still being encouraged to pursue all appropriate sources of recompense including insurance, the submission of applications to the DAFF scheme and the consideration of legal action against providers of contaminated animals, product or feed.

The introduction of Private Storage Aid for pigmeat, for which I successfully lobbied and which has a potential value of £6m, will help to provide market support to the pig sector over the next six months.

Less Favoured Area Payments

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what exchange rate was used for less favoured area payments, in each of the last four years. (AQW 3993/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: For claims made in the years 2005 to 2008, an exchange rate was not used to determine payment rates. The rates of the LFACA payment are set out in the annual implementing Regulations at £40 per hectare of Severely Disadvantaged Area and £20 per hectare of Disadvantaged Area/Common Land .

Less Favoured Area Payments

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what exchange rate between euro and sterling was used to calculate the most recent less favoured area payments issued to farmers; and what would these payments have been if the exchange rate of 31 December 2008, had been used. (AQW 3994/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: No exchange rate was used. The rates of the LFACA payment are set out in the annual implementing Regulations in sterling at £40 per hectare Severely Disadvantaged Area and £20 per hectare Disadvantaged Area/Common Land respectively. If an exchange rate at 31 December 2008 were appropriate these rates would have been £57.15 SDA and £28.58 DA/CL. However, that rate does not apply to claims made in 2008.

Countryside Management Scheme

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if the farmers in the current Countryside Management Scheme will have their level of grants increased to the level under the new Northern Ireland Countryside Management Scheme, (AQW 4122/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Participants in the existing Countryside Management Scheme will continue to receive the same payment rates in return for managing their land under the terms stated in the agreements that they signed.

However, these participants can apply to the new Countryside Management Scheme. I anticipate that it will reopen in Summer 2009. If an applicant is successful, they will, upon signing, receive the new rates of payment in return for managing their land according to the terms of their new agreement.

Disposal of Chicken Litter

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she is aware of new 'quickwash' technology for the disposal of chicken litter; and to give her assessment of the viability of this technology as a solution to the problems facing farmers regarding their future commitments under the EU Nitrates Directive. (AQW 4129/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department is aware of the new 'quickwash' technology for the disposal of chicken litter.

The technology is currently very much at an early development stage in the United States. The proposed process appears quite challenging to operate with a number of steps requiring the use of both acid and lime to extract and recover the phosphorus.

My officials will continue to monitor the development of this technology and others as a viable alternative to the landspreading of poultry litter.

Alternative technologies brought forward by industry are welcomed and will be considered by my Department.

Single Farm Payment

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why farmers in the Strangford constituency are still waiting for their Single Farm payment. (AQW 4304/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: At the end of December 2008, 83.6% of farmers in the north had received their Single Farm Payment. In Strangford, and other constituencies, some will not yet have received payments for a variety of reasons, including queries on the claim, need to complete processing of an on-farm inspection report, challenges by others of the right to claim land, the need to await probate or because the farmer has not provided bank account details to allow payment to be made by electronic transfer. The Department has improved its payment performance and will continue to make payments as quickly as possible.

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Reduction in Paperwork

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps he is taking to significantly reduce the amount of paperwork he sends to constituency offices and other organisations throughout 2009.

(AQW 3734/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr G Campbell): Throughout 2009 and in accordance with my Department's Waste Management Strategy, my Private Office, in line with other DCAL business areas, will continue to issue internal and external communication electronically where this is possible.

I should add, however, that Guidance on the distribution of departmental publications and consultation documents, published in November 2008, states that there is a requirement to provide hard copies of documents to certain recipients including political representatives, parliamentary contacts and Legal Deposit and other libraries. The Guidance does, however, point out that organisations can, if they wish, choose not to receive hard copies of publications.

Departmental Legislation

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what legislation will his Department bring forward to the Assembly in 2009.

(AQW 3811/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department has identified its potential legislative requirements for the remainder of this session of the Assembly. However, these proposals are subject to consideration by the Executive and it would therefore not be appropriate or possible to pre-empt this consideration by providing the information you request.

Funds for Cultural Events and Projects

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what discussions have taken place between the EU office and his Department about sourcing funds for cultural events and projects.

(AQW 3817/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My officials have attended an inter-departmental meeting and held exploratory meetings with colleagues in EU Division, DFP, around EU Transnational and Interregional Cooperation Programmes, as potential sources of EU funding. Discussions on this matter are ongoing.

Safety at Sports Grounds

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much money (i) is available under Safety at Sports Grounds; and (ii) is required to ensure that the safety of spectators is not compromised at any ground.

(AQW 3923/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) is responsible for the development of sport including the distribution of funding. The amount of money available for safety at sports grounds will be considered by SNI in the context of capital allocations for 2009/10 and 2010/11 which have not yet been confirmed.

Responsibility for determining how much money is required to ensure that the safety of spectators is not compromised at any ground rests with the owners and operators of the grounds. However, a strategic business case completed by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) in 2002 estimated that it would cost in the region of £30m net present cost to bring larger Soccer, Rugby and Gaelic Grounds in Northern Ireland up to modern standards of spectator safety.

Safety at Sports Grounds

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline (i) the process and criteria that led to the appointments of the Safety at Sports Grounds Overseeing Body; (ii) the names of those appointed; (iii) the skills or qualifications they hold; and (iv) how he defines their independent role. (AQW 3926/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The appointments to the safe sports grounds Overseeing Body were made by Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) through a range of processes, namely internal restructuring and redeployment, and external recruitment. Under these processes, SNI established three posts for the Overseeing Body, a Technical Manager post, a Technical Officer post and a Development Assistant post.

The essential short listing criteria that led to the appointments of the Technical Manager and Technical Officer posts were as follows:

- A degree or equivalent 3rd level qualification which relates to one or more of the following subject areas: health and safety law and practice, risk assessment, architecture, structural engineering, building control, fire safety or law
- or
- In exceptional circumstances SNI may consider 4 years experience which can be proven relevant to the post. For example health and safety, architecture, structural engineering, building control etc
- In the case of the Technical Manager a minimum of 5 years and in the case of the Technical Officer a minimum of 2 years full time (or equivalent) employment experience in a position with responsibilities which can be proved relevant to the post. For example health and safety, architecture, structural engineering, building control etc
- Demonstrable experience in the assessment of technical matters particularly related to construction and/or renovation of large structures
- Access to a form of transport to meet the requirements of the post and the ability to work flexible hours including frequent evening and week end duties.

The essential short listing criteria that led to the appointment of the Development Assistant post was as follows:

- 3 GCSE passes or equivalent which must include English Language and Maths and 2 A-level passes or equivalent
- 2 years full-time employment experience (or equivalent) in a position with responsibility for administration including experience of implementing monitoring procedures and file management
- Access to a form of transport that will permit the post holder to meet the requirements of the post in full

The names of those appointed are Paul Scott, Laura Strong and Patrick O'Toole. The qualifications or skills of those appointed meet these criteria.

In discharging its functions the Overseeing Body will be expected to act independently at all times, ie independently of district councils, sports ground owners, sports ground managers and event organisers.

Safety at Sports Grounds

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the (i) terms of reference; (ii) role; and (iii) function of the Overseeing Body established to regulate the Safety at Sports Grounds. (AQW 3927/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The (i) terms of reference; (ii) role; and (iii) function of the Safe Sports Grounds Overseeing Body is to provide advice and guidance to all interested parties on sports grounds safety matters in Northern Ireland and to monitor the implementation of the planned Northern Ireland safety certification scheme on behalf of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

Safety at Sports Grounds

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, to state the (i) terms of reference; (ii) role; and (iii) function of the local authorities in the certification process to regulate the Safety at Sports Grounds; and will he outline how his Department intends to ensure that a consistent and strict approach is legislated. (AQW 3928/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The (i) terms of reference; (ii) role; and (iii) function of local authorities will be to administer and enforce the planned safety at sports grounds certification scheme. This includes determining the number of spectators that owners and managers of sports grounds, or event organisers, shall be allowed to admit into a designated ground or stand and the issuing of safety certificates. DCAL has already taken steps to ensure that a consistent and strict approach to safety certification is legislated. The Safety of Sports Grounds (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 enables the Department, by Order, to designate any sports ground in Northern Ireland, with accommodation for more than 5,000 spectators, as a ground requiring a safety certificate. The Order also makes provision for the certification of stands at sports ground which provide accommodation for 500 or more spectators. The Order further imposes an obligation on all district councils to act in accordance with such guidance as the Department may give them to assist in their administration and enforcement of the certification scheme.

Ulster Scots Project

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he would consider implementing an Ulster Scots or similar project to the Gaeltacht project in Belfast. (AQW 3969/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Gaeltacht Quarter project arose out of a recommendation from the West Belfast Greater Shankill Task Force report 2003. I would consider any proposals supported by appropriate business cases for similar projects relating to Ulster-Scots.

Publish Local Authors

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (i) what are the financial and other incentives available to local authors to publish their works in book form; and (ii) what help is there to promote making films based on highly acclaimed publications. (AQW 4028/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: DCAL does not provide funding to individual authors or film-makers directly. DCAL funding for arts is disbursed by the Arts Council, and funding for film is disbursed by the Northern Ireland Screen Commission.

Authors may also apply to the Ulster-Scots Agency for funding and support through the Financial Assistance Scheme. The Agency also funds the Ulster-Scots Language Society to assist with the publication of Ulster-Scots books.

- (i) The Arts Council supports writers directly with sums of up to £5,000 through the Support for the Individual Artist Programme. This is intended to assist with loss of income for full-time writing, travel, equipment (such as laptops) and general living expenses while writing is being done.

The Arts Council's aim is to support artistic excellence, and therefore it does not fund individual writers to print their own work. Instead, the Arts Council encourages writers to submit their work for consideration by publishing houses in Northern Ireland. The Council assists those publishers to publish works of literary merit.

The Council seeks to promote the status of the individual writer in society, to help increase the skills of emerging writers and to assist good writers to become better, and frequently this is achieved at an appropriate stage in their career through publication by a recognised and reputable publishing firm.

- (ii) The Northern Ireland Screen Commission (NI Screen) offers funding for the development and production of film, television and digital content projects in Northern Ireland.

Although there is no specific funding line directed at projects based on books, applicants may obtain funding from NI Screen's general funding programmes which include the Product Development Fund and the Northern Ireland Screen Fund. Projects supported include the recent high-profile production of "City of Ember", based on the novel by Jeanne Duprau; "Puffball", a feature film based on the novel by Fay Weldon; and "Breakfast on Pluto", based on the novel of the same name by Patrick McCabe.

Multi-Sports Stadium

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when he will forward a paper on the proposed multi-sports stadium to the Executive. (AQW 4099/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: As I indicated to the House during Oral Questions on 12 January, I have reviewed all the material available to me in relation to this issue and have come to my own conclusion. I intend to present my conclusion to the Executive in the very near future.

Thundersport Motorcycling

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he has had any discussions with Thundersport motorcycling in Great Britain; and would he consider meeting local enthusiasts to promote this sport. (AQW 4137/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have had no discussions to date with Thundersport motorcycling, however, I would be content for my officials together with Sport Northern Ireland to meet with local enthusiasts to consider the promotion of this sport.

Orange Community Network

Mr D Burnside asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he has had any meetings with the Orange Community Network about funding opportunities to help with its sustainability. (AQW 4226/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: To date I have not had any meetings with the Orange Community Network as Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure in relation to funding opportunities to help with its sustainability.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

School Maintenance

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education how much was spent on maintenance as a result of vandalism to schools, broken down by (i) total allocation; and (ii) Education and Library Board. (AQW 4033/09)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Thug na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an t-eolas seo a leanas faoi chaiteachas ar chothabháil mar gheall ar loitiméireacht a rinneadh ar scoileanna le trí bliana anuas.

The Education and Library Boards have provided the following information on maintenance as a result of vandalism to schools in the last three years.

Board Area	2005/06 £000s	2006/07 £000s	2007/08 £000s
Belfast	182	85	117
Western	52	49	60
North Eastern	121	198	142
SEELB	109	112	72
Southern	158	138	60
Total	622	582	451

Information is not readily available on costs of vandalism at voluntary grammar and grant-maintained integrated schools.

Gender Breakdown of Teachers

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Education what is the gender breakdown of teachers in primary schools. (AQW 4130/09)

Minister of Education: Sa bhliain 2007-2008, seo a leanas líon agus cóimheas na múinteoirí fir agus na múinteoirí mná i mbunscoileanna i dtuaisceart na hÉireann:

In 2007-2008, the number and proportion of male and female teachers in primary schools in the North of Ireland was as follows:

Total number of primary school teachers	Number and proportion of female primary school teachers	Number and proportion of male primary school teachers
8,586	7,249 (84%)	1,337 (16%)

1 This includes teachers in preparatory departments of grammar schools.

Autism NI

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Education what plans she has to meet with Autism NI. (AQW 4140/09)

Minister of Education: Bhuail mé le Autism NI roimhe seo ar 16 Bealtaine 2008 agus tá mé le bualadh leo arís ar 5 Feabhra 2009.

I have previously met with Autism NI on 16 May 2008 and I am scheduled to meet with them again on 5 February 2009.

Priory Integrated College, Holywood

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 2514/09, what account has been taken of an existing and successful sixth form in Priory Integrated College, Holywood. (AQW 4145/09)

Minister of Education: Tá rollú 427 dalta idir bliain 8 agus bliain 12 agus rollú 23 dalta sa 6ú bliain ag Priory Intergrated College faoi láthair.

Priory Integrated College has currently an enrolment of 427 in years 8-12 and 23 pupils in its sixth form. It was agreed with the South Eastern Education and Library Board that the approved project for a replacement school should be for a projected enrolment of 400 for years 8-12 which takes account of trends in pupil numbers, and that the small sixth form should not be retained. The planned capacity is based on what is projected to be required and sustainable for the future. There is not a shortage of post-primary places in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area which encompasses North Down.

Priory Integrated College, Holywood

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 2514/09, to provide the reasons for building a new school with a smaller capacity than the current enrolment. (AQW 4146/09)

Minister of Education: Tá rollú 427 dalta idir bliain 8 agus bliain 12 agus rollú 23 dalta sa 6ú bliain ag Priory Intergrated College faoi láthair.

Priory Integrated College has currently an enrolment of 427 in years 8-12 and 23 pupils in its sixth form. It was agreed with the South Eastern Education and Library Board that the approved project for a replacement school should be for a projected enrolment of 400 for years 8-12 which takes account of trends in pupil numbers, and that the small sixth form should not be retained. The planned capacity is based on what is projected to be required and sustainable for the future. There is not a shortage of post-primary places in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area which encompasses North Down.

Priory Integrated College, Holywood

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 2514/09, what consideration has been given to the current levels of over-subscription of all post-primary schools in the North Down constituency, in setting the capacity of the new building. (AQW 4147/09)

Minister of Education: Tá rollú 427 dalta idir bliain 8 agus bliain 12 agus rollú 23 dalta sa 6ú bliain ag Priory Intergrated College faoi láthair.

Priory Integrated College has currently an enrolment of 427 in years 8-12 and 23 pupils in its sixth form. It was agreed with the South Eastern Education and Library Board that the approved project for a replacement school should be for a projected enrolment of 400 for years 8-12 which takes account of trends in pupil numbers, and that the small sixth form should not be retained. The planned capacity is based on what is projected to be required and sustainable for the future. There is not a shortage of post-primary places in the South Eastern Education and Library Board area which encompasses North Down.

Integrated Schools

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Education for an update on the review of the viability criteria for integrated schools. (AQW 4148/09)

Minister of Education: I am considering with officials the terms of the review to which I have committed the Department of Education.

Tá sé ar intinn agam go gcuirfear an t-athbhreithniú i gcrích i mbliana mar a tugadh le fios i mo fhreagra ar AQO 1786/09.

As indicated in my response to AQO 1786/09 it is my intention to complete the review this year.

Portadown College

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Education why Portadown College did not give its full co-operation to the electoral office's 'Schools Initiative'. (AQW 4192/09)

Minister of Education: Tá tugtha le fios ag Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt dom gur thug Portadown College lánchúnamh maidir leis an "Tionscnamh Scoileanna" a shocraigh an Príomhoifigeach Togchánach agus mar sin de tá a ndualgais dhlíthiúla comhlíonta acu.

The Chief Executive of the Southern Education and Library Board has advised me that Portadown College has cooperated fully with the Chief Electoral Officer's 'Schools Initiative' and has therefore met its legal obligations. The College provided the Chief Electoral Officer with the pupil data he requested and facilitated a visit by Electoral Office staff to meet pupils in the College.

Lagan College

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education what action is being taken by her Department to (i) replace mobile classrooms; and (ii) provide canteen facilities, for Lagan College. (AQW 4196/09)

Minister of Education: My Department agreed in September 2008 that a survey should be undertaken to assess the overall condition of mobile classrooms currently on site. The report will identify any remedial works necessary as well as estimate the remaining lifespan for each of the units. It is expected to be completed in February.

Improvements to school meals accommodation will be provided through the building project planned for the school.

There are some issues to be resolved before a preferred bidder can be appointed, a contract signed and construction commenced. The Department is working closely with those involved to allow the procurement process to move ahead.

Once a preferred bidder for the project has been appointed a Full Business Case will be prepared and submitted to the Department for approval. Providing that the business case indicates the project is affordable and provides a value for money solution to the school's accommodation needs then the necessary funding for the project will be provided.

Lagan College

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education when her Department intends to give approval for the replacement build project at Lagan College to proceed. (AQW 4206/09)

Minister of Education: My Department agreed in September 2008 that a survey should be undertaken to assess the overall condition of mobile classrooms currently on site. The report will identify any remedial works necessary as well as estimate the remaining lifespan for each of the units. It is expected to be completed in February.

Improvements to school meals accommodation will be provided through the building project planned for the school.

There are some issues to be resolved before a preferred bidder can be appointed, a contract signed and construction commenced. The Department is working closely with those involved to allow the procurement process to move ahead.

Once a preferred bidder for the project has been appointed a Full Business Case will be prepared and submitted to the Department for approval. Providing that the business case indicates the project is affordable and provides a value for money solution to the school's accommodation needs then the necessary funding for the project will be provided.

Children Awaiting Assessment by an Educational Psychologist

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education how many children in the North Down constituency are awaiting assessment by an educational psychologist. (AQW 4207/09)

Minister of Education: Tá curtha in iúl ag Príomhfheidhmeannach Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirdheisceirt dom go bhfuil 90 páiste ag fanacht ar mheasúnú ó shíceolaí oideachais i dtoghcheantar Dhún Thuaidh.

I have been advised by the Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board that the number of children currently awaiting assessment by an educational psychologist in the North Down constituency is 90. This figure includes both statutory and non-statutory assessments and also includes children attending special schools outside North Down but who live within the constituency.

Lagan College

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education whether she intends to make up any shortfall in funding for the new build at Lagan College that was caused by the delay in starting the project. (AQW 4208/09)

Minister of Education: My Department agreed in September 2008 that a survey should be undertaken to assess the overall condition of mobile classrooms currently on site. The report will identify any remedial works necessary as well as estimate the remaining lifespan for each of the units. It is expected to be completed in February.

Improvements to school meals accommodation will be provided through the building project planned for the school.

There are some issues to be resolved before a preferred bidder can be appointed, a contract signed and construction commenced. The Department is working closely with those involved to allow the procurement process to move ahead.

Once a preferred bidder for the project has been appointed a Full Business Case will be prepared and submitted to the Department for approval. Providing that the business case indicates the project is affordable

and provides a value for money solution to the school's accommodation needs then the necessary funding for the project will be provided.

Lagan College

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education what is the capital funding available to Lagan College. (AQW 4308/09)

Minister of Education: Meastar costas caipitiúil athchóiriú agus síneadh Lagan College bheith thart ar £21 milliún faoi láthair.

The capital cost for the refurbishment and extension of Lagan College is currently estimated at around £21 million.

School Buildings Handbook

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Education (i) what progress has been made in updating the School Buildings Handbook; (ii) why the new handbook was not issued in Autumn 2008; (iii) when she anticipates the new handbook will be issued; and (iv) for an assessment of the impact its delay will have on the tranche of new build schools that are in the design stage. (AQW 4336/09)

Minister of Education: Thug an Roinn faoi ghníomh anuraidh le hathbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar an lámhleabhar um thógáil bunscoileanna.

The department undertook an exercise last year to review the primary school building handbook. The update was not issued in the autumn because the work had not been completed. I expect the exercise will be concluded shortly. It is not anticipated that this change in timetable will have a detrimental effect on those primary schools currently in the design process.

Education Sectors

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Education if the recent High Court decision rejecting her intention to establish a framework of builders will have an equal impact on all education sectors. (AQW 4349/09)

Minister of Education: Bhí sé i gceist go mbainfí úsáid as an ggreatlach i gcomhair tionscadal móroibreacha sna hearnálacha oideachais ar fad.

It had been intended that the framework would be used for major works projects in all education sectors. In order to minimise the impact, my Department is preparing an alternative procurement approach outside the framework so that we avoid prolonged delays in delivering projects which are ready to enter the procurement stage. Projects will move forward through individual procurement exercises.

Planned New Schools' Programme

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Education if a decision has been made to appeal the recent High Court ruling that rejected her proposal to establish a framework of builders; and to outline the time delay this will have on the planned new schools' programme. (AQW 4351/09)

Minister of Education: Tá mé ag déanamh breithniú faoi láthair ar an seasamh maidir le hachomharc.

I am currently considering the position on an appeal. My Department is preparing an alternative procurement approach outside the framework so that we avoid prolonged delays in delivering projects which are ready to enter the procurement stage. Projects will move forward through individual procurement exercises.

English as Their First Language

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education how many pupils in (i) primary; and (ii) secondary schools in East Antrim do not have English as their first language. (AQW 4456/09)

Minister of Education: Tá an t-eolas a iarradh cuimsithe sna táblaí seo thíos.

The information requested is contained in the tables below.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE EAST ANTRIM CONSTITUENCY – PUPILS WHO HAVE ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE – 2007/08

School Name	Total Enrolment of EAL Pupils
St James' PS, Newtownabbey	52
Whiteabbey PS	12
St Nicholas' PS, Carrickfergus	7
Victoria PS, Carrickfergus	6
Greenisland PS	*
Moyle PS	*
Whitehead PS	*
Woodlawn PS	*
Carrickfergus Model PS	*
Silverstream PS	*
St Anthony's PS, Larne	*
St Macnissi's PS, Larne	*
Larne And Inver PS	*
Kilcoan PS	*
Carnalbanagh PS	0
Olderfleet PS	0
Woodburn PS	0
Mullaghdubh PS	0
Eden PS	0
Glynn PS	0
Ballycarry PS	0
Carrickfergus Central PS	0
Upper Ballyboley PS	0
Sunnylands PS	0
King's PaRk PS	0
Linn PS	0
Toreagh PS	0
Hollybank PS	0
Oakfield PS	0
Cairncastle PS	0
Seaview PS	0
St John's PS, Carnlough	0

School Name	Total Enrolment of EAL Pupils
Lourdes PS	0
Carnlough Controlled Integrated PS	0
Corran Integrated PS	0
Acorn Integrated PS	0
Total	104

POST PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE EAST ANTRIM CONSTITUENCY – PUPILS WHO HAVE ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE – 2007/08

School Name	Total Enrolment of EAL Pupils
Belfast High School	11
Carrickfergus College	8
Monkstown Community School	6
Ulidia Intergrated College	*
Carrickfergus GS	*
Larne High School	*
Downshire School	*
Larne GS	*
St Comgall's High School	0
St Macnissi's College	0
Total	32

Source: Annual school census.

“*” denotes fewer than 5 pupils

Note:

1. A child with English as an additional language is defined as one for whom English is not their first language and who has significant difficulty with the English language and requires assistance.

DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Family Learning and Literacy

Mr M Storey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what actions his Department is taking to support family learning and literacy; and to outline how funding on this was spent in the last financial year.

(AQW 4138/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): My Department's Essential Skills for Living Strategy recognises the importance of Family Learning as a vehicle for engaging parents in learning and, in so doing, improving achievement rates for essential skills qualifications.

DEL works closely with Further Education Colleges and other organisations to encourage parents to support and participate in their children's learning, while at the same time improving their own literacy and numeracy skills. In addition, the Department co-operates with the Department of Education's Extended Schools Initiative, is represented on the Department of Education's Literacy and Numeracy Taskforce, and engages with the Department for Social Development's Neighbourhood Renewal Programme.

To date, my Department's support for family learning and literacy has proceeded without the need for an earmarked allocation of funding from within the overall budget for Essential Skills.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) how many posts his Department will fund for neighbourhood renewal; and (ii) when a decision will be made regarding these posts. (AQW 4153/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: As I stated in my answer of 30 September, my Department does not core fund posts. It does, however, deliver a range of programmes related to employment and skills which aim to address disadvantage and are targeted at the needs of individuals, many of whom live in Neighbourhood Renewal areas.

I remain determined to tackle disadvantage and am committed to Neighbourhood Renewal. DEL predominantly awards contracts for services following a process of public procurement, and any organisation that has the relevant expertise and experience is able to compete for these. For example, contracts are already in place with organisations for the delivery of a range of DEL programmes which will target disadvantage and individual need, such as organisations based in North Belfast for the delivery of ApprenticeshipsNI and Training for Success, the Local Employment Intermediary Service (LEMIS) and the new Steps to Work provision.

Through the Learner Access and Engagement Pilot Programme local FE Colleges have recently awarded a number of contracts to 3rd Party organisations to deliver learner support. For example, Upper Springvale Development Company, which comprises Ashton Community Trust, GEMS NI, Workforce training Services, Impact Training and Oasis Caring in Action has been contracted by Belfast Metropolitan College for the delivery of learner support for the greater Belfast area.

Workforce at Spanboard

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what provision will be made for the workforce at Spanboard given the recent announcement of job losses. (AQW 4159/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department through the Coleraine Jobs & Benefits office, in collaboration with partner organisations will provide individually tailored help to the unemployed, those who have suffered as a result of recent job losses and those under notice of redundancy in the area.

With regard to Spanboard, my Officials and other key stakeholders including Invest Northern Ireland, Coleraine Enterprise Agency and North East Institute are working with the Coleraine Borough Council, to implement a collective strategic approach to assist those people that may be made redundant.

Stranmillis College

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what are the costs and problems associated with bringing Stranmillis College up to standard. (AQW 4174/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The College estimates that the total cost of bringing its estate up to standard is £5m excluding VAT and fees. To this must be added a further £3m in respect of the Henry Garrett Building which is currently vacant as it is not fit for use.

In addition Stranmillis House is a listed building and any proposed work may be subject to challenge. The College Hall is of a temporary construction and requires special consideration.

FG Wilson Factories

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what measures his Department has taken to help workers who have lost their jobs in the FG Wilson factories in Larne and Monkstown. (AQW 4237/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Staff in the Jobs and Benefits Office are working with FG Wilson and other employers in the East Antrim area to provide assistance to workers facing redundancy. They have established multi-agency partnerships with the Borough Councils to ensure that the maximum help and support is

available. A tailored response is being put in place to meet the individual needs of the company and those facing redundancy, with an event planned for 26 February in Larne Education Centre.

Tuition Fees

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning in relation to the review of tuition fees, (i) has the full panel been appointed; (ii) has it met; and (iii) when it will report to him. (AQW 4241/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The review of variable tuition fees and student finance arrangements in Northern Ireland is currently underway. A stakeholder steering group has been established comprising representation from: Queen's University Belfast; University of Ulster; Saint Mary's University College; Stranmillis University College; Association of Northern Ireland Colleges (ANIC); the Open University, the National Union of Students/Union of Students in Ireland, the National Association of Student Money Advisors (NASMA) and the Education and Library Boards. The group, which is chaired by Joanne Stuart independent chairperson of the review, had its initial meeting on 19th January 2009 and was attended by all members. I anticipate an interim report for consideration in May 2009.

Apprentices

Mr R Newton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many apprentices made redundant in the past 12 months have been able to take advantage of alternative arrangements that would enable them to utilise their full vocational qualifications. (AQW 4243/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: You will be aware that contingency arrangements were introduced from 1st December 2008, for apprentices who had been made redundant from the construction, engineering, and motor vehicle sectors, and that these arrangements apply to any apprentices who have been redundant from 1st September 2008.

Management Information collected by the Department in relation to apprentices who have left training provision is included in a broader "early leaver" destination category. Consequently, the Department cannot say categorically whether these apprentices have left due to redundancy. Nevertheless, from 1st April 2008, the following numbers of apprentices have been recorded as being "early leavers" in these three sectors:

Construction – 266

Automotive – 54

Engineering – 97

I would emphasise that the Department's work in this area is ongoing, and that contingency arrangements were only introduced in December 2008. These arrangements allow for a 3 week period in which the apprentice can look for an alternative employer, before transferring onto the Steps for Work initiative, or continuing training under Training for Success. This 3 week period, coupled with the Christmas holidays, means that a clearer picture on the uptake of contingency arrangements will emerge over the next few weeks.

The Department is currently carrying out a full monitoring exercise, in conjunction with Training Providers, on apprentices who have been made redundant and their current training positions. I will, of course, be happy to share this information with you once this exercise has been completed in the next couple of weeks.

Further Education Colleges

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what are his plans for ensuring that 16-18 year olds who have lost their jobs may complete their training courses at colleges of further education. (AQW 4310/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Contingency arrangements were introduced from 1st December 2008, for apprentices who had been made redundant from the construction, engineering, and motor vehicle sectors, and these arrangements apply to any apprentices who have been redundant from 1st September 2008. Under these arrangements, apprentices who are aged 16-17, and who have been made redundant, can return to the Pre-Apprenticeship component of Training for Success. This alternative pathway will allow the apprentice to complete the Technical Certificate and Essential Skills elements of the Apprenticeship Framework.

The Department is currently considering the option to also allow completion of the NVQ element of an Apprenticeship Framework under this training component.

Apprentices who have been made redundant and are aged 18 or over, can continue with training under the Department's Steps to Work initiative.

If they wish, apprentices who have lost their employment can also continue training by entering mainstream Further Education provision. This would be on the same basis as any other Further Education student, in that they can work for up to a maximum of 15 hours per week, without this affecting any benefits.

Stranmillis University College and Queens University, Belfast.

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the proposed merger between Stranmillis University College and Queens University, Belfast. (AQW 4333/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The business case to which I referred in my reply of 7 May 2008 has now been submitted by Stranmillis University College and is currently being considered by my Department's Economists. Subject to them being satisfied that it meets HM Treasury Green Book standards it will be examined by my Department's Finance Division before being submitted to the Permanent Secretary for approval.

If my officials are satisfied with the business case, it will then be forwarded to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) for scrutiny. If DFP approval is granted, I will at that time give the business case my full consideration.

Apprentices Made Redundant

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many apprentices have been made redundant in the last 12 months. (AQW 4334/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Management Information collected by the Department in relation to apprentices who have left training provision is included in a broader "early leaver" destination category. Consequently, the Department cannot say categorically whether these apprentices have left due to redundancy. Nevertheless, from 1st January 2008 until 21st January 2009, the following numbers of apprentices have been recorded as being "early leavers" in the following sectors:

Childcare	177
Agriculture	9
Engineering	187
Manufacturing Technologies	16
Transport Operations and Maintenance	68
Building and Construction	374
ICT Practitioners	4
ICT for Users	5
Retailing and Wholesaling	138
Service Enterprise	50
Hospitality and Catering	162
Sport Leisure Recreation	18
Publishing/Information Science	6
Administration	51
Business Management	7
Total	1,265

I would emphasise that not all of these apprentices will have left apprenticeship provision due to redundancy, as people leave both training and employment for a wide variety of reasons. This is especially true in sectors with an historically transient workforce such as Hospitality and Catering or Retail.

Furthermore, many of the apprentices listed above will have found alternative employment, or will have returned to an alternative training provision or mainstream Further Education course. The Department is currently carrying out a full monitoring exercise, in conjunction with Training Providers, on apprentices who have been made redundant and their current training positions. I will, of course, be happy to share this information with you once this exercise has been completed in the next couple of weeks.

Board of Governors of Stranmillis College.

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people are allowed to sit on the Board of Governors of Stranmillis College. (AQW 4378/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The Instrument of Government for the Stranmillis University College under Article 5(1) of The Colleges of Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 specifies that the Governing Body of the College shall consist of not more than fourteen persons.

Board of Governors of Stranmillis College.

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many people currently sit on the Board of Governors of Stranmillis College. (AQW 4379/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: My Department issued an Instrument of Government for the Stranmillis University College under Article 5(1) of The Colleges of Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2005. The Instrument of Government specifies that the Governing Body of the College shall consist of not more than fourteen persons.

At the present time there are twelve persons on the Governing Body.

Board of Governors at Stranmillis College.

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what criteria are used for interviewing candidates for the Board of Governors at Stranmillis College. (AQW 4380/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Potential applicants are advised that members of the Governing Body of Stranmillis College are appointed to act in a personal rather than a representative capacity, that they should have high standards of probity and integrity and should meet all of the following selection criteria :

- Have an understanding of current issues relevant to teacher education, early childhood education or health and leisure studies;
- Have experience commensurate with the responsibilities of a member of a governing body of the College, in a profession, business, industry or comparable organisation;
- Have the ability to bring a community perspective to the work of the College and
- Demonstrate the ability to be effective as a committee member.

All Department for Employment and Learning nominated appointments to the Governing Body are made in accordance with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland's (OCPA NI) Code of Practice.

Apprentices

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what assistance or support has his Department given to apprentices who have been made redundant over the past 12 months. (AQW 4381/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: contingency arrangements were introduced from 1st December 2008, for apprentices who had been made redundant from the construction, engineering, and motor vehicle

sectors, and these arrangements apply to any apprentices who have been redundant from 1st September 2008. The Department has also engaged with Sector Skills Councils, Workforce Development Forums, and Training Suppliers to try and identify alternative employers who would be prepared to employ those apprentices who have been made redundant.

Under the Department's contingency arrangements, apprentices who are aged 16-17, and who have been made redundant, can return to the Pre-Apprenticeship component of Training for Success. This alternative pathway will allow the apprentice to complete the Technical Certificate and Essential Skills elements of the Apprenticeship Framework. Apprentices who continue training under this contingency pathway will be entitled to receive a Training Educational Maintenance Allowance, as well as other allowances, if applicable.

Apprentices who have been made redundant, and are aged 18 or over, can continue with training under the Department's Steps to Work initiative. If undertaking this training pathway, apprentices are entitled to receive Jobseeker's Allowance, as well as an additional benefit-based training allowance.

Northern Ireland Businesses

Ms J McCann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if the scheme recently announced by the UK government to give a financial incentive to businesses who provide jobs to people who have been unemployed for 6 months or more, applies to businesses in Northern Ireland. (AQW 4412/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: This scheme does not apply in Northern Ireland. We already provide an employer subsidy to encourage employers to recruit and train those who are unemployed for 13 weeks or more. We are ahead of GB in terms of the flexibility of our programmes – Steps to Work includes some of the features which the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is now considering.

There is already significant assistance available including an employer subsidy to encourage employers to recruit and train those who are unemployed.

Also available are a range of employment and training options including where appropriate work placements in the private and public voluntary sectors, and help to set-up a business for a period of 26 weeks 'test trading'.

We will continue to examine the DWP proposals and consider what, if any, revisions need to put in place.

DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Independent Review of Electricity Prices

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment when she expects the independent review of electricity prices to be concluded; and how this pricing compares with the rest of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. (AQW 3944/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): The independent review of electricity prices, commissioned by the Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation (the Utility Regulator), and carried out by Mr Douglas McIlDoon, has now been completed, with the Utility Regulator having received Mr McIlDoon's report in December 2008.

Mr McIlDoon concluded that the tariff setting process which was followed by the Utility Regulator was similar to the process which had been followed successfully in the past. Mr McIlDoon stated that he found no anomalies or shortcomings within the process by which the October 2008 price increase was managed. He concluded that the process was no less rigorous than previous years, and in the context of rising fuel prices, the 33.3 % price increase was both inevitable and justified.

In addition to reviewing the price setting process, Mr McIlDoon also commented on wider issues on the structure and development of the electricity supply industry in Northern Ireland, and whether or not there are improvements which could help benefit consumers in the future. My senior officials have met with Mr McIlDoon to discuss his findings and the wider issues which were recorded in his review will be taken into consideration as part of my Department's review of the Strategic Energy Framework.

The 10.8% electricity tariff reduction implemented by NIE Energy from 08 January 2009 places Northern Ireland tariffs at an estimated 17.7% lower than electricity prices in the Republic of Ireland, and approximately 5% more expensive than comparator regions in Great Britain.

Biofuels

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what is her Department's target for the use of biofuels; (ii) what steps are her Department taking to deliver on biofuel targets; and (iii) what is her assessment of using Renewable Obligations Certificates for encouraging biofuel production. (AQW 3966/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation (RTFO) requires the major oil companies to ensure that a proportion of the road transport fuel supplied in the UK comprises renewable fuels such as biofuels. There is no regional breakdown of the current UK wide target of 5% by 2010-11.

A recent study, commissioned by my Department on behalf of the Bioenergy Inter Departmental Group, indicated that biofuel production in Northern Ireland was likely to remain small scale and marginal in economic terms and that the focus of the forthcoming Cross Departmental Bioenergy Action Plan should be on biomass for heat and electricity. Invest NI does, however, offer technical and legislative advice to companies on the production of biofuels using current technology and will provide further advisory support to producers, in particular, to develop and export second generation technology fuels. In addition, my Department recently announced support for a major Interreg research project, along with Scotland and the Republic of Ireland, into the production of marine biofuels from seaweeds and marine algae in the shared seas.

Biofuels can be used to produce electricity but this is not considered to be the most efficient use of this feedstock and sustainability concerns remain in relation to current biofuel technology. The Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (OFGEM) issues Renewable Obligation Certificates (ROCs) in respect of the generation of electricity from "eligible renewable sources". Substances that are derived directly or indirectly from fossil fuel are not supported under the Renewables Obligation mechanism. Some biofuels use fossil fuels in their production and therefore would not be considered by OFGEM to be eligible for ROCs. Those using methanol derived from natural gas (a fossil fuel) are ineligible whereas those produced using alcohols (including methanol) from non-fossil fuels are eligible for ROCs. Biofuels produced from vegetable oil, used cooking oil and tallow would be eligible for ROCs.

Seagate Ltd.

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what was the level of grant aid paid by Invest NI to Seagate, Ltd. for the company's Limavady plant; and what efforts her Department has made to recoup the funding following the closure of this plant. (AQW 3978/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Since its original establishment, Seagate Technology Media (Ireland) Ltd was offered support totalling £44 million of which £35 million was drawn down. The support offered was in the form of selective financial assistance, training support and Research & Development (R&D) support.

Of the £35 million received by Seagate for the Limavady operations, almost £24 million (68%) of was paid against costs incurred by the company at the time of the initial investment more than 10 years ago. Two subsequent expansions of the Limavady operations, in 2001 and 2006, plus R&D and training activities during this period, received a further £11 million of Invest NI grant.

Under the terms of the legal agreements, default was not technically triggered until production ceased at the Limavady plant on 25th September 2008. My Department, through Invest NI, and in consultation with legal advisors, has been reviewing the terms of the relevant agreements in order to determine the level of grant that may be recouped from Seagate. Invest NI is in regular contact with senior management at Seagate on this issue and will seek full repayment of the determined amount from Seagate at the earliest opportunity.

Seagate Ltd.

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what was the level of grant aid given by Invest NI to Seagate Ltd. for its plant at Springtown. (AQW 3979/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI and its predecessor agencies have offered support totalling £111 million to Seagate's Springtown operation since the company was established in 1993. This support has been in the form of selective financial assistance, Research & Development (R&D) support and training support. A total of £109 million has been drawn down to date.

Approximately £40 million was paid against the cost of establishing the operations in 1993 and conducting initial training and R&D activities. A further £69 million was paid against three subsequent expansion projects in 1997, 2003 and 2006, plus training and R&D activities in the same period.

Bioscience Technology Institute

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if her Department's inspection report on the Bioscience Technology Institute will be made public. (AQW 4110/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The inspection report on the Bioscience Technology Institute Limited has not yet been finalised. The Public Accounts Committee has received periodic updates on the progress of this investigation.

I have not yet made a decision on whether to publish the final report. It is not the Department's policy to publish inspectors' reports into private companies.

Start a Business Programme

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for the reason for the removal of the grant for the Start a Business Programme, on 7 April 2008. (AQW 4117/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The decision to remove the £400 grant from the Start a Business Programme (SABp) was taken following an independent evaluation which highlighted serious concerns surrounding its additionality and value for money. This reported that 75% of SABp participants would have started their business even if the grant had not been offered, indicating that it was not a good use of public funds.

Within the revised Go for It programme due to launch in April 2009, the grant resources have been re-deployed to enhance the training and mentoring available to local businesses starting up and growing.

Start a Business Programme

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment if she will reinstate the grant for the Start a Business Programme. (AQW 4118/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The decision to remove the £400 grant from the Start a Business Programme was taken as a result of recommendations emerging from an independent evaluation which highlighted serious concerns around its additionality and value for money.

As a result, the grant was withdrawn for new entrants from April 2008 and activity levels have subsequently been monitored closely. While the numbers progressing through the programme are down slightly, it is difficult to determine whether this is due to the grant removal or the wider economic conditions. An independent review is currently being carried out by KPMG and Oxford Economics in an attempt to determine the specific grant impact on the level of business start-ups. This exercise will be completed within the next few weeks and will help inform my decision on whether the grant should indeed be reinstated as you request.

CORGI Scheme

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans her Department will put in place when the CORGI scheme finishes at the end of this financial year. (AQW 4161/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland is currently conducting a consultation exercise to seek the views of stakeholders, particularly consumer groups and installers themselves, on the future provision of a gas installers' registration scheme for Northern Ireland from April 2010 onwards.

In the meantime, the current scheme, which is operated by the CORGI organisation, will continue in Northern Ireland in the next financial year.

Disadvantaged Areas

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what Council areas are designated as Disadvantaged Areas by her Department; and what are the policy considerations that apply to those areas. (AQW 4185/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Based on data from the income and employment domains of the 2005 Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure, DETI's current Disadvantaged Area map identifies Strabane, Omagh, Cookstown, Newry and Mourne, Dungannon and Derry Council areas, together with pockets of Belfast, as the focus for Departmental policies and programmes which can contribute towards tackling disadvantage.

DETI and its NDPBs aim to pay particular attention to Disadvantaged Areas through the delivery of key policies and programmes. In particular, there are two PSA targets relating to the targeting of Disadvantaged Areas:

- PSA 1, Objective 2 includes the Invest NI target "70% of new FDI (foreign direct investment) projects secured to locate within 10 miles of an area of economic disadvantage"; and
- PSA 3, Objective 3 similarly contains an Invest NI target "75% of land acquisition (acres) in areas of economic disadvantage".

Telecommunications Industry

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what measures have been taken by her Department, in conjunction with the telecommunications industry, to make effective broadband available in the Ardboe area of County Tyrone and in the wider rural areas. (AQW 4234/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Broadband access with speeds of no less than 512 kilo bits per second have been available to all of Northern Ireland since December 2005 through a five year contract my Department has with BT. This includes every village and rural area of County Tyrone (including Ardboe) and is delivered either through telephone lines, wireless or satellite services. Often consumers can choose from more than one provider.

The contract with BT expires at the end of March 2009 and my Department has recently put in place a new three year contract with Avanti Communications Group ensuring the continued availability of broadband services across all of Northern Ireland.

I am keenly aware that broadband availability is particularly important for those living and working in rural areas and in August last year I launched a Broadband Fund, with the explicit aim of encouraging Northern Ireland companies to develop new and innovative methods of delivering broadband services, particularly in rural areas. Currently, two projects are being funded under this initiative, one trialling mobile technology and the other wireless technology. The wireless trial, which is being undertaken by North West Electronics, will deliver speeds of up to 100mbps to most of County Tyrone, including Ardboe, and to southern parts of County Londonderry which will bring more choice and competition to these rural areas, and particularly for our rural based SMEs.

Presbyterian Mutual Society

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what progress she has made to ensure that the UK government's savings protection scheme is extended to include savings accounts in the Presbyterian Mutual Society. (AQW 4272/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: At its meeting on 15th January 2009, the Executive considered the Presbyterian Mutual Society issue and it was agreed that the First Minister and deputy First Minister would seek to raise with the Prime Minister the issue of help to the members of the Society and to impress upon him the need for the UK Government to provide support to them in terms of depositor protection.

The First Minister and deputy First Minister have since written on 26 January 2009 to the Prime Minister requesting a meeting and a response is awaited.

Enterprise Finance Guarantee

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what indications she has received from the four local main banks that they are availing of the recently announced Enterprise Finance Guarantee. (AQW 4413/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Enterprise Finance Guarantee (EFG) replaces the Small Firms Loan Guarantee (SFLG) and is operated by the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR). All lenders approved for SFLG were alerted to the new scheme by BERR at the same time and invited to participate.

The Northern Bank was named by BERR in the first tranche of lenders announced on 14 January 2009 and I understand that the Bank of Ireland, Ulster Bank and First Trust Bank are at various stages of the approvals process. It is my intention to meet with the four local banks in the near future to discuss, among other issues, progress in making the Enterprise Finance Guarantee available to local businesses.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Road Safety Council

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of the Environment to acknowledge the excellent work carried out by the Road Safety Council and its contribution to the improvement in road accident statistics. (AQW 3765/09)

Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson): Following a critical review of its performance, I wrote to the Road Safety Council (RSC) on 9 December 2008 to inform it of my decision to channel funding not into central administration but direct to local committees. My decision, which was made with considerable reluctance, was not a financial one and was based on the evidence before me. Three successive reviews over the last eleven years, which between them amount to a damning indictment of the Council's activities and performance, left me with no realistic alternative but to re-direct funding away from central administration and into front line activities carried out by local committees.

In my letter I acknowledged the Council's long and honourable history, and thanked members both of the Council and of local committees for the contribution they had made to improving road safety in Northern Ireland throughout that period. I am pleased to have the opportunity to reiterate those comments here.

Of course, the relevant issue is not whether the RSC has contributed to the encouraging improvements that we have seen in the numbers of people killed or seriously injured on our roads - the Council has played its part, along with many others - but whether this is the best way of utilising the resources available.

It is a question of priorities, and the latest review of the performance of the RSC, on top of two similar reviews previously, indicated to me that the money could be better spent.

It should be noted that it is my intention that the front-line road safety activity of the Council should continue, and that is why I have asked officials to put in place a new funding model for the period from 1 April 2009.

Impounded Unlicensed Vehicles

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment how his Department has disposed of impounded unlicensed vehicles that were not reclaimed by their owners and were not categorised as being 'of very poor quality'. (AQW 3780/09)

Minister of the Environment: Vehicle licensing is an Excepted Matter which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport, but it is administered in Northern Ireland by the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) under an agreement between my Department and the Department for Transport (DfT). Under DfT policy, the value of unclaimed vehicles sent for auction has been reduced recently from £5,000 to £3,000. DVA have not had any vehicles in the last 5 years assessed as having sufficient value to warrant auctioning.

Impounded Unlicensed Vehicles

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment how many impounded unlicensed vehicles were disposed of by crushing, broken down by vehicle age in the last year for which figures are available. (AQW 3781/09)

Minister of the Environment: Vehicle licensing is an Excepted Matter which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport, but it is administered in Northern Ireland by the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) under an agreement between my Department and the Department for Transport. In 2008, 974 unclaimed vehicles were destroyed. The break down of these vehicles, by year of manufacture, is set out in the table below.

Year of Manufacture	Number of Vehicles
Unknown (mainly not registered in NI)	93
1997	1
1984	1
1988	1
1989	1
1990	5
1991	8
1992	16
1993	43
1994	85
1995	123
1996	169
1997	136
1998	131
1999	77
2000	39
2001	18
2002	14
2003	4
2004	4
2005	4
2006	1

Impounded Unlicensed Vehicles

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment how many impounded unlicensed vehicles were disposed of at auction during the last five years, and what was the value of the vehicles sold, broken down by vehicle age. (AQW 3782/09)

Minister of the Environment: Vehicle licensing is an Excepted Matter which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport, but it is administered in Northern Ireland by the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) under an agreement between my Department and the Department for Transport. No unclaimed vehicles have been sold at auction in the last 5 years.

Impounded Unlicensed Vehicles

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of the Environment what is the average cost per car for disposing of impounded, unlicensed or unclaimed vehicles by crushing. (AQW 3783/09)

Minister of the Environment: Vehicle licensing is an Excepted Matter which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Transport, but it is administered in Northern Ireland by the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) under an agreement between my Department and the Department for Transport. The breaking up of unclaimed, impounded vehicles forms part of the contracted services provided by NCP Services to DVA under the provisions of a UK-wide contract awarded by DfT. There is no identifiable cost within the contract for this part of the service provided.

Water Pollution

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to his answer to AQW 1374/09, to provide a list of the names of all the organisations with repeat water pollution offences in South Antrim. (AQW 3883/09)

Minister of the Environment: The names of the five organisations who have caused water pollution on more than one occasion in the past 5 years in the South Antrim area have already been provided to Mr Burns by Dave Foster, Northern Ireland Environment Agency in his letter dated 24 November 2008.

Waste Batteries and Electrical Equipment

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment if stores that sell dry batteries and potentially noxious electric lamps are obligated to provide a collection point for their end of life disposal; and, if not, if he intends to require the introduction of such a measure. (AQW 3937/09)

Minister of the Environment: A consultation on transposition of the Batteries Directive was published by my Department in December 2008. It proposes in-store collection of waste batteries, except in very small outlets. This legislation is due to be made before the summer.

Under the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Regulations retailers paid into a fund to upgrade civic amenity sites to allow collection of lamps and other electrical goods. The Department has no plans to introduce a requirement for in-store collection of waste lamps.

Disposal of Neon Light Tubes

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment (i) to outline the regulations regarding the disposal of neon light tubes (ii) to clarify if all local government authorities operate a standardised means of collection and disposal; and (iii) if there is a regular Departmental oversight of local authorities for implementing the regulations, and, if so, to outline his Department's inspection procedures. (AQW 3938/09)

Minister of the Environment:

- (i) The legislation which impacts on the disposal of neon light tubes is the Controlled Waste (Duty of Care) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002, the Waste Management Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003, the Hazardous Waste Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 and the Waste Electrical and Electronic

Equipment Regulations 2006. The provisions in this legislation ensure that storage, transport and treatment of such waste are undertaken without endangering human health or the environment.

- (ii) District Councils operate to certain standards in order to ensure the requirements of the above legislation are met. There is no prescribed standardised means of collection and disposal in the legislation.
- (iii) The Northern Ireland Environment Agency inspects council sites on a quarterly basis.

Disposal of Neon Light Tubes

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of the Environment if (i) he intends to implement any changes in the procedure for disposing of new light bulbs in order to minimise pollution; (ii) he has had any consultation with local authorities; and (iii) he will make public, procedures that he considers proper and adequate in relation to this matter. (AQW 3940/09)

Minister of the Environment: (i) I have no imminent plans to implement any changes in the procedure for disposal of new light bulbs. (ii) Councils will be consulted on disposal of light bulbs as part of the transposition process of the forthcoming revised Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive. (iii) Current procedures for disposal of light bulbs may be found on the Departments webpage for Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment.

Expenditure of Councils

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what was the total expenditure of each of the 26 councils, in each of the last five years. (AQW 3988/09)

Minister of the Environment: The total gross expenditure for each district council has been extracted from councils' certified accounts, for each of the last five years. The figures are summarised in the table below.

District Council	2003/2004 £	2004/2005 £	2005/2006 £	2006/2007 £	2007/2008 £
Antrim	11,708,695	12,939,613	15,067,916	16,796,015	18,803,071
Ards	17,437,239	19,487,194	20,853,712	21,302,660	21,234,455
Armagh	13,878,196	14,738,611	17,020,106	16,597,603	18,185,607
Ballymena	15,906,888	17,173,195	18,906,030	19,160,123	20,395,149
Ballymoney	7,008,080	6,883,763	7,521,824	7,715,802	11,015,276
Banbridge	10,430,855	11,011,094	11,630,118	12,510,380	13,247,070
Belfast	103,597,105	112,270,044	131,122,974	141,623,325	154,352,244
Carrickfergus	10,331,253	11,097,559	11,546,080	11,520,089	11,852,837
Castlereagh	14,960,973	15,700,620	17,579,553	17,304,868	18,035,817
Coleraine	17,045,260	19,426,927	21,387,165	21,664,304	23,609,225
Cookstown	7,895,927	9,723,241	11,071,814	11,137,416	12,156,653
Craigavon	22,662,649	25,067,829	32,687,217	25,800,410	28,858,343
Derry	33,575,840	36,500,345	35,863,481	39,084,923	42,054,523
Down	21,282,432	21,036,959	21,224,496	18,609,003	20,441,661
Dungannon and South Tyrone	9,745,289	10,904,511	12,984,312	13,125,867	14,217,727
Fermanagh	11,449,703	12,993,733	12,854,303	15,937,855	16,270,421
Larne	9,084,108	8,485,604	12,009,691	10,209,297	11,194,330
Limavady	9,480,498	8,693,497	9,094,607	9,326,823	10,707,058

District Council	2003/2004 £	2004/2005 £	2005/2006 £	2006/2007 £	2007/2008 £
Lisburn	27,580,155	27,515,946	28,838,064	27,892,759	29,642,401
Magherafelt	9,396,555	10,004,631	10,664,303	9,952,036	10,868,508
Moyle	6,328,146	6,522,886	6,901,378	7,259,968	7,891,648
Newry and Mourne	21,360,516	22,303,268	23,184,203	24,736,855	26,867,847
Newtownabbey	22,513,277	23,781,089	24,253,159	24,940,933	27,406,710
North Down	19,324,175	19,442,753	26,432,746	22,987,272	24,146,458
Omagh	12,681,822	15,155,882	15,690,744	15,126,001	15,962,475
Strabane	8,421,058	9,187,144	10,388,465	10,345,166	11,839,449
Total	475,086,694	508,047,938	566,778,461	572,667,753	621,256,963

Expenditure of Councils

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how much money was spent by each of the 26 local government councils on tourism, in each of the last five years. (AQW 3989/09)

Minister of the Environment: The gross expenditure on tourism incurred by each district council has been extracted from councils' certified accounts, for each of the last five years. The figures are summarised in the table below.

District Council	2003/2004 £	2004/2005 £	2005/2006 £	2006/2007 £	2007/2008 £
Antrim	137,714	411,749	517,832	538,516	843,883
Ards	1,817,694	2,104,034	2,273,140	2,047,924	1,973,761
Armagh	1,902,161	2,211,959	2,542,590	1,923,504	1,783,782
Ballymena	1,732,448	1,810,093	1,803,645	1,310,585	1,375,705
Ballymoney	353,688	376,845	371,857	338,372	372,080
Banbridge	332,385	472,643	537,586	445,865	521,282
Belfast	2,527,971	3,681,576	3,202,345	4,025,626	4,626,978
Carrickfergus	903,315	782,510	832,309	780,825	789,389
Castlereagh	0	0	0	0	0
Coleraine	3,120,466	3,378,541	3,599,326	3,141,704	3,391,669
Cookstown	352,157	394,590	472,113	485,499	514,590
Craigavon	449,741	428,193	679,062	714,919	677,602
Derry	915,610	894,999	1,022,248	1,003,516	1,198,630
Down	1,455,992	1,454,435	1,615,751	1,540,441	1,589,384
Dungannon and South Tyrone	282,394	299,654	383,893	314,855	364,434
Fermanagh	1,429,463	1,317,456	1,460,349	1,384,188	1,325,973
Larne	795,748	836,148	881,055	601,372	580,937
Limavady	755,216	798,045	804,502	707,070	638,564
Lisburn	1,216,928	908,373	964,080	941,322	921,054
Magherafelt	558,763	588,910	564,789	599,094	724,871

District Council	2003/2004 £	2004/2005 £	2005/2006 £	2006/2007 £	2007/2008 £
Moyle	995,817	996,058	1,105,145	1,047,562	1,172,518
Newry and Mourne	1,165,854	1,261,517	1,326,734	1,249,209	1,429,713
Newtownabbey	219,278	220,482	211,015	225,098	257,571
North Down	1,674,530	1,690,619	1,651,044	1,531,440	1,620,379
Omagh	753,353	693,620	631,656	370,419	294,453
Strabane	293,553	323,483	309,041	257,853	242,043
Total	26,142,239	28,336,532	29,763,107	27,526,778	29,231,245

Water Pollution Offences

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to the answer to AQW 1374/09, for the names of all organisations with repeat water pollution offences. (AQW 4007/09)

Minister of the Environment: Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), records details of all pollution incidents on a database. However, there is not a specific field on the database to categorise whether an individual, company or organisation has been cited as responsible for any previous incident(s).

This latest question requires a significant amount of work to compile a list of the names of those who are recorded as, allegedly, responsible for more than one pollution incident over the 5 year period 2003 – 2007.

NIEA officials will write to you directly as soon as the information has been compiled.

Waste Communication Strategy

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made with the Waste Communication Strategy. (AQW 4021/09)

Minister of the Environment: I am keen to move forward as soon as possible with a waste communications strategy to ensure that key messages on waste are effectively communicated to people to bring about the behavioural changes necessary to reduce waste and improve environmental quality.

My Department has reconvened the Learning & Communications Forum to consider the way forward on a waste communications strategy. The Forum is a focussed stakeholder group to assist the delivery of consistent and appropriate key messages to business, communities, the public, households and the public sector. My Department has also secured the services of a specialist team from Morrow Communications to provide expert communications and PR support and a waste communications action plan over the next three months.

One initial action over the coming months, for example, will be to revise the “Wake up to Waste” website to cover more up to date and relevant key messages to encourage behavioural change. I also recognise that much good work is already taking place within District Councils and through organisations such as Bryson House to encourage behavioural change to reduce waste going to landfill.

I am pleased to be able to report that my Department is now taking action to deliver effective waste communications, though a lot of work will be required over the coming years to build on the good work already taking place and to bring about a fundamental change in our attitude and behaviour towards waste, how we can prevent it, recycle it and dispose of it in ways that are environmentally responsible and economically sensible.

Planning Service

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment how many invalid planning applications were returned to applicants by Planning Service in 2008; and were applicants informed before the notices were sent out and given an opportunity to provide further information before money was spent on posting the rejection notices. (AQW 4025/09)

Community Planning Laws

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment what his Department's plans are to develop community planning laws designed to protect coastal regions and discourage unsustainable development in holiday apartments. (AQW 4107/09)

Minister of the Environment: I have no plans to develop community planning laws on this matter.

Commercial Centres in Coastal Towns

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment what his plans are for ensuring developers do not kill off commercial centres in coastal towns by obtaining approval for holiday apartments. (AQW 4109/09)

Minister of the Environment: In the draft Northern Area Plan [DNAP] published in May 2005, there is no specific policy provision to protect the town centres of coastal towns from the development of holiday apartments. In the case of Ballycastle town centre and in a small portion of Portstewart town centre however there is a presumption against apartment development as a result of the application of an Apartments Development Policy within the Plan [Policy HOU 3].

This policy was included in the plan in an attempt to control the number and location of apartments being built and Areas of Opportunity for Apartments [AOAs] were designated in 5 of the 8 coastal towns - Ballycastle, Castlerock, Portballintrae, Portrush and Portstewart. In terms of commercial centres however its impact is only likely to be of significance in Ballycastle town centre.

The Apartments Development Policy in DNAP and its associated designations have attracted a considerable number of objections and some expressions of support from the public. Since DNAP was published, the Policy has been a material consideration in the determination of relevant planning applications and the Planning Appeals Commission has supported the refusal of planning permission for proposed apartments outside the designated AOAs in at least two of the five settlements.

Within all other commercial centres planning applications for apartment development will be determined on their individual merits within the context set by regional planning policies such as PPS1, PPS7 and PPS12 and the policies contained within DNAP including Policy HOU 3 where appropriate.

The Independent Examination into DNAP would facilitate a debate on the merits or otherwise of DNAP Policy HOU 3 and its associated proposed designated Areas of Opportunity for Apartments including the issue of apartments in commercial centres. In light of the ongoing legal proceedings in relation to DNAP however my Department does not consider it appropriate, at this point in time, to engage with the Planning Appeals Commission in order to progress the Independent Examination.

Tree Protection

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he is taking to protect trees by removing attached ivy, on land owned by (i) government Departments; and (ii) private landlords. (AQW 4141/09)

Minister of the Environment:

- (i) The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) recognises the importance of ivy – a native evergreen climbing perennial – for wildlife, providing nectar for insects and shelter for birds in winter and berries for birds in spring, when other sources of berries have been exhausted. Ivy is not routinely removed from trees on lands managed by NIEA except where affected trees might pose a significant threat to visitors, for example close to paths and open spaces. My Department has no remit to remove ivy from trees on lands owned by other Government Departments.
- (ii) My Department has no remit to remove ivy from trees on lands in private ownership.

Red Grouse Project

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to the answer to AQW 1385/09, how the interests of shooting sports will be included in the Red Grouse Project. (AQW 4142/09)

1. Minister of the Environment:
 - (i) From 1 April 2008 until 31 December 2008 a total of 5739 invalid applications were returned.
 - (ii) Applicants are not informed before applications are returned as per the invalid procedures.
2. The cost of returned applications cannot be identified as no separate postal costs are kept for invalid applications.
3.
 - (i) An application will be sent back if incomplete and it clearly states on the application form (P1) that seven signed copies are required. A judgement will be made by Planning staff, where possible, to contact an applicant/agent to request the additional information required to make an application complete, prior to the application being returned. However, help and advice on what is required to provide a complete planning application is readily available in advance to all customers.
 - (ii) As indicated above, we have no means of identifying the cost separately from the general postage costs.

Planning Service

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment what is the average postal cost to Planning Service for informing applicants of an invalid application. (AQW 4026/09)

4. Minister of the Environment:
 - (i) From 1 April 2008 until 31 December 2008 a total of 5739 invalid applications were returned.
 - (ii) Applicants are not informed before applications are returned as per the invalid procedures.
5. The cost of returned applications cannot be identified as no separate postal costs are kept for invalid applications.
6.
 - (i) An application will be sent back if incomplete and it clearly states on the application form (P1) that seven signed copies are required. A judgement will be made by Planning staff, where possible, to contact an applicant/agent to request the additional information required to make an application complete, prior to the application being returned. However, help and advice on what is required to provide a complete planning application is readily available in advance to all customers.
 - (ii) As indicated above, we have no means of identifying the cost separately from the general postage costs.

Planning Service

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of the Environment if an architect or applicant sends Planning Service three copies of site location plans instead of six; (i) why are all the plans sent back by post instead of contacting the applicant directly; and (ii) how much does the postal cost. (AQW 4027/09)

7. Minister of the Environment:
 - (i) From 1 April 2008 until 31 December 2008 a total of 5739 invalid applications were returned.
 - (ii) Applicants are not informed before applications are returned as per the invalid procedures.
8. The cost of returned applications cannot be identified as no separate postal costs are kept for invalid applications.
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 - (ii) As indicated above, we have no means of identifying the cost separately from the general postage costs.

Planning Approval

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment what action he is taking to (i) ensure that developers are only granted planning approval when the proposal represents a contribution to a balanced community; (ii) encourage the provision of badly needed hotels; and (iii) discourage the construction of apartment blocks that are increasingly unsold and unoccupied. (AQW 4031/09)

Minister of the Environment: My Department when dealing with applications assesses development proposals against all relevant planning policies and other material considerations including the appropriate development plan to arrive at a balanced decision. The development plan for an area ensures that there is sufficient land supply to meet a variety of housing needs.

Applications for hotels are currently assessed under Policy TOU3 Tourist Accommodation of the Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland which gives favourable consideration to proposals for Hotels in existing settlements and appropriate rural locations. The exceptional tourist need within former Greenbelt and Countryside Policy Areas, no longer applies under Draft PPS21. However, my Department is currently working on a new PPS for Tourist Development which will be available for consultation in due course.

Finally, in exercise of its responsibility for planning control it is not the role of my Department to discourage development of apartments on the basis of difficulty in selling. All planning applications for apartment development are required to be assessed on planning grounds only against relevant policy and guidance including PPS 7 Quality Residential Environments, PPS 12 Housing in Settlements, Planning Circular 03/07 Assessing Planning Applications for Residential Development in Urban Areas, Villages and other Small Settlements and DCAN 8 : Housing in Existing Urban Areas.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment how much money the Northern Ireland Environment Agency has set aside in its (i) 2008/9; (ii) 2009/10; (iii) 2010/11; and (iv) 2011/12 budget for (i) conservation; (ii) management; and (iii) development for the Historic Walls of Derry. (AQW 4100/09)

Minister of the Environment: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) manages the conservation of the historic fabric of Derry's Walls as a State Care Monument, and conducts this work under the provisions of the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995. NIEA conducts much of the day-to-day management of the walls in partnership with local groups and stakeholders, and continues to develop the long-term management of this internationally important monument.

(i) Conservation

NIEA has a team of specialist craftsmen who maintain the walls on an ongoing basis. Work completed in the current financial year comprises conservation works to the sections of city walls at Stable Lane and Hawkin Street. Conservation works are currently underway to the section of wall at Foyle Street, in advance of a hotel development planned for that area.

2009/10

The budget for Derry city walls for 2009/10 has not yet been allocated. However, planned conservation works will continue on Foyle Street in 2009/10 at an estimated cost of £4000.

2010/2011 and 2011/12

The budget for the conservation of Derry city walls for 2010/2011 and 2011/12 has not yet been allocated. Plans for future conservation by NIEA at any historic monument are informed by the conservation needs of the monument at the time, followed by workforce availability and/or budget. A degree of flexibility is necessary since, for example, a winter storm or episode of flood damage may mean that another monument is in more urgent need of conservation works.

(ii) Management 2008/9

Derry City Walls Conservation Plan was published in September 2007. NIEA aims to publish an accompanying Management Plan later this year and to establish a management working group. In the interim, NIEA has been working with the Western Perspective City Walls Working Group.

Resources expended for the management of the City Walls include the staff time of archaeologists, architects and our specialist conservation workforce who routinely inspect the monument, advise, and conduct its conservation. In addition professional staff also spent time processing planning applications and queries associated with the walls plus other features of historical, architectural or archaeological interest within the city. This is a routine task, conducted as part of a larger workload, and assisted from time to time with additional staff and contract resources.

NIEA has agreed, in principle, to undertake archaeological works prior to works for realigning paths for the Western Perspective Public Realm project. These works will take place in the grassed area immediately adjacent to the walls overlooking the Bogside and accessed via Fahan Street and Nailors Row. The budget for these works is still to be finalised and will depend on the scale of works proposed for the project. These works may take place in late 2008/9 or 2009/10.

2009/10, 2010/11, 2011/12

NIEA budgets for the management of Derry city walls in 2009/10 and future financial years will be informed by recommendations set out in the forthcoming Derry City Walls Management Plan.

NIEA will continue to meet its commitments to the better management of Derry city walls through attendance at meetings of the Western Perspective City Walls Working Group and future meetings arising from the publication of the Management Plan.

(iii) Development 2008/9

As a matter of routine, planning applications are passed from Planning Service to NIEA for advice regarding the impact of development on the walls themselves; their setting; buried archaeological remains, and; other historic buildings in the area.

The Management Group, led by NIEA, will also be involved in considering issues regarding the longer term development of the walls. NIEA has been involved for a number of years with the city council, NITB and other key agencies in promoting the importance of the walls as a key part of the Signature Development Project.

2009/10, 2010/11, 2011/12

It is anticipated that resources will continue to be engaged, in terms of NIEA staff time in - continuing the successful conservation and public enjoyment of Derry's Walls; to ensure the appropriate consideration of all planning applications within the core of this historic city, and; to enable NIEA to continue to attend and contribute to all relevant meetings relating to the management of the city walls.

Archeological Excavations

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment what archeological excavations or surveys does the Northern Ireland Environment Agency plan to undertake in and adjacent to the Historic Walls of Derry in (i) 2008/9; (ii) 2009/10; (iii) 2010/11; and (iv) 2011/12. (AQW 4101/09)

Minister of the Environment: In the last two years, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and its predecessor licensed four archaeological excavations within the Historic City and, wholly funded one of these. In 2008/09, NIEA has undertaken two archaeological surveys within and adjacent to the historic walls.

The Agency has also agreed, in principle, to undertake, and fund, archaeological works in advance of the realignment of paths for the Western Perspective Public Realm Project. These works are proposed to take place in the grassed area immediately adjacent to the City walls overlooking the Bogside and accessed via Fahan Street and Nailors Row. The budget for these works is still to be agreed, and will depend on the scale of works proposed by the Western Perspective City Walls Working Group and agreed with NIEA. These archaeological works may take place in 2008/9 or 2009/10. NIEA currently has no other timetabled excavation or survey projects in or adjacent to the Historic City Walls for years 2010/11 and 2011/12. In that time some archaeological investigation may become necessary, but this would need to be assessed and costed as the need arises, and undertaken within the existing constraints of resourcing.

Minister of the Environment: During the public consultation phase of the Red Grouse Action Plan all interests were invited to comment on the text and the Plan targets. Responses from sporting interests were considered alongside responses from other interests and together these helped shape the final plan.

The Action Plan for Red Grouse is primarily focused on conserving Red Grouse populations and their habitats. I am aware that there is much experience of grouse and moorland management within the sporting sector and can confirm that the cross-sectoral group attending the Seminar relating to Red Grouse conservation on 18th March 2009 will include sporting interests. Indeed the Seminar is to be chaired by the Northern Ireland Director of the British Association of Shooting and Conservation.

Local Government Councils

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment if a local government council has given a fixed term contract to an employee that runs beyond the existence of that council, does the newly formed council have an obligation to continue employing that person. (AQW 4166/09)

Minister of the Environment: Where a local government council has given a fixed-term contract to an employee that runs beyond the existence of that council, the newly formed council will have an obligation to employ that employee where transfer rights under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 are established.

Local Government Councils

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what limitations there are on the length of time for which a fixed term contract can be offered to an employee by local government councils. (AQW 4167/09)

Minister of the Environment: The Fixed-term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2002 give fixed-term employees the right, in principle, not to be treated less favourably than permanent employees of the same employer doing similar work. The Regulations contain no particular limitation on the length of time for which a fixed-term contract can be offered, which is of relevance to this question.

Stranmillis College

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of the Environment if anyone from the Department for Employment and Learning has approached his Department about the designation of land around Stranmillis College. (AQW 4171/09)

Minister of the Environment: No-one from Queen's University, Stranmillis College or the Department for Employment and Learning has approached my Department about the designation of land around Stranmillis College

Stranmillis College

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of the Environment if anyone from Queen's University or Stranmillis College approached his Department about the designation of land around Stranmillis College. (AQW 4172/09)

Minister of the Environment: No-one from Queen's University, Stranmillis College or the Department for Employment and Learning has approached my Department about the designation of land around Stranmillis College

Independent Working Group

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of the Environment to update the work of the Independent Working Group that is looking at the entitlement of non-farming rural dwellers under PPS21. (AQW 4184/09)

Minister of the Environment: The Independent Working Group will commence work on 3 February 2009.

Signposting for Rural Businesses

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment how many rural businesses have been the subject of enforcement procedures for planning offences in relation to signposting of businesses, broken down by Planning Service division. (AQW 4190/09)

Minister of the Environment: The current system of electronic retrieval does not record applications in sufficient detail to provide the information requested so to provide accurate figures for the periods in question could only be done by a manual search of all our existing files which would incur disproportionate costs.

Signposting for Rural Businesses

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to review the regulations in relation to signposting for rural businesses. (AQW 4191/09)

Minister of the Environment: The planning legislation relevant to signposting for rural businesses is the Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1992.

My Department has no plans to review the operation of these Regulations with respect to signposting for rural businesses.

Green-Belt Holdings

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment why (i) his Department requested Green-belt Holdings to become involved in managing maintenance of open space in new developments; and (ii) local authorities were not considered to carry out the maintenance. (AQW 4220/09)

Minister of the Environment: The management and maintenance of open space in new residential developments is a requirement of Policy OS2 of Planning Policy Statement 8: Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation. Where Green-belt Holdings are involved in such management and maintenance, it has not been at the express request of my Department although PPS8 does recognise that such an arrangement is an acceptable mechanism for doing so. Their involvement is a matter for the developer who is responsible for agreeing the arrangements for maintaining open space. Local authorities are also an acceptable mechanism for carrying out such management and maintenance but their involvement depends on the developer and council agreeing appropriate arrangements. Councils are involved in a number of schemes.

Green-Belt Holdings

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment in how many new developments have Green-belt Holdings taken over the maintenance and management responsibilities of open spaces. (AQW 4221/09)

Minister of the Environment: My Department does not record this level of detail on the current system of electronic data retrieval – 20/20. To provide accurate figures for the information requested can only be done by a manual search of all our existing files. This information would not be available in the time specified and would incur disproportionate costs.

Green-Belt Holdings

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment when a majority of residents of developments that have Green-belt Holdings as their property management company wish to seek alternative management arrangements, will they be able to do so. (AQW 4222/09)

Minister of the Environment: When residents of a housing development wish to seek alternative arrangements for the management and maintenance of open space, this is a matter in the first instance between the residents and Green-belt Holdings. However, alternative management arrangements would have to be acceptable to my Department in that they will continue to be required to meet the policy requirements of PPS8

in terms of being managed and maintained in perpetuity and comply with relevant conditions of the particular planning permission.

Green-Belt Holdings

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment if his Planning Department regulates the maintenance work carried out by Green-belt Holdings. (AQW 4223/09)

Minister of the Environment: My Department does not routinely regulate the maintenance work carried out by Green-belt Holdings, but where appropriate can investigate alleged breaches of planning control linked to the management and maintenance of open space within housing developments.

Enforcement Action Notices

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to his answer to AQW 2104/09, what steps he is taking to improve the clearance of enforcement actions, particularly those that remain over 24 months without clearance. (AQW 4231/09)

Minister of the Environment: The Downpatrick Divisional Planning Office has been reviewing the methods of work within the enforcement section, taking a more focused approach with regard to how its resources are utilised in each of the four Council areas. In the last eight months, this approach has seen the enforcement team halt the rise in the overall number of cases currently live.

Ulster Farm By-Products

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to his answer to AQW 3825/09 and 3826/09, how the difference in costs and the subsistence fees will be recovered. (AQW 4244/09)

Minister of the Environment: The charging scheme under the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations (NI) 2003 sets fees for each regulatory activity. For part A installations, like Ulster Farm By Products, these fees are charged per component prescribed in the scheme. The scheme does not allow for recovery of actual costs installation by installation, but it is reviewed regularly with the aim of achieving full cost recovery overall.

Ulster Farm By-Products

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to his answers to AQW 3825/09, 3826/09, and 3828/09, to outline how the time and cost of monitoring Ulster Farm By-Products compares with the other organisations prescribed for control under the PPC Regulations; and to state if there are any other organisations which require greater expenditure in terms of time and cost to monitor, and to state the names of any such organisations. (AQW 4260/09)

Minister of the Environment: Pursuant to my answer to AQW3828/09, NIEA is unable to calculate regulatory costs at each individual installation. NIEA can confirm that there is significant time spent in regulation of all rendering plants within Northern Ireland.

Ulster Farm By-Products

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to the answers to AQW 3825/09 and 3826/09, to detail how the difference in costs and subsistence fees will be recovered. (AQW 4261/09)

Minister of the Environment: The charging scheme under the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations (NI) 2003 sets fees for each regulatory activity. For part A installations, like Ulster Farm By Products, these fees are charged per component prescribed in the scheme. The scheme does not allow for recovery of actual costs installation by installation, but it is reviewed regularly with the aim of achieving full cost recovery overall.

Titanic Quarter

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his plans and the engagements he has had to ensure that the new development in the Titanic Quarter will include at least 15% social and affordable housing. (AQO 1886/09)

Minister of the Environment: Outline planning permission for Phase 2 of the Titanic Quarter development was granted in June 2008. The permission was granted subject to a planning condition which requires that a minimum of 15% of the residential accommodation will be allocated for affordable housing. I have asked my officials to ensure that details relating to the number and location of affordable units be recorded at the reserved matters planning stage and that their provision be monitored thereafter to ensure full compliance with the planning condition.

Road Safety Council

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment why he will withdraw funding from the Road Safety Council from 1 April 2009. (AQO 1887/09)

Minister of the Environment: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to take Questions 8, 12 and 14 together.

I would like first of all to take this opportunity to clarify that I did not make any decision to abolish the Road Safety Council: the Council exists independently of the Department, and any decision to abolish it would not be for me to make.

I wrote to the Road Safety Council in December 2008, following a highly critical independent review of its performance, confirming that funding will be directed away from central administration and into the front line road safety activities of local committees.

The review, by PA Consulting Group, was the most comprehensive evaluation to date. The report highlighted a lack of strategic leadership and control within the Council, and demonstrated that it had failed to deliver value for money.

The Department regularly reviews the activities of the Road Safety Council and its committees. Previous reviews, by the British Institute of Traffic Education Research (BITER) in 1997 and 2002, had also concluded that the Council's activities as a whole did not significantly enhance the Department's road safety efforts or represent good value for money.

In the circumstances I concluded that the only reasonable course open to me was to withdraw funding from the core of the Road Safety Council as of 1 April 2009. Not to do so would have left the Department open to criticism.

I have asked officials to develop a new funding model and to engage with the Council with a view to establishing a direct working relationship with local committees in preparation for the start of the new financial year.

The Department will continue to fund activities carried out by local committees and will continue to seek to harness the energy, imagination and creativity of volunteers at local level.

Given the more direct relationship envisaged between the Department and the committees, it is possible that the overall level of funding to front-line road safety activity could be increased under the new model rather than reduced.

The Road Safety Council has written to me requesting that I meet with its Executive Council in order to explore the possibility of deferring the decision to withdraw core funding, on a short term basis; in order to give it a further opportunity to reorganise and restructure, and I have asked my diary secretary to arrange a suitable date for such a meeting.

Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what progress has been made by his Department on the Performance and Efficiency Delivery Unit (PEDU) report on the planning system. (AQO 1889/09)

Minister of the Environment: The Performance Efficiency and Delivery Unit (PEDU) review of the Planning Service, which focused specifically on the processing of applications with the aim of helping achieve the Agency's PSA key targets in relation to processing times for applications, was completed in November 2008. The review, which is being taken forward as part of the wider planning reform programme, highlighted 5 areas for action: improving agent performance; improving consultee performance; staff and management issues; improving divisional performance; and better use of performance management.

The PEDU review is timely because, as you know, reform of the planning system is one of my key objectives. It is particularly pleasing that the key areas for improvement and action identified by the review are also those which Planning Service has already been focusing on and which fit with the thrust of the overall reforms.

Officials are now taking forward the actions needed to address the recommendations of the review and this should be completed by the end of March 2009.

Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems that have been built by his Department. (AQO 1890/09)

Minister of the Environment: My Department does not build Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems. However my Department's Northern Ireland Environment Agency chairs a working party looking at the promotion of the introduction of Sustainable Drainage Systems in future developments. I will be issuing a document for consultation within the next few weeks.

Road Safety Council

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment if he has met with the Road Safety Council since announcing his decision to abolish it. (AQO 1891/09)

Minister of the Environment: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to take Questions 8, 12 and 14 together.

I would like first of all to take this opportunity to clarify that I did not make any decision to abolish the Road Safety Council: the Council exists independently of the Department, and any decision to abolish it would not be for me to make.

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The Road Safety Council has written to me requesting that I meet with its Executive Council in order to explore the possibility of deferring the decision to withdraw core funding, on a short term basis; in order it give it a further opportunity to reorganise and restructure, and I have asked my diary secretary to arrange a suitable date for such a meeting.

Minor Planning Applications in Craigavon

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of the Environment what is his Department's estimate of the percentage of minor planning applications in Craigavon that will be included in the new streamlining process. (AQO 1892/09)

Minister of the Environment: The Department will be including all minor planning applications (100%) which are to be approved and where no objections are received in the new streamlining process.

Road Safety Council

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of the Environment to detail his plans for the future of the Road Safety Council. (AQO 1893/09)

Minister of the Environment: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to take Questions 8, 12 and 14 together.

I would like first of all to take this opportunity to clarify that I did not make any decision to abolish the Road Safety Council: the Council exists independently of the Department, and any decision to abolish it would not be for me to make.

I wrote to the Road Safety Council in December 2008, following a highly critical independent review of its performance, confirming that funding will be directed away from central administration and into the front line road safety activities of local committees.

The review, by PA Consulting Group, was the most comprehensive evaluation to date. The report highlighted a lack of strategic leadership and control within the Council, and demonstrated that it had failed to deliver value for money.

The Department regularly reviews the activities of the Road Safety Council and its committees. Previous reviews, by the British Institute of Traffic Education Research (BITER) in 1997 and 2002, had also concluded that the Council's activities as a whole did not significantly enhance the Department's road safety efforts or represent good value for money.

In the circumstances I concluded that the only reasonable course open to me was to withdraw funding from the core of the Road Safety Council as of 1 April 2009. Not to do so would have left the Department open to criticism.

I have asked officials to develop a new funding model and to engage with the Council with a view to establishing a direct working relationship with local committees in preparation for the start of the new financial year.

The Department will continue to fund activities carried out by local committees and will continue to seek to harness the energy, imagination and creativity of volunteers at local level.

Given the more direct relationship envisaged between the Department and the committees, it is possible that the overall level of funding to front-line road safety activity could be increased under the new model rather than reduced.

The Road Safety Council has written to me requesting that I meet with its Executive Council in order to explore the possibility of deferring the decision to withdraw core funding, on a short term basis; in order it give it a further opportunity to reorganise and restructure, and I have asked my diary secretary to arrange a suitable date for such a meeting.

Repatriation of Illegal Waste

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the progress of the repatriation of illegal waste which originated in the Republic of Ireland. (AQO 1894/09)

Minister of the Environment: Dublin City Council, as the competent authority for these matters in the Republic of Ireland, are committed to letting a contract for the removal of waste from the two sites in question and its disposal in a suitable facility in the Republic of Ireland. In parallel, officials from my Department have been involved in discussions with officials from the Department for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government over the last few months aimed at resolving the remaining issues surrounding the scope of the work, the methodology to be employed and the apportionment of costs.

I hope that the remaining issues can be resolved within the next month which will allow the contract procurement to proceed. The procurement is required to be carried under the EU Open Tendering process. It is therefore anticipated that it will be some 4-5 months before work on site commences.

Unlicensed Vehicles

Mr M Brady asked the Minister of the Environment how many cars were clamped and impounded in the crack down on unlicensed vehicles at the start of January 2009. (AQO 1895/09)

Minister of the Environment: From the start of the operation against unlicensed vehicles, "Operation Evader" on 5 January 2009 up to 15 January 2009, 328 unlicensed vehicles were clamped. Of these, 32 were removed to a vehicle pound.

Road Deaths

Mr W Clarke asked the Minister of the Environment to outline any new proposals to ensure the trend in the reduction of road deaths continues. (AQO 1896/09)

Minister of the Environment: Progress over the six years since the introduction of the road safety strategy has been significant. I recently announced the lowest annual road death total since records began in 1931. Provisional figures for 2008 show that 106 people were killed on our roads. But this is still far too many and I will continue to seek ways of further reducing the appalling human and economic costs involved.

To maintain momentum, I intend to bring forward a new road safety strategy for introduction in 2010, two years in advance of the original timescale for conclusion of the current strategy.

Of course, this does not prevent us from moving ahead with new initiatives that can make a difference now, and I announced in November my intention to consult on the drink drive limit and random breath testing and that will begin shortly.

In December 2008, I announced the introduction of a new motorcycle manoeuvres test and now anyone wishing to obtain a full motorcycle licence has to demonstrate their competence to a more demanding standard by completing this assessment as well as the theory and on-road tests.

A new qualification for people wishing to become professional bus and coach drivers was introduced in September 2008. Anyone wishing to become a professional bus or coach driver must now secure a driver certificate of professional competence. From September 2009 this qualification will also be required by lorry and heavy goods vehicle drivers. This requirement will also include coach and truck drivers coming to Northern Ireland, as equivalent arrangements are introduced across Europe.

I hope to have the mutual recognition of driving disqualifications between the UK and Ireland operational by April 2009. This will mean that drivers resident in Ireland or in GB, disqualified from driving for an offence committed here, will also be disqualified when they return home - and vice versa.

Compulsory basic training for learner motorcycle riders will require learners to undertake basic training before riding a motorcycle on the public road and will introduce an approved motorcycle instructor register. The Driver & Vehicle Agency will be working on this initiative during 2009 and when work has sufficiently progressed I will announce when it will be introduced.

I plan to consult on graduated penalties that reflect the level of traffic or roadworthiness offences, collecting deposits from offenders who do not have a UK address for future proceedings and empowering DVA to issue fixed penalty notices in respect of many of the offences they are charged with enforcing.

Road safety promotional and information campaigns will continue throughout 2009 using traditional methods such as television, radio, cinema and posters. I will also explore increasing our use of newer technologies such as online games environments and social networking sites.

Transition Committees

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the difficulties in establishing the composition of transition committees, what action he intends to take to ensure this problem is resolved prior to the committees being given statutory authority. (AQO 1897/09)

Minister of the Environment: I have asked the Policy Development Panel that is developing proposals on the governance arrangements for the councils post 2011 to bring forward proposals in relation to governance arrangements for the statutory transition committees. I have also asked the Panel to let me have their views on whether the representation on statutory transition committees should reflect the relative size of the constituent councils rather than the current arrangement whereby they have equal representation.

Energy Efficiency Rating of Buildings

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the energy efficiency rating of buildings that are under the control of his Department. (AQO 1898/09)

Minister of the Environment: Some 20 buildings, under the control of my Department, fall within scope of the Display Energy Certificate (DEC) Scheme. The summary breakdown is:

Dec Rating	Number of Buildings
C	1
D	2
E	1
F	1
G	15

I would be happy to provide the member with a full list of the buildings involved and of their individual DEC rating.

Planning Reform

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on planning reform. (AQO 1899/09)

Minister of the Environment: Subject to securing agreement from the Executive later this month, I hope to publish a detailed public consultation paper outlining my proposals for reform of the planning system in early February. The wide-ranging reforms aim to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning system and to ensure that it provides transparency in decision-making and gives confidence to its users.

If the public consultation process indicates broad support for the proposals then significant change will be required for all stakeholders in the planning system. For those reforms requiring legislative change, our PSA commitment is to bring forward the relevant legislation by March 2011. However, we will of course continue to make non-legislative process improvements wherever possible in advance of 2011, such as the very successful streamlined council consultation arrangements, with the aim of having a more immediate impact on improving operational performance. Action is also underway to address the recommendations of the recent Performance Efficiency and Delivery Unit (PEDU) review of the Planning Service, which focused specifically on the processing of applications.

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Civil Service

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number of new IT projects being developed across the Civil Service; (ii) the purpose of each project; and (iii) the anticipated cost of each project. (AQW 3478/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr N Dodds): The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) is currently developing 65 IT projects. This does not include projects currently underway within NDPB'S, notably health and education.

A list of these projects in Departmental order, together with their purpose and anticipated cost, has been placed in the Library.

Quasi Non-Governmental Organisations

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people were employed by quasi non-governmental organisations in the third quarter of 2008 compared to the third quarter of 2007. (AQW 3700/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: For the purpose of this question, all public bodies sponsored by Northern Ireland departments, which are listed in the annual public bodies report are included. These reports can be accessed at www.dfpni.gov.uk/index/delivery-and-innovation/did-publications.htm.

The information is as follows:

Number of staff employed at 31 December 2007 - 105,493

Number of staff employed at 31 December 2008 – 107,361

Construction Employers Federation

Mr B Armstrong asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what assessment has been made of the estimate by the Construction Employers Federation that 20,000 jobs will be lost in 2009. (AQW 3772/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The unemployment figures, published by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), confirm that the claimant count for the construction sector has increased from 4,775 in December 2007 to 9,115 in December 2008, an increase of 4,340 (90.89%) over the period. The most significant increase occurred during the months of November and December 2008 when the claimant count increased by 2,025. The claimant figures published on the Construction Employers Federation (CEF) website on the 5 December 2008 are consistent with the official DETI statistics through to October 2008 with the CEF estimate for December 2008 at 8,000 being lower than the DETI figure of 9,115.

The CEF bulletin of the 5 December 2008 forecasts that the claimant count in the construction sector will rise to 10,000 by the summer of 2009. CEF has estimated that, taking particular characteristics of the construction workforce into account, the total number of jobs lost could rise to 20,000 by the end of 2009. These characteristics include reduced hours of working resulting from lower workloads, the extent of self employment, migrant workers returning home, local workers choosing to work overseas and those opting for employment in other relatively low skilled sectors.

However, DETI has advised that the economic forecasts, produced by Oxford Economics for DETI and the Economic Development Forum in November 2008, which indicated that overall employment in Northern Ireland could fall by 12,000 in 2009 are currently being updated to take account of recent economic developments. The updated economic forecast from Oxford Economics will be available in early March 2009.

The importance of the construction industry to the NI economy cannot be understated and I share the industry's concerns regarding the downturn. The impact of job losses and the credit crunch touches us all in some way. During the latter part of last year I met the CEF and other key stakeholders to hear at first hand the difficulties facing the construction industry.

Whilst the public sector in Northern Ireland is already a major investor in construction making a contribution in excess of 40% of the total spend, it is even more important in these difficult times that the public sector maximises the funds available for investment in our infrastructure.

Further to my statement to the Assembly on the 15 December 2008, Departments have indicated that over 60 projects, with an aggregated value in excess of £400 million, are either to be advertised before the end of this financial year or are already at various stages in the procurement process. In addition, Public Sector investment in infrastructure is set to continue to increase over the remaining years of the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland (ISNI) and will be in the order of £5 billion for the initial three year period of the Strategy, 2008 – 2011.

I am confident that the continued investment I have outlined will help to alleviate some of the employment difficulties currently facing the construction industry.

Salary Sacrifice Childcare Vouchers Scheme

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to the implementation of Salary Sacrifice Childcare Vouchers scheme for NICS employees, to outline (i) the cause for further delay in the implementation of the scheme; (ii) what has been communicated to staff on this matter; and (iii) when he considers the scheme will be implemented. (AQW 3908/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The scheme was launched on Monday 19 January and those staff who are eligible and wish to do so may now avail of it. The first vouchers will be available along with the February pay.

Although non-industrial payroll went live in November, it was not possible to launch the childcare voucher scheme at the same time until further work had been done to assess the implications of new guidance issued by HM Revenue and Customs. This now classifies childcare vouchers as non-cash benefits and as such they must continue to be paid during periods of un-paid maternity and paternity leave.

Staff were given details of how the scheme would operate in September to enable them to consider if the scheme would be suitable for them.

Salary Sacrifice Childcare Vouchers Scheme

Mr D Ford asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel in relation to the Salary Sacrifice Childcare Vouchers scheme for NICS employees, (i) what is the cause of the further delay in its implementation; (ii) to state what has been communicated to his staff; and (iii) to state when he considers the scheme will be implemented. (AQW 3965/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The scheme was launched on Monday 19 January and those staff who are eligible and wish to do so may now avail of it. The first vouchers will be available along with the February pay.

Although non-industrial payroll went live in November, it was not possible to launch the childcare voucher scheme at the same time until further work had been done to assess the implications of new guidance issued by HM Revenue and Customs. This now classifies childcare vouchers as non-cash benefits and as such they must continue to be paid during periods of un-paid maternity and paternity leave.

Staff were given details of how the scheme would operate in September to enable them to consider if the scheme would be suitable for them.

Civil Service

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what the impact will be of his decision to remove the retirement age limit of 65 for civil servants. (AQW 3975/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The removal of the default age of retirement of 65 is considered to have already provided significant benefits to the NICS by giving staff a wider choice of when to retire to suit their own personal circumstances and allowing management to avail of the opportunity to retain experienced staff. It also demonstrates the commitment of the NICS to encourage and promote age diversity in its workforce and reflects the value placed by the NICS on the skills, experience and potential of all staff, regardless of age.

At 1 October 2008, there were 40 staff aged 65 and over employed across the eleven NI Departments and their Agencies, 0.16% of staff in post. This compares with a figure of 16 staff, at 1 October 2007, which was 0.06% of NICS staff in post at that date. Civil servants had been able to work past the age of 65 since 1 October 2006, under interim arrangements requiring management approval.

It is anticipated that numbers of staff choosing to work beyond age 65 will continue to be relatively low as a percentage of the overall workforce.

Salary Sacrifice Childcare Vouchers Scheme

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel in relation to the Salary Sacrifice Childcare Vouchers scheme for NICS employees, (i) what is the cause of the further delay in its implementation; (ii) to state what has been communicated to staff; and (iii) to state when he considers the scheme will be implemented. (AQW 4003/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The scheme was launched on Monday 19 January and those staff who are eligible and wish to do so may now avail of it. The first vouchers will be available along with the February pay.

Although non-industrial payroll went live in November, it was not possible to launch the childcare voucher scheme at the same time until further work had been done to assess the implications of new guidance issued by HM Revenue and Customs. This now classifies childcare vouchers as non-cash benefits and as such they must continue to be paid during periods of un-paid maternity and paternity leave.

Staff were given details of how the scheme would operate in September to enable them to consider if the scheme would be suitable for them.

Childcare Salary Sacrifice Scheme

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what progress has been made in getting the NICS to implement the Childcare Salary Sacrifice Scheme; and when is it anticipated that staff in all Departments will be able to avail of it. (AQW 4035/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The scheme was launched on Monday 19 January and those staff who are eligible and wish to do so may now avail of it. Staff were informed by e-mail and detailed information and applications forms are available on the HRConnect portal. The first vouchers will be available along with the February pay.

It is not possible to accurately predict the number of staff who will use the scheme as staff were not surveyed about their intentions. However, the voucher provider company who is operating the scheme for the NICS estimates that up to 10% of staff will have joined the scheme by the end of its first year of operation. This is based on their experiences with other employers and equates to around 3,000 staff in the NICS.

Childcare Salary Sacrifice Scheme

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps are being taken by his Department to ensure that NICS staff are able to access the Childcare Salary Sacrifice Scheme. (AQW 4036/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The scheme was launched on Monday 19 January and those staff who are eligible and wish to do so may now avail of it. Staff were informed by e-mail and detailed information and applications forms are available on the HRConnect portal. The first vouchers will be available along with the February pay.

It is not possible to accurately predict the number of staff who will use the scheme as staff were not surveyed about their intentions. However, the voucher provider company who is operating the scheme for the NICS estimates that up to 10% of staff will have joined the scheme by the end of its first year of operation. This is based on their experiences with other employers and equates to around 3,000 staff in the NICS.

Childcare Salary Sacrifice Scheme

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his estimate of the number of NICS staff who would want to avail of the Childcare Salary Sacrifice Scheme and cannot at present. (AQW 4037/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The scheme was launched on Monday 19 January and those staff who are eligible and wish to do so may now avail of it. Staff were informed by e-mail and detailed information and applications forms are available on the HRConnect portal. The first vouchers will be available along with the February pay.

It is not possible to accurately predict the number of staff who will use the scheme as staff were not surveyed about their intentions. However, the voucher provider company who is operating the scheme for the NICS estimates that up to 10% of staff will have joined the scheme by the end of its first year of operation. This is based on their experiences with other employers and equates to around 3,000 staff in the NICS.

Civil Service

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what method the Civil Service uses to monitor and control long term sick leave. (AQW 4086/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Long term sickness absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service is defined as 20 consecutive working days or more. Such absences are closely monitored by individual Departments. Information including trend data, costs and performance against departmental and corporate targets are reported on a regular basis to Departmental and Agency Boards, Ministers and the relevant Assembly Committees.

The control of long term absence is built around a number of interventions such as the Occupational Health Service and involvement of welfare services, provision of an Employee Assistance Programme as well as provision for dismissal under the Inefficiency procedures or for Early Retirement on Medical Grounds.

Civil Service

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service have been dismissed due to poor performance, in each of the last five years. (AQW 4119/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The information requested is provided in the table below. The data sourced is for each of the last five financial years. Figures presented include both industrial and non-industrial permanent staff in the eleven Ministerial Departments and their respective Executive Agencies.

2007/08	2006/07	2005/06	2004/05	2003/04
3	3	0	2	3

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many deaths have there been due to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, in each of the last three years. (AQW 4229/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: In Northern Ireland in the years 2005, 2006 and 2007 respectively, there were two, one and four deaths due to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome^{1, 2} registered in Northern Ireland.

Mortality data for the 2007 registration year is the latest data available. Data for 2008 is currently being finalised and will be available in March 2009.

¹ International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision code R95.

² Only infants aged less than one year old are included.

Elderly Population

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the projected increase of the elderly population in the North Down area. (AQW 4345/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The table below shows the mid-year population estimate for persons of current pensionable age for North Down Local Government District for 2006 and the 2006-based population projections for the years 2011, 2016 and 2021 along with the projected increase since 2006.

Year	Pensionable Aged Population ¹	Projected increase since 2006
2006 (Estimated)	15,800	
2011 (Projected)	17,900	13.4%
2016 (Projected)	19,800	25.3%
2021 (Projected)	21,800	38.1%

¹ The mid-year population estimates and population projections are generally quoted in rounded form, this is because population counts from the census and subsequent updates involving births, deaths and migration cannot be precise. In general the precision of the population estimates could be considered to be no better than to the nearest 100.

Transfer of Civil Servants

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what measures are in place to accommodate the transfer of civil servants between the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the equivalent services in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. (AQW 4369/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Northern Ireland civil servants who wish to 'transfer' to the Home Civil Service can do so by applying to individual UK Departments or Agencies. It is up to the relevant Department to determine if the application can be accommodated.

Under the NI Civil Service Commissioners' Recruitment Code, as an exception to the merit principle, persons can be transferred to the NICS from another Civil Service of the Crown on exceptional grounds. This exception should be used rarely and Departments must justify why it is not reasonably practicable to make the appointment in question in accordance with the merit principle. Such applications from Home Civil Servants are considered, in the first instance, by my officials in Central Personnel Group.

There are no arrangements in place for the transfer of staff between the the NICS and the civil service in the Republic of Ireland.

Civil Service

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the full extent of exceptions to the Merit Principle that may be available under Section A11 of the recruitment code of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. (AQW 4370/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Regulation 3 of the General Regulations 2005 permits appointments to be made other than in accordance with the Merit Principle in the following circumstances:

- (a) Appointment on secondment;
- (b) Transfers of persons into the NICS where the person holds a situation in another Civil Service of the Crown;
- (c) Transfers of persons into the NICS where the person is employed on functions being transferred to the Crown;
- (d) Where the person to be appointed is of proven distinction and there are exceptional reasons, justified by the needs of the NICS;
- (e) Appointments made under Government initiatives/programmes; and
- (f) Where the person has previously held a situation in the Civil Service and resigned his/her post in order to compete for and undertake an elected office.

Lone Pensioner Allowance Scheme

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many awards have been made under the lone pensioner allowance scheme in the last year, broken down by Council area. (AQW 4394/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Land & Property Services has made 17,204 awards under the Lone Pensioner Allowance Scheme since 1 April 2008. A break-down of the number of awards made in each district council area is set out in the attached table.

Awards of LPA for ratepayers in the social and private rented sectors are made by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and are not included in the figures.

Council Area	Number of Awards made
Antrim	401
Ards	876
Armagh	501
Ballymena	681
Ballymoney	235
Banbridge	328
Belfast	3,198
Carrickfergus	457
Castlereagh	1,216
Coleraine	723
Cookstown	187
Craigavon	639
Derry	561
Down	624
Dungannon & South Tyrone	313
Fermanagh	522
Larne	399
Limavady	176
Lisburn	1,160
Magherafelt	204
Moyle	170
Newry & Mourne	579
Newtownabbey	1,018
North Down	1,503
Omagh	339
Strabane	194
Total	17,204

Additional Rates

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number and total value of additional rates demanded from properties that have been listed in error as being vacant but were identified as being occupied as a result of monitoring by local government during 2008/2009, broken down by council area. (AQW 4400/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The inspection of property recorded as vacant but identified as occupied during the recent inspection exercise had, at 23 January 2009, resulted in the following rate bills being issued:

Council Area	Bills Issued	Total (£)
Antrim	110	268,735
Ards	137	215,373
Armagh	256	290,212
Ballymena	151	361,776
Ballymoney	0	0
Banbridge	141	141,283
Belfast	566	1,439,750
Carrickfergus	134	139,620
Castlereagh	154	182,232
Coleraine	47	75,773
Cookstown	111	272,484
Craigavon	29	23,709
Down	199	323,369
Dungannon	4	8,825
Fermanagh	374	602,866
Larne	2	2,023
Limavady	0	0
Lisburn	398	464,530
Derry	207	481,433
Magherafelt	0	0
Moyle	70	57,446
Newry	22	18,200
Newtownabbey	268	834,164
North Down	189	190,894
Omagh	164	256,400
Strabane	176	193,434
Total	3,909	6,836,646

Magherafelt District Council chose not to participate in the inspection exercise; Land & Property Services is currently making arrangements to complete vacancy inspections in this area. The 25 councils which are participating have returned forms in batches, with some returns only having been recently received by Land & Property Services. This has resulted in the processing of some council areas being more advanced than others.

Almost all forms which contain all information required for billing have been actioned by Land & Property Services. Processing of forms is continuing, with a significant number of Land & Property Services staff involved in accessing the additional information required for billing. The continuing exercise will result in further bills being issued.

Procurement System

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of recent successful court actions by businesses in relation to major government procurement projects in construction, what action he is taking to ensure that the procurement system is fit for purpose. (AQO 1901/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel:

The EU procurement regime, described by the Directives and Regulations, is not static. It is subject to change, driven by evolving European and domestic case law, European Commission communications, new and revised Directives and amendments to the existing UK Regulations.

In order to ensure that the procurement system is fit for purpose, the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) continuously reviews and updates its procedures in line with Office of Government Commerce guidance and the developing field of public procurement law.

Through the Construction Industry Forum for NI - Procurement Task Group, officials are working with key representatives of the Construction Industry Group to examine how modern methods of construction procurement can be taken forward in Northern Ireland in a way that mitigates the potential for litigation.

Capital Building and Infrastructure Programmes

Mr D Burnside asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what capital building and infrastructure programmes have been postponed from this financial year to the next financial year. (AQO 1906/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel:

A programme typically represents a group of related projects. I have been advised that no capital building and infrastructure programmes have been postponed.

However, 22 individual capital building and infrastructure projects have been postponed from this financial year to the next financial year: These include:

- Department of Education – 5 projects
- Department for Regional Development – 9 projects
- Department for Social Development – 4 projects
- Department of Finance and Personnel – 1 project
- Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure – 1 projects
- Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – 2 projects

The project spend postponed, totaling £43.7m, represents a very small proportion of the total capital investment of £1.5bn expected this financial year.

A further seven projects, which were to be postponed, are now scheduled to commence the procurement process this financial year. They include five schools at over £27m.

Large construction projects have lengthy lead-in times involving careful planning, procurement and management. Postponement or delay may be caused by various factors including the need for revisions to project requirements, business cases, planning applications and/or challenges to the procurement process.

Capital Investment

Mrs C Hanna asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans he has to bring forward the permitted capital of £9.4 million into the 2008/09 financial year. (AQO 1907/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I can confirm to the Member that as part of the recent December Monitoring Round the Executive agreed to avail of the opportunity from the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Pre-Budget Report to accelerate £9.4 million of capital investment from 2010-11 into the 2008-09 financial year.

This additional funding for 2008-09 was included in the overall amount of funding available for allocation as part of December monitoring which incorporated the Executive's response to the downturn in economic conditions.

However, Members will be aware that as this capital investment was accelerated, the equivalent amount will be deducted from our Block Grant for 2010-11.

Social Housing Sector

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the current economic downturn, what plans he has to revise the priorities set out in the Budget and to redirect expenditure towards social housing to help offset the collapse in private sector house building. (AQO 1908/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The expenditure plans for Northern Ireland departments over the period 2008-09 to 2010-11 were developed on the basis of the priorities set out in the Programme for Government which was agreed by the Executive in January 2008.

The Programme for Government highlights growing the economy as the Executive's top priority which is even more appropriate in the context of the current global economic downturn.

The Executive is committed to reviewing the Programme for Government on an ongoing basis as the underlying economic and social circumstances change.

However the priorities set out in the current Programme for Government remain valid in the current economic context.

Economic Downturn

Lord Browne asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what contact he has had or intends to have with the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer in relation to the current economic downturn. (AQO 1909/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have, over recent months, had several engagements with the Prime Minister and Chancellor on a range of financial and economic issues affecting Northern Ireland. I have also met with the Northern Ireland Minister of State to discuss the state of the local economy. This meeting was initiated to allow our local economic concerns to be fed directly into the National Economic Council, which is chaired by the Prime Minister.

My officials also continue to liaise with their HM Treasury and BERR colleagues on the local impact of UK-wide measures to assist the economy. This means that the Executive's policy measures will complement the national financial and economic policy initiatives.

Barnett Consequentials

Mr D Ford asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to report on the level of Barnett consequentials that have come to the Executive as a result of additional spending by the UK Government to combat the economic downturn. (AQO 1910/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Although the Government's response to the economic downturn was one of the main features of the Chancellor's Pre-Budget Report last November it is not possible to identify separately the resultant Barnett consequentials which were as a result of additional spending by the UK Government to combat the economic downturn.

However, I can report that the Northern Ireland Executive did receive £23.6 million in additional current expenditure Barnett consequentials and £3.3 million in respect of capital investment as a consequence of the announcements in the Pre-Budget Report.

In addition, the Executive was also provided with the option of accelerating £86.2 million of capital investment from 2010-11 into 2008-09 and 2009-10.

Regional Economic Strategy

Mrs N Long asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to report on the status of the Regional Economic Strategy. (AQO 1911/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have decided that work on an economic strategy for Northern Ireland needs to fully reflect key policy reviews currently underway within the Executive. The recent announcement by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment commissioning a fundamental review of economic development policy is a material issue that any economic strategy will need to embrace.

The revised strategy will also have to reflect the review of the Programme for Government goals relating to economic growth.

An inter-departmental steering group has been established to take forward work on this strategy, reflecting these key policy assessments and updates.

Public Sector

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what progress has been made by the public sector in meeting the target of paying invoices within ten days. (AQO 1912/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I think it is very important, in these difficult times that we take whatever steps we can to assist businesses in Northern Ireland. That is why I announced on 28 November 2008 a target of ensuring that all valid invoices are paid within 10 days.

It is too early to provide meaningful statistics but all departments have confirmed that they are taking steps to ensure that payments are made more promptly. Account NI, the new financial shared service centre which already includes 6 departments, has changed its normal application of payment terms. Payments which are ready for issue will be paid immediately, rather than waiting for normal terms.

Executive's Response to the Economic Downturn

Mr T Lunn asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what assessment he has made of the Executive's response to the economic downturn compared to other neighbouring jurisdictions. (AQO 1913/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The economic challenges confronting Northern Ireland are no different to those that exist in neighbouring economies. Indeed, Northern Ireland may be in a more favourable position than some of those economies because of factors such as the retail stimulus from increased cross border shopping as well as the relative size of our public sector.

However, the Executive has announced a range of additional measures to assist local businesses and consumers through the economic downturn. These measures complement the UK-wide initiatives announced by the Chancellor in his Pre-Budget Report and recently by the Business Secretary Lord Mandelson.

I am confident that the actions taken by the Executive, in combination with those by the UK Government, will help the local economy through this difficult time.

Procurement Task Group

Mr N McCausland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what progress has been made in relation to the Procurement Task Group. (AQO 1914/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I announced the establishment of the Construction Industry Forum - Procurement Task Group in my statement to the Assembly on the 15 December 2008.

The Procurement Task Group held its inaugural meeting on the 17 December 2008 and met again on the 7 and 21 January 2009. It will continue to meet at two weekly intervals until the end of March 2009. The Task Group will report to the next meeting of the Construction Industry Forum in April and to the Procurement Board, of which I am the Chair, in May 2009.

The Procurement Task Group is Chaired by the Director of the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD).

The Construction Industry is represented by nominees of the various colleges of the Construction Industry Group for Northern Ireland (CIGNI) which includes contractors, specialist sub-contractors, construction professionals and suppliers.

The public sector is represented by senior officials from various Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs) involved in construction procurement.

In order that the construction industry can plan for the deal flow, Departments have, through the Procurement Task Group, provided the Construction Industry Group with a comprehensive list of all projects that are to be advertised before the end of this financial year or are already at various stages in the procurement process.

The Task Group has made good progress on ensuring that those projects that are scheduled to move forward to the market place before the end of this financial year are progressing.

Through a partnership approach, the Task Group aims to develop practical procurement solutions that comply with NI Procurement Policy and, in so far as is practicable, meet the needs of the construction industry and the NI economy.

Providers of Business Insurance

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he has met with providers of business insurance to local businesses. (AQO 1915/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I have not held any meetings with providers of business insurance to local companies since my appointment in June 2008.

Social Housing Sector

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel if he will ensure that people renting from the social housing sector who meet the criteria for a green rates rebates will be eligible for this rebate. (AQO 1916/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: As the member will be aware I recently announced my intention to introduce two new schemes in April 2010 aimed at prompting householders to act in a more environmentally sustainable way. Under the energy efficiency scheme, a rates rebate will be available to owner occupiers who install cavity wall or loft insulation in their homes. The other scheme will allow the first residents of zero carbon homes to enjoy a rates exemption for up to five years and additionally, in response to the outcomes of the consultation carried out last year, the first residents of low carbon homes to enjoy a rates exemption for up to two years.

I understand that the Committee for Finance and Personnel were briefed on these new schemes, and other new rating policies to be included in the forthcoming Rates Amendment Bill, on 7 January this year. During that session, some members reiterated concerns about the decision not to extend the energy efficiency rates rebate scheme to tenants in the social rented sector. I also understand that information on the outcomes of further consultation that was conducted with key stakeholders on this issue following an earlier Committee session was requested and subsequently provided by my officials. This reflected the significant practical difficulties highlighted by organisations, such as the Northern Ireland Housing Association, the Energy Savings Trust and the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations, if the scheme were to be extended to the social sector.

Mindful of these difficulties and the different circumstances applying to the social rented sector, I have concluded that the energy efficiency rates rebate scheme should align with other similar schemes available in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, all of which do not include social sector tenants within their rebate. This is also consistent with the fact that the Housing Executive and housing associations already have policies in place to ensure that their properties are insulated to a high standard which is reflected in the much lower numbers of properties in those sectors without cavity wall or loft insulation compared with the owner-occupied sector.

That said, should circumstances change, for example should other similar schemes be extended in the future, I want to ensure that the legislation bringing in this new scheme is sufficiently flexible to allow us to follow suit if this is considered appropriate at the time. The Committee will have the opportunity to scrutinise this legislation later this year.

Civil Service

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what progress has been made on the Civil Service equal pay claim. (AQO 1917/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Engagement with Trade Union Side is ongoing with a view to reaching a negotiated settlement on the equal pay issue as soon as possible.

Whilst mindful of the need to ensure a fair deal for the civil servants affected, the impact on public expenditure must be minimised. Due to the complexities involved, achieving a negotiated resolution of any equal pay claims may take some time.

Civil Service

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what measures he is introducing to reduce the amount of money spent by civil servants on travel. (AQO 1918/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: It is not within my Department's remit to police how all public servants travel, however, there are plans to review the travel and subsistence policies in the coming year. The review will look for cost effective solutions that not only reduce costs, but also maintain employee productivity across all Northern Ireland Civil Service departments. Pending the review, all staff have been reminded of the travel policies' requirement to ensure that the most cost effective method of travel is used.

Programme for Government

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the current economic downturn, what plans he has to revise the priorities set out in the Budget. (AQO 1919/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The expenditure plans for Northern Ireland departments over the period 2008-09 to 2010-11 were developed on the basis of the priorities set out in the Programme for Government which was agreed by the Executive in January 2008.

The Programme for Government highlights growing the economy as the Executive's top priority which is even more appropriate in the context of the current global economic downturn.

The Executive is committed to reviewing the Programme for Government on an ongoing basis as the underlying economic and social circumstances change.

However the priorities set out in the current Programme for Government remain valid in the current economic context.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Fire and Rescue Service

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail the Fire and Rescue Service cover that is proposed to be removed in each parliamentary constituency; (ii) how the proposed cuts were decided; and (iii) what consultation there was with those affected by the cuts. (AQW 2195/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): The deployment of fire and rescue resources is a matter for the Chief Fire Officer and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service Board. Like all public bodies in Northern Ireland, the Fire and Rescue Service is committed to meeting the Executive's required efficiency target of 3% per annum between 2008/09 and 2010/11. These efficiencies will not affect the quality or effectiveness of fire and rescue services to the public.

A review of Second Pumping Appliances at 12 Fire Stations was included in a public consultation which resulted in a recommendation to remove the second pumping appliance from Portstewart Fire Station. A further public consultation on that recommendation is under way.

The Service has also consulted publicly on proposals to review the locations of fire stations and resources in the Belfast area, taking into account stations on the periphery of Belfast and emergency response standards. Work continues on that review and any further proposals on emergency response cover in the Belfast area will be subject to further public consultation as appropriate. In the interim, cover for the Dunmurry area between the hours of 11.00am and 11.00pm has been enhanced. Emergency cover has also been enhanced in a number of areas outside Belfast through the introduction of variable wholetime crewing. In addition, I recently announced an investment of £168 million over the next ten years to enhance services right across the Province.

Pain Clinics

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the waiting lists for referrals to pain clinics are increasing; and what proposals his Department will bring forward to reduce the waiting lists. (AQW 2198/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Pain management services are provided either as an inpatient or an outpatient service depending on clinical need. Challenging targets have been set in both areas and performance is monitored under the normal elective care access targets. The maximum waiting time from April 2008, for a first outpatient appointment is 13 weeks and for inpatient/daycase treatment is 21 weeks. These waiting times will be further reduced to 9 weeks and 13 weeks respectively by March 2009.

I am not aware of any recent breaches of these current maximum waiting time targets in this area.

Donemana Health Centre

Mr A Bresland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made in the establishment of the Donemana Health Centre. (AQW 3893/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The GP practice in Donemana is currently in the process of purchasing the site for the new Health Centre.

They have already secured planning permission for the new premises and the bids from contractors to undertake the building work are currently being evaluated.

Services for the Elderly

Mr E Poots asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the proposed closures of homes for the elderly by the Health and Social Care Trusts, what are the overall targets (i) set by his Department for saving services for the elderly; and (ii) for the number of closures of Homes for the elderly. (AQW 3920/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Efficiency Targets were set relative to the turnover of the Trusts. No specific central target was set for any patient group, type of institution or programme of care.

Postage Costs for Health and Social Care Trusts

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety the cost of postage for each Health and Social Care Trust in the last financial year. (AQW 3930/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer I gave to AQW 3530/09.

Energy Costs for Health and Social Care Trusts

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what are the energy costs for each Health and Social Care Trust in the last financial year. (AQW 3931/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer I gave to AQW 3211/09.

Bonuses Paid by Health and Social Care Trusts

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any bonuses paid by any Health and Social Care Trusts in the last financial year. (AQW 3932/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the member to the answer I gave to AQW 2987/09.

Ravara House Residential Home

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what savings would be made by the proposed closure of the Ravara House residential home by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 3933/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the Member to the answer I gave to AQW 3333/09

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what buildings or land sales are the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust planning to make. (AQW 3934/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust plans to sell the following buildings and land, which will contribute towards my Department's sales target of £95m in the current budget period:

- Appletree House, 100 Bridge St, Downpatrick
- The Banks Elderly People's Home, Groomspoint, Bangor (Bayview)
- Downe Hospital site, 3 Pound Lane, Downpatrick
- Land at the Downshire Hospital.

However, given the downturn in the NI property market, the sales target of £95m is no longer considered achievable, and my Department is working with all Trusts to determine if additional lands or buildings can be identified as surplus to increase potential sales income.

Nursing Posts

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the reduction of the number of nursing posts by 700, as reported in the Irish News on Friday 10 October 2008. (AQW 3945/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Trust consultation exercises are underway in relation to the key proposals for the planned efficiency savings. Until this period of consultation is complete and final decisions have been taken, I am not in a position to make assessments on any reductions in the number of posts required.

Availability of Wheelchairs

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many wheelchairs are available to the Health and Social Care Trust for use in the Ards area; and how many are in use. (AQW 3971/09)

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

Children Registered with Speech Difficulties

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children are registered with speech, language and communication difficulties, in each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 3972/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information is not available in the format requested, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Lisgarel Care Home in Larne

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he became aware that there were proposals to close Lisgarel Care Home in Larne.

(AQW 3980/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I became aware of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust proposals for the future of a number of residential care homes, including Lisgarel House in Larne, with the launch of the Trust's public consultation on 8 January 2009.

Care in the Community in Larne

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much funding has been given for care in the community in the Larne area, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3981/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Health and Social Services Board has advised that figures are not available in the format requested prior to 2007/8. The table below outlines investment in community care in Larne for 2007/8 and 2008/9.

Year	Funding
2007/08	£17,063,000
2008/09	£17,674,000

Flu Inoculation

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many pensioners have received the flu inoculation, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 3986/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of people aged 65 and over who have received the flu vaccination in each of the last three years is as follows:

Year	2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
Number of 65+	178,242	166,068	185,395*
Uptake	75.1%	75.7%	74%*

* Interim figures (received at the end of December 2008)

St. John's Ambulance

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if it is common practice to use St. John's Ambulance instead of an emergency ambulance when transferring patients receiving cardiac treatment from one hospital to another.

(AQW 3992/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The type of vehicle required to transfer a patient requiring cardiac treatment between hospitals is a matter for the clinician who will take into account the individual patient's condition and the reason for the transfer. An emergency ambulance will not be required in

every case. Where it was considered necessary to use an emergency ambulance to perform a patient transfer between hospitals, a St John Ambulance vehicle would not be used.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many senior management positions there are in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 3997/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In April 2007, Down Lisburn HSS Trust and Ulster Community and Hospitals HSS Trust merged to form the new South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. At this time, the new Trust covered a population of some 336,185 individuals (Mid-year civilian population estimate 2007 – Source: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency).

As at March 2007, there were 66 (65.64 Whole-Time Equivalent) Senior Managers employed within the Trusts which amalgamated to form the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

As at January 2009, there are 41 (40.98 Whole-Time Equivalent) Senior Managers employed within the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

Senior Managers are defined as Managers who were third level management and above in this answer. Figures were supplied directly from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many senior management positions there were before the creation of the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 3998/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In April 2007, Down Lisburn HSS Trust and Ulster Community and Hospitals HSS Trust merged to form the new South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. At this time, the new Trust covered a population of some 336,185 individuals (Mid-year civilian population estimate 2007 – Source: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency).

As at March 2007, there were 66 (65.64 Whole-Time Equivalent) Senior Managers employed within the Trusts which amalgamated to form the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

As at January 2009, there are 41 (40.98 Whole-Time Equivalent) Senior Managers employed within the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

Senior Managers are defined as Managers who were third level management and above in this answer. Figures were supplied directly from the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

Residential Care Homes

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many residents would be affected by all proposed Health and Social Care Trusts closures of residential care homes. (AQW 3999/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: While the HSC is currently consulting on the future of a number of homes, no final decision on the future of those homes will be taken until full and proper consideration has been given to the views put forward in current ongoing public consultations. It is not possible to say, therefore, how many residents will be affected until such times as those final decisions are taken.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much was paid for overtime by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, for the last three years. (AQW 4000/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not held centrally. The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust would have to undertake a lengthy manual exercise to collate this information and this would lead to a disproportionate cost.

Maintenance in Hospitals and Health Centres

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any outstanding maintenance to be carried out in hospitals and health centres, highlighting work that has health and safety implications. (AQW 4005/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: This information is not held centrally.

Flu Inoculation

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the flu inoculation was available to all Health Service staff; and how many staff members received it. (AQW 4008/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Influenza immunisation is offered to all Health and Social Care Workers.

Trust	Total Number of HCW who have received flu vaccination
Belfast	1903
Northern	1200
South Eastern	623
Southern	1186
Western	761
Total	5673

Residential Care Homes

Mr E Poots asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much is being spent on supporting the elderly in residential care homes. (AQW 4010/09)

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

Care for the Elderly

Mr E Poots asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money is being spent on the care for the elderly in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust; and on how many residential care homes. (AQW 4011/09)

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

Residential Care Homes

Mr E Poots asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what has been the growth of expenditure on residential care homes in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area, in each of the last ten years. (AQW 4012/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below gives information on the growth of expenditure in residential care homes in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust from 2002-03 to 2006-07.

Information is not available for the years prior to 2002-03 and information for 2007-08 is not currently available.

EXPENDITURE ON RESIDENTIAL CARE HOMES IN THE SOUTHERN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE TRUST

Year	£000s	Growth £000
2002/03	14,876	
2003/04	15,683	807
2004/05	17,100	1,417
2005/06	18,413	1,313
2006/07	20,058	1,645

Expenditure on residential care homes in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust increased by 35% between 2002-03 and 2006-07.

Agenda for Change

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when reviews of Agenda for Change bandings will be completed in each Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 4044/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: With the exception of the Western HSC Trust all other HSC Trusts expect to have Agenda for Change reviews heard by June 2009. In the case of the Western Trust the process may take longer.

Role of Secretaries

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what are the respective roles of (i) a personal secretary; and (ii) medical secretary, and to highlight any aspects of their roles that distinguish them from each other. (AQW 4045/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is a matter for the Health and Social Care employer to decide on the role and function of any member of staff employed by them. The role of a personal secretary and medical secretary may differ across HSC Trusts as individuals employed in this capacity do not necessarily work to identical job descriptions. However, in general terms the role of (i) a personal secretary is to provide secretarial services to non-medical staff, to maintain records and liaise with other departments. Whereas the role of (ii) a medical secretary is to provide secretarial support to the Medical Consultant and junior medical staff, to assist in the organisation of the Medical Consultant's workload and to communicate appointment and admission related information to patients/carers.

Efficiency Savings

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what efficiency savings would be achieved by the Northern Health and Social Services Board for proposed residential home closures. (AQW 4053/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is difficult to make a reliable estimate of such a figure at this stage given that such proposals are subject to the outcome of consultation.

Efficiency Savings

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what efficiency savings would be achieved by the Southern Health and Social Services Board for proposed residential home closures. (AQW 4054/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is difficult to make an accurate estimate at the present time, given that these proposals are currently subject to consultation.

Efficiency Savings

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what efficiency savings would be achieved by the Western Health and Social Services Board for proposed residential home closures.

(AQW 4055/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is difficult to make a reliable estimate of such a figure at this stage given that such proposals are subject to the outcome of consultation. The Trust has provided estimates that the potential savings from the closure of elderly homes are in the region of £1.58m.

Efficiency Savings

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what efficiency savings would be achieved by the Belfast Health and Social Services Board for proposed residential home closures.

(AQW 4056/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Belfast Health and Social Services Trust is not consulting on the closure of specific residential homes.

Salary Bands

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans has he to have uniform salary bands across the five Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 4057/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have already introduced uniform pay bands across all Health and Social Care employers from October 2004 with the implementation of the Agenda for Change arrangements. It is a matter for individual HSC employers, in partnership with local staff representative groups, to decide which pay band is appropriate for a particular job.

Patient Deaths

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patient deaths were attributed to staff error, in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 4064/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The information requested is not collected either by my Department or by Health and Social Care organisations.

Equality and Diversity Impact Assessments

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) if Equality and Diversity Impact Assessments of the future of Loch Cuan House at the Westwinds in Newtownards have been completed; and (ii) what consideration was taken that the age of residents is 85 and above.

(AQW 4070/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The South Eastern Trust is currently consulting on the reform and modernisation of statutory residential care. An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the proposals which affect Loch Cuan, Ravara House in Bangor and Grove House in Ballynahinch. Consideration has been given to the impact on residents of all ages including those over 85 years of age who are the majority of residents in Loch Cuan. Trust staff will continue to meet with residents and their families/carers to arrange suitable care arrangements with a view to reducing any potential impact on residents.

Loch Cuan House

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he would consider maintaining Loch Cuan House and increasing the number of residents until the supported housing scheme is completed.

(AQW 4071/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Given that the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is currently consulting on the future of Loch Cuan House, it would be inappropriate of me to discuss alternative proposals at this time. No final decision on the future of Loch Cuan will be taken until such times as the Trust has given full and proper consideration to the outcome of its consultation.

Drug Use and Abortions

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he has with his counterparts in the rest of the United Kingdom on research that shows that a large percentage of women who have abortions turn to drugs and alcohol. (AQW 4072/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In Northern Ireland, the only grounds for a termination of pregnancy are where the continuance of the pregnancy threatens the life of the mother, or would adversely affect her physical or mental health. The adverse effect on her physical or mental health must be 'real and serious', and must also be 'permanent or long term'.

I have not held any discussions with my counterparts in the rest of the United Kingdom on research that shows that a large percentage of women who have abortions turn to drugs and alcohol.

Mental illness and Abortions

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if his Department has undertaken any research on the claim from research in Great Britain that people who have had abortions have an increased chance of suffering from mental illness. (AQW 4074/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has sought expert advice from the Royal College of Psychiatrists. They have advised that the current research evidence base is inconclusive. Some studies indicate no evidence of harm, whilst other, more recent studies, have indicated that termination of pregnancy could cause a range of mental disorders. They also indicated that mental disorders can occur for some women both during pregnancy and after birth.

In Northern Ireland, the only grounds for a termination of pregnancy are where the continuance of the pregnancy threatens the life of the mother, or would adversely affect her physical or mental health. The adverse effect on her physical or mental health must be 'real and serious', and must also be 'permanent or long term'.

Sick Leave for Staff

Mr D Hilditch asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what method the Health Service uses to monitor and control sick leave for staff. (AQW 4084/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Boards, Trusts and Agencies have a range of absence management policies in place which include such elements as accurate recording of absence, provision of Occupational Health and counselling support services, linking sick absence to the disciplinary procedure where appropriate and focus on rehabilitative practices.

Organisational Structure of the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the organisational structure of the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 4093/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

Organisational structures for each of the Health and Social Care Trusts are available on the respective Trust's internet site.

- Belfast HSC Trust www.belfasttrust.hscni.net;
- Northern HSC Trust www.northerntrust.hscni.net;
- Southern HSC Trust www.southerntrust.hscni.net;

- South Eastern HSC Trust www.southeasterntrust.hscni.net;
- Western HSC Trust www.westerntrust.hscni.net .

Organisational Structure of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the organisational structure of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 4094/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

Organisational structures for each of the Health and Social Care Trusts are available on the respective Trust's internet site.

- Belfast HSC Trust www.belfasttrust.hscni.net;
- Northern HSC Trust www.northerntrust.hscni.net;
- Southern HSC Trust www.southerntrust.hscni.net;
- South Eastern HSC Trust www.southeasterntrust.hscni.net;
- Western HSC Trust www.westerntrust.hscni.net .

Organisational Structure of the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the organisational structure of the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 4095/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

Organisational structures for each of the Health and Social Care Trusts are available on the respective Trust's internet site.

- Belfast HSC Trust www.belfasttrust.hscni.net;
- Northern HSC Trust www.northerntrust.hscni.net;
- Southern HSC Trust www.southerntrust.hscni.net;
- South Eastern HSC Trust www.southeasterntrust.hscni.net;
- Western HSC Trust www.westerntrust.hscni.net .

Organisational Structure of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the organisational structure of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 4097/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Organisational structures for each of the Health and Social Care Trusts are available on the respective Trust's internet site.

- Belfast HSC Trust www.belfasttrust.hscni.net;
- Northern HSC Trust www.northerntrust.hscni.net;
- Southern HSC Trust www.southerntrust.hscni.net;
- South Eastern HSC Trust www.southeasterntrust.hscni.net;
- Western HSC Trust www.westerntrust.hscni.net .

Babies Delivered by a Midwife

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average number of babies delivered by a midwife, in each of the last five years; and the recommended average determined by the Royal College of Midwives. (AQW 4104/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information is not available centrally to distinguish between babies delivered by a midwife and babies delivered by doctors; however a midwife will be present at every birth.

The Royal College of Midwives have endorsed the “birth-rate plus” workforce planning tool, which recommends an average of 29.5 births per whole time equivalent (WTE) midwife for hospital births, including all aspects of midwifery care in hospital and community.

Based on that calculation the average number of births per WTE midwife in Northern Ireland for the last five years is as follows:

Year	Births (Live and Still)	Average number of births per WTE midwife
2003/04	22,492	22.3
2004/05	23,025	22.9
2005/06	23,062	22.5
2006/07	24,266	24.3
2007/08	25,564	26.3

Older People Placed in Residential Care

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many older people have been placed in residential care, in each of the last three years by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, broken down by (i) statutory homes; and (ii) private/voluntary homes. (AQW 4105/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of older people placed in residential care, in each of the last three years by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT) is as follows:

2006/2007	
Statutory Sector	91 permanent admissions
	1,201 short term ¹ admissions
Private Sector	147 permanent admissions
2007/2008	
Statutory Sector	72 permanent admissions
	1,252 short term admissions
Private Sector	141 permanent admissions
2008/2009	
Statutory Sector	56 permanent admissions
	1,207 short term admissions
Private Sector	100 permanent admissions

¹ Please note short term admissions include admissions for Step Down from hospital for rehabilitation, assessment and convalescence, Step Up from Community to avoid hospital admission and respite admissions to relieve carers.

Residential Care in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money was spent by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust providing residential care in (i) statutory homes; and (ii) private residential homes, in each of the last three years; and the average cost of each placement. (AQW 4106/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The tables below gives information on how much money was spent by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust providing residential care in (i) statutory

homes; and (ii) private residential homes, and the average annual cost of each placement for 2005-06 and 2006-07. Information for 2007-08 is not currently available.

TABLE 1: ACTUAL EXPENDITURE ON INDEPENDENT AND STATUTORY RESIDENTIAL CARE, 2005-06 TO 2006-07

Sector	2005-06 Expenditure £'000	2006-07 Expenditure £'000
Independent Residential Homes	15,937	16,141
Statutory Residential Homes	17,183	17,187

TABLE 2: ESTIMATED ANNUAL COST OF PLACEMENT IN INDEPENDENT AND STATUTORY RESIDENTIAL CARE HOMES 2005-06 TO 2006-07

Sector	2005-06 Estimated annual cost (£)	2006-07 Estimated annual cost (£)
Independent Residential Homes	5,300	5,600
Statutory Residential Homes	8,600	8,900

Table 2 shows the gross annual cost to the Trust of providing the residential care; however some residents make payments towards this care in the form of Client Contributions

Neighbourhood Renewal

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many posts his Department will fund for neighbourhood renewal; and (ii) when a decision will be made regarding these posts. (AQW 4155/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is not possible to indicate how many posts this Department will fund for Neighbourhood Renewal. Consideration of health actions arising from Neighbourhood Renewal Plans is ongoing. This process includes detailed consideration of the substantial investment already being made by Health and Social Care organisations in many areas, and involves extensive dialogue with Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships and DSD offices to identify gaps and ways to meet those gaps. This consideration will also identify where there is potential for better connections and improved co-ordination across services, as well as the potential for additional investment and how that might be addressed.

For example, in relation to Belfast Neighbourhood Renewal Areas further meetings are to be held during February 2009 between Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships and representatives of Health and Social Care organisations to consider the range of resources going into these areas for health – related projects and take a more strategic view on priorities for funding for health initiatives. DHSSPS and the HSC is working closely with DSD on this issue.

Chief Executives of Health and Social Care Trusts

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what medical experience did each of the Chief Executives of the five Health and Social Care Trust possess prior to taking up their posts; and what training is available for them. (AQW 4160/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Trust Chief Executives are required to undertake demanding strategic leadership roles. The knowledge, skills and experience requirements for appointment has to be focused on leadership competences. Medical experience was not one of the essential experience criteria required for these appointments however, experience of leadership in a health or social care setting was included as a desirable criterion for short listing purposes.

Following appointment Trust Chief Executives have access to a range of leadership and development programmes designed to strengthen and maintain these leadership skills.

Urgent Care and Treatment Centres

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Urgent Care and Treatment Centres are in operation in the five Health and Social Care Trusts; and how many are operating without medical back up support. (AQW 4162/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The only Urgent Care and Treatment Centre in operation at present is located in the Tyrone County Hospital. This is a doctor-led service under the leadership of medical personnel who are responsible for the planning, management and governance of the service.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the capital budget of the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last five years. (AQW 4164/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust was formed on 1 April 2007 in line with the Review of Public Administration, following the amalgamation of the former Ulster Community and Hospitals Trust and Down Lisburn Trust.

The table below disaggregates budget allocations prior to 2007/08 by former trust name. Cumulative totals are also shown.

Year	2004/05 (£m)	2005/06 (£m)	2006/07 (£m)	2007/08 (£m)	2008/09 (£m)
South Eastern HSC Trust	N/A	N/A	N/A	50.485	54.131
Ulster Community & Hospitals Trust	15.808	23.587	25.287	N/A	N/A
Down Lisburn Trust	6.925	8.391	14.765	N/A	N/A
Totals	22.733	31.978	40.052	50.485	54.131

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what additional money is to be given to the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, over the next three years; and what advice has been given by his Department on how the money can be spent. (AQW 4165/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The allocation of resources to the four Area Boards is made on a capitation basis and subject to my approval. These resources are then used to commission services from Trusts. My Department does not allocate resources directly to Trusts.

The allocations are made within the context of the Ministerial commitments and targets set out in the final Executive Budget and the Executive's Priorities for Government 2008-2011. Resources are allocated to the Boards with my Department's Priorities for Action which clearly sets out the Department's overall aims, objectives and key targets which these resources are intended to deliver. Allocations will continue to be refined over the next three years as plans are further developed and services implemented in the South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust.

Ambulances

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 3982/09, how much of the £100m capital funding is earmarked for the ambulance station at Knockbracken Healthcare Park, South Belfast. (AQW 4177/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The additional capital investment which I announced on 1 October 2008 to modernise the ambulance service fleet, estate, equipment and IT infrastructure is subject to the normal public sector business case process. I expect the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) to

submit detailed business case proposals to my Department in due course; at this stage NIAS cannot be precise about how much will be spent on any individual station.

Ambulances

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 3984/09, what is the estimated time it would take for an ambulance leaving Comber to reach Ballygowan. (AQW 4179/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the Member to the answer I gave to AQW 3984/09.

Ambulances

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if there are any proposals to reduce the number of ambulance teams operating from Knockbracken Healthcare Park, South Belfast. (AQW 4180/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are no plans to reduce the number of ambulance resources operating from Knockbracken Healthcare Park.

Ambulances

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answer to AQW 3984/09, to state the locations of deployment points for ambulances in Carryduff and Comber. (AQW 4181/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The ambulance deployment point in Carryduff is at Carryduff Fire Station, Comber Road, Carryduff. The deployment point in Comber is at Comber Fire Station, Glen Link, Comber.

Eating Disorders

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many people have been referred by his Department to private clinics; (ii) to breakdown the total cost of treatment; and (iii) what is the approximate cost per patient, for the treatment of eating disorders, in each of the last five years. (AQW 4194/09)

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

Treatment programmes are specific to each case and will vary widely in duration and involvement of specialist staff. There is not, therefore, an approximate cost per patient and so average costs per patient have been provided.

Year	No's referred	Treatment Cost	Ave Cost /Patient
2004/05	6	£371,412	£61,902
2005/06	12	£579,082	£48,2257
2006/07	10	£513,451	£51,345
2007/08	17	£1,358,418	£79,907
2008/09 (to date)	18	£2,149,562	£119,420
Total	83	£6,781,830	£81,709

A Regional Eating Disorders Service, based in Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, deals with the management of complex cases and specialised medical and dietetics support for all four Health Boards.

The most complex cases, requiring intensive refeeding and support, are referred to specialist inpatient units in England.

Royal Victoria Hospital

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money he has allocated to the maternity hospital at the Royal Victoria Hospital, over the last five years. (AQW 4202/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Trust advises that from 2002/03 to 2007/08 £2.656m of capital funding was spent on the Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital. In addition a further £4.2m has been approved for interim works across both the Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital (RJMh) and the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children (RBHSC) sites of which £2.155m has already been spent up to the end of March 2008.

Financial returns indicate that the total annual running cost of services at the Jubilee site per annum was as follows for the years 2003/04 to 2006/07:

ROYAL MATERNITY

Patient Type/Service	2006/07	2005/06	2004/05	2003/04
Obstetrics	18,079,552	15,990,243	15,056,091	13,052,003
Gynaecology	5,294,387	5,667,919	5,993,748	4,371,705
Neonatal Intensive Care	5,879,404	5,416,613	5,323,499	4,345,373
Community Midwifery Services	1,452,645	1,333,565	1,403,497	1,301,757
Total	30,705,988	28,408,340	27,776,835	23,070,838

Note 2007/08 costs are not currently available as they are currently being quality assured. Community midwifery teams are based at the site, but provide a service in the community.

Source: Trust Annual Costing Returns.

Royal College of Midwives

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many times have midwives not followed the guidance given to them by the Royal College of Midwives for the delivery of babies, due to a lack of resources, including staffing levels. (AQW 4203/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Midwives and their managers are aware of the guidelines and standards expected of them in relation to patient care and safety. HSC Trusts need to be satisfied that the care provided by staff does not compromise patient safety. These operational issues are therefore the responsibility of the HSC Trusts. The Trusts have internal governance arrangements to fulfil this responsibility to the public and the Department. All midwives have access to a supervisor of midwives who provides support to them in ensuring a safe environment for the practice of midwifery.

Complaints to Health and Social Care Trusts

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many complaints were received by each Health and Social Care Trust; and (ii) how many were satisfactorily resolved, broken down by (a) year; and (b) Health and Social Trust Care area, in each of the last three years. (AQW 4263/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety:

(i) The following is the number of complaints received by each Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years:

HSC Trust	No of complaints received		
	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Belfast Trust	1762	2118	1793
South Eastern Trust	729	944	743
Northern Trust	1106	1895	1087

HSC Trust	No of complaints received		
	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Southern Trust	623	625	494
Western Trust	546	660	636
NI Ambulance Service	178	129	107
Total	4944	6371	4860

Source: Hospital Information Branch

(ii) The information is not available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Ambulances

Mr F Molloy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the average ambulance response time is to (i) Magherafelt; (ii) Cookstown; and (iii) Pomeroy, from Antrim Area Hospital.

(AQW 4270/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) does not have an ambulance station on the Antrim Area Hospital site. NIAS will dispatch the nearest available vehicle in response to emergency calls; ambulance stations are located in both Magherafelt and Cookstown.

NIAS does not employ average response times as a performance indicator. Ambulance performance is assessed against the current performance target to respond to 70% of category A (life-threatening) emergency calls within 8 minutes with performance in individual Health and Social Services Board areas being improved to at least 62.5% by March 2009.

Fixed Term Employment Contracts

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many civil servants at all grades in his Department, have been on a fixed term (temporary) contract for a period of over four years.

(AQW 4367/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: There are no civil servants in my Department who have been on a fixed term (temporary) contract for a period of over four years.

Fixed Term Employment Contracts

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he is aware of staff in his Department who have been on fixed term employment contracts for up to 17 years; and if he regards this as a breach of the Fixed-Term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002.

(AQW 4368/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am not aware of any staff in my Department who have been on fixed term employment contracts for up to 17 years.

Mullinure Hospital in Armagh

Mr W Irwin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many times patients at Mullinure Hospital in Armagh were held up for (i) one day; (ii) two days; (iii) three days; and (iv) four days, due to the unavailability of an ambulance to transport them to Armagh Community Hospital for diagnostic procedures.

(AQW 4422/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Southern Health and Social Care Trust have advised that in the last 3 month period there was one occasion where a patient had to wait for an ambulance to transport them to Armagh Community Hospital.

The patient required a non-urgent diagnostic procedure, although for clinical reasons an ambulance with a stretcher was required to transport the patient. There was a delay of four days before the transfer took place during which time the patient was kept fully informed. As the diagnostic procedure required was not urgent, the patient's care was not compromised by this delay however I very much regret the time taken to transfer this patient.

Cigarette Displays

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has to implement the UK Government decision ordering retail outlets in England and Wales to remove cigarette displays.

(AQW 4437/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I recently sought and obtained agreement from the Northern Ireland Executive to the extension of certain provisions within the Westminster Health Bill 2009 to Northern Ireland. These included provisions relating to a ban on the display of tobacco products at point of sale.

My next step will be to seek the agreement of the Assembly through means of a Legislative Consent Motion in early Spring 2009.

DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Express Commuter Trains

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development if there are any plans to introduce express commuter trains from Coleraine to Belfast after the track upgrade between Coleraine and Ballymena is complete.

(AQW 3974/09)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): At this time no non-stop Coleraine to Belfast services are envisaged, as the single line nature of the majority of this track leaves it difficult to mix express services with normal services. However it is expected that the planned service will take just over one hour.

Extending Footway at the North End of Cargan

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development if Roads Service will consider extending the footway at the north end of Cargan to the 30mph boundary and the final property in the village. (AQW 4076/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I understand that the 30 mph boundary, at the northern end of Cargan, is some distance from the last house, therefore, providing a footway to this extent would serve little purpose. It will be possible to extend the footway somewhat towards the last house at the northern end of the village, however, the extent of this work will be limited, due to the availability of land.

My Department's Roads Service has advised that a scheme to introduce traffic calming measures in Cargan has commenced, and that, as part of these works, the footway will be extended to the limit of the land available. This should prove to be of some benefit to pedestrians in this area.

20mph Speed Limits Outside Primary Schools

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the effectiveness of 20mph speed limits being introduced outside primary schools. (AQW 4077/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Two primary schools were selected for trials of 20mph variable speed limits. These were:

- Kilmoyle Primary School, Benvardin Road, Ballymoney; and
- Hazlett Primary School, Downhill Road, Articlave, Castlerock.

The schemes became operative on Monday 1 September 2008, and will be assessed by the PSNI and my Department's Roads Service over the full school year. However, initial observations indicate a reduction in speed of traffic on the approaches to, and through, the speed limit zones.

I understand the Principal, Governors and Parents of both schools have praised the trial schemes and commented on the significant speed reduction during the times of operation. The PSNI who fully supported the schemes, have also reported reductions in speed and have detected one speeding offence.

The results of the traffic monitoring assessment for both sites, for the first school term, will not be available until the end of January 2009. I have asked Roads Service to provide me with an assessment of the effectiveness of the trial schemes in reducing traffic speeds and other dangers at the subject schools.

Speed Reactive Signage

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to list where speed reactive signage has been introduced; and what other sites are planned for it. (AQW 4078/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that Vehicle Activated Signs are used, in addition to conventional signage, to encourage reductions in speed and thereby assist in promoting overall safety. The locations of such signs, along with current proposed sites, are as follows:

VEHICLE ACTIVATED SIGNS - CURRENT LOCATIONS

- A2 Bangor Road at Devils Elbow;
- A2 Bangor Road at Coach Hill Bend;
- A20 Upper Newtownards Road at Stormont;
- A24 Saintfield Road at Brackenvale;
- A55 Malone Road at House of Sport;
- A2 Culmore Road, Londonderry;
- B52/B18 Kilknock Crossroads, Toome;
- A2 Castlerock Road at Hazlett Primary School;
- B67 Ballybogey Road at Kilmoyle Primary School;
- A4 Woodlough Road, Dungannon;
- A29 Moy Road, Dungannon;
- A509 Derrylin Road, Enniskillen;
- A29 Carland Road, Dungannon;
- A27 Auglish Road, Scarva; and
- A20 Kempestones Road, Newtownards.

VEHICLE ACTIVATED SIGNS - PROPOSED LOCATIONS

- A501 Falls Road at Rossa Club;
- A501 Falls Road at Beechmount Leisure Centre;
- A2 Clooney Road, Londonderry; and
- C27 Templepatrick Lylehill Road at Templepatrick Primary School.

Bus Shelters

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the total number of bus shelters and their locations in Antrim town, and if there are plans to locate any in the Rathenraw Estate. (AQW 4087/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is aware of three bus shelters in Antrim town that have been provided by the advertising company, Adshel. These shelters are located at High Street, outside numbers 16 and 19-21, and at Castle Way, outside the primary school.

Roads Service has advised that Translink and Antrim Borough Council discussed the provision of bus shelters in the Rathenraw Estate at a meeting with local residents, during the recent consultation for proposed traffic

calming schemes in the Stiles and Rathenraw estates. The residents identified locations for bus shelters in each estate and Antrim Borough Council are taking these proposals forward.

Roads Service

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Regional Development how many times Roads Service and Northern Ireland Water have been reprimanded for (i) water pollution; (ii) land pollution; and (iii) any other kind of pollution, by the Department of the Environment, in each of the last five years; and what sanctions were imposed upon them. (AQW 4088/09)

Minister for Regional Development: The Department of the Environment's Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has responsibility for the investigation of pollution related issues.

NIEA has advised that it has not taken any action against my Department's Roads Service for any pollution related incident in the last five years.

The table below sets out the actions taken by NIEA in relation to water pollution incidents caused by Northern Ireland Water (NIW), or previously by Water Service, in each of the last five years. From 1 April 2007 NIW ceased to have Crown Immunity and have since been liable to the full NIEA environmental enforcement regime in respect to any pollution caused.

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Number of actions taken	1	1	0	24	27
Sanctions imposed	Warning/ Enforcement Letter issued	Warning/ Enforcement Letter issued	N/A	16 Warning/ Enforcement Letters issued; 8 cases to PPS (4 Fines imposed and 4 cases pending)	15 Warning/ Enforcement Letters issued; 1 case to PPS; 2 cases pending prosecution; 9 cases being considered for prosecution by NIEA

No other type of pollution has been attributed to NIW or its predecessor, Water Service.

Disabled Badge Vehicle Drivers

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development what consideration is given to disabled badge vehicle drivers to ensure that they can access their destinations in towns and cities. (AQW 4143/09)

Minister for Regional Development: To assist those with mobility difficulties, my Department's Roads Service operates the Blue Badge Scheme, which allows holders of a valid badge, who display it properly, to park on-street, close to the facilities and services they need. The scheme aims to improve blue badge holders' lifestyle, independence and freedom of choice when parking in our towns and cities.

By using the Blue Badge Scheme, holders can:

- park in parking bays specifically marked for use by people with disabilities, which are generally provided next to the main shopping areas;
- park free of charge and without time limit on-street, where parking is charged for, unless a time limit indicates otherwise; and
- park on single or double yellow lines for up to three hours, except where there is a ban on loading and unloading, within the limits of a ticketed (pay and display) parking area or within 15 metres of a junction.

The legislation covering the Blue Badge Scheme does not extend to Roads Service's off-street car parking. However, badge holders can park in the bays specifically marked for use by people with disabilities in such car parks. These bays are provided in all Roads Service car parks and are generally located at the main pedestrian exit and entrance points.

In addition, Roads Service provides enforcement of parking restrictions, through traffic attendants employed by NCP Services Ltd. All traffic attendants are trained in the concessions available to blue badge holders.

Provided a valid blue badge is displayed, traffic attendants will permit a vehicle to park in locations where concessions apply. If a valid blue badge is not displayed on a vehicle parked in these locations, for example in a bay marked for disabled drivers, then traffic attendants will issue a penalty charge notice to the vehicle. In addition, two traffic attendants are employed by NCP to specifically identify vehicles whose drivers are abusing or mis-using the Blue Badge Scheme, and they will issue penalty charge notices, when this is shown to be the case.

Traffic Flow

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to his answer to AQW 2648/09, what the traffic flow was between Lurgan and Moira in each of the last three years. (AQW 4254/09)

Minister for Regional Development: In reply to the Member's previous question on this issue, I explained that my Department's Roads Service has one automatic traffic counting site located on the A3 between Lurgan and Moira at Magheralin. The Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) volumes recorded at this site over the last three years are as follows:

YEAR	AADT
2008	13,778
2007	13,583
2006	14,756

Use of the Term 'Central Government'

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to the answer to AQW 2738/09 and AQW 2739/09, does his use of the term 'Central Government' refer to the Executive or to Westminster. (AQW 4288/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I can confirm that all revenue generated by the payment of Penalty Charge Notices, along with the income from car-parking and other charges, is used to supplement the overall financing of Roads Service by the Executive.

Water Supply Pipes

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development what testing his Department carries out in homes to establish if the water supply pipes are fully coated. (AQW 4313/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the purpose of the phosphate treatment process is to coat the lead pipe and thereby prevent lead dissolving into the water supply. It would not be feasible to inspect the inside of pipes in individual properties and the success of the treatment is measured by collecting samples for lead analysis at customer's taps at a frequency agreed with the Drinking Water Inspector.

Parking Fines

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many parking fines have been issued to Republic of Ireland registered vehicles since the start of the NCP contract. (AQW 4359/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, from commencement of the current parking enforcement contract at the end of October 2006, up to 11 January 2009, the number of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) issued to vehicles registered in the south is 23,235.

20mph Speed Limits Outside Primary Schools

Mrs N Long asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the pilot 20mph speed limit outside schools and when he anticipates when it will be implemented in all schools. (AQW 4467/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Two primary schools were selected for trials of 20mph variable speed limits. These were:

- Kilmoyle Primary School, Benvardin Road, Ballymoney; and
- Hazlett Primary School, Downhill Road, Articlave, Castlerock.

The schemes became operative on Monday 1 September 2008, and will be assessed by the PSNI and my Department's Roads Service over the full school year. However, initial observations indicate a reduction in speed of traffic on the approaches to, and through, the speed limit zones.

I understand the Principal, Governors and parents of both schools have praised the trial schemes and commented on the significant speed reduction during the times of operation. The PSNI, who fully supported the schemes, have also reported reductions in speed and have detected one speeding offence.

Roads Service will continue to monitor and assess these trial schemes over the full school year, to determine their effectiveness in reducing traffic speeds and other dangers, at the subject schools, before consideration is given to introducing a more widespread programme.

DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Housing Applicants

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Social Development to detail on average, the percentage of people who are on the Housing Executive Housing Stress list, in each District Council area. (AQW 3669/09)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): The total number of housing applicants on the social housing waiting list is 39,780, at 30 September 2008. The table below details those applicants who are in housing stress within each District Council area, expressed as a percentage of the total number of housing applicants across Northern Ireland.

District Council	As % of total Waiting List *
Antrim	1
Ards	2
Armagh	1
Ballymena	2
Ballymoney	1
Banbridge	1
Belfast	15
Carrickfergus	1
Castlereagh	2
Coleraine	2
Cookstown	0
Craigavon	2
Derry	4
Down	2
Dungannon	1

District Council	As % of total Waiting List *
Fermanagh	1
Larne	0
Limavady	1
Lisburn	4
Magherafelt	1
Moyle	0
Newry & Mourne	3
Newtownabbey	2
North Down	3
Omagh	1
Strabane	1

* Figures rounded to whole number

Housing Applicants

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Social Development to detail on average, the percentage of people who are on the Housing Executive waiting list, in each District Council area. (AQW 3670/09)

Minister for Social Development: The total number of housing applicants on the social housing waiting list is 39,780, at 30 September 2008. The table below details the applicants on the social housing waiting list by District Council area, expressed as a percentage of the total number of housing applicants across Northern Ireland.

District Council	As % of total Waiting List *
Antrim	3
Ards	4
Armagh	2
Ballymena	4
Ballymoney	1
Banbridge	2
Belfast	25
Carrickfergus	3
Castlereagh	3
Coleraine	3
Cookstown	1
Craigavon	5
Derry	6
Down	3
Dungannon	2
Fermanagh	2
Larne	1
Limavady	1
Lisburn	7

District Council	As % of total Waiting List *
Magherafelt	1
Moyle	1
Newry & Mourne	5
Newtownabbey	5
North Down	5
Omagh	2
Strabane	1

* Figures rounded to the nearest whole number

£150 Fuel Credit

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people receive (i) pension credit; and (ii) income support, are entitled to the £150 fuel credit, broken down by (a) constituency; and (b) council area. (AQW 3853/09)

Minister for Social Development: It is not possible to provide all of this information. At the end of November 2008 there were 94,469 Income Support claimants and 96,315 Pension Credit claimants. The £150 fuel credit will be aimed at households rather than individuals. Work is on-going to determine how many people may receive support as part of the fuel poverty package

Housing Executive

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what the adaptation budget is for the Housing Executive, in the North Down constituency. (AQW 3911/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive does not hold this information by parliamentary constituency. Adaptations are classed into two categories: Housing Executive properties and Private Sector grants adaptations. For Housing Executive properties, the anticipated budget for adaptations in the North Down District Council area for 2008/2009 is £399,000. For Private Sector grants adaptations, the Housing Executive's Dundonald Grants Office has a budget allocation in 2008/2009 for Disabled Facilities Grants of approximately £1.7m. This covers the District Council areas of North Down, part of Ards and Castlereagh.

Environmental Schemes

Mr M Brady asked the Minister for Social Development to breakdown by constituency, the number of environmental schemes that have commenced and are fully or partially completed since she has taken up her post. (AQW 3924/09)

Minister for Social Development: The number of environmental schemes that have been fully or partially completed since I became Minister for Social Development in May 2007 are detailed in the table below, broken down by constituency.

Constituency	Environmental schemes fully or partially completed since May 2007
Belfast North	9
Belfast South	6
Belfast East	0
Belfast West	14
East Antrim	2
East Derry	4

Constituency	Environmental schemes fully or partially completed since May 2007
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	2
Foyle	7
Lagan Valley	3
Mid Ulster	3
Newry & Armagh	13
North Antrim	8
North Down	1
South Antrim	2
South Down	3
Strangford	2
Upper Bann	11
West Tyrone	6

Housing Executive

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister for Social Development what is the cost for oil clean ups at Housing Executive properties as a result of leaks from heating oil storage tanks, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 3941/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive's spend on remediation work to clean up oil spills was £15,093 in 2006/07, £39,409 in 2007/08, and £35,218 from April to December 2008. Prior to 2006/07 the information was not recorded.

Housing Executive

Mr B Wilson asked the Minister for Social Development to summarise the findings from the external reports of the Egan contract that is used by the Housing Executive; and to place a copy in the Assembly Library.

(AQW 3948/09)

Minister for Social Development: Neither the Housing Executive nor the Department for Social Development are aware of any reports being carried out on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's Egan contract.

Continuous Tenants Omnibus Survey

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development how many respondents to the Continuous Tenants Omnibus Survey in 2007 were from (i) District Four; (ii) District Six; and (iii) the Seven Towers in District Four.

(AQW 3953/09)

Minister for Social Development: 100 tenants from District Four, 100 tenants from District Six and 6 from the Seven Towers in District Four responded to the Continuous Tenants Omnibus Survey in 2007.

Waiting times for Housing Allocations

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development to detail all the Housing Districts that have the greatest religious differential in waiting times for housing allocations in 2000 and 2008.

(AQW 3955/09)

Minister for Social Development: To provide a complete picture, the tables below detail the average waiting times in all Housing districts, broken down by religion, for the Social Housing waiting list for 2007/2008 and 2003/2004 - which is the first year that the information is available for.

AVERAGE WAITING TIMES ON SOCIAL HOUSING WAITING LIST FOR 2003/2004

	Catholic Average Months	Other Average Months	Protestant Average Months	Undisclosed Average Months
Antrim	7.2	5.4	6.2	19.8
Armagh	6.8	6.7	8.0	7.2
Ballycastle	8.9	4.7	8.8	8.7
Ballymena	10.0	7.2	9.4	10.7
Ballymoney	15.2	6.7	7.9	3.5
Banbridge	14.7	4.3	6.6	5.4
Bangor	7.3	6.0	11.6	10.5
West Belfast	23.8	3.0	8.7	23.0
East Belfast	26.8	23.9	14.7	42.6
North Belfast	18.5	10.8	6.9	30.1
Shankill	35.0	12.7	7.4	15.4
South Belfast	20.5	13.2	14.2	44.2
Carrickfergus	5.9	5.1	13.2	20.0
Castlereagh	5.7	12.0	11.7	29.4
Coleraine	11.8	10.9	9.7	13.4
Cookstown	7.3	6.1	8.0	1.5
Downpatrick	13.4	9.5	14.8	11.9
Dungannon	8.5	6.8	11.1	5.7
Fermanagh	10.4	19.7	10.8	4.8
Larne	10.2	5.3	8.0	6.2
Limavady	7.6	5.9	7.6	9.4
Lisburn Antrim St	12.8	11.5	15.2	11.6
Lisburn Dairy Farm	19.0	5.5	4.5	26.4
Derry 1	12.1	13.0	4.1	4.1
Derry 2	6.0	6.3	4.3	14.8
Derry 3	9.7	26.5	9.0	12.2
Lurgan	8.7	5.3	8.6	6.6
Magherafelt	10.7	2.8	6.7	18.0
Newry	10.3	4.8	8.0	15.6
Newtownabbey 1	13.9	9.9	10.9	29.5
Newtownabbey 2	8.6	16.0	11.7	45.6
Newtownards	16.6	11.8	11.1	24.4
Omagh	6.2	4.7	7.1	7.8
Portadown	6.2	3.3	5.2	16.8
Strabane	8.2	4.0	10.6	7.8

AVERAGE WAITING TIMES ON SOCIAL HOUSING WAITING LIST FOR 2007/2008

	Catholic Average Months	Other Average Months	Protestant Average Months	Undisclosed Average Months
Antrim	21.2	19.8	17.7	20.1
Armagh	13.7	14.7	9.7	29.0
Ballycastle	22.4	8.5	15.1	16.5
Ballymena	20.4	16.4	16.7	18.1
Ballymoney	14.6	8.3	12.4	18.1
Banbridge	12.5	10.8	12.1	10.8
Bangor	19.5	13.0	21.5	33.8
West Belfast	25.3	11.3	8.3	51.1
East Belfast	15.0	11.6	16.5	9.0
North Belfast	25.8	12.7	12.9	16.3
Shankill	3.5	27.0	11.8	25.0
South Belfast	24.4	18.2	17.1	27.0
Carrickfergus	25.1	13.5	18.8	10.8
Castlereagh	21.0	18.3	16.2	12.9
Coleraine	11.0	7.0	12.1	8.8
Cookstown	14.4	8.3	12.3	11.0
Downpatrick	20.7	15.5	21.0	11.2
Dungannon	10.5	14.6	11.8	14.6
Fermanagh	17.6	12.8	15.4	14.5
Larne	14.2	11.5	9.2	7.1
Limavady	9.8	11.5	10.5	7.8
Lisburn Antrim St	20.4	16.5	16.5	30.1
Lisburn Dairy Farm	15.4	4.0	-	28.8
Derry 1	20.4	3.4	3.4	12.6
Derry 2	11.0	10.5	8.2	8.9
Derry 3	12.1	11.3	-	20.2
Lurgan	12.7	16.7	11.0	17.1
Magherafelt	10.4	16.5	11.2	38.8
Newry	17.5	12.4	11.3	20.4
Newtownabbey 1	15.9	6.7	16.2	10.0
Newtownabbey 2	82.5	15.4	14.8	14.2
Newtownards	18.0	25.5	17.0	26.8
Omagh	8.7	6.9	10.3	11.3
Portadown	11.3	3.6	6.7	8.0
Strabane	10.9	3.3	7.7	3.8

Housing Executive

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what is the policy for putting names of partners, who own their own properties, on rent books along with residents living in Housing Executive properties.

(AQW 3996/09)

Minister for Social Development: In order for a Joint Tenancy to be granted, the applicant(s) have to comply with Rule 78 and 79 of the Housing Selection Scheme, which sets out the condition for the creation of a joint tenancy. Once a tenancy has been granted the tenant(s) must comply with the General Conditions of Tenancy (1989) which includes occupying their home as their only or main dwelling of the tenant(s).

Strategic Business Review

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development why in the Strategic Business Review regarding social security offices, the North Down constituency has only been allocated 9 jobs out of a possible 1,500.

(AQW 4048/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Agency is not structured on a District Council or Parliamentary Constituency basis but on a basis of 6 geographical District areas. Bangor office is part of its East Down district which also includes offices in Newtownards, Holywood Road, Knockbreda, Downpatrick, Newcastle, Kilkeel and Ballynahinch. The Strategic Business Review proposals have been developed on current District structures. Proposed locations within Districts have been determined following a detailed analysis of staff availability, office capacity and staff skills.

All of the proposals are still the subject to the ongoing public consultation exercise and no final decisions on any of the proposed changes, including the number and location of benefit processing centres, will be made until consultation has been completed in April 2009.

Strategic Business Review

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what review her Department will make regarding the Strategic Business Review of social security provision, considering the expected increased pressures on offices caused by the economic downturn.

(AQW 4050/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Strategic Business Review proposals are currently subject to ongoing public consultation which will run until late April 2009. Final decisions on the proposals, including any relocation of functions or staff, will not be made until consultation has been completed and responses considered. I will make my assessment of the impacts of the Review once the consultation responses have been considered.

Strategic Business Review

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development why in the Strategic Business Review the social security offices, the North Down constituency has only been allocated 9 jobs, while South Down has been allocated 63 jobs and four offices.

(AQW 4051/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Agency is not structured on a District Council or Parliamentary Constituency basis but on a basis of 6 geographical District areas. Bangor office is part of its East Down district which also includes offices in Newtownards, Holywood Road, Knockbreda, Downpatrick, Newcastle, Kilkeel and Ballynahinch. The Strategic Business Review proposals have been developed on current District structures. Proposed locations within Districts have been determined following a detailed analysis of staff availability, office capacity and staff skills.

All of the proposals are still the subject to the ongoing public consultation exercise and no final decisions on any of the proposed changes, including the number and location of benefit processing centres, will be made until consultation has been completed in April 2009.

Strategic Business Review

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the Strategic Business Review regarding social security offices, why North Down and East Antrim are the only constituencies not allocated a main office. (AQW 4052/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Agency is not structured on a District Council basis or on a Parliamentary Constituency basis but on the basis of 6 geographical Districts across Northern Ireland. The proposed location changes have been brought forward based on current Agency structures across the whole of Northern Ireland.

All key frontline services will still be available locally meaning no reductions in the quality of services currently provided to customers.

The proposals are the subject to a public consultation which will run until late April 2009. Final decisions on the proposals will not be made until consultation exercise has been completed and the responses considered.

Winter Fuel Costs

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Social Development when she expects to make the proposed payments of £150 to low income households to assist with winter fuel costs under the Financial Assistance Bill. (AQW 4065/09)

Minister for Social Development: I expect the Financial Assistance Bill to come into effect by the end of January. OFMdFM will then designate a department to deliver a fuel credit/payment. I am unable to confirm when a credit/payment will be made as there are still a number of key decisions to be made in terms of who will get the payment and whether it will be a credit or a payment. These decisions will not be made until OFMdFM have designated a department to deliver the credit/payment.

Iona House in Strabane

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Social Development if her Department has received a request for capital funding from the Western Health and Social Care Trust to replace Iona House in Strabane. (AQW 4069/09)

Minister for Social Development: I have not received any requests from the Western Health and Social Care Trust to replace Iona House. However, North and West Housing Association has submitted a bid to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to include a scheme in the new five year Social Housing Development Programme 2009/10 - 2013/14 to replace Iona House, Strabane, in two phases. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive will decide on the need for a replacement when it is formulating the new Social Housing Development Programme for publication in February 2009.

Loch Cuan House, Newtownards

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development at what stage is the application for supported housing at Loch Cuan House at Westwinds, Newtownards. (AQW 4073/09)

Minister for Social Development: The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has discussed with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive a proposal to replace their Loch Cuan House residential care home with a supported housing scheme. In December 2008 the Trust indicated that it intended to table the proposal at the February 2009 Eastern Area Supporting People Partnership (EASPP). The South Eastern Trust has proposed the replacement for Loch Cuan in 2010/11. The current position is that the project has been identified by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive for inclusion on the capital development programme as a scheme planned to start in 2010/11.

Inclusion on the capital development programme does not mean confirmation that funding from either the Housing Executive's Supporting People Programme or New Build Programme has been agreed or secured.

Housing Grants

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister for Social Development how many (i) Housing Repair Grants; (ii) Renovation Grants; and (iii) Replacement Grants, have been put on hold in the West Tyrone constituency, as a result of the shortfall in the Housing Executive budget. (AQW 4113/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has been working alongside my Department to minimise the impact of the shortfall. A proposal to reallocate £10.5 million from existing Departmental resources to the Housing Executive has been made; this is subject to Executive agreement which will be sought as part of February monitoring. This would allow a significant amount of work to be undertaken this year that would otherwise not be possible including support for the grants system including Disabled Facilities Grants and the Home Repair Assistance Grants. It is too early in the review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's programmes to state the specific locations that might be affected by the shortfall in funding; however, the Housing Executive aims to undertake its full schedule of work and to commence all schemes in its programmes as soon as possible.

Social Housing New Build Programme

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Social Development how the social housing new build programme will be delivered for the remainder of the current financial year. (AQW 4132/09)

Minister for Social Development: On 14 January 2009 the Housing Executive announced a shortfall of £35million in its budget for this current financial year due to reduced receipts emanating from falling land and property values. The impact of this on the Social Housing Development Programme is that only 1100 homes will now be started this year instead of the 1500 originally envisaged.

I am however pleased that the 400 homes not started this year will be able to start as soon as the new financial year begins in April.

Housing Executive

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development for her assessment of the impact of the Housing Executive's budget shortfall of £25m on the (i) East Antrim; and (ii) South Antrim constituencies. (AQW 4151/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has been working alongside my Department to minimise the impact of the shortfall. A proposal to reallocate £10.5 million from existing Departmental resources to the Housing Executive has been made; this is subject to Executive agreement which will be sought as part of February monitoring. This would allow a significant amount of work to be undertaken this year that would otherwise not be possible. It is too early in the review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's programmes to state the specific locations that might be affected by the shortfall in funding, however, the Housing Executive aims to undertake its full schedule of work and to commence all schemes in its programmes as soon as possible.

Social Security Offices

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Social Development, given the recent increases in unemployment, if she would reassess her proposals for relocating staff from Social Security Offices in the East Antrim constituency. (AQW 4152/09)

Minister for Social Development: Public consultation on the Strategic Business Review proposals was launched on the 27 November 2008 and is planned to run in two phases until late April 2009. Final decisions on the proposals, including the potential relocation of staff, will not be made until consultation has been completed. I will make my assessment of the impacts involving the current economic downturn, once the consultation responses have been considered.

Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many posts her Department will fund for neighbourhood renewal; and (ii) when a decision will be made regarding these posts. (AQW 4156/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy is not about funding posts but providing services which most effectively address the causes of deprivation. My Department has committed some £60 million between 2008/09 – 2010/11 to provide services to Neighbourhood Renewal areas.

My Department is currently seeking to reach agreement with other Departments on longer-term funding for those Neighbourhood Renewal services that fall under their functional responsibility. These discussions will be completed before the end of March 2009.

Housing Executive

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development how many (i) housing repair grants; (ii) renovation grants; and (iii) replacement grants, have been suspended in the Mid-Ulster constituency, due to the shortfall in the Housing Executive budget. (AQW 4158/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has been working alongside my Department to minimise the impact of the shortfall. A proposal to reallocate £10.5 million from existing Departmental resources to the Housing Executive has been made; this is subject to Executive agreement which will be sought as part of February monitoring. This would allow a significant amount of work to be undertaken this year that would otherwise not be possible. It is too early in the review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's programmes to state the specific locations that might be affected by the shortfall in funding; however, the Housing Executive aims to undertake its full schedule of work and to commence all schemes in its programmes as soon as possible.

Mullaghmore Environment Improvement Scheme

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister for Social Development to provide a timeline for the completion of the Mullaghmore Environment Improvement Scheme in Killyclogher, Omagh. (AQW 4195/09)

Minister for Social Development: Tenders for the Mullaghmore Environmental Improvement Scheme in Omagh are due to be returned by 27 January 2009; the anticipated contract period is 72 weeks. The scheme was programmed to commence in March 2009, however the Housing Executive has deferred the starting date for the remainder of this year's Programme to the end of the financial year. The Housing Executive aims to undertake its full schedule of work and to commence all schemes in its programmes at the earliest opportunity.

Prefabricated Housing

Mr F Molloy asked the Minister for Social Development to outline her plans to bring the prefabricated housing that is part of her housing stock to a modern day standard. (AQW 4200/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive currently has 439 prefabricated aluminium bungalows which were constructed between 1948 and 1951. During the 1980's a comprehensive programme of upgrading of the properties was completed to improve fire safety, energy insulation and air leakage of the bungalows. Further improvement works are now being considered by the Housing Executive on a site specific basis and will be delivered after receipt of appropriate approvals and is dependent on the availability of finance.

Social Security Agency

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development how many claimants were in receipt of (i) Income Support; and (ii) Job Seekers Allowance, in each Social Security Agency office, in each of the last 12 months. (AQW 4210/09)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is set out in the tables below. The numbers shown reflect the number of claims for Income Support and Jobseekers Allowance where an amount of benefit was in payment. The information is taken from scans produced bi-monthly and reflects the number of claims from the first scan of each month up to 3 January 2009.

TABLE 1: INCOME SUPPORT

Office	Feb 08	Mar 08	Apr 08	May 08	Jun 08	Jul 08	Aug 08	Sep 08	Oct 08	Nov 08	Dec 08	Jan 09
Antrim	2426	2409	2409	2385	2383	2391	2397	2428	2424	2432	2433	2438
Armagh	2176	2154	2139	2125	2126	2117	2132	2114	2098	2088	2074	2069
Ballymena	2496	2480	2473	2518	2526	2532	2527	2528	2508	2514	2513	2515
Ballymoney	2075	2076	2056	2068	2081	2079	2077	2078	2069	2104	2108	2100
Ballynahinch	766	763	768	778	778	789	796	818	804	798	811	811
Banbridge	1626	1636	1644	1620	1617	1617	1631	1653	1662	1665	1672	1671
Bangor	2211	2194	2189	2193	2181	2196	2204	2204	2197	2210	2187	2189
Coleraine	2617	2609	2618	2609	2603	2626	2631	2660	2681	2714	2707	2701
Cookstown	1456	1455	1461	1461	1455	1457	1455	1461	1478	1478	1467	1458
Downpatrick	1559	1555	1561	1548	1546	1552	1559	1567	1574	1591	1584	1586
Dungannon	2757	2746	2744	2722	2733	2731	2727	2753	2743	2741	2741	2734
Enniskillen	2785	2770	2770	2768	2765	2777	2770	2762	2782	2801	2795	2785
Larne	2627	2646	2634	2626	2632	2627	2638	2641	2661	2673	2663	2658
Limavady	1628	1623	1617	1608	1632	1653	1642	1652	1655	1670	1665	1658
Lisburn	2519	2504	2505	2507	2518	2534	2543	2554	2540	2544	2548	2545
Foyle	7470	7446	7442	7457	7425	7448	7434	7436	7419	7437	7373	7345
Lurgan	2993	2972	2991	2998	3008	3021	3012	3020	3039	3044	3042	3027
Magherafelt	1721	1716	1710	1714	1716	1722	1718	1725	1746	1755	1760	1763
Newcastle	1089	1116	1102	1102	1110	1105	1113	1116	1115	1112	1117	1113
Newry	4870	4853	4838	4810	4790	4797	4810	4803	4792	4818	4812	4798
Newtownards	1921	1946	1929	1915	1917	1925	1938	1960	1967	1969	1970	1986
Omagh	2880	2896	2874	2901	2911	2909	2941	2932	2919	2941	2927	2923
Portadown	1932	1937	1950	1946	1935	1944	1949	1962	1967	1965	1966	1957
Strabane	2968	2986	2985	2983	2993	2995	2995	3011	2997	3007	2983	2978
Kilkeel	680	693	694	691	694	701	706	710	709	715	711	710
Shaftsbury Square	2849	2849	2869	2867	2875	2867	2895	2903	2899	2905	2899	2895
Corporation Street	6714	6715	6720	6698	6691	6726	6724	6760	6786	6809	6812	6792
Shankill Road	2521	2549	2558	2569	2573	2565	2558	2565	2564	2583	2548	2520
Knockbreda	2796	2775	2751	2725	2725	2728	2739	2764	2753	2754	2730	2737
Falls Road	5369	5361	5397	5411	5410	5415	5436	5438	5441	5436	5410	5369
Hollywood Road	3869	3826	3826	3821	3806	3846	3855	3851	3862	3860	3846	3833
Newtownabbey	2630	2624	2631	2611	2630	2634	2654	2664	2661	2674	2681	2664
Andersonstown	5395	5392	5373	5352	5357	5352	5367	5355	5355	5388	5368	5367
Lisnagelvin	3159	3150	3159	3143	3141	3157	3156	3150	3121	3138	3161	3148
Unattributed *	22	24	20	20	13	20	21	29	22	34	26	22
Total	95572	95446	95407	95270	95296	95555	95750	96027	96010	96367	96110	95865

Note: These cases cannot be assigned to a specific office due to invalid office code.

TABLE 2: JOBSSEEKERS ALLOWANCE

Office	Feb 08	Mar 08	Apr 08	May 08	Jun 08	Jul 08	Aug 08	Sep 08	Oct 08	Nov 08	Dec 08	Jan 09
Antrim	530	561	532	527	523	552	583	594	615	692	781	859
Armagh	455	472	474	466	453	512	504	543	535	571	623	757
Ballymena	638	655	654	650	654	705	766	804	823	843	939	1011
Ballymoney	598	583	603	595	576	617	667	680	691	739	842	938
Ballynahinch	134	133	151	145	148	154	175	159	196	202	216	246
Banbridge	299	335	314	334	352	358	414	440	460	491	542	578
Bangor	676	710	718	687	653	683	704	724	765	790	849	948
Carrickfergus	363	385	383	402	395	420	410	468	491	540	588	629
Coleraine	841	879	839	829	800	763	834	860	899	939	1076	1190
Cookstown	235	284	271	274	279	291	356	365	346	417	498	524
Downpatrick	450	444	423	448	469	501	528	530	572	580	645	671
Dungannon	354	390	435	434	435	470	510	515	529	581	722	848
Enniskillen	757	778	770	777	742	782	814	789	884	936	994	1038
Larne	306	309	307	317	291	291	306	297	346	384	434	458
Limavady	501	540	566	577	588	600	662	692	722	836	924	1012
Lisburn	526	577	579	599	619	617	625	632	701	765	905	983
Foyle	2095	2079	2056	2137	2193	2233	2259	2468	2397	2459	2515	2609
Lurgan	514	552	570	598	617	689	701	678	730	715	859	893
Magherafelt	270	279	300	313	295	352	403	447	448	540	627	739
Newcastle	269	256	254	247	249	234	270	289	304	312	341	388
Newry	986	1000	987	973	994	1046	1150	1241	1172	1227	1278	1402
Newtownards	650	648	647	653	659	700	734	783	794	866	928	962
Omagh	596	568	566	547	554	603	684	741	705	768	843	937
Portadown	474	534	523	532	537	544	566	570	562	592	693	727
Strabane	988	1006	1007	1001	976	1045	1057	1128	1119	1161	1178	1254
Kilkeel	96	91	91	84	92	110	105	155	144	164	194	213
Shaftsbury Square	906	903	895	997	973	1010	1064	1121	1108	1183	1170	1201
Corporation Street	1310	1319	1323	1412	1398	1378	1442	1464	1476	1505	1522	1576
Shankill Road	824	859	841	835	817	821	828	830	842	853	918	953
Knockbreda	530	524	518	532	532	568	586	654	671	703	709	748
Falls Road	1202	1235	1249	1282	1300	1290	1309	1325	1343	1384	1426	1491
Hollywood Road	696	709	665	712	706	732	739	714	704	764	854	952
Newtownabbey	695	765	730	727	710	731	749	847	821	890	945	998
Andersonstown	1445	1482	1500	1549	1556	1550	1561	1702	1712	1764	1856	1925
Lisnagelvin	694	749	740	776	788	811	840	871	908	951	1044	1110
Unattributed *	0	3	2	2	2	4	6	5	11	9	13	18
Total	22903	23596	23483	23970	23925	24767	25911	27125	27546	29116	31491	33786

Note: These cases cannot be assigned to a specific office due to invalid office code.

Social Security Agency

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development how many new claims were made for (i) income support; and (ii) job seekers allowance, in each Social Security Agency office, in each of the last 12 months.

(AQW 4211/09)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is set out in the Tables below.

TABLE1: INCOME SUPPORT CLAIMS RECEIVED

Office	Jan 2008	Feb 2008	Mar 2008	Apr 2008	May 2008	Jun 2008	Jul 2008	Aug 2008	Sep 2008	Oct 2008	Nov 2008	Dec 2008	Totals
Andersonstown	84	79	78	95	100	81	99	83	102	151	97	56	1105
Antrim	90	67	61	70	80	86	67	69	97	94	70	53	904
Armagh	70	69	55	78	74	82	79	66	88	96	53	43	853
Ballymena	83	85	60	99	90	84	64	69	97	85	60	39	915
Ballymoney	60	73	43	73	76	56	58	52	70	100	62	31	754
Ballynahinch**	30	35	26	30	33	37	42	24	35	20	43	7	362
Banbridge	84	59	49	61	50	64	62	72	68	77	52	43	741
Bangor	82	65	42	84	69	84	79	61	81	93	53	39	832
Carrickfergus*	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Coleraine	60	84	68	78	61	77	86	98	91	120	76	48	947
Cookstown	42	40	38	38	42	49	44	26	75	56	33	25	508
Corporation St	215	180	149	186	131	167	180	164	171	219	112	87	1961
Downpatrick	53	37	47	47	35	58	52	43	62	53	57	16	560
Dungannon	67	73	58	82	63	68	53	82	79	109	61	33	828
Enniskillen	86	93	58	121	96	81	75	80	118	100	89	34	1031
Falls Rd	104	112	120	119	110	95	124	107	121	113	64	56	1245
Foyle	119	132	110	147	112	148	111	123	150	132	84	59	1427
Hollywood Rd	87	81	70	97	97	99	96	84	107	112	91	45	1066
Kilkeel	24	24	23	28	25	28	24	23	23	39	25	18	304
Knockbreda	85	82	88	75	83	79	96	86	90	95	79	43	981
Larne	108	99	73	111	86	104	77	61	174	80	65	58	1096
Limavady	44	48	39	50	64	53	41	51	53	76	37	26	582
Lisburn	70	77	62	93	88	97	78	94	90	76	74	49	948
Lisnagelvin	75	91	69	64	84	99	90	74	87	86	62	30	911
Lurgan	97	100	62	87	79	96	72	122	77	103	74	44	1013
Magherafelt	61	53	40	76	59	68	51	57	72	60	62	32	691
Newcastle***	38	43	14	32	36	26	42	29	34	41	31	20	386
Newry	86	129	83	121	110	103	162	91	126	135	104	56	1306
Newtownabbey	77	65	64	83	58	108	79	58	92	108	67	50	909
Newtownards	68	83	52	66	56	57	88	52	69	52	48	49	740
Omagh	84	81	47	64	57	79	114	70	95	92	47	33	863
Portadown	60	74	56	75	62	78	54	55	80	69	61	39	763
Shaftesbury Sq	78	88	68	86	71	63	96	80	80	79	43	45	877

Office	Jan 2008	Feb 2008	Mar 2008	Apr 2008	May 2008	Jun 2008	Jul 2008	Aug 2008	Sep 2008	Oct 2008	Nov 2008	Dec 2008	Totals
Shankill	57	64	41	76	49	60	54	65	72	83	44	31	696
Strabane	65	84	58	85	51	85	82	76	86	89	46	34	841
Totals	2593	2649	2071	2777	2437	2699	2671	2447	3012	3093	2126	1371	29946

Notes:

** Income Support claims for Ballynahinch are administered by Downpatrick (accounted in Ballynahinch)

* Income Support claims for Carrickfergus are administered and accounted by Larne

*** Income Support claims for Newcastle are administered by Killeel (accounted in Newcastle)

TABLE 2: JOBSEEKERS ALLOWANCE CLAIMS RECEIVED

Office	Jan 2008	Feb 2008	Mar 2008	Apr 2008	May 2008	Jun 2008	Jul 2008	Aug 2008	Sep 2008	Oct 2008	Nov 2008	Dec 2008	Totals
Andersonstown	213	190	211	280	195	233	194	298	289	292	294	269	2958
Antrim	146	152	91	167	144	167	200	136	220	212	263	196	2094
Armagh	148	137	123	121	105	199	186	184	171	207	210	268	2059
Ballymena	165	170	139	184	152	176	254	198	250	240	236	231	2395
Ballymoney	169	126	121	154	126	176	182	166	213	209	253	196	2091
Ballynahinch	50	46	42	63	43	61	79	51	82	88	83	85	773
Banbridge	111	128	93	119	122	137	189	164	211	188	193	189	1844
Bangor	179	217	150	179	152	209	188	222	268	275	274	231	2544
Carrickfergus	126	103	85	141	123	139	146	164	192	223	213	168	1823
Coleraine	219	253	176	228	175	186	274	221	270	303	333	319	2957
Cookstown	52	90	42	85	67	88	146	91	159	146	199	130	1295
Corporation St	234	224	186	299	272	250	319	271	384	321	274	279	3313
Downpatrick*	77	86	58	119	106	154	151	80	165	196	188	134	1514
Dungannon	129	157	146	176	136	200	183	186	199	241	316	347	2416
Enniskillen	160	140	148	214	141	221	221	215	352	313	277	267	2669
Falls Rd	194	215	175	230	198	183	192	207	240	246	207	219	2506
Foyle	268	240	197	358	360	430	362	524	446	452	441	333	4411
Hollywood Rd	170	175	126	219	212	201	209	184	253	278	286	283	2596
Killeel**	61	30	33	65	41	55	94	70	83	79	102	63	776
Knockbreda	146	144	146	174	147	193	203	226	258	243	216	186	2282
Larne	90	86	71	99	79	112	108	92	145	154	164	113	1313
Limavady	113	142	100	154	110	118	187	145	176	209	343	256	2053
Lisburn	223	240	186	215	208	231	222	248	333	347	421	296	3170
Lisnagelvin	181	180	155	212	183	208	243	216	296	251	322	262	2709
Lurgan	185	195	174	217	187	260	241	219	270	327	366	278	2919
Magherafelt	88	96	80	138	94	149	171	155	193	259	224	277	1924
Newcastle	65	52	36	71	52	72	104	86	112	114	127	107	998
Newry	265	256	166	238	188	321	344	318	321	304	357	318	3396
Newtownabbey	186	199	149	228	190	238	223	279	316	306	331	220	2865

Office	Jan 2008	Feb 2008	Mar 2008	Apr 2008	May 2008	Jun 2008	Jul 2008	Aug 2008	Sep 2008	Oct 2008	Nov 2008	Dec 2008	Totals
Newtownards	163	149	139	183	171	201	199	211	240	307	246	203	2412
Omagh	145	114	74	139	132	187	255	214	206	260	280	254	2260
Portadown	146	184	161	196	166	181	196	231	279	272	341	244	2597
Shaftesbury Sq	289	256	222	373	234	344	377	372	385	446	345	338	3981
Shankill	191	194	107	174	156	173	168	185	201	195	207	167	2118
Strabane	131	147	134	168	137	192	151	190	202	241	200	207	2100
Totals	5478	5513	4442	6380	5304	6645	7161	7019	8380	8744	9132	7933	82131

Note:

* Jobseekers Allowance claims for Downpatrick are administered by Ballynahinch (accounted in Downpatrick)

** Jobseekers Allowance claims for Kilkeel are administered by Newcastle (accounted in Kilkeel)

Social Security Agency

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development how many applications were there for (i) Social Fund budgeting loans; (ii) Community Care grants and; (iii) Crisis Loans, in each Social Security Agency office, in each of the last 12 months.

(AQW 4212/09)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not recorded in the form requested as Social Fund is administered by the Social Security Agency on a District basis. Applications received by District are outlined in the Tables below.

TABLE 1: BUDGETING LOAN APPLICATIONS RECEIVED

	Jan 2008	Feb 2008	Mar 2008	Apr 2008	May 2008	Jun 2008	Jul 2008	Aug 2008	Sep 2008	Oct 2008	Nov 2008	Dec 2008	Totals
Belfast North & East Antrim	1232	1417	1478	1853	1268	1813	1324	1429	1506	2593	3049	1995	20957
Belfast West & Lisburn	1357	1751	1684	2069	1742	1927	1726	1581	1780	3035	4103	2485	25240
East Down	1180	1212	1153	1505	1220	1466	1132	1261	1371	2023	2658	1724	17905
North	1192	1363	1184	1547	1284	1504	1341	1185	1489	2078	2732	1589	18488
South	1111	1278	1208	1556	1395	1467	1478	1283	1500	2276	2904	1809	19265
West	1593	1873	1696	2293	1847	1964	2039	1720	1978	3355	4197	2280	26835
Totals	7665	8894	8403	10823	8756	10141	9040	8459	9624	15360	19643		128690

TABLE 2: COMMUNITY CARE GRANT APPLICATIONS RECEIVED

	Jan 2008	Feb 2008	Mar 2008	Apr 2008	May 2008	Jun 2008	Jul 2008	Aug 2008	Sep 2008	Oct 2008	Nov 2008	Dec 2008	Totals
Belfast North & East Antrim	615	715	431	915	764	731	783	663	722	956	934	669	8898
Belfast West & Lisburn	531	714	560	787	675	754	598	582	784	1003	1165	855	9008
East Down	406	525	416	584	528	553	434	436	544	624	622	416	6088
North	450	532	398	608	525	552	512	425	648	656	700	478	6484
South	507	667	546	662	733	664	585	554	721	772	870	546	7827
West	719	877	714	1027	762	858	890	669	897	1051	1034	616	10114
Totals	3228	4030	3065	4583	3987	4112	3802	3329	4316	5062	5325	3580	48419

TABLE 3: CRISIS LOAN APPLICATIONS RECEIVED

	Jan 2008	Feb 2008	Mar 2008	Apr 2008	May 2008	Jun 2008	Jul 2008	Aug 2008	Sep 2008	Oct 2008	Nov 2008	Dec 2008	Totals
Belfast North & East Antrim	2404	2297	1991	2538	1924	2001	1979	1853	1998	2514	1984	2069	25552
Belfast West & Lisburn	1552	1310	1105	1420	1355	1330	1331	1357	1549	1635	1408	1620	16972
East Down	2118	1900	1650	1865	1720	1762	1793	1961	2216	2549	2196	2339	24069
North	1076	1042	933	1291	947	982	925	994	1159	1224	1098	1219	12890
South	1626	1678	1620	2069	1532	1528	1615	1779	1913	2200	2137	2464	22161
West	1547	1440	1253	1362	1468	1392	1443	1369	1573	1709	1463	1760	17779
Totals	10323	9667	8552	10545	8946	8995	9086	9313	10408	11831	10286	11471	

Environmental Improvement Scheme in Dunclug

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Social Development when the Environmental Improvement Scheme that includes the refurbishment of houses, will commence in Dunclug. (AQW 4235/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive proposes completing an Environmental Improvement Scheme in three phases to remove blight, create private space, consolidate the area and protect the existing assets within the Dunclug area. Tenders for the first phase of this project, which includes the proposed improvements referred to, were approved by the Housing Executive on 20th October 2008. My Department is currently in discussions with the Housing Executive regarding the details of the Economic Appraisal for this phase of works. The completion of all proposed works is subject to appropriate approvals and the availability of finance.

Housing Executive

Mr P Butler asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of NIHE dwellings that have gas heating appliances; and (ii) the frequency that gas heating appliances are serviced by the NIHE.

(AQW 4242/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive currently has 27,972 properties with gas heating systems, which are serviced annually.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister for Social Development which areas of Craigavon have benefited financially from neighbourhood renewal schemes in the last two years.

(AQW 4252/09)

Minister for Social Development: There are three Neighbourhood Renewal Areas in the Craigavon Borough Council Area: North West Portadown which comprises the area around the housing estates along the Garvaghy Rd and Obin Street and part of the Edgarstown estate; Brownlow which comprises the Drumgor and Drumgask Wards; and Lurgan, comprising the Court Ward, the deprived output areas of the Church, Taghnevan, Woodville and Drumnamoe and a large section of the town centre. These areas have benefited financially from neighbourhood renewal schemes in the last two years.

Housing Executive

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Social Development which firms based in North Antrim carry out housing repair and renovation work for the Housing Executive; and how much of this work has been suspended because of the shortfall in its budget.

(AQW 4264/09)

Minister for Social Development: The only firm based in North Antrim carrying out housing repair and renovation work for the Housing Executive at the present time is Dixons Contractors, Dunloy. None of the work awarded to this contractor has been suspended.

NIHE Grant Work Contractors.

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development what measures are taken to ensure prompt payment to NIHE grant work contractors.

(AQW 4291/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has established Standards of Service which it aims to meet in processing grants applications and payments and compliance with these Standards is systematically monitored.

The Housing Executive aims to inspect completed work, before payment of any grant, within two weeks of being requested to do so and aims to make a final payment, once the work is deemed to be satisfactorily completed, within four weeks of inspection, provided they have received all necessary documentation. This means they aim to make payments within 6 weeks.

In addition, on larger grant schemes, the Housing Executive assists contractors by facilitating stage payments rather than making payment only at the completion of the project. The Housing Executive may also make these payments directly to the contractor's bank account through a legal assignment process.

The Housing Executive's Grants Offices also gives clear advice on the necessary documents required to make a final payment to avoid delays. Contractors can therefore help to facilitate the timely processing of grant payments by ensuring that works are fully completed and all necessary documents are submitted at the earliest possible stage.

Conway Education Centre

Mr G Adams asked the Minister for Social Development to detail what stage discussions are at between her Department and the Department of Education regarding the funding of Category 2 posts in Conway Education Centre, the progression of these discussions and a date for when they are set to conclude. (AQW 4293/09)

Minister for Social Development: My Department has been having discussions with other Departments on the issue of posts and services, including those in the Conway Education Centre, currently funded by DSD that are assessed as being within the policy responsibility of other statutory bodies. These discussions remain on-going and should be concluded shortly at which time I will consider the way forward on Neighbourhood Renewal funding post March 2009.

Lost Benefit Application Forms

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Social Development how many benefit application forms have been deemed lost in each of the last five years; and to break these down by benefit type. (AQW 4360/09)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is not available. Each year the Social Security Agency receives over 200,000 benefit claims including those claims that are made by telephone. Given such volumes, there may be occasions when an item is mislaid or not received. When such instances are brought to the Agency's attention urgent steps are taken to locate the missing item, and if necessary, action is taken to obtain a replacement application form from the customer.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development if eligible persons and families in the BT71 or other postcode areas will be given Cold Weather Payments following the cold snap in December 2008 and January 2009. (AQW 4408/09)

Minister for Social Development: A cold weather payment period was triggered between 29 December 2008 and 4 January 2009. The post code areas affected were BT45-48, BT70 and BT78-82 and only people living in these areas were eligible to receive a payment.

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