
OFFICIAL REPORT

(HANSARD)

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NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 24 April 2009

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Planning Appeals Commission

Mr T Elliott asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what percentage of the current appeal cases that are being addressed by informal hearing does the Planning Appeals Commission believe could be addressed through written representation. (AQW 6491/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): The Planning Appeals Commission is an independent tribunal Non-Departmental Public Body. Given its independent tribunal status, its Chief Commissioner has been asked to provide a response directly to you, and we understand that she has written to you in the following terms:

“I have been asked to provide you with information requested in the above Assembly Question.

The Planning Appeals Commission is not in a position to state what percentage of its current appeals could have been addressed by Written Representation instead of by the Informal Hearing procedure. This information is currently unavailable however, the Planning Appeals Commission intend capturing this data commencing from 1st April 2009.

I would be happy to provide any further information you require arising out of this response or to meet with you to discuss the matter if that would be more suitable.”

Barnett Formula Select Committee

Mr D McNarry asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what representations it has made to the Lords Barnett Formula Select Committee. (AQW 6955/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The First Minister and the deputy First Minister made no representations to the Lords Barnett Formula Select Committee, however the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, Bruce Robinson, submitted written evidence and DFP Officials gave oral evidence to the committee.

British-Irish Council: Work Streams

Dr A McDonnell asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the work streams/programmes which have been added to the work of the British/Irish Ministerial Council since restoration of devolution. (AQO 2472/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The strategic review of the British Irish Council is currently underway aimed at ensuring that the Council operates in the most efficient and effective manner to deliver on its mandate to promote relationships among the people of these islands. Society has changed since the original work programmes were established and it is important to ensure that these are relevant to the priorities of the member administrations. The review is focusing on the work programmes, working methods and support arrangements.

The Council decided at the Edinburgh Summit meeting held on 26 September 2008 that the Knowledge Economy and Tourism work streams should come to an end as work in those areas had reached a natural conclusion. In addition, it concluded that in the e-Health work stream as the EU had become increasingly active in this area BIC work had been largely superseded and should end.

At the Edinburgh Summit the Council agreed to adopt an Early Years Policy work stream, with Wales leading. At the Cardiff Summit, held on 20 February 2009, four new work stream proposals were agreed by the Council. They included a proposal on Energy from Scotland, which comprises two distinct elements, namely marine renewables and grid issues which will be led by the Scottish and UK Governments respectively. The second proposal was for a Digital Inclusion work stream which will be led by the Isle of Man. The final two proposals were from Northern Ireland. They were for work streams on Collaborative Spatial Planning and Housing which will be led by Northern Ireland.

In total five new work streams have been adopted whilst three have come to an end since restoration of devolution. There are now ten BIC work streams operational.

Investment Strategy

Mr A Ross asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of how the Investment Strategy is assisting the Executive to mitigate the impact of the economic downturn. (AQO 2473/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The priority of the Programme for Government and the Investment Strategy is to grow a dynamic and innovative economy, and notwithstanding the challenges of the current financial climate, the Executive remains fully focused on delivering its commitments as published.

The past year has seen departments achieve a record level of capital investment – expected to total some £1.5 billion, over double what was spent only 5 years ago and 30% higher than in 2007/2008.

Over 40% of construction work in Northern Ireland is public sector related.

At a time when the construction industry is suffering a decline in private sector demand, particularly from private sector housing projects, record investment strategy funding is providing a much needed boost for local companies. Indeed as the Minister of Finance and Personnel announced last month, 90% of government procurement contracts in the past year have been secured locally, mainly by small and medium sized enterprises.

The opportunity for local firms to contribute real, long-term benefits for our people through large scale transport, health, education and other Investment Strategy projects has and will continue to enhance the competitiveness of our construction companies.

It is important that we continue to ensure that the Investment Strategy provides opportunities for local business so that our firms can take advantage of not just our own record levels of capital spend, but also develop their competitiveness to take advantage of opportunities internationally in order to bring additional benefit to our economy.

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

Mr F Cobain asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when it will publish its Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy. (AQO 2474/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Improving relationships between and within communities in Northern Ireland and building a shared and better future remains a high priority for our Department and the Executive. We are continuing to develop and refine the programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration to examine how we can build on the achievements of previous initiatives and programmes.

Our work at Ministerial level in OFMDFM as well as throughout the Department at all levels, has demonstrated our commitment to building cohesive, inclusive communities. The fact that we have been delivering substantial additional funding secured in the Executive's budget is just one of our achievements. We have increased funding by a third for the period 2008-2011, from £21 million in the previous CSR period to almost £30 million in the current one. That means that vital work on the ground and with both existing and new communities is better resourced than ever. We also want to ensure that these resources are used in an effective way, so we have been assessing existing programmes and considering new approaches to ensure tangible outcomes from our funding and actions.

We have increased funding to minority ethnic groups by two-thirds and increased funding for youth and interface workers by one-quarter. Statistics show that the work that we fund and resource, is delivering real and meaningful outcomes. There has been a 13.2% reduction in sectarian motivated crimes and three out of five young people in 2007 reported that relationships between Protestants and Catholics were getting better.

However, we are not complacent – we are leading and driving change in our society and in our work – through the Department and the Executive to deliver a shared and better future for all our people.

The delay in producing the programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration is an indication of the depth of consideration that it has been given. We are still determined to bring the programme forward as soon as possible, but not before we are satisfied that we have got the detail right.

International Relations Strategy

Mr P Weir asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans it has to bring forward an International Relations Strategy. (AQO 2475/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Programme for Government identified an action to develop an International Relations Strategy with OFMDFM being the lead department.

The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is currently drafting an Executive International Relations Strategy and following consultation with Departments and Departmental Committees, we hope to bring this to the Executive in the coming months.

Cross-Sectoral Advisory Group

Miss M McIlveen asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the cross sectoral advisory group will next meet. (AQO 2476/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The first meeting of the Cross Sector Advisory Forum took place on the 6 April 2009; this meeting was primarily used to discuss the impact of the economic downturn and agree the terms of reference, topics for further discussion and future working arrangements of the Forum.

It is envisaged that the next meeting will take place before the summer recess.

NICCY: Formal Investigations

Mr R Beggs asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many formal investigations have been conducted by the Commissioner for Children and Young People; and what assessment it has made of any investigations that have been conducted. (AQO 2477/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Commissioner for Children and Young People has not conducted any formal investigations.

Child Poverty

Ms S Ramsey asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consideration it has given to enshrining in legislation the targets contained within the Programme for Government to eradicate child poverty. (AQO 2478/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Ministers for Department of Children and Family Services, Department of Work and Pensions and HM Treasury recently wrote to us as Chairs of the Executive, seeking support for their proposal to place child poverty targets for the UK on a legislative footing and requesting our views on an associated consultation paper.

We intend to issue a formal response on behalf of the NI Executive, having taken the views of Executive colleagues, our Departmental Committee and closely considered the proposals and their potential impact.

Our officials will continue to liaise with their colleagues in Britain throughout the consultation process and when specific legislation proposals emerge we would intend to consult further with Executive colleagues and our Departmental Committee and, if appropriate, seek any necessary consent from the Assembly.

Bill of Rights UK

Mr S Moutray asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether it has been consulted in relation to a UK Bill of Rights. (AQO 2479/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Officials from our department met with Ministry of Justice officials on two occasions in recent months to discuss the forthcoming UK Bill of Rights Green Paper. These discussions were about the generalities of the Green Paper and were arranged by the Ministry of Justice to help it in the development of its proposals.

Long Kesh Site

Mr M McLaughlin asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the development of the Long Kesh site given the current economic climate and the need to create employment opportunities. (AQO 2480/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: We believe that the former Maze/Long Kesh prison and security site is a most valuable asset that can serve as a driver for international as well as local investment, employment and prosperity. As we announced on 8 April, the 360 acre site, which remains in public ownership, is a site of regional significance. We fully recognise the economic development potential of this site and we are committed to exploiting this potential to the full, particularly given the economic climate we now find ourselves in. In order to do so, we will establish a Development Corporation which will take this project forward and will build on the work previously undertaken by OFMDFM and the All-Party Maze/Long Kesh Consultation Panel and which will have regard to all the elements of the site including any listed buildings. As we seek to maximise the economic, historical and reconciliation potential of the site we will continue to work with all those bodies interested in contributing to the development of the site.

Victims Commissioners

Mr T Elliott asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what communication it has had with the Victims Commissioners in pursuance of section 8 of the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. (AQO 2481/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Department has been working closely with the Commission for Victims and Survivors on the development of its work programmes and officials are in regular contact with the Commission. We have approved the Commission's 2008/09 work programme.

The Commission is currently working on its draft 2009-2010 work programme, which will build on the current approved programme. We expect to receive the draft from the Commission shortly.

Climate Change and Sustainable Development

Mr D O'Loan asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister the reasons for the delay in publishing a strategy on climate change and sustainable development. (AQO 2482/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are currently considering a draft of a new Sustainable Development Strategy. We wish to ensure that the new document is closely aligned with our plans and priorities. The cross-cutting nature of sustainable development has necessitated a thorough examination of complementary Plans and Strategies, to better inform our deliberations. Following engagement with the OFMDFM Committee, and approval by the Executive, we intend to publish our Sustainable Development Strategy for consultation in the near future. This will acknowledge tackling climate change as a factor in sustainable development.

Race Forum

Ms A Lo asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether it would consider reconvening the Race Forum in the absence of a Racial Equality Strategy. (AQO 2483/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister is giving consideration to reconvening the Racial Equality Forum. Our Officials are considering the structure and remit of the Forum to help ensure it is fit for purpose in the context of devolution. Officials will seek the views of the sector on this. When all the options have been considered, we will undertake to reconvene the Racial Equality Forum.

We would also take the opportunity to make clear that, although the Forum has not met for some time, the Racial Equality Strategy 2005-10 remains current and we are committed in the Programme for Government to its implementation. We consider that the six shared aims of the Racial Equality Strategy remain robust and comprehensive, especially in light of the increasing diversity of our population in recent years.

Practical work to improve racial equality and create good race relations has also continued. For example, the Migrant Workers thematic sub-group has continued to operate, and its work has been widely welcomed, including the Migrant Workers Strategy and Action plan. And we have increased the resources for our Department's Minority Ethnic Funding Scheme to £1 million per annum.

We are committed to the partnership process which developed the six shared aims and the Strategy originally, and the Racial Equality Forum will be a key mechanism in this partnership.

We are continuing to develop detailed proposals for a programme to promote cohesion, sharing and integration, including good race relations.

Victims Groups: Funding

Mr D Bradley asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when core funding and development grants, including the additional 10% financial resources, will be provided to Victims Groups. (AQO 2484/09)

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: Arrangements for funding the work of victims and survivors groups, including making additional resources available, are already in place for the 2009/2010 financial year, and the groups have been notified accordingly.

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

Tony McCoy's Record National Hunt Wins

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what his plans are to recognise Tony McCoy's record 3,000 National Hunt wins. (AQW 5046/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr G Campbell): I am aware of the recent achievement of Mr A P McCoy in attaining 3,000 National Hunt wins and I have asked my officials to bring forward proposals for the most appropriate way to recognise this achievement.

I will be writing to Tony McCoy to congratulate him on this remarkable achievement.

Ulster American Folk Park

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action does the Ulster American Folk Park take to encourage educational tourists to visit every year. (AQW 5137/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Ulster American Folk Park attracts a wide and diverse audience. The Museum has a marketing strategy which targets a number of key markets including people who are motivated by continuous learning about Northern Ireland's history and traditions. Marketing activity includes

targeted mail drops, conference attendance to showcase programmes, liaison with relevant education bodies and communication through educational journals.

The Museum also works with the Centre for Migration Studies to attract educational tourists. The Centre provides emigration history through books and periodical resources; an emigration database; lectures; a masters programme and international student programmes. Educational tourism is also encouraged through conferences such as the Ulster American Heritage Symposium and the Annual Literature of Irish Exile Autumn School.

The Ulster American Folk Park attracts approximately 20,000 formal learners to the site each year. Tailored educational programmes support the school curriculums in both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. The museum also offers learning and information facilities online. Children are also encouraged to visit the museum during the summer months through youth groups and summer schemes bookings.

Ulster American Folk Park

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action the Ulster American Folk Park is taking to increase the number of visitors it receives from (i) the Republic of Ireland; (ii) the United States of America; and (iii) Europe. (AQW 5147/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Ulster American Folk Park has an effective marketing strategy to raise awareness and encourage visitors from out-of-state markets in line with National Museums Northern Ireland Business Plan. A dynamic and participative Events and Exhibitions programme and tailored service for international tour operator's helps the museum achieve approximately 30% out-of-state visitors.

Targeting of the Irish Republic market is achieved through an integrated communications programme of advertising, PR and promotions particularly in the border counties. This strategy is to be developed further in 2009/2010 to take advantage of the economic climate including the strength of the Euro against Sterling.

The museum also works with key tourism partners such as Tourism Ireland and Regional Tourism Partners to maximise opportunities to encourage visitors from the United States of America and Europe. This includes attendance at shows where networks and contacts are developed. The quality of the visitor experience onsite continues to drive repeat visitation.

Traditional Arts Associated with Ulster Scots

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action it is taking to support and promote the traditional arts associated with Ulster Scots. (AQW 5149/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: DCAL funding for arts is disbursed by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. The Arts Council seeks to promote access to all artforms, including those associated with Ulster-Scots.

Although there is no specific funding programme dedicated to promoting the traditional arts associated with Ulster Scots, funding is available through a range of programmes including the Support for Individual Artists Programme, the Annual Support for Organisations Programme (which incorporates the Cultural Traditions Programme), the Arts Development Fund, and Lottery funding.

The Arts Council is currently providing funding to the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council for a salary for an arts officer. This is the second year in which support has been provided for this post, which has been effective in generating co-operation within the sector and stimulating new arts practice. For the first time, the Ulster-Scots community has a dedicated arts officer, working among the full range of organisations with an investment in 'Ulster-Scots'.

The Arts Council has also provided funding to the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council for other projects, including a project in Scottish Country Dance. The organisation engages in a variety of arts activity including verbal arts, music and dance, and produces materials for use by teachers and youth leaders.

The Arts Council has awarded £662,140 for Ulster-Scots related projects since 1 April 2004.

The Arts Council is currently restructuring its Arts Development Department and intends to advertise for a part time Traditional Arts Officer in the next six months. Support for the traditional arts is currently provided by a number of Arts Development Officers with relevant knowledge of the sector.

Broadcasting: Devolution

Mrs C Hanna asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what consideration his Department has given to the possible devolution of Broadcasting. (AQO 2513/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Broadcasting responsibilities and powers remain a reserved matter. However, I am committed where possible, to ensuring that the specific characteristics and needs of Northern Ireland are fully considered in the development of broadcasting policy.

For example, my Department has responded to the consultation process on the Ofcom Review of Public Service Broadcasting. I am pleased to advise that Ofcom has listened to our representations and subsequently amended the original proposals for Northern Ireland in its final recommendations to the UK Government. The recommendations were published on 21 January 2009.

I have also written to Lord Carter, the Minister for Communications, Technology and Broadcasting, who is responsible for the Digital Britain Review. I have asked him to engage directly with the Northern Ireland broadcasting community in order to ensure that the views of key stakeholders here are clearly articulated to the Review team. I understand that Lord Carter has agreed to host a round table discussion on Digital Britain in Northern Ireland on 23rd April which I will be attending.

I have also agreed to a joint meeting with my counterparts in the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly, to discuss the future of broadcasting and how the needs of our nations are fully taken into account by the UK Government. A suitable date for this meeting is being arranged.

I will continue to ensure that Northern Ireland's position is considered and reflected in the development of broadcasting policy. I consider that the devolution of broadcasting would be difficult and would be a major drain on the resources of the devolved administrations, with the need to introduce parallel legislation in each jurisdiction. Also in the current economic situation and the resultant pressures on Public Service Broadcasters, devolution of broadcasting could result in further fragmentation of commercial broadcasting sector.

Ulster Museum

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the progress in refurbishing the Ulster Museum. (AQO 2514/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Refurbishment work on the Ulster Museum is on schedule and progressing well, with the reopening planned for Autumn 2009. This is a major landmark project which will see the Ulster Museum entirely revitalised with additional gallery space and state-of-the-art visitor facilities. Construction work for the project is on the verge of completion and fit-out of the galleries has already commenced.

Stadia Development

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the importance of the contract between the Irish Football Association and Linfield Football Club in relation to stadia development. (AQO 2515/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The present lease and financial agreement between the Irish Football Association (IFA) and Linfield Football club currently enables all of the Northern Ireland international football team's competitive home international games to be played at Windsor Park. Windsor Park is presently Northern Ireland's largest football stadium and I understand that the lease and financial agreement imposes obligations on both the IFA and Linfield to maintain the stadium in good order, repair and condition. I have made it clear to both the IFA and Linfield that any development at Windsor Park which involved significant public expenditure would be conditional on the current contractual arrangements being replaced.

Film Industry: Economic Contribution

Mr E Poots asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the contribution that development of the film industry can make to the economy. (AQO 2516/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Northern Ireland Screen has been proactive in securing major productions for Northern Ireland which include *City of Ember*, *Closing the Ring* and *Five Minutes of Heaven*.

I am pleased to note the First and deputy First Ministers recent announcement that Northern Ireland Screen has secured the production of the major Hollywood film 'Your Highness' at the Paint Hall, in Belfast's Titanic Quarter. It is expected that the film could mean as much as £10 million to the Northern Ireland economy, employing hundreds of Northern Ireland cast, crew and extras.

Provisional figures indicate that the sub-sector accounted for 2,437 employee jobs (0.3% of total employee jobs in NI) in 2007. The film industry provides many skilled jobs in NI. Furthermore, Northern Ireland Screen estimates that film and television drama production, which are supported through the same funding package, generated around £30m expenditure to the Northern Ireland economy in the last three years.

Films contribute substantially to the cultural life of a country and are a key means of expressing our identity and cultural diversity. Films depicting Northern Ireland are also responsible for attracting tourism and promoting the image of Northern Ireland internationally.

John Calvin

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if his Department recognises the importance of the 500th anniversary of the birth of John Calvin to cultural life. (AQO 2517/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I recognise John Calvin's contribution to Reformed Christian theology, through both his writing and preaching.

This contribution has significantly informed the life of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches both here and further afield.

Public Money: Arts Spend

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why his Department has not made an assessment of the social and/or economic return to the economy per pound of public money spent on the arts. (AQO 2518/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: It is relevant to note here that employment in the creative industries is around 34,600 (4.7% of the workforce) and that this accounts for around 3.8% of the value of the Northern Ireland economy. This area of the economy has been growing rapidly in recent years.

In 2007, DCAL commissioned a study into the social and economic value of public libraries, museums, art and sport in Northern Ireland (known as the ValCAL research project). This research looked in detail at the available data and identified a range of social and economic benefits. However, it was not possible to make a reliable assessment of the economic return per pound spent on the arts.

The challenge of quantifying the economic return on public money spent on the arts is universal and not unique to Northern Ireland.

Arts Funding

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of funding for the arts. (AQO 2519/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In the Budget 2008 – 11 £55.5m revenue funding has been allocated over three years to the arts. A further £31.6m capital funding has been awarded to the arts bringing the total figure for the three years to £87.1m.

These revenue allocations reflect an increase of £9.75m over the 3 years. This is a very significant uplift which was allocated following the public consultation on the Draft Budget. The increase reflects the Executive's appreciation that investment in the arts can generate significant economic, cultural and social benefits.

Despite this increase, the Arts Council has not been able to meet the very high levels of demand for funding through its various funding streams. I am also aware that the current economic climate is having an adverse impact on the amounts of private sponsorship and philanthropic donations to the arts.

I am committed to the development of the Arts and Creativity sector. However, Members will be aware that, we are facing a much more challenging expenditure environment which will put increasing pressure on all areas of expenditure.

The CAL committee is currently carrying out an inquiry into funding of the arts in Northern Ireland. My Department has responded to the inquiry and I am aware of the input provided by the Arts Council. I very much welcome the inquiry and look forward to its conclusions and recommendations, which I will consider carefully when received.

Windsor Park

Mr P Butler asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail his proposed remedial programme of work at Windsor Park, so that international football matches can continue to be played there. (AQO 2520/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Responsibility for developing proposals for a remedial programme of work at Windsor Park so that international football can continue to be played there rests with the Irish Football Association (IFA), the governing body of football in Northern Ireland, and Linfield FC, the owners of the ground. I am aware that the IFA, in conjunction with Linfield, is currently developing such proposals and Sport Northern Ireland (SNI), which is responsible for the development of sport including the distribution of funding, is assisting the IFA and Linfield in that process. Obviously, any proposal for remedial and health and safety work at Windsor Park would need to be viewed in the context of the IFA's long-term stadium development plans.

Creative Industries Innovation Fund

Mr L Cree asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the Creative Industries Innovation Fund. (AQO 2521/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I launched the £5m Creative Industries Innovation Fund on 17 October 2008 to support Northern Ireland's creative sector and am committed to ensuring that all creative businesses have the opportunity to benefit from the Fund.

An initial call for applications from sectoral bodies was issued with the launch of the Fund and 8 organisations submitted applications to the Arts Council.

Following the assessment process funding of £283,560 has been awarded for the delivery of 12 projects.

The projects include international showcasing, a creativity conference, a high definition video content website and the development of marketing plans. I believe that these projects will strengthen the creative sector as a whole.

A second call for applications from creative enterprises opened on 5 January 2009 and closed on 5 February. The Arts Council has advised that 352 applications have been received and these are currently being assessed.

Due to the considerably higher level of interest than originally anticipated, it is likely that decisions on these applications will not be finalised until at least June 2009.

A further call for applications will take place in September 2009 with a closing date of 8 October.

Through the Fund £2m will be made available in each of the years 2009/10 and 2010/11.

Language Development

Mr A Attwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline any recent discussions he has had with counterparts in Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland on language development in other regions; and what lessons he has learned in relation to models of good practice. (AQO 2522/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have discussed language issues with my counterparts in Scotland, Wales and the Irish Republic on several occasions.

I met former Minister Fabriani on 8 September 2008 and Minister O'Cuiv on 4 July 2008 and 16 January 2009. I also met my Scottish, Welsh and Irish Republic counterparts at the meeting of the British Irish Council on 19 & 20 February when language issues were on the agenda.

I have found these meetings to be valuable in demonstrating alternatives to language legislation and providing models of good practice for language protection and development.

Health and Well-Being

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail what discussions he has had with the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing. (AQO 2523/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have not had any discussions, nor have I received any requests to meet, with Nicola Sturgeon the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing.

Irish Language

Mr F Brolly asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why he did not detail his strategy to promote and enhance the Irish language at the last meeting of the British Irish Council where language issues featured on the agenda. (AQO 2524/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The meeting of the British Irish Council on 19 and 20 February 2009 was principally concerned with Social Inclusion.

As the Strategy for Indigenous or Regional Minority Languages has not yet been considered by the Executive I did not think it was appropriate to raise the issue at this time.

Maze Stadium

Mr D McClarty asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what plans he has to reallocate funds from the Maze stadium project to the IFA or football clubs. (AQO 2525/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have indicated my intention to defer major stadium expenditure and to bring forward a number of other high priority sports capital programmes. I am currently considering the scope to re-allocate some of the funding originally allocated for stadium development in 2009/10 and 2010/11, by way of re-profiling the capital programme.

This will include the consideration of a range of competing pressures in my Department's capital programme, such as stadia safety issues and the Elite Facilities Programme.

In seeking to access funding, re-allocated or otherwise, the IFA along with other sports governing bodies and individual clubs may apply to Sport NI and its capital programmes.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Voluntary Grammar Sector

Mr J O'Dowd asked the Minister of Education what financial accountability mechanisms are in place to ensure public funds are properly managed and audited in the voluntary grammar sector. (AQW 6453/09)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Éilíonn an Roinn ar gach Scoil Dheonach Ghramadaí (VSGanna) a bhíonn á maoiniú aici, glacadh le Meabhrán Airgeadais a leagann amach na freagrachtaí airgeadais a bhíonn ar Bhoird Ghobharnóirí agus ar Phríomhoidí.

The Department requires all Voluntary Grammar Schools (VGS) it funds to agree to a Financial Memorandum which sets out the financial responsibilities for Boards of Governors and Principals. A key element of the Financial Memorandum is compliance with the requirements included in the Financial & Audit Arrangements Manual for Voluntary Grammar Schools (FAAM) produced by the Department. This document specifies the standards required in respect of financial management and accountability and is supplemented from time to time by the Department with any current guidance or requirements issued by the Department of Finance & Personnel in respect of relevant financial issues for all public bodies. Additionally, a requirement in FAAM is the submission for analysis of in-year financial returns by all VGS and follow-up by the Department as may be required. All Voluntary Grammar schools funded by the Department are also required annually to be subject to both internal and external audits by professionally qualified auditors (in a format designated by the Department within the

FAAM) in respect of their financial management and financial accountability with the results of these audits submitted for analysis and evaluation by the Department. A further mechanism in respect of evaluating financial management and accountability is performed by NIAO who conduct an annual audit on the DE Accounts which include funding provided to the Voluntary Grammar Sector. I am however concerned that we have the correct approach to financial accountability and therefore I look forward to discussing these issues with representatives of all VGS at meetings to be arranged over the coming months.

Asbestos Risk Assessments

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail the asbestos risk assessment for each school, broken down by parliamentary constituency; (ii) to outline the criteria by which risk is assessed; (iii) if guidance is available to schools on dealing with asbestos; and (iv) if she has any plans to reform the policy on asbestos in schools. (AQW 6663/09)

Minister of Education:

NIA 115/08-10	Financial Auditing and Reporting 2007-08
NIA 116/08-11	The Administration & Management of Disability Living Allowance Reconsideration & Appeals Process
NIA 117/08-12	General Report on the Health & Social Care Sector by the Comptroller & Auditor General for Northern Ireland 2008

Primary Schools

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education (i) which primary schools of all management types underspent their budgets; (ii) how much underspend there was; and (iii) what happened to the underspend, broken down by Education and Library Board area, in each of the last three years. (AQW 6786/09)

Minister of Education: Details of year end surpluses on primary schools budgets in each of the last three years (2005/06, 2006/07, 2007/08), are contained in the schools LMS Outturn Statements for each individual school which have been deposited in the Assembly Library. A summary of the amount of year-end surplus in each of the last three years for primary schools of all management types, broken down by Education and Library Board area is provided at Annex A.

Under the Local Management of School (LMS) arrangements, a school may accumulate savings over a period of several years, however these should not be in excess of 5% or £75,000, whichever is the lesser, of their delegated budget unless they are being accumulated for specific purposes and are detailed in the school financial plans.

Tá na barrachais chinn bhliana ar fad leithdháilte ar scoileanna aonair agus tá sé de dhualagas ar na Boird Gobhanóirí scoile cinntí a dhéanamh ar cén dóigh a úsáidfear na barrachais seo, laistigh de théarmaí na Foirmle Có-mhaoinithe do scoileanna.

All year-end surpluses remain committed to individual schools and the decisions on how the surpluses are utilised are for the schools' Board of Governors to determine within the terms of the Common Funding Formula for schools.

ANNEXE A

PRIMARY SCHOOL SURPLUS BY EDUCATION AND LIBRARY BOARD AREA

	2005/06		2006/07		2007/08	
	No of Schools	(£000s)	No of Schools	(£000s)	No of Schools	(£000s)
Belfast	35	1,808	47	2,763	54	4,126
North Eastern	128	2,914	158	5,719	180	6,780
South Eastern	89	4,846	101	5,556	120	7,834
Southern	119	3,398	145	5,202	168	7,094
Western	141	4,461	131	6,774	137	7,800

Teaching Vacancies

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Education how many teaching vacancies there are in each school in the Upper Bann area. (AQW 6885/09)

Minister of Education: Bíonn an Roinn ag iarraidh eolais ar fholúntais mhúinteoirí ó gach scoil dheontaschúnta ar bhonn bhliantúil. Soláthraíonn an t-eolas “griangraf” ar na folúntais atá ar fáil ar dháta áirithe gach bliain. Leagtar amach thíos na sonraí a bhaineann le togcheantar na Banna Uachtar:

The Department seeks information on teacher vacancies from all grant-aided schools on an annual basis. The information provides a “snapshot” of vacancies at a specific date each year. Details for the Upper Bann parliamentary constituency are set out below:

NUMBER OF VACANCIES STILL TO BE FILLED DURING THE 2008/09 ACADEMIC YEAR AT 3RD NOVEMBER 2008 IN SCHOOLS IN THE UPPER BANN PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

School Name	Permanent		Temporary		Total
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	
Edenderry PS	1	0	0	0	1
Craigavon PS	0	1	0	0	1
Ballyoran PS	1	0	0	0	1
St Mary's PS	1	0	0	0	1
St John The Baptist PS	1	0	0	0	1
Ceara Special School	1	0	0	0	1
Banbridge Academy	1	1	0	0	2

New Build Schools

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Education (i) if the use of renewable energy was considered in the plans for the new build schools St Mary's College and St.Cecilia's College; and (ii) if it is departmental policy that projects favour the use of renewable energy sources. (AQW 6932/09)

Minister of Education: Tugadh mar chomhairle dom gur bhreathnaigh Comhairle na Scoileanna Caitliceacha faoi Chothabháil (CCMS) ar úsáid an fuinnimh in-athnuaite nuair a bhí an tógáil nua ar na scoileanna le haghaidh Coláiste Muire agus Coláiste Cecilia á pleanáil acu, cé gur shocraigh siad gan dul ar aghaidh léi sa chás seo.

I have been advised that the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) considered the use of renewable energy in the planning for the new build schools for St Mary's College and St Cecilia's College though it was not pursued in this case.

The departmental policy is that renewable energy sources should be considered for all school new build projects. Procurement of school buildings takes account of the Government Estate Sustainable Procurement Action Plan and the department's Sustainable Operations on the Government Estate Action Plan in relation to renewable energy sources. The Department of Education also contributes to Government renewable energy targets.

Teaching Vacancies

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Education how many teaching vacancies there are in each school in the East Antrim constituency. (AQW 6961/09)

Minister of Education: Bíonn an Roinn ag iarraidh eolais ar fholúntais mhúinteoirí ó gach scoil dheontaschúnta ar bhonn bhliantúil. Soláthraíonn an t-eolas “griangraf” ar na folúntais atá ar fáil ar dháta áirithe gach bliain. Leagtar amach thíos na sonraí a bhaineann le togcheantar an Aontroma Thiar:

The Department seeks information on teacher vacancies from all grant-aided schools on an annual basis. The information provides a “snapshot” of vacancies at a specific date each year. Details for the East Antrim parliamentary constituency are set out below:

NUMBER OF VACANCIES STILL TO BE FILLED DURING THE 2008/09 ACADEMIC YEAR AT 3RD NOVEMBER 2008 IN SCHOOLS IN THE EAST ANTRIM PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY

School Name	Permanent		Temporary		Total
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	
Olderfleet PS	1	0	0	0	1
Moyle PS	1	0	1	0	2
Linn PS	0	0	1	0	1
Silverstream PS	2	0	0	0	2
St Anthony's PS	0	0	0	1	1
St Nicholas' PS	1	0	0	0	1
Carnlough Controlled Integrated PS	1	0	0	0	1
Monkstown Community School	1	0	0	0	1

Broughshane Primary School

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Education if her Department has any plans to provide a new building for Broughshane Primary School. (AQW 7037/09)

Minister of Education: Is féidir amharc ar an fhreagra a thug mé ar cheist chomhchosúil leis seo a d'fhiafraigh Mervyn Storey MLA díom – in AQW 6731/09. Tá fáil air seo sa Thuairisc Oifigiúil dar dáta 17 Aibreán 2009

I refer you to my answer to the similar question from Mervyn Storey MLA - AQW 6731/09 refers. This can be viewed in the Official Report of 17 April 2009.

DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Major Retail Investments

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if his Department or its agencies have worked with large retailers and community groups/associations to train people for major retail investments, in the last three years. (AQW 5214/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): The Employment Service role is to assist employers to fill vacancies and to assist individuals to move into work. A vacancy service is provided to thousands of employers across Northern Ireland, including in the retail sector. The Employment Service has worked closely with a number of employers in the retail sector and including retail developments such as the Victoria Square and Outlet developments.

Through the Bridge to Employment Programme, my Department participated in a project led by the Local Employment Access Partnership to train staff for IKEA. Two groups of 15 trainees were recruited through community organisations.

In addition, Further Education Colleges have collaborated with a number of major employers and with Skillsmart, the sector skills council, on the development and delivery of training programmes for the retail sector.

DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT**Project Kelvin**

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to confirm that the Telehouse announced for Londonderry/ Derry will be marketed as the Project Kelvin Telehouse by Invest NI when seeking Foreign Direct Investment. (AQW 7147/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): Invest NI will promote Project Kelvin and the benefits it brings to the whole of Northern Ireland. The project currently consists of 8 Points of Presence, one of which is the telehouse in Londonderry.

Invest NI will integrate the benefits of Project Kelvin into its Northern Ireland sales proposition. This will help in its efforts to secure quality mobile foreign direct investment from companies that need an excellent telecommunications infrastructure as part of their overall solution.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT**Management of Bonfires**

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of the Environment to report on his Department's obligations in relation to the regulation of '11th Night' bonfires. (AQW 7017/09)

Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson): My Department's obligations, and powers in relation, to '11th Night' bonfires are limited, being only one of a number of public authorities with an interest in this area.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has neither the regulatory powers nor sufficient operational resources to remove waste from bonfire sites. This is the responsibility of either the Housing Executive, should they own the land, or District Councils, which are also responsible for the control of smoke emissions, under the Clean Air (NI) Order 1981.

NIEA's focus is on commercial, large scale dumping and our investigations focus on those businesses and transporters who allow waste to be deposited illegally. Agency staff can pursue incidents of wastes being illegally deposited on bonfires if they have evidence of the company, or the carrier, responsible. If there is sufficient evidence then NIEA will prepare a file for the Public Prosecution Service (PPS).

In respect of controlling air pollution arising from bonfires, District Councils are the lead enforcement authority and the primary legislation is the Clean Air (NI) Order 1981. Article 4 of the Order prohibits the emission of dark smoke from industrial or trade premises, or other premises on which waste originating from a trade source is burned. Article 23 provides that where a nuisance is caused by smoke emitted from premises, then action can be taken under the Public Health (Ireland) Act 1878 for 'statutory nuisance.'

In terms of guidance, NIEA officials maintain regular liaison with tyre dealers in the lead-up to bonfires being built to ensure that they are aware of their responsibilities with regard to Duty of Care and that appropriate procedures are being followed.

My Department is also obliged to monitor, and encourage, Northern Ireland's adherence to targets within the EU Waste Directive, which stipulates percentages of waste to be recycled by certain years.

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Civil Service

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the total number of Civil Servants who have been supplied with job-related mobile phones; and (ii) how much money his Department has spent paying the bills for these phones, in each of the last five years. (AQW 6311/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr N Dodds): It is not possible to supply all of the information requested for the last 5 years.

As of 31st March 2009 5848 Civil Servants were supplied (of which 601 were DFP staff) with job-related mobile phones and other mobile technologies and the total spend for DFP staff in 08/09 was £111,646.45.

Please note that there is a requirement on staff to pay for any personal calls made on NICS-provided mobile phones.

VAT Paid by Departments

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much has each of the Departments paid in VAT to other (i) Departments; and (ii) UK Departments, over the last three years. (AQW 6497/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: In the case of departments in Northern Ireland and certain public bodies, an agreement has been reached, with HM Revenue and Customs, that Value Added Tax (VAT) paid on goods and services may be refunded. This was done, at the introduction of VAT in 1973, on the basis that many of the services administered by Central Government in Northern Ireland would be regarded as local authority functions in Great Britain and there is a single VAT registration number covering all participants in this arrangement. All VAT paid by NI Departments to other NI Departments and GB Departments for the last three years has been reclaimed.

It is not possible without disproportionate effort to quantify the amount of VAT paid.

Civil Service

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to the answer to AQW 5594/09, whether he will fill the 1067.8 vacancies across the Civil Service, that are currently filled by temporary staff, with pensionable appointed civil servants. (AQW 6596/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The 1067.8 NICS posts identified in the previous answer as being filled by temporary workers were a mixture of permanent and temporary posts. It is intended that less than 50% will subsequently be filled by permanent staff.

The use of temporary arrangements allows management greater flexibility in meeting business needs in terms, for example, of running projects of limited duration or dealing with temporary pressures in staffing levels

Concessionary Travel Pass Applications

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) how many days does it take to process an application for a Concessionary Travel Pass for Civil Service employees; (ii) how many Concessionary Travel Pass applications have not been processed and are still outstanding; and (iii) what is the average waiting time from the date of application for the Concessionary Travel Pass to its receipt. (AQW 6656/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The average time taken to process concessionary travel claims, known as excess fares allowance, depends on the circumstances of the particular application. Payroll cut off for salaries is usually on the 12th of the given month. All applications completed before this date will be included in that month's salary.

There are currently 32 concessionary travel applications to be processed.

The average waiting time from the date of application for excess fares allowance to its receipt cannot be determined. Applications are through an automated system which is not designed to track the initial date of application against the excess fares that are recorded on the system.

Investment Planned for East Antrim

Mr D Hilditch asked Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the (i) projects; and (ii) amount of investment planned for the East Antrim constituency, for each of the next two financial years. (AQW 6750/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Department of Finance and Personnel currently has no investment projects planned for the East Antrim constituency in the financial years 09/10 and 10/11.

Government Construction Contracts

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in relation to his statement that in excess of 90% of government construction contracts were awarded to local companies during the financial year 2008/9, to list (i) the contracts; (ii) the value of the contracts; and (iii) the companies awarded the contracts. (AQW 6807/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The information required to provide a comprehensive reply to your question is not held centrally in DFP.

However, Government construction clients have recently advised the Central Procurement Directorate that, up to January 2009, 324 construction works contracts, valued at £250k or above, were awarded by Government construction clients. The aggregated value of these contracts was approximately £575m. Of these, 318, (approximately 98%), with an aggregated value of approximately £571m, were awarded to local construction companies.

The ISNI Information Portal, when available, will provide access to information on individual projects.

Water Infrastructure Projects

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel the financial implications of slippage in the timing of capital schemes for water infrastructure projects. (AQW 6949/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: At present, there is almost £200 million capital allocated for waste infrastructure projects in the Budget period 2008-2011. Should there be slippage in these projects, thus necessitating spend beyond the Budget period, DOE, as the sponsoring Department, would bid for the relevant amounts in the years beyond the budget period. Such bids would be considered by the Executive in the light of all the competing pressures and in the context of the resources available.

Reclassification of Resource Expenditure

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what impact reclassification of resource expenditure will have on the Northern Ireland Block Grant in the next Comprehensive Spending Review. (AQW 6952/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The reclassification of resource expenditure as capital investment by the Executive, as part of the in-year monitoring process, will not impact on the opening baseline position for the Northern Ireland Block in the next Spending Review.

Civil Service

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of civil servants who have taken early retirement in each of the last five years, broken down by gender and retirement age. (AQW 6969/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The number of civil servants who have taken early retirement in each of the last five years, broken down by gender and retirement age, is set out in the attached table.

NUMBERS OF NICS EARLY RETIREMENTS IN YEARS 2004/5 TO 2008/9

BROKEN DOWN BY AGE AND GENDER

Age	2004/05		2005/06		2006/07		2007/08		2008/09	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
28	1									
30							2			
31		1								
33		1			1					
34	1							1		
35		1	2		1					1
36	1	1	1	1		1				
37		1		2	2			1		
38	1	1					1	2		
39		2		1	1	1	1			1
40			1	1		2				
41	1	3	3	3	2	2	1	1		
42	2		1			1	1	2		
43	1	1	1	1		3	3	2		
44	2	1	2			1		3	2	
45	1	2	2	2	1	1	3	4	1	1
46	1	3		7	1	5	1	1	2	
47	1	3			2	5	1	3		
48	1	5		6		7	2	1	1	4
49	5	4		4	8	3	2	4	2	3
50	5	6	3	3	9	3	10	3	2	2
51	5	4	7	1	3	5	3	2	1	1
52	5	2	3	7	4	1	2	2	3	2
53	2	3	3	7	6	4	4	5	2	4
54	5	4	9	2	6	7	6	6		3
55	4	8	5	4	6	4	7	4	6	2
56	5	2	4	3	7	3	5	6	6	2
57	5	10	9	5	7	5	10	6	7	2
58	12	7	15	11	10	6	11	9	5	12
59	11	8	20	13	20	15	33	16	13	7
Total	78	84	91	84	97	85	109	84	53	47
Annual Total	162		175		182		193		100	

Energy Performance Certificates

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when his Department will impose fines on individuals and businesses who fail to have, or display, an energy performance certificate in their premises.

(AQW 6980/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Department is currently pursuing an enforcement regime based on Trading Standard's best practice, which recognises that enforcement is measured by compliance rather than the number of fines imposed. Each case will be considered on its own merit, and fines will be imposed on the relevant person when the Department is satisfied that all other routes to encourage compliance have been exhausted.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Arthritis Care Report

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what measures his Department is taking in response to the Arthritis Care Report in which many respondents described the dismissive attitude of medical professional, during diagnosis and treatment; (ii) if his Department maintains complaints statistics; and (iii) to breakdown the number of complaints by Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 4887/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey):

- (i) My Department is already taking steps which address the issues raised in the Arthritis Care Report. Additional funding has been made available for services for people with arthritis and waiting times for anti-TNF treatment and hospital appointments have been reduced. The report is critical of the attitude of medical professionals. This is very disappointing and needs to be addressed, and we are doing so. For example, this is one of the key areas covered in the GP Patient Experience Survey currently being undertaken by the Department. Over 50,000 replies to the survey questionnaire have been received and I will ensure that action is taken to address areas of concern identified in the survey.
- (ii) My Department's Hospital Information Branch maintains health and social care complaints statistics.
- (iii) The following table presents a breakdown of the total number of complaints received by Health and Social Care Trusts (in each of the last three years):

HSC Trust	Total number 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
Southern Trust	623	625	494
Western Trust	546	660	636
NI Ambulance Service	178	129	107
Total	4944	6371	4860

Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made to date on improving parking facilities at Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry.

(AQW 4901/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have provided funding for a further 87 car parking spaces at the Daisy Hill Hospital site. Work is underway and is expected to be completed in March 2009.

Revenue Funding

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if, under exceptional circumstances, revenue funding can be transferred to capital funding. (AQW 4907/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Under exceptional circumstances it may be possible to transfer revenue funding to capital funding. However, this could only be done with the approval of HM Treasury and in agreement with the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Patient Deaths

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what records the Department keeps on the number of patient deaths attributable to hospital error. (AQW 4908/09)

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

Administration Staff in Hospitals

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what education and training is in place for administration staff in hospitals in relation to hygiene. (AQW 4910/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Administration staff in all Trusts receive Infection Prevention and Control training.

Ambulance Vehicles

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the deep cleaning procedures in place for ambulance vehicles. (AQW 4911/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The cleaning of the ambulance fleet and equipment is the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS). I have been assured by NIAS that ambulance stations are supplied with the necessary equipment and materials to facilitate vehicle cleaning and that robust procedures for infection control which comply with national guidelines are in place.

Deep cleaning involves the removal of the major pieces of equipment from the ambulance and thorough cleaning of these along with cleaning the interior of the ambulance and its external body.

Pneumonia

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many cases of hospital acquired pneumonia and MRSA related pneumonia there were in each hospital, in each of the last three years. (AQW 4912/09)

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

Flu Vaccination

Mr S Moutray asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of people who received letters informing them that they may benefit from a flu vaccination who did not avail of the opportunity and what percentage of the total number of letters sent out that this represented, in each of the last three years. (AQW 4915/09)

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

MRSA

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many visitors to hospitals have contracted (i) MRSA; and (ii) Clostridium Difficile, in each of the last ten years. (AQW 4918/09)

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

Nursing Staff

Mr F Molloy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the total number of nursing staff is, in each Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 5093/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of nursing staff employed by each Health and Social Care Trust can be found in the latest Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Key Facts Workforce Bulletin as at 31st December 2008, which is on the DHSSPS website at:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/key_facts_workforce_bulletin_dec_2008_web.pdf

Efficiency Savings

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he will be bringing the Health and Social Care Trusts proposals on efficiency savings to the Executive. (AQW 6699/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Executive approval is only required for decisions or proposals that cross Departmental boundaries. I therefore do not intend to bring any efficiency proposals to the Executive for consideration. The Executive is aware of the public concerns about the proposals being put forward by Health and Social Care Trusts. These proposals are only necessary as there has been no dispensation given to Health and Social Care from the 3% per annum efficiency target.

Cancelled Clinics

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many clinics were cancelled during the 2007/08 and 2008/09 period. (AQW 6754/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information in respect of cancelled clinics during 2007/08 can be found on the DHSSPS website at http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-activity_stats-2/hospital_statistics.htm#hospital

Following a review of my Department's outpatient data collection, the collection of data on cancelled clinics was discontinued from the beginning of 2008/09 and was replaced by the collection of data on cancelled outpatient appointments.

The 2008/09 Annual Hospital Statistics publication which will report on the number of cancelled outpatient appointments during 2008/09 will be published in August/September 2009.

Minor Ailments Scheme

Mr D McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the reasons why people who are not exempt from paying prescription charges are also not eligible for the minor ailments scheme, given that some medications on this scheme are cheaper on prescription rather than over-the-counter. (AQW 6978/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The minor ailments service was initiated as part of the Pharmaceutical Efficiencies programme in response to the Comprehensive Spending Review 2005/08. The principal tenet of the minor ailments service is that it is more efficient to treat some common, minor ailments in community pharmacies as opposed to within GP practices. The evidence suggests that those patients who can afford to pay for medication for minor ailments will choose to do so, while those who cannot afford to pay will consult their GP in order to receive supply via a health service prescription.

Whilst there are some products on the Minor Ailments Scheme, mainly for headlice and thrush, which cost more than the cost of a current prescription charge, the majority, over 80% are less than £3.00.

It is important to note that this is an interim scheme which will run for one year. It will be monitored and include an evaluation of the ongoing affordability and value for money of the service. Now that prescription charges are in the process of being removed, careful consideration needs to be given to the minor ailments scheme and a review group comprising relevant stakeholders has been established to make proposals.

Care of Patients

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to increase the role of family members for the care of patients. (AQW 6989/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Trusts, at present, are required to ensure that comprehensive determination of need takes account of the wishes of service users and their carers (usually family). Service users and their carers should be supported to make informed choices about packages of care. The proposed new capacity legislation will provide for statutory recognition of the views of carers to be taken into account when decisions on care plans are being made.

Care of Patients

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what responsibilities health care staff have to take into consideration the views of family members regarding the care of patients who have reduced mental capacity. (AQW 6990/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Staff dealing with patients with a reduced mental capacity should, as best practice, consult with a person nominated to speak on behalf of the patient and explain what their proposed treatment will be. In the case of a patient detained under the Mental Health Order, the 'nearest relative' should be informed about the proposed treatment regime. The views of family members are integral to any care package as part of a multidisciplinary assessment of needs.

Care of Patients

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what role do family members have in the decision making process relating to the care of individuals with severe mental problems. (AQW 6991/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Family members are involved in any multidisciplinary assessment of the patients needs. In the case of a person with severe mental needs, there would usually be one member of the family nominated to speak for, and be consulted on, the person's behalf.

Care of Patients

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his plans to introduce legislation to clarify the rights of family members to intervene when patients with mental health problems are incapable of making their own decisions. (AQW 6992/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has completed consultation on a "Legislative Framework for Mental Capacity and Mental Health Legislation in Northern Ireland", which ended on 31 March. This framework contains a proposal to replace the existing role of the nearest relative with a new role of nominated person, as recommended in the Bamford Review. Following this consultation, my Department will be seeking the endorsement of the Executive on its policy proposals.

Care of Patients

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety under what circumstances can health professionals intervene in the feeding of a patient with mental health problems who is refusing to eat. (AQW 6993/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In the first instance health professionals would aim to engage with the patient, and if appropriate their family and carers, in order to persuade the patient to eat voluntarily. Should this prove unsuccessful, and where the patient is suffering from a mental illness or severe mental impairment of a nature or degree which would warrant his detention in hospital, they would then be able to intervene by detaining the person under the Mental Health Order for treatment, which may include re-feeding.

Before deciding on whether or not to feed a patient against their will, clinicians will ensure that any intervention is proportionate and complies with available clinical and legal guidance.

Policy on Recycling

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to report on the current policy on recycling or purchasing used medical equipment where appropriate and safe to do so. (AQW 7016/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Any medical device, new or otherwise, used by HSC bodies that has been purchased, donated or obtained on loan, must have a valid CE mark and be fit for its intended purpose in accordance with the guidance contained in Device Bulletin DB2006 (05) Managing Medical Devices published by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency and available on their website at www.mhra.gov.uk/publications/safetyguidance/devicebulletins.

MRSA

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) what is the procedure for swabbing for MRSA at the A&E department in the Ulster Hospital; and (ii) why there is a procedural difference between this and those in the wards in the hospital. (AQW 7113/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The swabbing procedures for MRSA in the Ulster Hospital are;

- (i) Nasal and groin swabs are taken when screening for MRSA. For patients who are denture wearers a throat swab is also requested. If a patient has a wound (break in the skin) this area is also swabbed.
- (ii) The same screening procedure is employed in the A&E department as in the wards of the hospital.

MRSA

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why people testing positive for MRSA at the A&E department in the Ulster Hospital are sent home being unaware of the test results, particularly as it is contagious. (AQW 7114/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Following submission of swabs screening for MRSA a preliminary result is available within 24hrs of receipt of the sample. However following this, the bacteria undergoes further tests, requiring incubation for a further 18-24 hours, to confirm its species and antibiotic sensitivity pattern. It is only when this 48 hour testing period is complete that confirmation of the presence of MRSA can be made.

Most patients presented to the A&E department will have been either admitted to the hospital or discharged home by this time.

When the presence of MRSA has been confirmed, usually 48 hours after the test is submitted to labs, the practice is that the Trust's infection control staff contact the patient's GP to advise of this result, who will follow up.

This is in line with Trust policy.

MRSA

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why GP's nurses and family members of people who test positive for MRSA in the A&E department of the Ulster Hospital are not told of the results. (AQW 7115/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Following submission of swabs screening for MRSA a preliminary result is available within 24hrs of receipt of the sample. However following this, the bacteria undergoes further tests, requiring incubation for a further 18-24 hours, to confirm its species and antibiotic sensitivity pattern. It is only when this 48 hour testing period is complete that confirmation of the presence of MRSA can be made.

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This is in line with Trust policy.

Children's Diabetes Research

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to explain why he does not provide funding for children's diabetes research. (AQW 7117/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department, via the Health and Social Care (HSC), Research and Development function of the Public Health Agency, funds a significant amount of research into diabetes - funding currently exceeds £4.9 million and supports twenty three research studies. The studies do not generally focus on the age of patients. Rather they consider aspects such as the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diabetes and the prevention of diabetic complications.

As well as funding individual research studies the Public Health Agency also funds networks to support clinical research, including the recently established Northern Ireland Clinical Research Network (NICRN). To date the NICRN has adopted ten diabetes research studies with a further six in the pipeline. The NICRN is part of a wider UK Clinical Research Network which brings together a wide range of commercial, academic and charitable funders. Some of these clinical trials are UK-wide studies and some are initiated in Northern Ireland - an example of the latter group is a project looking at the needs of adolescents with Type 1 diabetes.

Patient and Client Council

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide the names of those appointed to the Patient and Client Council. (AQW 7144/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I refer the Member to www.patientclientcouncil.hscni.net

DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Road Opening

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he intends to take to ensure that the recommendations in the recent PAC Report in relation to road opening are implemented. (AQO 2492/09)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): I note publication of the report and will consider the Committee's recommendations fully.

The member for Belfast North will be aware of the established parliamentary process regarding responding to recommendations made by the Public Accounts Committee which requires a detailed Memorandum of Reply,

setting out my Department's response to the report, to be submitted to the Chairman of the Committee within 2 months of the publication of the report. On this occasion that will be done before 22 May 2009.

It would, therefore, be inappropriate for me to comment in detail in advance of the issue of the Memorandum of Reply.

Rapid Transport System, Belfast

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the need to develop Belfast's rapid transport system beyond the boundaries of the city. (AQO 2493/09)

Minister for Regional Development: In November 2008 the Executive endorsed the design and construction of a pilot Rapid Transit network in Belfast with 3 routes from the city centre into Titanic Quarter, East Belfast and West Belfast. The newly formed Rapid Transit Division within my department is currently working on the preliminary design of this network. Extensions to the pilot network, either within or outside the boundaries of the city, will be considered based upon the success of the initial pilot network.

Water Pipes

Mr K McCarthy asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he has taken to ensure that his Department is better equipped to deal with burst water pipes. (AQO 2494/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it is satisfied it is adequately equipped to respond efficiently and effectively to incidents of burst water mains, through the deployment of in-house resources and contractor support. NIW carries out reviews of all significant incidents and the effectiveness of its responses to them, and any lessons learnt are used to improve subsequent responses.

M2 Road Works

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister for Regional Development if the M2 road works are on schedule. (AQO 2495/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the M2 improvement scheme is currently programmed by the contractor for completion by late April/early May - approximately four months ahead of the contractor's original programmed completion date of 28 August 2009.

20mph Zones: Lagan Valley

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to introduce 20mph zones in the Lagan Valley constituency. (AQO 2496/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it has no plans to introduce any 20 mph zones in the Lagan Valley constituency, at this time.

By way of background I should explain that 20mph zones are an extension of traffic calming schemes, and are generally implemented in residential areas where an extensive network of streets are involved and self-enforcing measures are provided to reduce vehicle speeds to approximately 20mph. Experience shows that 20mph zones in residential areas are ineffective without traffic calming measures.

While there are no plans to introduce any 20mph zones in the Lagan Valley constituency area, Roads Service will continue to implement traffic calming schemes which, by their nature, will encourage a reduction in speed to 20 mph. However, the provision of traffic calming schemes is dependent upon resources. Roads Service receives many requests for traffic calming schemes and, as demand greatly exceeds the capacity to supply these measures, priorities must be established. All requests are assessed objectively, using criteria which consider factors such as, speed, volume of traffic, collision history and general road characteristics.

Foyle Ferry Service

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps he has taken to amend articles 99 and 100 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993 which would allow him to take direct action to save the Foyle Ferry Service. (AQO 2497/09)

Minister for Regional Development: As I advised the Member in my recent answer to his Assembly Question AQW 6417/09, my Department was not involved in the creation of this ferry service, nor does it have legislative or direct operational responsibility. However, in the absence of other Departments or Ministers accepting responsibility, I have offered to work with all parties to see if solutions to its financial problems can be found.

I have previously made it clear that there are already many pressures on the funding available for Roads Service, and I do not foresee my Department taking over responsibility for this ferry service. That said, I am hopeful that in highlighting the problems being encountered by the ferry service and urgently canvassing support from all possible interested parties, the necessary financial support can be secured.

Rural Transport

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister for Regional Development when he intends to conduct a review into rural transport. (AQO 2498/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department is currently reviewing the Regional Transportation Strategy. Among the issues being considered by the review team is accessibility for people living in rural areas.

In 2007 the Department carried out a review of the Rural Transport Fund. This Fund provides support to 18 Rural Community Transport Partnerships to offer a range of specialised transport services to their members. These services complement the existing conventional public transport network and provide transport opportunities for people with reduced mobility living in rural areas throughout the North.

The rural transport services provided by Translink are monitored and developed on an ongoing basis taking account of current customer patronage and prospective demand.

Narrow Water/Carlingford Lough: Proposed Bridge

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the development of the proposed bridge between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland at Narrow Water/Carlingford Lough. (AQO 2499/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has no direct involvement in the proposal to provide a bridge at Narrow Water. The project is being taken forward by Louth County Council and their Consultant Roughan O'Donovan. I am therefore unable to provide you with an update on development of the proposed bridge.

Planning Applications

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Regional Development what guidelines the Roads Service follows when being consulted on the impact of a planning application upon traffic and parking in a given area. (AQO 2500/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service is consulted by Planning Service to provide advice on roads matters for planning applications, including the impact of traffic and parking in a given area.

The main guidelines that Roads Service considers planning proposals against, is the "Transport Assessment – Guidelines for Development Proposals in Northern Ireland", a joint DOE/DRD planning guide.

In addition, Roads Service considers planning proposals against:

- Creating Places - achieving quality in residential developments (DOE/DRD 2000);
- Guidelines for Traffic Impact Assessment (Institution of Highways and Transportation, 1994);
- Planning Policy Statements and Development Control Advice Notes;

- Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy 2002 – 2012 (DOE/DRD/Investing for Health/PSNI); and
- Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (Highways Agency).

A8 Belfast to Larne: Dualling

Mr S Neeson asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update, including timescale, on the full dualling of the A8 Belfast-Larne road; and what assurance he can give that funding from the Irish Government, under the National Development Plan, will remain available for the project. (AQO 2501/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Development work on the dualling of the remaining stretch of single carriageway, on the A8 Belfast to Larne road, has been progressing well. The first key milestone, completion of the preliminary route corridor assessment, was achieved ahead of target and the next key milestone, to identify a preferred route option within the corridor, is expected to be completed on target in mid 2009.

Subject to satisfactory progression through the statutory procedures and procurement process, and the availability of finance, construction could start in 2012. I can also advise that the Irish Government has recently confirmed that the £400 million contribution to the A5 and A8 projects is still available.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister for Regional Development what his Department is doing to advance any policy focusing on Corporate Social Responsibility, and how his Department and its agencies will provide positive community and social impact through procurement and service delivery. (AQO 2502/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department is strongly committed to corporate social responsibility and has articulated how it aims to develop it in its Corporate & Business Plans 2009-11.

In relation to procurement, my Department is following the guidance prepared by the Central Procurement Directorate and the Equality Commission on Sustainable Development and Equality of Opportunity in Public Sector Procurement. In line with this guidance, action plans have recently been produced by Roads Service, Northern Ireland Water and Translink at my instruction. These include proposals for implementing critical community impact and social objectives such as increasing access to public sector procurement opportunities for small and medium enterprises, encouraging the economically inactive back into the workplace and encouraging training and skills development through, for instance, apprenticeships.

In addition, the Roads Service Action Plan ensures that social and environmental factors are taken into consideration, alongside financial factors, in making procurement decisions.

The Action Plan has a package of actions to deliver the step change needed to ensure that Roads Service and its partners are focused upon better design, low waste, higher recycled content, respect for biodiversity and delivery of its wider sustainable development goals.

We are also very keen to support our staff to make a personal contribution to the community. One of the ways we hope to achieve that is through a partnership with Business in the Community, which would allow us to participate in schemes such as the Talent Management programme and the Time to Read initiative. You will also be aware of the recent Between the Bridges community-based charity event which my Department played a role in facilitating, through its corporate social responsibility agenda.

We also wish to develop in areas such as Research Development where we can, through internships and work placements, make use of undergraduates and graduates to help us with work associated with promoting sustainability.

It is my intention to publicly launch my Departments Corporate Social responsibility policy shortly which is currently being comprehensively developed to take account of the wide spectrum of measures we will take now and in the future.

Irish Language: Public Transport

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development what his Department is doing to advance the use of the Irish Language in the Gaeltacht Quarter in Belfast through services provided by his Department's agencies, such as Translink, in the delivery of public transport. (AQO 2503/09)

Minister for Regional Development: The Department worked recently with Raidió Fáilte to develop Irish language advertisements to promote our Door-2-Door transport and concessionary travel services in Belfast. Literature to promote Door-2-Door services has also been made available in Irish.

I am told by Translink that it provides school safety information and guides on how to use their services in Irish. Also at a local level it has made information available on bus services at two bus stops with known Irish language links. Following representations on this matter, I am asking Translink to give consideration to the provision of further bilingual information.

Road Schemes: Northern Division

Mr A McQuillan asked the Minister for Regional Development how many major road schemes are planned for the Northern Division in 2009/10 and 2010/11. (AQO 2504/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has two major road schemes planned for Northern Division in 2009/10 and 2010/11, these being:

- A2 Broadbridge dualling scheme between Maydown and City of Derry Airport; and
- M2/A26 Ballee Road East dualing scheme outside Ballymena

It is anticipated that construction of both these schemes will commence during April/May 2009.

Water Charges: Undetected Leaks

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development what assessment he has made of consumers being charged for water that is lost through undetected leaks in the metered supply. (AQO 2505/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I am advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that customers with metered water supplies are legally responsible, and are billed, for all water usage recorded through their meters. This will include any water which is lost through bursts and leaks on their private supply pipes, as well as the water that is consumed. These responsibilities reflect the fact that there is a cost associated with treatment and distribution of all water supplied to customers and that the cost of wastage arising from bursts or leaks on private supply routes should not be borne by other customers or the taxpayer.

Nevertheless, NIW recognises that customers may be unaware that wastage is occurring and, in specified circumstances where NIW believes the customer has not been negligent and repairs have been carried out effectively, defined allowances may be granted in accordance with a policy agreed with the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland.

NIW will also offer a repayment agreement to the customer, which will enable revised amounts to be paid over an extended period.

DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Caravan Owners

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development if he plans to introduce legislation to protect caravan owners from being evicted by caravan site owners, if they do not agree to upgrade their caravans. (AQW 6828/09)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): I refer the Member to the answers I gave in respect of AQW 7085/08 and AQW 5513/08.

Homes Scheme

Dr S Farry asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the current status of the 'Homes Scheme' to facilitate existing Housing Executive tenants to access tenancies in other parts of the United Kingdom. (AQW 6833/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Organisations Mobility Exchange Scheme provided the facility to enable social tenants to swap homes between different regions of the UK. The scheme was facilitated through the Housing Selection Scheme, a scheme approved by my Department in accordance with Article 22(2) of the Housing (NI) Order 1981. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister revised a range of 'mobility' scheme and services, resulting in the cancellation of the Housing Organisations Mobility Exchange Scheme in August 2006.

However, the Housing Selection Scheme continued to provide the facility for qualifying UK applicants to apply directly for social housing from outside Northern Ireland.

Budget Priorities

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Social Development what her budget priorities will be in the next financial quarter. (AQW 6998/09)

Minister for Social Development: For the incoming year 2009-10 my priorities remain:

- investing in housing and addressing the housing crisis;
- building communities, tackling disadvantage and encouraging social responsibility; and
- creating vibrant cities, towns and urban areas.

Social Housing

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development how many are currently on the waiting list for social housing in the Down District. (AQW 7005/09)

Minister for Social Development: At 31 December 2008, 1266 applicants were on the waiting list for social housing in the Housing Executive's Downpatrick District Office.

Household Fuel Payments

Mr M Brady asked the Minister for Social Development why enough money was not available in Post Offices to meet the household fuel payments, bearing in mind the numbers involved, and what action the Minister is taking to rectify the situation; and can she give an assurance that it will not happen again and that these payments will be dealt with appropriately. (AQW 7065/09)

Minister for Social Development: The provision of cash in Post Offices is a matter for Post Office Ltd. Questions relating to the operation and management of the Post Office Network should therefore be directed to Post Office Limited. My officials are working with Post Office Ltd to ensure that lessons are learnt from this incident and that a recurrence is avoided.

Social Security Agency

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development in relation to vacancies in the Social Security Agency, (i) how many there are; (ii) for how long they have been vacant; (iii) what sections/branches are affected; (iv) what the grades are; and (v) what action is being taken to fill the vacancies. (AQW 7118/09)

Minister for Social Development: At the 31 March 2009 the Social Security Agency (SSA) had a net vacancy position of 199. This is approximately 3.8% of the total SSA employees. Staff turnover alone in a typical year is in the order of 7%. Therefore the Agency will always have a 'float' of vacancies and temporary staff at any particular moment in time. The length of time a post can be vacant varies and a breakdown is not readily available. Details are provided in the tables below of the vacancies at Directorate and grade level. The Agency is continuing to work with the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) and HR Connect in the recruitment of new staff.

OPERATIONS DIRECTORATE

Grade	Vacancy (Surplus) March 09
G7	4.00
DP	3.39
SO	9.02
EO1	41.20
EO2/ SSO1	64.82
AO/SSO2	61.82
AA	87.35
Other Perm Staff	59.19
Temporary Staff	(196.9)
Total	133.89

FINANCE & PLANNING DIRECTORATE

Grade	Vacancy (Surplus) March 09
G7	0.00
DP	2.00
SO	5.5
EO1	4.17
EO2/ SSO1	3.25
AO/SSO2	18.18
AA	14.46
Other Perm Staff	0.00
Temporary Staff	(13.00)
Total	34.56

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE

Grade	Vacancy (Surplus) March 09
G7	3.3
DP	2.00
SO	4.50
EO1	6.98
EO2/ SSO1	5.59
AO/SSO2	7.67
AA	0.00
Other Perm Staff	4.8
Temporary Staff	(4.00)
Total	30.84

SOCIAL SECURITY AGENCY (TOTAL)

Grade	Vacancy (Surplus) March 09
G7	7.30
DP	7.39
SO	19.02
EO1	52.35
EO2/ SSO1	73.66
AO/SSO2	87.67
AA	101.81
Other Perm Staff	63.99
Temporary Staff	(213.9)
Total	199.29

Grades: G7 (Grade 7) DP (Deputy Principal) SO (Staff Officer) EO1 (Executive Officer 1) EO2/ SSO1 (Executive Officer 2, Social Security Officer 1) AO/SSO2 (Admin Officer, Social Security Officer 2) AA (Admin Assistant)

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