
OFFICIAL REPORT

(HANSARD)

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Tel: 028 9052 1078

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NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Friday 19 June 2009

Written Answers to Questions

OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

Gender Equality Strategy

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if the Gender Equality Strategy is being advanced in its Department. (AQW 7531/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): Our commitment to tackling gender inequality is outlined in our Programme for Government. A key driver is the Executive's Gender Equality Strategy 2006-2016. It commits the Executive to progress the work of Departments in mainstreaming gender equality into policies, strategies and activities; and to promote gender specific measures to tackle identified gender inequalities. Dedicated Equality Practitioners in all Departments have contributed to Cross-departmental Gender Equality Action Plans for 2008-2011, linked to Programme for Government priorities.

OFMDFM seeks to promote gender equality across government and more widely, by working in partnerships with key stakeholders which includes representation from across the voluntary sector.

Bonuses Paid to Senior Civil Servants

Mr P McGlone asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much was paid in bonuses to senior Civil Servants in its Department in the year 2008/09. (AQW 8186/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Information on the total amount paid in non-consolidated bonus payments to Senior Civil Servants in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in respect of performance year 2008/2009 is not yet available. It is anticipated that this information will be available in the autumn.

Economy

Mr P Weir asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps the Executive is taking to deal with the economic downturn. (AQO 2955/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Recent economic reports and commentaries have speculated that the downturn has bottomed out and the rate of economic decline is halted or slowing. To the extent that this is accurate it is, of course, encouraging and welcomed.

Nevertheless, we remain very conscious that local business and people continue to face significant challenges. But, as we mentioned in our statement to the Assembly on 20 April about the Cross Sector Advisory Forum – increasingly our focus is on recovery. We are determined to support our business and people to reclaim economic growth and row back the tide of unemployment.

We should be in no doubt that we will be dealing with the effects, costs and casualties of the recession for some time to come.

On several occasions in this Assembly we have discussed the range of measures we announced on 15 December 2008 to address the effects of the credit crunch. The economic downturn continues to be a standing

item of Executive business and we continue to monitor the implementation of that package and the development of the downturn.

Ministers across the Executive are taking forward initiatives to address the variety of challenges we currently face. We have established the Cross Sector Advisory Forum and, from within that, set up a range of sub-groups to take forward the various strands of work associated with these challenges. We have appointed Ministerial chairs to each of the sub-groups to maximise the opportunity to make their work as effective as possible and allow them to work closely with lead departments. The next meeting of the full Cross Sector Forum is scheduled for 30 June 2009.

We are also continuing our direct engagement with the banks operating in Northern Ireland. We are keen to ensure that they are using the various Government credit Schemes to support business and people here. We are scheduling a further series of bank meetings to open discussions beyond the four local clearing banks.

The economy remains our top priority and continues to get our close attention.

Programme for Government

Mr I Paisley Jnr asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what arrangements are in place to monitor the delivery of the Programme for Government. (AQO 2956/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Programme for Government sets out a clear statement of our priorities and we have already delivered significant successes across a range of areas. From investment in our infrastructure, to the appointment of commissioners and advocates for victims, children and older people; from reforms in public services to delivering support to local people and businesses in the face of the economic downturn; it is clear that delivery of the programme for government generates real and tangible benefits for the people of Northern Ireland.

On 5 March, the Executive finalised the formal delivery framework for the Programme for Government. Structures and processes have been established across departments to monitor and report on performance.

A key element of the framework is the preparation of Delivery Reports setting out progress against the Programme's key goals, commitments and targets.

On 7 May the Executive commissioned the preparation of a formal Delivery Report to show progress as at 31 March 2009. This is scheduled for consideration at our meeting on 25 June.

We hope that this report will be made available to the OFMDFM Committee for its consideration before the summer recess. This will mark the first step in a wider consultation on the Programme for Government.

North/South Implementation Bodies and Tourism Ireland

Mr S Gardiner asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the First Minister's comments on the excessive cost of the North/South Implementation Bodies and Tourism Ireland Limited, what discussions have taken place on the matter. (AQO 2957/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: On submission of the first 2009 Business Plans from North/South Bodies for approval in January, the Minister of Finance & Personnel requested that officials examine how efficiencies could be built in to the Plans before they could be considered for approval.

We recognise that it is important that all North/South Bodies, like all other public bodies, should seek to deliver their objectives and programmes more efficiently, particularly during the current global economic downturn.

Discussions are ongoing between officials from the Department of Finance and Personnel and their counterparts in the Department of Finance in Dublin regarding the scope for additional cumulative cash releasing efficiency savings to be delivered by all North/South Bodies for 2009 and 2010.

An examination of the efficiency and value for money of the existing Implementation Bodies and Tourism Ireland Limited is underway as part of the St Andrews Agreement Review. The Review Group will submit a report on the recommendations coming out of the review to a future NSMC Plenary. Until that happens it would not be appropriate for us to comment further.

Efficiency Review Panel

Mr W Irwin asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the Efficiency Review Panel will begin its work. (AQO 2958/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: On 9 April 2009, we announced our intention to appoint an Efficiency Review Panel. We intend to put proposals for the creation of the Panel to the Assembly soon for approval.

The first task of the Panel will be to examine the number and organisation of Departments in the light of the present financial pressures and the implications of the Review of Public Administration, and to ensure that the departmental structure is best organised to deliver public services in an efficient manner. It is our intention to appoint the Panel in time for it to report on this work later in the year, as envisaged in our 9 April announcement.

The review will be on the basis of both fairness and efficiency, taking account of the requirement to protect the safeguards which ensure the Executive is representative of the community and can participate and work together successfully in the operation of the institutions.

The establishment of an Efficiency Review Panel was provided for in the St Andrews Agreement, and there is also a commitment in the Programme for Government to review the overall number of Government departments by 2011. We are very aware of the need for greater efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of public services.

Devolution

Mr J Craig asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister if the Executive has a strategy to highlight the benefits of devolution. (AQO 2959/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We are very aware of the importance of demonstrating to the public the benefits of locally elected Ministers making decisions on their behalf. The Executive is making a difference and it is important that this message is communicated. Ministers have a collective responsibility to communicate key decisions made by this Executive and we can already point to a number of important decisions which have been taken, including:

- We have taken direct action to support local business and people.
- We froze domestic regional rates, making the average local household £1000 better off.
- We have waived domestic water charges for 2007/08, 2008/09 and again for 2009/10. In comparison to what Direct Rule Ministers wanted to charge, this is a saving of over £600 for every household.
- We are reducing the cost of prescriptions.
- We have implemented the fuel credit scheme for the most disadvantaged households.
- We have used capital spending of our investment strategy to support construction - £1.4bn last year.
- We used December monitoring to bring forward spending on roads, schools and farms to support the construction sector.
- We have established the Cross Sector Advisory Forum to enhance our ability to stay in touch with local interests across the community.

These are just some of the benefits of devolution. The challenge for the Executive is to ensure that people can see the value of locally elected Ministers who are more attuned to their needs, making decisions on their behalf. OFMDFM is also working on a draft communications strategy for consideration by Ministers.

Efficiency Review Panel

Mr A Easton asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for its assessment of the work of the Efficiency Review Panel. (AQO 2960/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: On 9 April 2009, we announced our intention to appoint an Efficiency Review Panel. We intend to put proposals for the creation of the Panel to the Assembly soon for approval.

The first task of the Panel will be to examine the number and organisation of Departments in the light of the present financial pressures and the implications of the Review of Public Administration, and to ensure that the

departmental structure is best organised to deliver public services in an efficient manner. It is our intention to appoint the Panel in time for it to report on this work later in the year, as envisaged in our 9 April announcement.

The review will be on the basis of both fairness and efficiency, taking account of the requirement to protect the safeguards which ensure the Executive is representative of the community and can participate and work together successfully in the operation of the institutions.

The establishment of an Efficiency Review Panel was provided for in the St Andrews Agreement, and there is also a commitment in the Programme for Government to review the overall number of Government departments by 2011. We are very aware of the need for greater efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of public services.

Efficiency Review Panel

Mr B McCrea asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when it will appoint an Efficiency Review Panel, as announced on 9 April 2009. (AQO 2963/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We intend to put to the Assembly soon, for approval, proposals for the creation of an Efficiency Review Panel. The first task of the Panel will be to examine the number and organisation of Departments in the light of the present financial pressures and the implications of the Review of Public Administration, and to ensure that the departmental structure is best organised to deliver public services in an efficient manner. The review will be on the basis of both fairness and efficiency, taking account of the requirement to protect the safeguards which ensure the Executive is representative of the community and can participate and work together successfully in the operation of the institutions. It is expected that the Panel will report on this work later this year, as indicated in our announcement of 9 April 2009.

Water Charges

Mr G Robinson asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the Executive last discussed water charges. (AQO 2965/09)

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

Childcare

Mr B McElduff asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to report on the work of the Executive sub-group dealing with departmental responsibility for childcare provision, including support for after school clubs. (AQO 2966/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: A Child Poverty Sub-Group of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People is currently considering the issue of childcare provision. The Group has completed a Preliminary Report and it is hoped to present this to the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Thursday 18th June.

In the interim, pending Executive approval for the reallocation of OFMDFM resources in the June Monitoring Round, funding will be made available to allow the after-school clubs to continue to operate until August 2009.

Work is ongoing to identify if further monies will be available.

Maze/Long Kesh

Mr P Butler asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister what options are under consideration for the development of the Maze/Long Kesh site. (AQO 2967/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We would refer the Member to our reply to AQW 7314/09 on 15 May 2009.

We are currently examining the policy and legislative framework necessary to set up and empower a Development Corporation to drive forward the regeneration work.

Proposals for the regeneration of this regionally significant and strategically located site will be brought forward as soon as possible by the Corporation. This process is at a very early stage and whilst the development of the site will be a matter for the Development Corporation we can reassure the Member that in due course full consultation will take place with the public and with all interested stakeholders to ensure that whatever uses of the site are chosen, Maze/Long Kesh will be regenerated to ensure the maximum possible benefit to the whole community.

Quangos

Rev Dr R Coulter asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the total amount spent annually on all its Department's Quangos, since 2007. (AQO 2968/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Department spent approximately £26.427 million on Quangos in the 2008-09 financial year. In 2007-08, OFMDFM spent £25.050 million. The figures provided in the table below have been taken from the Departmental Resource Accounts for 2007-08 which have been audited by NIAO and the 2008-09 Departmental Resource Accounts which are as yet unaudited.

Body	2007-08 (£000's)	2008-09 (£000's)
Economic Research Institute of NI	920	969
NI Commissioner for Children and Young People	1,892	1,853
Strategic Investment Board	7,377	7,609
ILEX	1,852	1,424
Equality Commission for NI	7,294	7,185
Community Relations Council	5,715	7,387
Total	25,050	26,427

Central Freedom of information Team

Mr J McCallister asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister on how many occasions since 2005, has the Central Freedom of Information Team issued guidance notes to Departments and other public bodies. (AQO 2969/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: An annual breakdown of the number of guidance notes issued by the Central Freedom of Information (FOI) team is set out in the table below. Since 2006 the Central FOI team has taken forward a programme of work to enable Departments to manage more routine FOI requests without requesting guidance. This work includes the delivery of briefings to Senior Civil Servants, seminars on the application of exemptions and the production of a new range of training courses informed by the experience of processing requests. The success of this programme has resulted in fewer requests for guidance and has allowed the Central team to focus on providing advice on the most complex and sensitive cases.

Year	Number of guidance notes issued by Central FOI team
2005	14
2006	80
2007	64
2008	29
2009 (to 29 May)	12

Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy

Mrs N Long asked the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy. (AQO 2970/09)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: We refer the Member to the answer to AQO 2838/09. Our comments then are equally applicable to this question.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Bonuses Paid to Permanent Secretary

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much was paid in bonuses to her Department's Permanent Secretary in each of the last five financial years. (AQW 8134/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): Combined salary and bonus information for the Permanent Secretary of DARD is currently provided through Resource Accounts in £5k bands, available from www.dardni.gov.uk. It is our policy not to disclose the remuneration details of individual civil servants, other than in broad terms.

There is widespread public anger at the large bonuses being paid to public servants who are already in receipt of substantial incomes. As Minister, I share this concern and want a review to be undertaken on this matter.

Financial Disallowance

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline dates and monetry details of all EU disallowance decisions against her Department since she took up office. (AQW 8190/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: No financial disallowance has been imposed on DARD since May 2007. However, during the period in question, the Commission have ratified financial corrections imposed due to late payments (i.e. payments being made after the payment window and in excess of the allowable 4% franchise) and for breaching RD Ceilings. These are as follows:

Ad hoc Decision	Date of Decision	Amount	Reason/Financial year
24 2004	18-Apr-07	£1.496m	Late Payments/breaches of Ceilings FY 2004
26	21-Dec-07	£1.803m	Late Payments/breaches of Ceilings FY 2005
29	08-Dec-08	E 0.572m (Euro)	Late Payments/breaches of Ceilings FY 2007

There has been a delay in the Commission ratifying the decision for the FY 2006 year.

On 22 October 2008, the Commission also proposed a financial correction as follows:

Amount Correction	Reason/ Financial Year
£1,756,082.24	arable crops and animal premia FY 2004
£11,864,577.83	area based premia FY 2005
€18,601,952.89	area based premia FY 2006

Senior Civil Servant Bonuses

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how much was paid in bonuses to senior Civil Servants in her Department in the year 2008/09. (AQW 8199/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

Year	Total Amount Paid
2008/2009	£124,250

There is widespread public anger at the large bonuses being paid to public servants who are already in receipt of substantial incomes. As Minister, I share this concern and want a review to be undertaken on this matter.

Limit of Creel for Strangford Lough

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she would be prepared to consider setting the limit of creel for Strangford Lough at 200 rather than 150. (AQW 8261/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department is currently consulting on the Strangford Lough Pot Fishing Management Plan. Following this consultation, which is due to conclude on the 6th July, my officials will consider the responses received and make recommendations on how to take this plan forward. I have noted your comments in relation to the suggested number of creels.

Limit of Creel for Strangford Lough

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had with fishing organisations to agree the creel numbers on Strangford Lough. (AQW 8262/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Since my meeting with you, John McCallister and representatives of the Strangford Lough fishermen on the 11 October 2007 my officials have met with the representatives of the Strangford Lough Fishermen's Association on 16 November 2007, 16 January 2008 and 20 March 2008. During these meetings, held to develop the proposed measures to be included in Strangford Lough Pot Fishing Management Plan, suggestions were put forward to set the creel/pot limit at 150 per commercial fisher. My officials met the Strangford Lough fishermen and their representatives on 21 May 2009 to discuss the current consultation.

Wildflower Growth

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she is taking to encourage hay seed and wildflower growth to increase the population of honeybees and bumblebees. (AQW 8276/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: DARD recognises the importance of bees in particular, as pollinators, through its agri-environment schemes. The new Countryside Management Scheme (CMS), launched in June last year, includes a specific measure – a pollen and nectar mixture - which contains a mix of legumes flowering at different times to provide a habitat with a continuous supply of pollen and nectar for bees, butterflies and other insects.

There are several other options in new and existing agri-environment schemes which are also beneficial to bees. These include:

- Rough grass margins where minimal disturbance benefits ground nesting bumblebees;
- Conservation cereals with reduced pesticide and herbicide input;
- Tree planting and planting of traditional orchards where apple trees, rowan, whitebeam, hazel and holly are pollinated by bees;
- Wild bird cover which contains kale and weeds of arable land which may be pollinated by bees;
- Hedgerow restoration where hawthorn, gorse and blackthorn are all pollinated by bees; and

- Responsible management of field boundaries, in particular, cutting on a rotational basis.

Further information is available in the Countryside Management Scheme 2007 – 2013 Information booklet available at the link below.

http://www.ruralni.gov.uk/nicms_cmb.pdf

Rural Development Programme

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what measures are in place to ensure that individual farmers will have access to funding from the Rural Development Programme. (AQO 2976/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: To ensure that individual farmers can access funding under the Rural Development Programme, my Department has undertaken a comprehensive public advertising campaign with the aim of promoting the Programme widely, and encouraging farmers, their families and rural communities to apply. This campaign has included television advertising, adverts and special features in the local and farming press, a new Rural Development Programme website, and an information pack containing details of the range of funding and support available. The information pack, which contains details of how, when and where to apply for funding, has been available to farmers since January this year, and can be requested via a local rate phone call. Information packs are also available at local DARD offices across the North, and are distributed directly to farmers at numerous public events, such as Balmoral Show. My Department also works in partnership with a delivery agent for Axis 1 of the Programme and with seven joint council committees and Local Action Groups who administer Axis 3 of the Programme at local level. These delivery bodies undertake their own advertising and promotional activity for the funding measures for which they are responsible, with the aim of encouraging as many individual farmers, and others, to access Rural Development Programme funding.

Rural Development Programme

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the current status of the Rural Development Programme within each of the seven council clusters. (AQO 2977/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The strategies have now been assessed and as you know I previously announced the final allocations of funding to the seven areas. My officials are currently working with the areas to finalise their implementation plans. These plans will form an integral part of the legal contracts.

There has been a period of intense activity between legal representatives of Joint Council Committee and my officials. The Joint Council Committee's are now tasked with providing my officials with their final comments and the indications are that they hope to complete the contract by the end of June. This will enable Joint Council Committee's to issue letters of offer for funding in July.

Information Technology and Customer Service

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department has taken to develop Information Technology and customer service. (AQO 2978/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department has an on-going programme to improve the way that we use Information Technology to deliver services effectively. This is an area I am particularly keen on, as I feel there is tremendous opportunity for new technology to make things easier for our customers. Farmers and their agents are now able to use APHIS-on-line to register births and deaths of cattle, order ear tags or notify movements electronically. They can also submit their Single Application Form which includes the Single Farm Payment on-line, and they can access benchmarking data to help improve business performance.

We all have a dream of paperless bureaucracy and I was particularly pleased that the new NI Countryside Management Scheme uses a paperless application process underpinned by a sophisticated IT system in the background to carry out checks and determine eligibility.

The advances we have made in using IT were recognised at the 2009 Government Computing Awards where DARD's Single Application Form IT system won the overall category for business services, and the extension of APHIS-on-line to markets and meat plants was shortlisted for the delivering efficiency award.

I am keen to build on this success and encourage increased uptake of these electronic services by the industry. I'm also committed to extending the range of services available.

Farm Nutrient Management Scheme

Mr T Gallagher asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if work carried out by some applicants to the Farm Nutrients Management Scheme in 2008 will not be inspected until the end of 2009 and whether the applicants will be denied the outstanding element of their grants until after that time. (AQO 2979/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department has received 3,938 claims under the Farm Nutrient Management Scheme and has so far paid out just over £92m in grant aid. A quarter of claims were received in the last few days before the scheme closed on 31 December 2008. Whilst we are making every effort to have remaining claims inspected as quickly as possible, those that lodged claims at the end of the claim period have been made aware that they will receive their inspection not later than November 2009. In August last year I had introduced a part payment option which enables up to 50% of the claim to be paid prior to inspection precisely because I predicted there would be a late surge in claims. I also issued a press release around that time which encouraged farmers to get their claims in early as I was mindful of the need to help farmers' maintain their cash flow. Whilst I am very pleased that the number of claims received are at the top end of expectations, this nonetheless presents a logistical problem in getting all claims inspected. My officials are inspecting claims largely in date order of receipt and on 27 May past we wrote to all those still to be inspected explaining when they can expect to receive their inspection relative to when their claim was received. I have also more than doubled the number of inspectors on FNMS inspection duties to 28 but as this is public money, full or balance payment of grant aid under FNMS cannot be paid until the claim has successfully passed inspection.

Rural Tourism: Planning Permission

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what contact she has had with the Minister of the Environment in relation to the difficulty in gaining planning permission for rural tourism initiatives. (AQO 2980/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: As Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development I am very aware of the need to ensure that all Executive policies complement each other to ensure a thriving and sustainable rural community and environment. The current Rural Development Programme, under Axis 3, contains a measure that supports rural tourism initiatives and will be worth in excess of £15 million to rural areas. Rural tourism type initiatives can also be supported through the farm diversification measure of the Rural Development Programme and the Quality of Life measures, so there is a great opportunity to give a significant boost to our rural tourism product.

However I am aware of the impact planning policies could potentially have on all manner of projects in the countryside. To that end I am a member of the Ministerial group that is currently reviewing rural planning policy that is chaired by the Minister for the Environment. On this group I have continued to articulate the need for planning policy to be complementary to my Department's policy of ensuring a sustainable rural economy. Whilst I recognise the need to protect the countryside there is also a need to develop and support rural communities and business opportunities. I have also raised and will continue to raise, the need for rural needs to be fully considered in the wider planning reform proposals, to recognise local circumstances and ensure that planning policy requirements are proportionate to local need.

Fishing: Strangford Lough

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the fishing allowance proposals for Strangford Lough, what consideration has been given to recreational creel fishermen, as opposed to those who do it for a living. (AQO 2981/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: My Department issued a consultation on 6 April 2009 to seek views on proposals for a Strangford Lough Pot Fishing Management Plan. The consultation closes on 6 July after which responses will be considered and recommendations made for regulations to implement the scheme. The consultation includes a number of proposals related to recreational pot fishing, these include:-

- All pot fishing including recreational activity will be controlled by permits specific to Strangford Lough.
- The Department will place a cap on the number of commercial and recreational pot fishing permits issued and the number of pots per permit
- Both the number of permits and the maximum number of pots per would depend on scientific advice about the total number of pots that fish stocks in the Lough could sustain.
- The consultation suggests 150 pots per commercial permit and 5 pots per recreational permit.
- All pots both commercial and recreational must be marked individually with a tag provided by the Department.

These measures are seen as vital to ensure a sustainable long term pot fishery within the Lough.

Animal Welfare

Ms A Lo asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what discussions she has had with the USPCA concerning the increase in the number of abandoned animals and pets due to the economic downturn.

(AQO 2982/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: To date I have had no discussions with the USPCA on this specific issue.

However, I did meet representatives from the USPCA on 19 May as part of a delegation from the NI Companion Animal Welfare Council, which also includes The Blue Cross, the Dogs Trust, Animal Welfare Federation and other local animal welfare groups. During the meeting the issue of abandoned horses was raised by one participant. I agreed to consider what might be done to address these issues in any new animal welfare legislation that I bring forward.

During the meeting, Council members welcomed the fact that I intend to seek Executive approval shortly after the summer recess to bring forward a new comprehensive Animal Welfare Bill. This Bill will reflect the concerns of the many stakeholders that I have met during my Review.

It is, of course, an offence under the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 to abandon any animal, whether permanently or not, in circumstances likely to cause the animal any unnecessary suffering. The PSNI is responsible for enforcing this legislation with regards to non-farm animals. Under the Dogs Order 1983, it is an offence to keep a dog without a licence, and it also an offence to allow a dog to stray. Local Councils are responsible for enforcing this legislation and may seize any stray dog. In addition, Councils can, at the request of the owner of an unwanted dog, arrange for the collection or disposal of that dog.

From 1 July 2009, new EU Regulations will come into force strengthening the link between a horse and its passport document. As part of our implementation of these Regulations, all horses born here after this date will be required to have a microchip implanted and the microchip number recorded on a national database. This will make it easier to identify abandoned horses, and trace them back to their owner.

Single Farm Payment Scheme

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, since the inception of the Single Farm Payment Appeals system, how many recommendations were overturned where the Independent Appeals Panel found in favour of the appellant and the Independent Review Panel found in favour of her Department.

(AQO 2983/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Since the inception of the Single Farm Payment Review of Decisions process to date, the External Panel has considered and made recommendations in respect of 346 Single Farm Payment cases. Fifty of these cases are currently on hold pending the outcome of Judicial Review (this includes duplicate field cases) and, in 13 cases, the recommendation is currently under consideration. In one case the appellant withdrew their case before the Panel's recommendation could be considered.

This means that decisions have been made in respect of 282 of the Panel's recommendations. These are broken down as follows:-

- In 212 cases the Panel agreed with my Department's original decision and recommended that the decision was not changed. However, in 2 of these cases the Panel recommendation was not accepted and the decision was changed in part.
- In 54 cases the Panel recommended that my Department's decision be changed in full. Unfortunately, as 18 of these recommendations were not in keeping with the EU rules the recommendation was rejected. In 7 of the 54 recommendations while not accepting the Panel's recommendation my Department's decision was changed in part.
- In 16 cases the Panel recommended that my Department's decision be changed in part. As 2 of these recommendations were not in keeping with the EU rules the recommendation was not accepted.

In a number of cases, the Panel recommendations are not in keeping with the framework of EU regulations and regrettably these recommendations have not been accepted. However I am pleased to say that in the majority of cases I, and my predecessors, have been able to accept the majority of the Panel recommendations.

Dioxin Contamination: Compensation

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development if she will continue to pursue the Irish Government for compensation in relation to the dioxin scare. (AQO 2984/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: As I have already intimated in my answer to your oral question in May that a number of interventions were made by the First and Deputy First Ministers, DETI Minister and myself in relation to seeking compensation from the South. The South confirmed that due to legal and financial constraints they cannot provide any financial assistance to producers and processors in the North.

It would be for the Executive to decide whether they wish to pursue this issue further; however it does not preclude any legal action by producers and processors affected by the incident.

Rural Childcare Programme

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to report on the Rural Childcare Programme launch at Eskra Childcare Centre on Tuesday 9 June 2009. (AQO 2985/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: With your permission Mr Speaker I will answer questions 2 and 15 together.

Shortly after I took office I initiated the Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group [July 2007] and was pleased to present its report "Rural Childcare, Investing in the Future" to the Ministerial Sub Committee on Children and Young People in March 2008.

This report has a number of cross cutting recommendations, as well as recommending that DARD develop a rural childcare programme. My officials are working with other Departments on the cross cutting recommendations for rural childcare as part of the development of the Rural Champion concept and the Rural White Paper.

I am delighted to say that the Rural Childcare Programme has just recently opened for applications and will be funded from the Department's Rural Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework budget. I formally launched the programme on Tuesday 9 June during a visit to the Eskra Childcare Centre in Co. Tyrone – an excellent example of a rural community working together for the good of all the community. The programme is worth £1.5 million and its overall objective is to improve childcare provision in rural areas by providing solutions that address the distinct challenges faced by rural areas in relation to the delivery of, and access to, rural childcare services.

Through the Programme we will provide funding to support the development of a series of pilot or demonstration projects that will be evaluated and the evidence collected will then act as the basis for the development of future policy and priorities in the area of rural childcare provision. By improving the level of information on the provision of rural childcare this Rural Childcare Programme has the potential to help bring about great improvements in the lives of local women and children, to support families and to contribute to the economic and social development of rural areas of the north of Ireland. I am therefore confident that this new innovative programme will provide a significant contribution towards a better future for rural communities, will lead to increased opportunities and choice for rural parents for taking up employment or training, and will assist rural development.

The Rural Childcare Programme and the Rural Childcare report both complement other work going on in the Executive, such as Lifetime Opportunities and the work being carried out by the Ministerial Sub Group for Children and Young People, as well as informing the Early Child Development - Early Years Strategy for 0-6 year olds.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr D McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the process of negotiation on the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, and what steps she will be taking to ensure that the views of farmers are represented. (AQO 2986/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: At present, changes to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) are made by a qualified majority vote at the EU Council of Ministers following a proposal from the EU Commission and after an opinion is given by the European Parliament.

The usual process of negotiation is that the Commission presents a proposal to the EU Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. Over a period of months, Member State governments set out their views and attempt to convince the Commission to make changes to the proposals. During this time the European Parliament gives their opinion and when this is received, the EU Council of Ministers proceeds to reach an agreement in conjunction with the EU Commission. At the moment therefore, the Commission and the Council have the most influence on the shape of any legislative proposal that will further reform the Common Agriculture Policy.

Farmers can make their views known through the usual consultation process. Prior to the recent agreement of the CAP Health Check there were two consultations.

In order to ensure that the views of farmers are represented, it is vital for me to influence the Commission, Member State governments and MEPs. Since taking up office, I have been to Brussels and Luxembourg twelve times on behalf of the North including regular meetings with EU Commissioner, Mariann Fischer Boel with whom I have developed a good relationship. This has enabled me to communicate the views of our farmers directly to the Commission. I have continual contact with Defra, Scottish and Welsh Ministers and frequent discussions with Irish Ministers. The North/South Ministerial Council has also proved to be a very useful forum in making our views known to the DAFF Ministers. I have been proactive in seeking meetings with all our local MEPS both in Brussels and here at home and I intend to continue this approach in the future. My officials also maintain close working relationships with the various agricultural administrations.

By taking the actions outlined above, I managed to obtain a desirable outcome on the CAP Health Check in November 2008. My attention is now turning to the next round of CAP reform and I have already made my views clear on continuation of Single Farm Payment in the future during a speech at Balmoral show attended by Commissioner Fischer Boel. I will continue do my utmost to engage with the European institutions to further the interests of our farmers and to obtain the best outcomes possible.

Forest: Recreation

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on plans to increase recreational use of forests and, in particular, mountain biking in South Down. (AQO 2988/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: A Strategy for the Recreational and Social Use of our Forests will be launched on 1 July. This will contain proposals to develop the potential of our forests to deliver a wider range of recreation, sport, health and educational opportunities and to encourage more visitors to our forests. In particular, it commits Forest Service to develop partnerships with a range of public and private sector service providers in order to secure a more diverse range of facilities and attractions.

The opportunities for mountain biking in forests in the South Down area are being considered in conjunction with local councils and other interested parties including the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. My officials will continue to explore the possibilities for mountain bike trail development with stakeholders.

Bees

Mr L Cree asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action she has taken to address the decline in the number of bee colonies. (AQO 2989/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Contrary to claims there is no evidence that average bee losses here last year were outside of the normal over-wintering ranges, although obviously individual hive losses will vary widely. In order to gauge losses here, AFBI recently carried out a survey of the beekeeping industry, with nearly 100 respondents. The survey found that average colony losses reported here this year were at 22%, which is around the upper end of the range of normal over-winter losses.

I remain committed to reducing the risks of bee diseases here, and have recently put a draft Bee Health Contingency Plan to the main industry representatives, so that we can work together to mitigate threats to the island's bees. The Contingency Plan sets out action to be taken in the general case of an emergency response to the introduction of a bee pest or disease. I am confident that with an agreed Contingency Plan in place later this year, DARD and the industry will be in a strong position to work together to keep out threats to bees and to beekeeping here.

I am also in the process of developing a Bee Health Strategy for the North, which will be the subject of an industry-wide consultation later in the year.

My Department recognises the importance of bees through its agri-environment schemes. Under these schemes, in 2007 alone, my Department helped widen the bee environment here through the restoration of 570km of hedgerow field boundaries; the sowing of 360ha of conservation cereals; the planting of 1700ha of wild bird cover, 70ha of traditional orchards, 620ha of other trees and the maintenance of around 350ha of rough grass margins.

Brucellosis

Mr P Doherty asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress is being made in the 'Brucellosis Initiative' and to detail the steps being taken. (AQO 2990/09)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: I am pleased to report that excellent progress is being made in relation to the Brucellosis Initiative that I announced in spring 2008. This is reflected in the declining disease levels. The incidence of brucellosis has been dropping since the latter half of 2008. It has almost halved in the 6 month period from Sept 2008 to March 2009 and the number of herds under restriction in May 2009 (48) is approximately one third of the number that was restricted in May 2008.

The initiative had 3 key objectives:-

- (i) Consistent and effective application of established procedures.
- (ii) Engaging with the local farming communities to secure compliance with the essential elements of the disease control programme.
- (iii) Continuous evaluation and improvement of the scheme.

To achieve these objectives, brucellosis is now being managed by a combined Veterinary Service, HQ - Implementation Management Team which has reviewed all aspects of brucellosis control and developed an extensive programme of initiatives and improvements. These have been developed under 10 key headings:-

- Successful disease detection.
- Resource Management.
- Testing of risk herds and moved animals.
- Financial considerations.
- Cattle demographics.
- Farm Management Standards.
- Training and Education of staff and farmers.
- Brucellosis Scheme Management.
- Compliance and Enforcement issues.
- Computer support for the scheme.

In addition, local Brucellosis Farmers' Liaison Groups have been developed in high disease areas. The role of the Liaison Groups is to improve working relationships with farmers, to improve communication about disease risks and how to protect their herds.

I am pleased to see that these changes are leading to reductions in disease and I intend to build further on this success and press towards the eradication of brucellosis.

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE, ARTS AND LEISURE

North West 200

Mr I Paisley Jnr asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the last economic appraisal of the North West 200 was completed. (AQW 8210/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure (Mr G Campbell): Sport Northern Ireland (SNI) completed an economic appraisal for health and safety improvements to the paddock area of the NW 200 circuit in May 2009.

In addition to this, in 2008/09, the Department's Events Unit undertook an internal assessment of the economic benefit of the NW 200 including a proposal for the appointment of a Business Development/Operations Manager.

More recently, I have asked the Events Unit to prepare draft terms of reference for an independent economic impact assessment of the event.

Poland – Northern Ireland International Football Match

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the discussions he has had with the Irish or Polish Football Associations in relation to the change of venue for the Northern Ireland - Poland World Cup qualifying match scheduled for September; and what assistance can be offered, financial or otherwise, to those Northern Ireland fans who have already booked flights or hotels for the match. (AQW 8364/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I have had no discussions with the Irish or Polish Football Associations in relation to the change of venue for the Northern Ireland – Poland game as decisions regarding the venue for an international football match are the responsibility of the relevant Football Association of the home country. In the first instance, it would be a matter for the Irish Football Association (IFA) to contact the Polish Football Association to discuss a change of venue. Fans who have already booked flights or hotels should, in the first instance, contact the IFA or their existing travel insurance company.

Economy: Arts

Dr S Farry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the potential of arts organisations to contribute to economic recovery. (AQO 2997/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The arts and creative sector makes a very significant contribution to the cultural, social and economic life of all in Northern Ireland. Many aspects of the sector contribute directly and indirectly to the development of our economy. These include:

- The contribution of the sector to employment, both within the creative sector and in other sectors;
- Developing and strengthening our Cultural Tourism offering;
- Investment in the construction industry through major arts capital programmes. This has helped to sustain and create jobs;
- Physical and community regeneration, which in turn contribute to economic regeneration; and
- Education.

In addition, the Northern Ireland Screen Commission, which is one of DCAL's arms length bodies, has recently secured two major multi-million pound productions for Northern Ireland, drawing in foreign direct

investment to bolster our economy. This will help to sustain and grow the local film industry, whilst also making a significant contribution to the wider economy.

It is essential that we continue to support and invest in the arts sector to maximise the economic, social and cultural benefits which this sector has generated, and will continue to generate. I believe that continued investment in our arts and creative sector is an essential aspect of Northern Ireland's economic recovery.

Irish and Ulster Scots Funding

Mr D O'Loan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline (i) whether he intends to have parity in terms of the Irish and Ulster Scots languages, or whether funding for Ulster Scots includes other aspects of Ulster Scots Culture; (ii) which piece of legislation compels him to ensure equality of funding between Irish and Ulster Scots; and (iii) whether there will be equality in terms of the criteria for funding for Irish and Ulster Scots language development. (AQO 2998/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Ulster-Scots Agency's remit is the promotion of culture, heritage and language issues, and Foras na Gaeilge is tasked solely with the promotion of the Irish language. It is my view that good relations cannot be built on uneven foundations and the promotion of one must be based on an equitable approach to the other.

It is my intention to achieve a position where the funding allocations to the Ulster-Scots Agency by my Department matches the funding allocation to Foras na Gaeilge.

Pollution: Fish Stocks

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much has been spent on pollution prevention measures to protect existing and new fish stocks, since he announced the restocking of departmental waters on 3 February 2009. (AQO 2999/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency are responsible for policing and prevention of pollution incidents.

My Department is not responsible for developing measures to tackle pollution. My officials work closely with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to assist in the investigation of incidents in rivers impacting on fish stocks.

The Department undertakes stocking of put and take fisheries such as those announced on 3 February 2009. These fish are stocked as an angling product and this is distinct from restocking after pollution incidents which involves the rearing and stocking of fish native to the affected water.

Efficiency Savings

Mr F Cobain asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the efficiency savings his Department has made since the restoration of devolution. (AQO 3000/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: As part of Priorities and Budget 2005-2008, my Department agreed to realise total efficiencies of at least £15.7m by the end of this period. Actual savings achieved by March 2008 totalled £26.45m.

Of this, my Department estimates that £13.5m was achieved in the two years prior to devolution and £12.95m was achieved in the one year after devolution.

Furthermore, as part of Budget 2008-11, my Department has a target to deliver cash releasing efficiencies of £21m in the period 2008-11. The target of £3.6m for 2008-09, included in this, has already been achieved.

Board Members: DCAL

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if all board members associated with bodies under the control of his Department have received mandatory board training. (AQO 3001/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Training is a mandatory requirement for all Ministerial appointees to ALB Boards, and is included in letters of appointment and Terms and Conditions.

All Ministerial appointees to Arms Length Bodies associated with my Department and in post for a period of at least six months, have either undertaken training or are scheduled to complete training before the end of the calendar year.

Training is not a mandatory requirement for non Ministerial appointees to ALB Boards, however they are encouraged to undertake training where appropriate.

Musical Instruments for Bands Scheme

Mr A Attwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much money has been awarded under the Musical Instrument scheme to bands that are perceived to be (i) Unionist/Protestant; and (ii) Nationalist/Catholic. (AQO 3002/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Arts Council of Northern Ireland has responsibility for arts funding.

The Arts Council does not hold information in a manner which would facilitate a breakdown of awards to bands by religious belief or political opinion. However, details of all of the Arts Council's grants can be viewed on its website.

Sport Matters

Mr T Elliott asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to provide an update on the development of the 'Sports Matters' strategy. (AQO 3003/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), in partnership with Sport Northern Ireland (SNI), has prepared a final version of a planned new Northern Ireland Sports Strategy now entitled "Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation, 2009-2019". The final version of this strategy has been forwarded to the Northern Ireland Executive for consideration at a future meeting.

Irish Language Broadcasting Fund

Mr B McElduff asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to give his assessment of the Irish language broadcast fund to date. (AQO 3004/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: An interim evaluation of the fund, carried out in 2007, found that the targets for the Irish Language Broadcast Fund (ILBF) had been met.

A Post Project Evaluation is planned to commence in October 2009 and I will be better able to assess the overall value of the ILBF when that work is complete.

Libraries

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how the newly-formed Library Authority envisages the appearance of newly built library properties; and how these properties will integrate with and serve their local communities. (AQO 3005/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: Libraries NI is currently undertaking a Strategic Review of the public library estate which will inform the ongoing modernisation programme and future vision.

Proposals for any new library development will be consistent with DCAL's published libraries policy 'Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries' which includes issues such as good design, sustainability and accessibility of services – providing a dynamic focal point in the community.

Accessibility will be a priority consideration for new library buildings which will be considered on a case by case basis with an emphasis, where possible, on maximising local opportunities through co-location and multi-functional, shared services.

Modern libraries should provide flexible multi-functional spaces which provide opportunities for people to engage in learning and cultural activities. Libraries NI will also consider the potential of partnerships and co-location where relevant.

The features I have outlined are important to the future success of the provision of local services and the extent to which it will be able to integrate with and serve the local community.

Examples of two excellent new public library developments are Bangor Library which provides a range of facilities and the Grove Wellbeing Centre which incorporates a library, health centre and leisure centre.

Facilities at any new library development will be subject to local need which must be adequately demonstrated in a formal Business Case which meets Green Book requirements.

Navigation Authority

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the details of the business case to assess the viability of establishing a Navigation Authority for Lough Neagh and the Blackwater and Upper Bann rivers. (AQO 3006/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: In October 2008 DCAL commissioned a business case to examine the need for and options pertaining to the establishment of a Navigation Authority in relation to Lough Neagh, River Blackwater and Upper Bann River. My Department took receipt of the business case on 28 April 2009. It is recognised that a Navigation Authority could contribute to addressing public safety concerns in parallel with delivering the strategic sustainable development of water based activity within the Lough.

The options and constraints are currently being reviewed and DCAL is considering the recommendations detailed in the report.

National Gallery

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure if he has initiated a feasibility study into a National Gallery. (AQO 3007/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: My Department is supportive, in principle, of a National Gallery as the absence of such is viewed by many as a significant gap in Northern Ireland's cultural infrastructure.

The Department has not commissioned a feasibility study at this stage however, initial work has commenced on the preparation of the Terms of Reference should funding become available for the study.

Arts: Funding

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for his assessment of the arts being essential to the development of tourism and how his Department is ensuring that additional money is being acquired from both public and private sector sources for investment in the arts. (AQO 3008/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I believe that investment in the arts sector and in our arts infrastructure plays a key role in the development of Northern Ireland's tourism offering.

The VALCAL study of 2007, commissioned by my Department, concluded that the arts sector improves the attractiveness and image of NI and provides a key product which contributes towards tourism development.

The study also noted that major arts and cultural events, supported by the Northern Ireland Events Company in 2005, generated 25,000 bed nights per annum in Northern Ireland. This is a very significant impact, generating income for and sustaining many local businesses in the tourism sector.

In the last financial year Arts and Business, through its Reach investment fund, awarded £209,602 to arts and cultural organisations to strengthen and deepen their partnerships with NI businesses. This leveraged £960,930 of business sponsorship to the arts in NI – or £4.58 levered for every £1 of Reach investment.

Sports Facilities: Proceeds of Crime

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what further action he has taken to pursue having asset seizures from the proceeds of crime used for the development of sporting facilities, as is done in Scotland. (AQO 3009/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I would refer the member to the answer I gave previously on this matter (AQO 2757/09) in which I made it clear that issues pertinent to Assets Recovery and the redistribution of cash forfeiture receipts are a reserved matter and the responsibility of the Home Office in conjunction with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

There are currently no formal mechanisms to allow NI Executive Departments to access such funding. I understand however that this may not prevent local groups, running projects that have a distinct benefit to offer in terms of crime prevention, from approaching any of the investigation agencies directly and making a case for funding.

I have written to the NI Security Minister, Paul Goggins, seeking a meeting on this issue and my officials have met with officials from Scotland and Wales to discuss the position in both their jurisdictions and their ability to pursue assets from the proceeds of crime.

Minority Languages

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQO 2522/09, to outline if he learned anything about the usefulness of legislation in protecting and developing minority languages in Scotland and Wales that would be of benefit in language development in Northern Ireland. (AQO 3010/09)

Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure: I am not persuaded that language legislation is necessary in Northern Ireland in order to protect and develop our indigenous or minority languages.

It is my opinion that the protection and development of Ulster-Scots and Irish can best be achieved through the introduction of a single strategy for indigenous or regional minority languages.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Programme of Reform

Mr D Simpson asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to her answer to AQW 4398/09, if she would list in order her top 10 priorities in her programme of reform for education. (AQW 5241/09)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Is é an rud atá i gcróí-lár mo chláir um leasu san oideachas ná an diongbháilteacht lena chinntiú go mbeidh an deis ag gach páiste a c(h)umas féin a bhaint amach.

At the heart of my programme of reform in education lies a determination to ensure that every child has the opportunity to achieve to her or his full potential. While my main priority is to raise educational standards overall, the nature of education is such that many of the priorities are interdependent and as such cannot be listed in priority order. I have therefore identified the following high level education priorities which will determine the work of the education service in the coming years:

- Putting equality at the heart of the education system;
- Raising standards;
- Closing the gap in educational standards between the highest and lowest attainers;
- Equality of access to education, both formal and informal;
- Fit for purpose Estate;
- Fair and equitable post-primary admissions arrangements “Transfer 2010”;
- Special Educational Needs provision, tailored to help the most vulnerable children;
- Irish Medium and Integrated education.
- Safeguarding young people;

- Reforming education administration;
- North / South - building on good practice;
- Ensuring all young people leave school with basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT;

Mobile Classrooms

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Education for a list of schools using mobile classrooms, in each parliamentary constituency. (AQW 7031/09)

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

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

Ex-Gratia Payments

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Education (i) how many ex-gratia payments have been made to teachers by her Department; (ii) the amount of each payment; and (iii) the reason for each payment, in each of the last three years. (AQW 8121/09)

Minister of Education: Ba é líon na n-íocaíochtaí ex- gratia a thug an Roinn do mhúinteoirí i ngach bliain le trí bliana anuas (2006-07 go dtí 2008-09) ná 4, 0 agus 3 i ngach bliain faoi seach. Mionsonraítear thíos méid na n-íocaíochtaí agus na fáthanna ar tugadh iad:

The number of ex- gratia payments made to teachers by the Department in each of the last three years (2006-07 to 2008-09) was 4, 0 and 3 in each year respectively. The amount of each payment and the reasons for the payments are detailed below:

2006/07

Amount	Reason
£25.00	To recompense a teacher for damage to a degree certificate that was submitted to the Department.
£50.00	To recompense a teacher for a certificate that was lost.
£55.00	To recompense a teacher for bank charges incurred as a result of the teacher's salary being paid late.
£137.88	To recompense a teacher for bank charges incurred as a result of the teacher's lump sum being paid late.

2007/08

No ex-gratia payments were made to teachers in 2007/08.

2008/09

Amount	Reason
£271.32	To recompense a teacher for statutory sick pay that the teacher was unable to claim due to the late issue of the Statutory Sick Pay 1 form.
£30.00	To recompense a teacher for bank charges incurred as a result of the teacher's salary being late.
£63.00	To recompense a teacher for bank charges incurred as a result of the teacher's salary being paid late.

Free Nursery Places

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, for the 2008/09 and 2009/10 academic years, how many children were refused free nursery places in their first preference school or unit in (i) Lurgan; (ii) Portadown; and (iii) Banbridge. (AQW 8168/09)

Minister of Education: Tá curtha in iúl ag Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt don Roinn líon na bpáistí a thaispeáin príomhrogha d'áit i naiscoil nó in aonad naiscoile sna ceantair a sonraíodh, agus nár éirigh leo an príomhrogha sin a fháil.

The Southern Education and Library Board have advised the Department of the numbers of children expressing a first preference for a place in a nursery school or nursery unit in the areas specified, and who were unsuccessful in having their first preference met. Some of these children were in their final pre-school year, others were underage i.e. in their penultimate pre-school year. These children may subsequently have been placed at nursery schools or nursery units other than their first preference. The information requested is set out in the tables below.

2008/09	Number of First Preference Applications	Number of First Preference Admissions	Number of Applicants refused admission at first preference
Lurgan	445	314	131
Portadown	345	252	93
Banbridge	201	130	71

2009/10	Number of First Preference Applications	Number of First Preference Admissions	Number of Applicants refused admission at first preference
Lurgan	534	320	214
Portadown	379	260	119
Banbridge	190	130	60

Notes:

- The question has been interpreted as those nursery schools and units located within each of these towns.
- The first preference statistics include underage children.

Review of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Education whether a date has been secured for discussion of the Review of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion by the Executive. (AQW 8204/09)

Minister of Education: Cuireadh moltaí beartais faoi bhráid an Choiste Fheidhmiúcháin den chéad uair i mí Iúil anuraidh ag iarraidh teacht ar chomhaontú leis na moltaí a eisiúint le haghaidh comhairliúcháin phoiblí. Ó shin i leith, chuaigh mé chuig an Choiste Feidhmiúcháin ar thrí ócáid eile ag iarraidh teacht ar chomhaontú leis na moltaí beartais a eisiúint le haghaidh comhairliúcháin phoiblí.

The policy proposals were first referred to the Executive last July seeking agreement to issue them for public consultation. Since then I have gone back to the Executive on three further occasions seeking their agreement to the issue of the policy proposals for public consultation.

In November 2008 I issued a further Executive memo including amendments to reflect Ministers' comments. In February this year I forwarded a copy of the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) to help inform my Executive colleagues' understanding of the proposals. Then in early May I resubmitted the policy proposals to the Executive with some minor changes to the Preface and Foreword and I again recommended that the Executive agree to their issue for public consultation as soon as possible.

As you are aware the Assembly supported the motion to issue the proposals for public consultation following a debate on this subject on 19 May. Despite this and the other efforts made during the last year to move things forward, I regret that the consultation document has not yet been tabled for an Executive meeting.

I remain hopeful that my Executive colleagues will agree at the earliest opportunity to the issuing of the policy proposals for consultation to allow all interested parties involved the opportunity to contribute to the shaping of the final policy.

Pupils with Epilepsy

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Education what measures her Department takes to ensure that pupils with epilepsy receive all necessary support within the education system. (AQW 8237/09)

Minister of Education: Tá creatlach riachtanas speisialta oideachais ag an Roinn Oideachais (DE) a leagann amach go soiléir na dualgais reachtúla a bhíonn ar scoileanna agus ar Bhoird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (ELBanna) le páistí a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta oideachais (SEN) acu a aithint, a mheasúnú agus soláthar speisialta oideachais a dhéanamh le freastal ar a riachtanais i gcásanna nuair is cuí.

The Department of Education (DE) has in place a special educational needs framework setting out clear statutory duties on schools and Education and Library Boards (ELBs) to identify, assess and in appropriate cases make special educational provision to meet the needs of children with special educational needs (SEN). The framework applies to support for all children with SEN, including those diagnosed with epilepsy. In addition DE issued a Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational needs in 1998 to provide detailed guidance to schools and ELBs on the framework and the various statutory duties that apply. A Supplement to this Code was issued in 2005, which updated the previous guidance following the introduction of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005.

As the diagnosis of children with epilepsy is the responsibility of the Department of Health and Social Services and Public Safety, Education and Library Boards (ELBs) rely on co-operation from health professionals in this area. In addition ELBs work directly with their local Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) on an ongoing basis to ensure that the specific needs of children with epilepsy are met to maximise their educational potential. Many special schools have school nurses provided by their HSCT to support the medical needs of those children with more complex epilepsy and a recent improvement in services has seen most ELBs appoint Health Care Assistants, who are jointly funded by ELBs and HSCTs, to work with children with more complex medical needs, including those with epilepsy.

As advised in my response to your recent AQW 7908/09 the Chief Executives of the ELBs have advised that while there is no specific training offered to teachers dealing with epilepsy, schools can request training from the ELBs when a particular special need, including epilepsy, is identified for specific pupils. When a request for training is made the ELB would secure this from the most appropriate provider which in the case of epilepsy would most likely be the local HSCT. This ensures that the training delivered is appropriate to the needs of the individual child. The medical and education needs of children with epilepsy will vary greatly from child to child depending upon their individual circumstances, the severity and nature of the epilepsy and their assessed special educational needs.

Furthermore, following the issue of the Department of Education's document "Supporting Pupils with Medication Needs" in 2008, a training programme for school principals was offered to all schools to ensure that all pupils with medication needs, including epilepsy, could have their needs met in schools.

Pupils with Epilepsy

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Education what co-operation there is between her Department and the Health and Social Care Trusts to ensure that pupils with epilepsy maximise their educational potential. (AQW 8238/09)

Minister of Education: Tá creatlach riachtanas speisialta oideachais ag an Roinn Oideachais (DE) a leagann amach go soiléir na dualgais reachtúla a bhíonn ar scoileanna agus ar Bhoird Oideachais agus Leabharlainne (ELBanna) le páistí a bhfuil riachtanais speisialta oideachais (SEN) acu a aithint, a mheasúnú agus soláthar speisialta oideachais a dhéanamh le freastal ar a riachtanais i gcásanna nuair is cuí.

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Pupils with Epilepsy

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Education how many pupils currently in primary and secondary mainstream education have been diagnosed with epilepsy. (AQW 8240/09)

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

The information requested is contained in the table below.

Primary and post primary mainstream and special unit pupils who are recorded as having epilepsy – 2008/09

School level	Mainstream	Special unit	Total
Primary	153	20	173
Post primary	214	27	241
Total	367	47	414

Source: School Census.

Note:

1. Primary includes nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
2. Figures relate to pupils at Stage 1 – 5 of the Special Educational Need (SEN) Code of Practice. However, some pupils at SEN Stage 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice may have had their needs recorded at a more general level and therefore are not included here.

Nursery Places

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education for her assessment of the adequacy of nursery provision in East Antrim, given that 237 children in their final pre-school year in the boroughs of Newtownabbey, Carrickfegus and Larne were not selected for their preferred nursery school or unit in 2009/10. (AQW 8246/09)

Minister of Education: This question is pursuant to the member's AQW 7812/09 dated 2 June 2009.

The process for admission to pre-school is a preference based application system and parents are advised to list, in order of preference, a number of centres on the application form as it is not always possible to meet parents' first choice preferences.

196 children not admitted to their first preference choice were subsequently offered a funded pre-school place. In addition, during the admissions process, a total of 45 additional funded places were allocated to

voluntary/private providers in the Newtownabbey, Carrickfergus and Larne areas. A number of these places were subsequently returned as they were not taken up.

Tá an Grúpa Comhairleach um Oideachas Réamhscoile de chuid NEELB fós ag déanamh athbhreithnithe ar líon na n-áiteanna cistithe a nglacfar leo san earnáil dheonach/phríobháideach don scoilbhliain 2009/10 agus tá athleithdháileadh na n-áiteanna idir sholáthróirí á shocrú go fóill.

The NEELB Pre-School Education Advisory Group is continuing to review the uptake of funded places in the voluntary/private sector for the 2009/10 school year and the reallocation of places between providers is still ongoing.

Temporary Term Time Contracts

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Education how many employees have been on a temporary term time only contract for two years or more, broken down by gender. (AQW 8258/09)

Minister of Education: Níl aon bhall foirne sa Roinn Oideachais a bhí ar chonradh sealadach téarma scoile do dhá bhliain nó níos mó. Déantar iarratais ar Chonradh Oibre Téarma Scoile bliain ar bhliain.

No member of staff in the Department of Education has been on a temporary term time only contract for two years or more. Applications for Term Time Working are made year on year.

Pupils with Epilepsy

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Education how many classroom assistants are employed in the Western and Northern Education and Library Boards, specifically to help pupils with epilepsy. (AQW 8277/09)

Minister of Education: Seo a leanas an t-eolas a thug Cathaoirligh Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Oirthuaiscirt agus Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Iarthair:-

The Chief Executives of the North – Eastern and Western Education and Library Boards have advised as follows:-

1. North Eastern Education & Library Board

Statements of special educational need are maintained on 10 pupils who have been diagnosed with epilepsy as their main educational need. 5 of these pupils attend special schools where there are classroom assistants in each class. The other 5 attend mainstream schools and would have a level of individual 1:1 General Assistant support. General assistants are provided when the child does not have any learning difficulties.

There are a further 69 pupils who have epilepsy identified as an additional need. Of these 28 pupils are in mainstream/units and will again have access to individual support to meet all of their special educational needs although not exclusively their epilepsy. The remaining 41 pupils attend special schools where there is a classroom assistant in each classroom.

2. Western Education and Library Board

Statements of special educational need are maintained on 18 pupils who have been diagnosed with epilepsy as their main educational need. Of these 18 children, 4 are in special schools where they will generally have 2 classroom assistants per class. The other 14 children are placed in mainstream schools with varying degrees of classroom assistant support depending on their assessed need.

There are a further 18 pupils who have epilepsy identified as an additional need. Of these 4 pupils are in mainstream/units and will again have varying degrees of classroom assistant support. The remaining 14 pupils attend special schools where there are generally 2 classroom assistants per class.

Creggan Pre-School Training Trust

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Education (i) what representations her Department has made in respect of Creggan Pre-School Training Trust to (a) the Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister and (b) the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People; and (ii) to detail when those representations were made. (AQW 8295/09)

Minister of Education: Scríobh mé chuig na hAirí Sóisearacha ar 27 Aibreán 2009 ag moladh go dtabharfaí ceist faoi bhráid Fhochoiste na nAirí ar Pháistí agus ar Dhaoine Óga maidir le cistiú le haghaidh tacaíochta do thuismitheoirí a bhfuil páistí óga acu. Chuir na hAirí Sóisearacha freagra chugam ar 13 Bealtaine agus cuirfear an cheist seo ar an chlár oibre le haghaidh plé ag an chéad chruinniú eile.

I wrote to Junior Ministers on 27 April 2009 suggesting that the issue of funding for support to families with young children is brought to the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People for discussion. Junior Ministers responded on 13 May and this issue will be put on the agenda for discussion at the next meeting.

Portadown College

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Education for an update on the new build at Portadown College. (AQW 8299/09)

Minister of Education: Tá Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne an Deiscirt ag tabhairt faoi níos mó oibre ar an bhreithmheas eacnamaíochta do Portadown College faoi láthair, ar an rogha a ligfidh do scoil athsholáthair bheith ar an pháirc imeartha ar an chuid íochtair de shuíomh reatha na scoile go sonrach.

The Southern Education and Library Board is currently undertaking some further work on the economic appraisal for Portadown College specifically on the option to allow for a replacement school on the playing fields on the lower part of the existing school site.

Sign Language Interpreting

Mr D Ford asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 7358/09, if the Inclusion and Diversity Service within her Department provides sign language interpreting services for deaf parents to partake in occasions such as parent / teacher consultations. (AQW 8307/09)

Minister of Education: Mar a luadh in AQW 7358/09 tugann mo roinn cistiú don tSeirbhís réigiúnach Chuimsithe agus Éagsúlachta (IDS), a bhunaigh na cúig Bhord Oideachais agus Leabharlainne le tacaíocht a thabhairt do scoileanna a bhfuil daltaí núíosacha acu. Níl IDS mar chuid den Roinn Oideachais, agus níl freagracht ag an IDS as seirbhísí ateangaireachta teanga comharthaíochta do thuismitheoirí atá bodhar nó a bhfuil lagú éisteachta acu.

As stated in AQW 7358/09 my department funds the regional Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS), which was established by the five Education and Library Boards to provide support to schools with newcomer pupils. IDS is not part of the Department of Education, nor does IDS have responsibility for sign language interpreting services for deaf and hard of hearing parents.

However, my Department has been considering a pilot project to establish the demand for support to parents (indigenous and newcomer) who are deaf and hard of hearing, specifically to improve parent/teacher communication. This project may include sign language interpreters, lip-readers and notetakers with IT equipment. I am aware that steps are being taken to train more sign language interpreters.

The pilot project is planned for 2010/11.

Transfer Tests

Mr A Attwood asked the Minister of Education to confirm if it will be her Department's policy to take action against the governors of a primary school if they decide to offer instruction to their primary six pupils, in respect of the transfer tests being set by some grammar schools; if so, to confirm the nature of the action her Department may take. (AQW 8344/09)

Minister of Education: Sonraítear i dtreoir mholta na Roinne ar Aistriú 2010 gur chóir do bhunscoileanna a thabhairt faoi deara nach féidir a éileamh orthu go n-ullmhófaí páistí do theisteanna iontrála agus sonraítear go soiléir sa treoir go molann an Roinn go láidir nach ndéantar é.

The Department's proposed Transfer 2010 guidance states that primary schools should note that preparation of children for entrance tests cannot be required of them and makes clear that the Department strongly recommends against it.

Primary schools must abide by their statutory duty to deliver the revised curriculum, something which is monitored through the work of the Education and Training Inspectorate. Parents also have a right to question the decision of any primary school to deviate from the revised curriculum. If the Board of Governors of a primary school is found to have failed to discharge its statutory duty to deliver the curriculum, it can be required to do so, ultimately, if necessary, by a direction from the Department.

I have written to all primary schools reminding them of their statutory duties.

St Paul's College, Kilrea

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Education when she intends to answer letters sent to her on 5 and 26 May 2009 by the Principal of St Paul's College, Kilrea, requesting that a temporary variation would allow the college to enrol all of the pupils that have applied this year. (AQW 8346/09)

Minister of Education: Thug mé freagairt cheana féin ar an dá litir ó Phríomhoide St Paul's College, Chill Ria.

I have already responded to both letters from the Principal of St Paul's College, Kilrea.

DEPARTMENT FOR EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Apprenticeships

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the need to encourage trades; and if he will take steps to ensure that apprentices are kept on with their mentor after training has finished, in the economic downturn. (AQW 8130/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Sir Reg Empey): My Department continues to promote apprenticeships and the benefits of the professional and technical career path for school leavers. We are also working tirelessly to develop training support packages to meet the growing needs of industry and employers and to encourage them to maintain and develop the core skills of the trades in new recruits and in the existing workforce.

You will also be aware that I recently announced the Skillsafe initiative to support manufacturing companies in this recession and of the contingency arrangements already established for redundant apprentices to help them continue training within priority trades such as construction, engineering and motor vehicle.

We are also working with Sector Skills Councils, Workforce Development Forums and employers to develop specific packages to upskill employees. These projects are considered as normal business and while the agreements will continue well beyond the eventual economic upturn, the packages being offered are more generous than might be offered under normal times. Because of this they will be particularly helpful and while not specifically for apprentices, they will encourage apprentices to be retained after qualification.

I trust this information is helpful.

Sector Skills Councils

Mr R Newton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many Sector Skills Councils have been assessed within the licensing review and have not met the required standard. (AQW 8140/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Tranche 1 of the Sector Skills Council Reform and Relicensing process has now completed, and one out of the five Sector Skills Councils which were assessed, failed to meet the standard. The assessment process for the remaining Sector Skills Councils is currently underway and decisions will be made in due course.

Sector Skills Councils

Mr R Newton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the Sector Skills Councils and their role within Northern Ireland. (AQW 8142/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Sector Skills Councils are employer led organisations who have a critical role in influencing the Northern Ireland skills agenda. SSCs have a role to ensure that we have an economy in which the right people have the right skills at the right time. The Department is fully involved in the reform and relicensing process, and along with the other nations, provides the National Audit Office with feedback on Sector Skills Council performance, as part of the assessment exercise.

Sector Skills Councils

Mr R Newton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he will assist those Sector Skills Councils not currently meeting the standard in their bid, to become re-licensed. (AQW 8143/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: A due process is in place for the Reform and Relicensing process. The Department is working with the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, and the other Administrations, to ensure that the most appropriate course of action is implemented for those Sector Skills Councils who do not currently meet the relicensing standard.

Bonuses Paid to Permanent Secretary

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much was paid in bonuses to the Department's Permanent Secretary, in each of the last five years. (AQW 8182/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Combined salary and bonus information for the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Employment and Learning is currently provided through Resource Accounts in £5k bands, available in the DEL Resource Accounts publications on the DEL website delni.gov.uk

It is our policy not to disclose the remuneration details of individual civil servants, other than in broad terms.

Senior Civil Servant Bonuses

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how much was paid in bonuses to senior Civil Servants in his Department in the year 2008/09. (AQW 8184/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Information on the total amount paid in non-consolidated bonus payments to Senior Civil Servants in the Department for Employment and Learning in respect of the performance year 2008/09 is not yet available. It is anticipated that this information will be available in the autumn.

Support for Postgraduate Students

Mr D McClarty asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what consideration has been given to the introduction of loans to enable postgraduate students to pay their tuition fees and how much would an extension of the Student Loan Scheme cost. (AQW 8202/09)

Minister for Employment and Learning: It is my Department's policy that public funding for student support for higher education should be targeted, in the main, towards students entering higher education for the first time. Support for postgraduate students, many of whom have already had the benefit of my Department's student support for their primary degree, has always been discretionary and subject to change to reflect wider government priorities.

For these reasons, my Department has not given consideration to the introduction of loans to enable postgraduate students to pay their tuition fees and has not, therefore, costed such proposals. The exception to this is students undertaking Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) courses, who are generally eligible to apply for a student loan for tuition fees.

DEPARTMENT OF ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Indigenous Renewable Fuel Sources

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what opportunities have been identified to increase the percentage of industrial heating systems using indigenous renewable fuel sources.

(AQW 8212/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): Invest NI, both directly and through its funding of the work of The Carbon Trust promotes sustainable energy practices which include the deployment of renewable energy technologies encompassing the use of indigenous renewable fuel sources for industrial heating applications.

Since its establishment in Northern Ireland in 2002 The Carbon Trust has:

- Carried out research into the role of bioenergy in reducing NI's carbon footprint.
- Published a report entitled "Prospects for bioenergy in Northern Ireland to 2050" as part of its 2005 vision study, highlighting the importance of public sector procurement in accelerating the development of a profitable, indigenous bioenergy sector in Northern Ireland.
- Conducted 40 technical studies within individual businesses and public sector organisations to determine the business case for installing biomass heating systems.
- Loaned nearly £3million to 26 local businesses to enable them to install biomass boilers and heating systems, reducing their annual energy costs by nearly £1 million and leveraging an additional £4 million of private sector capital into the biomass sector.
- Published a number of best practice case studies featuring local businesses that have installed biomass systems and highlighting the economic and environmental benefits achieved.
- Hosted a number of free-to-attend technical and policy seminars promoting bioenergy solutions which have been attended by over 1,000 delegates.
- Promoted the findings from The Carbon Trust's biomass heat technology accelerator project to NI stakeholders to encourage efficient policy frameworks that increase the uptake of biomass energy and to promote the optimal design and value engineering of biomass systems.
- Investigated the potential for district heating in a number of industrial estates in Northern Ireland which concluded that heat for these could be better supplied using heat recovery from companies located on the estates rather than by installing new heating equipment such as biomass boilers.

In 2008/09 advisers from Invest NI's Sustainable Development Team responded to approximately 200 requests from client companies for advice, information and support. Of these requests approximately 30% related to Industrial Heating systems with reference to Biomass and indigenous renewable sources.

In addition, in 2008/09 Invest NI's Sustainable Development Consultancy Framework provided consultancy support for eight projects involving industrial heating systems using indigenous renewable fuel sources.

Invest NI is a member of the DETI-led Bioenergy Inter-Departmental Group which aims to establish an integrated government approach to the sustainable development of bioenergy in Northern Ireland including the subject of the question.

The key objectives proposed by the Group are as follows:

- To raise awareness and understanding of the benefits and opportunities of all forms of bioenergy within the public and private sector and the wider community.
- To create a supportive and encouraging policy and regulatory framework within which the bioenergy sector can develop and thrive.
- To encourage and support targeted investment in key areas of the overall bioenergy supply chain to stimulate growth.
- To continue to undertake focused and relevant research into bioenergy and to further work to address gaps in knowledge and identify future research actions.

An Executive Summary of a report on the assessment of the potential for bioenergy development in Northern Ireland October 2008 has been published on the DETI Sustainable Energy website. <http://www.detini.gov.uk/cgi-bin/downutildoc?id=2314>

Review of Public Administration

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions her Department has had with (i) the Department of the Environment; (ii) the Department for Social Development; (iii) local government; and (iv) advice provision organisations, in respect of advice provision, post the Review of Public Administration. (AQW 8217/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: My Department is a member of the Department for Social Developments Government Advice and Information Group (GAIG) which has representatives of government Departments, local government and other public bodies. The purpose of this group is to provide Departments, who fund advice provision, and other information giving organisations, with a forum to share information, to ensure best use of funding and to agree the principles to be applied to advice and information work at both regional and local level.

Whilst my Department has had no direct discussions with the Department of the Environment about future advice provision it has, through its participation in the GAIG, had extensive discussions with DSD officials, advice providing organisations and local government about the shape of services and advice delivery post the Review of Public Administration.

Construction Sector

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the initiatives her Department is undertaking to protect local jobs in the construction sector. (AQW 8289/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI has undertaken a number of initiatives in support of its clients in the Construction Products Sector. In September 2008, the agency introduced a series of Credit Crunch Seminars, aimed at helping local businesses deal with the economic downturn. Businesses had the opportunity to avail of one to one free and independent advice, on key business issues such as financial management, sales generation, business process and energy efficiencies.

In November 2008, a 2012 Olympics site visit was organised with the 27 participating companies given the opportunity to meet buyers from the tier one contractors involved in the building projects. As a follow up, a dedicated team has been put in place to help clients to promote their products and services and secure Olympic contracts.

Invest NI has developed a number of internationally focused initiatives with a programme of major exhibitions and trade missions currently being rolled out. These have included support for companies attending the Seatrade Cruise Shipping Convention in Miami March 2009, as well as trade missions and trade support to research opportunities in key export markets in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. A trade mission and exhibition visit to Saudi Arabia will also take place later this month. A Construction and Engineering Breakfast Seminar has been held to present information on the construction and engineering opportunities in India, with bespoke research and information presented to Invest NI clients in the sector by Invest NI's Indian based representatives.

Invest NI has delivered a highly successful "Construct for Growth" pilot programme to focus SMEs operating in the construction sector on the key drivers of modern methods of construction and sustainable products. A number of measures have been introduced to help prepare clients in the Construction Products sector for new regulations requiring all new homes to be zero carbon by 2016. In May the agency launched a series of five DVDs, including one on Low Carbon Technologies, which embrace integrated building technologies, to demonstrate Northern Ireland's capabilities in the renewables sector. Earlier this month, more than 40 companies attended an Invest NI seminar on "Future Opportunities for Sustainable Building Products" which highlighted the opportunities available in the design, construction, refit and maintenance of sustainable buildings and how Invest NI proposes to assist clients to take advantage of them.

Last month also saw the introduction of a new £15 million Short Term Aid Scheme to provide eligible businesses with financial assistance to enable the retention of key staff while businesses plan, and where necessary, restructure for the future.

Free Face-to-Face Debt-Advice

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) to provide an update on the roll-out of additional funding for free face-to-face debt advice announced on 3 July 2008; (ii) to detail the process for allocation of funding; and (iii) to outline the reasons for any delay in the distribution of any such monies.

(AQW 8354/09)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Although the announcement of £800k additional funding for face to face debt advice was made in July 2008 the extra funding was allocated to the 2009/10 and 2010/11 financial years. This was subsequently supplemented by a significant contribution from the Ulster Bank of an extra £300k over the same 2 years. Preparations are well advanced for the roll-out of this additional £550k per annum funding which will be allocated by a public tender process, to be published later this month.

The funding will be additional to the existing spend of £800k per annum which funds the current free face to face debt advice service which Citizens Advice provides. The new funding will be used to complement the existing service and cover gaps in the existing provision.

A number of matters relating to the nature and the details of the tender documentation have recently been resolved with the Central Procurement Directorate. This has resulted in some slippage to the original tendering schedule but every effort will be made to ensure that all of the allocated funding is drawn down for the intended purpose.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Burial Spaces

Mr D McClarty asked the Minister of the Environment (i) how many burial spaces are available in each Council area; and (ii) whether it is permissible to give preference to local residents and, if so, in what Council areas is this happening.

(AQW 8165/09)

Minister of the Environment (Mr S Wilson): The Department does not hold the requested information. The Department will request the information from the 26 local councils and will provide the member with a written response that will be placed in the Assembly Library.

Asda Supermarket

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the initiative taken by the Asda supermarket chain not to provide bags free of charge but to charge for more durable, reusable bags; and if he has any plans to promote this initiative on a large scale.

(AQW 8178/09)

Minister of the Environment: Asda is one of a number of leading UK supermarket chains signed up to the voluntary agreement to reduce, by 50%, the number of single use bags handed out to customers by the end of May 2009, working towards a reduction of 70% over the longer term. The interim results of the voluntary agreement will not be available until later in the summer but it is estimated that the agreement will result in a reduction of around 5 billion bags per year.

I warmly welcome the increasing efforts by many supermarkets, other stores and smaller shops to reduce the numbers of bags handed out to customers. Some shops have chosen to charge for single use bags to encourage shoppers to reuse bags and to promote “bags for life”. I understand that Asda’s initiatives include, for example, the removal of single use carrier bags from view at checkouts thereby giving more control to checkout operators to encourage customers to choose a “bag for life” at 5p a bag. Some shops award bonus loyalty card points to shoppers who reuse bags. Some shops are asking customers “Do you need a bag?”. Together all of these initiatives are working to reduce the number of single use carrier bags handed out to customers.

I have called on people in Northern Ireland to change their shopping habits to help to reduce the numbers of carrier bags. Simple things can be very effective and if more of us bring our own reusable carrier bags with us and refuse to take new carrier bags at the checkout we can expect to see greater reductions in carrier bag numbers in the future.

In April we also encouraged people in Northern Ireland, through local radio advertisements, to reuse their carrier bags whenever they can. These advertisements were part of the “get a bag habit” publicity campaign organised by DEFRA and the Waste & Resources Action Programme. Further information on reducing bag numbers is also available on Government websites and through the Waste & Resources Action Programme.

There are no easy answers to the carrier bags problem. However, I am satisfied that, as a result of a range of initiatives, we are making good progress and that many shoppers and retailers are now playing their part to reduce the numbers of carrier bags.

Civil Servant’s Bonuses

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment how much was paid in bonuses to senior Civil Servants in his Department in the year 2008/09. (AQW 8227/09)

Minister of the Environment: Information on the total amount paid in non-consolidated bonus payments to Senior Civil Servants in the Department of Environment in respect of performance year 2008/2009 is not yet available. It is anticipated that this information will be available in the autumn.

Public Body Expenses

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment to consider if the details of expenses of Chief Executives and Directors of local authorities and other public bodies for which his Department is responsible, should be published, in line with many councils and public bodies in England, Scotland and Wales, in the interests of transparent and accountable government (AQW 8228/09)

Minister of the Environment: I have asked Policy Development Panel A, reporting to the Strategic Leadership Board working on the local government reform agenda, to consider this issue and report to the August meeting of the Strategic Leadership Board.

Audit Committee

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the role and responsibility of a member of the audit committee for local authorities and for other public bodies, including any extra responsibility that person may have. (AQW 8229/09)

Minister of the Environment: Local authorities and other public bodies must ensure that their financial management is adequate and that sound internal control facilitates the effective exercise of their functions and includes arrangements for the management of risk.

Audit committees are widely recognised across the public sector as a core component of effective governance. Central government departments, their Non-Departmental Public Bodies and sponsored bodies comply with the Audit Committee Handbook published by HM Treasury, with some flexibility to reflect Northern Ireland circumstances. Local authorities, whilst not bound by statute, are encouraged to have regard to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy’s Audit Committees – Practical Guidance.

Audit committee members’ main responsibilities include:-

- i. to confirm for the public body that the right processes are in place, and that financial stewardship and overall governance arrangements such as internal control, risk management, anti-fraud arrangements and financial reporting issues can be relied upon;
- ii. to provide independent assurance that adequate controls are in place to mitigate key risks and to provide assurance that the organisation is operating effectively; and
- iii. to ensure that internal audit systems are operating effectively and issues raised by both internal and external auditors are satisfactorily addressed.

In addition, members of a local authority audit committee may be designated responsibility (under Regulation 5 of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006) for approving, by a resolution, the annual statement of accounts of the local authority.

NI Environment Agency

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment how many staff who were formerly in his Department are now classed as employees of the NI Environment Agency and what is their status in relation to the Civil Service. (AQW 8231/09)

Minister of the Environment: The NI Environment Agency (NIEA) is an agency of the Department of the Environment and all its staff have remained within the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS).

2008-2011 Business Plan

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the main targets set for his Department in the 2008-2011 business plan and whether any interim review of progress has taken place in respect of meeting those targets. (AQW 8232/09)

Minister of the Environment: The main targets in my Department's 2008-11 Corporate Plan are detailed at Annex 1 and reflect those PSA Targets for which my Department has responsibility within the Programme for Government. The three year targets contained in the Corporate Plan are being pursued via one year business plans which set out actions for achievement in each of the three years covered. Progress in respect of these actions was subject to quarterly review by the Departmental Board during 2008/09.

Annex 1

Corporate Plan 2008-11: Main Targets

The targets contained in the 2008-11 Corporate Plan are organised under five strategic objectives as follows:

1. **To protect and promote the natural environment and built heritage.**
 - Reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25% below 1990 levels by 2025 and improve energy efficiency in homes.
 - Through the Sustainable Development Implementation Plan 2008-11, progress delivery, where appropriate, of the Key Targets associated with Strategic Climate Change and Energy objectives.
 - By 2015 achieve the environmental objectives set for all water bodies under the Water Framework Directive.
 - Achieve the health based objectives for 7 key air pollutants in the Air Quality Strategy by the relevant dates.
 - Compliance with EU Landfill Directive target to reduce the amount of biodegradable municipal waste sent to landfill to 75% of 1995 levels by 2010.
 - Save at least 45 buildings or scheduled monuments on the Built Heritage At Risk Northern Ireland (BHARNI) register by March 2011, contributing to the target of saving 200 structures by 2016.
 - To reduce significantly the loss in biodiversity by 2010, and to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2016.
2. **To plan and manage development in a sustainable way which is responsive to the needs of the community.**
 - Ensure a fit for purpose suite of draft or adopted development plans is in place by March 2011.
 - A fit for purpose suite of Planning Policy Statements to be in place by March 2011.
 - A fit for purpose legislative framework for reform of the planning system to be in place by March 2011.
 - By March 2011, ensure: 60% of major applications processed in 23 weeks; 70% of intermediate applications processed in 31 weeks; and 80% of minor applications processed in 18 weeks.
3. **To reduce road deaths and serious injuries.**
 - By 2012 reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on our roads by 33% of the average for the period 1996-2000.
 - By 2012 reduce the number of children killed or seriously injured on our roads by 50% of the average for the period 1996-2000.

4. **To support the delivery of a system of strong and effective local government.**
- Reduction in the numbers of local councils, and transfer of agreed functions from central government to local government control.
 - Modernisation of existing processes of councils.
 - Assumption of new powers for local government.
5. **To support the Minister, Permanent Secretary and senior management, and oversee the securing and allocation of resources to enable the Department to achieve its business aims and meet its legal and equity obligations.**
- Production of annual procurement plan.
 - A minimum of 95% value of procurement to be subject to CoPE influence by 31 March 2008. If this target is not met must seek to reduce non-CoPE procurement by 25% year on year (2008-11).
 - Deliver Shared NICS Corporate Services through the implementation and realisation of the benefits of the following reform programmes:
 - Financial and accounting services through Account NI by 1 April 2009;
 - Human resource services through HR Connect by November 2008;
 - ICT services through the ICT Shared Services Centre by April 2009;
 - Network service through Network NI by 30 September 2009; and
 - Office estate services through Workplace 2010 by 30 November 2008.

Enforcement Officers

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment how many enforcement officers work in the different divisions of his Department. (AQW 8233/09)

Minister of the Environment: There are currently 83 dedicated enforcement officers working within my Department's three executive agencies, as well as a further 100 staff members who are involved in enforcement work alongside other duties. A breakdown of these figures by agency is set out below.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

There are currently 27 dedicated enforcement officers working in the Agency's Environmental Crime Unit. A further 79 staff working in the Water Management Unit and Industrial Pollution and Radiochemical Inspectorate also have an element of enforcement work within their job descriptions.

In addition, the Agency's Natural Heritage Directorate does not employ enforcement officers as such but has an ASSI compliance team which comprises 4 administrative staff and 3 scientific staff, 2 of which are employed as investigative officers.

Planning Service

There are currently 41 enforcement officers working within Planning Service's six divisional offices. There are also six senior officers at PPTO (Principal Planner) grade who are involved with enforcement work alongside their other duties.

Driver and Vehicle Agency

Within the Driver & Vehicle Agency, there are currently 15 officers dedicated to full time enforcement activities, with ad-hoc support provided by a further 8 officers (authorised to undertake enforcement duties) who predominantly work full time on other enforcement related activities.

Pollution Incident on the Ballygowan Road

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the reasons for the pollution incident on the Ballygowan Road on 25 July 2006 not resulting in action being taken against the perpetrators. (AQW 8274/09)

Minister of the Environment: Following the report of dead fish in the Ballygowan River on that date, the then Environment and Heritage Service took immediate action. Staff from the then Fisheries Conservancy Board,

acting on behalf of the Agency, investigated and confirmed that the source of the pollution was a blockage in pumps at a sewage pumping station belonging to the then Water Service.

Appropriate action was taken to resolve the issue quickly. However, as Water Service enjoyed Crown Immunity, it could not be prosecuted for causing this incident.

Birds on the Red List

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the discussions he has had with organisations about the 21% of birds on the Red List in the UK. (AQW 8275/09)

Minister of the Environment: Discussions with various organisations about the birds on the red list are undertaken on my behalf by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA).

The red list referred to is derived from the UK Birds of Conservation Concern. This provides information on the conservation status of regularly occurring birds in the UK. The most recent listing was published in May 2009.

A total of 246 species were included in this review. Their conservation status was assessed against a set of criteria to place each on one of three lists; green, amber and red in increasing level of conservation concern.

There are 52 species on the red list which represents the 21% referred to in the question. Only 22 of these species occur regularly in Northern Ireland.

NIEA is also involved in a similar all-island exercise (known as Birds of Conservation Concern Ireland) which is led by Birdwatch Ireland and the Northern Ireland office of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Both the UK and Ireland lists are being used by NIEA to update their list of priority species. This list will then inform the development of conservation actions to assist these species.

High Hedges

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what plans his Department has to introduce legislation to deal with the problem of high hedges. (AQW 8284/09)

Minister of the Environment: Any scheme provided for in new legislation to deal with the nuisance high hedges problem in Northern Ireland will be operated by local government and I would not underestimate the amount of additional work such a scheme would have on district councils, particularly during the early stages of the scheme's operation when the existing problems affecting many householders would need to be dealt with. It is with this in mind, together with the competing priorities and resource constraints I am facing, that I have decided not to progress the development of policy and legislation on this matter until after the eleven new councils have been elected in May 2011. This also allows me to focus Departmental staff resources on higher priority environmental issues over the coming years.

High Hedges

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what consideration his Department has given to the legislation that is in place in England and Wales on the problem of high hedges. (AQW 8286/09)

Minister of the Environment: When my Department consulted in 2005 to gather information about the scale and geographical spread of nuisance high hedges in Northern Ireland it drew attention to the position elsewhere including the legislation in England and Wales. The relevant legislation in force in England and Wales, namely Part 8 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 and associated subordinate legislation, will be taken into account whenever policy development work in respect of a nuisance high hedges scheme for Northern Ireland is commenced. An initial policy consultation exercise would help to establish whether or not a scheme modeled on the England/Wales scheme would be the best way forward for Northern Ireland.

High Hedges

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department intends to take on the issue of high hedges. (AQW 8287/09)

Minister of the Environment: Once a decision is taken to progress work on nuisance high hedges policy and legislation my Department will produce a policy consultation document on the proposed details of the system of high hedge control to be enshrined in legislation and a regulatory impact assessment. The consultation will inform the subsequent drafting of the legislation which will, in due course, be laid before the Assembly.

Clean Neighbourhood Agenda

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what action his Department intends to take on the Clean Neighbourhood Agenda. (AQW 8288/09)

Minister of the Environment: In view of resource constraints and competing priorities facing my Department and the impact on Councils of the Review of Public Administration further consideration of the Northern Ireland Clean Neighbourhoods agenda and associated new primary legislation corresponding to the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act has been deferred until 2011. This will allow my officials to concentrate on higher priority environmental issues over the coming years.

Clean Neighbourhood Agenda

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the role of the District Councils in the Clean Neighbourhood Agenda. (AQW 8290/09)

Minister of the Environment: The main purpose of the Clean Neighbourhoods Agenda is to strengthen the powers available to District Councils to enable them to deal more effectively with a wide range of local environmental problems. Clearly therefore the role of District Councils in the context of the Clean Neighbourhoods Agenda is very important. Once a decision is taken to progress work on the Clean Neighbourhoods Agenda it will be necessary to carry out an initial policy consultation with key interested parties including, in particular, District Councils, seeking views to assist my Department in the development of proposals to deal with local environmental quality issues more effectively.

Environment Agency Employees

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment the status of employees of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and what remuneration and pension arrangements apply to them. (AQW 8300/09)

Minister of the Environment: The Environment and Heritage Service was reorganised into the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) on 1 July 2008. The NIEA continues to be part of the Department of the Environment and on reorganisation all of its staff remained within the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS). NIEA staff are therefore subject to remuneration and pension arrangements in line with normal NICS provision.

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Rental Arrangements

Mr J Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail on what figures the Commissioner of Valuations based his advice to the Interim Assembly Standards Commissioner concerning the rental arrangements for 9-11 Church Street, Ballymena. (AQW 7532/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr N Dodds): The Commissioner of Valuation was asked by the Interim Commissioner for Standards to provide a view on the level of rent which might reasonably be expected to be paid for 9-11 Church Street, Ballymena.

The Commissioner of Valuation relied on established rental levels in Ballymena and in particular on asking rents in the immediate vicinity.

Lurgan and Craigavon Leisure Centres

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline his Department's position in relation to the grant of £161,000 which was awarded to Craigavon Borough Council for the installation of boilers at Lurgan and Craigavon Leisure Centres and which was not progressed. (AQW 7974/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: It is regrettable that Craigavon Borough Council was unable to proceed as planned with the projects to install biomass boilers at Lurgan and Craigavon leisure centres. Both projects were considered by the Department of Finance and Personnel to be worthwhile investments that could have delivered estimated savings of £48,000 and 528 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions annually.

Lurgan and Craigavon Leisure Centres

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether his Department is aware of why the grant of £161,000, which was awarded to Craigavon Borough Council to fund the installation of boilers at Lurgan and Craigavon Leisure Centres, was not progressed; and if the grant monies were offered to another council and, if not, was the money returned to the central budget. (AQW 7975/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: In February 2008, the Department was advised by Craigavon Borough Council that it would not be claiming the £161,000 grant awarded to it in April 2007 from the Central Energy Efficiency Fund. Due to legal issues that arose during the tendering process the Council was unable to make an award of contract. As this advice was received late in the financial year, the Department was unable to transfer the grant to another energy efficiency project and the money was surrendered to the central budget at the February 2008 monitoring round.

Suicides in East Belfast

Ms D Purvis asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many suicides were registered in the east Belfast and Castlereagh area in (i) 2006; (ii) 2007; and (iii) 2008. (AQW 8250/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The table attached gives the number of deaths registered due to 'suicide and self-inflicted injury'¹ and 'undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'² where the deceased was resident in either East Belfast Parliamentary Constituency or the remainder of Castlereagh Local Government District for each year between 2006 and 2008P.

1 International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes X60-X84, Y87.0 for years 2006-2008.

2 International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes Y10-Y34, Y87.2 for years 2006-2008.

P 2008 data is provisional

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF REGISTERED DEATHS DUE TO 'SUICIDE AND SELF-INFLICTED INJURY' AND 'UNDETERMINED INJURY WHETHER ACCIDENTALLY OR PURPOSEFULLY INFLICTED' IN EITHER EAST BELFAST PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCY OR THE REMAINDER OF CASTLEREAGH LOCAL GOVERNMENT DISTRICT, 2006 - 2008P.

Registration Year	Number of Suicide Deaths
2006	11
2007	17
2008P	12

Civil Service Equal Pay Claim

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when he expects all tasks in relation to the Civil Service equal pay claim to be completed and when he proposes to make the awards. (AQW 8305/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The issues relating to equal pay in the NICS are both significant and complex and, therefore, it is important that they are properly addressed. It is likely that it may yet take some time before they will be finally resolved.

Discussions between officials in the Department of Finance and Personnel and NIPSA are ongoing in an effort to establish as clearly as possible the parameters within which a negotiated settlement might be reached so that I, in conjunction with my Ministerial colleagues in the Executive, can consider how the matter should be taken forward.

However, if there are unlawful inequalities in pay in the NICS, I am determined that these should be put right.

Death due to Malnutrition

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 7963/09, to detail the age of these individuals. (AQW 8319/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The attached table gives the number of deaths due to malnutrition¹ registered where the place of death was recorded as being in a hospital by the age of the deceased, 2004 to 2008P. The average age at death of the patients noted was 73 years with a significant number having also had a stroke, dementia or other severe illnesses. Deaths related to anorexia nervosa or other eating disorders are recorded separately and not shown in these figures.

¹ Deaths are defined as being due to malnutrition using International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes E40 to E46.

P 2008 data is provisional

TABLE: THE NUMBER OF DEATHS DUE TO MALNUTRITION REGISTERED IN NORTHERN IRELAND WHERE THE PLACE OF DEATH WAS RECORDED AS BEING IN A HOSPITAL BY THE AGE OF THE DECEASED, 2004 TO 2008P

Age	Number of Deaths due to Malnutrition
Under 45	-
45-54	2
55-64	1
65-74	4
75+	7
All Ages	14

Construction Sector

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the initiatives her Department is undertaking to protect local jobs in the construction sector. (AQW 8321/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Government recognizes the important contribution that local construction firms make to the NI economy and has provided significant levels of support to the local construction sector in terms of its capital investment programme. The latest figures suggest that in excess of £1.6 billion in gross capital investment was delivered in 2008-09.

This support is planned to continue in 2009-10 with the net capital investment plans, set out in the Budget 2008-11 document, almost 6% greater than the equivalent figures for 2008-09.

Public procurement is however, subject to the EU Treaty, which requires freedom of movement, transparency and non-discrimination on the basis of nationality. Government cannot restrict its purchases of construction works and services to favour local firms.

However, in December 2008, I established the Construction Industry Forum – Procurement Task Group to agree the principles to be applied to future construction procurement. The Group's Report was finalized on 30 April 2009 and was tabled at the Procurement Board on 7 May 2009. As Chair of the Procurement Board, I have instructed the Central Procurement Directorate to work with all Government Construction Clients to implement

the seven key principles agreed by the Task Group – one of which is to provide recurrent tender opportunities for enterprises of all sizes.

In addition to these principles, the report includes 25 actions with dates for implementation. Work has already commenced on a number of these with a view to completing them by 31 December 2009.

Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs) are already required to advertise all construction procurement opportunities in excess of designated thresholds (£5k for construction professional services and £30k for construction works) on their websites or in the local Press. Where the value of a contract is in excess of the EU thresholds (£90k for construction professional services and £3.5m for construction works), it must also be published in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU).

The Procurement Board approved the use of the eSourcing NI web portal as a single sourcing tool for all CoPEs. eSourcingNI offers all registered construction firms “24/7” access to view all procurement opportunities and facilitates the submission of electronic tenders. In my Department, the Central Procurement Directorate has been using eSourcing NI since May of last year. All CoPEs will be using the system by early 2010.

In addition, the ISNI information website has been developed to provide the public, and in particular the construction industry, with specific project information drawn from the Delivery Tracking System. The website is now operational and was demonstrated to representatives of the construction industry at the Construction Employers Federation (CEF) Conference held on 11 June 2009. The website provides details of ISNI projects including their type, location, value and delivery timescales.

Government recognises that not all organisations will contract directly with the public sector and has introduced a requirement into all new public sector construction contracts, since December 2008, for main contractors to publish opportunities within their supply chains on their websites and/or in the local Press.

The initiatives outlined above, demonstrate the commitment of my Department to ensure that local construction firms have a higher degree of visibility of business opportunities and that they will be able to fully engage in the take up of these opportunities through modern, efficient and cost effective construction procurement processes.

Death due to Malnutrition

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to his answer to AQW 7963/09, to detail the total number of deaths due to malnutrition recorded in each of the last five years. (AQW 8370/09)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The attached table gives the number of deaths due to malnutrition¹ registered in Northern Ireland, 2004 to 2008P.

¹ Deaths are defined as being due to malnutrition using International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes E40 to E46.

P 2008 data is provisional

TABLE: THE NUMBER OF DEATHS DUE TO MALNUTRITION REGISTERED IN NORTHERN IRELAND, 2004 TO 2008P

Registration Year	Number of Deaths due to Malnutrition
2004	6
2005	2
2006	2
2007	6
2008P	2

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Use of a Private Dentist for Emergency Treatment

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what procedures are in place for people who are living on benefit to reclaim costs incurred by having to use a private dentist for emergency treatment. (AQW 7064/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): Unfortunately my Department's scheme to assist people on low incomes does not cover the cost of private treatment.

Southern Health and Social Care Trust, Emergency Referrals

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what provision exists in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area for emergency referrals outside normal working hours in relation to children, the elderly and vulnerable adults; and where this is based, broken down by area within the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQW 7100/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Southern Trust has an emergency Out of Hours Service which covers all programmes of care. This has been operational from 1st October 1973.

The Out of Hours Service is accessed by the public via the hospital switchboards in Craigavon Area Hospital, Daisy Hill Hospital and St. Luke's Hospital.

From 1 April 2009, the Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) has extended its services so that during weekends and Public Holidays a CAMHS Practitioner will be available to receive referrals and complete an appropriate assessment.

Within the Adult Mental Health Service the Home Treatment Team provides an extended service which operates up to 9.00pm, seven days a week. In addition, they provide a "crisis response service" within limited periods during weekdays and weekends.

Alzheimer's Research

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money is being spent on Alzheimer's research. (AQW 7151/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department, through the HSC Research & Development Office of the Public Health Agency, has made a significant contribution to the study of the aetiology and treatment of Alzheimers Disease over the past several years through the establishment of a Recognised Research Group in Neurosciences and Mental Health. To date funding for a portfolio of studies by this group has reached approximately £2m.

HSC R&D also funds HSC infrastructure to support clinical research. This includes the Northern Ireland Clinical Research Network (NICRN) that helps to ensure that the outcomes of research are translated into benefits for patients and clients as soon as possible. Dementia is one of nine areas of focus of NICRN and support of £375,000 has been provided. Northern Ireland has an impressive track record in providing access for patients with Alzheimers Disease to novel drug treatments through clinical trials. The NICRN will continue to build on this expertise.

In addition, my Department has co-funded (£150,000) the establishment of a Centre for Ageing and Research and Development in Ireland (CARDI), which is a not-for-profit organisation developed by leaders from the ageing field across Ireland to advocate for and to advance the ageing research agenda both North and South.

Building upon the expertise and infrastructure in the Recognised Research Group and NICRN, local research into Alzheimers Disease is also significantly supported by external partners including local and national charities, international funding bodies and drug companies. For example the Alzheimers Research Trust (ART), a national organisation, has contributed £95,000 for the establishment of a NI Centre, within a national research network, led jointly by Queens University Belfast and the University of Ulster. ART provides funding for the local Centre, research equipment, student fellowships and scientific conferences.

My Department recognises the burden of illness caused by Alzheimers Disease within the population of Northern Ireland and the cost of caring associated with this condition. It is committed to funding research in this area and to ensuring the most effective translation of research findings into strategies for prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

Patients Referred Outside Northern Ireland

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to seeking surgery or medical procedures outside Northern Ireland in the last financial year (i) how many people were referred; (ii) what was the total cost; and (iii) what action is being taken to reduce the number of referrals. (AQW 7158/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In relation to parts (i) and (ii) of the question I can advise that information on the number of patients referred outside Northern Ireland and the cost of their procedures is not held centrally and could only be collected at disproportionate cost.

Patients may receive treatment outside NI for a number of reasons; where a specialist service is not available here, as part of waiting list initiatives or for illness or injury while outside NI on business, holiday or studying.

My Department is continually reviewing how best to make services accessible locally where that is possible, recognising the additional anxiety and difficulty caused to patients and families who have to travel outside NI for treatment. However, in some specialist areas the numbers requiring treatment are insufficient to make a service here sustainable.

It will continue to be necessary to refer patients to the independent sector for treatment, both within and outside NI, while waiting times are further reduced and backlogs exist. Significant efficiency improvements and investment have been made to improve capacity in local services over the past few years and that will continue. It is expected that, once waiting times stabilise, Trusts will seek independent sector capacity only in exceptional circumstances.

St John's Ambulance Service

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in relation to the Health Service's use of St John's Ambulance Service (i) how many calls/jobs there were; (ii) what percentage this was of the total calls/jobs; and (ii) how many were deemed to have been emergency calls, in each of the last 5 years, (AQW 7191/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The table below sets out the information requested. The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) did not collect this data prior to 2006/07.

Year	Total tasks assigned to St John Ambulance	% of total ambulance calls	No emergency calls attended by St John Ambulance
2006-07	166	0.05%	40
2007-08	149	0.04%	22
2008-09	62	0.02%	18

St John's Ambulance (SJA) may provide routine patient transport. SJA also assists NIAS by attending a very small number of the less serious non-life threatening incidents on a pre-planned basis during known periods of high demand. SJA does not respond to the more serious Category A (life-threatening) calls.

Consultants Costs

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the cost of (i) hotel accommodation; and (ii) flights for consultants flown in to reduce outpatient waiting lists by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last three financial years. (AQW 7202/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Contracts for the procurement of assessment and/or treatment services from the independent sector are negotiated through a competitive tendering process aimed at

ensuring best value for money. Contracts are agreed on a price per case basis. The agreed price includes all of the costs associated with the contract, including any staff travel or accommodation costs where appropriate. Separate information on accommodation or travel costs is not available.

Education and Training

Mr A Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what proportion of the five Health and Social Care Trusts' budgets are earmarked for education and training. (AQW 7236/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: On average the combined proportion of the five Health and Social Care Trust budgets earmarked for education and training during the 2008/09 financial year was just under 2%. By Trust this varied from 2.6% where the large teaching hospitals are situated at Belfast Trust to 0.4% at the Northern Trust.

Southern Health and Social Care Trust

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much the Southern Health and Social Care Trust has spent on recruitment, in each of the last three years. (AQW 7283/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information is available for the last two years that the Trust has been established. The Southern Trust has spent £198,126 in the financial year 2007/08 and £137,893 in the financial year 2008/09 on costs directly associated with advertising vacancies.

Agency Nurses

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent on the employment of agency nurses, in each Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last five years. (AQW 7291/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the cost of Agency staff is published on a bi-annual basis on the departmental website at www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/hrd/wpu/wpu-monitoring.htm

Health Service Dentists

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people were taken on as patients by Health Service dentists in (i) Carrick; (ii) Newtownabbey; and (iii) Larne, broken down by (a) dentist; and (b) year, for each of the past three years. (AQW 7388/09)

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

A new Health Service patient is defined as a patient who is registered with a Health Service dentist employed in a given surgery at March of a given year, but the patient was not registered there at April of the previous year. Practices have been assigned to Local Government Districts (LGD) based on the postcode of the practice.

i) **Number of New Registered Patients by Health Service Dentists in Carrickfergus LGD by (a) dentist for (b) the period April 2008 to March 2009.**

Dentist Surname & Initial	No. of New Registered Patients
Harper W N	331
Clements M	343
Currie A	1,223
Athimoolam D	29
Campomanes De Allende B	122

Dentist Surname & Initial	No. of New Registered Patients
Hanna W R	124
Thompson R M R	85
Buchanan T	245
Blair J	6
Abbott L	234
McVeigh J C	358
Russell L	99
Eller B	850
McVeigh C E	481
Gardner H A	372
McClure A H	520

Source: Family Practitioner Services - HSC Business Services Organisation

- i) **Number of New Registered Patients by Health Service Dentists in Carrickfergus LGD by (a) dentist for (b) the period April 2007 to March 2008.**

Dentist Surname & Initial	No. of New Registered Patients
Harper W N	344
Clements M	115
Law A	253
Athimoolam D	66
Hanna W R	103
Thompson R M R	75
Buchanan T	16
Blair J	76
Abbott L	287
McVeigh J C	231
Russell L	111
Cairns R	645
McVeigh C E	468
Gardner H A	947
McClure A H	358

Source: Family Practitioner Services - HSC Business Services Organisation

- i) **Number of New Registered Patients by Health Service Dentists in Carrickfergus LGD by (a) dentist for (b) the period April 2006 to March 2007.**

Dentist Surname & Initial	No. of New Registered Patients
Harper W N	592
Clements M	199
Law A	624
McDonald S J	35

Dentist Surname & Initial	No. of New Registered Patients
Hanna W R	152
Thompson R M R	123
Buchanan T	84
Blair J	279
Abbott L	385
McVeigh J C	473
Gordon K A	210
Russell L	3
McVeigh C E	552
McClure A H	703
Meekin E	476

Source: Family Practitioner Services - HSC Business Services Organisation

- ii) **Number of New Registered Patients by Health Service Dentists in Newtownabbey LGD by (a) dentist for (b) the period April 2008 to March 2009.**

Dentist Surname & Initial	No. of New Registered Patients
Turner B W	291
McLean F	206
Armstrong L M	251
McKeever M	308
McClinton J	298
Irwin M A	270
Doyle SC	452
Tumelty P	270
Gordon E	177
Alton B C	256
Best S	332
Kirk M B	603
Burns P	401
Gordon K	686
McNally D	24
McCloskey GJ	479
Martin T	228
Lalor A	947
Ferris B S	819
Thompson I	448
Bloomer C	762
Costelloe J	335
Mellor D A R	459
Mellor M C	280

Dentist Surname & Initial	No. of New Registered Patients
Moore J	676
McCann F J	85
Tohani V	725
Tosh M	134
Hodgkinson J	112
McKissick T	54
McKissick JS	60
Lowe P	382
Douglas H	331

Source: Family Practitioner Services - HSC Business Services Organisation

ii) **Number of New Registered Patients by Health Service Dentists in Newtownabbey LGD by (a) dentist for (b) the period April 2007 to March 2008.**

Dentist Surname & Initial	No. of New Registered Patients
Turner B W	371
McLean F	324
Armstrong L M	1,197
McKeever M	146
McClinton J	153
Irwin M A	220
Doyle SC	349
Tumelty P	101
Gordon E	228
Alton B C	299
Best S	591
Kirk M B	622
Burns P	636
Gordon K	452
McNally D	24
McCloskey GJ	962
Martin T	146
Lalor A	58
Ferris B S	1,505
Thompson I	662
Bloomer C	318
Costelloe J	388
Mellor D A R	440
Mellor M C	297
Moore J	874
McCann F J	225

Dentist Surname & Initial	No. of New Registered Patients
Stevenson K	1
Tosh M	184
McKissick T	67
McKissick JS	358
Lowe P	314
Douglas H	362

Source: Family Practitioner Services - HSC Business Services Organisation

- ii) **Number of New Registered Patients by Health Service Dentists in Newtownabbey LGD by (a) dentist for (b) the period April 2006 to March 2007.**

Dentist Surname & Initial	No. of New Registered Patients
Turner B W	350
McLean F	835
Armstrong L M	156
Kostiw K	1,431
McKeever M	489
McClinton J	515
Irwin M A	336
Doyle SC	341
Tumelty P	1,053
Gordon E	228
Alton B C	601
Best S	1,770
Kirk M B	1,981
Burns P	1,691
McNally D	202
McCloskey GJ	535
Martin T	285
Lalor A	675
Ferris B S	570
Thompson I	962
Bloomer C	532
Costelloe J	443
Mellor D A R	487
Mellor M C	315
Moore J	951
McCann F J	270
Stevenson K	236
Tosh M	294
McKissick T	260

Dentist Surname & Initial	No. of New Registered Patients
MCKISSICK JS	348
LOWE P	827
DOUGLAS H	482

Source: Family Practitioner Services - HSC Business Services Organisation

- iii) **Number of New Registered Patients by Health Service Dentists in Larne LGD by (a) dentist for (b) the period April 2008 to March 2009.**

Dentist Surname & Initial	No. of New Registered Patients
Donnelly P J	1,087
Blair J	1,205
Kviklyte Z	227
Lynch F	65
Morrison I	253
Christie J	248
O'Boyle T	290
McGahan A	500
McFaul WM R	453
McGarel R	485
Vila Ortego P	28
Donnelly P J	137

Source: Family Practitioner Services - HSC Business Services Organisation

- iii) **Number of New Registered Patients by Health Service Dentists in Larne LGD by (a) dentist for (b) the period April 2007 to March 2008.**

Dentist Surname & Initial	No. of New Registered Patients
Donnelly P J	883
Blair J	793
Rainey S	919
Lynch F	208
Morrison I	366
Christie J	307
O'Boyle T	187
McGahan A	817
McFaul WM R	356
McGarel R	454
Donnelly P J	163
Blair J	2
Rainey S	150

Source: Family Practitioner Services - HSC Business Services Organisation

- iii) **Number of New Registered Patients by Health Service Dentists in Larne LGD by (a) dentist for (b) the period April 2006 to March 2007.**

Dentist Surname & Initial	No. of New Registered Patients
Donnelly P J	733
Blair J	671
Rainey S	1,485
Lynch F	364
Morrison I	394
Christie J	377
O'Boyle T	397
McFaul WM R	503
McGarel R	479
Donnelly P J	141
Blair J	3
Rainey S	149

Source: Family Practitioner Services - HSC Business Services Organisation

Diabetes

Mrs C Hanna asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many amputations have been carried out as a result of diabetes, in the last five years, broken down by (i) Health and Social Care Trust area; and (ii) what was the cost of this to the Health Service including aftercare. (AQW 7418/09)

- (i) Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of amputation procedures carried out in Health and Social Care Hospitals in Northern Ireland, where a diagnosis of diabetes was also recorded, in each of the last five years, are shown below;

HSC Providers	2007/08	2006/07	2005/06	2004/05	2003/04
Belfast HSC Provider	134	130	105	111	112
South Eastern HSC Provider	5	7	8	12	14
Northern HSC Provider	2	7	7	12	17
Southern HSC Provider	11	13	15	29	26
Western HSC Provider	8	14	14	14	17
Total	160	171	149	178	186

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

- (ii) The table below shows the estimated costs the care of inpatients undergoing amputation procedures in the last five years. The below costs do not include aftercare.

Financial Year	Expenditure (£)
2008/09	unavailable
2007/08	787,916
2006/07	992,902
2005/06	1,057,199

Financial Year	Expenditure (£)
2004/05	1,220,691

Public Procurement Contracts

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the companies that were successful in securing public procurement contracts in works, services and goods through the Department, in the last two years and the percentage of those that were from the SME or the Social Economy sectors.

(AQW 7439/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: DHSSPS, in common with other departments, channels its procurement through contracts that are centrally negotiated and managed by DFP's Central Procurement Directorate (CPD). In those cases where DHSSPS has itself arranged procurement within the framework of a CPD contract, the position regarding SMEs and Social Economy organizations was as follows:

	2007-08	2008-09
Number of contracts awarded	14	7
Registered as SME/Social Economy	6	6
Percentage SME/Social Economy	43%	86%

The above classification of an organization as SME or Social Economy is as provided by CPD, from the database they maintain for the purpose. According to that, the organizations concerned were:

- in 2007-08: Deloitte, Ecom Software Ltd, KPMG, PWC, Queen's University Belfast, and Social Market Research; and
- in 2008-09: BDO Stoy Hayward, Community Evaluation, Deloitte, Hyder Consulting, KPMG, and SMR.

Guidance on Visiting Patients

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the policy or guidance for GPs visiting patients following their discharge from hospital.

(AQW 7451/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Health and Social Care Board contracts GP practices, under the terms of the new General Medical Service Contract (GMS), to provide essential services required for the management of their patients and to deliver those services in a manner determined by the practice in discussion with the patient or their representative.

The new GMS Contract, which is a nationally agreed contract across the UK, does not require GPs to carry out home visits. If deemed necessary home visits would be carried out following discussion with the patient or their representative.

Ministerial Questions

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to his answers to questions AQW 7061/09, AQW 7062/09 and AQW 7063/09, if he will consider the establishment of a central database for these types of information for ease of access when answering Ministerial questions. (AQW 7468/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The establishment of a central database is not proposed.

Young People in Care Homes

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the age profile of young people that reside in care homes broken down by (i) Health & Social Care Trust areas; and (ii) care homes. (AQW 7474/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is assumed that this question relates to the number of looked after children aged under 18 in a residential placement.

Information on the age profile of looked after children residing in residential care homes:

(i) In each Health & Social Care Trust is detailed for 31 March 2008 in the table below;

Placement Type	Age Group			Total
	Under 12	12-15	16+	
Belfast HSC Trust	12	35	34	81
Northern HSC Trust	12	21	29	62
South Eastern HSC Trust	12	28	30	70
Southern HSC Trust	9	21	19	49
Western HSC Trust	5	23	29	57
Northern Ireland	50	128	141	319

To avoid personal disclosure information cannot be disaggregated for children aged under 12.

Source: Departmental Information Return, LA2

(ii) In each care home is not available in the format requested.

Therapeutic Units

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of children that travel each year to England to be placed in therapeutic units due to the lack of specialist/differentiated residential provision for children in Northern Ireland. (AQW 7478/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of children that travel each year to England to be placed in therapeutic units due to the lack of specialist/differentiated residential provision for children in Northern Ireland is not available in the format requested.

Hospital Dress Code

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the hospital dress code announced last year is a recommendation or a regulation. (AQW 7496/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Regional Dress Code Policy is guidance.

It was published by my department in February 2008 and issued to HSC Trusts by the CMO and CNO with the specific recommendation that the dress code policy should be implemented immediately.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if any decision to introduce a staff dress code has been taken, and if so, have all staff of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust been issued with a copy of this dress code. (AQW 7527/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Staff Dress Code Policy was considered and approved by the Policy Committee on 10 November 2008 following this the document was ratified by the Executive Team on 12 November 2008. A list of all Policies and Standards and Guidelines (which included the Staff Dress Code Policy) was presented to the Trust Assurance Committee on 4

March 2009. Staff were advised about the revised Dress Code for Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, via the Trust intranet site on 3 March 2009, and a copy of the Dress Code was attached.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if a decision to introduce a staff dress code was recorded in the minutes of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust meeting and, if so, what was the date of this meeting. (AQW 7528/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Staff Dress Code Policy was considered and approved by the Policy Committee on 10 November 2008 following this the document was ratified by the Executive Team on 12 November 2008. A list of all Policies and Standards and Guidelines (which included the Staff Dress Code Policy) was presented to the Trust Assurance Committee on 4 March 2009.

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if a dress code has been introduced by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and, if so, on what date it was implemented. (AQW 7530/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Staff Dress Code Policy was considered and approved by the Policy Committee on 10 November 2008 following this the document was ratified by the Executive Team on 12 November 2008. A list of all Policies and Standards and Guidelines (which included the Staff Dress Code Policy) was presented to the Trust Assurance Committee on 4 March. The implementation date was 4 March 2009.

Anti-TNF Drugs

Dr A McDonnell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in relation to patients who have been assessed as requiring anti-TNF drugs, to detail (i) how many are receiving them; (ii) how many are on the waiting list to receive them; and (iii) what is the criteria for moving up the waiting list. (AQW 7600/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I have allocated additional funding of £39.1m for specialist drugs including anti-TNF drugs over the CSR period 2008/11. The HSC is working towards reducing the waiting time for anti-TNF drugs for severe arthritis to nine months by March 2010 and 21 weeks by March 2011. An interim target to achieve a maximum waiting time of 18 months by the end of March 2009 was achieved.

The Department does not collect information on patients waiting for or receiving anti-TNF drugs for conditions other than severe inflammatory arthritis. At 31 March 2009 there were (i) 1157 patients receiving anti-TNF drugs for the treatment of severe inflammatory arthritis with (ii) 485 patients waiting to start treatment. (iii) Patients of equal clinical priority are treated in chronological order starting with those who have been waiting longest.

Maternity Services Strategy

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why the proposed development of a maternity services strategy was removed as a Departmental target, at a departmental board meeting. (AQW 7651/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Departmental Board's position on this matter reflects my decision that in light of the priorities emerging during 2008, this work was better delayed until the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority review of maternity services along with the review of maternity capacity in the Eastern Board area were completed.

Once both these reviews are completed and the results examined a new departmental objective in this area will be considered.

Maternity Support Strategy

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whom he, or his officials, consulted on the decision to remove the Maternity Support Strategy as a departmental target. (AQW 7654/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Departmental Board position on this matter reflects my decision that in light of priorities emerging in 2008, this work was better delayed until the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority review of maternity services and the Eastern Health and Social Services Board review of maternity capacity were completed.

Once both these reviews are completed and the results examined, a new departmental objective in this area will be considered.

Caesarian Sections

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to the Ulster hospital, (i) how many caesarian sections have been performed in the last three years; and (ii) how does he intend to make full use of the new maternity facility. (AQW 7690/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of caesarean sections performed at the Ulster Hospital in the last three years is as follows:

Financial Year	No. of caesarean sections	No. of babies born by c-section	Total Births	Rate of Caesarian Sections
06/07	609	623	2741	22.7%
07/08	683	707	3023	23.4%
08/09	805	828	3466	23.9%

The caesarean rate at the Ulster Hospital is lower than the average rate of 28% for 2007/08 across Northern Ireland. The new maternity unit at the Ulster Hospital has proved a popular choice with patients. The unit offers state of the art, purpose built accommodation for mothers and newborn children and all the facilities there are in use.

Hospital Hygiene Audits

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 7329/09, to confirm, if and when, all monthly hospital hygiene audits will be carried out and published. (AQW 7718/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Environmental cleanliness audits in hospitals should be carried out based on the frequency recommended in Cleanliness Matters Toolkit. In my response to AQW 7329/09, I indicated that I had no plans to publish the results of monthly audits.

Hospital Hygiene Audits

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 7329/09, for his assessment of the value of the compulsory publication of audits at the entrance to the ward being an incentive to ensure they were completed, as recommended in the Cleanliness Matters Toolkit. (AQW 7719/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Cleanliness Matters Toolkit is guidance which sets out a framework for internal monitoring/audit of environmental cleanliness by Health & Social Care Trusts to allow cleaning performance to be highlighted. This is supported by the Environmental Cleanliness Controls Assurance Standard which underlines the necessary governance requirements. Compulsory publication is not proposed.

Hospital Hygiene Audits

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 7329/09, to confirm that the only published unannounced inspection reports by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority are (a) Altnagelvin and Waterside Hospitals in May 2008; (b) Belfast City in April 2008; (c) Causeway in June 2008; (d) Craigavon in March 2008; and (e) Downe in May 2008; and for his assessment of whether this is sufficient to provide public safeguards against hygiene lapses. (AQW 7720/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I can confirm that the only unannounced inspection reports published by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority so far are those listed in the question AQW 7720/09. The inspections are an important element in a package of measures which aims to reduce the risk of hygiene lapses.

Hospital Hygiene Audits

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the Royal Victoria Hospital was subjected to an unannounced inspection by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority. (AQW 7721/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) has completed unannounced inspections of one acute hospital in each Trust area and reports have been published. RQIA plans to inspect the remaining seven acute hospitals before the end of the calendar year including the Royal Victoria Hospital.

Residential Care Settings

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children and young people are sent to residential care settings or other facilities outside Northern Ireland; and to detail the reasons and costs for taking this action. (AQW 7788/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information regarding how many children and young people are sent to residential care settings or other facilities outside Northern Ireland and the costs for taking this action is not available in the form requested.

There are a variety of reasons why placements outside Northern Ireland occur which are not necessarily associated with the absence of appropriate residential care settings or other facilities within Northern Ireland. This may be that the child or young person's assessed health and social needs are exceptional and local services are not considered to be the appropriate response. A placement outside of Northern Ireland may be as a result of an assessment of the risks a child or young person poses to himself or other people, their needs or behaviour or the unavailability of appropriate specialist services in Northern Ireland.

Epilepsy Specialist Nurses

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the times and locations of dedicated clinics held by Epilepsy Specialist Nurses in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area. (AQW 7902/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is primarily for the Health and Social Care Board, as the commissioner of services, to prioritise and allocate resources to meet the needs of the population within each Trust area.

At Altnagelvin Hospital, patients are seen by Consultant Neurologists at the Neurology Clinic. In addition a senior epilepsy nurse from Belfast continues to attend Altnagelvin once every 3 months to review patients there.

A nurse-led epilepsy clinic is currently held once a month on a Friday afternoon at Tyrone County Hospital.

I am further advised that the Trust plans to commence a clinic in September 2009 at the Erne Hospital.

Specialised Paediatric Epilepsy Nurses

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of specialised paediatric epilepsy nurses and their location, in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 7911/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Western Health and Social Care Trust has advised that although there currently are no Specialised Paediatric Epilepsy Nurses employed by the Trust, 2 (1.00 Whole-Time Equivalent) Specialised Paediatric Epilepsy Nurses have recently been appointed and are due to take up post in June 2009. One of these Nurses will cover the Northern Sector of the Trust while the other will cover the Southern Sector of the Trust.

The Cost of Free Personal Care

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, following the report on the cost of free personal care, if he will provide clarification on the proposal that family homes are excluded from the financial assessment.

(AQW 8116/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: As part of the report I commissioned on the cost of introducing free personal care, my officials conducted a survey of care home residents in July 2007. Based on this information, it was estimated that the alternative option of disregarding a resident's former home from the financial assessment to determine how much they can contribute to the cost of their care, would cost some £44.3m and benefit 2,926 of the 14,232 residents in care homes at that time.

I have considered this issue very carefully against the competing priorities I face across the health service and have concluded that neither free personal care nor the exclusion of all family homes in financial assessments, is affordable within the current CSR period. However, there is currently no requirement to sell a former home to meet an assessed contribution; how a resident meets this contribution is a matter for the resident and their advisors.

Bonuses

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much was paid in bonuses to his Department's Permanent Secretary in each of the last five financial years.

(AQW 8122/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Combined salary and bonus information for the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Health, Social Service and Public Safety is currently provided through Resource Accounts in £5k bands, available from www.dhsspsni.gov.uk It is not our policy to disclose the remuneration details of individual civil servants, other than in broad terms as provision of personal information of this nature would breach the principles of the Data Protection Act.

Self Harm

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many emergency admissions to hospitals have there been due to self harm or suicide attempts in the past 12 months, broken down by hospital.

(AQW 8133/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The number of emergency admissions to hospital due to self harm or suicide attempts during 2007/08 (the latest 12 month period for which data is available), broken down by hospital is shown in the following table:-

Hospital	Emergency Admissions
Belfast City	578
Ulster	492
Royal Victoria	443
RBHSC	<5

Hospital	Emergency Admissions
Mater	711
Lagan Valley	129
Downe	188
Causeway	158
Whiteabbey	25
Mid Ulster	77
Antrim	541
Craigavon	656
Daisy Hill	272
Altnagelvin	584
Erne	106
Tyrone County	122

Source:- Hospital Inpatient System

Deaths and discharges are used to approximate admissions. These figures do not equate to individuals as a person may be admitted to hospital more than one in a year or across a number of years.

Fire Station, Shambles, Armagh

Mr D Kennedy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans he has for the former fire station site at the Shambles, Armagh. (AQW 8139/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The former Armagh fire station is surplus to requirements following the opening of the new Armagh fire station in January 2009.

Armagh City & District Council has expressed an interest in purchasing the site following a trawl across public sector bodies in accordance with policy requirements. Discussions are ongoing between the Council, NIFRS and Land & Property Service officials in relation to the proposed sale to Armagh Council.

Scottish Medical Consortium

Mr C Boylan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if the recommendations of the Scottish Medical Consortium have any legal standing in Northern Ireland. (AQW 8151/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Scottish Medicines Consortium (SMC) assesses and makes recommendations on all new drugs to NHS Boards and their Area Drug and Therapeutics Committees across Scotland. SMC recommendations have no legal standing in Northern Ireland. SMC guidance is not currently reviewed or assessed as applicable in Northern Ireland.

Child Abuse in the Republic of Ireland

Mr D Ford asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the implications are for child care and child protection in Northern Ireland arising from the report of The Commission to Enquire into Child Abuse in the Republic of Ireland (AQW 8153/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I was concerned to learn about the level of abuse highlighted by the Ryan Report. Officials are considering the Report and whether there are any implications for Northern Ireland.

The statutory framework requires that where allegations of child abuse come to light within Northern Ireland these must be reported immediately to PSNI and/or Social Services for investigation. I believe that where there is evidence of child abuse perpetrated by an individual then they should be brought before the court.

Under current legislative procedures in Northern Ireland individuals who wish to work in a paid or unpaid capacity with children in a regulated position will be subject to pre-employment vetting procedures. Information regarding individuals who have harmed a child or placed a child at risk of harm will be considered with a view to placing that individual on a disqualification list thereby preventing them from working with children in the future. Individuals placed on disqualification lists have the right of appeal to the independent Care Tribunal.

The introduction of new Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups legislation later this year will further strengthen protection for children and vulnerable adults in workplace situations. These new safeguarding arrangements will help to meet Government's commitment to increasing public protection by significantly extending the range of activities and workplaces from which individuals may be barred from working with children and vulnerable adults. Consequently, many more individuals than at present who may pose a risk to children or vulnerable adults can be removed from the workplace.

I have just approved policy arrangements for the establishment of a regional, independently-chaired Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland. The Board will ultimately replace the four non-statutory Area Child Protection Committees and will have a duty to make arrangements to safeguard the welfare of children and young people. There will be a duty for relevant agencies to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and to co-operate to improve the well being of children.

Social Workers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to answer AQW 7101/09, to detail how many social workers employed by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust have undertaken the six week training course in child protection delivered to community volunteers through Community Sector Training; and do those who have participated need to re-train every three years.

(AQW 8154/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Southern Health and Social Care Trust have advised that none of the social workers employed by SHSCT undertake the six week training course in child protection offered by Community Sector Training. Community Sector Training was funded by the Southern Health & Social Services Board and the training offered is targeted at community and voluntary groups who are not required to be registered as Early Years providers under the Children (NI) Order. As referred in my previous answer, social workers employed by the Trust receive child protection training as part of their social work course, during induction and as part of in-service training. All social workers are registered with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council and, as such, are required to undertake continuous professional training to meet re-registration requirements to keep their knowledge and skills updated. Re-registration occurs every 3 years.

Road Traffic Collisions

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety who is responsible for notifying the Fire and Rescue Service to attend road traffic collisions.

(AQW 8157/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) will attend road traffic collisions when notified by a member of the public or when contacted by Police and Ambulance Services. Its Regional Control Centre personnel will establish the facts of the road traffic collision to determine if NIFRS attendance is required, for example if persons are trapped in a vehicle or if there is a fire or risk of fire.

Road Traffic Collisions

Mr M Storey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) how many road traffic collisions were attended by the Amdulance Service in the past twelve months; and (ii) how many of these were attended by the Fire and Rescue Service.

(AQW 8158/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the joint attendance at road traffic collisions by the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) is not recorded. During the 2008/09 financial year NIAS attended 4,937 road traffic collisions, NIFRS attended 749 during the same period. However, it is likely that the majority of those incidents attended by NIFRS were also attended by NIAS.

Speech and Language Therapy Taskforce

Mr M Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to provide an update on the implementation of the Speech and Language Therapy Taskforce recommendations. (AQW 8194/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: My Department has established a multi-agency Speech and Language Therapy Action Plan Project Team to develop and agree an action plan taking account of the recommendations made in the Task Force Report. It is intended that the work of the Project Team will be completed and an agreed Action Plan, which will be subject to public consultation, launched before the end of 2009. The Project Team met with representatives, which included the Department of Education, The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, Health and Social Care Trusts, and the Regional Health and Social Care Board, at a focus group event being hosted by my Department on 12 June 2009.

Tyrone County Hospital

Dr K Deeny asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money has been spent by his Department in transporting nurses by (i) bus; and (ii) taxi, from the Tyrone County Hospital to work in the Altnagelvin and Erne Hospitals (AQW 8195/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am advised that the Western Health and Social Care Trust has spent £13,835 for the period from 27 February 2009 to 3 May 2009 in transporting nurses from the Tyrone County Hospital to the Erne and Altnagelvin hospitals. All costs relate to taxi hire. The decision to transport nurses between the two sites was taken at the request of staffside to facilitate staff.

The Trust continues to work with staff to determine the long term placement of staff and detailed discussions have taken place with the Royal College of Nursing and UNISON at every stage in the process. Whilst the Trust expects this process to be completed by 3rd August this is subject to review by the Trust.

Tyrone County Hospital

Dr K Deeny asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for how long the practice of transporting nurses from the Tyrone County Hospital to work in the Altnagelvin and Erne Hospitals will continue. (AQW 8196/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am advised that the Western Health and Social Care Trust has spent £13,835 for the period from 27 February 2009 to 3 May 2009 in transporting nurses from the Tyrone County Hospital to the Erne and Altnagelvin hospitals. All costs relate to taxi hire. The decision to transport nurses between the two sites was taken at the request of staffside to facilitate staff.

The Trust continues to work with staff to determine the long term placement of staff and detailed discussions have taken place with the Royal College of Nursing and UNISON at every stage in the process. Whilst the Trust expects this process to be completed by 3rd August this is subject to review by the Trust.

Senior Civil Servant Bonuses

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much was paid in bonuses to senior Civil Servants in his Department in the year 2008/09. (AQW 8197/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the total amount paid in non-consolidated bonus payments to Senior Civil Servants in the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in respect of performance year 2008/09 is not yet available.

NICE Guidelines

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if he would consider implementing the current NICE guidelines that recommend providing 3 cycles of In vitro fertilisation or intracytoplasmic sperm injection. (AQW 8312/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Northern Ireland does aspire to provide the full three cycles of fertility treatment as recommended by NICE however financial constraints currently make this unachievable. The current provision of one publicly funded cycle of treatment is comparable to many other areas of the United Kingdom.

I have recently announced an additional £1.5m recurrent funding for fertility services. This, in addition to an investment of £800k in a waiting list initiative, means that no patient will now wait more than 12 months for treatment from being placed on a waiting list. It is hoped that it will also be possible to introduce a cycle of Frozen Embryo Transfer in addition to the currently funded stimulated cycle of treatment where this is appropriate.

Severe Intractable Epilepsy

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the assistance his Department provides for children with severe intractable epilepsy and their families, who are forced to go to the United States for treatment. (AQW 8331/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I am fully committed to ensuring that children suffering from intractable epilepsy and their families receive the highly specialist services they need.

High quality care for children with epilepsy is available in Northern Ireland and other UK centres, and no family is forced to access care in the United States. Specialists at Great Ormond Street Hospital in London provide a range of services comparable to those available at the Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago.

It would not be appropriate for my Department to support any referral to a hospital in the United States unless it was clear that all possible help within the UK had been exhausted and there was evidence that firstly referral outside the UK – and secondly outside the EU – was required to secure necessary treatment.

Fertility Counselling Services

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his plans for improving fertility counselling services. (AQW 8358/09)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Counselling services are an integral part of fertility treatment and it is for commissioners and trusts to ensure that is readily available where and when needed. In September 2006 my predecessor announced an additional £50k per annum to improve the accessibility of counselling services within fertility services and this is being utilised to provide extra services including fertility nurse advisors in each Trust providing secondary and tertiary fertility services. Funding has also been provided to Infertility Network UK to provide information and support to patients.

DEPARTMENT FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

GPS Tracking

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail punctuality statistics from on-board GPS tracking, broken down by each bus route that serves the South Down Constituency, in each of the last five years. (AQW 8113/09)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): Translink has informed me that it cannot provide the information requested. Translink's ticket machines have a GPS capability, but it is for the purpose of identifying fare stages and not for tracking vehicle punctuality.

GPS Tracking

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide punctuality statistics from on-board GPS tracking, for each 200 series express bus route run by Translink, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 8114/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink has informed me that it cannot provide the information requested. Translink's ticket machines have a GPS capability, but it is for the purpose of identifying fare stages and not for tracking vehicle punctuality.

Route Management Strategy

Mr P Butler asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) to detail the Route Management Strategy for the A26 between the Moira roundabout and Nutts Corner roundabout; and (ii) what proposals there are for improvements within the vicinity of Glenavy village. (AQW 8147/09)

Minister for Regional Development: In general, Route Management Strategies comprise of the investigation of a range of minor measures, aimed at delivering safety benefits as well as considering enhancements, to provide a more consistent standard of road.

With regard to the A26, my Departments Roads Service has advised that a study of this road has resulted in a number of proposals at various junctions along the route, including roundabouts at Ballinderry and Glenavy along with right turning pockets at six other junctions.

In relation to Glenavy, the study identified some pedestrian improvements in the vicinity of the village. These propose the upgrading of existing footways on the A26 and Main Street as well as providing an additional footway in Main Street. Roads Service has also considered improving pedestrian crossing facilities at the bus stops at Chestnut Glen and Lisburn Road.

These proposals will be assessed, scored and prioritised in future Minor Works programmes. However, scheme delivery will be dependent on the successful completion of statutory processes and the necessary funding being available.

Car Parking

Mr P Butler asked the Minister for Regional Development, since NCP/NSL was awarded the contract, to detail the income received by Roads Service (i) from car parking charges; and (ii) from car parking fines.

(AQW 8152/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the on-street parking enforcement contract with NCP/NSL commenced at end-October 2006. Traffic Attendants, employed by NCP/NSL, began issuing Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) in November 2006.

In the period since then, to end-March 2009, the net amount received from car parking charges, excluding VAT is £25.5 million. For the same period, the amount received from the payment of PCN's is £9.8 million.

Revenue generated by the payment of PCNs, along with income from car-parking and other charges, is used by Central Government to supplement the overall financing of Roads Service.

For the year ended 31 March 2009, the cost to operate car park services, including off-street car parks, on-street pay and display and the enforcement of on-street parking restrictions, was in the region of £24 million. With revenue from car parking charges and PCN payments during the same period totalling approx £15million, the net deficit to the Department, to operate this service, is approx £9million for the year 2008/09.

Bus Services

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development if he will consider reducing the £1.70 cost of the all day pass in light of the reduction in bus services in the Ards Borough Council area. (AQW 8160/09)

Minister for Regional Development: It is not my role to determine fare changes for individual services or ticket types. This is an operational decision for Translink. Translink financial plans have to take account of commercial obligations and the funding available.

Ulsterbus town service fares are consistent across the North. The changes to bus services in May impacted on a number of Ulsterbus town services. My understanding is that the changes to bus services in the Ards Borough Council area were minimal in that they impacted on very low use routes. As a result of discussions with the Consumer Council, Translink took the decision to remove the town day ticket rather than increase it to £2.40. A new town service day return ticket was introduced at £1.90 (a reduction of 10p).

Translink Job Losses

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline how the proposed jobs losses within Translink are to be conducted; and if voluntary redundancies are to be considered first. (AQW 8161/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have advised me that the voluntary redundancy process has been undertaken. Translink asked their employees to inform the Company if they wanted to be considered for voluntary redundancy by mid April. These requests were considered based on business needs, locations and costs. Translink have confirmed that the majority of the staff involved have now left, with the remainder to go in the next few months. No compulsory redundancies are involved.

Bus Services

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development if Translink will reconsider the review of bus services which started in May if numbers of passengers justify reinstatement. (AQW 8162/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink operates under a commercial remit and, in order to keep fares increases to a minimum, constantly faces the challenge of keeping costs under control. In this context Translink has had to look at low use bus services and decide whether or not to continue running them. Low use public transport services do not represent good value for money to the taxpayer nor is it environmentally friendly to run buses which are largely empty particularly where alternatives are available.

Translink continually monitor the demand for bus services but it is unlikely in the foreseeable future that the service changes announced will be reversed.

Bus Services

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment as value for money of the removal of bus services and routes in Newtownards, resulting in a reduction of 22,500 journeys and the loss in revenue of £37,400. (AQW 8180/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink has informed me that it took the operational decision to withdraw those services in Newtownards that, on average, carried fewer than two passengers per journey and were not commercially viable to operate. Translink is not aware of the figures you have quoted in your question. It would therefore be my assessment that the decision to withdraw these services was prudent.

Traffic Calming Schemes

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development how many traffic calming schemes are operational in the Upper Bann constituency and how many more are planned over the next three years. (AQW 8205/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there are 34 traffic calming schemes, and 17 school travel and safety projects within the Upper Bann constituency.

It is expected that a further eight traffic calming schemes and four school travel and safety projects will be introduced in this financial year.

At present programmes for traffic calming schemes and school travel and safety projects, beyond financial year 2009/10, have not yet been developed.

Salt Boxes

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many salt boxes have been provided in the Upper Bann area; (ii) to indicate their location; and (iii) are any more planned in the next year. (AQW 8206/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that there are currently a total of 185 salt boxes provided within the Upper Bann Parliamentary Constituency area and details of locations are listed below.

I can also advise that Roads Service has no current plans to provide any additional salt boxes in the Upper Bann area for the 2009/10 winter season. Requests for salt boxes are assessed in accordance with Roads Service guidelines and currently there are no outstanding requests within the Upper Bann area.

Street Name	Location
PORTADOWN AREA	
Kernan Gardens	Junction Kernan Road
Seagoe Drive	Junction Seagoe Road
Upper Ramone Park	Half way up hill (grass area)
Ramone Park	1st Layby
Ballyhannon Road	Entrance to No 41A
Ballyhannon Grove	1. Between Nos 17 & 18 2. Between Nos 27 & 28
Ballyhannon Lane	Street light No 10
Larchwood	Street light 02 near junction
Killycomaine Drive	Junction Killycomaine Gardens
Ulsterville Park	Gable No 86 Ulsterville Grove
Canvy Manor	At No 57 (junction Long Lane)
Beaufort Manor	Junction Drumnacanny Road
Bocombra Avenue	At Street light 03
Calvertstown Manor	Junction Calvertstown Road
Brownstown Park	Opposite gable No 6
Drumard Avenue Roundabout	At Roundabout
Drumard Avenue	At Derryclone Gardens
Tullyroan Drive	Grass area at 36-72 Drumard Avenue
Moeran Park	Gable of No 1 at garages
Hobson Park	Rear of 17 Moeran Park
Deramore Drive	No 61 on bend
Brownstown Road	At steps leading to pensioners houses
Corcrair Drive	1. BT pole front of No 60 2. BT pole at grass area opp No 104 3. Street light 0210 front of No 36
Corcrair Avenue	Opposite near No 24
Drumilly Green	Footway at flats 1c & 1d (westland road junction)
Ashley Heights	Junction Andre Drive

Street Name	Location
Marlborough House	Rear access road
Meadowbrook	Rear of No 108
LURGAN AREA	
Hoophill Park	Top of park
Wood Lane	Junction Banbridge Road
Wood Lane	Junction Regents Park
Lisnasure Road	Junction Hillview Park
Sandhill Park	Top of Hill
William Street, Donaghcloney	Junction Main Street
Newforge Road	Junction Malcolmson Park
Elmhurst	Junction Steps Road
Woodville Avenue	Junction Lough Road
Shane Park	Junction Banbridge Road
Clanconnel Gardens	Junction Banbridge Road
Monroe Avenue	Junction Wheatfield Drive
Annsborough Park	Front of No 34
Oakleigh Heights (North Street)	At street light No 8004
Connaught Park (Upper Toberhewny Lane)	Grass verge beside No 4
Donaghcloney Road	Junction Clover Brae
The Grange	Gable of No 99
Bullays Hill (Annsborough Road)	At shrub bed
Albert Avenue	At top of hill
The Poplars	At junction near No 2 The Poplars
Baird Avenue	Gable of House No 45
Glencroft, Magheralin	At street light No 02
Soye Crescent	Junction North Circular Road
Ashgrove Drive	On hill on Ashgrove Drive
Ballymacbredan Road	On footpath at Street Light 0102
Bowens Lane	On footpath beside 1 & 3 Bowens Manor
BANBRIDGE	
Arderys Lane	At Street Light 1207
Tullyear Avenue	Near House No 14
Foxleigh Fields	At junction 2nd House
Rathview	At House No 40 near roundabout
Rathview	At House No 95
Thorn Heights	At Street Light 25
Thorn Heights	On grass area opposite street light 01
Thorn Heights	Turning head near House No 70
Thornhill	Side of House No 17

Street Name	Location
Thornhill	5 m up from Street Light 19
Thornwood	At House No 1
Hillside Park	Opposite House No 28
Highfield Gardens	At Street Light 1504
Forthill Green	At House No 30
Downshire Gardens	At House No 22
Legion Court	At House No 4
Hillhead Park	Opposite Hillhead Close junction
Wyncroft Heights	Opposite House No 4 on grass area
Larchwood Avenue	At House No 4
Larchwood Crescent	Side House No 17 L/Avenue
Larchwood Mews	Side House No 9 L/Avenue
Larchwood Avenue	At House No 41
Gowanvale Drive	At Ballygowan Road end
Hawthorn Hill	Opposite House No 28
Thorndale	At Ballygowan Road end
Pinley Green	Opposite House No 17
Pinley Park	At Street Light 04 opposite House No 04
Ballygowan Park	At House No 14
Granville Gardens	At Street Light 6 in centre parking
Reilly Park	On cobbles near school entrance
Scarva Walk	Rear House No 34 Riley Street
Scarva Walk	Between Abbetfield and No 1
Victoria Gardens	Side House No 12 Victoria Street
Edenderry Park	Grass area outside House No 173
Edenderry Park	At sub station opposite House No 124
Iveagh Park	At House No 78
Iveagh Close	At street sign wall
Brookfield Avenue	At Street Light 15 near House No 71
Brookfield Park	At electric box near House No 108
Brookfield Park	Near opposite House No 42
Dunbar Road	Opposite Nursery
Huntly Bungalows	At House No 35
Huntly Bungalows	At House No 5
Downshire Place Car Park	At wall facing Imperial
Downshire Place Car Park	Top of car park
Bridge Street Car Park	At Street Light 11
Kenlis Place	Area below No 6
Maryville Park	Opposite House No 1

Street Name	Location
Maryville Park	Opposite House No 22
Parkview, Rathfriland Street	At footpath wall near House No 10
Gospel Lane Car Park	Near entrance
Kensington Avenue	Opposite House No 10
Kensington Avenue	Opposite House No 15
Kensington Avenue	Opposite House No 27
Kensington Avenue	Opposite House No 33
Oakridge	At crossroads near House No 13
Oakdale	Opposite House No 48
Castle Lodge	At fence near Street Light No 2
Chinauley Park	Opposite House No 26
Bramblewood Drive	Opposite House No 58 at corner junction
Bramblewood Drive	At House No 92
Old Forge	At House No 1
Bramblewood Drive	At house sales office opp House No 1
Ballydown Meadows	Opposite Street Light 9
Ballydown Meadows	At House No 5
Ballydown Meadows	At Castlewellan Road end
Church Square Car Park	Opposite Public Toilets
Mountview Drive	Side House No 1
Mountview Drive	Opposite House No 5
Mountview Park	Side House no 31
Mountpleasant	Entrance
Moorfield	Opposite House No 8
Mount Charles	Side House No 25
Mount Charles	Opposite House No 3
Konver Heights	At House No 14
Konver Heights	Opposite House No 2
Tudor Oaks	At Hill Street end
The Rowans	At Ballymoney Road end
Brook Gardens	At Dromore Street end
Richmond Heights	Opposite House No 23
Richmond Heights	Opposite House No 31
Willow Grove	Near junction Dromore Road
Willow Grove	At House No 30
Willow Close	Side House No 12
Bridgeways/Ballyvalley Heights	Opposite House No 3 at green area
Bridgeways	At House No 8

Street Name	Location
Bridgeways	At Street Light 0417
Ballvally Heights	At Street Light No 10
Ballvally Heights	At Street Light No 27
Ballvally Heights	At Street Light opp House No 22
Mornington	At House No 11
Mornington	Opposite House No 9
Mornington	At Dromore Road end
Rockmore	Side House No 15
Laurel Heights	At Street Light 08 1st junction
Laurel Heights	At end of cul-de-sac
Laurel Heights	At Street Light 14
Laurel Heights	At Street Light 20
Churchview Drive	At House No 22
Bannview Heights	At House No 33
Bannview Heights	At Street Light 31
Kiloanin Crescent	At Street Light 15
Kiln Lane	On verge opposite Kiloanin Crescent
Milford Green	Opposite House No 23
Milford Green	At House Nos 14/15
Bodell Place	Opposite House No 1
Seapatrick Road	Opposite House No 3
LAWRENCETOWN	
Drumnascamph Road	At community centre
Hillside Crescent	At House No 6
Hillside Crescent	Opposite House No 1
Hillside Crescent	Side House No 47
Point Road	On hill at houses
Locard Park	Side House No 20
GILFORD	
Hunters Hill	At primary school
Hunters Hill	At Church
Hill Street	Opposite House No 14
Hill Street	At St Light 0208
Dunbarton Bungalows	Near opp Street Light 0209
Copperfields	At Whinny Hill end
Stramore Park	At Stramore Road end
Pineview Court	At 'T' junction
Castle Meadows	At A50 junction

Street Name	Location
SCARVA/LOUGHBRICKLAND	
Gleloughan	At House No 1
Donard View Road	Opposite New Bridge School
Greenan Court	At Street Light 05
Greenan Drive	At corner between House No 4&5
Maple Drive	At Rathfriland Street junction
Rathfriland Street	Opposite House No 6

Tourist Signage

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline what tourist signage is currently provided to tourist attractions or amenities in the Upper Bann area and if he plans to enhance or extend the signage. (AQW 8207/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has developed a policy jointly with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board regarding the provision of tourist signs in the North. This policy indicates that all enquiries regarding tourist signing are dealt with initially by the relevant local council and, as such, I would direct you to Craigavon and Banbridge Councils which cover the Upper Bann area.

Roads Service hold no historical inventory of tourist signing provided in the Upper Bann area, however, my Department will continue to fulfil its role in assisting local Councils with the provision of signing that complies with the tourist signing policy.

Northern Ireland Water

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development how many complaints have been received by NI Water about poor water pressure, broken down by postcode. (AQW 8208/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that it does not hold records of complaints broken down by postcode and is therefore unable to provide the information sought. However, since its establishment on 1 April 2007, NIW has received a total of 14,660 complaints from customers regarding poor water pressure.

Water System

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the percentage of the water system which has asbestos lagging on the pipes; and (ii) when will these pipes be replaced, in the Upper Bann area. (AQW 8209/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that approximately 0.35 percent of the 1,243 kilometres of water mains in the Upper Bann area are asbestos cement pipes.

NIW is currently undertaking extensive water main replacement through its Watermain Rehabilitation Programme but there is no specific programme to replace asbestos cement pipes. These pipes are approved fully for use in the water industry and will, similar to other types of pipes, only be replaced if there is a problem with their structural condition or performance.

Translink

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development how many instances of bullying on Translink buses have been reported in the Lurgan, Portadown and Banbridge areas, in each of the last three years. (AQW 8219/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been informed by Translink that one case of bullying was reported in Portadown in 2007 and one case in Lurgan in 2009.

Road Openings

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many roads have been opened in the Craigavon Borough and Banbridge District Council areas; and (ii) if there have been any prosecutions for road opening offences, in each of the last three years. (AQW 8220/09)

Minister for Regional Development: For the purpose of responding, it is assumed that the Member is referring to the number of road openings in the Craigavon Borough and Banbridge District council areas made by utility providers and others.

My Department's Roads Service advises that the number of road openings, during the last three financial years, is as follows:

Year	Number Of Road Openings
2006/07	1337
2007/08	3072
2008/09	4310

During the last three years Roads Service did not consider it necessary to refer any offence, in connection with a road opening in the above named Council areas, for prosecution.

Road Flooding

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development what action his Department has taken to address road flooding issues in the Craigavon Borough and Banbridge District Council areas, in each of the last three years. (AQW 8221/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it takes a proactive approach to road flooding issues in both the Banbridge and Craigavon Council areas. Roads Service officials have advised that road gullies and drainage outlets in both Council areas are cleaned routinely, in accordance with its Maintenance Guidelines.

In addition to ongoing routine maintenance activities, a substantial annual programme of structural drainage repairs and new drainage systems has been carried out. Details of all such works are contained in the Roads Service Southern Division Annual Council Reports. The current Council Report includes details of drainage and can be accessed at:- www.roadsni.gov.uk/index/publications-council_reports.htm. Alternatively, a hard copy of this and previous reports can be provided on request by contacting the Acting Divisional Roads Manager for Southern Division, Mr Bertie Ellison, on telephone number 3832 0250.

NI Water has advised that there were a number of out-of-sewer flooding events in the Craigavon and Banbridge Council areas during the extreme weather events of June 2007 and August 2008. As a result, the design capacity of the drainage network was exceeded and in some places totally overwhelmed. Sewerage systems are not designed to cope with rainfall of this intensity and while NI Water continues to monitor and improve its network, to reduce the risk of future flooding, it must be recognised that it is not possible to guarantee that such flooding will not recur in similar weather conditions.

However, NI Water will continue to liaise with other agencies to identify known flooding "Hot Spots" to agree a lead agency with responsibility for each.

In addition, Michelle Gildernew, my Ministerial colleague with responsibility for the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development's (DARD) Rivers Agency, has advised that Rivers Agency's primary concern is to reduce the risk to life and property from flooding emanating from watercourses. However, it is possible where feasibility studies have shown a flood alleviation scheme to be viable, that roads in the area will also benefit from the flood risk alleviation.

Rivers Agency completed a scheme, in August 2008, on the Belmont Stream, Banbridge. Furthermore, during the extreme flooding event of August 2008, a number of other locations in the Craigavon Borough and Banbridge District Council areas were threatened with or experienced flooding. Where this flooding was identified as originating from a watercourse, Rivers Agency has a number of studies ongoing, ranging from initial investigations to design of works to be carried out, to reduce the risk of future flooding.

Car Parking Facilities

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development what increased facilities for off-street and on-street car parking have been provided by his Department in the Craigavon Borough and Banbridge District Council areas, in each of the last three years; and what plans he has to increase car parking in those areas in the next three years. (AQW 8222/09)

Minister for Regional Development: I can advise the Member that, in line with the recently adopted Sub Regional Transport Plan, parking strategies were developed for all of the 29 major towns and cities contained therein. The overriding parking strategy within the Plan is to encourage the availability and turn-over of convenient short stay spaces in the town centres, which is achieved through on-street enforcement and appropriate charging off-street. The ultimate aims of the strategy are to encourage a shift to more sustainable transport modes, reduce congestion, improve accessibility and promote economic vitality in town centres to the benefit of all in the area.

In relation to off-street parking, following the resurfacing of Commercial Road car park in Banbridge, an additional 5 spaces were provided by amending the layout and 6 Park and Share spaces have been provided at the Gowdstown Road junction with the A1. Consideration is also being given to improving park and ride/share facilities, both at Rathfriland Road, Banbridge (60 spaces), and in Wesley Place Car Park, Lurgan (60 spaces), subject to the completion of the appropriate planning process and the availability of lands and finance.

With regard to the provision of on-street parking, you will appreciate that within existing urban areas there is limited opportunity to provide additional spaces. However, my Department's Roads Service reviews, at a local level, the nature and extent of existing waiting restrictions and where appropriate amends these.

This has resulted in the relaxation of existing restrictions that has provided approximately 61 on-street spaces in the Craigavon Council area, and 3 in the Banbridge Council area. Subject to the satisfactory outcome of the statutory process, alterations to on-street waiting restrictions are proposed that would result in approximately 38 additional spaces on Carrickblacker Road, Portadown and 10 spaces on Anderson Street, Banbridge. The review of waiting restrictions will continue and any opportunities to provide additional parking will be investigated.

Rural Public Transport

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development what additional provision his Department has made for access to rural public transport in the Craigavon Borough and Banbridge District Council areas, in each of the last three years. (AQW 8223/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department provides funding to Translink to deliver stage carriage services throughout the North. In addition, the Department provides support for rural public transport through the Rural Transport Fund. This support allows Translink to provide rural services which would otherwise be uneconomic to operate and also allows Down & Armagh Rural Community Transport Partnership (DART) which operates in the two Council areas to offer a range of specialised transport services to its members. The level of support from the Rural Transport Fund to Translink in the two Council areas and to DART in the last three years is detailed in the table below.

DRD Funding made to:	DART	Translink
2006/2007	£ 82,275.00	£ 14,359.93
2007/2008	£ 86,651.00	£ 14,584.24
2008/2009	£ 91,535.00	£ 14,357.78
Totals	£ 260,461.00	£ 43,301.95

Lisheeghan Road, Ballymoney

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) what work has been carried out by Roads Service to Lisheeghan Road, Ballymoney; and (ii) the cost of this work, in each of the last 5 years.

(AQW 8242/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Lisheeghan Road is a very lightly trafficked unclassified road and constructed over bog land.

Roads Service has carried out the following works on the Lisheeghan Road over the past 5 years:-

2004/2005 - routine road patching;

2005/2006 - carriageway resurfacing at eastern end, and routine road patching;

2006/2007 - surface dressing and patching;

2007/2008 - routine road patching;

2008/2009 - new road drainage and routine road patching.

As financial expenditure is not held on an individual route basis, I am unable to advise of the cost of completing these works.

Safety to Users of School Buses and HGV Lorries

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the safety to users of school buses and HGV lorries that travel along the Derrylecka Road, outside Newry. (AQW 8256/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is not aware of any specific safety issues for road users on the Derryleckagh Road. However, Roads Service would be willing to investigate any matters which are giving cause for concern.

Upper Damolly Road

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to upgrade the Upper Damolly Road, Newry (AQW 8257/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that general upgrading of the Upper Damolly Road has taken place over several years to accommodate ongoing residential development.

Roads Service has presently no further plans for improvements to the Upper Damolly Road.

Translink

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development what action he is taking to ensure that there are no compulsory job losses at Translink. (AQW 8278/09)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink has advised me that the voluntary redundancy process is almost complete. The majority of those to leave on a voluntary basis have left the organisation on 29 May with the remainder leaving over the next few months.

The number of job losses is in line with my announcement on 18 March. Translink have not indicated that there will be a need for compulsory redundancies.

Translink

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how many meetings he has had with Translink management to discuss possible job losses; and (ii) to detail the outcome of those meetings.

(AQW 8282/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My officials have been in regular contact with Translink Management about possible job losses. I myself met with Translink Trade Union representatives and made a subsequent announcement on 18 March which referred to the Translink plans. My officials subsequently informed Translink of my views on the Corporate and Business plans. Translink has advised me that the voluntary redundancy process is almost complete and that there will be no need for compulsory redundancies. This is in line with my agreement to the Corporate/Business plan submitted by Translink.

Vehicles Damaged by Potholes

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Regional Development for each of the last five years (i) how many compensation claims have been received by his Department; and (ii) how much money has been paid out to the owners of vehicles damaged by potholes and rutted surfaces in the Upper Bann constituency, broken down by Roads Service section office area. (AQW 8296/09)

Minister for Regional Development: The area of the Upper Bann constituency extends over two Roads Service Section Offices. It includes all of the Craigavon Section Office and part of the Banbridge Section Office.

The following figures show the number of compensation claims received and the amounts of compensation paid by my Department's Central Claims Unit for each of the last five financial years in respect of damage to motor vehicles caused by potholes and rutted surfaces for the whole of the two Section Offices, Craigavon and Banbridge.

	No.of Claims Received	Compensation Paid
2008/09		
Craigavon Section Office	26	£3,437.49
Banbridge Section Office	42	£1,271.38
Total	68	£4,708.87
2007/08		
Craigavon Section Office	61	£3,705.89
Banbridge Section Office	17	£1,851.74
Total	78	£5,557.63
2006/07		
Craigavon Section Office	58	£2,848.24
Banbridge Section Office	28	£2,920.42
Total	86	£5,768.66
2005/06		
Craigavon Section Office	35	£960.61
Banbridge Section Office	26	£2,416.91
Total	61	£3,377.52
2005/06		
Craigavon Section Office	20	£4,034.56
Banbridge Section Office	24	£2,768.57
Total	44	£6,803.13

Sprucefield By-Pass

Mr E Poots asked the Minister for Regional Development to provide an update on the proposed Eastern Seaboard Corridor M1/A1 Sprucefield By-Pass; and a timescale for work to begin. (AQW 8308/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service recently commissioned consultants to develop proposals for the M1 / A1 Sprucefield Bypass scheme. The commission requires the consideration of a range of options for an enhancement to the capacity of this route. Any detailed road improvement proposals developed for the route will take account of proposed future development in the area and will be subject to public scrutiny through the normal statutory processes.

It is anticipated that this scheme, which is included in Roads Service's 10 year Forward Planning Schedule, could be delivered between 2014 and 2018, subject to the satisfactory completion of statutory procedures and availability of finance.

Dromore Road/A1 Flyover

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the reasons for the delay in opening the Dromore Road/A1 flyover, Banbridge; and when the flyover is expected to be open. (AQW 8327/09)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the improvement of four junctions on the A1 between Banbridge and Hillsborough is progressing well ahead of programme.

However, works arising out of a safety audit, and other snagging surveys, undertaken by both the Construction Contractor and Roads Service, still have to be completed to ensure the satisfactory handing over of the new bridge and link road on the A1 Dromore Road, Banbridge.

I can advise the Member that, as an interim measure, traffic travelling south-bound on the A1 can now leave the main carriageway and use the flyover in one direction into Banbridge, under temporary traffic management arrangements.

Road Surfaces

Mr D McNarry asked Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the reinstatement of road surfaces by utilities and others. (AQW 8353/09)

Minister for Regional Development: As you may be aware, utilities have a statutory right to open roads and footpaths for the purpose of installing and maintaining their equipment. My Department's Roads Service cannot control the number of such openings, but it does regulate the process. A Code of Practice sets out a specification for the reinstatement of openings in roads – prescribing the materials to be used and standards of workmanship. Roads Service officials inspect and monitor street works on a sample basis, to ensure that utilities' work is compliant.

In a recent report, the Audit Office acknowledged significant improvements in my Department's management of road openings by utilities and in the performance of the utilities in reinstating road surfaces. However, more work needs to be done to improve performance.

To this end, Roads Service is aiming to strengthen regulations to empower it to require utilities to resurface the road to a greater extent than is currently necessary. Alternatively, Roads Service could carry out resurfacing and then obtain a contribution towards the cost from the utility/utilities that executed street works and contributed to the poor condition of the road.

These regulations would form part of the suite of regulations proposed for Street Works in the North, over the coming years. Other regulations could include, the introduction of a Permit Scheme for Street Works, greater powers of direction for Roads Service and Fixed Penalty Notices for certain breaches of the legislation. Roads Service has already introduced increases in fines for certain Street Works offences, from October 2007.

The number of road openings by private developers and others is rather small by comparison. They are usually carried out under either the Private Streets (NI) Orders 1980 and 1992 (if the work is associated with a new housing development) or, (for most other cases) by Agreement or Consent issued by Roads Service under either the Private Streets or Roads Orders respectively, or the Planning (NI) Order 1991.

In each case, my Department's Roads Service has no supervisory role as to the way this work is carried out, other than to ensure it meets the required specification and layout. However, where the consent has been contravened, Roads Service has the power to rectify serious infringements and recover its costs.

DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Social Dwellings

Mr P Butler asked the Minister for Social Development how many social dwellings have (i) wood pellet boilers; (ii) solar panels; and (iii) condensing boilers. (AQW 8150/09)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): Currently 24 social dwellings have wood pellet boilers, 2447 have solar panels and 9076 have condensing boilers.

Employment and Support Allowance

Mr J Shannon asked the Minister for Social Development if she would consider changing the use of a courier service for Employment and Support Allowance applications, to allow responses to be sent to Social Security Offices more quickly. (AQW 8218/09)

Minister for Social Development: The courier services for my Department are provided by the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). Any changes to the existing courier services would therefore have to be considered by DFP.

In using these services the ESA Centre ensures that documents are moved as quickly as possible to the appropriate site. Documents relating to a claim for ESA, which are handed into a Social Security Office/Jobs & Benefits Office, are forwarded directly to the ESA Centre. This ensures that documents are collected, sorted and normally delivered within 2 working days.

The outcome of the application or requests for further information is notified to the customer in writing. At no stage is any contact made with the applicant using the courier.

Government Relations with the Voluntary Sector

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the proposed policy paper on defining government relations with the voluntary sector. (AQW 8241/09)

Minister for Social Development: Work has begun within my Department to develop the new framework for relationships between Government and the voluntary and community sector. My intention is to take this new framework to the Executive in late 2009.

Social Housing Units

Ms C Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Social Development how many new Social Housing Units will be allocated to (i) North Belfast; (ii) West Belfast; and (iii) Derry. (AQW 8244/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Social Housing Development Programme is still being finalised and will be published shortly. Details will be posted in the Assembly library and on www.nihe.gov.uk in due course.

Social Housing

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Social Development to outline her plans to build social housing (i) this year; and (ii) in the next two years. (AQW 8291/09)

Minister for Social Development: The Social Housing Development Programme is still being finalised and will be published shortly. Details will be posted in the Assembly library and on www.nihe.gov.uk in due course.

Social Security Offices

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Social Development for a breakdown of customers using (i) Lurgan; (ii) Banbridge; and (iii) Portadown Social Security Offices, (a) whose first language is not English; (b) who have a disability; and (c) how these compare with the average across all other Social Security and Jobs and Benefits Offices. (AQW 8304/09)

Minister for Social Development: The information requested is not recorded and is not therefore available. Customers whose first language is not English and need assistance are offered interpreting or translation services. Similarly customers with a disability are offered appropriate help commensurate with their individual needs.

Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008

Mr T Burns asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the circumstances under which a small charity is exempt from holding formally audited accounts under the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008. (AQW 8342/09)

Minister for Social Development: Under Part 8 the Charities Act (NI) 2008, all charities are required to prepare and submit an annual statement of accounts. Small charities with a gross annual income below £100,000 are only required to produce a receipts and payments account along with a statement of assets and liabilities. These must be signed off by an independent person and the charity is required to preserve these accounts for a period of six years.

All accounts will be posted on the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's website. It is envisaged that the first annual accounts will not be required until April 2011.

Loughview Estate, Holywood

Mr A Easton asked the Minister for Social Development when the flats at West Green in the Loughview Estate, Holywood will be demolished. (AQW 8345/09)

Minister for Social Development: A decision has not yet been reached as to whether the flats in West Green should be demolished. The Housing Executive are currently preparing an Economic Appraisal which will fully assess and cost each of the options available. These will then be submitted to my Department for consideration. I expect this will take place by the end of the Summer.

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