

Written Answers to Questions

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Friday 21 January 2011

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Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 21 January 2011

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Royal Mail

Mr P Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what representations the Executive has made to Royal Mail regarding the retention of customer service jobs in Belfast, rather than the redeployment of these jobs to Great Britain.

(AQW 1958/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister (Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness): We have consistently made it clear that growing the economy and protecting jobs is our top priority. Clearly all enterprises, not just Royal Mail, will be looking to improve their internal efficiency to face the difficult economic operating conditions. It is our view that the quality of our local labour force is one of several key features that make this a good place to do business. This view has been supported in many places, not least during our economic conference in Washington DC.

Postal services are a reserved matter. Any restructuring will be an operational matter for the company's management team and we understand no decisions have yet been taken on its customer service sites. However, we will write to Royal Mail on this issue.

Presbyterian Mutual Society Savers

Mr R Beggs asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of the Comprehensive Spending Review announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for an update on the progress made by the Executive in alleviating the hardship faced by Presbyterian Mutual Society savers.[R]

(AQW 2632/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The Mutual Access Fund will give PMS members early access to their share capital pending the Administrator/Scheme Supervisor managing the orderly realisation of PMS assets over time.

HM Treasury is prepared to contribute to the fund and £25 million has been provided in the Spending Review with an additional minimum £1 million contribution from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The proposed Executive contribution would be £25 million which would be recovered from the Administrator in later years.

The proposed solution remains subject to Executive, Assembly, and EU agreement.

Written Correspondence from Members of the Public

Mr T Burns asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what ten subjects were raised most often by members of the public in written correspondence with their Department in the last 12 months.

(AQW 2890/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: While correspondence from members of the public addressed to Ministers or processed under Fol legislation is specifically recorded and monitored, no central record

is kept of correspondence addressed directly to business units within OFMDFM. The information is not, therefore, available in the format requested.

New Programme for Government

Ms M Ritchie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what steps they are taking to produce a new Programme for Government; and whether they will make a statement on this issue.

(AQW 3241/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Our focus over the past number of months has been the development of a 4-year draft Budget which the Executive agreed on 14 December 2010. Our officials have been working with departments on a draft Programme for Government during this period and we, together with our Executive colleagues, need to consider the opportune timing for consulting upon a draft Programme for Government, bearing in mind the forthcoming elections in May 2011.

Permanent Secretary of the Department for Regional Development

Mr P McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in light of Sir John Shortridge's report, when action will be taken in relation to the suspended Permanent Secretary of the Department for Regional Development.

(AQW 3276/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The investigation into events which followed the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) hearing on Northern Ireland Water on 1 July 2010 is part of an ongoing process. No further action will be taken until this process is completed.

Civil Contingencies Group

Mr G Savage asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister at what point the Civil Contingencies Group was mobilised in response to the NI Water crisis of December 2010; and to detail (i) the number of meetings of this Group that took place; (ii) the location of these meetings; and (iii) who attended.

(AQW 3407/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: A decision to activate the Civil Contingencies Group (NI) (CCG(NI)) was taken on the morning of 29 December 2010 by the Head of the Civil Service. A total of 5 meetings of CCG(NI) were held on 30 and 31 December 2010 and 3, 5 and 7 January 2011. A further meeting was held on 19 January to carry out a multi-agency debrief of the response.

At its meeting on 30 December the CCG(NI) agreed to establish a sub-group, the Tactical Group (Recovery), to act as a multi-agency problem solving group to give effect to the decisions of CCG(NI). This sub-group met on 6 occasions on 31 December 2010 and 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 January 2011.

All meetings of CCG(NI) and the Tactical Group (Recovery) were held in Castle Buildings and Stormont Castle.

The organisations attending CCG(NI) and Tactical Group (Recovery) meetings are listed in Tables 1 and 2 below.

TABLE 1: ORGANISATIONS ATTENDING CCG(NI) MEETINGS

Department/Organisation
Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM)
Executive Information Service (EIS, OFMDFM)
Department for Regional Department (DRD)
NI Water (NIW)

Department/Organisation
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)
Rivers Agency (RA)
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)
Department of Education (DE)
Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP – NI Direct)
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS)
Public Health Agency (PHA)
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS)
Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS)
Food Standards Agency (FSA)
Department of Environment (DOE)
Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)
Department for Social Development (DSD)
Social Security Agency (SSA)
Local Government Emergency Management Group (LGEMG)
Belfast City Council (BCC)
Department for Employment and Learning (DEL)
Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL)
British Telecom

TABLE 2 ORGANISATIONS ATTENDING TACTICAL GROUP (RECOVERY) MEETINGS

Department/ Organisation
Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM)
Executive Information Service (EIS, OFMDFM)
NI Water (NIW)
Department of the Environment (DOE)
Local Government Emergency Management Group (LGEMG)
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS)
Department for Regional Development (DRD)
Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI)
Invest NI (INI)
Public Health Agency (PHA)
NI Housing Executive (NIHE)

Department/ Organisation
Department of Education (DE)
Rivers Agency (RA)
Social Security Agency (SSA)
Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)
Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS)
Belfast City Council (BCC)

Civil Contingencies Group

Mr G Savage asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the effectiveness of the Civil Contingencies Group during the NI Water crisis of December 2010. **(AQW 3408/11)**

First Minister and deputy First Minister: The role of the Civil Contingencies Group (NI) (CCG(NI)) during the major disruptions to water supply across the region in December 2010 and early January 2011 was critical in providing continued strategic direction to the response to and recovery from the emergency, including the identification of new priorities as the situation changed, and to monitor progress on the delivery of actions.

The strategic priorities agreed by CCG(NI) were:

- arrangements to secure the provision and distribution of alternative sources of water;
- better alignment of NI Water resources to those customers who were off supply;
- arrangements to protect public health, and in particular measures to protect vulnerable people and key sites (hospitals, care facilities);
- arrangements to augment call handling capacity within NI Water via NICS staff; co-ordination of communication to the public to provide a consistent and accurate message across all responding organisations;
- a priority to ensure 'business as usual' for the region by 4 January 2011, particularly in respect of resumption of schools and business; and
- securing improved resilience in the short-term.

In pursuit of these strategic objectives, CCG(NI) and its Tactical Group (Recovery) sub-group, facilitated the delivery by participating organisations of the following key outcomes:

- Improved water distribution arrangements, for example CCG(NI) facilitated matching of distribution sites to areas of need, in particular vulnerable sites such as nursing and care homes; and arrangements for the distribution of bottled water via council sites and a range of organisations such as the Red Cross.
- Improved public communication, for example the use of the NI Direct Website to provide better quality, more customer-focused information on water outages and school closures; the establishment of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's helpline for farmers; and the use of social network media.
- Improved inter-agency communication, for example the assignment of a District Council officer to NI Water; liaison between the Public Health Agency and District Councils on identification of vulnerable people; liaison between the health sector and NI Water on the protection of hospital and care facilities; and liaison between the Department of Education and NI Water on the schools likely to be affected by bursts/rotational cuts in water supply.

- Capacity building and better targeting of resource from other organisations to bolster the NI Water response, for example the offer of additional NI Civil Service (approx 150 volunteers) to augment NI Water call handling capacity; and the provision of staff and equipment to assist in the identification of leaks to the mains supply and in private premises.
- Focusing effort on achieving 'business as usual' by 4 January, for example liaison with schools and the business sector to promote checking of premises and identify problems, and pro-actively working with NI Water to ensure water supply to entertainment zones on New Year's Eve.
- Improving Resilience in the short-term, for example gathering information from all participants on lessons learned; and a review of escalation procedures to ensure an appropriate level of response to emergencies as they develop.

In summary, we consider that CCG(NI) was extremely effective in ensuring that the multi-agency response to and subsequent recovery from the water supply disruptions was co-ordinated, managed, and fully informed, which served to mitigate to a considerable extent the hardship which was undoubtedly still suffered by a large number of people. As with any emergency of this nature, lessons can be learned as to how we might do things better next time. To that end, CCG(NI) is now embarking on a review of the multi-agency response that took place, to identify lessons learned and to apply those learning points to further increase resilience for the future.

Sir Jon Shortridge's Report on NI Water

Mr P McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action will be taken as a result of the conclusions detailed in Sir Jon Shortridge's report on NI Water and any other available evidence; and to detail the likely timescale for any actions.

(AQW 3424/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Sir Jon Shortridge was not reporting on NI Water. The terms of reference and the scope of the investigation were provided to the Public Accounts Committee and the Regional Development Committee and subsequently published on 1 September 2010.

Report on the Investigation into NI Water

Mr G Savage asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the report on the investigation into NI Water by Sir John Shortridge will be published.

(AQW 3445/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Sir Jon Shortridge was not reporting on NI Water. The terms of reference and the scope of the investigation were provided to the Public Accounts Committee and the Regional Development Committee and subsequently published on 1 September 2010.

Sir John Shortridge's Investigation into NI Water

Mr G Savage asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the cost incurred to date by the office of the Head of the Civil Service in supporting Sir John Shortridge's investigation into NI Water.

(AQW 3455/11)

First Minister and deputy First Minister: Sir Jon Shortridge was not reporting on NI Water. The terms of reference and the scope of the investigation were provided to the Public Accounts Committee and the Regional Development Committee and published on 1 September 2010.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

New Forest Walking Routes

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether there are any new forest walking routes being developed in (i) Carrickfergus; (ii) Larne; (iii) Moyle; or (iv) Newtownabbey, in light of the creation of a series of new routes in Fermanagh; and to list all the forests in East Antrim with formal walking routes.

(AQW 3277/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ms M Gildernew): When I launched the Department's 'Recreation and Social Use Strategy for Forests' last year, I was keen to realise the potential that forests offer. Indeed, evidence shows that using forests for walking and relaxing contributes to people's physical and mental wellbeing.

A key part of this strategy was the development of working partnerships with operational providers to secure a more diverse range of facilities and attractions for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

The successful completion of the walking routes you mention in County Fermanagh is the result of effective partnership working between my officials in Forest Service and Fermanagh District Council. It reflects a desire from the Council to develop the tourism opportunities that our forests can offer and my Department's willingness to work with the Council to facilitate the development of tourism and educational facilities within the Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark. The result has been very positive.

I am keen to see this partnership approach develop further and my officials in Forest Service are continuing to explore partnership opportunities with a number of stakeholders including NI Tourist Board, Countryside Access and Activities Network, National Trust and District Councils.

Although there are currently no new walking routes being developed in the areas you mention, you will be aware that within the East Antrim area, Woodburn forest, Ballyboley forest and Glenarm forest all have formal walking routes, providing some 10 km of walking trails, some sections of which form part of the Ulster Way. Forests in the East Antrim area also offer an extensive network of forest roads, which provide further walking opportunities.

Nevertheless, there may be potential to develop other walking opportunities in the East Antrim area using the partnership approach promoted in our Recreation and Social Use Strategy.

My Department's Forest Service would be very happy to meet with Councils in the area to discuss any proposals Councils might wish to explore.

Single Farm Payments

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the increased financial pressures facing livestock farmers as a result of the severe winter weather; and if she will ensure that outstanding Single Farm Payments are made without delay.

(AQW 3342/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: The severe winter weather has caused a number of problems for livestock farmers. For sheep farmers, feeding of forage commenced earlier than normal for March lambing ewes due to the level of snow and extreme temperatures. In a lot of cases this would not have been budgeted for and farmers may now have to buy additional hay or silage before the end of the winter. Sheep farmers, and in particular hill sheep farmers, may also have reduced numbers of lambs born this year, as lack of nutrition caused by the snow cover can result in embryonic reabsorption leading to barren ewes.

For cattle, the severe weather may have impacted on their growth performance with a longer time now being needed to finish them, and as a result, increased feed bills.

The other main problem that occurred on livestock farms during the severe weather was the freezing of water pipes and troughs in livestock houses. Livestock had to be manually watered, greatly increasing the workload for farmers. Once the thaw came, fixing of burst pipes has created additional costs for farmers.

In relation to Single Farm Payment, my Department's targets are to complete 83% of 2010 payments for receipt by farm businesses by 31 December 2011 and a total of 90% by 31 January 2011. I am pleased to say that the December target was exceeded with 84.5% achieved. The December payments were worth £211.75 million. I am keen to ensure that all Single Farm Payments are paid as quickly as possible and my Department is working to complete the assessments on the remaining claims at the earliest possible date.

Rural White Paper

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what progress has been made in relation to the development of a Rural White Paper; and if she will make a statement on this issue. **(AQW 3371/11)**

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: DARD is actively working with other Departments on the development of realistic and meaningful actions for inclusion in the Rural White Paper.

I have recently held very positive bilateral meetings with many of my Ministerial colleagues where I have reinforced to them the importance of the Rural White Paper and we have agreed concrete actions for inclusion in the action plan.

I remain committed to issuing a draft Rural White Paper Action Plan for consultation by 31 March 2011.

Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how much money has been spent on the administration of Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme; and (ii) how much has been awarded in grants in each of the seven geographical areas. **(AQW 3381/11)**

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development:

- (i) £4.7m has been spent on the administration of Axis 3 to date
- (ii) Number of Projects and Grant awarded by Cluster are as follows:

GROW	NER	LRP	DRAP	SOAR	ARC	SWARD
47	79	49	50	83	136	151
1,790,902	£2,167,121	£1,315,889	£2,320,694	3,155,369	£4,025,814	£5,987,389

Single Farm Payments

Mr P J Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she will consider reinstating the system that permitted part payment of Single Farm Payments to livestock owners and in particular to those farmers who are still awaiting their payment as a result of late farm inspection reports carried out by her Department. **(AQW 3403/11)**

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: Under EU Regulations, I am only permitted to make Single Farm Payments (SFP) when all the checks are complete and I am satisfied that the eligibility conditions have been met. The farm inspections are part of the checking process and they were completed in time to allow payments to begin at the beginning of December. Where inspections find no errors those claims are processed rapidly. We have processed approximately 90% of claims including around 340 of those claims where an inspection was carried out.

However, in 2010 most of the eligibility inspections found that farmers had overstated the eligible area in their claims, and the results of these inspections take much longer to process before the eligibility checks are complete and payment can be made. Often these cases are complex because we also need to trace the effect of over-claims on previous years, and this adds considerably to the time taken to make payments.

I am keen to ensure that all claims are paid as soon as possible and my Department is working hard to ensure that all remaining claims are paid as early as possible.

New Forest Walking Routes

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether there are any new forest walking routes being developed in the North Down area.

(AQW 3409/11)

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development: When I launched the Department's 'Recreation and Social Use Strategy for Forests' last year, I was keen to realise the potential that forests offer. Indeed, evidence shows that using forests for walking and relaxing contributes to people's physical and mental wellbeing.

A key part of this strategy was the development of working partnerships with operational providers to secure a more diverse range of facilities and attractions for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

I am delighted that new walking routes have recently been completed in County Fermanagh as a result of effective partnership working between my officials in Forest Service and Fermanagh District Council. It reflects a desire from the Council to develop the tourism opportunities that our forests can offer and my Department's willingness to work with the Council to facilitate the development of tourism and educational facilities within the Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark. The result has been very positive.

I am keen to see this partnership approach develop further and my officials in Forest Service are continuing to explore partnership opportunities with a number of stakeholders including NI Tourist Board, Countryside Access and Activities Network, National Trust and District Councils.

Although there are currently no new walking routes being developed in the area you mention, you will be aware that within the North Down area, Ballysallagh forest and Clandeboye forest both have formal walking routes, providing some 5 km of walking trails.

Nevertheless, there may be potential to develop other walking opportunities in the North Down area using the partnership approach promoted in our Recreation and Social Use Strategy. My Department's Forest Service would be very happy to meet with Councils in the area to discuss any proposals Councils might wish to explore.

Department of Education

Cost of Repairing Damage to Heating and Water Supplies

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Education to outline the cost incurred by each Education and Library Board for repairing damage to heating and water supplies caused by burst pipes over the Christmas period.

(AQW 3272/11)

Minister of Education (Ms C Ruane): Sonraítear sa tábla thíos na costais mheasta a thabhaigh gach Bord Oideachais agus Leabharlann go dtí an lá atá inniu ann maidir leis na scoileanna faoi chothabháil agus na scoileanna rialaithe.

The table below outlines the estimated cost incurred by each Education and Library Board on schools in the maintained and controlled sectors to date. The full extent of the costs involved will unfold over the coming weeks as the Education and Library Boards move to repair the damage.

BELB	£327,820
WELB	£140,343
NEELB	£102,280
SEELB	£178,600
SELB	£194,250

Voluntary Grammar Schools and Grant Maintained Integrated schools are responsible for maintenance in their respective schools; and have their own insurance arrangements in place. The Department is therefore unable to provide costs incurred by these sectors.

Schools in the South Antrim Area: Broken Pipes

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister of Education how many schools in the South Antrim area had broken pipes over the Christmas period caused by the cold weather; and what was the total cost of repair.
(AQW 3279/11)

Minister of Education: Bhí 29 scoil i gceantar an Aontroma Theas a raibh píobáin briste iontu le linn tréimhse na Nollag.

There are 29 schools in the South Antrim area which had broken pipes over the Christmas period. The estimated cost of the repairs currently stands at £45,400, however, at this time not all costings are known. It is possible that there will be reports of further damage done to external areas as a result of the severe weather conditions which could present health and safety hazards and will as a result require to be repaired.

The actual cost of the repair work will be realised when the contractors have completed the work and submitted their invoices.

School Repairs

Mr J Craig asked the Minister of Education if repairs have been carried out, in all schools, on the damage caused by the recent severe weather, and if not, when these repairs will be completed.
(AQW 3302/11)

Minister of Education: Thuairiscigh níos mó ná 300 scoil go raibh damáiste uisce déanta agus ba é an tosaíocht é na píobáin briste a dheisiú agus díriú isteach ar ghlanadh na scoileanna ionas go mbeadh siad réidh do dhaltáí agus do mhúinteoirí.

Over 300 schools had reported water damage and the priority was on repairing burst pipes and clean up operations to allow schools to become fully operational again. The remainder of schools in the maintained and controlled sectors are being assessed by the Education and Library Boards maintenance officers and will be prioritised accordingly.

Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated schools are responsible for maintenance in their respective schools; and have insurance arrangements in place to cover any damage which occurred.

Employment Support Allowance

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education (i) how the criteria for social disadvantage on the pre-school application form were agreed; (ii) what consideration she has given to including Employment Support Allowance as part of the criteria; and (iii) why Employment Support Allowance is currently not listed in the criteria.
(AQW 3374/11)

Minister of Education: Tá dhá thosaíocht sonrath sa Treoir a eisíonn an Roinn Oideachais (DE) agus úsáidtear iad seo leis an chritéar iontrála a dhearbhu -

In determining the admissions criteria, the Guidance issued by the Department of Education (DE) specifies two priorities-

- social disadvantage – because research has shown that those children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds tend to experience more difficulty at school than other children; and
- 4-year-olds with July and August birthdays – because these children do not enter compulsory education until after their 5th birthday.

This targeting process, which is part of DE's wider strategy to reduce levels of educational underachievement in the long-term, has been in operation since the 1999/2000 school year.

When the Pre-School Education Expansion Programme (PSEEP) was established in 1998 the criteria established for targeting social disadvantage was based on the indicators used in the Department to determine entitlement to Free School Meals.

At that time funded pre-school places were available for only 45% of children in their final pre-school year and the social disadvantage criteria ensured that those children most in need were afforded priority in the admissions process.

The level of funded pre-school provision has increased over the last 10 years to a point now where places are available for over 90% of children in their final pre-school year. Research has shown that this figure is sufficient to meet demand as the parents of approximately 10% of eligible children choose not to apply for a funded pre-school place.

I am aware that Employment Support Allowance (ESA) is included in the criteria for a number of other entitlements, including Free Schools Meals for which my Department is responsible. As part of the on-going management of the PSEEP, officials plan therefore to look at the proxy indicators used to target social disadvantage, including any changes which have been made to the benefit system, to determine whether any revision of this current definition is necessary.

Schools in the North Down Area Disrupted by Burst Pipes

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education which schools in the North Down area, if any, were disrupted by burst pipes as a result of the recent severe weather conditions.

(AQW 3416/11)

Minister of Education: Seo a leanas liosta na scoileanna i gceantar an Dúin Thuaidh a raibh próbáin briste acu mar gheall ar an drochaimsir:-

The following is a list of schools in the North Down area which suffered burst pipes as a result of the recent severe weather conditions:

- Priory College, Holywood
- Sullivan Upper, Holywood
- Ballyvester PS
- Holywood PS
- Redburn PS
- Crawfordsburn PS
- Ballymagee PS
- St Malachy's PS Bangor
- St Comgall's PS Bangor

Flooding in Schools

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how much has been spent to date in dealing with flooding in schools as a result of the recent severe weather.

(AQW 3442/11)

Minister of Education: Sholáthraigh na Boird Oideachais agus Leabharlann costais mheasta den mhéid £944,000 le scoileanna faoi chothabháil agus scoileanna rialta a dheisiú mar gheall ar an damáiste a tharla le linn na drochaimsire.

To date the Education and Library Boards have provided estimated costs amounting to £944,000 for repairs to maintained and controlled schools as a result of the recent severe weather. However maintenance officers are still assessing the damage and it may be some time before final costs are actually known.

Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated schools are responsible for maintenance in their respective schools; and have insurance arrangements in place. Therefore this information would not be available to the Department.

Nursery Units in Larne, Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister of Education when decisions will be made on the provision of nursery units in (i) Larne; (ii) Carrickfergus; and (iii) Newtownabbey.

(AQW 3488/11)

Minister of Education: Faoi láthair, níl aon Togra Forbartha foilsithe a bhfuil mar aidhm aige aonaid naíscoile a sholáthar i Latharna, i gCarraig Fhearghais nó i mBaile na Mainistreach.

There are currently no published Development Proposals to provide nursery units at Larne, Carrickfergus, or Newtownabbey.

Proposed Capital Build for Bangor Grammar School

Mr P Weir asked the Minister of Education what implications, if any, the Department's draft budget will have on the proposed capital build for Bangor Grammar School.

(AQW 3527/11)

Minister of Education: Is scoil amháin as 13 scoil í Bangor Grammar School a fuair faomhadh le haghaidh maoiniú caipitil de réir na fógartha a rinne mé ar an 5 Lúnasa 2010.

Bangor Grammar School was one of the 13 schools approved for capital funding in my announcement of 5 August 2010.

I can inform you that tenders for the construction of the new school were received in December 2010 and it is anticipated that the contract will be awarded in late January with construction work expected to get underway in mid February.

The Department's financial planning for the period 2011-15 takes into consideration completion of contractually committed projects.

Department for Employment and Learning

Student Fees

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the extent to which families in Northern Ireland will be affected by the proposed increase in student fees.

(AQO 783/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning (Mr D Kennedy): I have said consistently that the opportunity to enter higher education must be based on the ability to learn and not the ability to pay. I am committed to minimising the impact of any fee increase on Northern Ireland families and I am explaining what may be possible in relation to the level of financial support available for students

Student Fees

Mr S Gibson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what progress has been made on the review of student fees.

(AQO 784/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Significant progress has been made in recent weeks in developing proposals in advance of the planned public consultation on the future of tuition fees and student finance arrangements. Joanne Stuart has been updating her original report and I expect to receive her update in a matter of days.

In addition to Joanne's work, my officials have been costing and modelling various options and analysing the key proposals in each of the other UK administrations, as well as developments in the Republic of Ireland.

All of these elements, along with the budget settlement, will inform the options that I will set out in the consultation paper. I plan to take this to the Executive next month to seek its agreement to publish. If the Executive agrees to publication, the consultation document will be available for public consultation in early March.

Constructive engagement through the external stakeholder group has been a key feature of the work to date and this will continue. A further meeting is planned in the next few weeks to discuss the emerging consultation proposals, which will need to be affordable, maintain access and promote excellence.

Budget 2011-15: DEL

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the potential impact of the draft Budget on his Department's activities in years 1 and 2.

(AQO 785/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: I published my assessment of the implications of the draft budget on 10 January.

I plan to make savings in years one and two of some £40m and £72m respectively.

In doing so I will seek to protect front line services as far as possible. But unfortunately some service impact is unavoidable and this will mean reductions to the employment service, skills and further and higher education budgets.

Although the impact of these reductions should be potentially offset by efficiency improvements I will not be able to sustain funding for adult apprenticeships and I will have to look very closely at the affordability of the provision offered by our employment service.

But even after delivering these savings, the draft budget will leave a significant gap in our funding for the first two years. In real terms, after efficiency savings have been implemented, there is a funding deficit of £40 million and £31 million in years 2011-12 and 2012-13 respectively.

If this is not resourced, it will have a serious impact on the services we offer. I will then have to make even more difficult choices in order to balance the books.

Delivering these further reductions of £40m and £31m in years 1 and 2 will potentially mean that:

- we struggle to maintain parity with Great Britain in our delivery of services to the unemployed;
- key projects and initiatives in research and innovation will be cancelled;
- funding to the FE sector will reduce further, with obvious consequences on capacity;
- our ability to deliver our proposed Skills Strategy, including STEM will be severely restricted and implementation delayed; and
- higher education's funding will reduce further.

Queen's University Belfast and Stranmillis University College

Mr K Robinson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the proposed merger of Queen's University and Stranmillis College.

(AQO 786/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The College has recently completed a public consultation on an Equality Impact Assessment and has published the results. The College has concluded that the proposed merger has no adverse impact on any Section 75 category or on good relations generally. However, I have stated that legislation will not be brought forward unless the newly merged entity can guarantee respect for the ethos of the Controlled Sector. Officials are currently exploring how this can be achieved with legal advisers. Should an outcome emerge from this which satisfies me, this will be reflected in the public consultation document which will require Executive approval. The subsequent consultation will inform my decision whether or not to proceed with legislation to effect the proposed merger. Any legislation will be subject to a full debate and vote on the floor of this Assembly.

World Skills

Mr B Armstrong asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on Northern Ireland's involvement in World Skills 2012.

(AQO 787/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Fourteen competitors from Northern Ireland have been selected to be part of Squad UK for WorldSkills London 2011. This is an excellent achievement; and represents 16% of the overall squad of 87 members, and is higher than any other Nation or Region in the UK. The Squad members come from the 6 Further Education Colleges and the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise and are across 8 occupational areas. The Squad members will undergo a rigorous training programme ahead of selection for the team that will eventually represent the UK at WorldSkills London 2011. Team UK will be announced in June 2011.

A training event for squad members in the construction trades will be held in North West Regional College, Limavady campus in May. This will be the first time a WorldSkills Squad UK training session will be held in Northern Ireland and will involve about 26 squad members and 9 training managers from across the UK.

Tuition Fees

Lord Empey asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the applicability to Northern Ireland of the Welsh Government's approach to Higher Education tuition fees.

(AQO 788/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Shortly after the announcement by the Welsh Assembly Government, I indicated that I would be looking carefully at its approach to consider its potential applicability here.

It is important to remember that, in the context of the Welsh proposals, we in Northern Ireland have a very different pattern of student flows.

Wales is a net importer of students. In academic year 2008/09 almost 8,800 first year full-time undergraduate students entered higher education in Wales from other parts of the United Kingdom, whilst Wales exported only 5,500 similar students. Under the Welsh proposals, these 8,800 students could be charged up to £9,000 per year.

Northern Ireland is a net exporter of students, with fewer than 200 enrolments in the same period from other parts of the United Kingdom while approximately 4,000 Northern Ireland domiciled students enrolled in institutions in Great Britain.

Unfortunately, this essential fact and its impact on the financing of the Welsh proposals means that it is not really a feasible option for Northern Ireland.

Clearly, the decision by the Welsh Assembly Government to invest very significant sums of public money in meeting any additional fee costs above the current levels for Welsh students, could only be replicated in Northern Ireland at a very significant cost.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the future of the Education Maintenance Allowance, including an assessment of whether ending this allowance would be likely to force young people from disadvantaged backgrounds out of full-time education.

(AQO 789/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: Both my Department and the Department of Education received the findings of the jointly commissioned Review of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme in Northern Ireland in December 2010. Officials from both Departments are currently assessing the findings of the report and will brief the Employment and Learning Committee on 19 January 2011. My Department will engage fully with the Committee as policy options are developed, which will clearly consider any potential impact on those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds whom I am committed to supporting.

Further Education: Redundancies

Mr J Spratt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what provision has been made for Further Education lecturers in relation to possible redundancies.

(AQO 790/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: All six Further Education Colleges have agreed a common policy regarding the award of enhanced severance pay in the event of redundancy. This proposal, which has been based on affordability limits, remains subject to discussions with the Trade Unions, through established negotiating mechanisms.

I have great sympathy for all those staff affected by this situation and remain hopeful that the discussions between management and the trade unions will limit the number of compulsory redundancies.

Further Education: Annual Plans

Mr J Bell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the progress of Further Education Colleges in relation to meeting targets set out in their annual plans.

(AQO 791/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: As part of the annual College Development Planning process, which included a bilateral discussion with each of the six Further Education Colleges in March 2010, recurrent block grant allocations were agreed with each college for the current academic year commencing 1 August 2010.

Through this process, targets and budgets were agreed with each individual College to deliver the Department's priorities for the FE sector in terms of provision at levels 2 and 3, provision on the regulated qualifications frameworks, provision in priority skills areas, Higher Education provision delivered by colleges and Essential Skills. Delivery against these targets is monitored throughout the academic year, and interim enrolment data was received from the sector in November.

In this year the performance is encouraging and indicates that the sector is projecting to meet, and in some cases exceed, the targets set.

Further Education: Redundancies

Mrs M O'Neill asked the Minister for Employment and Learning if he has had any discussions with trade unions about redundancies recently proposed by the Further Education colleges.

(AQO 792/11)

Minister for Employment and Learning: I am aware of the redundancies proposed in the Further Education Sector. While I have not had direct discussions with the Trade Unions, my officials have had regular contact in recent months. Issues relating to employment are a matter for each Governing Body but I have encouraged the six College employers to adopt a common 'Sector Wide' approach for the purpose of implementing severance payments for lecturers.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Water Crisis in December 2010

Mr G Savage asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an estimate of the loss of income incurred by the economy due to the water crisis in December 2010.

(AQW 3242/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (Mrs A Foster): The main economic impact of the disruption in water supplies over the Christmas and New Year period is expected to have been in respect of those businesses which were unable to operate at normal capacity because of interrupted water supply. In addition, the impact of water damage to premises from burst pipes will also have had consequences for the usual operation of business.

However, it is not expected that the impact of these events will be identifiable in respect of the main economic indicators. Therefore, it is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of the loss of income incurred by the Northern Ireland economy in the absence of a survey of the affected businesses which could only be conducted at disproportionate cost.

Reduction in Corporation Tax

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the recent report from PricewaterhouseCoopers regarding the possible impact of a reduction in corporation tax on the location of further foreign direct investment jobs.

(AQW 3263/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: On 7 January 2011 PricewaterhouseCoopers published the latest report in its Government Futures series entitled "Corporation Tax- Game Changer or Game Over?"

This report provides a useful contribution to the debate on whether the Executive should seek to reduce the rate of corporation tax in Northern Ireland, to match that in the Republic of Ireland.

In particular, it highlights the recent strong performance of the local economy in attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) which would be further enhanced by a reduction in the rate of corporation tax.

However, it also sets out some of the technical and legal issues involved, including the public expenditure cost, whilst there is a need for complementary measures to maximise the benefit from a reduced rate. In addition, it is suggested that other targeted fiscal incentives might be more effective in supporting the achievement of the Executive's goals for the local economy.

The Executive will need to balance all of these issues in deciding on its approach to corporate taxation.

Tourism: Strangford Lough

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the development of Strangford Lough as a tourism destination.

(AQO 800/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 has identified Strangford Lough as one of nine potential “key tourism areas”.

The local authorities of Down District Council and Ards Borough Council have a Strangford Lough Destination Forum comprising public/private membership in place.

Discussions are currently taking place with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board regarding implementation of the associated draft Tourism Action Plan for the area.

Employment

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the proposed package of measures referred to in the draft Budget statement which will result in the creation of around 4000 jobs.

(AQO 801/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: The Executive’s draft Budget includes a package of measures to support employment, with examples including assistance for FDI contact centres; Business start ups in Neighbourhood Renewal areas; food processing and Social enterprises.

These measures are being introduced specifically in response to the downturn, including the rise in unemployment, and are additional to the support already provided by Invest NI to grow the economy and create jobs.

Electricity Costs

Mr Pól Callaghan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the recent severe weather, what consideration has been given to introducing a payment option, to allow pensioners and other low income customers of NI Electricity to spread the cost of payments over a 12-month period, to protect them against the costs of increased usage and from falling into arrears.

(AQO 802/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: NIE Energy advise that a number of payment options are already available to customers to help spread the cost of electricity bills.

Customers can choose to spread an outstanding balance over the coming year by rolling it into a fixed monthly direct debit payment. In addition, there is up to £40 a year discount for those paying by monthly direct debit.

Another option is the ‘pay as you go’ Keypad meter. NIE Energy will install this free of charge and also give a 2.5% discount on the standard electricity tariff.

NIE Energy also advises that it can arrange lower than normal repayment amounts for customers on certain benefits, and offers free, fitted loft and cavity wall insulation to lower income householders.

Matrix Report

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the implementation of the recommendations of the Matrix Report.

(AQO 804/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: In November 2009, I announced the government response to the MATRIX report. Implementation is being overseen by a senior cross-departmental

working group chaired by DETI and I am pleased to confirm that there has been good progress towards delivering the 4 key actions in that response.

MATRIX' main recommendation was the creation of Innovation Communities. The first true Innovation Community, the Global Maritime Alliance, has been trading internationally since June 2010. DETI and Invest NI are currently supporting a further 10 collaborative ventures which have the potential to evolve into Innovation Communities.

MATRIX continues to advise on the implementation process.

Social Economy

Ms M Anderson asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the draft Budget allocation to the social economy sector.

(AQO 806/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: I launched the Executive's current cross-departmental Social Economy Enterprise Strategy last March.

The focus of that strategy is on departments ensuring that existing financial and other support programmes are widely publicised and made accessible to social enterprises.

A cross departmental policy group continues to monitor delivery. Departments will be expected to meet their commitments from within their final Budget allocations and also to consider how they can further support the development of the sector.

The draft Budget allocation would allow my department to meet its commitments to the Social Economy Enterprise Strategy.

Small Businesses: Financial Support

Mr A Ross asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assistance is available to small businesses that are struggling to obtain access to finance.

(AQO 807/11)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Invest NI and the banks are working in partnership on events for local businesses to provide advice and outline services that might be beneficial in these difficult economic times. The emphasis is on building capability that leads to entrepreneurs and managers having the ability to develop viable business propositions, to identify the most appropriate funding options and to negotiate successfully with the banks.

My officials and I are also in regular contact with the banks to relay concerns expressed by businesses and their representatives and to urge upon them the importance of explaining clearly the reasons for lending decisions and to make appropriate use of Government schemes such as the Enterprise Finance Guarantee.

Department of the Environment

Contamination to Water Supplies

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the risk of contamination to water supplies as a result of the prolonged periods of low reservoir levels in December 2010.

(AQW 3260/11)

Minister of the Environment (Mr E Poots): NI Water, as part of its regulatory duty to supply safe, clean drinking water is required to monitor all aspects of the water it supplies to its consumers. The regulations are prescriptive and require samples to be taken at specific locations at stipulated frequencies to cover a range of water quality parameters. This sampling programme covers all aspects

of the water supply chain, from the water treatment works, the service reservoirs where water is stored for onward distribution through many kilometres of pipe to consumers' taps.

NI Water's regulatory sampling programme covered 330 service reservoirs which are sampled on a weekly basis for compliance with the microbiological samples and at the same time, checks are made on the levels of chlorine which is used to disinfect the water. This is important as it may indicate a breach in the integrity of the water supply systems.

To safeguard public health, where the regulatory standards have not been achieved, NI Water must investigate all breaches of these standards and report these findings to the Drinking Water Inspectorate. The Inspectorate assesses the significance of these breaches and may take appropriate action to ensure NI Water complies with the regulations.

To date, NI Water has not reported any significant or potential water quality issues because of low service reservoir levels to the Inspectorate. From the information provided by NI Water, the Inspectorate has no evidence to suggest that low water levels in service reservoirs put consumers at increased risk of contamination.

The Inspectorate is aware that NI Water has been in close liaison with the Public Health Agency to provide public health protection where it has been considered necessary.

The Inspectorate's ongoing investigation into this water quality incident will provide the Minister for Regional Development with a report of its findings in due course.

Planning Application H/2008/0089/F

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 3214/11, in relation to planning application H/2008/0089/F, (i) whether the Planning Service opinion of 9 June 2010 remains; (ii) if and when he received further advice; (iii) who provided the advice; and (vi) to detail any further advice.

(AQW 3291/11)

Minister of the Environment:

- (i) My officials in the Ballymena Divisional Planning Office consulted the Magherafelt District Council with an opinion to approve the application on 9 June 2009 (not 2010) and the opinion was accepted. However subsequent to this I received a detailed representation from Dr W. McCrea MP MLA, on behalf of an objector, and am currently considering this prior to making a final determination.
- (ii) My officials in the Ballymena Divisional Planning Office first provided information and advice to me on 4 January 2010 to facilitate a meeting with Dr McCrea on 19 January 2010 when he raised a number of detailed issues on behalf of an objector. These issues were addressed in further advice from officials from Ballymena and Planning Service Headquarters on 15 February 2010 and subsequently in further meetings with my officials. I received further briefing from the Director of Operations on 24 September 2010 again addressing issues raised by Dr McCrea.
- (iii) As above.
- (iv) Under the terms of paragraph 12(4)(e) of the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, I cannot disclose the nature of this advice as it is internal communication relating to a planning application which has yet to be finally determined.

External Legal Advice

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment how much each local council has spent on external legal advice in each of the last five years, broken down by payments to (i) solicitors; and (ii) barristers.

(AQW 3314/11)

Minister of the Environment: The information is not held centrally by my department and to obtain the information from all 26 councils could only be undertaken at disproportionate cost. The information may be available from any individual council in which you have an interest.

Consultation on the Review of the Regional Development Strategy

Mr S Hamilton asked the Minister of the Environment whether the consultation on the review of the Regional Development Strategy, published on 6 January 2011, will be regarded as a material consideration when dealing with planning applications and planning inquires.

(AQW 3324/11)

Minister of the Environment: The existing Regional Development Strategy and the draft Strategy, which is the subject of public consultation, are material considerations when dealing with planning applications and inquiries but are not operational planning policy. The weight to be given to these documents is a matter for the Planning Service based on the planning merits of a particular proposal.

Trade Unions: Talks

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of the Environment what talks he has had with trade unions representing staff employed in his Department or in any of its arm's-length bodies in the last six months.

(AQW 3390/11)

Minister of the Environment: I met representatives from Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) and Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) on 12 August 2010 to discuss job opportunities for professional planners outside Planning Service.

Planning Decisions

Ms M Ritchie asked the Minister of the Environment to outline his policy in relation to ministerial announcements about planning decisions on which the Committee for the Environment has not been informed.

(AQO 809/11)

Minister of the Environment: In announcing decisions on Article 31 major planning applications where I am the decision maker I follow a standard procedure which is to inform in writing the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Chair of the Environment Committee and all Members. A copy of the letter announcing my decision is also placed in the Assembly Library.

My Department also follows a standard procedure in releasing information about future planning decisions on non – Article 31 planning applications.

Following an internal Development Management Group meeting, at which a preliminary opinion will be formed indicating the likely decision, the Department's opinion on the proposal is then made available when the application is presented to the local Council on a publically available schedule or list of applications.

When a planning decision issues, the nature of the decision and the reasons for it will then be provided to those who commented on the application during the planning process. All information relating to the processing of a planning application including the Department's decision can be viewed by appointment with the open file unit located at each local divisional planning office.

Footpaths

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister of the Environment whether he plans to issue emergency guidance to councils about co-operating with the Department for Regional Development to ensure that major public footpaths are maintained in a safe condition in times of severe weather.

(AQO 817/11)

Minister of the Environment: I have no plans to issue guidance to councils about co-operating with the Department for Regional Development to ensure that major public footpaths are maintained to a safe condition in times of severe weather.

I have no locus in maintaining the public highway but I would encourage councils to collaborate with the Department for Regional Development and enter into arrangements in clearing footpaths affected by snow or ice and to work within the terms of any guidance that, the Minister for Regional Development, chooses to issue.

Landfill Sites

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the procedures in place to ensure that landfill operators comply with the terms and conditions of their licences, particularly outside working hours and at weekends.

(AQO 818/11)

Minister of the Environment: Operating landfill sites must comply with stringent conditions in terms of compliance and monitoring contained in landfill permits issued by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA).

NIEA carry out regular audits of these facilities both as part of the regulatory regime and in response to complaints received.

Any issues raised during inspections are promptly and effectively dealt with to ensure that the highest environmental standards are maintained.

A number of enforcement mechanisms exist and are used by NIEA. These are:

- An enforcement notice, which relates directly to breaches of permit conditions, served on the operator which specifies steps to be taken to remedy the contravention and the time period allowed for compliance.
- A suspension notice in relation to risk of serious pollution. The notice may cease to authorise the entire operation or any specified activities.

Landfill sites are restricted in terms of operating hours and historically have not required regulatory effort outside working hours. Working within resources available NIEA do not provide routine outside hours cover on waste activities. If the level of risk to the environment were to change NIEA will reconsider the position.

Knock Golf Club, Belfast

Mr T Burns asked the Minister of the Environment when he intends to make a decision on the planning application for a housing development at Knock Golf Club, given that the application to relocate the golf club has been turned down.

(AQO 819/11)

Minister of the Environment: The Belfast Divisional Planning Office (DPO) has recently received a letter from the agent withdrawing this application. All those who have been in correspondence with the DPO will now be informed of this.

Road Deaths

Mr J Wells asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the road fatality statistics for 2010.

(AQO 820/11)

Minister of the Environment: The number of road deaths in Northern Ireland for 2010 was 55, compared with 115 in 2009.

Obviously, we welcome the huge reduction in road deaths, but it is with extreme caution that we note the number of lives saved in 2010. It is difficult to take pleasure from this record low when 55 families were unexpectedly without their loved ones in 2010. I offer my sincerest sympathy to those families.

We have seen a downward trend in road casualties over the last decade. In 2000, 171 people were killed, this has steadily declined to 107 in 2008 the lowest since records began until that point. In 2010 there has been an unprecedented fall of around 50% in fatalities and over 20% in serious injuries. The reduction in fatalities is consistent across all road user groups and includes a reduction in the number of child deaths from 4 in 2009 to 2 in 2010.

It is impossible to be precise about the reasons for the reduction in deaths and serious injuries, because of the range of factors that can impact positively or negatively upon road safety. These include vehicle, road and traffic engineering; education and awareness; weather; roadside enforcement, the economy and penalties; along with public attitudes and various social and cultural factors.

As there are so many variables, the figures can fluctuate significantly from month to month and from year to year. Complacency poses an enormous threat to road users so we must not let our guard down. My Department will continue working in partnership with DRD's Road Service, the PSNI, the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service and Ambulance Service, the Department of Education delivering a programme of road safety education, engineering and enforcement initiatives that have brought us to the position where, even before this year, we were achieving the best figures on record.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Government Office Estate

Lord Empey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the steps his Department has taken to identify properties within the Government Office Estate that could be sold or leased to raise revenue. **(AQO 821/11)**

Minister of Finance and Personnel (Mr S Wilson): The office estate owned or leased by DFP comprises approximately 200 buildings with a total asset value of approximately £300m and is managed by Properties Division within DFP.

Properties Division has a 3-year accommodation plan which is focused both on generating revenue savings through improved space utilisation within the estate and generating capital receipts through the sale of surplus assets.

This approach has generated annual revenue savings of some £1.68m over the last 2 years through reductions in leased space. It is anticipated that an additional annual saving of £2.85m p.a. can be achieved over the next 3 years through vacation of further buildings when leases expire.

During this financial year two freehold properties have been sold, realising over £2.2m of capital, and a further site has been declared surplus and is in the process of disposal.

Space in a number of properties is leased under licence to other Public Sector bodies which realises some £677k per annum in rent.

Government Procurement

Mr B Armstrong asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the steps he has taken to make the procurement process more efficient. **(AQO 823/11)**

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Procurement Board is fully aware of the need to deliver an efficient procurement service for the taxpayer in Northern Ireland. I will highlight some of the steps which are being taken.

There is a continuing focus on improving the efficiency of procurement processes through the development and implementation of best practice guidance produced by CPD, in consultation with Centres of Procurement Expertise, and approved by the Procurement Board. In the past year eight new guidance notes have been approved by the Procurement Board for implementation across Departments and CoPEs. These cover a range of processes including selection and evaluation of tenders and ensure a consistent and compliant approach to procurement across CoPEs. These are all available on CPD's website.

A programme of formal training is being developed to support the implementation best practice procurement guidance across CoPEs.

The enhanced use of the electronic tendering system, eSourcing NI, has underpinned more streamlined processes, greater consistency and transparency and visibility of opportunities available to the market. Tender documentation is also being streamlined, in conjunction with the industry, to benefit both the supplier and purchaser.

Budget 2011-15

Mr S Neeson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the consultation process on the draft Budget 2011-15.

(AQO 832/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: Members will be aware that the Budget issued to draft consultation on 15th December.

The Executive expressly stated that individual Ministers had to publish expenditure plans and savings delivery plans within 7 days. It is disappointing that there have been some considerable delays on the part of some departments in releasing this information.

I have now informed the Executive that the consultation period has been extended to the 16th February but this means that the Executive has a very limited period to consider and approve a final budget position.

Departments and Arms Length Bodies need certainty to allow them to plan service delivery next year.

My officials have already commenced a series of stakeholder consultations on draft budget.

Budget 2011-15

Mr J Bell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps he intends to take to ensure that Ministerial colleagues publish their draft budget proposals in accordance with the Executive's budget decision.

(AQO 833/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: The Executive expressly demanded that individual Ministers publish their departmental budget proposals within a week. Whilst it is disappointing that there has been great delay, I am pleased that all departments have now published their detailed plans.

In recognition of the need to allow as much time as possible for the public consultation the Executive has now agreed to extend the consultation period by one week. We cannot extend it any further if we are to agree a final budget before the start of the new financial year.

Banks: Business Support

Mr J McCallister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether his Department has liaised with local banks in relation to the need to increase lending to small and medium-sized enterprises.

(AQO 834/11)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: I met with representatives of the local banks and the Institute of Directors on the 6th December 2010 to discuss actions being taken to improve access to business finance and customer relationships.

Those in attendance from the banking sector included representatives from the British Bankers Association, Barclays, Ulster Bank, Bank of Ireland, First Trust Bank, Northern Bank, Santander and HSBC.

In particular, we discussed the implementation of the recommendations contained within the British Bankers Association October 2010 Business Finance Taskforce Report. These include a range of specific actions that UK banks could take to help businesses get the advice and support they need, to provide wider access to finance and to deliver better customer services.

It was agreed that the banks will report back with further progress at a subsequent meeting which is to be arranged later this month.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

St. Luke's Hospital Site in Armagh City

Mr W Irwin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the impact his draft budget will have on the Southern Health and Social Care Trust's strategic development plan for the St. Luke's Hospital site in Armagh City.

(AQW 3511/11)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Mr M McGimpsey): I remain committed to developing the St Luke's site. However the budget, whilst still in draft, has given the Department less than half of what was bid for over the budget period. A review of Capital Priorities is currently being undertaken, which will establish those projects which will go ahead and the timescales for their implementation.

Department of Justice

Court Service Case Number 10/111192

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 2236/11, how the estimated figure of £10,000 for defence legal aid was reached in view of the composite fee system.

(AQW 2773/11)

Minister of Justice (Mr D Ford): The legal aid bill in respect of case number 10/111192 has not yet been submitted to the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission to be assessed. Estimated legal aid costs were derived from court records, the relevant remuneration arrangements and the Legal Service Commission's experience. The estimated costs reflect the following:

- (a) the cost of providing legal advice and assistance at the police station;
- (b) the costs associated with this case at the Magistrates Court which are governed by the Magistrates' Court and County Court Appeals (Criminal Legal Aid) (Costs) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2009. These rules prescribe a set fee for attendance at a preliminary hearing and, where relevant, payment for travel time and mileage.
- (c) the costs of the Crown Court case which are prescribed by the Legal Aid for Crown Court Proceedings (Costs) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2005. These Rules provide a standard fee system which includes a Basic Trial Fee for Crown Court work. Where the matter is contested, the fee applied takes account of the class of offence, which in this instance was one of theft. The Rules also provide for other court attendances as appropriate to the case and also includes an element of travel and mileage, as appropriate, for both solicitor and counsel.

The estimated costs provided in the table below are inclusive of VAT and allow for costs which may have been incurred which are not visible from the court records including potential disbursements.

ESTIMATED COSTS:

Nature of legal aid	£'s (inc VAT)
1. Advice at police station (PACE)	£250
2. Magistrates court appearance	
Trial Fee	£820
Travel Allowances	£150
Other disbursements (for example Translation Services/ Interpretation Costs)	£530
Total	£1,500
3 Crown Court	
Trial Fees (Sol and Counsel)	£4475
Pre-Trial Appearances	£652
Travel Allowances	£458
Other Disbursements	£2665
	£8,250
Total	£10,000

I will provide the actual figures to the Member once they are available.

Definition of a Separated Prisoner

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice for an exact definition of a separated prisoner. (AQW 3264/11)

Minister of Justice: A prisoner will be entitled to be admitted to separated conditions in Bush or Roe House at Maghaberry Prison only if the Secretary of State is satisfied that:

- (a) he wishes to be admitted to separated conditions;
- (b) he is of male gender;
- (c) he has attained the age of 18 years;
- (d) he is a member or supporter of a proscribed organisation connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland;
- (e) admitting him to separated conditions would not be likely to prejudice his safety;
- (f) admitting him to separated conditions would not be likely to prejudice the safety of others; and
- (g) admitting him to separated conditions would not be likely to prejudice the maintenance of security or good order in prison.

New Mini-buses for Separated Prisoners in Maghaberry Prison

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the cost, including fitting and adaptations, of the two new mini-buses for separated prisoners in Maghaberry Prison for transferring them to and from visits; and (ii) the reasons the new mini-buses were required.

(AQW 3265/11)

Minister of Justice:

- (i) In 2010 a new mini-bus was purchased for transferring separated prisoners to and from visits at Maghaberry. The mini-bus cost £15361.38 + VAT. An additional cost of approximately £5000 was incurred in adapting the mini-bus to provide a degree of security for both staff and prisoners. In 2004 following the Government's formal acceptance of the recommendations of the Steele

Review of Safety at Maghaberry a mini-bus was purchased, and is still in use. The mini-bus cost £11737.20 + VAT. At that time it cost approximately £2200 to adapt the mini-bus to meet the security need.

- (ii) The NIPS report into the review of the separated regime which was published in 2006 recommended that a second van should be provided to assist with the movement of prisoners to the separated gym, legal visits and other external activities. This recommendation was not acted upon at that time as the degree of prisoner movement and perceived security implications did not justify the outlay which would be incurred. This decision was recently reviewed and the recommendation implemented.

Separated Prisoners

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many prisoners are currently housed in (a) Roe House; and (b) Bush House in Maghaberry Prison; and (ii) of these how many are separated prisoners. **(AQW 3266/11)**

Minister of Justice:

House	(i) Total Population	(ii) Separated Population
(a) Roe	103	30
(b) Bush	92	24

Cost of Art and Drama Teachers in Prisons

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost of (i) art teachers; and (ii) drama teachers in each prison, including Hydebank Young Offenders Centre, in each of the last three years. **(AQW 3310/11)**

Minister of Justice: Table A, below, sets out the costs¹ of (i) art teachers², and (ii) drama teachers in each prison for the last 3 calendar years:

TABLE A: COST OF ART AND DRAMA TEACHERS IN PRISONS

Calendar Year	Art	Drama
Maghaberry		
2008	£106,668	£11,604
2009	£109,960	£7,301
2010	£113,036	£20,333
Magilligan		
2008	£43,076	£nil
2009	£38,412	£nil
2010	£39,384	£nil
Hydebank Wood		
2008	£140,439	£nil
2009	£170,121	£nil
2010	£166,268	£nil

Notes:

1. Costs available upto and including November 2010.
2. Includes subjects such as craft, leatherwork and pottery.

Prisoner Ombudsman: Recommendations

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how much has been spent to date on implementing recommendations made by the Prisoner Ombudsman.

(AQW 3311/11)

Minister of Justice: The implementation of recommendations is an integral part of service delivery within the Northern Ireland Prison Service and is not costed separately.

Court Fines

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 3158/11, to outline where the revenue from court fines will be allocated now that policing and justice has been devolved.

(AQW 3378/11)

Minister of Justice: Court-imposed fines are paid to the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund.

Prior to devolution of justice, fines were paid to the UK Consolidated Fund.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr D McNarry asked the Minister of Justice to detail the financial allocation made to the PSNI from his Departmental Expenditure Limit of £1,223.7m.

(AQW 3393/11)

Minister of Justice: The Department of Justice came into existence on 12th April 2010. The opening Resource DEL budget allocation in 2010/11 Main Estimates was £1,223.7m.

Of this total, the PSNI Resource DEL allocation was £791.6m.

Department for Regional Development

CEO of NI Water

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development if the former CEO of NI Water received any bonuses or performance related payments during his appointment, and if so, to provide a breakdown.

(AQW 3237/11)

Minister for Regional Development (Mr C Murphy): I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that its former CEO did not receive any bonuses or performance related payments during his period of appointment.

Permanent Secretary

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been paid to the Permanent Secretary since his suspension.

(AQW 3288/11)

Minister for Regional Development: Mr Paul Priestly was suspended from duty on full pay with effect from 18 August 2010. The banding within which his annual salary falls is shown in the published DRD Resource Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2010.

Rail Services on the Larne Line

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development on how many occasions rail services have been cancelled on the Larne line in each of the last three months; and how this figures compares to Translink targets.

(AQW 3300/11)

Minister for Regional Development: NI Railways monitor service reliability over 4 and 5 week periods which roughly align with calendar months. Under the terms of the Passenger's Charter, NI Railways publish train service reliability figures (i.e. train services operated) each month for the preceding period and the preceding cumulative 26 weeks (6 months). The details for the Larne line are provided in the table below. The Passenger Charter target for Reliability is 99.2%. Passenger Charter targets are agreed between my department, the Consumer Council and Translink.

Period / Dates	No. of Planned Services	No. of Cancelled Services	Comment	Passenger's Charter Reliability	Cumulative Reliability (26 Weeks)
Period 7 27/09/10 – 24/10/10	1800	15	9 cancellations due to NIR, 6 outside of their control	99.5%	99.7%
Period 8 25/10/10 – 21/11/10	1800	29	23 cancellations due to NIR, 6 cancellations outside of their control	98.7%	99.6%
Period 9 22/11/10 – 26/12/10	2165	125	42 cancellations due to NIR, 83 cancellations out of their control	98.1%	99.2%

Notes

- 1 that under the terms of the Passenger Charter only cancellations due to NIR are counted against Reliability targets.
- 2 Period 9 contained 5 operating weeks. During this Period NI Railways experienced 2 individual weeks of unprecedented freezing snow and ice.

Tannoy System at Stations on the Larne Line

Mr A Ross asked the Minister for Regional Development for how long the tannoy system at stations on the Larne line has been faulty; and when Translink plans to replace or repair the system.

(AQW 3301/11)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have advised that the Long Line Passenger Address (LLPA) system on the Larne line and likewise Bangor and Lisburn lines is approximately 20 years old. Hardware and the software which drives the system does on occasions fail. The root cause is that many of the parts are unreliable and obsolete. NI Railways do respond as best they can to failures across all parts of the system and continuously implement and review repair and maintenance strategies to keep the system operational. Translink advise that proposals exist to replace the entire system. Taking these plans forward will depend on the relative priority of capital schemes against budget resources.

Meetings held with the Chair and, or the CEO of NI Water

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the (i) date; (ii) time; (iii) location; and (iv) duration of all meetings he had had with the Chair and, or the CEO of NI Water from 1 January to 7 January 2011.

(AQW 3325/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I had no meetings with the Chair and, or the CEO of NI Water from 1 January to 7 January 2011, although I was in contact with the interim Chair, Padraic White, by telephone, throughout this period in relation to the handling of the major interruption to water supplies arising from the 'Freeze-Thaw' incident.

Public Accounts Committee Inquiry into NI Water

Mr P McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 3212/11, to detail about which two Assembly Questions the Permanent Secretary wrote to the Treasury Office of Accounts on 7 December 2010.

(AQW 3380/11)

Minister for Regional Development: On 7 December 2010, the Permanent Secretary wrote to the Treasury Officer of Accounts in the Department of Finance and Personnel to make her aware of AQW 2762/11 and AQW 2763/11.

Carrickfergus Station Car Park

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) if he can confirm that there will be increase in the size of Carrickfergus Station car park, as a result of obtaining land from Roads Service; and (ii) when additional park and ride car parking spaces will be made available.

(AQW 3441/11)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink are currently taking forward a project to provide additional park and ride facilities at Carrickfergus station. They hope to be able to start work on site early in February 2011 and have the project fully completed during Spring 2011. The project will result in a significant increase in the current capacity of circa 126 car parking spaces to just under 300 spaces.

New Translink Trains

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) for an update on the new Translink trains expected for delivery this year; (ii) when the first trains are expected to arrive in Northern Ireland; (iii) when the first train is expected to commence service on the East Antrim line, following its commission; and (iv) how many of the new trains will operate on the East Antrim line.

(AQW 3443/11)

Minister for Regional Development: The first of the new CAF Class 4000 trains is scheduled to be delivered in March 2011.

The rest are expected to be delivered progressively from June this year through to February 2012. All of the trains will be required to go through extensive testing and commissioning trials, with the first train potentially available for passenger service from September 2011.

Currently 9 older Class 450/Class 80 trains are operating on the Larne line and the first objective will be to replace these on a one for one basis as new trains are delivered and commissioned into service. It is planned to complete this process by Spring 2012. Full operational deployment of the new trains will be determined later this year once testing and delivery dates have been finalised.

East Antrim Railway Line

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to improve the frequency of service on the East Antrim railway line, following the delivery of new trains.

(AQW 3444/11)

Minister for Regional Development: Translink have informed me that NI Railways are currently preparing a new network timetable to be introduced, following consultation, when they receive and fully commission the new CAF Class 4000 rolling stock. Improvements to the capacity and frequency of services on the Larne line are planned as part of this process but the scale of the enhancements have still to be finalised and will have to take account available PSO funding and revenue generation.

Junction of Bog Road and Woodside Road, Broughshane

Mr D McKay asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the work that Roads Service intends to carry out at the junction of Bog Road and Woodside Road, Broughshane, in light of the recent accidents due to drainage problems.

(AQW 3497/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I understand that the Member has recently met with my Department's Roads Service to discuss the drainage systems at this location, and the wider area. As you are aware, the results of an ongoing investigation to identify the source of the flooding will determine what works are required by Roads Service, or other third parties, to address the cause of the flooding, and minimise the risk posed to the travelling public.

I can also advise that Roads Service will monitor this site during prolonged or significant rainfall and arrange for the placement of advisory signage, until substantive works are completed.

Severance Package Paid to the Former CEO of NI Water

Mr C McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development to specify the exact amount of the total severance package paid to the former CEO of NI Water, Mr Lawrence McKenzie.

(AQW 3498/11)

Minister for Regional Development: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the amount to be paid to its former CEO is £91,000 in respect of 6 months salary. In addition, NIW has agreed to contribute £3,000 towards his legal fees and a further £3,000 towards tax advisor's fees.

Damage to Vehicles from Potholes

Mr G Savage asked the Minister for Regional Development how many claims have been brought against Roads Service for damage caused to vehicles by potholes from September 2010 to date; and the total cost of these claims.

(AQW 3523/11)

Minister for Regional Development: My Department's Central Claims Unit has received 202 vehicle damage pothole claims in the period from 1 September 2010 to 17 January 2011.

32 of these claims have been settled at a total cost of £5,489.05. This total cost figure comprises solely compensation payments and does not include any legal costs.

Department for Social Development

Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 1811/10, for a description of the projects within East Antrim which have been funded through the Small Pockets of Deprivation Programme since 2006.

(AQW 3231/11)

Minister for Social Development (Mr A Attwood): The Housing Executive delivers neighbourhood renewal funding through the Department for Social Development's Small Pockets of Deprivation programme to three areas within the East Antrim constituency – Greenisland estate, Sunnylands estate in Carrickfergus, and Larne town centre area. The programme started in 2006/07 and is still running this year. Please see the funded project details below.

Small Pockets of Deprivation programme expenditure within East Antrim area 2006/07 to 2010/11**2006/07****Larne**

- £33,987 for refurbishment of Dixon Park Residents Association community house
- £1,400 for Riverdale Community Association running costs
- £77,723 to Larne Borough Council for Tullygarley play area

Sunnylands

- £1,305 to Sunnylands Nursery School for the development of a school garden
- £5,650 to Carrickfergus Community Forum for the development of area based strategies for Greenisland and Sunnylands estates.

Greenisland

- £2,084 to Greenisland Youth Club for an anti-graffiti project
- £2,249 for equipment in Greenisland Library
- £14,890 to Carrickfergus Borough Council for refurbishment of Greenisland Bowling Club
- £27,270 to Greenisland Community Council for refurbishment of Jubilee Hall

2007/08**Larne**

- £1,348 for Riverdale & District Community Association running costs
- £335 to Tullygarley Community Development Group for an 'action plan' event
- £10,000 to Larne Borough Council for a public art project

Sunnylands

- £13,006 to NORSUN for a community development worker salary
- £1,200 for development of a community information pack and £2,955 for development of a local strategy and action plan to Carrickfergus Community Forum

Greenisland

- £10,285 for development of a play area and £1,840 for play equipment to Alphabet Playgroup
- £31,186 to refurbish Greenisland Scout Hall
- £2,555 for a Greenisland Cultural Society project
- £3,901 to Greenisland Community Council for further work on Jubilee Hall

2008/09**Larne**

- £1,140 for Riverdale & District Community Association running costs

Sunnylands

- £75,000 to Carrickfergus Borough Council for a Multi Use Games Area
- £3,500 to Carrickfergus Community Forum for a development residential

Greenisland

- £14,999 for a community development worker salary

2009/10**Larne**

- no project applications

Sunnylands

- £26,312 to Carrickfergus YMCA for a PAKT ('Parents and Kids Together') project
- £5,000 for an art project and £28,695 for a community development worker salary to Carrickfergus Community Forum
- £4,990 to Carrickfergus Boxing Club for fees associated with developing a new club building.

Greenisland

- £1,200 to Greenisland Youth Club for miscellaneous activities
- £2,142 to Greenisland Community Council for repairs to Jubilee Hall and IT equipment

2010/11**Larne**

- £2,420 for a summer scheme and running costs and £3,803 for equipment and running costs to Dixon Park Residents Association
- £500 to Tullygarley Community Development Group for senior citizens activities

Sunnylands

- £24,965 to Carrickfergus YMCA for a PAKT ('Parents and Kids Together') project
- £29,920 to Carrickfergus Community Council to employ two Project Workers working in Sunnylands and Greenisland

Greenisland

- no other project applications other than the above.

Economy Seven Heating

Mr R McCartney asked the Minister for Social Development how many houses in the Foyle constituency currently rely on Economy Seven heating as the primary source of heat; and what plans he has to modernise the heating systems in these houses, including the estimated timescale for completion of the modernisation.

(AQW 3282/11)

Minister for Social Development: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Parliamentary Constituency. However, the Foyle Constituency area comprises the Housing Executive District Office areas of Waterside, Collon Terrace and Waterloo Place which have a total of 685 properties * with electrical heating systems. The Housing Executive has made provision for 168 electrical heating systems to be replaced during 2011/2012 which are included in seven schemes throughout the Foyle area. The delivery of this programme will be dependent on the availability of funding.

* This figure includes 27 houses, 186 bungalows, 457 flats and 15 maisonettes.

Housing Executive Tennants: Arctic Conditions

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development (i) whether he or the Housing Executive was made aware of the likelihood of severe weather over the Christmas period; (ii) when it became apparent that tenants were being seriously affected by the weather; and (iii) what action was taken to ensure that tenants were protected against the Arctic conditions.

(AQW 3327/11)

Minister for Social Development: Severe weather warnings were received and acted upon by the Housing Executive before the acute weather hit on 16 December 2010 and subsequently over the holiday period. The Housing Executive put its local offices and Contractors on alert. They also ensured that the water supply to empty and void properties was turned off and that tanks were emptied. Prior to this, the Housing Executive had also offered advice to tenants through the media during November and December about how to prepare for the cold weather. Over the period the Housing Executive received thousands of telephone calls from tenants who reported heating and/or plumbing problems which resulted in the placing of over 30,000 repair orders.

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has an Emergency Arrangements Booklet and a Strategic Emergency Plan in place which are updated to provide enhanced arrangements over certain periods. However, in the early stages of this unprecedented crisis, the initial response from the Housing Executive was not all that it should have been. In advance of Christmas I therefore met with its Senior Management and Chair and laid down a series of requirements to respond to the emerging situation. For example, the Housing Executive Emergency Services Response capability was moved to their Belfast Customer Services Unit which allowed for an increase in physical space and hence additional staff to man additional telephone lines.

Throughout the period I met with and was in contact with the Housing Executive's Chair, acting Chief Executive and others to ensure that the Housing Executive responded fully and were seen to respond fully. I did not delay until the emergency developed. My Department and I made clear to the Housing Executive the level of response needed during each phase of the response.

Alley-Gating in West Belfast

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on alley-gating in West Belfast.

(AQW 3335/11)

Minister for Social Development: My Department is not carrying out any such projects. However, funding may be awarded for alley gating where this is identified as a priority in a Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plan and sufficient resources are available.

Draft Spending Plans for 2011-15

Mr T Clarke asked the Minister for Social Development when he intends to publish his Department's draft spending plans for 2011-15.

(AQW 3346/11)

Minister for Social Development: I can advise that my Department's draft spending plans for 2011-15 were published on the Department for Social Development internet site on Wednesday 12 January.

The Charity Commission

Mr J Craig asked the Minister for Social Development for an update of the work currently being carried out by the Charity Commission; and to detail (i) the people in post; (ii) the salaries they are paid; and (iii) the total cost incurred to date.

(AQW 3348/11)

Minister for Social Development: The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI) is currently taking forward a programme of work that is putting in place the necessary structures, processes and

procedures that will allow it to operate effectively as an independent regulator and registrar of the charity sector in Northern Ireland.

To date the Chief Executive of the CCNI, appointed on 8th April 2010, is the only permanent member of staff in post, attracting an annual salary of £57,300.

Whilst CCNI take forward their plans to recruit permanent staff, they are operating in the interim with staff on loan from the NICS, a secondee from Big Lottery and eight temporary agency staff. The detail and costs of these staff from April to December 2010 are as follows:

Five staff on Loan from NICS	£153,383.
One secondee from Big Lottery	£28,882.
Eight temporary agency staff	£60,457.

Since its establishment on 1st June 2009 the total cost incurred by the CCNI is £855,000. This includes all staff costs and overheads.

Anticipated Capital Receipts

Ms A Lo asked the Minister for Social Development for a breakdown of how he expects to receive the income for the anticipated capital receipts of (i) £109.1million in 2011/12; (ii) £101.4million in 2012/13; (iii) £96million in 2013/14; and (iv) £91million in 2014/15, as outlined in his draft budget for 2011-15.

(AQW 3369/11)

Minister for Social Development: Capital receipts over the next 4 years are expected to come from Departmental land sales, Housing Executive house & land sales and from Housing Association/Housing Executive grant and loan repayments. A breakdown of the amounts is provided in the table below.

Receipts	2011-12 £m	2012-13 £m	2013-14 £m	2014-15 £m
Departmental land sales	7.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
NI Housing Executive house & land sales	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0
Housing Association Grant receipts	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
Housing Association loan repayments	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.4
NI Housing Executive loan repayments	78.9	73.3	68.0	63.1
Totals	109.1	101.4	96.0	91.0

While the figures represent our best estimates of the likely level of receipts possible, prevailing market conditions will undoubtedly impact on the timing of sales and the final values ultimately realised. To illustrate this point, it should be noted that NI Housing Executive house & land sales in 2009-10 were only £18m against an original baseline of £69m. Similarly, departmental land sales in 2010-11 are forecast to be only £2.2m against an original baseline of £13m. This highlights the challenge that my Department faces in raising these levels of capital receipts.

Housing Executive Phone Systems

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development whether the phone systems set up for the Housing Executive by the major contractors had collapsed during the severe weather crisis over the Christmas period making it impossible for tenants to contact the Housing Executive.

(AQW 3398/11)

Minister for Social Development: The Housing Executive has advised that the telephone communications between them and their major contractors worked satisfactorily, given the volume of work during the Christmas and New Year period. However, they were aware that HEAT had telephony issues. Nevertheless, alternative forms of communication were available including mobile telephones and email to their teams. White Horse also experienced some difficulties with their telephones. However, it is important to note that tenants do not need to contact the Housing Executive's contractors directly. The Housing Executive primarily issues jobs to contractors through their electronic housing management system. The Housing Executive holds contact numbers for all contractors which cover both normal working hours and after hours. These numbers provide round the clock contact details and all of these numbers were available to cover the Christmas and New Year periods. A number of contractors also provided additional land line and mobile numbers for use due to the volume of calls and queries. Finally, in addition, the dedicated number issued to contractors to contact the Housing Executive outside of normal working hours was also in use.

Green New Deal

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development if there is a timescale for the Green New Deal to commence.

(AQO 797/11)

Minister for Social Development: The Department for Social Development Permanent Secretary, Will Haire, is leading a cross departmental group to examine the potential of the Green New Deal for Northern Ireland. The group will meet with representatives from Green New Deal on 17th January to discuss their business case. The draft Budget has set aside £4 million for Green New Deal in 2011/2012.

Community and Voluntary Sector: Budgetary Cuts

Mr R Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development whether he has had any discussions with other Government Departments to ensure that the community and voluntary sector does not face disproportionate budgetary cuts.

(AQO 825/11)

Minister for Social Development: I wrote to Executive Colleagues on 21 September 2010 to confirm the important role that voluntary and community organisations play in meeting the needs of disadvantaged communities and vulnerable people in Northern Ireland and to advise against departments taking the view that funding for the community and voluntary sector would be a soft option for future savings.

On 26 October 2010 Executive Ministers were invited to attend the Spectrum Centre to discuss budget priorities when I met with a cross-section of representatives from the voluntary and community sector I informed all my Ministerial colleagues of the outcome of this meeting and I plan to hold a similar event in February 2011 to discuss the implications of the Executive's spending plans.

Disability Living Allowance Claimants

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development how many current Disability Living Allowance claimants suffer from (i) alcohol; and (ii) drug related issues.

(AQW 3447/11)

Minister for Social Development: Data is published on a Northern Ireland wide basis on what is known as the main disabling conditions for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) recipients at <http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/publications/dla.htm>. However, it cannot be deduced from these figures how many customers are in receipt of DLA due to dependency upon alcohol or addiction to drugs. Entitlement to this benefit is not dependent on a diagnosis or medical condition but on the basis of care and/or mobility needs arising.

Flats at West Green in Holywood

Mr P Weir asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the timescale for the proposed demolition of the flats at West Green in Holywood.

(AQW 3465/11)

Minister for Social Development: Two blocks of flats alongside other adjacent properties in West Green Holywood have been earmarked for demolition to make way for a new housing development in the area.

The demolition will take place in two phases: the first phase involving the flats and the second involving the adjacent properties.

Services have been disconnected from the flats at West Green and plans are already being developed to effect their demolition before March this year.

Residents from the adjacent properties comprising the second phase of demolition are still being re-housed. Once that has been completed, those properties will also be demolished but the timing of that will of course be entirely dependant on how quickly suitable alternative accommodation can be found for those residents who have to relocate.

Gas and Oil Boilers in Housing Executive Properties

Mr P Maskey asked the Minister for Social Development (i) how many (a) gas; and (b) oil boilers in Housing Executive properties had to be replaced during the recent cold spell; (ii) what was the total cost of replacing these boilers; and (iii) why the boilers could not be repaired.

(AQW 3483/11)

Minister for Social Development: 154 gas boilers and 27 oil boilers had to be replaced during the recent cold spell. The Housing Executive estimates that the cost of replacing these boilers will be in the region of £217,300. The main reason for replacing the boilers was because they had burst and could not be repaired.

Co-ownership Scheme

Mr S Gardiner asked the Minister for Social Development what percentage ownership options are available for support under the Co-ownership Scheme; and whether there are plans to extend these options.

(AQW 3530/11)

Minister for Social Development: Under the Co-Ownership Scheme, applicants have a choice of nine starter shares between 50% and 90% rising in multiples of 5%. Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Housing Association purchases the remaining share in the property, on which the applicant will pay rent. Applicants may subsequently purchase further shares in their home, again in 5% multiples (this is known as staircasing); until they have purchased 100%, when they do so they will have full ownership of their home.

Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Housing Association continually review the operation of the Scheme to ensure it remains fit for purpose. At present there are no plans to extend the range of starter shares available to applicants.

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Revised Written Answers

Friday 21 January 2011

(AQW 2817/11)

The total running costs of each Commissioner's Office within the remit of our Department, including the salary and expenses of each Commissioner, are set out below.

Commissioner's office		Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland	Older Peoples Advocate for NI	Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland	Commission for Victims and Survivors*
2007/08	Running costs	£138,384	N/A	£1,728,982	N/A
	Commissioner's salary	£31,008	N/A	£75,000	N/A
	Commissioner's expenses	£247	N/A	£1,317	N/A
2008/09	running costs	£189,290	£11,922	£1,674,768	£640,420
	Commissioner's salary	£31,628	£6,203	£76,875	£300,508
	Commissioner's expenses	£571	N/A	£1,067	£11,176
2009/10	running costs	£214,133	£125,420	£1,742,937	£1,075,675
	commissioner's salary	£31,836	£27,915	£79,566	£333,569
	commissioner's expenses	£188	£115	£722	£9,248

* There were 4 Commissioners until 17.02.10; there have been 3 Commissioners since 18.02.10

It should be noted that the total running costs given above also include the Commissioner's salary and expenses which are then detailed afterwards.

(AQW 2971/10)

The term 'advisers' is interpreted in this question as meaning 'external consultants' as defined by DFP guidance. Over the past three years, the related expenditure in the Health Service (including HSC Trusts, Boards, NDPBs and Special Agencies) was as follows:-

Year	£
2008/09	£787,747
2007/08	£663,143
2006/07	£1,476,919

The HSC uses external consultants for a wide variety of assignments e.g. to prepare Outline Business Cases in capital projects, to carry out independent reviews of service provision or needs assessments into health requirements, or to design and deliver various IT systems.



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