

Northern Ireland Assembly Disability Monitor



MONDAY 16 NOVEMBER 2009

**Centre on Human Rights for
People with Disabilities**

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A Last Week's Assembly Business

Ministerial Statement

Planning Policy Statement 7: Draft Addendum

The Minister of the Environment: The Minister of the Environment issued for consultation a draft addendum to Planning Policy Statement 7 on safeguarding the character of established residential areas. During the consultation, the draft policies contained in the addendum may be regarded as material planning considerations.

Increased housing density and concern over so-called town cramming or garden grabbing in some areas have continued to be the focus of much public attention and controversy right across Northern Ireland. There is already a significant body of operational planning policy and guidance that deals with housing development in established areas. That includes: PPS 6, 'Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage'; PPS 7, 'Quality Residential Environments'; PPS 12, 'Housing in Settlements'; DCAN 8, 'Housing in Existing Urban Areas'; and supplementary planning guidance 'Creating Places'. That policy and guidance promotes high-quality design, layout and landscaping. It emphasises sustainability, and it helps to create more balanced communities by supporting a mix of housing tenures and house types.

The existing policy also indicates that increased housing density should not result in town cramming. Arlene Foster (DUP) reminded the Planning Service of that in her August 2007 circular, which emphasised that the impact of new residential development in urban areas, villages and other settlements should be fully considered in line with existing policies. PPS 6 and PPS 7 set out robust planning policies to protect conservation areas and areas of townscape character. They ensure that new development harmonises with the historic townscape and leaves the character and appearance of those areas unharmed.

In those special areas, proposals involving intensification of site usage or site coverage are permitted only in exceptional

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circumstances. Additionally, development plans can bring forward local policies for conservation areas and areas of townscape character. That will ensure that new development is in harmony with adjacent housing and does not detract from environmental quality, residential amenity and established character.

The majority of established residential areas, villages and smaller settlements do not have the distinctive character of areas of townscape character or conservation areas. However, that does not mean that the quality of residential environment in those areas is unimportant. Those areas can also be vulnerable to change in the physical environment, particularly from redevelopment of existing houses and development on infill sites at higher densities than that of surrounding areas.

Where the demand for smaller households through apartment living exists, it will need to be catered for, but overdevelopment can lead to the erosion of an area's character, especially where the architecture, size and scale of the new development is not in keeping with that of the locality. New high-density housing can have a detrimental impact on the environment, on the amount of increased garden grabbing and the loss of green space.

Not all higher-density residential development is bad; on the contrary, it can often be beneficial to local areas by bringing much-needed housing. The redevelopment of derelict sites can assist with urban regeneration and support the drive to create more balanced communities by introducing a mix of tenures and house types.

Although Northern Ireland has policy safeguards to prevent town cramming, more are needed. That is why the Minister has published the draft addendum. It provides three operational planning policies, which will strengthen the existing planning policy framework. The first two will enable better management of proposals to redevelop existing buildings, infill vacant sites, including gardens, and convert buildings to apartments, including those for multiple occupancy. In particular, planning permission will not be granted to proposals where the density is significantly higher than that found in the locality, or where

the pattern of development is not in keeping with the overall character and environmental quality of the neighbourhood.

The draft addendum also introduces space standards. Those will ensure that there will be adequately spaced dwelling units. This is the first time that space standards have been introduced for private housing in Northern Ireland. The Minister sees them as an important tool for controlling densification. The size of a home is a key factor in determining who can live there and how they will use the property. The Minister wants to ensure that all new housing units are sufficiently spacious, particularly if they are to prove attractive on a long-term basis to families with children.

With regard to conversions, all flats must be self-contained and not wholly at the rear of a property. Planning permission will not be granted when the original property is under 150 sq m. Additional policy criteria will ensure that there is no reduction in the space available for parking.

According to the Minister the draft addendum is not a blanket ban on redevelopment, conversion, in-filling or the development of gardens. It is about the right development in the right place in order to provide good-quality homes. High-density development will continue to be acceptable in city and town centres and along public transport corridors and arterial routes in cities and larger towns. Those areas are, therefore, excluded from the definition of established residential areas.

The draft policies retain sufficient flexibility to allow for higher-density housing schemes through imaginative and innovative design. They can deliver significant benefits, while continuing to ensure that new residential schemes are sensitive in design and in harmony with the character of established residential areas.

Flash flooding can cause significant damage and emotional stress and anxiety. Although the Department of the Environment has already adopted a precautionary approach in Planning Policy Statement 15 to development that could result in increased flooding, the Minister recognises that more can be done. Therefore, the final

operational policy set out in the draft addendum encourages greater use of permeable paving in new residential developments. Permeable paving is a relatively straightforward example of sustainable drainage systems (SUDS), which can reduce the amount and speed of surface water run-off.

The Minister believes that the addendum provides strong, clear policy, with no room for misinterpretation: it will strengthen the policy framework. This is the start of a four-month public consultation. This is an important issue, and the Minister encouraged everyone who has an interest in it to write to tell the Department of the Environment what they think. The Department for the Environment will carefully consider all the responses before finalising their policies.

During the discussion Patsy McGlone (SDLP) asked the Minister for some clarity on the issue of conversions. In the Minister's statement to the Assembly, he Minister said: "Planning permission will not be granted where the original property is less than 150 square metres." Patsy McGlone asked what type of conversions that this referred to. He submitted that conversions for those with disabilities may fall into that category, and I am unsure from the statement whether that is the case.

Furthermore, Patsy McGlone stated that the operational policy that is set out in the draft addendum to Planning Policy Statement 7 encourages greater use of permeable paving in new residential developments. Members who have seen that paving and who have met manufacturers of SUDs will know of the huge advantages of such systems and how they can alleviate some of the worst aspects of flash flooding. Patsy McGlone asked whether the Department of the Environment merely encourage developers to use that type of paving, or will its use become mandatory in future planning policy.

The Minister of the Environment: On the issue of conversions, the Minister assured the Assembly that the policy is not designed to discriminate against those with disabilities. If it did, it would not pass the equality impact assessments, and the Minister is absolutely certain that the policy will not discriminate. However, the Department

of the Environment will seek to provide further clarity and assurance on that issue during the consultation process.

The Department of the Environment will expect developers to use permeable paving in many proposed developments in our towns and cities, particularly in areas that are vulnerable to flooding. One example that the Minister gave was the considerable flooding in parts of south and east Belfast over the past few years, some of which has been due, in large part, to the development that has taken place in those areas over the previous five or six years. That has contributed significantly to the water that has been caught on hard surfaces and which has immediately been deposited into our drainage systems. The Department of the Environment wants to ensure that there will be a slower release of water from new developments when significant rainfall occurs.

B This Week's Assembly Business

Monday 16 November 2009

Committee Business

Motion - Report on the Inquiry into Obesity

Proposed: That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety on its inquiry into obesity; and calls on the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in liaison with Executive colleagues and relevant bodies, to bring forward a timetable for implementing the recommendations contained in the report.

C Written Answers to Questions, Week ending 13 November 2009

EDUCATION

People with Dyspraxia

Mark Durkan (SDLP) asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) the services available to people with dyspraxia in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area; and (ii) what planning and co-ordination exists between education service providers and other agencies to deliver services to this group. (AQW 2232/10)

Minister of Education: The Minister understood that the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety will respond to part (i) of the question relating to the services available to people with dyspraxia in the Western Health and Social Care Trust (your AQW 2227/10 refers). With regard to part (ii) of the question the Minister replied regarding children and young people.

An inter-board working group consisting of educational psychologists from each of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) was established in 2003 to plan and co-ordinate the diagnosis and assessment of dyspraxia.

The findings and recommendations of this group were agreed on an inter-disciplinary and inter-agency basis. Multi-agency group meetings were held to facilitate a co-ordinated approach to the assessment and diagnosis of dyspraxia which it was agreed would be called Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD).

As a result of this inter-agency liaison and consultation the booklet "Guidelines towards Inter Agency Agreement (DCD)" was produced. This booklet was distributed to health and education professionals and forms the basis of a co-ordinated approach across the health and education sectors.

ELBs regularly liaise with many other agencies including occupational therapy, child development clinics, multi-agency support teams, speech and language therapy, behaviour therapy and clinical

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psychologists to promote inter-agency and inter-disciplinary partnerships to address the needs of children and young people with DCD.

Blind and Partially-Sighted Pupils

Peter Weir (DUP) asked the Minister of Education what steps are being taken to ensure that all text books are accessible to blind and partially-sighted pupils. (AQW 2259/10)

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

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

The Minister recognised, however, that the expediency with which material can be accessed by children and young people is an area where further enhancements to service delivery could be made. In this connection the Regional Strategy Group for Special Educational Needs (RSG) has established a Visual Impairment Working Group the aim of which is to promote a consistent approach across the five ELBs in relation to service delivery in schools. The Working Group has consulted with the voluntary and statutory sectors as well as parents and children. The RNIB has had an active role in this consultation process and has met with the Working Group to discuss outcomes. The Group has reported its findings to RSG and the key recommendation is that a regional resource base is needed, in the context of an overall strategy of achieving full educational inclusion and of improving levels of educational attainment amongst children and young people with a visual impairment.

The Minister can confirm that DE, as part of a strategic stock-take, has prioritised the future development of a centralised resource and has recently secured £190k capital funding. Statutory responsibility for securing provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) rests with the five ELBs, which are responsible under special education legislation for identifying, assessing and in appropriate cases making provision for children with SEN in these areas. Within this context DE has allocated this funding to the Belfast Education and Library Board, on behalf of the five ELBs, to consider how the establishment of a regional resource base may be progressed. It is anticipated that this centralised resource will produce textbooks and study materials in appropriate format for pupils with visual impairment. DE will also be bidding at the next appropriate opportunity for the recurrent funding necessary to staff and maintain this resource although the Assembly will appreciate that no guarantee can be given at this stage as to the outcome of this bid.

Children with Autism

Jim Shannon (DUP) asked the Minister of Education, in relation to the proposed removal of statements for children with special needs (i) how the Department of Education will safeguard the rights of children with autism; (ii) how children with autism will be assured of the continued education and specialist support they receive from appropriately trained and qualified staff; and (iii) how parents will be consulted and involved in the process. (AQW 2275/10)

Minister of Education: The Department of Education has undertaken a policy review of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and inclusion and issued for consultation, in August 2009, a document setting out high level proposals for public consideration. The formal consultation period will run to 30 November 2009, after which the Department will fully consider the responses received. One of a range of proposals is to introduce a Coordinated Support Plan for children and young people with complex or multiple needs and a Personal Learning Plan for all other SEN children. It is proposed that both of these documents would focus on setting and monitoring outcomes for children and young people; a process, which it is considered is not adequately captured in the current system. Until all responses to the policy

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proposals have been fully considered and decisions made on the proposals that are to be taken forward, it will not be possible to develop the necessary lower level detail of the policy. Overarching principles of the policy will, however, ensure that the rights of children and young people, including those with autism, and their parents, are preserved and that they will receive the specialist support they need as soon as possible following the assessment of that need.

Children with SEN will continued to be managed within the existing SEN framework until any new policy is implemented.

Every School A Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Inclusion

Carmel Hanna (SDLP) asked the Minister of Education if the proposals outlined in her Department's consultation document 'Every School A Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Inclusion' will result in fewer classroom assistants being employed in schools. (AQW 2346/10)

Minister of Education: The current proposals set out in the document 'Every School a Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion' represent high level proposals for policy development in this area. Decisions regarding the level of educational provision to be made for children with special educational needs, including the provision of classroom assistance, is currently determined by the Education and Library Boards and schools in conjunction with parents. While the current proposals intend to enable mainstream schools to have greater flexibility in adapting provision and the increased capacity to meet the educational needs of children within the resources available to them, they will not in themselves determine the provision to be made. The type and level of the educational provision to be made will continue to be a matter for the professionals working with the children.

Every School A Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Inclusion

Carmel Hanna (SDLP) asked the Minister of Education what assurance she can provide that a higher level of multi-disciplinary support will be provided to take forward the proposals outlined in the Department of Education's consultation document 'Every School A Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Inclusion'. (AQW 2348/10)

Minister of Education: The proposals outlined in the Departments of Education's consultation document: 'Every School A Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion', support improved multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working in order to meet the assessed needs of children and young people with special educational needs. It is envisaged that this will be facilitated by memoranda of understanding or service level agreements with relevant partners. Following the completion of the formal consultation period at the end of November 2009, the Department will fully consider the responses received and will then begin to develop the necessary lower level detail. This will be taken forward through the Education and Skills Authority structures and detailed engagement with other statutory bodies with responsibility for putting in place the non-educational provision required to fully meet assessed needs. This will include the support provided by health professionals for children and young people with special educational needs is a matter for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). The Minister can provide an assurance that she will make every effort to ensure that the necessary levels of multidisciplinary supports can be made available, before policy proposals are moved forward.

Special Educational Needs

Carmel Hanna (SDLP) asked the Minister of Education if extra staff will be employed in schools to meet the additional responsibility of providing for special educational needs. (AQW 2349/10)

Minister of Education: The Minister addressed this question from the context of the current policy consultation: Every school a Good School; The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion. Following a review of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Inclusion, it is a proposal that schools would have a greater capacity to meet the assessed needs of children and young people in mainstream schools, without the need to seek external supports. Under the current SEN framework, schools already have responsibility for providing for assessed needs for those enrolled there. It is proposed that, instead of mainstream schools having to wait in many cases for external assessment to identify the provision that they should make, school staff would be trained to better identify and meet those needs. To facilitate this, a comprehensive capacity building programme for schools would be developed and delivered in advance of the implementation of any new policy.

Every School A Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Inclusion

Carmel Hanna (SDLP) asked the Minister of Education, following her Department's consultation document 'Every School A Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Inclusion', what assurance can be given that a higher level of multi-disciplinary support will be provided by health professionals. (AQW 2350/10)

Minister of Education: The proposals outlined in the Departments of Education's consultation document: 'Every School A Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion', support improved multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working in order to meet the assessed needs of children and young people with special educational needs. It is envisaged that this will be facilitated by memoranda of understanding or service level agreements with relevant partners. Following the completion of the formal consultation period at the end of November 2009, the Department will fully consider the responses received and will then begin to develop the necessary lower level detail. This will be taken forward through the Education and Skills Authority structures and detailed engagement with other statutory bodies with responsibility for putting in place the

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non-educational provision required to fully need assessed needs. This will include the support provided by health professionals for children and young people with special educational needs is a matter for the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). The Minister can provide an assurance that she will make every effort to ensure that the necessary levels of multidisciplinary supports can be made available, before policy proposals are moved forward.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder Advisory Service

Carmel Hanna (SDLP) asked the Minister of Education if there are plans for an Autistic Spectrum Disorder Advisory Service which schools and parents can access. (AQW 2426/10)

Minister of Education: Following publication of the 'Report of the Task Group on Autism (2002)', the Department of Education funded the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) to establish an inter-board autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) group to provide a support programme to children on the autistic spectrum within each ELB. As a consequence, an ASD advisory service was established in each ELB to enhance existing ASD services.

In all ELBs schools and parents can access an extensive range of services and resources including advice and information, teacher and parent training, consultation visits to schools and parents and individual pupil support.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Carmel Hanna (SDLP) asked the Minister of Education how her Department will guarantee the rights of children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder and their specific neurological condition, under the proposals outlined in her Department's consultation document 'Every School A Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion'. (AQW 2428/10)

Minister of Education: The key principles of the Department of Education's proposals for children with special educational needs, including those with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), are contained X:\Admin\JFulton\COHR\Assembly Disability Monitors for Website\Northern Ireland Assembly Disability Monitor 16 November 2009.doc

in the current consultation document. These underpinning principles include: the continued promotion of an inclusive ethos in schools; the provision of a continuum of provision to meet a diversity of need; quality intervention and provision tailored to the needs of individuals and focused on improved outcomes for those facing barriers to learning; and all professionals, including teachers, have the skills and knowledge to allow early identification and intervention to facilitate improved outcomes.

It would be through an improved framework, such as that envisaged by the new proposals, that the rights of children with ASD would be preserved.

Children with ASD will continued to be managed within the existing SEN framework until any new policy is implemented.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Carmel Hanna (SDLP) asked the Minister of Education how the Department of Education will continue to offer children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder specialist support from trained and qualified staff under the proposals outlined in her Department's consultation document 'Every School A Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion'. (AQW 2429/10)

Minister of Education: One of a range of proposals contained in the Department of Education's consultation document: 'Every School a Good School - The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion', is to introduce a Coordinated Support Plan for children and young people with complex or multiple needs and a Personal Learning Plan for all other SEN children. It is proposed that both of these documents, in addition to setting out the special educational support to be provided, would provide a focus on setting and monitoring outcomes for children and young people; a process, which it is considered is not adequately captured in the current system. After all responses to the policy proposals have been fully considered and decisions made on the proposals that are to be taken forward, the Department will develop the necessary lower level detail of the policy. Overarching principles of the policy will, however, ensure that

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the rights of children and young people, including those with autism, and their parents, are preserved and that they will receive the specialist support they need as soon as possible following the assessment of that need.

Provision for children with autism will continued to be managed within the existing SEN framework until any new policy is implemented.

Every School A Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion

Carmel Hanna (SDLP) asked the Minister of Education what guarantee the Department of Education can give to uphold parents rights to be consulted, to challenge decisions and hold professionals to account under the proposals outlined in her Department's consultation document 'Every School A Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion'. (AQW 2472/10)

Minister of Education: It is a key underpinning principle of the current policy proposals for a revised special educational needs (SEN) framework that the knowledge, views, experience and involvement of parents and carers will play a vital role in the development and maintenance of any programme put in place to support a child.

It would be through an improved framework, such as that envisaged by the new proposals, that the rights of children with SEN and their parents would be preserved.

The consultation document 'Every School a Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion' includes no proposals that dilute the rights of parents to challenge decisions about SEN provision. It is envisaged that a right of appeal through the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal will remain.

Every School A Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion

Anna Lo (Alliance) asked the Minister of Education if there will be sufficient funding and training in place to meet the proposals outlined

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in her Department's consultation document 'Every School A Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion'. (AQW 2490/10)

Minister of Education: The Minister has allocated an additional £25 million to commence implementation of the Review of SEN and Inclusion policy proposals.

It is envisaged that the funding allocated during 2009/10 will be used for pre-implementation activities on a capacity building programme for schools and pre-school settings and the balance will be allocated for the roll out of that training and development from the 2010/2011 school year.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder Advisory Service

Anna Lo (Alliance) asked the Minister of Education if there will be an Autism Spectrum Disorder advisory service which schools and parents can access under the proposals outlined in her Department's consultation document 'Every School A Good School: The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion'. (AQW 2542/10)

Minister of Education: The Review of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Inclusion makes high level policy proposals for a revised SEN framework. It does not, however, make recommendations about the strategic approach currently being followed across Education and Library Boards (ELBs) for the delivery of individual special educational services, such as those for children with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD).

As part of the ELBs strategic approach to ASD services, the Department of Education has funded the establishment and maintenance of an inter-board ASD group, which provides a support programme for children on the autistic spectrum within each ELB; this includes the provision of an ASD advisory service.

In all ELBs, schools and parents can access an extensive range of services and resources including advice and information, teacher and

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parent training, consultation visits to schools and parents and individual pupil support.

The Review of SEN and Inclusion is currently out for consultation and has been extended until 30 November 2009.

EMPLOYMENT AND LEARNING

Student Debt

Thomas Burns (SDLP) asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the total amount of debt belonging to students from Northern Ireland which has been written off by the Student Loans Company in each of the last ten years. (AQW 2316/10)

Minister for Employment and Learning: The total amount of debt belonging to students from Northern Ireland which has been written off in each of the last ten years is detailed in the table below.

Financial Year	Total amount written off
1999/2000	£42,000
2000/2001	£10,000
2001/2002	£50,000
2002/2003	£40,000
2003/2004	£84,000
2004/2005	£83,000
2005/2006	£205,000
2006/2007	£186,000
2007/2008	£225,000
2008/2009	£815,000

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This debt encompasses both mortgage style loans and income contingent repayment loans. These loans are cancelled upon death, permanent disability or on the borrower reaching a prescribed age (in the case of loans pre-2006) or passage of time (in the case of loans since 2006).

FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

Community and Voluntary Organisations: Funding

Dawn Purvis (PUP) asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the impact of efficiency savings on community and voluntary organisations tasked with delivering front-line services on behalf of Government Departments. (AQO 357/10)

Minister of Finance and Personnel: As part of the Budget 2008-11 process the Executive agreed that Northern Ireland departments would be set the target of delivering 3% per annum cash releasing efficiency savings over the years 2008-09 to 2010-11.

As a result of the Executive's efficiency savings programme, over £1.6 billion of resources, will be recycled into the budgets for frontline services over the three year Budget period, thus improving the level of services delivered.

Although primary responsibility for the planning and delivery of efficiency savings lies with individual Ministers and departments, it has been pointed out to departments that efficiency savings should not be achieved by simple cuts in the funding to priority frontline services. However, it is also recognised that there is scope to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of delivery in these areas.

The Minister of Finance and Personnel has not made an assessment of the impact of efficiency savings on community and voluntary organisations.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

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Spending per Child on Personal Social Services

Mary Bradley (SDLP) asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, given spending per child is lower in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the UK, what measures he intends to put in place to increase spending per child on personal Social Services. (AQW 2096/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Minister's main task at the moment is to protect vital services from cuts. This includes all of the very many critical areas of spending we have in health such as, for example, acute services, primary care, domiciliary care, learning disability, mental health and children's services. Within CSR the Minister has invested approaching £20m in family and children's services. The Minister has also invested in services covering areas such as mental health, domestic violence, suicide and substance abuse, all of which have a positive impact on family and children's services. However, there is now considerable further pressure on children's services arising from current economic circumstances. The Minister will be making the case to protect and enhance our investment in such services at every stage as we move through harder economic times. Should more resources become available to the Minister, services for children will be amongst the Minister's highest priorities.

Care Packages

Lord Morrow (DUP) asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many care packages have been withdrawn in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency in the last twelve months. (AQW 2201/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of care packages withdrawn in the last twelve months is not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Care Packages

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Lord Morrow (DUP) asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many care packages have been refused in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency in the last twelve months. (AQW 2202/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of care packages refused in the last twelve months is not available centrally.

Care Packages

Lord Morrow (DUP) asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many care packages are currently in place in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency. (AQW 2203/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: Information on the number of care packages currently in place is not available in the format requested.

Free Personal Care for People with Dementia

Peter Weir (DUP) asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what decisions he has taken regarding the provision of free personal care for people diagnosed with dementia living in residential care homes. (AQW 2204/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In May 2007 the Minister commissioned a report on the cost of introducing free personal care for all residential care and nursing home residents, not just those with dementia. This report estimated that free personal care would cost some £30.5m and benefit just over 3,700 of the 14,232 residents in care homes at that time.

The report also examined the cost of disregarding a resident's former home in the financial assessment to determine how much each resident can afford to contribute to the cost of their care. The report estimated that this disregard would cost some £44.3m and benefit approximately 2,900 residents.

The Minister has considered this issue very carefully against the competing priorities the Minister faces across the health service and has concluded that free personal care is not affordable within the current CSR period. However, there is currently no requirement to sell a former home to meet an assessed contribution; how a resident meets this contribution is a matter for the resident and their advisors.

People Having to Sell Their Homes to Pay for Care

Peter Weir (DUP) asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he is taking to prevent people having to sell their homes to pay for care. (AQW 2205/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: In May 2007 the Minister commissioned a report on the cost of introducing free personal care for all residential care and nursing home residents, not just those with dementia. This report estimated that free personal care would cost some £30.5m and benefit just over 3,700 of the 14,232 residents in care homes at that time.

The report also examined the cost of disregarding a resident's former home in the financial assessment to determine how much each resident can afford to contribute to the cost of their care. The report estimated that this disregard would cost some £44.3m and benefit approximately 2,900 residents.

The Minister has considered this issue very carefully against the competing priorities the Minister faces across the health service and has concluded that free personal care is not affordable within the current CSR period. However, there is currently no requirement to sell a former home to meet an assessed contribution; how a resident meets this contribution is a matter for the resident and their advisors.

People Diagnosed with Dementia

Peter Weir (DUP) asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assistance is available for people diagnosed with dementia who require residential care. (AQW 2206/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety's aim is to maintain people within their homes whenever possible and a range of community services are in place to support this aim.

Each person diagnosed with dementia and requiring care and support receives an individual, multi-disciplinary, assessment of their needs - physical, psychological and social functioning - and the carers' and relatives' needs.

Where it has been decided that a residential home is the best setting in which to deliver care, an income based assessment is carried out to ascertain how much the individual can contribute towards his or her placement.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is currently developing a Northern Ireland Dementia Strategy. It is hoped the strategy will be available for consultation in early 2010.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Merger of Volunteer Centres

Raymond McCartney (Sinn Fein) asked the Minister for Social Development what decisions have been made by the Department for Social Development and the Volunteer Development Agency in relation to the merger of volunteer centres. (AQW 2271/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Department for Social Development has agreed to fund the Volunteer Development Agency in their work with 10 volunteer centres towards merger and modernisation. These autonomous organisations have decided to come together to pool their resources and reduce duplication of activities. No decision has been taken for the future Volunteer Infrastructure

Volunteer Development Agency's Merger

Barry McElduff (Sinn Fein) asked the Minister for Social Development if the volunteer centres which have withdrawn from the Volunteer Development Agency's merger process will be adequately resourced and appropriately funded in the 2010/11 financial year. (AQW 2312/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Department for Social Development is providing funding to 15 Volunteer Centres until 31 March 2010 under the Volunteer Bureau Initiative. Future funding will be determined by the findings from the Volunteering Strategy consultation which closed on 6 November 2009. Consideration is being given as to how best to support volunteering in the interim until a finalised Strategy is in place. The Department for Social Development will be writing to all Volunteer Centres in the coming weeks.

Funding Allocation for the Omagh Volunteer Centre

Barry McElduff (Sinn Fein) asked the Minister for Social Development when she will finalise the Department for Social Development's funding allocation for the Omagh Volunteer Centre beyond 31 March 2010. (AQW 2313/10)

Minister for Social Development: The Department for Social Development is providing funding to 15 Volunteer Centres, including Omagh Volunteer Centre, until 31 March 2010 under the Volunteer Bureau Initiative. Future funding will be determined by the findings from the Volunteering Strategy consultation which closed on 6 November 2009. Consideration is being given as to how best to support volunteering in the interim until a finalised Strategy is in place. My Department will be writing to all Volunteer Centres in the coming weeks.