

Northern Ireland Assembly Disability Monitor



MONDAY 21 SEPTEMBER 2009

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

For further information, please contact Hannah Russell,
Research and Policy Officer

hannahrussell@disabilityaction.org

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A. Last Week in the Assembly

Monday 14 September 2009

Questions to the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Action Mental Health Vote

John O'Dowd (Sinn Feinn) asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the reasons behind the decision to withdraw funding, from 1 April 2010, from Action Mental Health Vote project in the Craigavon and Banbridge area. (AQO 4/10)

The Minister stated that the decision to withdraw funding from the Action Mental Health vote project was made by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust. The trust provided funding for 30 places on the project, but only 15 of those were taken up by trust clients. The service was not fully utilised by trust clients, so the trust has therefore decided to provide individualised services for its clients.

In a follow up question John O'Dowd noted the scheme, although it may not have been used by trust clients, is a very effective and efficient one. It is there to provide individual learning courses to 16- to 25-year-olds with learning difficulties in the Craigavon and Banbridge area. The scheme levers in £178,000 of funding from other sources. On many occasions, sometimes quite correctly, the Minister has complained that his Department does not have enough funding. Surely a scheme that attracts £178,000 of other funding should be supported by the trust and the Department. In response the Minister stressed that although the trust provided 30 places, only 15 were taken up, not all of those by clients who have learning disabilities; some were taken up by clients with learning difficulties. The trust is responsible for the first of those two groups and has to spend their money in areas that we are responsible for. The point was taken that the service is valuable. It is offered to 18- to 20-year-olds, individuals who are at an important transitional period in their lives. However, if the trust pays for 30 places and only 15 are taken up, it obviously does not fit the demand that the trust has identified. Thus the trust will now provide funding for clients on an individual basis.

In addition, the Minister pointed out that the Health Service funds almost £1 million of transition services throughout Northern Ireland, so it is not a one-off, stand-alone service. The need for transition services is recognised, but for whatever reason, that particular service is not getting the necessary support.

In a supplementary question, Dolores Kelly (SDLP) requested that the Minister assure the House that there was proper promotion of the service and that it was not the case that places were not taken up because people did not know about it because their key workers had not referred them to it? Furthermore, Mrs Kelly asked for some indication of the financial cuts to the support for such services, which are provided by the community and voluntary sector. The Minister responded by stating that these plans were voted for by the House. Mrs Kelly contests this, to which the Minister responded that the SDLP voted in favour of these plans.

To close the debate the Minister assured the House that there was proper assessment made of the service.

Private Members Business

Compensation from the Libyan Government

Alex Easton (DUP) emphasised that we must not forget that many innocent victims still bear their loss, still carry their disability, and still live with the wounds of the IRA torture, mutilation and murder machine.

The Assembly noted the decision by the Scottish Government to release the Lockerbie bomber from prison, and supports the case being taken by the victims of IRA terrorism to claim compensation from the Libyan Government who supplied arms and Semtex explosives to the IRA; and further calls on the UK Government to apply diplomatic pressure on Libya to pay this compensation.

North/South Ministerial Council

Language Body Sectoral Format

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure made a report on the eighth North/South Ministerial Council meeting in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 which took place in Gweedore on 9th July 2009. The Council noted the ongoing collaboration between the agencies on a range of projects. Those include working with Irish language officers in district councils with a view to offering the lecture series 'aspects of our shared heritage'; a film in Irish about the Ulster-Scots language and culture, which has been completed and will be broadcast on TG4; continuing co-operation on human resources and corporate governance issues; the preparation of a joint disability action plan; and the preparation of a joint policy on child protection. There have also been joint stands at a number of events; for example, the national ploughing championships and the Tall Ships event in Belfast.

Tuesday 15 September 2009

Social Development

Housing Executive Grants

Sue Ramsey (Sinn Fein) asked the Minister for Social Development if she has intervened in any cases where people have been turned down for housing renovation and disability grants, and if so, how many were overturned due to her intervention in the South Down constituency in 2008-09. (AQO 31/10)

The Minister for Social Development strongly contested that she intervened in any cases in which people were turned down for private grants in South Down in 2008-09 and the implied suggestion that she may have used ministerial authority to ensure that the South Down constituency was given preferential treatment over others. With regard to the disabled facilities grant scheme the Minister assured that it is unaffected. The Minister went on to explain that she had received many representations about the scheme several of which were made by colleagues here, on behalf of constituents. She also received numerous representations from members of the public about individual applications. The Minister has looked into and responded to each and every one of those representations, but has not intervened

in any cases that resulted in the overturning of decisions taken by the Housing Executive. Since it was not necessary for the Housing Executive to refuse or cancel applications that were made in 2008-09, it is a fact that no such enquiries were made to the Minister's office during that period, although that was the case subsequently, because of budgetary problems. The Minister stressed that she has done her utmost to protect the most vulnerable households by ring-fencing budgets for new social housing to help those who are in housing stress. In fact, in the past two years, 236 new social housing units have been started in her constituency, costing almost £38 million.

In a follow up question, Jim Shannon (DUP) asked the Minister whether she was aware that there is a three-year waiting list for those grants in the Strangford constituency. In addition, would the Minister confirm the concerns of people who are on that list will be address, and that there will be a greater emphasis, as the Minister said before, on making those grants available, and specifically in the Strangford area.

The Minister responded by stating that disabled facilities grants can be divided into two types: mandatory, which are not affected by the scheme, and concern internal alterations to houses; and discretionary, which are affected because of the £100 million shortfall in the housing budget. In deciding the housing budget for this year, the Minister was given a certain pot, with which she decided to protect the vulnerable. The vulnerable are those who are homeless or in housing stress, hence the protection of money for newbuild; those who are vulnerable because of fuel poverty, hence the protection of funding for the warm homes scheme, and those who are in institutions or in the community and who may not be well. It is important to protect people through the Supporting People Programme in order to ensure that they can remain in the community, with the support of family and friends, instead of being admitted to an institution.

The Minister further stated that Jim Shannon raised another fundamental issue, and urged him to have further discussions with the Minister of Finance and Personnel. The Minister was grateful for the £20 million capital allocation that was made in June, but that simply deals with what is already in the pipeline. Financial assistance

is still needed to cover the shortfall in order to deal with the people in the pipeline. The Minister instructed the Housing Executive to ensure that nobody lost his or her place in the queue because of the lack of finance for improvement grants. As soon as money becomes available, those grants will be dealt with: money will flow to them. It is important that housing is put on a sound financial footing so that those problems can be rectified. There is not one person in the House or in the community who is responsible for the economic downturn: it has beset us globally. However, the one budget that has been deeply affected by the downturn is the housing budget. That must be rectified as a matter of urgency.

Wednesday 16 September 2009

Committee for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

Disability Discrimination (Transport Vehicles) Regulations

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward copies of the Disability Discrimination (Transport Vehicles) Regulations and the summary of responses to the Committee for the Environment and the Committee for Regional Development for their comment.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to seek an update on progress of the Code of Practice to accompany these Regulations.

Agreed: The Committee agreed in principle with the Disability Discrimination (Transport Vehicles) Regulations.

Proposed Autism Bill

The Committee noted the response from the Department concerning a proposed Autism Bill for Northern Ireland. The response advised that the Department for Health, Social Services and Public Safety are taking forward an Autism Spectrum Disorder Strategic Action Plan.

Thursday 17 September 2009

Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety

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Matters Arising

The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister regarding his plans for a legislative framework on mental capacity & mental health. The Committee also noted that evidence sessions on the safeguarding bill and the legislative approach to mental health have been organised for 1st and 22nd October.

Briefing on Proposed Autism Bill

The Committee agreed to invite the Department to brief members on its views on a proposed Autism Bill, write to other interested Departments seeking their views and to seek the views of charities working with autism. The Committee also agreed to write to the Chairpersons Liaisons Group about the proposed Bill.

B. This Week in the Assembly

Monday 21 September 2009

Please see Assembly Monitor dated 28th September 2009.

Tuesday 22 September 2009

Please see Assembly Monitor dated 28th September 2009.

C. Answers to Written Questions

Week ending 18 September 2009

EDUCATION

Free School Milk

George Savage (UUP) asked the Minister of Education to detail how many children in (i) nursery schools; (ii) primary schools; (iii) secondary and grammar schools; and (iv) special needs were in receipt of (a) free school milk; and (b) school milk at a cost as they did not qualify for free school milk, at the start of the academic year 2009/10. (AQW 24/10)

Minister of Education: The figures requested showing the number of pupils taking milk in the 2009/10 academic year are not yet available.

However, under my Department's Milk and Meals Arrangements free school milk is provided to;

- all pupils at special schools,
- pupils in nursery and primary schools who do not have access to school meals, and
- individual nursery and primary school pupils where it is deemed necessary in the interests of their health.

All pre-school children are eligible for free milk under the DHSSPS's Day Care Food Scheme. In addition, drinking milk must be available every day as an option with school meals. There is no accurate way of measuring how many choose to buy milk with their school meal.

I have listed below the latest available figures, supplied by the Education and Library Boards, which show the number of pupils taking milk as at June 2009.

	Free	Paid
Nursery	8,979	0
Primary	192	37,357
Secondary	0	0

And Grammar		
Special	3,491	0

Special Educational Needs

Roy Beggs (UUP) asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of young people who have received Special Educational Needs Statements, broken down by (i) constituency ; and (ii) District Council area, in each of the last three years. (AQW 75/10)

Minister of Education: The Chief Executives of the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) have advised that the information you have requested is not held by either constituency or District Council area. The information has, therefore, been provided by Board area as follows:-

	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	WELB
2006/07*	430	273	335	410	350
2007/08*	393	326	342	660	231
2008/09*	451	280	145	342	200

* academic years

The above figures refer to children and young people who received final statements of special educational need. They do not include those who may have received reviewed statements.

Special Educational Needs

Roy Beggs (UUP) asked the Minister of Education to detail how the additional £25 million for Special Educational Needs has been distributed to date. (AQW 77/10)

Minister of Education: My Department has secured funding of £25 million over two years to commence implementation of the Review of SEN and Inclusion policy proposals. It is planned that £750k will be spent in 2009-10 and £24.3 million in 2010-11.

The £750k secured for 2009/10 will be used for pre-implementation activities on a capacity building programme for teachers and on developing standards/indicators and good practice guidance for Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs); funding has also been set aside for the consultation process which is currently underway.

To date, £5k has been allocated to the 5 Education and Library Boards to provide substitute cover for teachers attending SENCO sub-group meetings which formed part of the pre-consultation process.

The 24.3m secured for 2010/11 will be used for the implementation of a number of proposals contained in the Review and which will be individually costed in the coming months.

Dyslexic Children

Lord Morrow (DUP) asked the Minister of Education how many children in schools are dyslexic; and how many are awaiting assessment. (AQW 96/10)

Minister of Education: Data from the 2008/09 School Census shows that there were a total of 5, 944 pupils in schools at Stage 1 – 5 of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice with Dyslexia.

There were 175 pupils recorded at Stage 4 of the SEN Code of Practice. Stage 4 of the Code is when the relevant Education and Library Board (ELB) considers the need for a statutory assessment and, if appropriate, makes a multi-disciplinary assessment. Therefore, pupils at this stage are awaiting assessment from the ELB to determine if they are to be classified as being statemented.

Note: Figures include nursery schools, primary, post primary and special schools.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Mental Health Care for Older Persons

Naomi Long (Alliance) asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust's assertion that the modern approach to older persons mental health day support is best achieved by individual care plans rather than centre-based activities. (AQO 14/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: I agree with the Trust that the needs of each of its older people should be assessed on an individual basis to formulate tailored care plans. This was also recommended by the Bamford Review which strongly advocated the person centred approach. Part of the care plan could, of course, be placement in an appropriate day centre.