

Northern Ireland Assembly Disability Monitor



MONDAY 4 JANUARY 2010
**Centre on Human Rights for
People with Disabilities**

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**A. Minutes from Committee Meetings, Week Ending 11
December 2009**

Wednesday 2 December 2009

COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

Matters Arising

The Committee for Education noted correspondence of 18 November 2009 from Ms F O'Toole on the SEN and Inclusion Review.

The Committee for Education noted correspondence of 25 November 2009 from the GTCNI enclosing its response to the SEN and Inclusion Review consultation.

The Committee for Education noted correspondence of 28 November 2009 from Mr G McGlashan asking the Committee to press the Department to maximise awareness of the Minister's decision to extend the SEN and Inclusion Review consultation until 31 January 2010. The Committee for Education agreed to forward Mr McGlashan's correspondence to the Department of Education for response. The Committee for Education further agreed to release its own Press Release welcoming the SEN and Inclusion Review consultation extension.

The Committee for Education noted a copy of correspondence of 26 November 2009 from a group of barristers to the Minister of Education on equality and human rights issues arising from the SEN and Inclusion Review consultation. The Committee for Education agreed to write to the Department of Education to request that it is copied the Minister's response to this. In addition, the Committee for Education agreed to forward the barristers' letter to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister in light of the equality and human rights issues raised for its consideration.

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The Committee for Education noted correspondence from Ms A Brennan on the SEN and Inclusion Review consultation.

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B. Last Week's Assembly Business

The Assembly was in recess from 12 December 2009 to 3 January 2010.

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C. This Week's Assembly Business

The next Plenary Session is not until 11 January 2010.

Wednesday 6th January 2010

Committee for Employment and Learning

**Briefing from National Autistic Society (Northern Ireland) on the
"Don't Right Me Off" Campaign**

In attendance: Shirelle Stewart, Communications Officer
: Caroline Bogue, Family Support worker
: Jenny McGleave

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D. Written Answers to Questions, Week Ending 18 December 2009

ENTERPRISE, TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Economically Inactive People

Alastair Ross (DUP) asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many people were economically inactive in the East Antrim constituency, in each of the last five years. (AQW 3182/10)

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment: Estimates of economic inactivity at constituency level are sourced to the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey annual dataset and are only available on a consistent basis from 2005 onwards. The table below provides the estimated¹ total number of economically inactive people in the East Antrim Parliamentary Constituency Area, aged 16 & over and of working age, from 2005 – 2008.

Number of economically inactive² persons in the East Antrim Constituency, 2005 - 2008

Year	Total Economically Inactive Aged 16+	Total Economically Inactive Working Age ³
2005	21,000	9,000
2006	22,000	10,000
2007	26,000	11,000
2008	30,000	14,000

¹ The LFS is a sample survey and the estimate has an associated degree of sampling error. In particular, estimates at constituency level are based on relatively small sample sizes and are subject to a higher degree of sampling variability. They should, therefore, be treated with caution.

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2 The economically inactive are those people who are neither in employment nor unemployed. This group includes, for example, all those who are looking after the family/home, retired, sick/disabled or in full-time education etc.

3 Working age refers to females aged 16 to 59 and males aged 16 to 64.

Source: NI Labour Force Survey (LFS), January - December annual dataset.

HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Occupational Therapists Issuing Wheelchairs

Ian McCrea (DUP) asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what criteria are in place for Occupational Therapists issuing wheelchairs to patients. (AQW 3212/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is committed to the provision of a person-centred, accessible, responsive and equitable wheelchair service to every individual in Northern Ireland who is assessed by an Occupational Therapist who confirms the need for a wheelchair.

Comprehensive regional access criteria and policy guidelines for wheelchair provision has been developed in partnership with users and professionals. This guidance will be formally signed off by the NI Occupational Therapy Managers in early 2010 for implementation across the province.

Multiple Sclerosis

Lord Morrow (DUP) asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety if provision will be made at South Tyrone Hospital for specialist treatment and physiotherapy for people in that area

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diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, given that they currently have to travel to Forster Green Hospital in Belfast for treatment. (AQW 3244/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety understands that patients with Multiple Sclerosis in the South Tyrone region have access to a variety of physiotherapy treatment delivered both in hospital and community settings. Inevitably patients with more complex symptoms will need to continue being treated at the Regional Specialist Centre provided at Forster Green, Musgrave Park and the Royal Victoria hospitals.

However, from November 2009 a specialist Multiple Sclerosis clinic has commenced in Craigavon Area Hospital and the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety anticipates that a number of patients who currently travel to Belfast for treatment will now be accommodated at this new clinic.

Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease

Jim Shannon (DUP) asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of recent media reports highlighting the increase in the number of people diagnosed with dementia and Alzheimer's disease, what steps he is taking to assist people diagnosed with these conditions. (AQW 3254/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: 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. The Strategy will assess the current level of service provision for people with dementia and their carers, and, drawing on best practice here and elsewhere, make recommendations which will aim to significantly improve the services and support arrangements currently available.

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Alzheimer's Disease

Jim Shannon (DUP) asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are currently diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease; and how much funding is available to assist these people. (AQW 3255/10)

Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety: It is estimated that there are approximately 16,000 people living with dementia in Northern Ireland. At 31 March 2009 a total of 9,971 patients were registered by their GP as having dementia; these registers are maintained by GPs as part of the Quality & Outcomes Framework (QOF).

An exact cost of health and social care services provided for people with dementia in Northern Ireland cannot be obtained because people with dementia often have other health and social care needs which are also being met; and people with dementia often use services which are not earmarked as being specifically for people with dementia.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Easy Bus Service Bangor

Alex Easton (DUP) asked the Minister for Regional Development why his Department is withdrawing funding for the Easy Bus service in Bangor for older people and people with disabilities. (AQW 3231/10)

Minister for Regional Development: Currently there are two Easibus vehicles operating in Bangor, only one of which is supported by the Department for Regional Development through the Transport Programme for People with Disabilities.

The decision to withdraw these services was taken by Translink in discussion with the Department. I am told by Translink that the

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number of passengers using these services is low and that Translink considers that it is not an efficient use of resources to continue these non commercial services.

Easibus services were introduced in Bangor in 2000 to provide accessible local transport within the area. They therefore pre-date the substantial improvements in accessibility of local services which have resulted from investment in the upgrading of the Ulsterbus fleet. They also pre-date the Door-to-Door Transport services for older and disabled people which have been available in the Bangor and Holywood areas since February 2007.

Easibus Service, Bangor

Alex Easton (DUP) asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of running the Easibus service in Bangor. (AQW 3543/10)

Minister for Regional Development: For the financial year ending in March 2009 the operating cost to Translink of providing Easibus in Bangor was £69,746.70, to which DRD contributed £38,360.69.

Easibus Service, Bangor

Alex Easton (DUP) asked the Minister for Regional Development how many passengers used the Easibus service in Bangor in the last financial year. (AQW 3544/10)

Minister for Regional Development: In the 2008/09 financial year, the four Easibus services in Bangor had the following passenger journeys:

- Ashbury 6,532
- Kilcooley 4,904
- Rathmore 8,193
- Groomsport 3,657

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Easibus Service, Bangor

Alex Easton (DUP) asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the funding arrangements for the Easibus service in Bangor. (AQW 3545/10)

Minister for Regional Development:

The Department for Regional Development provides funding to Translink to assist it to operate two of the four Easibus services in Bangor. The Department reviews statistical information on the operating costs and patronage of the services on a monthly basis and provides Translink with up to 55 percent of its operating costs, depending on the level of fare revenue received. In relation to the two other Easibus services, Translink has informed me that from 2001 until 2005 it received support from tenants of Bloomfield Shopping Centre to meet 60 percent of costs. This support has now ended and Translink has been meeting the costs of these two services from within its own resources.

Works and Repairs to Railway Stations

Sam Gardiner (UUP) asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) what criteria Translink/NI Railways use to prioritise work and repairs to railway stations; (ii) what input his Department has to the decisions; and (iii) whether meeting the statutory requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 is the main priority in the refurbishment and upgrading of railway stations. (AQW 3578/10)

Minister for Regional Development: (i) When prioritising work at railway stations Translink consider the following parameters:

1. safety or legislative compliance issues;
2. asset condition;
3. business efficiency; and
4. strategic requirements.

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There are also external influences that need to be considered including local development and funding opportunities.

In addition, these parameters need to be balanced within the capital funding allocations. Budget availability will impact on timings and priorities accordingly.

(ii) It is Translink's responsibility to prioritise capital projects including any repairs to railway stations, however the Department for Regional Development must assess and agree Translink's Corporate Plan and associated planning assumptions which includes consideration of the capital programme. Prior to being taken forward any capital project must be subjected to the economic appraisal process and be brought to the department for approval. Subject to the availability of funding and the necessary approval by the Department for Regional Development and DFP the project will be able to proceed.

(iii) Railway station and rail halt developments are driven by safety or legislative compliance which will include meeting the statutory requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. However with limits on the amount of funds allocated to public transport, the availability of capital funding will invariably affect timings and priorities. Consideration too must be given to the maximisation of benefits for a given cost and in some cases that means it is only sensible to slip certain works to enable them to be incorporated as part of a larger development project further down the line. Consideration of the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 is an important factor to be considered in all rail investment including trains, halts and stations.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Grants

Simon Hamilton (DUP) asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the amount of investment in (i) Egan contracts; (ii) renovation

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grants; (iii) disabled facilities grants; (iv) repair grants; (v) replacement grants; (vi) home repair assistance grants; and (vii) HMO grants, in each of the last 10 years. (AQW 3229/10)

Minister for Social Development (Ms M Ritchie): The tables below provide the following information:

- Table 1 details the Housing Executive's Egan Contract spend for the period 2000/01 to 2009/10.
- Table 2 details Housing Executive Grants expenditure (by Grant type) from 2000/01 to 2009/10.

Table 1 - Housing Executive Egan Contract Spend

Period	Planned Maintenance Schemes **	Heating ***
	(£k)	(£k)
2000/01	n/a	0
2001/02	n/a	331
2002/03	n/a	1,094
2003/04	n/a	1,919
2004/05	n/a	12,984
2005/06	n/a	16,155
2006/07	n/a	14,000
2007/08	n/a	10,886
2008/09	19,186	8,665
2009/10*	21,140	10,788

* This is the current forecast for 2009/10 but may be liable to change if additional funding becomes available.

** Egan arrangements commenced 1st April 2008

*** Egan arrangements commenced 1st June 200

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Table 2 - Housing Executive Grants Expenditure 2000/01 to 2009/10

Grant type	2000/01 £k	2001/02 £k	2002/03 £k	2003/04 £k	2004/05 £k	2005/06 £k	2006/07 £k	2007/08 £k	2008/09 £k	2009/10* £k
Renovation	15246	16172	15284	15221	16306	13517	11801	12043	11059	9254
Disabled Facilities	7244	6792	8542	8572	10075	11027	12920	13571	14432	17574
Repair	2745	2262	2411	2138	2078	1341	1214	1174	916	1193
Group Repair	1281	990	1497	1984	2486	2713	3119	3394	2501	1713
Replacement	10299	9911	9501	7121	6991	5499	4628	3756	3449	2720
Home Repair Assistance + Minor Works	1810	2040	2177	2446	3256	6843	7290	9061	6633	4953
HMO	3373	3805	3545	3728	4451	4666	3357	1871	1509	2447

Note:

* This is a forecast for 2009/10

Benefit Claim Forms

Simon Hamilton (DUP) asked the Minister for Social Development the average back office cost of processing benefit claim forms for social security claimants.(AQW 3367/10)

Minister for Social Development: The table below details, for each benefit, the average back office cost of processing benefit claim forms for social security claimants once a new claim has been received:

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Benefit	Average Cost (£)
Income Support	36.06
Job Seekers Allowance	26.14
Attendance Allowance	32.17
Carers Allowance	21.35
Disability Living Allowance	27.21
Industrial Injuries Branch	57.41
Incapacity Benefit	16.39
State Pension	38.47
State Pension Credit	58.31
Employment & Support Allowance	42.53

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