

## **NICCY Summary: NI Assembly Written Answers for Week Ending 31<sup>st</sup> January 2014**

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## **Signature Programme on Numeracy and Literacy**

Mr Kinahan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the schools that will receive teaching assistance as part of the Signature Programme on numeracy and literacy; and when the assistance will commence.

(AQW 25953/11-15)

### **Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister):**

The Department of Education is taking forward the Delivering Social Change Signature Programme to provide additional literacy and numeracy support within primary and post primary schools, announced by us on 10 October 2012. As a result of these measures, a total of 233.3 full-time equivalent graduated teachers, who are not currently in work, are being recruited to deliver tuition to children in primary and postprimary schools who are currently struggling to achieve educational standards. Recruitment of the teachers, funded under the Delivering Social Change Signature Programme, is ongoing. A list of Primary Schools due to receive extra teaching support under the Delivering Social Change Signature Programme on Literacy and Numeracy has been placed in the Assembly Library. A list of Post Primary Schools due to receive extra teaching support under the Delivering Social Change Signature Programme on Literacy and Numeracy has been placed in the Assembly Library.

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## **Together: Building a United Community**

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to the 100 summer camps to be delivered in Together: Building a United Community, to detail the purpose of the camps; and whether there is a planned year round engagement with the young people involved in the camps.

(AQW 27775/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The preparation work for the planned summer camps is currently in a co-design phase with voluntary and community groups, external stakeholders and other interested groups. We plan to deliver a number of pilot summer camps in Summer 2014 well in advance of the 2015 target set out in the Together: Building a United Community Strategy.

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## **Bright Start**

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the

- (i) funding available for the early actions contained within Bright Start; and
- (ii) budget to implement the actions of the childcare strategy, when it is released in 2014.

(AQW 28246/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The £12 million Executive Childcare Fund was put in place in 2011. Its remaining funds are available to support the key first actions.

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## **Early Actions of Bright Start**

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the rationale for choosing a figure of 5,000 to 7,000 school aged childcare places, which are contained within the early actions of Bright Start; and what further actions are being taken to sustain the current level of funding for childcare within the voluntary and community sector.

(AQW 28301/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** The principal rationale for Bright Start aiming to sustain or create up to 7,000 school age childcare places is that school age childcare is the single biggest area of unmet childcare need. That was made clear by parents and stakeholders during consultation. The places are intended to bring about a measurable increase in services and, thereby, begin to close the gap in current provision. However, they are just a start. Work will continue under the full Bright Start Strategy. We plan to prepare this over the coming months and for it to run until 2020. Preparation will include identifying any additional actions that might be required.

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## Equality Coalition

Ms Fearon asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their discussions with the Equality Coalition.

(AQO 5008/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** Junior Minister Bell and Junior Minister McCann attended a Biannual meeting with the conveners of the Equality Coalition on Wednesday 6 November. A range of current issues was discussed including: OFMDFM's equality co-ordinating role; Together:Building a United Community Strategy legislation; Delivering Social Change/Social Investment Fund and Anti-Poverty Strategy and OFMDFM led equality strategies.

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## Planning, Commissioning and Delivery of Children's Services

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any policy or legislation that their Department is developing which is aimed at improving the integration of planning, commissioning and delivery of children's services; and on which date they will be published.

(AQW 29827/11-15)

**Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:** As the Member will be aware from the answers to previous questions, the planning, commissioning and delivery of children's services is primarily a matter for the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety. He may wish to note however that a new strategy 'Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People' is being developed and is currently out for public consultation. This strategy will provide an integrated policy framework encompassing policy on children and young people, including child poverty and children's rights.

The 'Delivering Social Change for Children and Young People' strategy proposes a more focused approach to outcomes and more collaborative working across Government and key stakeholders to deliver better outcomes for children and young people. The consultation document is available on our website at [www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/dsc-children-young-people](http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/dsc-children-young-people). The final strategy will be published in March 2014.

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## **Programme Board for the Lisanelly Project**

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to outline the

- (i) Terms of Reference; and
- (ii) composition of the Programme Board for the Lisanelly project.

(AQW 30007/11-15)

**Mr O’Dowd:** My Department is in the final stages of reconstituting the Programme Board for the Lisanelly Shared Education Campus with the intention of holding the initial meeting in February. When the composition of the Board has been confirmed and the Terms of Reference agreed the information will be posted on the Department’s website.

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## **Stakeholder Consultation Group for the Lisanelly Project**

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to outline the

- (i) Terms of Reference; and
- (ii) composition of the Stakeholder Consultation Group for the Lisanelly project.

(AQW 30008/11-15)

**Mr O’Dowd:** My Department is in the final stages of reconstituting the Programme Board for the Lisanelly Shared Education Campus with a view to holding the initial meeting in February. The Programme Board will consider the Terms of Reference and composition of the Stakeholder Consultation Group moving forward. When this has been determined the information will be posted on the Department’s website.

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## **Delivering Social Change Literacy and Numeracy Project**

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 28475/11-15, how many teaching posts in the Delivering Social Change Literacy and Numeracy Project are yet to be filled.

(AQW 30011/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** As at 23 January 2014, 27.5 FTE posts remain to be filled. In the primary sector this comprises 1 FTE post (5 schools requiring a teacher for 1 day per week) and in the post-primary sector 26.5 FTE posts (12 full-time and 6 part-time English posts, 10 full-time and 3 part-time mathematics posts). The recruitment process for these outstanding posts is currently underway.

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## **Priorities for Youth**

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update on the implementation of Priorities for Youth.

(AQW 30072/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** Following publication of Priorities for Youth in October 2013, implementation is being taken forward in partnership with the statutory and voluntary sectors on a phased basis with full implementation anticipated by April 2016.

A key priority in Priorities for Youth is the establishment of a Regional Advisory Group which will involve a range of stakeholders with interest and expertise in youth service policy and delivery. Work is in hand to take this forward so that the Group can be established as soon as possible. The Group will provide advice to the Education and Skills Authority or the Education and Library Boards/Youth Council in the interim.

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## Priorities for Youth

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact of Priorities for Youth on the work of the Youth Council.

(AQW 30073/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** The Youth Council will continue to carry out its statutory duties as outlined in the Youth Service (NI) Order 1989 until the establishment of ESA. Under Priorities for Youth, the Youth Council and Education and Library Boards will work collaboratively to ensure that youth services continue to be provided in line with assessed need. Officials have recently held discussions with the Youth Council and Education and Library Boards in relation to the delivery of key actions arising from Priorities for Youth. I expect the Youth Council to play an integral part in the delivery of the actions arising from Priorities for Youth.

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## Pre-School Places in the 2014/15 Academic Year

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of need for pre-school places in the 2014/15 academic year; and how many additional places will be made available to meet this need.

(AQW 30083/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** The Executive's Programme for Government Commitment is to provide at least one year of pre-school education for every for every child whose parents want it. During the 2013/14 admissions process, 99.8% of children, whose parents engaged with the admissions process to the end, were offered a funded pre-school place. The Pre-School Education Advisory Group (PEAG) in each Education and Library Board manages the Pre-School Education Programme (PSEP) at local level and, as in previous years, the Department has worked with the PEAGs to assess demand for funded pre-school education places for the 2014/15 academic year. As a result, funding has been made available for 24,159 pre-school places in statutory and voluntary/private pre-school settings. This is an increase on the previous year. In addition, recognising the need for pre-school places in the area, I have recently approved a further 52 places in Dungannon. The position will be monitored and should pressures arise I will consider how best to respond.

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## **Looked After Children: Special Schools**

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Education how many looked after children attend special schools; and what percentage of these children are in

- (i) foster care;
- (ii) kinship care; and
- (iii) residential care.

(AQW 30094/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** Data relating to looked after children are collected via the annual school census. The type of care received by looked after children has been collected for the first time in 2013/14. This data will be available at the end of February 2014.

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## **Primary Integrating/Enriching Education Programme**

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail his plans for

- (i) continuing the legacy of the Primary Integrating/Enriching Education programme, along with other shared education projects; and
- (ii) using the project as a pilot to encourage further shared education.

(AQW 30105/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** As I indicated in my statement to the Assembly on 22 October 2013, I am committed to delivering the Programme for Government commitments to advance shared education through a variety of actions. My Department is currently working with the Office of the First and deputy First Minister and the Atlantic Philanthropies on a funding programme to support shared education.

The Primary Integrating/Enriching Education (PIEE) programme, along with two others, was subject to evaluation by the Shared Education Learning Forum (SELF), with the Education and Training Inspectorate taking forward evaluations of a number of other shared education projects. Lessons learnt from these evaluations are being taken into account in developing the new funding programme, thus building on the legacy of the Sharing in Education Programme. The PIEE project has already been used as an example of shared education and my Department will continue to use this and other similar projects to encourage further shared education.

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## **Pupils with Special Education Needs in the Lurgan Area**

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education whether there are plans to provide a facility for post-primary pupils with Special Education Needs in the Lurgan area.

(AQW 30138/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** Assessment of the need for special educational needs (SEN) provision and the delivery of services to meet this need are the responsibility of each Education and Library Board (ELB). The Southern Education and Library Board SELB has confirmed that it has no current plans to submit a development proposal to the Department of Education for a post-primary facility for pupils with SEN in the Lurgan area. I can, however, confirm that SELB has lodged an application to my Department under the Schools' Enhancement Programme for an extension to Ceara Special School to meet anticipated need. An economic appraisal has been submitted and is currently being assessed by officials.

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## **School Crossing Patrols**

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education whether his Department makes resources available to schools to secure the services of a school crossing patrol; and what opportunities exist for schools to address road safety concerns outside the school gates.

(AQW 30213/11-15)

**Mr O'Dowd:** Funding provided within the Department of Education overall Block Grant to the Education and Library Boards is used for the purposes of determining the need for, and, if required, the deployment of school crossing patrols.

The revised curriculum which has been taught to all pupils of compulsory school age in grant-aided schools since 2009/10 provides teachers with a number of opportunities to cover the issue of road safety. For example through their delivery of the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) Area of Learning at primary level and the Learning for Life and Work (LLW) Area of Learning at post-primary level pupils are provided with the opportunity to learn about road safety. As with all aspects of the curriculum, the specifics of what is taught, and how it is taught, under each Area of Learning is a matter for each teacher/school.

The Department of the Environment, which has statutory responsibility for road safety, has produced a number of road safety resources and lesson plans which are available to all schools through the C2k elearning platform, Fronter. Schools may also approach the Department of the Environment to explore further their local traffic conditions and the suitability of introducing a range of safety measures.

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### Looked After Children Attending University

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline any specific packages of support his Department provides for looked after children attending university. (AQW 30080/11-15)

**Dr Farry:** Access to Success, my Department's regional strategy for widening participation in higher education, has identified care leavers as an under-represented group in higher education.

My Department makes funding available to all higher education providers, including the Further Education Regional Colleges, to support various outreach initiatives in schools and the community, which are targeted at increasing representation in higher education, including by children from a care background. In addition, my Department pays an annual financial premium to support the extra costs to higher education institutions of recruiting and retaining students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In academic year 2013/14 this premium amounts to £1.34m.

Access to Success has introduced a new Widening Access & Participation Plan (WAPP) reporting process, within which all higher education providers must demonstrate their clear commitment to supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds into and through higher education. Institutions are specifically required to target financial support to under-represented groups, including children from a care background. This support may take the form of bursaries and other direct financial support such as fee waivers, and free or discounted accommodation. It will also include post-entry support activities such as mentoring and additional tutoring to ensure the students' progression and success. For example, the University of Ulster has committed to providing a support package for care leavers, which includes assistance with the higher education application process, a bursary of £1,000 per annum, access to year round accommodation and

increased pastoral care.

Under its “Fostering Aspiration” programme it will support a wide range of projects and activities that look to raise the educational aspiration of care leavers. In addition, the University has joined forces with The Fostering Network Northern Ireland and the Health and Social Care Board to launch the “Tick the Box” awareness raising campaign. This initiative aims to encourage young people who have spent time in care to self report that fact on their Universities and Colleges Admissions Service application form to ensure that they get the extra support that they may need while at university.

My Department has been strongly supportive of the work that has been done by ButtleUK with all higher education providers in Northern Ireland to provide a framework to improve and accredit support for looked after children in higher education.

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### **Looked After Children: Education**

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail what specific policies and programmes of support are available to facilitate looked after children to avail of Further Education.

(AQW 30081/11-15)

**Dr Farry:** Whilst my Department does not have specific policies relating to looked after children in further education, it provided financial assistance to enable two colleges, Belfast Metropolitan College and North West Regional College, to attain the Buttle UK (FE) Quality Mark for Care Leavers, as part of a pilot programme for the award in April 2011.

Since then, Southern Regional College and South Eastern Regional College have attained the Buttle UK Quality Mark in September 2013. The remaining colleges, Northern Regional College and South West College, are currently working towards achieving this quality mark.

The Quality Mark provides a set of standards and guidelines to ensure appropriate action is taken to raise the aspirations of care leavers in relation to accessing further education provision. This is achieved through:

- outreach activities in local communities;
- developing effective links with key organisations;
- adapting application arrangements to ensure that the additional needs of care leavers are met; and
- providing the necessary support to secure recruitment and retention in further education.

All colleges provide a wide range of support for students from this background in relation to entering, sustaining and achieving in further education.

Pre-enrolment Outreach activities are designed to present the opportunities available in further education, and to highlight the support available to students whilst in provision. These include visiting care homes, regular contact with professional staff in social work teams, Education and Library Boards, the Careers Service and voluntary sector organisations such as Include Youth.

Colleges maintain close links with feeder schools where they deliver information talks. There are also taster sessions and college open days to allow young people to experience colleges at first hand. College literature and websites contain information specifically targeted at looked after children. Enrolment and on provision support, all colleges already have in place, or are working towards implementing, arrangements to identify looked after young people at an early stage. This allows colleges to establish appropriate additional support arrangements for individual students and also provides information on the level of participation by this particular cohort of students.

Colleges provide additional support for students from a care background by designating specific staff to arrange the support required, as well as delivering training and awareness sessions for all staff on the potential additional barriers faced by these students. Students can then be given extra support, if needed, by learning support staff, counsellors and student finance officers.

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## Access Rights of Grandparents

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the current access rights that grandparents have to their grandchildren, including whether there are plans to make amendments to access rights.

(AQW 29979/11-15)

**Mr Hamilton:** Our law does not set out who may or may not have contact with a child. It does, however, allow a court to make a contact order in favour of a named person and that order will detail the contact arrangements. Ordinarily, a grandparent will need the court's permission to make an application for a contact order. In considering whether to grant permission the court will take a number of matters into account, including the applicant's connections with the child. In the coming months I hope to elicit views on the issue of contact, with a view to determining whether any legislative amendments are required.

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## People Diagnosed with Autism

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what resources have been invested to support people diagnosed with autism and their families in North Belfast; and to outline his Department's policies for assisting these families and the charities that support them.

(AQW 29894/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** This information is not available specifically for the North Belfast constituency area. The Belfast HSC Trust has advised that £395k is allocated to provide post-diagnostic interventions by Trust staff within both Children and Adult Autism services. In addition, the Belfast Outcomes Group, mandated by the Children's and Young People's Strategic Partnership, have also invested approximately £120k to assist the voluntary and community sector in Belfast to support children with autism and their families in 2013.

Autism services are underpinned by a range of DHSSPS policies and strategies. The foremost of these is the cross-departmental Autism Strategy (2013 – 2020) and Action Plan (2013 – 2016) which I launched in the Assembly on 14 January 2014. The Strategy and Action Plan document includes a summary of these policies and planned actions.

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## **Autism Strategy 2013-2020 and Action Plan 2013-2016**

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what additional funding will be provided by his Department to support the Autism Strategy 2013-2020 and Action Plan 2013-2016.

(AQW 29895/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** The Health and Social Care Board is investing £500k across 2013-15, to further support Adult ASD-specific service capacity within Health and Social Care Trusts.

Within the Autism Action Plan (2013 – 2016), a key health and social care action is the completion of a regional validation exercise of both the Children and Adult’s Autism Care Pathways, by March 2014. When I review these reports – if areas of specific need are identified – I will consider the appropriate action to take for the delivery of effective Autism Services within Health and Social Care. In addition, my Department has submitted a proposal to have funding approved through the NI Executive’s 2014/15 Government Advertising Programme to deliver a public awareness element of a broader campaign to raise awareness and understanding of autism.

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## High Dependency Cots

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

- (i) how many High Dependency cots are available each Health and Social Care Trust;
- (ii) whether all of the cots are currently available;
- (iii) whether there has been a reduction in number of cots within in the last two years
- (iv) if so, for what reason.

(AQW 29935/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** The number of High Dependency cots which were either occupied or available for use at each Health and Social Care Trust at midnight on 17th January 2014, is given in the table below.

|                      | <b>HSC Trust Cots Occupied</b> | <b>Additional Cots available for use</b> |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>Belfast</b>       | 5                              | 2  |
| <b>Northern</b>      | 2                              | 0  |
| <b>South Eastern</b> | 4                              | 0  |
| <b>Southern</b>      | 1.25*                          | 3  |
| <b>Western</b>       | 4                              | 2  |

Source: Health and Social Care Trusts

\* At midnight on 17th January 2014, Southern HSC Trust had one occupied high dependency cot. In addition to this a level 2 high dependency cot which is designated as a high dependency cot 25% of the time was also occupied. This has been represented in the table above as 1.25 occupied cots.

All Health and Social Care Trusts reported that there has been no reduction in the number of cots within the last two years.

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## Defibrillators

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what training his Department provides to teachers on the use of defibrillators.

(AQW 29972/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety has no statutory responsibility to offer training to individuals or organisations that purchase their own defibrillators. When individuals or organisations purchase a defibrillator ideally they should be advised about training and maintenance of the machine by the supplier. This is an area that has been considered as part of the regional resuscitation strategy for Northern Ireland which is currently out for consultation until the 14 February 2014.

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## Legal Highs

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to list the range of possible health consequences of legal highs.

(AQW 29990/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** Substances referred to as “legal highs” have a psychoactive effect but are not currently covered by the UK-wide Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. However, the term “legal highs” can be misleading, and we therefore refer to them as New Psychoactive Substances. Many of these substances are new and often have no safety or toxicity data. This makes it very difficult to make an assessment of the active chemical in any New Psychoactive Substance and to give an accurate picture of potential side-effects and dangers. Indeed, there are many different types of New Psychoactive Substances – some act like stimulants, others as depressants. In addition, ingredients and effects can change from batch to batch – and when tested some of these substances have been found to contain illegal drugs. However, I have no doubt there is a potential for very serious and potentially tragic consequences for anyone taking any substance that has not been prescribed for them. Users have no way of knowing exactly what they are taking and health risks are likely to range from being out of control and/or passing out, through to increased risk of cardiac arrest and overheating, potentially up to overdose and Death. In addition, these substances can decrease inhibitions, act as a depressant and increase the risk of suicide, self-harm, and poor mental health.

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## Legal Highs

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he is aware of any research which shows a link between the usage of legal highs and illegal drug use.

(AQW 29992/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** My Department has not undertaken or commissioned any research on the links between the usage of so-called “legal highs” and illicit drug use. The term “legal highs” falsely implies that these substances are safe, and are legal for human consumption. They are not necessarily safer than illegal drugs – in some situations their affects can be more devastating. We therefore refer to them as New Psychoactive Substances. Given that this is an emerging issue, and the sensitive/illegal nature of drug consumption, it is difficult to find out detailed information about these substances and their users. However, I am concerned that the availability of these substances, and particularly in “head shops” on our high streets, may help normalise drug misuse within our society. Indeed, these substances may be a “gateway” to the further misuse of drugs. I recently raised this issue with the Home Secretary, setting out my concerns about the accessibility of New Psychoactive Substances and seeking a more robust and consistent approach to addressing this issue across the UK. In response to this, the Home Office has now announced a review of how the UK’s legislative response can be enhanced beyond the existing measures of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. I am pleased that the review will be informed by a range of evidence, including the various international approaches I highlighted to the Home Secretary, including those adopted by the Republic of Ireland, the USA and New Zealand. It is anticipated that this review will be completed by Spring 2014. I believe it is essential that we take a consistent approach across the UK for any efforts to be effective and I welcome the fact that NI will be part of this review.

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## Children with Complex Medical Needs

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether a hospital admittance of a child with complex medical needs automatically triggers a review of their care package.

(AQW 30141/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** The DHSSPS guidance, Developing Services to Children and Young People with Complex Physical Healthcare Needs (2009), sets out an integrated care pathway for the treatment of children and young people with complex healthcare needs, including a planning model which considers the changing needs of these children and their families. Any change in the child's circumstances which may impact upon their care should be assessed and addressed. Therefore, while admittance of a child to hospital may not automatically trigger a review of their care package, when the child is being discharged, an assessment should be made of any possible change in the child's healthcare needs which would impact on the level of care required at home.

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## Autism: Support

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what actions are being taken to support people with autism.

(AQO 5390/11-15)

**Mr Poots:** The Autism Strategy (2013 - 2020) and Action Plan (2013 - 2016), which I launched in the Assembly on 14 January 2014, outlines the Executive's commitment to improving services and support for people with autism and their families, throughout their lives. Key actions for my Department and the HSC include: autism awareness – training for relevant frontline staff and raising awareness via a public campaign;

- enhancing health and wellbeing for people with autism and their families;
- building on existing early intervention and family support services for children, as outlined in the Six Steps of Autism Care Pathway;
- regional validation review of autism care pathways; and
- developing adult ASD-specific service capacity in HSC Trusts.

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## Prevalence of the Use of Legal Highs

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice what discussions he has had with the PSNI to determine the prevalence of the use of legal highs.

(AQW 29996/11-15)

**Mr Ford:** Department of Justice officials have regular discussions with the PSNI and a range of other partner organisations regarding the prevalence of new psychoactive substances, inappropriately known as legal highs. Official surveys on illicit drug prevalence now include questions on such substances in order to gain a greater understanding of the extent of use.

The Department of Justice, DHSSPS, the PSNI, and the Public Health Agency have developed and introduced an informal early warning system – known as the “Drug and Alcohol Monitoring and Information System” (DAMIS) – which seeks to identify new substances or drug trends at an early stage, and provide information and advice to key stakeholders.

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## Criminalisation of the Sale and Distribution of Legal Highs

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the criminalisation of the sale and distribution of legal highs.

(AQW 29997/11-15)

**Mr Ford:** The term “legal highs” can be misleading, and we therefore refer to them as New Psychoactive Substances. While these substances have psychoactive effects they are not currently covered by the UK-wide Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. The legislation associated with the misuse of drugs in Northern Ireland is a reserved matter for Westminster.

In December 2013, in response to the growing concern regarding the adequacy of existing legislation to respond to the challenge presented by new psychoactive substances, the Home Office announced that it would lead a review looking at how the legislative response can be enhanced to maximize its impact and improve the enforcement response. It is anticipated that this review, together with recommendations will be completed by Spring 2014.

It is vitally important that there is a consistent and uniform response to this issue and as the outcome of this review is awaited, my Department continues to engage with key stakeholders to respond to this issue. Most recently, you may be aware that Environmental Health Officers from Belfast City Council, supported by the PSNI, have proactively utilised the General Product Safety Regulations 2005 in responding locally to this issue and I understand that a Court case is currently being progressed.

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## Death Driving

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Justice what actions arose from the multi-agency discussions following the recent incidents of 'death driving' by young people in West Belfast.

(AQO 5405/11-15)

**Mr Ford:** A number of Criminal Justice Agencies, including the PSNI, the Probation Board and the Youth Justice Agency, met with community organisations and local representatives on 6 January 2014 and again on 20 January to discuss the disturbing events that occurred on the Falls Road on New Years Eve. I welcome the involvement and commitment of all those who took part in these multi-agency discussions and would assure the member that my Department remains committed to tackling car crime across Northern Ireland.

In terms of outcomes, the Agencies represented are committed to work in partnership with the local community as they implement a range of operational measures focused on prevention and detection. For example I can advise that the Department of Justice is a partner in an inter-agency project, led by Belfast City Council that aims to build relationships and reach out to disengaged youth in the Lower Falls Area who may be engaged in car crime and anti-social behaviour. The Department has contributed £25,000 to the project.

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## **Domestic Violence**

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice what steps can be taken to increase public awareness of the campaign against domestic violence.

(AQO 5409/11-15)

**Mr Ford:** My Department is fully committed to raising awareness of domestic violence and recently endorsed the PSNI Crimestoppers campaign – “Behind Closed Doors.” The focus of this campaign was to encourage family, friends and neighbours to report in confidence incidents of domestic violence and abuse known to them.

Domestic violence is an unacceptable crime and members should be aware that the Health Minister and I launched a consultation exercise on a new joint domestic and sexual violence and abuse strategy on 15 January. That consultation exercise will run until 11 April and I look forward to receiving the views of the community and especially any comments that victims or their families may wish to make. The “Prevention and Early Intervention” strand of the draft strategy clearly identifies the need to raise awareness and promote zero tolerance to such violence.

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