

NICCY Summary: Written Assembly Questions weeks ending 9 December 2016

Devolving powers from DfC to local government

<p>AQO 842/16- 21</p>	<p>Mrs Jenny Palmer (UUP - Lagan Valley)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister for Communities to outline the opportunities that exist to devolve powers from his Department to local government.</p> <p>My priority is to ensure that the functions that my Department is responsible for are delivered in the most effective and efficient manner.</p> <p>I chair the Partnership Panel on behalf of the Executive, where I formally meet with both NILGA and representatives of the local authorities. That forum allows a direct connection with local government, and provides a mechanism to explore any opportunities that may exist to devolve powers from my or other Executive Departments to local government, should that offer a more effective and efficient mode of delivery.</p> <p>As was previously the case, any transfer of functions would, of course, require the consideration and agreement of the Executive.</p>
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DfC engagement with LGBT groups

<p>AQO 839/16- 21</p>	<p>Ms Kellie Armstrong (APNI - Strangford)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister for Communities to outline his engagement with lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender advocacy groups since May 2016.</p> <p>Given the extensive remit of my Department, it is not always possible for me to engage personally with the many stakeholders and interest groups across society. My officials have met with representatives from LGB&T groups as</p>
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		<p>part of the consultation on the draft Programme for Government.</p> <p>I have received one invitation to meet with representatives from the LGB&T community since taking up my role as Minister for Communities. Regrettably I was unable to take up that offer on that occasion due to other pressing diary commitments. I am however due to meet with representatives from The Rainbow Project early in the New Year.</p> <p>I have made it clear that when it comes to engagement, my door is always open.</p>
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Update on Welfare Reform

<p>AQO 833/16- 21</p>	<p>Mr Andy Allen (UUP - East Belfast)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister for Communities for an update on the implementation of Welfare Reform.</p> <p>Substantial and very real progress has been made over the last year on the implementation of Welfare Reform. As the Member may be aware, the Welfare Reform and Work (Northern Ireland) Order 2016 received Royal Assent on 12 October 2016. This means that all the Primary legislation needed to implement Welfare Reform in Northern Ireland is now in place.</p> <p>A number of the bigger Welfare Reforms, including Personal Independence Payments and the Benefit Cap have already been successfully introduced.</p> <p>The new Finance Support Service went live last week. Its telephone application process allows customers to access the service at a time and place that suits them. Providing an immediate response to urgent financial need. The time limiting of contributory Employment Support Allowance also came into effect last week.</p>
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		<p>Detailed timetables are in place to ensure that the outstanding welfare reforms will commence over the next ten month period, culminating in the introduction of Universal Credit from September 2017</p> <p>Equally significant progress has been made in ensuring that the mitigation schemes recommended by the Evason Working Group following the Fresh Start Agreement are in place. These payments are designed to provide additional financial support for vulnerable families (both in and out of work) who will be impacted by the introduction of welfare changes. An estimated 15,000 claimants will be receiving Welfare Supplementary Payments by March 2017.</p>
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Impact of changes to social security for those with dependent children

<p>AQW 8284/16- 21</p>	<p>Mr Gerry Carroll (PBPA - West Belfast)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister for Communities to outline the impact assessments carried out prior to an adverse decision being taken or a financial sanction being imposed on social security claimants with dependent children.[Priority Written]</p> <p>A decision maker, on behalf of the department makes each decision by considering all the evidence, establishing the facts and applying the law, including any relevant case law, in each case. Where legislation specifies or implies discretion, the decision maker's judgement must be reasonable and made with unbiased discretion. Whilst the claimant's family circumstances are not directly relevant to the decision, a hardship award may be considered if the claimant shows that they, or a specified member of their family, would suffer hardship if an award was not made. The primary legislation that gives the power to apply sanctions and award Hardship Payments is: The Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015 www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/welfare-changes-overview Other references which are available in the public domain are:</p>
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		<p>Social Security Benefit Fraud Sanction Policy www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/social-security-benefit-fraud-sanction-policy DMG Volume 9 Chapter 53 www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/decision-makers-guide-volume-9 DMG Volume 6 Chapter 34 www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/decision-makers-guide-volume-6 DMG Volume 6 Chapter 35 www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/decision-makers-guide-volume-6 DMG Volume 1 Chapter 05 www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/decision-makers-guide-volume-1</p>
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Reducing number of families presented to the NIHE as homeless

AQW 6911/16- 21	Mr Roy Beggs (UUP - East Antrim)	<p>To ask the Minister for Communities pursuant to AQW 6284/16-21, to outline any proactive action he is taking to reduce the number of families with children presented to the NIHE as homeless.</p> <p>For 2016/17, over £35 million pounds has been made available to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to work with the voluntary sector to prevent homelessness and to provide vital support to those people, including those with families, who find themselves facing homelessness.</p> <p>The Housing Executive has advised me that it currently provides funding for 27 accommodation based and 8 floating supporting schemes for homeless families with children at a cost of 4.7 million pounds per annum. These schemes are delivered by 11 service providers (including the Housing Executive) and provide a total of 858 units for homeless families with children throughout Northern</p>
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		<p>Ireland.</p> <p>In the draft Programme for Government (PfG) I have committed to a number of proactive actions to tackle homelessness including for those with families. These include building 9,600 new social homes, supporting 3,750 first-time buyers to purchase a new home and ensuring that the private rented sector is a good housing option for everyone including families.</p> <p>In addition this year I am investing almost £1 million in housing advice services for mortgage debt and other housing advice. The Housing Executive seeks to take proactive action in reducing the number of families with children who present as homeless to them through a number of different measures.</p> <p>The current Homelessness Strategy deals with a range of client groups, including families, while the Housing Options approach currently being piloted by the Housing Executive seeks to assist families in preventing the need to present as homeless and find sustainable housing solutions.</p>
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Gritting outside rural schools

<p>AQW 7683/16- 21</p>	<p>Mr Jim Allister (TUV - North Antrim)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister for Infrastructure whether he will introduce a policy of gritting outside rural schools during winter months.</p> <p>Following the severe wintry conditions experienced at the start of December 2008, the then Committee for Regional Development requested that an examination was carried out in relation to the winter service operational response to areas around rural schools.</p> <p>The outworking of this examination resulted in the introduction of priority “secondary” salting and of enhanced communication</p>
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		<p>arrangements, to the 46 rural schools most affected by weather conditions throughout the winter of 2008/09.</p> <p>The policy which is maintained at a local level by TransportNI Section offices takes on board local weather conditions and has the flexibility to add other schools as conditions dictate throughout the winter period. At the same time the criteria for the provision of grit/salt piles and salt bins was also amended so that these can now be provided to affected schools, if requested.</p> <p>I can confirm that this amended policy which prioritises such schools will be in operation again this winter.</p> <p>I am therefore satisfied with current arrangements and have no plans to alter the current policy relating to the winter service operational response around rural schools.</p>
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Ensuring young people with additional needs have access to suitable further education

<p>AQO 859/16- 21</p>	<p>Ms Carla Lockhart (DUP - Upper Bann)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister for the Economy how his Department will ensure that young people with additional needs have access to suitable Further Education.</p> <p>My Department is committed to ensuring access to suitable Further Education for all individuals, including young people with additional needs, through a range of educational provision, targeted initiatives and funding.</p> <p>This includes the delivery of FE provision in community settings, entitlement framework provision in which school pupils attend FE colleges, liaison between FE colleges, local schools, the Careers Service and other relevant professionals to ensure young people are aware of the opportunities and support available in FE.</p>
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		<p>There is an Additional Support Fund to provide the support necessary for students with learning difficulties and disabilities to access FE, financial support specifically for young parents with childcare responsibilities and additional financial support for students who are experiencing financial difficulties through FE Awards and the Hardship Fund.</p> <p>In addition, my Department is implementing the FE ‘Further Education Means Success’, a key theme of which is Social Inclusion. The Social Inclusion Project will focus on identifying barriers which inhibit participation in FE and how the sector can work in partnership with other organisations to overcome barriers and strengthen pathways to FE at a higher level.</p>
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Support by schools and youth service for transgender young people

<p>AQO 871/16- 21</p>	<p>Ms Clare Bailey (GPNI - South Belfast)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education to outline the guidance his Department has issued to schools and youth service providers to better enable them to support transgender and non-binary gender young people.</p> <p>Under the Department’s I-Matter programme, a range of posters, leaflets and diary inserts have been produced for use by schools. These provide information and advice on a range of 20 subjects of concern to young people including ‘Sexual Identity’.</p> <p>The ‘iMatter’ Programme, as I’m sure you are aware, is the overarching vehicle for promoting pupils’ emotional health and wellbeing and addresses how the entire school community should be engaged in promoting resilient emotional health for all pupils, what support systems are available for vulnerable pupils and what support is available to schools in the event of a crisis. The Programme aims to support a school in integrating its individual policies and support systems in a consistent and coherent way. The leaflets and posters provide links and contact details to a</p>
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		range of organisations in Northern Ireland that offer specific advice and support to children and young people, their parents, schools and other education settings
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Waiting lists for children to be assessed for a statement of special educational needs

AQO 866/16- 21	Mr Keith Buchanan (DUP - Mid Ulster)	<p>To ask the Minister of Education how many children are waiting to be assessed for a statement of special educational needs.</p> <p>As allowed by statute, where the Education Authority (EA) decides to proceed with a statutory assessment of special educational needs (SEN), it will have 10 weeks to conduct the assessment.</p> <p>The EA has advised that, as at 29 November 2016, 1548 children were awaiting completion of their statutory assessment. This figure is based on the number of children where the EA has agreed to commence a statutory assessment and advice has been sought from a range of professionals to inform whether the Authority will make a statement of SEN.</p>
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Future of pre-school SEN home teaching

AQO 864/16- 21	Mr Robin Swann (UUP - North Antrim)	<p>To ask the Minister of Education for an update on the future of pre-school special educational needs home teaching.</p> <p>The statutory responsibility for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) rests with schools, and the Education Authority (EA) which is the body responsible under special education legislation for identifying, assessing and in appropriate cases, making provision for children with SEN.</p> <p>It is recognised that for young pre-school children with SEN access</p>
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		<p>to a home based learning programme may provide the most appropriate help. The EA provides this type of support through its SEN pre-school home teaching service.</p> <p>The EA is currently considering the arrangements for its SEN pre-school home teaching service and its Early Years SEN Service. Work is in progress to create interim management arrangements for a single Early Years' SEN Service, which will include pre-school home teaching. The EA has confirmed that an interim regional manager has been appointed and has begun the process of moving towards a single service entity.</p> <p>The EA is working to ensure that appropriate intervention can be accessed consistently across the Authority, for those children who require these services.</p>
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School starting age for children

<p>AQW 7989/16- 21</p>	<p>Mr Richie McPhillips (SDLP - Fermanagh and South Tyrone)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education (i) for his assessment of the issue that not all children are ready to start formal schooling at four years of age; (ii) to detail how parental concerns regarding their child not being ready to start school are addressed in the new guidance on school starting age; and (iii) whether he plans to introduce any flexibility on school starting ages in the future.</p> <p>I accept that some parents, particularly those of summer born children, feel strongly that it would be in their child's best interests not to start school at four years of age. I am also aware that a significant amount of research has been carried out, in England and elsewhere, on the issue of whether a later start contributes to improved outcomes for children, and that a wealth of evidence is available on both</p>
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		<p>sides of the debate.</p> <p>The Education Authority’s guidance provides advice to parents on the issues they need to consider as their child approaches school starting age and on the curriculum at foundation stage. It also provides clarity for parents and schools on what is possible under the current arrangements.</p> <p>I am aware that a consultation on proposals to provide some flexibility on school starting age took place during the previous mandate. I am currently considering the way forward on this issue.</p>
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Minimising children’s exposure to electromagnetic radiation

<p>AQW 7867/16- 21</p>	<p>Mrs Rosemary Barton (UUP - Fermanagh and South Tyrone)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education to outline the steps that are taken when (i) creating learning spaces; and (ii) installing new equipment in order to minimise children's exposure to electromagnetic radiation.</p> <p>When installing electrical equipment as part of the building services infrastructure for schools, the installation is primarily governed by the relevant British Standard for each particular item. All electrical equipment must comply with the Electrical Equipment Safety Regulations 1994, which aims to ensure that equipment is safe when utilised for its intended function. As such, equipment must carry a “CE Mark” and must be installed to the manufacturer’s guidelines.</p> <p>The Education Authority (EA) is committed to encouraging and supporting the use of new digital technologies in schools and the Education Network contract provides all schools with a modern, networked ICT infrastructure. While the majority of the equipment provided as a core element of the service</p>
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		<p>continues to be connected through a cabled network, the strategy to enable schools to significantly enhance the levels of pupil access, by either providing school purchased devices or allowing pupils to bring their Own smartphones, netbooks or tablet devices, has required that the cabled networks be supplemented with Wi-Fi connectivity throughout every school. This reflects the current advances in technology where all mobile and portable devices are now Wi-Fi enabled by default and Wi-Fi services are becoming increasingly available in homes and public spaces.</p> <p>Of course the health and safety of children and staff is of paramount importance to the EA and advice from the Health Protection Agency (HPA) and the International Commission on Non-ionising Radiation Protection (ICNRP) is constantly monitored. The current position being taken by the HPA is that radiation exposure levels from laptops and wireless access devices is low in classroom situations and should not constitute a reason to discourage their use.</p> <p>The decision to use Wi-Fi functionality can, however, be taken at the individual school level where wireless access points can be switched off without adversely impacting on the functioning of the cabled workstations.</p>
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Cost of a universal Sure Start programme

<p>AQW 7735/16- 21</p>	<p>Mr Steven Agnew (GPNI - North Down)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education pursuant to AQO 715/16-21, to outline (i) how he arrived at his figure for the additional cost of a universal Sure Start programme; (ii) how; and (iii) why this figure differs from the £36.9m per annum estimated by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action.</p> <p>(i) Sure Start is delivered in the 25% most disadvantaged areas in Northern Ireland, with current investment of around £25m p.a. As I said during my response to the follow up question to AQO 715/16-21 this is an estimate and is based on a direct extrapolation of the current level of funding. Costs to extend services by a further 75% could require additional funding of around £70m to £75m p.a. to provide 100% coverage.</p> <p>(ii) The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) estimated figure of £36.9m is based on a 'cost per child' (£658.11) figure, multiplied by NICVA's estimated number of children (56,095) that would take up services which they predict as 91% of the eligible cohort. However, Sure Start does not operate on the basis of 91% coverage.</p> <p>(iii) The Sure Start budget allocations are not calculated on a per capita (cost per child) basis. Rather, they are calculated, following full economic evaluation, on the financial need of each of the 39 Sure Start projects to deliver the service needed in their locality. The Independent Review of Sure Start acknowledged that Sure Start is not funded on a per capita basis, although the review team used cost per child as a proxy for comparison purposes. Each project budget takes account of the many variants which can impact service delivery costs including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location; Rurality; Number of eligible children in catchment area; Transport network; Existing support framework; and
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		<p>Number of staff.</p> <p>The Department would not use an average 'cost per (existing) child' figure to estimate the costs of providing Sure Start on a universal basis.</p>
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Cost of education in a non-school setting

<p>AQW 7580/16- 21</p>	<p>Mrs Sandra Overend (UUP - Mid Ulster)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education to detail his departmental spending per child educated in a non-school setting (i) at primary level; and (ii) at post-primary level.</p> <p>The Education Authority has provided the following answer as the Department does not hold this level of information: Pupils in a non-school setting are not a homogenous group. Pupils are being educated on the basis of identified need and as such a cost will be individual, influenced by differing factors. These will typically include: age/year group of pupil the type /nature of the provision required the number of hours length of time whether the pupil has a statement of special educational needs level of assessed risk transport</p> <p>A spend per child can therefore not be calculated.</p>
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Cost of educating children at primary and post-primary level

<p>AQW 7579/16- 21</p>	<p>Mrs Sandra Overend (UUP - Mid Ulster)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education to detail his departmental spending per child, excluding children educated in a non-school setting, (i) at primary level; and (ii) at post-primary level.</p> <p>The Department does not hold information on average spending per pupil. Such information would require disaggregation of central costs – e.g. administration and services such as transport, meals, Curriculum Advisory and Peripatetic Service etc. - which are not disaggregated at school or phase levels. In addition, overall expenditure will include grant-aided recurrent funding (and other non-public funds including voluntary contributions etc.), as well as capital expenditure - which, by its nature, is not regular or consistently applied across schools from year-to-year.</p> <p>Every grant-aided school covered by the Common Funding Scheme receives a fully delegated budget for its day-to-day recurrent funding needs, distributed under the current Common Funding Formula arrangements. A breakdown of the average budget per pupil in grant-aided schools in the current financial year is provided below:</p> <p>2016-17 Formula funding for schools *</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="671 1456 1294 1713"> <thead> <tr> <th>Phase</th> <th>Per Capita</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Primary (1)</td> <td>3,069</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Post-primary</td> <td>4,350</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>* Data source: Common Funding Formula 2016-17 including Transition and Budget Addition</p> <p>Notes: (1) Includes nursery classes within Primary schools</p>	Phase	Per Capita	Primary (1)	3,069	Post-primary	4,350
Phase	Per Capita							
Primary (1)	3,069							
Post-primary	4,350							

Support for children with speech and language issues

<p>AQW 7502/16- 21</p>	<p>Ms Kellie Armstrong (APNI - Strangford)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education to outline the reporting system that is in place to ensure that children with speech and language issues are recognised and support is put in place as soon as possible.</p> <p>The framework that all schools are required to follow is as set out in the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.</p> <p>This framework allows for the identification and assessment of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) across a continuum of five stages. When a pupil is identified as having a SEN-related difficulty, including speech and language difficulties, the school involved is required to respond by implementing, monitoring and reviewing relevant and purposeful measures to meet those identified needs and seeking support from external specialists, as necessary.</p>
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Skills based training for young people with SEN

<p>AQW 7312/16- 21</p>	<p>Mrs Sandra Overend (UUP - Mid Ulster)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education to detail what opportunities are available for pupils with Special Educational Needs to access skills-based training.</p> <p>Young people with a statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) will be supported by the Education Transition Service in their transition from school to adult life. All available options will be explored with the young person and their family, taking into account their individual SEN and career aspirations. In addition, the young person will have an individual interview with a Careers Adviser from the Department for the Economy. There are a number of opportunities available for pupils with SEN to access skills based training which are provided through FE Colleges and other training providers.</p>
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		<p>The Regional Colleges provide a range of training skills courses eg: essential skills in literacy and numeracy, employability skills, customer service, catering or horticulture, joinery, plumbing, bricklaying and life skills programmes designed specifically for pupils with SEN.</p> <p>Skills based training courses are also available through other training providers eg: vocational skills, essential skills, ICT training, personal development, money management, employability skills and employment services.</p>
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Number of people admitted for mental ill-health by age

AQW 8264/16- 21	Mr Daniel McCrossan (SDLP - West Tyrone)	<p>To ask the Minister of Health to detail the number of people admitted to hospital for mental ill-health in the last five years, broken down by age.</p> <p>Information on the number of people admitted to hospital for mental ill-health broken down by age is not available. However, information on the number of admissions under the mental health programme of care is published annually and available to view or download at: https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/hospital-statistics-inpatient-and-day-case-activity-statistics-201516</p>
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Assessment of children's physical and mental health needs

AQW 8129/16- 21	Ms Paula Bradshaw (APNI - South Belfast)	<p>To ask the Minister of Health which aspects of the updated fostering regulations will contain provisions to ensure children admitted to care receive a holistic assessment of physical and mental health needs.</p> <p>Several current sets of Regulations contain provisions to ensure that children and young people admitted to care receive health assessments and that those assessments are</p>
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		<p>then reviewed regularly: paragraph 1(c) of Schedule 3 to The Foster Placement (Children) Regulations (NI 1996; Regulations 7(1)(a) and 7(1)(c) of The Arrangements for Placement of Children (General) Regulations (NI) 1996; and Regulation 6 of, and Schedule 3 to, the Review of Children's Cases Regulations (NI) 1996.</p> <p>The draft Foster Placement and Fostering Agencies Regulations which were issued for consultation place a particular duty on the responsible authority (the Health and Social Care Trust) to promote the health and development of children placed with a foster parent. These draft Regulations explicitly refer to medical, dental, nursing, psychological and psychiatric advice, treatment and other services. They also require the Trust to ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable the foster parent to provide appropriate care for the child. In particular, each foster parent is to be provided with the appropriate information regarding the state of health and health needs of any child placed or to be placed with the foster parent. I am currently considering the draft Regulations and intend to seek Health Committee scrutiny of them thereafter.</p>
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Number of Serious Adverse Incidents in relation to child deaths

<p>AQW 7937/16- 21</p>	<p>Mr Robbie Butler (UUP - Lagan Valley)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Health how many of the Serious Adverse Incidents since October 2013 are in relation to child deaths; and how many of these were from natural causes.</p> <p>Since October 2013, 387 Serious Adverse Incidents (SAIs) were reported by HSC Trusts in relation to child deaths. Information relating to the cause of death is not available. There is a requirement to record every child death as an</p>
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		SAI which was introduced in October 2013. The rationale behind this decision was to provide clarity in reporting child deaths and to enhance the culture of learning and review.
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Infant Mental Health Strategy update

AQW 7887/16- 21	Ms Paula Bradshaw (APNI - South Belfast)	<p>To ask the Minister of Health for an update on the status of the Infant Mental Health Strategy being developed by the Public Health Agency.</p> <p>The Infant Mental Health Framework was issued and disseminated widely from April 2016 and can be accessed at http://pha.site/IMHF.</p> <p>The Framework represents a commitment by the health and social care sector, as well as academic, research, voluntary and community organisations, to improve interventions from the ante-natal period through to children aged 3 years old. It has three key priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to ensure that commissioners and policy makers are fully informed of the latest evidence and interventions; to provide practitioners across health, social care and education disciplines with the skills to support parents and children in the development of positive infant mental health; and to encourage service development to ensure effective delivery of evidence based interventions for families with children where there are significant developmental risks. <p>Since its publication in April, governance arrangements have been established including a multi-agency Implementation Group to oversee the delivery of the framework. The Implementation Group had its first meeting June 2016 and is scheduled to meet again in January 2017.</p>
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Victims of domestic abuse who have been separated from their children

<p>AQW 7812/16- 21</p>	<p>Mr Mark Durkan (SDLP - Foyle)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Health how many victims of domestic abuse are there in each Health and Social Care Trust area; and how many of these people have been separated from their children by Social Services.</p> <p>Figures on the total number of victims of domestic abuse are not held by the Department of Health.</p> <p>Information on the number of victims of domestic abuse separated from their children by Social Services is not centrally available and could only be provided by a manual trawl through thousands of files at disproportionate cost.</p>
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Visual impairment screening at schools

<p>AQW 7255/16- 21</p>	<p>Mr Trevor Clarke (DUP - South Antrim)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Health (i) whether all school children are screened for visual impairments; (ii) what types of school screening is used in each Health and Social Care Trust; and (iii) how many children have been identified to have a visual impairment that cannot be corrected with glasses over the last five years.</p> <p>Screening for visual impairments is offered to all school children as part of the P1 health appraisal which is carried out by school nurses.</p> <p>Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts use the Logarithm of the Minimum Angle of Resolution (log MAR) test to determine a child's visual acuity.</p> <p>The HSC Trusts do not hold this information.</p>
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Funding for Mental Health Street Triage Pilot

<p>AQW 7253/16- 21</p>	<p>Ms Nichola Mallon (SDLP - North Belfast)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Health whether she will allocate funding to the Mental Health Street Triage Pilot in Belfast; and if so, when the funding will be allocated.</p> <p>My Department is represented on a working group, chaired by the Police Service, which also comprises representatives from the Public Health Agency, the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, Belfast City Council, Belfast Policing and Community Safety Partnership, Lifeline, Bridge of Hope, Lighthouse, Start 360 and Extern. The group met for the first time on 27 September to discuss how a street triage pilot might be developed.</p> <p>Scoping of existing provision is now under way, and a number of costed models will be developed and eventually considered for prioritisation.</p> <p>It is therefore too early to consider funding allocations</p>
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Mental health funding

<p>AQW 7214/16- 21</p>	<p>Mr Chris Lyttle (APNI - East Belfast)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Health why mental health provision is 8.5 per cent of the Health budget despite mental health constituting approximately 25 per cent of health need; and whether she will change this ratio for the 2016-17 budget.</p> <p>There have been increases in mental health expenditure during the last decade, but there is a legacy of underinvestment and unmet need and, as I outlined in the Assembly on 15 November, this will take some time to address. I am committed to moving towards parity of esteem, to ensure that mental health receives the time, effort and resource required to meet local needs.</p>
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		<p>The 2017/18 budget is still under consideration across the Executive but it is clear that we face a very challenging financial situation. I am fully aware of the significant issues with regard to mental health and I am committed to improving services. Whilst I am actively making the case for more resources for mental health, it is also incumbent on us to get the best value for the money we already spend, and systemic reform is important in this regard. For example, the Health and Social Care Board is currently working up proposals for a managed care network to better utilise existing expertise across Trusts and promote uniformity and better continuity of care across the region. The pressure on mental health services also highlights that fundamental reshaping of the health and social care service is vital to enable money to be released across the system so that it can be targeted to those areas that need it most.</p>
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Music therapy for children and young people with mental health issues

<p>AQW 6888/16- 21</p>	<p>Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley (DUP - Fermanagh and South Tyrone)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Health for her assessment on the study by Queens University Belfast and Bournemouth University on the benefits of music therapy for children and young people with mental health issues.</p> <p>I welcome the 2014 study by Queens University Belfast and Bournemouth University, which examines the efficacy of music therapy in clinical practice for young people with mental health needs, as it adds to our knowledge in this area. Whilst I do not wish to go into the detail of this academic article, I do note that the trial did not lead to definitive recommendations for the inclusion of music therapy in clinical practice and recommended that further research would need to be undertaken. I look forward to further developments</p>
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Belfast waiting list for autism assessments for children

<p>AQW 2985/16- 21</p>	<p>Mr Chris Lyttle (APNI - East Belfast)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Health to outline the reasons for the 22 month waiting list in Belfast for autism assessments for children.</p> <p>Demand for autism assessments over the last few years has substantially outstripped capacity to provide diagnostic services. In 2015/16, there was a 17% increase overall in demand for autism assessment. The number of referrals – 3000 in total – was double the number the current system was designed to deal with.</p> <p>The Belfast Trust has had a much higher level of referral than the other HSC Trusts (e.g. 2,262 referrals over the last three years, compared to 1,316 in the South Eastern Trust during the same period). This differential in referral rates, accounts for longer waiting times in the Trust.</p> <p>I am firmly of the view that the current waiting lists are unacceptably long. However, unless we tackle the root causes this will remain the case, as we have a 20th century model delivering services for a 21st century population. This is having an increasingly negative impact on the quality and experience of care. The long term solution is the transformation of our health and social care system as outlined in Delivering Together. It is only in transforming the health and social care system and by implementing new models of care that we will be able to alleviate the pressures on our health and social care services, sustain improvements in waiting times and deliver better outcomes for patients.</p> <p>That said, I would pay tribute to the staff across the Health & social care sector. Notwithstanding the structural issues, they continue to work incredibly hard and on average deliver 9,000 outpatient appointments, 2,600 inpatient/day case procedures</p>
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and 31,000 diagnostic tests per week.

Removal of children by social services from victims of domestic abuse

<p>AQW 7819/16- 21</p>	<p>Mr Mark Durkan (SDLP - Foyle)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Justice whether she will work with the Minister of Health to address the re-victimisation of victims of domestic abuse through the removal of their children by social services.</p> <p>My Department in conjunction with the Department of Health and the PSNI, fund Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs). MARACs draw together representatives from local voluntary and statutory agencies to discuss high risk cases of domestic violence in local areas, share information and agree a co-ordinated action plan to ensure the safety of victims and their children.</p> <p>I recognise however that there may be scenarios involving domestic violence which give rise to Social Services applying to the court for the removal of children from the home. The Children (NI) Order 1995 is the principal statute governing the care, upbringing and protection of children in Northern Ireland and in considering any such application the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration for the court.</p>
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