

NICCY Summary: Written Assembly Questions week ending 20 January 2017

Consideration of changing model of benefit system

<p>AQW 9133/16- 21</p>	<p>Mr Robin Swann (UUP - North Antrim)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister for Communities whether he has, or intends to explore the potential of a universal basic income model instead of the current benefit system.</p> <p>The current system of income related social security benefits is being replaced by Universal Credit in September 2017. There are currently no plans for a further overhaul of the social security system to change to a universal basic income model where all citizens or residents of a country would regularly receive an unconditional sum of money, either from a government or some other public institution, in addition to any income received from elsewhere.</p>
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Impact of SEN staff travelling to rural schools

<p><u>AQW 9045/16- 21</u></p>	<p>Ms Kellie Armstrong (APNI - Strangford)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 8375/16-21 whether Special Educational Needs support to schools is being put under pressure by the lack of funding for SEN staff to travel to rural schools.</p> <p>The Education Authority (EA) has advised that there has been no change to SEN support to rural schools and no change to the arrangements for travel in this regard. Training and support are provided equitably to both rural and urban settings.</p>
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Impact of EA consideration to charge for school transport

<p><u>AQW</u> <u>9523/16-</u> <u>21</u></p>	<p>Mr Patsy McGlone (<i>SDLP - Mid Ulster</i>)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Education, in relation to the Education Authority’s statement that it is considering ending free school transport (i) what rural-proofing exercise has been carried out in relation to charging for school transport; and (ii) for his assessment of the introduction of such charges. [<i>Priority Written</i>]</p> <p>The Education Authority (EA) is currently considering a broad range of options to help it operate within its approved budget. Should they wish to progress any options that would require changes to the current home to school transport policy, any such changes would require the approval of the Department of Education.</p> <p>If the EA chooses to bring forward any such proposals, I would expect them to take full account of the potential impact on any families that would be effected, including those living in rural areas, before I would study them in detail and come to a view on the proposals. Of course, any change to current policy would be subject to the normal Equality Impact Assessment and consultation processes.</p>
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Update on closure of HSCB

<p><u>AQO 901/16- 21</u></p>	<p>Mr Justin McNulty (SDLP - Newry and Armagh)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Health for an update on the proposal to close the Health and Social Care Board.</p> <p>As you will be aware, on the 25 October last year, I announced <i>'Health and Well-being 2026: Delivering Together'</i>, to take forward radical and far-reaching transformation of our health service to deliver better outcomes for the population in the North. Within this context, I have confirmed the decision to close the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and I have committed to bring forward details about new structures to support the reform of planning and administration of the HSC by March 2017. In October I also wrote to staff in the HSCB to re-affirm a commitment I made when I met with them, to work in partnership to develop those new structures and achieve a managed transition for staff.</p>
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Update on mental health services

<p>AQO 898/16-21</p>	<p>Mr Mike Nesbitt (UUP - Strangford)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Health whether she will be making any changes to local mental health services following commitments made by the Prime Minister in her speech on mental health support on 9 January 2017.</p> <p>Improving mental health services is one of my key priorities. I am committed to moving towards parity of esteem for mental health; designing services with a focus on recovery; co-production with experts by experience in the design, delivery and evaluation of services; service development where resources allow; systemic reform and improved performance management; and considering the potential for all-island service development.</p> <p>Indicator 6 in the draft Programme for Government framework seeks to drive improvement in the general mental health of</p>
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people in the North. The draft delivery plan for indicator 6 accepts the need to move towards parity of esteem for mental health and physical health.

The draft delivery plan also outlines that a range of proposed service developments are under detailed consideration, including development of a comprehensive regional perinatal mental health service with community and mother and baby inpatient provision, potentially with an all-Ireland element; development of eating disorders service provision, potentially with an all-Ireland element; putting the provision of psychological therapies on a sure footing, by completing the roll-out of talking therapies hubs in each Trust area; fully implementing the Mental Capacity Act; implementing a mental trauma service; improving personality disorders provision; developing a Looked After Children support scheme; and consolidation of wellbeing and mental health services with the Department of Education. Service development is costly and with limited resources there will be a need to focus on developing interventions that will have the greatest impact. Prioritisation will be required to make best use of scarce resources.

Following the consultation on the draft delivery plan, which closed on 23 December 2016, my officials are considering amendments to take account of some of the comments from consultees.

There is no doubt that local mental health services are under increasing pressure. There is a higher than average prevalence of mental health issues in the North, together with an increased awareness of mental health issues, and a legacy of unmet need. Whilst I am actively making the case for more investment in mental health, with significant pressure on budgets it is incumbent on all of us to get the best value for the money that

		<p>we already spend. This demonstrates why fundamental reshaping of the health and social care service is so vital, to enable money to be released across the system so that it can be targeted at those areas that need it most.</p>
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Working to support looked-after children

<p><u>AQO</u> <u>895/16-</u> <u>21</u></p>	<p>Mr Barry McElduff (SF - West Tyrone)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Health to outline what work her Department is undertaking to support looked-after children.</p> <p>The term Looked After Children refers to a diverse group that varies in terms of age, the reason for being looked after, age of first entry into the care system and duration in care. While some Looked After Children and young people can go on to enjoy success, as a group, outcomes, including health and educational outcomes, tend to fall significantly below those of the general population.</p> <p>In my term as Health Minister, I have been consistent in my determination to give these children and young people the priority they deserve in keeping with my duties as their corporate parent. I want a care system where fewer children need to become looked after; where quicker decisions are made about where they will live permanently; and where there are improved outcomes for each and every looked after child in key areas of their lives including their physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing and educational attainment. I also want to ensure that everything possible is done to secure their successful transition into adult life. It is a commitment that I can't deliver alone. I will need the help of other Ministers. This is reflected in the draft Programme for Government. My Department, in conjunction with the Department of Education, is developing a strategy specific to Looked After Children. The Looked After Children Strategy will be reinforced by a Family Support Strategy, also being developed by my Department. Both strategies are being developed on a co-</p>
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design basis and we intend to consult on a draft Looked After Children Strategy and supporting action plan this year. Where legislation is required to deliver any of our strategic aims for Looked After Children, this will be done by way of an Adoption and Children Bill. I have already made public my intention to bring forward a Bill in the current mandate.

It is important that we listen to children and young people in order to better understand the encouragement, support and services they need. I have already met with a group of bright, articulate young people who have spent time in care and I am committed to ongoing engagement. Care Day this year will celebrate the magic of all care-experienced children and young people's possibility and potential. The goal is to challenge individuals, public, communities, government departments and the statutory, voluntary, community and private sectors to 'Look, Act and Care' for children in care and care leavers. I wrote to Ministerial colleagues in December asking if your department could take forward at least one action to either promote or participate in Care Day 2017 and I look forward to your participation.

I accept that a Looked After Children Strategy may require some additional investment, either to test new ways of working or extend existing supports available to Looked After Children. I have already made a number of new investments to enhance fostering services and therapeutic support for Looked After Children, particularly those who have suffered or been exposed to trauma.

I thank the member for his interest in Looked After Children.

Benefits of a Family Drug and Alcohol Court in NI

<p><u>AQW</u> <u>9437/16-</u> <u>21</u></p>	<p>Mr Roy Beggs (UUP - East Antrim)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Justice for her assessment of the benefits of establishing a Family Drug and Alcohol Court FDAC in Northern Ireland; (ii) what steps have been taken to establish such a court; and (iii) when a model similar to the English FDACs will be introduced in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Given increasing interest in Northern Ireland in problem solving approaches to justice and the positive outcomes that Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDACs) have produced in other jurisdictions, I think there is merit in exploring whether adopting the FDAC approach in this jurisdiction can improve outcomes for vulnerable families who come into contact with the justice system because of substance misuse problems. My Department is therefore working with the Department of Health to consider the development of proposals to pilot a FDAC in Northern Ireland. Work is at a relatively early stage but I am hopeful a pilot can be established in the short to medium term.</p>
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Benefits of Family Drugs and Alcohol Courts

<p><u>AQW</u> <u>9435/16-</u> <u>21</u></p>	<p>Mr Roy Beggs (UUP - East Antrim)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Justice what interaction her Department has had with the Department of Justice in London regarding Family Drugs and Alcohol Courts operating in parts of England; and for her assessment of the benefits of such courts to (i) children and young people; (ii) parents; and (iii) public bodies.</p> <p>Evidence from England and other jurisdictions suggests Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDACs) can produce better outcomes than traditional care proceedings in terms of parents accessing treatment and overcoming substance misuse problems and children being able to remain in the family. As well as resulting in improved outcomes for families, FDACs may have a positive impact on public bodies in the longer term, for example, through</p>
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		<p>potential savings to the care system and the health system. My officials have had the opportunity to discuss the merits of the FDAC approach with retired District Judge Crichton, who championed the establishment of FDACs in England and Wales. Further engagement with Judge Crichton and officials from the FDAC National Unit (which promotes the development of FDACs across England) is planned for the end of January, to inform consideration by my Department and the Department of Health about piloting a FDAC in Northern Ireland.</p>
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Cases of defendants sending sexual communication to children

<p>AQW 9295/16- 21</p>	<p>Lord Morrow of Clogher Valley (DUP - Fermanagh and South Tyrone)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Justice to provide a breakdown of cases currently before the courts, per former court division, in respect of sending sexual communications or similar to a child since the legalisation was introduced in in February 2016, shown per magistrates and crown courts.</p> <p>The number of cases active in the court system relating to defendants charged with sending sexual communications to a child, at 31st December 2016, is outlined in the table below.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="587 1332 1377 1892"> <thead> <tr> <th>Former Court Division</th> <th>Magistrates'</th> <th>Crown</th> <th>Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Belfast</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Londonderry</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Antrim</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fermanagh and Tyrone</td> <td>3</td> <td>1</td> <td>4</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Former Court Division	Magistrates'	Crown	Total	Belfast	0	0	0	Londonderry	0	0	0	Antrim	0	0	0	Fermanagh and Tyrone	3	1	4
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		Armagh and South Down	0	1
		Ards	1	0
		Craigavon	2	0
		Total	6	2
				8
		Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)		

Number of people referred for a Diversionary Youth Conference

<p>AQW 9210/16- 21</p>	<p>Mr Jim Allister (TUV - North Antrim)</p>	<p>To ask the Minister of Justice to detail (i) how many people were referred for a Diversionary Youth Conference, in each of the last five years; and (ii) how many were referred for (a) more than one conference; (b) three - five conferences; (c) more than five conferences; and (iii) for her assessment on whether repeat referrals are a sign of failure in respect of this form of disposal.</p> <p>Referrals for a Diversionary Youth Conference in each of the last five years.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Number of Referrals for a Diversionary Youth Conference</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2011/12</td> <td>1,006</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2012/13</td> <td>862</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2013/14</td> <td>867</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2014/15</td> <td>661</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Number of Referrals for a Diversionary Youth Conference	2011/12	1,006	2012/13	862	2013/14	867	2014/15	661
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2015/16	730
Total	4126

Number of young people in the last 5 years (1 April 2011 to 31 March 2016) who have been referred for (a) more than one conference; (b) three - five conferences; (c) more than five conferences

Number of Referrals for a Diversionary Youth Conference	Number of young people	% of young people
1	2061	72.4%
2	486	17.1%
3 to 5	279	9.8%
6+	22	0.8%
Total	2848	

The figures provided above outline the number of referrals for Diversionary Youth Conferences across the last five years, from 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2016. The total number of diversionary referrals in this time period was 4126, relating to 2848 individual young people. Of these individual young people, 787 (28%) had more than one referral for diversionary youth conference.

Almost 90% of the young people, 2547, had one or two referrals

for diversionary youth conference in this time period. Just fewer than 10% of young people, 279, had 3 to 5 referrals and 22 young people had more than 5 referrals, representing less than 1% of young people referred for diversionary youth conferences in this time period.

The Youth Justice Agency accepts Diversionary Youth Conference referrals from the Public Prosecution Service. The Public Prosecution Service therefore has taken the decision that the offence warrants a diversionary disposal.

Given the restorative principles underpinning Diversionary Youth Conferences it is important that each individual victim is offered the opportunity to meet the offender face to face. Repeat referrals therefore represent individual victims being given that opportunity. Previously there was a mechanism for some offences to be “taken into consideration” thus not giving victims the chance to engage in a meeting with the perpetrator. Repeat referrals should not be viewed as a sign of failure in respect of this disposal rather it demonstrates opportunity for individual victims to engage in the process and represents a concerted effort to keep young people out of the formal court system except for serious offences.