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## Ministerial Statements

### **Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) (8 September)**

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Official-Report/Reports-14-15/08-September-2014/#8>

The Environment Minister stated that he had authorised DoE to adopt the BMAP which will become operative on 9 September 2014. The BMAP comprises seven volumes and runs to 900 A4 pages, plus 30 larger maps. It comprises a written statement and accompanying maps as well as detailed site designations. The written statement is divided into four parts. Part 1 sets out the background to the preparation of the plan; part 2 sets out its guiding principles and strategy; part 3 sets out the plan framework, comprising allocations, designations, policies and proposals relating to the plan area as a whole; and part 4 translates the broad policies and proposals of part 3 for each of the council areas specifically addressed in volumes 2 to 7. The key components of the plan include supporting economic development; protecting the natural environment; promoting urban renewal; promoting equality of opportunity; enhancing quality of life; sustaining a living, working countryside; and developing an integrated, inclusive transport system. BMAP covers the council areas of Belfast, Lisburn, Carrickfergus, Castlereagh, Newtownabbey and North Down and is key to securing the economic growth of the region. The Minister added that the environment and the protection of our valuable resource of open space and the natural resource in the area are central to the plan. Following the publication of PPS 21, 'Sustainable Development in the Countryside', DoE withdrew the proposed green belt designation in the draft BMAP. The policies and provisions in PPS 21 take precedence over the policy provisions for all green belts in existing statutory and published draft plans, with a limited number of exceptions. He concluded that the plan *protects the countryside through a number of designations such as rural landscape wedges, coastal policy areas, areas of high scenic value and the Lagan Valley Regional Park.*

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### **North/South Ministerial Council: Aquaculture and Marine (22 September)**

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Official-Report/Reports-14-15/22-September-2014/#3>

The Agriculture Minister updated members on the outcome of the twenty-fifth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in aquaculture and marine sectoral format held 27 June 2014. Ministers welcomed progress on the activities of the Loughs Agency, including its ongoing conservation and protection efforts and participation in Operation Salar, which is the result of a multi-agency approach to tackle fish poaching and protect fish stocks. The PSNI is working alongside the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Loughs Agency to enforce fishing regulations and educate the public on fishing and the importance of protecting fish stocks. Ministers heard of the agency's participation in the planting of over 5,000 native broadleaf trees of various species in the Glenshane Pass area as part of the climate change adaptation initiative and were told how the Loughs Agency has developed a number of initiatives to animate the River Foyle and provide local people and visitors with an opportunity to experience the river and learn more about its history and biodiversity. The programme will include education and outreach to local schools on both sides of the border as well as an adult education programme be delivered as part of walking, bus and canoe tours. Ministers also received a presentation on the Foyle ambassador project. That project brought young people from different communities together for a 10-week environmental programme providing an increased understanding of biodiversity and the value of Lough Foyle in recreation and commercial use.

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## Committee Business

### **Barroso Task Force (9 September)**

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Official-Report/Reports-14-15/09-September-2014/#5>

Members debated and approved a motion from the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister: *That this Assembly notes the report of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (NIA 179/11-15) on its Inquiry into the Barroso task force; and calls on the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to implement the recommendations contained in the report.* The President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso,

announced a task force for Northern Ireland on 1 May 2007. The task force was created to support the peace process, with a particular emphasis on how to assist us in our efforts to improve its economic competitiveness and to create sustainable employment. The task force comprises a group of representatives from the European Commission who work with officials from the Northern Ireland Executive Departments to strengthen European engagement. As President Barroso's term comes to an end next month, and the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister agreed that it was timely to undertake a short inquiry to reflect on the work of the task force and what it has achieved. The inquiry concluded that the initiative stimulated a marked increase in engagement in European affairs by Departments. The outcomes were grouped into successes across four areas: the drawdown of competitive funds; the establishment of fora and networks; an increase in profile and focus; and the creation of appropriate structures. The structures created by the task force, particularly the additional staffing resources in the Executive offices in Brussels, were viewed positively in providing information on policy, legislative and funding issues relevant to Northern Ireland. In conclusion, the Committee acknowledged the work of the Barroso task force and of the task force working group to date, while making a number of recommendations that seek to enhance and further develop Northern Ireland's engagement in EU affairs. While the future of the task force is unclear, the Committee recommends that OFMDFM continues to support an interdepartmental forum to support a cohesive and coherent Executive-wide approach to EU engagement.

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## Answers to Written Questions

### Assembly Commission

#### Solar Panel/ Roof Maintenance (12 September)

[AQW 35276/11-15](#)

The Chair of the Assembly Commission outlined the renewable technologies that had been installed on the roof of Parliament Buildings as part of the roof maintenance scheme. The primary objective of the roof project is to provide a long lasting solution to ongoing problems of water ingress thereby protecting the heritage of the listed building. However, the Assembly Commission has taken the opportunity to refurbish and/ or replace all of the existing roof-mounted mechanical and electrical services and, where appropriate, to incorporate renewable technologies. In order to comply with planning requirements and strict loading capacities for the existing roof, thin film photovoltaic (PV) panels were chosen for the high level roofs. Electricity generated by these panels will supplement the building's energy supply. A small number of solar thermal tubes will also be installed on the roof at the rear of the building and these will provide around 50% of the domestic hot water supply for the building. In addition, a rainwater harvesting system will be installed which will provide 'grey' water to be used to flush some of the toilets in the building. It is anticipated that these combined measures will reduce the building's energy consumption by a minimum of 25%.

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### Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

#### Strangford Lough Restoration Plan (19 September)

[AQW 35627/11-15](#)

The Minister provided an update on the Strangford Lough restoration plan. DARD and DOE introduced a Strangford Lough *Modiolus* Biogenic Reef Revised Restoration Plan in October 2012. The plan meets the approval of the Commission and the Complainant and focuses on Protection, Intervention, and Monitoring. The Departments have established Protection through a non-disturbance zone consistent with the recommendations of Queens University's 2011 *Modiolus* Restoration Research Project. As outlined in the Plan, Departments have introduced a pot fishing permit scheme outside the non-disturbance zone, and appointed a dedicated fisheries officer and Marine Ranger. As required in the intervention workstream in the plan, a post-doctorate researcher has been appointed and the Restoration team are currently evaluating translocation of *Modiolus* from outside the Lough following confirmation of genetic compatibility by Heriot Watt University. Monitoring of the remaining Strangford *Modiolus* continues to record temporal and spatial changes in the extent and condition of biogenic reefs, and a substantial drop camera survey is to take place

imminently. A restoration working group has been convened to oversee the work involving both Departments, Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, Queen's University, Ulster Wildlife and Seafish, and the delivery of the Restoration Plan is monitored by an Interdepartmental Group.

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### **Impact on farmers of greening requirements (26 September)**

[AQW 35996/11-15](#)

The Minister outlined the potential impact on farmers as a result of greening requirements. Farmers who participate in the Basic Payment Scheme must, where applicable, adhere to three greening requirements (retention of permanent grassland, crop diversification and the provision of ecological focus areas (EFAs)). However, the first of these three will be monitored at regional level and, therefore, is unlikely to affect the operations of individual farmers. As agriculture here is dominated by grassland enterprises, the vast majority of farmers will attract the greening payment without any change to their farming practices. Greening will have its greatest impact in the arable sector. Analysis undertaken by the Department (based on 2013 scheme year applications to the Single Farm Payment) suggests that fewer than 1,500 farms may have to comply with the crop diversification requirements that will apply to arable land. Some of these farm businesses may find that they can comply with the requirements without having to change their existing cropping patterns. DARD's analysis suggests that fewer than 1,000 farm businesses will have an EFA requirement and that the total EFA requirement in the north is likely to be less than the equivalent of 2,000ha. For the majority of farm businesses, existing land based features (e.g. hedges on or adjacent to arable land) are likely to meet all or most of their EFA requirement.

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### **Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment**

#### **Implementation of the Renewable Heat Incentive Programme Scheme (19 September)**

[AQW 35684/11-15](#)

Since its introduction in November 2012 the Non-Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) Scheme has received 264 applications of which 225 have received accreditation to date. The Renewable Heat Premium Payment (RHPP) Scheme, introduced as an interim support scheme for domestic applicants has received 2004 applications with 1409 vouchers issued so far for technology support. Subject to final financial and legal approvals, the Minister will announce the launch of the Domestic RHI Scheme to replace the RHPP in the next few weeks with the intention that it will be open for applications before the end of the year. In the meantime domestic customers can continue to avail of the RHPP Scheme.

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### **Minister of the Environment**

#### **Agency workers in NIEA (12 September)**

[AQW 35284/11-15](#)

The Minister provided details of the agency workers in the Northern Ireland Environment Agency who had their employment terminated prematurely; and the sites affected, since July 2014. Over 80 temporary workers (79.2 full time equivalent) were released early from their contracts. A significant number of the affected agency workers were engaged for the summer months at a number of the NIEA visitor attractions. Service levels are being maintained by redeploying permanent staff as far as is practicable. Full details of numbers and sites affected were provided.

Minerals extraction from Lough Neagh

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#### **Habitats and Birds Directives and Lough Neagh (12 September)**

[AQW 35119/11-15](#)

The Minister was asked whether the Environmental Impact Assessment, Habitats and Birds Directives are being breached by the unregulated minerals extraction being permitted from Lough Neagh Special Protection Area. He replied that Mineral extraction is an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) development and therefore subject to the EIA regulations. These regulations apply to every application for planning permission for EIA development received by the Department. The Habitats Directive requires member states to carry out a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) when considering the authorisation of plans or projects likely to affect a NATURA 2000 site which would include Special Protected Areas (SPAs). NIEA would carry out a HRA to determine if a

proposed plan or project would have a significant effect on NATURA 2000 site selection features. Extraction of minerals from Lough Neath pre-dates the designation of the SPA and, therefore, no HRA was undertaken at the time of designation as the extraction was classified as an existing practice.

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### **Northern Ireland Marine Network of Special Protection Areas (19 September)**

[AQW 35302/11-15](#)

The Minister outlined the measures being taken to improve the Northern Ireland marine network of Special Protection Areas. The number and extent of marine Special Protection Areas in Northern Ireland is being considered as part of the UK SPA Marine Review. Recommendations have been made with regard to the extent of existing marine Special Protection Areas. Potential new sites have been identified covering inshore marine areas of importance for waterbird/seabird populations. The planned outcome for Northern Ireland by 2016 will be an increase in the number of marine Special Protection Areas and an increase in the total designated marine area. The Minister added that the condition of existing marine Special Protection Areas, together with all marine areas of ornithological significance, is also of importance to ensure that no adverse impacts affect these sites and the bird populations using them. These populations are monitored regularly as part of Northern Ireland's site condition assessment of designated sites. This, together with wider monitoring activities elsewhere inform the Department of site changes, placing these in a wider context. Evidence of change is typically further investigated to determine the cause and informing any necessary management interventions.

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### **Cost of disposing of waste (26 September)**

[AQW 35569/11-15](#)

The Minister revealed the cost of disposing of one tonne of waste (i) to landfill; (ii) through incineration; and (iii) by recycling. The estimated gate fee: waste disposal in 2013 was £80 to £121 per tonne; for waste incineration in 2013 was £62 to £126 per tonne; and for waste recycling in 2013 was -£40 to £13 per tonne. A negative gate fee indicates that the facility is paying to obtain the material.

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### **Minister for Regional Development**

#### **Sewerage and Storm Water Connection (12 September)**

[AQW 35378/11-15](#)

The Minister detailed the process for developers to obtain a sewerage and storm water connection. From the date of application, NI Water aims to provide a written quotation within 21 working days. The onus is then with the Developer to (i) accept the fixed charge quotation and pay the connection fee, and (ii) contact NI Water to arrange a suitable appointment when he would be ready for the sewer connection. From the date the sewer connection fee is paid, NI Water has 21 days to organise the sewer connection. In some instances there may be Transport NI restrictions, such as road opening embargos, but these are few in number. NI Water also works with Developers in their construction programme, and may agree a connection date at a later date to facilitate the needs of the house-builder. NI Water is generally in compliance with the length of time stipulated for dealing with new sewer connection requests.

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#### **Cycling Network in Rural Areas (12 September)**

[AQO 6556/11-15](#)

The Minister was asked whether he plans to extend the cycling network to include rural areas. He replied that he published the draft Bicycle Strategy for Northern Ireland on 27th August for a 12 week period of public consultation. The strategy recognises that there are differences between using the bicycle in an urban area and a rural area, and clearly states that we will continue to make provision for the bicycle in rural areas where opportunities arise, especially where there is cycling demand. The National Cycle Network (NCN) is a comprehensive network of safe and attractive cycling routes, developed by the charity Sustrans. In Northern Ireland, the Network extends to more than 800 miles, mostly on quiet country roads and includes 106 miles of traffic free paths. In addition to the existing NCN, DRD will develop specific interventions, including Greenways, and pilot them in rural areas. Greenway development will include looking at ways to make use of disused

canals and railway tracks, for example, along the Lagan Navigation to Portadown and the old GNR from Portadown to Londonderry. There are a number of specific road schemes currently being taken forward by DRD which will incorporate some provision for the bicycle including, the A26 Frosses dualling scheme, the proposed A8 Larne Dualling Scheme and the A20 Comber to Newtownards Dual Carriageway. He concluded that once the Bicycle Strategy has been finalised, a Delivery Plan will be prepared and that this plan will be subject to a 'rural proofing' exercise to ensure that the needs of rural communities and areas are considered as part of the policy development process.

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### **Sustainable Modes of Travel and PfG Targets (12 September)**

[AQO 6553/11-15](#)

The Minister provided an update on the Programme for Government 2011-15 target to invest in and promote more sustainable modes of travel and create the conditions to facilitate at least 36 per cent of primary school pupils and 22 per cent of secondary school pupils to walk or cycle to school as their main mode of transport by 2015. He replied that DRD remains on target to meet its PfG commitment of investing over £500m to promote sustainable modes of travel in the budget period up to the end of this financial year. In relation to the PfG commitment for active school travel, DRD along with the Public Health Agency, continues to fund Sustrans to promote cycling and walking within schools as part of the Active Schools Travel Initiative. The Initiative will deliver a programme of cycling and walking skills to 180 schools across Northern Ireland over the next three years at a cost of £1.2million. The programme will work with parents and teachers to support schools to develop a culture of active travel. It is important any child cycling or walking to school has the necessary skills to enable them to walk or cycle safely. DRD needs to invest in delivering the necessary vital skills required to enable pupils to travel actively and safely. At present DRD is not in a position to report on the trend on children walking and cycling to school as the baseline data for year one has just been compiled. A report on the active travel participation of those schools that took part in the Initiative is expected later in the autumn. DRD will also seek to draw on information within the Travel Survey to assess active travel to school over all of Northern Ireland.

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### **Budget for Cycling Specific Infrastructure (19 September)**

[AQW 35381/11-15](#)

The Minister was asked what percentage of this year's departmental budget for roads infrastructure will go towards cycling specific infrastructure. He replied that DRD anticipates spending approximately £725,000 on cycling measures this financial year, which equates to around 5% of the Local Transport and Safety Measures allocation. In addition, he has secured £1 million of funding for infrastructure works related to the Active Schools Travel Programme. Schools that would benefit from improvements are currently being identified and the scale of work required is currently being assessed. He expects to bid again for an additional £1 million for cycling infrastructure in the October monitoring round. A previous bid in the June monitoring round for this funding was not met. Future years' bidding for capital cycling funding will be in the region of £3 million for 2015/16 rising to £5 million in 2019/20.

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### **Park and Ride Proposals (19 September)**

[AQW 35380/11-15](#)

The Minister outlined his proposals to build more park and ride spaces over the next two years. DRD's Park & Ride Programme Board has prepared a "Park & Ride Strategic Delivery Programme 2013-15", which is a prioritised schedule of Park & Ride projects with clearly defined responsibilities for funding, implementation, maintenance and operation. The aim of this Programme is to deliver at least an additional 1,000 spaces across Northern Ireland. To date, over 600 additional spaces have been provided under the Programme with a further 750 spaces scheduled to be completed by 31 March 2015. DRD is currently considering the options for the delivery of additional Park & Ride and Park & Share facilities post 2015, when the current programme expires. This future programme is likely to include the completion of some sites from the current programme, totalling approximately 1,500 spaces, together with the development of other new facilities. The scale of the Park & Ride proposals post 2015 will be dependent on the availability of funding.

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## Oral Answers to Questions

### Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

#### Countryside Management Scheme (9 September)

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Official-Report/Reports-14-15/09-September-2014/#4>

Question 6 (AQO 6525/11-15)

The Minister provided an update on the implementation of the new countryside management scheme. She stated that a new agri-environment scheme — the environmental farming scheme (EFS) — is still being developed and will provide support to farmers and land managers to carry out environmentally beneficial farming practices. These practices will aim to preserve and enhance biodiversity; improve the quality of our water, air and soil; create small woodlands; and help to mitigate climate change. The proposed scheme will have three levels: a targeted level, primarily for environmentally designated sites; a wider level to deliver benefits across the countryside, outside of environmentally designated areas; and a group level to support cooperative action by farmers in specific areas, such as a river catchment or commonage. It is planned that rural development programme proposals will be submitted to the European Commission in October 2014. Commission approval can normally be expected around six months following submission, although possibly sooner. Subject to Commission clearance and the necessary IT and control systems being in place, it is planned to launch the scheme in the second half of 2015, with the first environmental farming scheme agreements commencing in January 2016. Following the initial launch, the scheme will open in further tranches.

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#### Rivers Agency (9 September)

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Official-Report/Reports-14-15/09-September-2014/#4>

Question 8 (AQO 6527/11-15)

The Minister outlined the role of the Rivers Agency in cleaning out designated water courses. Rivers Agency has permissive powers under the terms of the Drainage Order 1973 to carry out maintenance to designated watercourses to ensure that they are free-flowing and performing their drainage function. Designated open watercourses are routinely inspected, with those benefiting rural areas typically on a six-year rolling inspection programme, and urban watercourses are inspected and maintained annually. Watercourses that are prone to siltation or dumping are inspected and maintained more frequently. Where a designated watercourse is culverted, it is inspected on a three-year cycle. In addition, culvert inlet grilles are inspected and maintained on a frequent basis, many of them weekly. Additional grille inspections are also undertaken when heavy rainfall is forecast and after flood events, as debris can often be carried downstream by high river flows causing obstructions. In assessing maintenance needs, consideration is given to whether any obstruction to flow or reduction in channel dimensions will have a significant impact on the drainage function of the watercourse or increase flood risk. The Drainage Order 1973 does not empower Rivers Agency to carry out maintenance for any other purpose, such as the removal of litter or the improvement of water quality.

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#### Ash Dieback: Impact (9 September)

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Official-Report/Reports-14-15/09-September-2014/#4>

Question 10 (AQT 1420/11-15)

The Minister revealed that the 2014 survey of ash is complete, and 406 of the planned 1,000 inspections have been carried out. That survey was done in the recently planted sites of ash in public and private woodland; roadside plantings; established trees and hedgerows; and there is ongoing nursery surveillance. Any suspect trees that have been sampled have undergone laboratory testing for the ash dieback pathogen, and we are adopting a risk-based, intelligence-led, targeted approach. The survey has found only two new infections, with no evidence that the disease is circulating in the wider environment. However, current scientific understanding suggests that the conditions for spread in the wider environment still exist. Two wider environment sites were identified in the South last year when action was taken to destroy the mature ash in hedgerows and associated ash debris affected by the disease.

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### **Nitrates Directive (30 September)**

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Official-Report/Reports-14-15/30-September-2014/#4>

Question 1(AQO 6725/11-15)

The Nitrates Action Programme contains to prevent water pollution and to ensure that manures and chemical fertilisers are used efficiently. The Nitrates Directive requires action programmes to be reviewed and, as necessary, revised every four years. The Minister revealed that proposals for the 2015-18 action programme should not require any significant changes to current farming practices. The majority of the measures in the current action programme are being carried forward. Key measures, such as the dates of the closed period for spreading slurry, remain unchanged despite pressure from the European Commission for a longer closed period. The changes which are proposed are based on scientific evidence or technical and policy developments, or have been requested by the European Commission.

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### **Minister of the Environment**

#### **Planning: Enforcement (22 September)**

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Official-Report/Reports-14-15/22-September-2014/#7>

Question 1 (AQO 6637/11-15)

The Minister explained that planning enforcement can be a lengthy, protracted and complex process, with many issues and circumstances that may need to be considered. DoE's aim is to rectify the breach, and in many cases the breach is addressed without the need for formal enforcement action. For example, the applicant may submit a retrospective planning application to regularise the situation. In other cases, formal action is necessary. However, it may be held in abeyance until an application is determined or an enforcement notice is appealed, which can add many months on to the time taken to resolve a case. Other Departments and agencies can also have a bearing on the effective enforcement of planning control. Given those various factors, it is therefore not possible to advise of a definitive timescale for dealing with enforcement investigations and any associated action taken. However, DoE has a business plan target to process to a conclusion 70% of cases within 39 weeks. The most recently published annual stats confirmed that, in 2013-14, 66% of enforcement cases were brought to a conclusion within that time period. Currently there are over 2,800 planning enforcement cases. The Minister is prioritising the clearing the backlog of enforcement cases in advance of the transfer of the function to councils. At the point of transfer, councils will be responsible for investigating alleged breaches of planning control. The councils will also determine what action, if any, will be taken. DoE will, however, retain reserved powers to take enforcement action in exceptional circumstances.

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#### **Planning: Policy/Area Plans (22 September)**

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Official-Report/Reports-14-15/22-September-2014/#7>

Question 4 (AQO 6640/11-15)

The Minister was asked to outline the flexibility and discretion the new councils will have to interpret planning policy and influence the content of area plans.

He replied that from 1 April 2015, councils will have a statutory requirement to prepare local development plans for their respective districts. A council plan will be made up of two documents: a plan strategy, which is adopted first and which will set out the council's objectives and strategic policies for the development of its district; and a subsequent local policies plan, which will set out the council's local and site-specific policies and zonings. In preparing their development plans, councils must take account of central government policies, such as the regional development strategy and the strategic planning policy statement (SPPS), and, indeed, of relevant European directives. All this will be tested at the independent examination of the plan. The Minister also confirmed that if, for example, in a rural council area, there is a huge demand for rural housing that councillors feel is not adequately served by existing planning policy, they can, work with planners and within the confines of existing policy to find something that suits them better.

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## Minister for Regional Development

### Public Transport Ticketing (8 September)

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Official-Report/Reports-14-15/08-September-2014/#10>

Question 4 (AQO 6551/11-15)

Translink is finalising a feasibility study to examine the options for a replacement ticketing system. Among the options being considered are the enhancement of the current system; the use of ITSO ticketing, which is an open standards system supported by the Department for Transport in GB; and the use of contactless bank debit or credit cards, similar to that which has been piloted and is about to go live in London. When that study is finalised, Translink will complete an economic appraisal, which will examine the costs and benefits of the various options. That will be subject to approval by DRD and DFP who will want to ensure that any new ticketing system offers the best possible value for money to passengers. Consideration to coordinating integrated ticketing with other transport providers on an all-Ireland basis was considered but the Leap card system used in the Republic of Ireland concluded that it could not easily be converted to the open standards required for wider use. Other technological developments, such as mobile phones and contactless bank cards, are considered to offer a more up-to-date solution. It is, of course, recognised that Translink works closely with Irish Rail and Bus Éireann on cross-border services, and it is expected that any new system will be sufficiently flexible to handle the tickets involved.

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## Minister for Social Development

### Fuel Poverty (9 September)

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Official-Report/Reports-14-15/09-September-2014/#3>

Question 6 (AQO 6510/11-15)

The Minister was asked for his assessment of DSD's effectiveness at reducing the proportion of households in fuel poverty. He replied that fuel poverty in Northern Ireland has three core contributors: income, energy prices and the energy efficiency of homes. Unlike other regions of the UK, a primary reason for high levels of expenditure in Northern Ireland is the prominence of oil as a source of domestic heating fuel. In 2009, it was estimated that 44% of households were experiencing fuel poverty. According to the 2011 house condition survey, the figure is currently 42%. That is based on households needing to spend 10% or more of their income on household fuel costs. Research has also highlighted 33,000 households across Northern Ireland that need to spend 25% or more of their income to adequately heat their home.

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