



Assembly Update:  
November - December 2016

Prepared by WRDA Women's Sector Lobbyist

## Summary

You'll notice that this is quite a long edition of the WRDA Assembly Update. With an election now looming, I have tried to provide as much detail as possible about the issues addressed by the Assembly in recent months. Despite the growing disruptions throughout November and December that have now led to the collapse of the Assembly and Executive, many important issues that affect women were raised and debated.

**Childcare** was extremely high on the agenda with a number of MLAs seeking more information from the Minister for Education about the Childcare Strategy which is still not published or budgeted for. Questions to the Minister and his party colleague the Minister for Communities also highlighted the lack of clarity on the Women's Centre Childcare Fund which is an essential resource for childcare services in some of the most deprived communities. The publication of the Childcare Costs Survey by Employers for Childcare led to a number of questions on the problem of affordability of childcare across Northern Ireland.

**Domestic violence** also generated a number of assembly questions as the Minister for Justice has been progressing legislative work on a Domestic Violence offence, coercive control and a Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme. **Stalking** law has also been subject to review by the Minister and the Justice Committee.

**Abortion** generated questions from MLAs as the Executive has chosen not to publish the report of the working group on fatal fetal abnormality. Alliance MLA and former Justice Minister David Ford also introduced a Private Members Bill in early December to decriminalize abortion in such cases.

As the Equality Commission published its **Gender Equality** Policy Priorities and Recommendations Report, there were questions to a range of Ministers from MLAs seeking to ascertain how departments plan to implement the report's findings. Underrepresentation of **women in public life** also had some focus in the context of the Assembly's own Gender Action Plan and the Commissioner for Public Appointment's Diversity Initiative.

The Minister for Health took questions on the availability of screening for **Group B Strep in pregnancy** and the care pathways for women experiencing server **perinatal mental health** problems.

The Minister for Justice was asked for an update on plans for a **women's prison** in light of a recommendation made by the Criminal Justice Inspectorate.

## Kellie Turtle

Women's Sector Lobbyist

## Bills introduced

Abortion (Fatal Foetal Abnormality) Bill <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/legislation/bills/non-executive-bills/session-2016-2017/abortion-ffa/abortion-ffa-bill---as-introduced-6.12.16.pdf>

A Bill to make provision to decriminalise medical termination of a pregnancy in those circumstances where the foetus is diagnosed with a fatal abnormality.

Bill Type: Non-Executive

Bill Sponsor: David Ford

Introduced 6<sup>th</sup> Dec 2016

## Assembly Questions –asked in November and December 2016

Issue	Question	Answer
<p><b>Gender equality</b> (<i>issues raised by the publication of the Gender Equality Policy Priorities and Recommendations report by ECNI</i>)</p>	<p>Sean Lynch (SF) asked the Minister of Finance what actions he is taking to implement the policy priorities and recommendations, issued by the Equality Commission, to advance gender equality.</p> <p>Michaela Boyle (SF) asked the Minister of Finance what actions he is taking to implement the policy priorities and recommendations, issued by the Equality Commission, to advance gender equality.</p>	<p>I am committed to gender equality and will take forward actions within my Department's remit to advance this goal where possible. For example, I have recently asked for a review to be conducted in relation to the current policy on gender recognition and my Department has introduced protection orders in relation to Female Genital Mutilation. We will also work with the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments to take forward actions aimed at improving gender equality in Public Appointments.</p> <p>In addition, in line with The Executive Office's Gender Equality Strategy 2006 – 2016, my Department has already developed and implemented a number of policies and measures to promote gender equality among the NICS workforce. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducting formal reviews of the gender profile of the NICS and including statements in recruitment advertisements welcoming applications from the under-represented gender.</li> <li>Establishing a NICS Women's Network to examine positive characteristics contributing to success and barriers to career progression. A new mentoring initiative aimed at middle management women in the feeder grades to the senior civil service has also been introduced.</li> <li>Arranging 'conversation with a purpose' events for female staff to encourage them to consider further opportunities for career progression.</li> </ul>

		<p>Developing a training programme which promotes respect for diversity and challenges stereotypes. This is compulsory for all staff and is undertaken at regular intervals.</p> <p>Working to ensure there is gender pay equality in the NICS. Latest figures show no gap between male and female pay in the NICS.</p> <p>Continued commitment to flexible working policies.</p> <p>The use of a Salary Sacrifice Childcare Scheme to help staff with the cost of registered childcare.</p> <p>Developing a NICS Domestic Abuse policy to provide advice and sources of help and support for those staff who are affected by this issue.</p>
	<p>Sean Lynch (SF) asked the Minister of Justice what actions she is taking to implement the policy priorities and recommendations, issued by the Equality Commission, to advance gender equality.</p> <p>Michaela Boyle (SF) asked the Minister of Justice to outline the actions she has taken to implement the policy priorities and recommendations to advance Gender Equality issued by Equality Commission.</p>	<p>My Department has recently received a copy of the Gender Equality Policy Priorities and Recommendations report, published by the Equality Commission in November 2016, and this has been distributed to officials who have a responsibility for leading on policy across the department for their considerations. In respect of civil servant employees, my Department aligns with the NICS commitments on gender equality, led by Department of Finance, in relation to pay, flexible working and childcare support and we actively participate in diversity initiatives including the Diversity Champions Network and diversity and equality awareness training for staff.</p> <p>In relation to public appointees, my Department ensures that it complies with the Commissioner for Public Appointments Code of Practice and implements the diversity initiatives outlined within it, including giving consideration to diversity issues at the outset of Public Appointment competitions. We are contributing to the development of a cross departmental strategic action plan, led by TEO, which will underpin the delivery of Executive diversity targets and commitments agreed in February 2016.</p> <p>In addition my department is currently revising its Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan for the period 2017-2021 and we will give due consideration to the ECNI recommendations on gender equality as part of the development.</p> <p>In terms of tackling transphobic hate crime, the Community Safety Strategy sets out my Department's approach to tackling all forms of hate crime and the harm it causes through prevention, awareness, education and support for victims and communities. To deliver on this commitment, my Department chairs a multi-agency Hate Crime Delivery Group, who have developed a comprehensive Action Plan around increasing reporting and providing support for victims of all hate crime, including through the regional Hate Crime Advocacy Service which is jointly funded by the PSNI and DOJ. The Advocacy Service includes a specific</p>

		<p>homophobic and transphobic hate crime Advocate based in the Rainbow Project, who provides personal and practical support to victims, including support to report hate crimes in the first instance.</p> <p>The seven year 'Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy' published in March 2016 takes a zero tolerance approach to domestic violence. The Strategy is not gender-specific but rather seeks to ensure that the particular needs of all victims and potential victims of domestic and sexual violence, are identified and responded to appropriately.</p>
	<p>Catherine Seeley (SF) asked the Minister of Health to outline what action her Department is taking to implement the policy priorities and recommendations to advance gender equality as issued by the Equality Commission.</p> <p>Sean Lynch (SF) asked the Minister of Health what actions she is taking to implement the policy priorities and recommendations, issued by the Equality Commission, to advance gender equality.</p>	<p>My Department and its Arm's Length Bodies are committed to ensuring gender equality in the workplace and the provision of appropriate health and social care to all Section 75 groups.</p> <p>A wide range of initiatives are already in place across health and social care bodies to implement the policy priorities and recommendations to advance gender equality. In relation to those highlighted Equality Commission's policy priorities and recommendations for health care examples are as follows:</p> <p>Gender appropriate health and social care to address the particular needs of women and men, trans people, and those with multiple identities is available through specialist sexual health services and Regional Gender Identity Services. The Public Health Agency is recognised as a 'Diversity Champion' and a programme of training and awareness raising is in place across the sector to ensure understanding amongst health and social care professionals about gender equality with specific guidelines developed for the Royal College of GPs to raise awareness and understanding in supporting LG&amp;B patients and the needs of transgender patients in primary care.</p> <p>Lower life expectancy for men, higher suicide rates and health risks in relation to alcohol, drug and substance abuse than women is being addressed through the New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2. The draft Protect Life 2 Strategy aims to reduce the differential in the suicide rate between the most deprived areas and the least deprived areas and will continue to have a focus on men.</p> <p>Regarding barriers to women accessing health and social care services, including access to reproductive health services, RQIA recommendations have been implemented on staff training, arrangements for partner notification, provision of information about accessing services and endorsement of NICE guidance on long acting reversible contraception (LARC). A number of regional and strategic recommendations including a focus on development of clinical sexual health services (including reproductive healthcare) are still being considered and are a key priority going forward.</p>

		<p>Regarding gaps in research, The Executive Office has lead policy responsibility for promoting gender equality across government and addressing gender inequalities. The Gender Equality Strategy (2006-16) provides an overarching strategic policy framework to promote gender equality in partnership across government departments and the wider public sector. The Department of Health has progressed actions in respect of suicide prevention, domestic and sexual violence and abuse, and maternity care.</p> <p>The link between socio economic disadvantage and health inequalities experienced by both men and women is recognised by Making Life Better and provides strategic direction for action to improve health and reduce health inequalities, through strengthened collaboration and an approach which takes account of the need for greater intensity of action for those with greater health and social need.</p> <p>The Department of Finance is responsible for corporate Human Resource issues across the Civil Service and my Department is committed to fulfilling its responsibilities in this respect.</p>
	<p>Sean Lynch (SF) asked the Minister for Communities what actions he is taking to implement the policy priorities and recommendations, issued by the Equality Commission, to advance gender equality.</p> <p>Michelle Gildernew (SF) asked the Minister for Communities to detail the action he is taking to implement the recommendations made by the Equality Commission in its document entitled Gender Equality: Policy Priorities and Recommendations.</p>	<p>I am aware of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's Gender Equality: Policy Priorities and Recommendations document which seeks to inform policy development to advance gender equality in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>One of the priority areas identified in the document is to tackle gender based violence and domestic violence in gender specific contexts. I recognise that domestic violence is a serious problem which has a devastating effect on victims and their families and I recently participated in the Women's Aid '16 Days of Action' campaign designed to raise awareness of domestic violence.</p> <p>In relation to the other priorities identified in the document, responsibility for a number of policy areas covering a wide range of social inclusion issues, including gender equality, transferred to my Department in May this year. I am currently considering how best to take forward this work in the context of the Executive's draft Social Strategy which will be issued for public consultation in due course.</p>
<p><b>Under-representation of women: Assembly</b></p>	<p>Gerry Kelly (SF) asked the Assembly Commission for an update on the current Gender Action Plan.</p>	<p>The gender action plan 2016-18 was approved by the Assembly Commission in March 2016 following staff consultation. It sets out actions and measures to promote gender equality in the Assembly secretariat and is broken down into three themes: leadership and development; communication and engagement;</p>

<p><b>Commission's Gender Action Plan</b></p>		<p>and life balance, health and well-being. A gender action plan implementation group, which comprises staff from across the secretariat, has been established to oversee the implementation of the plan. The group reports to the Commission every six months on progress against targets. An update was presented to the Commission at its November meeting, highlighting progress made since March 2016.</p> <p>For full discussion and official report see:  <a href="http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&amp;eveDate=2016-11-29&amp;docID=283509#AQO 807/16-21">http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&amp;eveDate=2016-11-29&amp;docID=283509#AQO 807/16-21</a></p>
	<p>Clare Bailey (GPNI) asked the Assembly Commission pursuant to AQO 807/16-21, to outline the rationale behind the statement that it is unlawful to reserve a quota of jobs for members of a particular under-represented or disadvantaged group.</p>	<p>Mr Gerry Kelly MLA (AQO 807/16-21) asked the Assembly Commission "for an update on the current Gender Action Plan." The issue of quotas arose during supplementary questions to this AQO.</p> <p>The Gender Action Plan sets out actions and measures to promote gender equality within the Assembly Secretariat. The action plan was developed by the Gender Action Plan Working Group which comprised members of staff from across the Secretariat. The Group considered the issue of quotas during discussions on developing guidance for Heads of Business and Directors with regard to staff representation on internal working groups. The Group therefore sought confirmation from the Equality Commission on its position regarding the use of quotas in the appointment of internal decision-making groups.</p> <p>In its response, the Equality Commission outlined the difference between lawful positive action and unlawful positive action, stating that:</p> <p><i>"..... for employers generally, Articles 48 and 49 of the Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 set out the conditions for positive action. Under these provisions employers are allowed to encourage persons of a particular sex to apply for jobs if few or no people of that sex have done that type of work in the previous twelve months. Positive action encouragement can take a number of forms, including positive action advertising. Under these provision employers may provide single-sex training in circumstances where that sex is under-represented in particular work or has been in the past twelve months. Positive action training may also be provided to people where they have been engaged in discharging domestic or family responsibilities to the exclusion of full-time employment for a period of time. The purpose of positive action training is to provide members of the under-represented group with the skills and abilities to enable them to compete for job vacancies on an equal basis. Examples of positive action training include management skills and engineering training courses for women as these are areas which women are under-represented.</i></p>

		<p><i>Importantly, the provision for positive action encouragement does not allow an employer to treat a job application from a woman more favourably than one for a man. The exception to the principle of equal treatment only applies to special training provisions and encouragement to apply for a job and not at the point of selection for that job. The merit principle should always be applied at that point. It would therefore be unlawful for the Assembly Secretariat to reserve a quota of jobs for the appointment of women to jobs."</i></p> <p>This view accorded with the Group's understanding that, in terms of recruitment, it would be unlawful to reserve a quota of jobs for members of particular under-represented or disadvantaged groups if those groups are defined by reference to sex, religion, community background, race or sexual orientation. Specifically, in relation to quotas the Equality Commission stated that: <i>"In terms of the appointment of staff to internal decision-making groups, it would appear to us that it would be unlawful to reserve a quota of positions for members of one sex or the other unless the conditions set out in Articles 48 and 49 of the Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 are met."</i></p> <p>The Gender Action Plan can be found on the Assembly's intranet, AssISt. The Group's consideration of quotas is outlined at page 31:  <a href="http://assist.assemblyni.gov.uk/services/commission/equality/genderequality.htm">http://assist.assemblyni.gov.uk/services/commission/equality/genderequality.htm</a></p>
<p><b>Under-representation of women: diversity in public appointments</b></p>	<p>Sean Lynch (SF) asked the Minister for Communities whether his Department has adopted and implemented the diversity initiative as promoted by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.</p>	<p>My Department is fully committed to ensuring that the boards of its public bodies are fully reflective of society and welcomes the recent impetus provided by the Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland (CPA NI) in addressing diversity issues.</p> <p>Following the introduction of targets in April 2016 by the Northern Ireland Executive to achieve equal representation of men and women on public body boards, my Department has implemented a range of initiatives, such as increased usage of social media, ensuring the public is aware of the gender targets, making the appointment process more user friendly and engaging with organisations that champion under-represented groups to attract applications from such groups.</p> <p>The Commissioner has acknowledged and commended my Department on actions it has taken to achieve the gender targets.</p> <p>My Department will continue to engage with the Commissioner as part of the diversity initiative to ensure that actions taken are reflective of good and current practice.</p>
	<p>Sean Lynch (SF) asked the Minister of Health whether her</p>	<p>I fully support the Diversity initiative being promoted by the Commissioner for Public Appointment.</p>



	<p>Department has adopted and implemented the diversity initiative as promoted by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.</p>	<p>My Department is working towards improving the gender balance across the boards of its public bodies whilst ensuring that all public appointments are made on the basis of merit.</p> <p>As a result in a recent public appointment competition, 45% of the applications received were from women. Overall across all of the Department's public bodies the current gender balance is 59% male and 41% female.</p>
<p><b>Women in detention</b></p>	<p>Fra McCann (SF) asked the Minister of Justice, in light of recommendation 5.3 Criminal Justice Inspection Report on an unannounced inspection of Ash House Women's Prison 9th - 19th May 2016, whether her Department intends to expedite plans for a separate women's prison.</p>	<p>I am committed to the development of a new, separate facility dedicated to women to provide fit for purpose accommodation that will aid their rehabilitation and enhance public protection.</p> <p>An Outline Business Case (OBC) 1 for a New Facility for Women on the Hydebank Wood site was approved by the Department of Finance (the then Department of Finance and Personnel) in December 2015.</p> <p>Project Delivery is dependent on the provision of capital funding. This will be considered as part of the process of setting the next budget.</p> <p>I am unable to confirm when the building of a New Facility for Women will commence until capital funding is secured.</p>
<p><b>Perinatal Mental Health</b></p>	<p>Jo-Anne Dobson (UUP) asked the Minister of Health to detail the support provided to pregnant women and new mothers with severe mental health problems.</p>	<p>Regionally, mental health services for expectant or new mothers are provided by general community mental health teams, in line with the Integrated Perinatal Mental Health Care Pathway (Dec 2012). This pathway provides guidance for all health and social care staff, and is currently being updated to reflect NICE guideline CG192 (2014). Where inpatient care is required, this is provided within existing general adult mental health facilities.</p> <p>Small-scale specialist perinatal services are available in the Belfast Trust area.</p> <p>The Perinatal Mood Disorder Clinic provides care to mothers with serious mental illness who are not already attending a consultant psychiatrist. However, there is a clear need for a regional specialist service, and I am currently considering an options paper on establishing comprehensive specialist community provision and a Mother and Baby Unit. This is also an area where I will explore the potential for an all-island approach.</p>
<p><b>Health in pregnancy: Group B Strep Screening</b></p>	<p>Robin Swann (UUP) asked the Minister of Health whether she has any plans to introduce screening of Group B Strep of expectant mothers which could prevent early onset GBS.</p>	<p>National Screening Committee (NSC) is an expert body which advises the four Health Departments on screening programmes. In November 2012 NSC re-reviewed the research evidence on antenatal screening for Group B Streptococcus (GBS) and recommended that screening should not be offered to all pregnant women.</p> <p>The following were factors in the decision.</p>

		<p>65% of deaths linked to GBS are in babies born prematurely i.e. before screening would take place.</p> <p>Most long term disability linked to GBS is caused when the baby is infected after the first week of life (Late Onset GBS) and antibiotics in labour do not reduce this type of GBS disease.</p> <p>The test only identifies women who are carrying GBS at the time when they are screened; some women will no longer be carrying GBS by the time they receive antibiotics in labour. Screening cannot identify the small number of women whose babies would be affected; therefore many thousands of women would receive antibiotics in labour when their babies would not be affected.</p> <p>Evidence suggests that a small number of pregnant women have been harmed as a result of receiving antibiotics in labour. This needs to be investigated further. NSC's recommendation is currently being reviewed as part of NSC's regular review cycle of all policies. As part of this review a public consultation has been issued and responses are due to be returned by 25th January 2017.</p> <p>The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and NICE also advise that screening for GBS should not be offered in pregnancy.</p>
<p><b>Domestic and sexual violence</b></p>	<p>Michaela Boyle (SF) asked the Minister for Communities for his assessment of the tripartite arrangement for the funding of Women's Aid.</p>	<p>For full discussion and official report see:</p> <p><a href="http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&amp;eveDate=2016-12-05&amp;docID=284534#AQO 831/16-21">http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&amp;eveDate=2016-12-05&amp;docID=284534#AQO 831/16-21</a></p>
	<p>Caoimhe Archibald (SF) asked the Minister of Justice to outline her Department's timeframe for legislating on coercive control.</p>	<p>My Department has consulted on the potential introduction of a Domestic Abuse offence. My officials attended the Justice Committee on 27 October to present the consultation <i>Summary of Responses</i> report. The report has also been published on the Department of Justice website.</p> <p>I have previously made clear my intention to introduce a specific Domestic Abuse Offence in Northern Ireland given the widespread support demonstrated through the consultation process. My Officials are now working with key stakeholders to develop the shape of the offence for Northern Ireland. This work will also be informed by benchmarking with other jurisdictions.</p> <p>I hope to introduce the offence early in the New Year and I recognise that this is a challenging target.</p> <p>Naturally this will require the support of Assembly and Executive colleagues in taking this process forward.</p>

		However, I want to be clear that whilst it is important to legislate as quickly as possible we need to ensure that the new offence is both comprehensive and practical. I know that members of the Justice Committee share this view.
	Gary Middleton (DUP) asked the Minister of Justice what support her Department is providing for victims of domestic violence in Foyle.	For full discussion and official report see: <a href="http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&amp;eveDate=2016-11-29&amp;docID=283509#AQO_791/16-21">http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&amp;eveDate=2016-11-29&amp;docID=283509#AQO_791/16-21</a>
	Mark Durkan (SDLP) asked 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.	Figures on the total number of victims of domestic abuse are not held by the Department of Health. 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.
	Mark Durkan (SDLP) asked 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.  Same question to Minister of Health not answered yet.	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. 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.
	Jenny Palmer (UUP) asked the Minister of Justice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- whether she plans to introduce legislation similar to Clare's Law.</li> <li>- for her assessment on the progress towards introducing legislation</li> </ul>	Legislation is not required in order to introduce a Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (also known as Clare's Law) in Northern Ireland. Earlier this year my Department sought views through a public consultation, on whether PSNI's existing common law powers for disclosing information should be utilised through the establishment of a formal Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme. Having considered the responses to the consultation, I am now committed to introducing a Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme in Northern Ireland. The

	<p>similar to the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme that exists in England.</p>	<p>Scheme will make provision for both a 'Right to Ask' and 'Right to Know' processes.</p> <p>A Task and Finish Group representing key stakeholders from the statutory, voluntary and community sector has been established to develop the scheme. The primary focus will be ensuring the safety of all those involved hence the scheme will require clear protocols and guidance for police on the operation of the scheme.</p>
	<p>Gerry Kelly (SF) asked the Minister of Health what engagement she has had with the Minister of Justice about addressing domestic and sexual violence.</p>	<p>The Justice Minister and I met, not long after we took office, to discuss how our respective Departments can continue to work together to deliver the Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy. This is a priority for us both. We are committed to working in partnership to send a clear message that domestic and sexual violence is not tolerated in any form in our society. We have, where possible, coordinated our support for this year's '16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence' Campaign and will be participating in a number of events together over the coming days.</p> <p>To mark this campaign, the Justice Minister and I will co-Chair the first meeting of the newly re-constituted Inter-Ministerial Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence (later this afternoon). I also look forward to our joint visit to a Women's Aid refuge to meet with staff and volunteers and indeed participating with the Justice Minister at the Women's Aid Charter event in the Long Gallery this Tuesday evening.</p> <p>Our Departments will continue to work together to jointly fund key victim support and advice services such as the Government's 24 Hour Domestic and Sexual Violence Helpline; the Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences for high risk victims of domestic violence; and The Rowan Sexual Assault Referral Centre. I also fully support the work the Justice Minister is taking forward to introduce a new Domestic Abuse Offence in the North and my officials will continue to work with her Department to ensure any new measures and protections are integrated within Health and Social Care.</p> <p>This is but one example of where departments can successfully apply a joined up approach in dealing with difficult societal issues.</p>
<p><b>Stalking</b></p>	<p>Brenda Hale (DUP) asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the potential for stalking legislation.</p>	<p>As I announced on 12 September I have asked my Department to review the law of harassment and to identify the scope for introducing specific stalking offences. The Justice Committee has also indicated that it intends to carry out a review to consider the potential benefits of specific stalking legislation. The Committee will produce a report by April 2017 to support legislative change.</p>

	Adrian McQuillan (DUP) asked the Minister of Justice for an update on legislation on stalking	<p>My Department will work closely with the Committee on this issue so that legislation can follow on swiftly from the conclusion of this shared approach.</p> <p>For full discussion and official report see:</p> <p><a href="http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&amp;eveDate=2016-11-29&amp;docID=283509#AQO_790/16-21">http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&amp;eveDate=2016-11-29&amp;docID=283509#AQO_790/16-21</a></p>
<b>Childcare: the Women's Centres Childcare Fund</b>	Alex Easton (DUP) asked the Minister of Education what transitional plans are in place to facilitate the movement of the Women's Centre Childcare Fund from the Department for Communities.	<p>The Department of Education is leading on the development of the Executive's Childcare Strategy which, when agreed by the Executive, may include further opportunities for a range of childcare provision to be supported. The future of the Women's Centre Childcare Fund (WCCF) is currently under the control of the Minister for Communities. Officials from DE and DfC will continue to engage on the development of the Childcare Strategy and on the timescale for the development and delivery of its constituent actions.</p> <p>I hope to bring forward the full version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the coming months, having taken account of the many consultation responses received, the Programme for Government and the new opportunities that now exist to align childcare and Early Years initiatives.</p>
	Jenny Palmer (UUP) asked the Minister for Communities to detail where the £800,000 currently allocated to the Women's Centre Childcare Fund will be allocated after March 2017.	The budget for 2017/18 has not yet been agreed, accordingly, I am not therefore in position to advise where the resources currently allocated to the Women's Centre Childcare Fund will be allocated after March 2017.
	Nichola Mallon (SDLP) asked the Minister for Communities to outline his plans for funding of the Women's Centre Childcare Fund post April 2017.	The Executive's Childcare Strategy, which is being taken forward by the Department of Education, is the appropriate vehicle to address the matter of pre-school childcare in the future and I am working to ensure that we have a transition that, as far as possible, is not detrimental to the Women's Centre Childcare Fund.
	Alex Easton (DUP) asked the Minister for Communities to outline his plans for the future of the Women's Centre Childcare Fund.	<p>It is proposed that the provision of childcare in Women's Centres, provided through the Women's Centre Childcare Fund, will be addressed in the new Childcare Strategy, currently being considered by the Department of Education.</p> <p>The new Strategy is unlikely to be in place before April 2017 and my officials continue to engage with the Department of Education about the new childcare</p>

		arrangements. I have not yet made any decisions about budget allocations for 2017/18.
	Eamonn McCann (PBPA) asked the Minister for Communities whether he will ensure the Women's Centres Childcare Fund will continue to be funded through his Department, in financial year April 2017 to March 2018.	It is proposed that the provision of childcare in Women's Centres, as provided under the Women's Centre Childcare Fund, will be taken forward through the Childcare Strategy, currently being considered by the Department of Education. Department of Education officials have advised that the alternative funding measure being brought forward under the Strategy is unlikely to be in place before April 2017. No decisions have yet been taken regarding funding commitments by the Department for 2017/18.
	Eamonn McCann (PBPA) asked the Minister of Education whether the Women's Centres Childcare Fund will be funded through his Department in 2017-18.  Mark Durkan (SDLP) asked the Minister of Education whether the Women's Centres Childcare Fund will be funded through his Department for the year 2017-18.	The funding arrangements for the Women's Centre Childcare Fund is the responsibility of the Minister for Communities. My Department is leading on the development of the Executive's Childcare Strategy which, when agreed by the Executive, may include further opportunities for a range of childcare provision to be supported. Officials from my Department and Department for Communities will continue to engage on the development of the Childcare Strategy and its constituent actions including timescales. I hope to bring forward the full version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the coming months, having taken account of the many consultation responses received, the Programme for Government and the new opportunities that now exist to align childcare and Early Years initiatives.
<b>Childcare: affordability (issues raised by the publication of the Childcare Costs Survey by Employers for Childcare)</b>	Sandra Overend (UUP) asked the Minister of Education what is the average cost of childcare.	The average weekly cost of a full-time childcare place, according to the latest Employers for Childcare Northern Ireland Childcare Cost Survey, is £164 per week. This average cost relates to formal childcare settings (day nurseries and childminders). A copy of this report can be accessed at the following link: <a href="http://www.employersforchildcare.org/report/childcare-costs-survey-2015/">http://www.employersforchildcare.org/report/childcare-costs-survey-2015/</a>
	Rosemary Barton (UUP) asked the Minister of Education - how he will support community childcare providers in Fermanagh and Tyrone as the most	The affordability of childcare has been recognised as a key issue for families during the development of the Childcare Strategy. The first phase of the Strategy led to the establishment of the Bright Start School Age Childcare (SAC) Grant Scheme, which financially supports low cost childcare places and has, to date, supported some 3,000 low cost childcare places across Northern Ireland, of which around 1,500 are in rural areas.

	<p>cost-effective childcare option</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- how he will address (i) the increasing cost of childcare in Fermanagh and Tyrone; and (ii) the greater lack of childcare provision in Fermanagh and Tyrone compared with the rest of Northern Ireland</li> <li>- how he will increase awareness of (i) the new Tax-Free Childcare scheme which will be introduced in 2017; and (ii) existing family benefits and entitlements available to parents related to childcare</li> <li>- how he will address the increasing cost of (i) breakfast clubs; (ii) afterschool clubs; and (iii) summer schemes</li> </ul>	<p>At a local level the Childcare Partnerships (CCPs) have a role in identifying the need for childcare services in their respective areas, which should enable them to build a comprehensive picture of supply and demand in local areas. The CCPs have also acted as the Managing Agents in delivering the SAC Grant Scheme and offer information and support to childcare providers, parents and employers. The CCPs aim is to increase the number of childcare places and to ensure high quality affordable childcare for parents across Northern Ireland.</p> <p>The first phase of the Childcare Strategy has sought to promote and encourage uptake of financial assistance available to help parents meet the costs of childcare, principally, childcare vouchers and the childcare element of Working Families' Tax Credit. This is something I hope to build on in the future as HMRC introduces the Tax-Free Childcare scheme.</p> <p>I am aware of the recent report 'Northern Ireland Childcare Cost Survey 2016', issued by Employers for Childcare, which highlighted a number of issues with the costs of childcare including the cost variations across areas, different types of settings and for different services such as summer schemes, breakfast clubs and afterschool clubs.</p> <p>The forthcoming Childcare Strategy will seek to address accessibility and affordability issues. I hope to bring forward the full version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the coming months, having taken account of the many consultation responses received, the Programme for Government and the new opportunities that now exist to align childcare and Early Years initiatives. The Childcare Strategy, when agreed by the Executive, may include further opportunities for a wider range of childcare provision to be supported.</p>
	<p>Andy Allen (UUP) asked the Minister of Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- how he will support community childcare providers in Belfast as the most cost effective childcare option</li> <li>- how he will reduce the cost of childcare in (i) Antrim; and (ii) Down as the counties with the highest average cost of full-time childcare</li> </ul>	<p>As above.</p>

	<p>Danny Kennedy (UUP) asked the Minister of Education what he is doing to address the rising cost of childcare</p>	<p>The affordability of childcare has been recognised as a key issue for families during the development of the Childcare Strategy. The first phase of the Strategy led to the establishment of the Bright Start School Age Childcare Grant Scheme, which financially supports low cost childcare places and has, to date, supported some 3,000 low cost childcare places across Northern Ireland.</p> <p>The first phase of the Childcare Strategy has sought to promote and encourage uptake of financial assistance available to help parents meet the costs of childcare, principally, childcare vouchers and the childcare element of Working Families' Tax Credit. This is something I hope to build on in the future as HMRC introduces the Tax-Free Childcare scheme.</p> <p>I am aware of the recent report 'Northern Ireland Childcare Cost Survey 2016', issued by Employers for Childcare, which highlighted a number of issues with the costs of childcare including the cost variations across areas, different types of settings and for different services such as summer schemes, breakfast clubs and afterschool clubs.</p> <p>The forthcoming Childcare Strategy will seek to address accessibility and affordability issues. I hope to bring forward the full version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the new year.</p>
<p><b>Childcare Strategy and funding</b></p>	<p>Barry McElduff (SF) asked the Minister of Education to outline his Department's action plan for childcare in rural areas.</p>	<p>The first phase of the Childcare Strategy has, to date, supported 51 childcare settings serving rural areas representing some 1,500 low cost, childcare places. Development of the full Executive Childcare Strategy has been taken forward on a co-design basis with ongoing involvement from the relevant Government Departments, the childcare sector and childcare stakeholders, including stakeholders representing rural interests. The issue of childcare availability in rural areas was raised during last year's public consultation on the draft Executive Childcare Strategy.</p> <p>I hope to bring forward the full version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the coming months, having taken account of the many consultation responses received, the Programme for Government and the new opportunities that now exist to align childcare and Early Years initiatives.</p>
	<p>George Robinson (DUP) asked the Minister of Education pursuant to AQW 4735/16-21, what opportunities will exist for schools to provide afterschool childcare from 4:00pm to</p>	<p>The first phase of the Childcare Strategy, launched in September 2013, included actions to support school age childcare services (breakfast clubs, afterschool clubs and summer schemes). The Strategy has, to date, supported some 3,000 low cost school age childcare places. I am currently considering the need for a similar scheme in the forthcoming strategy.</p>



	<p>6:00pm under the final version of the Childcare Strategy.</p>	<p>I hope to bring forward the full version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the coming months, having taken account of the many consultation responses received, the Programme for Government and the new opportunities that now exist to align childcare and Early Years initiatives.</p>
	<p>Jenny Palmer (UUP) asked the Minister of Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- for an update on the status of the Childcare Strategy 2015-25</li> <li>- whether he plans to give organisations that provide childcare more funding security</li> <li>- whether the final Childcare Strategy will include ring-fenced funding for (i) specific organisations; or (ii) types of childcare provision</li> <li>- (i) for an outline of the funding model being considered for the Childcare Strategy 2015-25; and (ii) whether the Childcare Strategy will have a long term budget attached to it or will it be funded via monitoring rounds</li> </ul>	<p>I hope to bring forward the final version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the coming months, having taken account of the many consultation responses received, the Programme for Government and the new opportunities that now exist to align childcare and Early Years initiatives.</p> <p>The budget for the final Childcare Strategy will be determined in the context of this process, along with the Executive's agreement of the overall 2017-18 Budget. When agreed by the Executive, the Strategy may include further funding opportunities for a range of childcare provision to be supported.</p>
	<p>Sandra Overend (UUP) asked the Minister of Education to outline what funding model he will propose to the Executive to ensure the delivery of the Ten Year Strategy for Affordable</p>	<p>I hope to bring forward the final version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the new year.</p> <p>The budget for the Childcare Strategy from 2017 will be determined in the context of the Executive's consideration of future year budgets.</p>

	and Integrated Childcare 2015-2025.	
	Danny Kennedy (UUP) asked the Minister of Education to detail the date on which he will be presenting the Childcare Strategy to the Executive.	The affordability of childcare has been recognised as a key issue for families during the development of the Childcare Strategy... The forthcoming Childcare Strategy will seek to address accessibility and affordability issues. I hope to bring forward the full version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the new year.
<b>Abortion</b>	Stewart Dickson (APNI) asked the Minister of Health following reports on Monday 28 November 2016 that the working group on fatal foetal abnormality has recommended legislative change in cases of fatal foetal abnormality, whether she will publish immediately the working group's report.	As I indicated in the Assembly Chamber, the report has been shared with the First and deputy First Ministers and the Justice Minister and I intend to submit joint proposals to the Executive early in the new year. It remains our intention to publish the document after it has been considered by the Executive.
	Trevor Lunn (APNI) asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment on the Human Rights Commission's annual statement's findings that Termination of pregnancy is an area which requires urgent attention.	The Health Minister and I have said that proposals on fatal fetal abnormality will be brought to the Executive in the New Year. We want to make progress on this as soon as possible. Decisions on future policy and legislative direction are for the Executive to make. In its statement, the Human Rights Commission also made reference to the judgment of the High Court in November 2015 and the subsequent Court of Appeal case. As noted by the Commission, the outcome of that appeal is still awaited.

## Motions – tabled during period of November - December 2016

Issue	Date	Tabled by	Motion
Pregnancy and Maternity Rights: The Law and Good Practice	7/11/16	SF Caoimhe Archibald Linda Dillon Alex Maskey Conor Murphy	<p><b>Proposed:</b></p> <p>That this Assembly recognises the recent report by the Equality Commission entitled Pregnancy and Maternity Rights: The Law and Good Practice; notes the findings from the report on how issues of pregnancy and maternity are treated in the workplace; calls on the and Minister for the Economy to engage with the Labour Relations Agency and the Equality Commission in respect of this report; further calls on the Minister to acknowledge the model maternity policy in the report and to bring forward regulations that will ensure equality of opportunity for women in the workplace.</p> <p><i>(No plenary discussion yet.)</i></p>
Good Quality Early Years Education, Support and Childcare	15/11/16	GPNI Steven Agnew	<p><b>Proposed:</b></p> <p>That this Assembly notes the benefits to children, families and society of good quality early years education, support and childcare, especially with regard to improved health, wellbeing, education, increased employment opportunities and reduced criminal activity; recognises that the earlier this intervention is provided, the more effective it is; and calls on the Executive to establish a universal early years provision for 0-3 year olds in Northern Ireland.</p> <p><i>(No plenary discussion yet.)</i></p>
The draft Civil Legal Services (Scope) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016	28/11/16	Minister for Justice	<p><b>Proposed:</b></p> <p>That the draft Civil Legal Services (Scope) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 be approved.</p> <p><i>The draft statutory rule is made under article 12(6) of the Access to Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. The purpose of the statutory rule is to bring two new</i></p>

			<p><i>public protection orders – the violent offences prevention order (VOPO) and the slavery and trafficking prevention order (STPO) – within the scope of legal aid services as services that may be funded through legal aid.</i></p> <p><b>Motion carried.</b></p> <p>For official report see:  <a href="http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&amp;eveDate=2016/11/28&amp;docID=283508">http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&amp;eveDate=2016/11/28&amp;docID=283508</a></p>
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### Petitions promoting women's rights or equality

<b>Title</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Presented by:</b>	<b>Tabled by:</b>
Public Petition: Campaign for Abortion Law Reform in Northern Ireland	22/11/16	Amnesty International UK	Clare Bailey (GPNI) Presented to assembly and passed to the Department of Justice <a href="https://www.theyworkforyou.com/ni/?id=2016-11-22.1.3">https://www.theyworkforyou.com/ni/?id=2016-11-22.1.3</a>