

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS OF HOUSE OF KEYS (QUESTIONS)

Douglas, Tuesday, 26th March 2002
at 10.00 a.m.

Present on this day:

The Speaker (the Hon J A Brown) (Castletown); Mr D M Anderson (Glenfaba); Hon A R Bell and Mr L I Singer (Ramsey); Mr R E Quine OBE (Ayre); Mr J D Q Cannan (Michael); Mrs H Hannan (Peel); Hon S C Rodan (Garff); Mr P Karran, Hon R K Corkill and Mr A J Earnshaw (Onchan); Mr G M Quayle (Middle); Messrs J R Houghton and R W Henderson (Douglas North); Hon D C Cretney (Douglas South); Hon R P Braidwood and Mrs B J Cannell (Douglas East); Hon A F Downie and Hon J P Shimmin (Douglas West); Hon J Rimington, Mr Q B Gill and Hon Mrs P M Crowe (Rushen); with Mr M Cornwell-Kelly, Secretary of the House.

The Chaplain took the prayers.

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**Flooding – Contingency and
Emergency Plans –
Review of Measures –
Question by Mr Henderson**

Question 1. The hon. member for Douglas North (Mr Henderson) to ask the Chief Minister:

In the light of the recent North Quay, Douglas Promenade and other flooding throughout the Island, and the recent closure of a large area of Douglas around Walpole Avenue on 13th March, will you be instructing the relevant government departments involved, and other departments –

- (a) *to review what contingency and emergency plans they have to cover emergencies such as flooding and chemical leaks or put in place plans if none exist;*
- (b) *to examine the range of possible emergencies currently covered, to establish that the list is as comprehensive as it could be; and*
- (c) *are you satisfied with the measures taken in recent flooding and chemical leak incidents and will you be having a full review of measures to improve any responses that may require adjusting?*

The Speaker: I call on the member for Douglas North, Mr Henderson.

Mr Henderson: Thank you, Mr Speaker, I beg leave to ask the question standing in my name.

The Speaker: I call on the hon. member for Onchan, Mr Corkill, the Chief Minister.

Mr Corkill: Thank you, Mr Speaker. There is no requirement for me to give any instructions to the government departments involved in the incidents referred to in the question. Nothing that has emerged from the handling of the incidents warrants the sort of route-and-branch review that the question suggests. There was, of course, some initial assessment of lessons to be learned by those involved once the incidents were over, and I understand that there have been some changes made to the standing arrangements in the light of these assessments. In addition, the Department of Transport has established a working group to look longer term at flood defence arrangements with particular reference to the possible implications of climate change. Actions have been taken, Mr Speaker, and I can see no necessity at this time for requiring anything further to be done.

The Speaker: Hon. member for Douglas North, Mr Henderson.

Mr Henderson: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the Chief Minister for his answer to my question. Would he agree with me that, with this working party that has been established to keep an eye on the situations, it should include other areas of contingency such as chemical leaks and so on and that any further information will be fed into this working party so that situations can continually be under review and any changes or adjustments may be made from that?

The Speaker: Chief Minister to reply.

Mr Corkill: A couple of points, Mr Speaker, I would like to make clear are that the Isle of Man Government has had emergency planning procedures in place for a number of years and that there are also two working groups which are relevant to the subjects before us that have been in existence for some time also. The first one of those is the Joint Emergency Services Working Group, and also there is another group, the Chemical Biological Radiation and Nuclear Resilience Planning and Response Group. Both of these groups have got multidisciplinary memberships, they meet every two months and that is an ongoing situation.

So in terms of preparedness for major events, major disasters and major accidents, I do believe the Isle of Man is as well prepared as it can be, bearing in mind that catastrophic events are always extremely difficult to deal with and have to be dealt with in the best and most opportunistic way at the time. Can I say that plans are in place and have been in place for some time.

The Speaker: Hon. member for Douglas North, Mr Houghton.

Mr Houghton: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can the Chief Minister advise whether any claims for compensation have been submitted to government with regard to consequential and damaging effects caused to businesses by the evacuation procedures which had to be implemented due to those safety reasons, sir?

The Speaker: Chief Minister to reply.

Mr Corkill: Mr Speaker, the issue of insurance, generally speaking, is a matter for individuals and the question on the paper does not talk about compensation and claims. I have no briefing notes to help me in that respect, but generally speaking, in terms of flooding, in terms of these sort of events, it is up to individual businesses to have insurance to insure against those particular issues. It is not necessarily a duty of government to cover those insurance costs or indeed to give compensation which would be a great burden on the taxpayer.

The Speaker: Hon. member for Douglas North, Mr Henderson.

Mr Henderson: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Is the Chief Minister satisfied that the list of contingencies covered in the emergency planning operations as he has indicated is wide enough and contains enough to cover things such as chemical leakage and so on, and should that list in itself be under review?

The Speaker: The Chief Minister.

Mr Corkill: These things are always under review, Mr Speaker, and yes, every time there is an incident we try to improve the situation so that we learn by events. So I am satisfied that the structures and the processes in place are as good as we can make them.

Gatwick Airport – Action to Promote – Question by Mr Houghton

Question 2. The hon. member for Douglas North (Mr Houghton) to ask the Minister for Tourism and Leisure:

What action is your department taking to promote London Gatwick Airport as a replacement gateway to the Island?

The Speaker: I call on the hon. member for Douglas North, Mr Houghton.

Mr Houghton: Thank you, Mr Speaker, I beg leave to ask the question standing in my name, sir.

The Speaker: I call on the hon. member for Douglas South, Mr Cretney, Minister for Tourism and Leisure.

Mr Cretney: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Since the announcement by British Airways that they were transferring London flights from Heathrow to Gatwick, my department has been putting together additional marketing activity as well as changing a number of already planned promotions. Whilst there will be ongoing activity over the forthcoming months I can advise that the following activity is already confirmed: direct mail to 40,000 households in the South of England area taken from our data base - this is in conjunction with Manx Airlines; marketing activity directed at 700 travel agents in the South London and South East of England areas, again in conjunction with Manx Airlines; 4,000 London tube cards during April featuring the Gatwick service; a media visit to the Isle of Man in April from the Gatwick catchment area; press releases on an ongoing basis to all media in the South of England; tactical advertising in the local

Gatwick media; e-mail links to existing e-mail data base. Other activity which is in progress but not yet confirmed includes negotiation regarding radio advertising on relevant radio stations, London Metro News advertorial, Classic FM Magazine advertorial; Gatwick Rail Link Magazine.

In addition to all of these activities my department will be using the opportunity to promote the Gatwick route by utilising media visits and ongoing advertising plans plus, of course, the internet. We will also seek continued partnership opportunities with other government departments and the private sector as we recognise it is vital for the Isle of Man to quickly establish itself as an attractive holiday destination in this new marketing area.

The Speaker: Hon. member for Douglas North, Mr Houghton.

Mr Houghton: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the hon. Minister for Tourism and Leisure for his very comprehensive answer this morning. I thank him for that, but can he advise whether British Airways have put a budget in place to promote the Island whilst operating out of London Gatwick, sir?

The Speaker: Minister for Tourism and Leisure.

Mr Cretney: A number of the activities, as I indicated in the question, are being part-funded in partnership arrangements with Manx Airlines, and I guess ultimately the funding for that comes from British Airways.

The Speaker: Hon. member for Ramsey, Mr Singer.

Mr Singer: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Could I ask the hon. minister, whilst he is talking and he is actually, I suppose, going along with the British Airways spin that Gatwick is as good an airport to leave from as Heathrow, would he agree with me that whilst he is promoting the tourism side of this, as far as the businessman is concerned Gatwick is a great disadvantage compared to using Heathrow? It only has one runway and has a poor history of delays. It is served only by one motorway which has a history of delays and that to businessmen cheap flights are not a priority but location and speed of access to London is, and that we should recognise that Gatwick is a poorer airport for businessmen who wish to come to this Island?

The Speaker: Minister for Tourism and Leisure.

Mr Cretney: I am not going along with any British Airways spin, Mr Speaker; I am going along with the reality of the situation as it exists today. (Mr Cannan: Hear, hear.) We have to work in partnership with those who wish to operate to and from

the Isle of Man and I am delighted that later today I understand British European will be making announcements in relation to their services to and from the Island. We will work with whoever for the best interests of the Isle of Man.

**Gas Leak in Walpole Avenue,
Douglas –
Question by Mr Houghton**

Question 3. The hon. member for Douglas North (Mr Houghton) to ask the Minister for Transport:

- (1) *What was the cause leading to the gas leak in Walpole Avenue; and*
- (2) *could it have been prevented?*

The Speaker: I call on the hon. member for Douglas North, Mr Houghton.

Mr Houghton: Thank you, Mr Speaker, I beg leave to ask the question standing in my name, sir.

The Speaker: Hon. member for Douglas West, Mr Shimmin, Minister for Transport.

Mr Shimmin: Mr Speaker, in answer to part (1) of the question the release of hydrogen sulphide gas was from a manhole located in the back alley at the rear of Jubilee Buildings, previously Yates's Wine Lodge or Bushy's. Hydrogen sulphide is formed in sewage when it is starved of oxygen. In this situation the sewage becomes anaerobic and the level of hydrogen sulphide increases in the liquid. When hydrogen sulphide gas is released from solution it can be toxic at high concentrations.

It is currently believed that a plug of fat in the downstream sewer caused the sewage to back up. Sewage then became septic, hydrogen sulphide levels increased and this was released as a gas when the manhole cover was lifted in order to investigate the source of sewage odours in the area. Detectable levels of hydrogen sulphide gas were recorded at the surface, and the police and fire service, in consultation with my department, therefore took the precaution of cordoning off the surrounding area while investigations were carried out within the sewer system. To remove the hydrogen sulphide gas the sewers were ventilated and subsequently cleaned using high pressure water jets. The cleaning process unblocked the sewers and hydrogen sulphide levels began to reduce to levels that were not considered a potential threat, and the extent of the cordon was reduced to the immediate environs of the source of the problem. Investigations using closed circuit TV cameras are ongoing in order to ensure there are no further blockages within the sewers in the area. Also sewer cleaning to remove sludges,

debris and slimes, which contain the potential for release of hydrogen sulphide is continuing.

In answer to part (2) of the question, hydrogen sulphide only becomes problematic when sewage within the system becomes septic. Sewers are designed to be self-cleaning with sewage velocities preventing the formation of anaerobic or septic conditions. Should any blockages occur within sewers there is always the potential for the sewage to become septic. The situation at the rear of the Jubilee Buildings was not detected as there are no known buildings still connected to the sewer.

It is not possible to ensure that deleterious material is not disposed of within the sewer system. The Environmental Health Division of the Department of Local Government and the Environment are ensuring that restaurants, hotels et cetera install and operate grease traps in order to stop discharges of grease and fat into the sewers that the department believes resulted in the build-up of hydrogen sulphide gas within the sewers in the Walpole Avenue area.

May I at this point, Mr Speaker, thank all of those involved on the emergency services which was a combined effort involving as the lead authority the Fire Service, but in supportive rôles working together were the police, the Civil Defence, the Environmental Health, Public Health, Douglas Corporation and my own Department of Transport, and I would like to express my gratitude for all the hard work put into this operation, sir.

The Speaker: Hon. member for Douglas North, Mr Houghton.

Mr Houghton: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Can the hon. minister inform the Court, how many redundant sewerage tanks exist in the Walpole Avenue area and what action has been taken to seal those tanks in order to make them safe from future hazards, sir?

The Speaker: Minister for Transport.

Mr Shimmin: Indeed, Mr Speaker, during the investigation of trying to find the source of the problem, it was apparent that there were redundant tanks in the old Noble's Baths area which had been sealed some years back and were inaccessible to the emergency services. In order to try and solve the problem, holes were broken into those areas to try and detect if that was the source. Ongoing investigations continue to see whether there is anything that needs to be done in that area, but readings are still being monitored and we do believe and hope that the situation has been resolved, but it does mean that areas in that location will still need to be investigated.

**Parking Spaces for the Disabled –
Illegal Use –
Question by Mr Henderson**

Question 4. The hon. member for Douglas North (Mr Henderson) to ask the Minister for Home Affairs:

- (1) *Can you confirm that traffic wardens have the power to move and/or book a person who is not disabled, and not displaying the relevant badge in their vehicle windscreen, but using a disabled parking space; and*
- (2) *will the police act positively on evidence supplied by members of the public on offenders illegally in a disabled space?*

The Speaker: I call on the hon. member for Douglas North, Mr Henderson.

Mr Henderson: Thank you, Mr Speaker, I beg leave to ask the question standing in my name.

The Speaker: I call on the hon. member for Douglas East, Mr Braidwood, Minister for Home Affairs.

Mr Braidwood: Thank you, Mr Speaker. When parking places orders are produced they can contain certain provisions with regard to types of vehicles to be permitted to stand in those parking places. If it is ordered that only vehicles displaying disabled badges will be permitted within certain parking spaces, then traffic wardens or parking controllers do have the power to tell the drivers of other vehicles to move and/or book that vehicle.

In answer to the second part the police will always act positively on evidence supplied by members of the public on offenders illegally parked in a disabled space if the offending vehicle is seen by an officer or traffic warden. In other circumstances should a member of the public make a statement and be willing to attend any future proceedings, then police would seriously consider taking action in these circumstances also. The policing of a disabled space is important, and 402 fixed penalty notices were issued in such areas in the last 12 months.

The Speaker: Hon. member for Douglas North, Mr Henderson.

Mr Henderson: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank the hon. minister for his positive statement in respect of my concerns, but could he just clarify the issue of a member of the public supplying information to a traffic warden or to the police that it will be acted on positively and that member of the public will not necessarily have to go through the stressful situation of

supplying written statements and going through the scenario of appearing in court?

The Speaker: Minister for Home Affairs.

Mr Braidwood: I thought I had already answered that point in my answer. Yes, the police will act positively on any information supplied to them.

**Gas Leak –
Traffic Management Strategy –
Question by Mr Henderson**

Question 5. The hon. member for Douglas North (Mr Henderson) to ask the Minister for Home Affairs:

Are you satisfied with the traffic management strategy that was put in place on the morning of 14th March during the time 0600 to 1100 hours?

The Speaker: I call on the hon. member for Douglas North, Mr Henderson.

Mr Henderson: Thank you, Mr Speaker, I beg leave to ask the question standing in my name.

The Speaker: Hon. member for Douglas East, Mr Braidwood, Minister for Home Affairs.

Mr Braidwood: Thank you, Mr Speaker. From the time on Wednesday 13th March that the fire services were first informed of the presence of hydrogen sulphide in the drainage system, attempts were made through the night to clear the problem by flushing the system. The levels of hydrogen sulphide were monitored continuously. Initially the wind direction was off-shore and obviously assisted in terms of disposal away from the public. The initial exclusion zone was bordered by Victoria Street, Fort Street, Bath Place and Peveril Square.

By 6.40 a.m. on Thursday, 14th March, the levels of hydrogen sulphide being detected had not altered despite the flushing, and the initial exclusion zone was retained.

At about 8 a.m. on Thursday, 14th March, the wind changed direction to easterly and was blowing at about 25 to 35 miles per hour inland and the decision was made on public safety grounds by the fire services and public health advisers to extend the evacuated area bordered by North Quay, Chapel Row, Market Hill, Duke Street, Regent Street and Loch Promenade.

At 8.15 a.m. the deputy fire chief declared a major incident on the grounds of the likely disruption caused to the public and the potential for serious harm to the public if, in particular a cloudburst of highly toxic and inflammable H₂S, which is hydrogen sulphide, should occur. The police were tasked to evacuate the area and

prevent persons from entering. A traffic management plan was put into operation.

In considering the exclusion zone, the one-way traffic systems and main Douglas car parks, the following arrangements were put into place. Traffic flowing from the South via Kewaigue was diverted via Quine's Corner, Ridgeway Street and Prospect Hill. Traffic flowing from the South-West by Peel Road was diverted along Circular Road. Access was permitted to Railway Station Hill and Tesco car parks. Traffic flowing from Onchan and the North via the promenade was diverted along Finch Road and Market Street for access to the Well Road Hill and Marks and Spencer car parks. Access was permitted along Loch Promenade to Regent Street. Traffic flowing down Buck's Road was diverted along Circular Road with access permitted to Athol Street.

In conjunction with the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company, arrangements were made for the arrival and departure of sailings. Passengers and vehicles were directed to report to the Sefton Hotel war memorial area and then escorted to the ferry. Some delays were experienced, but were unavoidable. In conjunction with the bus services, special bus routes were arranged. Buses which normally terminate or commence their routes from Lord Street Bus Station were moved further up Lord Street to the area alongside Coronation Terrace, and traffic flow in Market Street was reversed for the buses.

Regrettably, due to the overnight timing of the incident and the fact that it was predicted that the problem could have been resolved prior to 7 a.m. and the change of wind direction, traffic warning signs could not be strategically placed in advance to give prior notice of the system in operation to motorists entering Douglas town centre. These signs, however, were in place by mid-morning and assisted during the evening rush hour which operated smoothly. Throughout Manx Radio played an extremely important helpful role and should be congratulated for their assistance.

In essence there are very few options available in terms of reducing or preventing a gridlock situation when main traffic arteries are blocked. The police do have contingency plans and liaise closely with the Director of Transport in arranging road closures, lifting other traffic restrictions et cetera in order to ease any problems, but in the main the problems were caused by the sheer volume of traffic that enters Douglas on a daily basis. Therefore, Mr Speaker, under the circumstances I believe the traffic management strategy was satisfactory.

The Speaker: Hon. member for Douglas North, Mr Henderson.

Mr Henderson: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Could the hon. minister confirm for me that given that he feels the traffic management strategy was adequate for the purposes, the police and others were blessed with

some hindsight in this particular emergency and that maybe the strategy should have been implemented sooner, given that it is well known the volume of traffic that comes into Douglas, and the seriousness of this particular situation? Also, could the hon. minister confirm that following this incident a review of emergency traffic management strategies will be underway and the timings of such implementations of those strategies so to lessen any future impacts, God forbid that we ever have to go through this again at some other time?

The Speaker: Minister for Home Affairs.

Mr Braidwood: Thank you, Mr Speaker. As I mentioned, it was through the deputy chief fire officer only at 8.15 that morning after the change of wind direction and because the levels of hydrogen sulphide had not decreased, that the emergency traffic management policy was put into place. Therefore there was no time, as I have already mentioned, to put signs out and warn the people coming into Douglas and I know that even members of this hon. Court had to take about one hour and 20 minutes to come down because of the problems associated along the promenade. I can also confirm to the hon. member for North Douglas, Mr Henderson, that there will be a debriefing and analysis of what happened during the incident on 14th March.

The Speaker: Hon. member for Douglas North, Mr Henderson.

Mr Henderson: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am grateful for the minister's positive responses to my concerns, but I must further ask: in the light of these occurrences, would he agree with me that, given the serious nature of the emergency situation, whether we were going to have it exacerbated by easterly winds or not, it may well have been a better precaution to actually institute traffic management plans sooner rather than waiting up until the last minute and will he also take that on board for when this debrief occurs with the senior staff?

The Speaker: Minister for Home Affairs.

Mr Braidwood: Mr Speaker, yes I will take it on board and I will be taking it back to my department.

The Speaker: Hon. member for Onchan, Mr Karran.

Mr Karran: Vainstyr Loayreyder, would the minister also review the possibility of this happening in other parts of Douglas with the likes of the holding tanks for IRIS, and would he check on all the other aspects so that we would not find ourselves just looking for a repeat in this particular area? If there

could be a problem here there could be a problem in other areas.

The Speaker: Minister for Home Affairs.

Mr Braidwood: Mr Speaker, I am not an expert on sewage, but I do know that hydrogen sulphide, when it was given off in the Walpole area, was because the sewage in the tank at that time or in the sewer had gone septic. Therefore the holding tanks on the IRIS, which are ventilated have movement through them all the time and therefore any H₂S should not arise in the holding tanks on the IRIS project.

The Speaker: Hon. member for Onchan, Mr Karran.

Mr Karran: Vainstyr Loayreyder, in the case of IRIS not working, would the minister not agree that it would be better for us to have a contingency plan as far as this happening somewhere else in order to make sure that we do not end up with a repeat just in case that does happen, as I am sure he is not an expert any more than I am, but would he just make sure that he looks at that point so that we could not be caught out in that area of the town if that was to happen at a later date, allowing for the fact there have been question marks over the design of such facilities?

The Speaker: Minister for Home Affairs.

Mr Braidwood: Yes, Mr Speaker, I will look at that, but while I am on my feet I would also like to mention that the department received a letter from Mr Hall, the director of Environment Safety and Health, and when he mentioned that in his previous career he had been involved in many chemical incidents and debriefs and giving a good understanding of the level of management of such incidents in the UK, saying that the standard varied from excellent to abysmal, but he says, 'I have no hesitation in letting you know, based on my observations of both gold and silver control, that this incident was very well managed indeed.'

The Speaker: Hon. member for Douglas West, Mr Shimmin.

Mr Shimmin: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Would the minister be able to confirm that, under the current all-Island infrastructure contract, the Department of Transport has an ongoing programme of CCTV surveys and sewer-cleaning, and one of the issues is that a number of manholes previously have been covered over, therefore his department can come to my department in order to get further information to try and prevent these situations occurring in the future?

A Member: Hear, hear.

The Speaker: Minister for Home Affairs.

Mr Braidwood: Mr Speaker, I thank the Minister for Transport for his helpful comments.

Curfew Orders – Introduction – Question by Mr Houghton

Question 6. The hon. member for Douglas North (Mr Houghton) to ask the Minister for Home Affairs:

With regard to the Criminal Justice Act 2001, when will your department bring curfew orders into force?

The Speaker: I call on the hon. member for Douglas North, Mr Houghton.

Mr Houghton: Thank you, Mr Speaker, I beg leave to ask the question standing in my name, sir.

The Speaker: I call on the hon. member for Douglas East, Mr Braidwood, Minister for Home Affairs.

Mr Braidwood: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Criminal Justice Act 2001 introduces 63 different provisions, of which 52 have already been brought into force. In connection with the remaining provisions my department has a programme for the phased introduction of all these elements of the Act. It should be noted that some of the remaining provisions are highly complex and technical in nature, and that which is most complex is the introduction of curfew orders and, in particular, the monitoring of the whereabouts of offenders placed on curfew orders. However, my department is progressing this issue and has already brought into force the relevant sections of the Act as well as the Curfew (Monitoring of Irresponsible Persons) Order.

The delay in introducing curfew orders is a result of the need to provide a full and effective system of monitoring prior to providing the courts with the power to make curfew orders. In this connection my department has been progressing the introduction of electronic monitoring, tagging, and I am pleased to be able to report that the extensive work that has been required with the respective suppliers on how they would actually install and monitor the equipment has now been completed and the contract with the preferred supplier will be signed in the very near future. I will add, however, that electronic tagging is technically complex and it is essential that the system is thoroughly tested before it is used on offenders. Therefore, the process of installing and setting up equipment, drafting rules and testing is likely to mean that electronic tagging will not be available until July of this year.

The Speaker: Hon. member for Douglas North, Mr Houghton.

to do if they were not engaged in preparing the answers to questions.

Mr Houghton: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I welcome the hon. minister's answer to this question. Can he advise whether there is a differential in the regulations that he intends to bring forward in July which differentiates between those who require to be tagged and those under curfew order who do not, sir?

The Speaker: Minister for Home Affairs.

Mr Braidwood: Thank you, Mr Speaker. When curfew orders without tagging were introduced in the United Kingdom it proved to be highly ineffective and it was only used in a minority of cases where offenders were clearly the type of persons who would do their time without breaching the order. It is essential that monitoring of curfew orders is effective from day one; therefore when curfew orders will be brought in, monitoring will be brought in at the same time.

The Speaker: Hon. members, that completes the questions for oral answer.

We have one question for written answer which will be circulated in compliance with standing orders.

**Questions in Keys and Tynwald –
Cost to the Taxpayer –
Question by Mr Earnshaw
for Written Answer**

Question 7. The hon. member for Onchan (Mr Earnshaw) to ask the Chief Minister:

On average what is the estimated cost to the taxpayer in answering each of the 182 questions put to ministers during the 10 House of Keys and Tynwald question times held since the beginning of 2002?

Answer

It is difficult to generalise because the amount of research required to produce the answer to a particular question varies greatly from question to question.

However, in answer to a similar question in April 2001, when I was Treasury minister, I suggested that the average cost was probably between £120 and £180. We can probably add about 4 per cent to those figures to bring them up to date.

The main cost of preparing answers to parliamentary questions is, however, the opportunity cost. Generally the work on questions has to be done by senior staff. It is important that answers are correct and so officers of knowledge and experience must be used. The main cost to government is the lost opportunity of what those staff would have been able
