

## **Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 8 March 2001**

[R] signifies that the Member has declared an interest.

[W] signifies that the question was tabled in Welsh.

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## **Questions to the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities**

### **Policies to Support Community Development**

**Q4 Alun Cairns:** Would the Minister make a statement on policies introduced to support community development? (OAQ10118) *Transferred for written answer.*

**The Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities (Edwina Hart):** Communities First is the most recent policy introduced to support community regeneration and development. The National Assembly is currently consulting on the proposals for implementation and will do so until 16 March. The programme is expected to come on line in the summer.

Other programmes also exist to support community development such as the People in Communities programme, the sustainable communities programme and the local regeneration fund. In addition to these, though not specifically introduced to support community regeneration, the Objective 1, 2 and 3 programmes are examples of the type of structural fund that can also support community development. Furthermore, one of the three themes within the LEADER+ programme addresses quality of life in rural areas, with a strong focus on community development.

*Questions 5 to 9 were answered in Plenary.*

### **Policy Agreements between Local Authorities and the National Assembly**

**Q10 Karen Sinclair:** What progress is being made on the policy agreements between each local authority and the National Assembly for Wales? (OAQ10114) *Withdrawn.*

### **Impact of the Local Government Settlement on Council Tax Levels in Wales**

**Q11 Jonathan Morgan:** Would the Minister make a statement on the impact of the local government settlement on the level of council tax in Wales? (OAQ10108)

**Edwina Hart:** I refer to the answer I gave you in response to OAQ10109, answered today in Plenary.

### **Social Exclusion Unit**

**Q12 Helen Mary Jones:** Has the Minister had discussions with the social exclusion unit regarding the relevance of its research to Wales? (OAQ10142)

**Edwina Hart:** I have regular contact with colleagues in Westminster in relation to UK strategies and how they impact on or apply to Wales. I have attended meetings of the UK Ministerial Network on Social Exclusion and the Joint Ministerial Committee on Poverty and keep in contact with the social exclusion

unit through these avenues. Officials from the National Assembly's community regeneration and social inclusion unit also have information sharing meetings every few months with the Cabinet Office's social exclusion unit.

### **Communities First**

**Q13 David Lloyd:** Will the Communities First programme address the needs of communities of interest? (OAQ10166)

**Edwina Hart:** Our proposals for the Communities First programme are out to consultation until 16 March 2001. One of the important issues raised in the document is communities of interest. We have invited specific comment on whether there are communities of interest or special need which merit investigation and/or support beyond the provision made by the National Assembly's current programmes and initiatives. I will be looking at this issue closely when the responses to the second paper are being considered.

### **Council Housing in Urban Areas**

**Q14 David Lloyd:** Will the Minister make a statement on the allocation of council housing in urban areas? (OAQ10140)

**Edwina Hart:** I am keen to assist local authorities to increase choice for applicants, and to develop allocations systems that respond to applicants' preferences as well as needs. A revised code of guidance under Parts VI and VII of the Housing Act 1996 will be issued by the National Assembly later this year. As was indicated in 'Better Homes for People in Wales', I intend to establish a sounding board to develop future policy in this area.

### **Community Regeneration Projects**

**Q15 Pauline Jarman:** How does the Minister ensure that all community regeneration projects are evaluated effectively? (OAQ10145)

**Edwina Hart:** The National Assembly supports a number of community regeneration projects under various programmes. Each of these are subject to monitoring and evaluation. For example, in relation to the People in Communities programme, bi-monthly monitoring meetings are held with the project development co-ordinators. Furthermore Cambridge Consultants Limited has been appointed to carry out a full evaluation of the programme.

### **Allgáu Cymdeithasol yng Nghymru Wledig**

**C16 Dafydd Wigley:** Pa gamau mae'r Cynulliad Cenedlaethol yn cymryd i fesur allgáu cymdeithasol yng Nghymru wledig? (OAQ10141) [W]

**Edwina Hart:** Mae'r mynegrif amddifadedd lluosog ar gyfer Cymru, a gyhoeddwyd fis Awst diwethaf, yn enwi'r etholaethau yn ardaloedd gwledig a threfol Cymru lle ceir yr amddifadedd mwyaf, a hynny mewn modd y gellir eu cymharu'n deg. Mae'r mynegrif hwn, sydd yn gynnyrch menter ar y cyd rhwng y Cynulliad a llywodraeth leol yng Nghymru, yn gwneud llawer mwy na'r ymdrechion cynt i gydnabod y dimensiwn gwledig sydd i amddifadedd. Serch hynny, cynllunnir mwy o waith ar y mynegrif er mwyn gweld pa welliannau pellach y gellir eu gwneud i'r fethodoleg, yn enwedig er mwyn mynd i'r afael â phryderon cymunedau cefn gwlad.

### **Social Exclusion in Rural Areas**

**Q16 Dafydd Wigley:** What measures is the National Assembly undertaking to identify social exclusion in rural areas? (OAQ10141) [W]

**Edwina Hart:** The Welsh index of multiple deprivation, published last August, identifies the most deprived electoral divisions in both rural and urban areas of Wales on a comparable basis. This index, the product of a collaborative venture between the Assembly and local government in Wales, goes much further than its predecessors in recognising the rural dimension of deprivation. However, more work on the index is planned to identify what further improvements can be made to the methodology, in particular to address the concerns of rural communities.

### **Funding for Voluntary Sector Community Regeneration Programmes**

**Q17 Brian Hancock:** Will the Minister make a statement on sources of funding for voluntary sector community regeneration programmes? (OAQ10143)

**Edwina Hart:** The voluntary sector can bid to a number of National Assembly community regeneration programmes. Under Communities First we propose that the voluntary sector, in partnership with others, can access specific funding for the priorities agreed in local action plans. The specific grant for Communities First for the next three years is as follows:

2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
£20.054 million*	£28.854 million	£33.854 million

\*includes approximately £2 million for the People in Communities and sustainable communities programmes.

### **Reducing Homelessness in Wales**

**Q18 Delyth Evans:** What is the Minister doing to reduce homelessness in Wales? (OAQ10135)

**Edwina Hart:** The Assembly, in 2000-01, in addition to the rooflessness programme under Section 180 of the Housing Act 1996, made available a one-off allocation of £3.6 million to local authorities to help them develop sustainable strategic solutions to rough sleeping and to deal with problems related to homelessness and houses in multiple occupation.

The Assembly also resolved, on 27 February 2001, to extend the categories of homeless people who are regarded as being in priority need of accommodation to include:

- a care leaver or person at particular risk of sexual or financial exploitation, 18 years or over but under the age of 21;
- a 16 or 17-year-old;
- a person fleeing domestic violence or threatened domestic violence;
- a person homeless after leaving the armed forces;
- a former prisoner who, after being released from custody, has no accommodation to return to;

These additional categories are widely recognised as some of those most at risk of homelessness and the Order came into force on 1 March 2001.

The Assembly has also established a Homelessness Commission that will advise the Assembly on:

a) Delivering the objectives in 'Betterwales.com' to reduce (by 2003) the 'number of homeless families in temporary housing to below 500', for 'the need for rough sleeping to be eliminated', and to 'improve the access to health services for those sleeping rough and the homeless';

b) Taking forward the recommendations in the Assembly report 'Rough Sleeping in Wales' and the recommendations of the housing strategy task groups relating to homelessness and rough sleeping;

- c) Delivering local homelessness strategies in all Welsh local authorities;
- d) Setting targets and outcomes;
- e) Measuring homelessness and rough sleeping and advising the Office for National Statistics in relation to the count of rough sleepers in Wales on census night 2001;
- f) The options for the long-term funding for homelessness services in Wales, particularly in relation to 'Supporting People—Preventing Homelessness.'

### **People in Communities Projects**

**Q19 Alun Pugh:** Will people who are in People in Communities projects automatically qualify for Communities First? (OAQ10153)

**Edwina Hart:** I have yet to make a final decision on this matter. Such a decision will depend on the timescale for current People in Communities projects and the content of local action plans to be developed for Communities First areas.

### **Local Government Finance Settlement (Transitional Grants)**

**Q20 Elin Jones:** Will the Minister make a statement on the transitional grants received by some local authorities in the local government finance settlement? (OAQ10139) [W] *Withdrawn.*

### **Communities First and European Structural Funds**

**Q21 Karen Sinclair:** How will the Minister ensure that in the regeneration of deprived communities there is a shared approach between Communities First and European structural funds? (OAQ10113) *Withdrawn.*

### **The Local Government Act 2000 (White Paper)**

**Q22 Janet Ryder:** Will the Local Government Act 2000 White Paper for Wales incorporate the principles governing conduct of members of relevant authorities? (OAQ10136) *Withdrawn.*

### **Council Tax Levels in Wales**

**Q23 David Melding:** Would the Minister make a statement on the level of council tax in Wales? (OAQ10115) *Withdrawn.*

### **Community Driven Initiatives**

**Q24 Alun Cairns:** Would the Minister make a statement on community-driven initiatives in which she has been involved? (OAQ10117)

**Edwina Hart:** The new community regeneration and social inclusion unit, which I have set up, will be linking into all the National Assembly's community-driven initiatives.

### **Guideline Rent Increase (Affect on Powys)**

**Q25 Cynog Dafis:** How will the guideline rent increase proposed for the next financial year affect Powys? (OAQ10149) *Withdrawn.*

### Measuring Social Exclusion in Urban Areas (Role of Housing)

**Q26 Jocelyn Davies:** Will the Minister make a statement on the role of housing when measuring social exclusion in urban areas? (OAQ10150) *Withdrawn.*

### Guideline Rent Proposed for 2001-02

**Q27 Cynog Dafis:** Will the Minister make a statement on the guideline rent proposed for 2001-02 in Wales? (OAQ10138)

**Edwina Hart:** The housing revenue account subsidy guideline rent increases for 2001-02 were announced on 19 January 2001. The all-Wales average increase in guideline rents is 4.5 per cent. The increase in guideline rents has been distributed in line with a formula agreed with the Welsh Local Government Association.

The timetable followed was broadly in line with that for previous years. The Local Government and Housing Committee was invited in November 2000 to give its views on the proposal to consult on an average housing revenue account subsidy guideline rent increase of 4.5 per cent in 2001-02. The Committee concluded that priority should be given to maximising resources available to local authorities for management and maintenance, rather than reducing the level of guideline rent increases. That view was taken into account in setting the increases.

### Hypothecation in the Local Government Revenue Settlement

**Q28 Janet Ryder:** Will the Minister make a statement on the use of hypothecation within the local government revenue settlement? (OAQ10137) *Withdrawn.*

### Local Councils' Policies

**Q29 Glyn Davies:** How will the Minister ensure that local councils' policies fully reflect the needs of the over 60s? (OAQ10185)

**Edwina Hart:** The Minister for Health and Social Services has announced that a strategy for older people in Wales will be developed over the next year. Local government representatives will be included in the strategy steering group and its remit will encompass all aspects of local government responsibility.

Already, policy agreements between local authorities and the National Assembly will include targets addressing the objective that older people should be able to live in comfort and dignity in their own homes wherever possible, by providing support which also recognises the role and wishes of carers. Draft guidance from the National Assembly on the development of community strategies and existing guidance on Best Value both point out the need to involve older people and identify their specific needs.

### Local Councils' Powers

**Q30 Peter Black:** Will the Minister make a statement on the powers and opportunities currently available to local councils to assist people living in small rural villages to acquire accommodation so as to remain in their community? (OAQ10121) [R]

**Edwina Hart:** For some time authorities have been able to commission registered social landlords to provide affordable rent housing in rural areas and to help local people purchase property using our homebuy equity purchase scheme. To make the scheme more accessible I have increased the maximum equity loan in rural areas from 30 per cent to 50 per cent and have made an additional £1.5 million available for 2001-02. I am also consulting authorities and registered social landlords on current obstacles to providing more affordable rent housing in rural areas.

## Questions to the Minister for Environment

### The Safety of Wylfa Power Station

**Q6 Kirsty Williams:** Will the Minister make a statement on the safety of Wylfa power station? (OAQ10182)

**The Minister for Environment (Sue Essex):** Wylfa power station has not been producing electricity since April 2000 when cracks in the welding were identified. It will return to operation only when the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate is satisfied that it is safe to do so.

### The National Botanical Garden for Wales

**Q7 Helen Mary Jones:** Will the Minister make a statement on the work of the National Botanical Garden for Wales? (OAQ10195)

**Sue Essex:** As I have said on my numerous visits, the creation of the National Botanical Gardens has been a remarkable achievement by its sponsors. I pay tribute to the high number of visitors, the growing awareness of the gardens across the UK and beyond, the way in which they have raised the profile of the local area and west Wales and its direct impact on the local economy. I am glad that the Welsh Office was able to support the project through the provision of a new road junction on the A48, that substantial sums of public support have been provided by the Welsh Office and the National Assembly for Wales through the Welsh Development Agency and the Wales Tourist Board and that the gardens have received strong support from European sources.

### Traffic Growth in Wales

**Q8 Peter Black:** Has the Minister conducted any research into traffic growth in Wales over the next five years since receiving the local transport plans from local councils? (OAQ10163) [R]

**Sue Essex:** An assessment of all local transport plans submitted by local authorities in August 2000 has been undertaken. This included consideration of the reports prepared by local authorities under the Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997, which considered the impact of traffic growth in their areas.

Further work will need to be done with local authorities to obtain a better understanding of the impact of traffic growth in particular areas and measures taken to alleviate the position through modal shift and other measures.

### Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

**Q9 Ann Jones:** Will the Minister make a statement on the responsibilities of the Countryside Council for Wales in respect of areas of outstanding natural beauty in Wales? (OAQ10133) *Withdrawn*.

### The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (Resources)

**Q10 Dafydd Wigley:** What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that there are adequate resources to implement the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 in Wales? (OAQ10209)

**Sue Essex:** The Assembly's budget makes provision for the implementation of the key provisions of this Act in Wales.

For 2001-02, this includes an extra £1.1 million for the Countryside Council for Wales, an estimated £360,000 for the three national parks and £2.4 million for local authorities.

This will enable progress to be made on the preparation of access maps, establishing local access forums, the production of guidance and information for users and landowners, improvements to the rights of way network and introducing better protection for wildlife and sites of special scientific interest.

The forward budget allocations for these organisations also include provision to take this work forward.

### **World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002**

**Q11 Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** How will the Minister ensure that Wales contributes towards the world summit on sustainable development in 2002? (OAQ10193)

**Sue Essex:** We will ensure this by consulting stakeholders in Wales, by developing good practice in sustainability that could be replicated elsewhere and by reflecting this in our input to the UK Government's preparations.

### **Windfarms at Pentrefoelas and Tir Mostyn/Foel Goch**

**Q12 Alun Pugh:** Will the Minister make a statement on her latest meetings with representatives from the national parks and local people about windfarms at Pentrefoelas and Tir Mostyn/Foel Goch? (OAQ10172)

**Sue Essex:** A planning decisions committee of the Assembly will determine these planning applications. It would be inappropriate for me to meet any interested parties to discuss the proposals. I have initiated a review of the planning guidance that we provide to local authorities, and the Planning Guidance (Wales) Technical Advice Note (Wales) 8: Renewable Energy will be re-drafted and issued for consultation by the summer. The review of the guidance is being undertaken by a technical advisory group composed of representatives from a range of environmental and industrial interests, which will ensure that the review is conducted in an inclusive way.

### **The Efficient Running of Rail Services**

**Q13 Ieuan Wyn Jones:** Has the Minister had any discussions with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions regarding the efficient running of rail services in Wales? (OAQ10203)

**Sue Essex:** I have had no discussions with the DETR regarding the efficient running of rail services within Wales. However, I and my officials are in regular dialogue with the Strategic Rail Authority and the Office of the Rail Regulator about the current running of services in Wales, as well as about the shape of the future Wales and Borders rail franchise. I will also meet Steve Marshall, Chief Executive of Railtrack, next month and will discuss with him how he will ensure the efficient maintenance and development of infrastructure in Wales.

### **Sustainable Development (Health Policies)**

**Q14 David Lloyd:** How will the Minister ensure that sustainable development lies at the heart of health policies in Wales? (OAQ10213)

**Sue Essex:** This is primarily a matter for my colleague, the Minister for Health and Social Services, with whom I work closely. However, I know that sustainability is highlighted as one of the drivers for action in 'Improving health in Wales: A plan for the NHS with its partners' which was published recently. I have suggested that the Health and Social Services Committee discuss the sustainable development action plan and indicators.

### **Cycle Lanes in Towns and Cities**

**Q15 Mick Bates:** What discussions has the Minister had with local authorities to encourage the development of recognised cycle lanes in towns and cities? (OAQ10171)

**Sue Essex:** In all my discussions with local authorities I encourage them to take an integrated approach to the provision of transport facilities. This includes improvements to the cycling infrastructure in towns and cities.

### **Mobile Communication Masts**

**Q16 Glyn Davies:** What plans does the Minister have to control the development of mobile communication masts? (OAQ10177)

**Sue Essex:** We have recently consulted on the scope and detail of proposed legislation governing the erection of telecommunications masts, together with related draft guidance and advice. The consultation period expired on 5 January 2001 and we are considering the proposals in the light of all responses received.

### **Reducing Agricultural Pollution in Wales**

**Q17 Elin Jones:** How does the Minister plan to reduce agricultural pollution in Wales? (OAQ10201)  
*Withdrawn.*

### **Planning Application Procedure**

**Q18 Nick Bourne:** What is the Minister doing to promote a greater understanding of planning application procedure among members of the public? (OAQ10180)

**Sue Essex:** I recently issued a draft planning policy for Wales for public consultation. That document updates and clarifies national planning policy, and sets out the operating principles of the planning system.

Local planning authorities deal with most planning applications. Guidance booklets, including those that explain planning application and appeals procedures for householders and businesses, are made available to the public in local planning authority offices. The booklets are kept under review and will be revised and supplemented where necessary, for example 'A Farmer's Guide to the Planning System' is currently under review. Consultation is also taking place to explain, and invite comments on, the Assembly's procedures for calling-in planning applications.

### **The Future of Flood Defence Committees**

**Q19 David Melding:** Will the Minister make a statement on the future of flood defence committees in Wales? (OAQ10129) *Withdrawn.*

### **The Environmental Impact of Wylfa Power Station**

**Q20 Lorraine Barrett:** Will the Minister make a statement on the current and anticipated future environmental impact of Wylfa power station? (OAQ10131)

**Sue Essex:** The environmental impact of Wylfa power station has been reviewed by Environment Agency Wales as part of the Agency's duties under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993. Specifically, the agency is determining applications for authorisation to dispose of radioactive wastes from Wylfa and other Magnox power stations following public consultation by the agency last summer.



The agency regulates all Wylfa's radioactive discharges to the environment, and some non-radioactive discharges. Discharges are required to be within limits, which are set such that resulting levels of pollutants in the environment satisfy recognised international and national standards. The agency has also considered environmental detriments at sites upon which Wylfa depends for its supply of nuclear fuel and the reprocessing of its spent fuel. The agency has not yet reached a decision on Wylfa's application.

The draft authorisation proposes limits lower than existing limits for most discharges, and no increases.

Environmental monitoring for radioactivity is carried out by the operators of Wylfa, by the Environment Agency, and by the Food Standards Agency, which has taken over responsibility from the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food. The results of this monitoring are published. For example, MAFF reported in 1998 that the dose to members of the public most exposed to Wylfa discharges of 10 microsieverts per year. This may be compared with the average dose to the UK public from background radiation of 2,200 microsieverts per year, or the statutory dose limit for members of the public of 1,000 microsieverts per year from artificial radioactivity excluding medical exposure. The results support the conclusion that Wylfa only has a small impact upon the environment, and the agency's continued regulation of the site should ensure that this impact remains small or gets even smaller.

### **The Waste Strategy's Recycling Targets**

**Q22 Janet Ryder:** How will the Minister ensure that recycling targets set out in the waste strategy are met? (OAQ10198) *Withdrawn.*

### **Free Passes on Local Buses**

**Q22 Delyth Evans:** Will the Minister make a brief statement on the Assembly's commitment to provide free passes on local buses in Wales? (OAQ10162)

**Sue Essex:** The Assembly is committed to ensuring that from April 2001, free concessionary passes will be available to pensioners and disabled people to entitle them to travel on local bus passes with at least a 50 per cent discount on fares. From April 2002, pensioners and disabled people will be entitled to free travel on buses. The Assembly has welcomed the recent announcement by the UK Government that legislation will be introduced to ensure that entitlement to these concessions will be equalised for men and women at the age of 60.

The Assembly is working with local authorities and bus operators to ensure the smooth implementation of free passes and free travel across Wales.

### **Trecatti Tip, Dowlais**

**Q23 William Graham:** Will the Minister make a statement concerning the Trecatti tip in Dowlais with particular regard to the environmental welfare of the local residents? (OAQ10158)

**Sue Essex:** I recognise and understand local people's concerns about the Trecatti landfill site. It is important that the site is regulated to protect human health and the environment. The responsibility for that regulation rests with the Environment Agency, while Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council has statutory duties in relation to any nuisance arising. I understand that the agency is taking action to deal with odour problems at the site and is keeping the Council informed of developments. Local people who have concerns about activities at Trecatti should raise them with the agency and council, as appropriate.

In addition, Bro Taf Health Authority, which has a responsibility for monitoring the health of the local population, works closely with the agency and the council to ensure a co-ordinated approach to local environmental and health issues, including those relating to landfill sites.

### **Safety Problems at Wylfa Power Station**

**Q24 Mick Bates:** Has the Minister had any contact with the Health and Safety Executive or the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate regarding the safety problems being experienced at Wylfa power station? (OAQ10170)

**Sue Essex:** The Nuclear Installations Inspectorate is part of the Health and Safety Executive. My officials have regular and frequent contact with both. The most recent formal meeting was held at the National Assembly on 21 November 2000 and covered briefing on the current situation at Wylfa.

### **Urban Planning in South Wales**

**Q25 Jonathan Morgan:** Will the Minister make a statement on urban planning in South Wales? (OAQ10126) *Withdrawn.*

### **Yellow School Buses**

**Q26 Lorraine Barrett:** Will the Minister make a statement on the development of yellow school buses in Wales? (OAQ10128)

**Sue Essex:** FirstGroup plc has been given the go-ahead by the Deputy Prime Minister to run pilot schemes of American-style yellow school buses in the UK. It is for FirstGroup to discuss and implement schemes with interested local authorities. I am aware that FirstGroup has met with several local authorities in Wales. We will watch the pilot schemes with interest.

### **Sustainable Development (Arts, Culture, Sports)**

**Q27 Jocelyn Davies:** How will the Minister ensure that the Assembly's commitment to sustainable development is reflected in policies on the arts, culture and sports? (OAQ10212) *Withdrawn.*

### **Implementation of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000**

**Q28 Dafydd Wigley:** Has the Minister had any discussions with local authorities on the implementation of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 in Wales? (OAQ10197) *Withdrawn.*

### **Low-floor Buses for Disabled People in Carmarthenshire**

**Q29 Christine Gwyther:** Can the Minister make a statement on the introduction of low-floor buses for use by disabled people in Carmarthenshire? (OAQ10179) *Withdrawn.*

### **The 'Telecommunications Mast Development' Consultation Paper**

**Q30 Karen Sinclair:** Will the Minister give a brief statement on the findings of the 'Telecommunications Mast Development' consultation paper? (OAQ10165) *Withdrawn.*