

## Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 11 December 2002

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

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

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### Questions on Local Government to the Finance Minister

*Question 10 (OAQ21068) withdrawn.*

#### Social Exclusion in South Wales Central

**Q11 Jonathan Morgan:** Will the Minister make a statement on Assembly measures to address social exclusion in South Wales Central? (OAQ21084)

**The Finance Minister (Edwina Hart):** Social inclusion is one of the guiding principles of the Welsh Assembly Government. The wide range of policies which were set out in the second annual report on social inclusion in Wales is a demonstration of our commitment to improving social inclusion in all communities across Wales, including those in South Wales Central.

#### Housing Conditions

**Q12 Pauline Jarman:** Will the Minister make a statement on funding provided to local authorities to improve housing conditions? (OAQ21046)

**Edwina Hart:** The expenditure on housing, which I announced in the draft budget in October, will increase by £66 million over the next three years (net of housing revenue account subsidy, which is annually managed expenditure). This includes support for local authority capital funding and a whole range of other programmes, which will have significant impact on improving housing conditions, in both public and private sectors.

#### Neighbourhood and Street Wardens Programme

**Q13 Val Lloyd:** Could the Minister make a statement about the neighbourhood and street wardens programme? (OAQ21073)

**Edwina Hart:** Neighbourhood wardens can make an important contribution to building safer communities and reassuring people. They form part of the joined-up approach to community safety, which can now include community support officers and accredited community safety organisations. They are also involved in some innovative joint working with the Probation Service on projects which promote public reassurance by using people on community punishment Orders to improve the built environment by removing litter and graffiti.

#### Affordable Houses in Wales

**Q14 Elin Jones:** Will the Minister make a statement on whether the coalition Government has succeeded in its aim to increase the number of affordable houses available in Wales? (OAQ21065)

**Edwina Hart:** The social housing grant budget of over £56 million is producing well over 1,000 homes each year for either rent, or homebuy. I regard this as a very significant contribution to increasing the number of affordable homes in Wales.

### **Community Councils**

**Q15 David Melding:** What meetings has the Minister had with representatives from community councils concerning their role and responsibility? (OAQ21085)

**Edwina Hart:** I have met representatives of town and community councils on a number of occasions throughout the year to discuss a wide range of issues. These included the Welsh Assembly Government's research study into the role, functions and future potential of town and community councils and the setting up of the new single community councils' association for Wales.

## **Questions to the Minister for the Environment**

### **Environment Agency Wales**

**Q6 David Davies:** Will the Minister advise what discussions she has had with the Environment Agency Wales to minimise the risk of flooding this winter? (OAQ21095)

**The Minister for Environment (Sue Essex):** I regularly discuss a wide range of issues with the Environment Agency and have made additional funds available to enable it to bring forward schemes more quickly. My officials are also in regular contact with the agency to discuss the programme. I have consulted earlier this year on how arrangements for flood defence may be improved, and will be discussing the flood review with the chair of the agency when I next meet him.

### **Reducing Noise from Motorways and Roads**

**Q7 Brian Gibbons:** Will the Minister give an update on the work that is being undertaken to reduce noise and other nuisance from motorways and other major road routes in Wales? (OAQ21093)

**Sue Essex:** The consultants appointed to carry out the noise study have completed their assessment. The report of their findings has been received and is currently under consideration. I hope to see the report published within a few weeks.

### **The National Seed List**

**Q8 Mick Bates:** Will the Minister make a statement on proposals to place Chardon LL on the national seed list? (OAQ21134) *Transferred for written answer by the Deputy First Minister and Minister for Rural Development and Wales Abroad.*

**The Deputy First Minister and Minister for Rural Development and Wales Abroad (Michael German):** The public hearing into the proposal by UK Ministers to add Chardon LL to the UK national list concluded on 13 June 2002. Alun Alesbury, the person appointed by Ministers to conduct the hearing, is in the process of producing his factual digest of the evidence. Any decision to list Chardon LL will be taken jointly by UK Ministers and will take into account the advice from the statutory advisory bodies, the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment and the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes, as well as the information in the Alesbury digest.

### **Innovative Environmental Projects**

**Q9 Christine Chapman:** What actions has the Minister taken to encourage innovative environmental projects which improve local communities? (OAQ21105)

**Sue Essex:** The Environment Wales initiative currently supports over 80 such projects across Wales. In addition, the sustainable development fund is being extended by a further three years to support community-based projects in Wales's protected landscape areas. Mrs Hart has also recently announced a new community facilities and activities programme providing extra relevant support throughout Wales.

### **Ceredigion Unitary Development Plan**

**Q10 Elin Jones:** Will the Minister make a statement on the Ceredigion unitary development plan? (OAQ21120)

**Sue Essex:** It is the statutory responsibility of Ceredigion County Council as the local planning authority to prepare a UDP for its area which will provide a framework within which provision can be made for development and conservation needs. The statutory plan stages allow any individual or organisation to have their representations considered by the local planning authority. Ceredigion County Council published their deposit UDP in September this year, when a statutory consultation exercise was undertaken. It is at this stage that people have the opportunity to make their views known to the council. All duly made objections must be considered by the authority, and will be considered at the independent planning inquiry, which is expected to be held in 2004.

### **Flood Prevention in Clwyd West**

**Q11 David Ian Jones:** Will the Minister make a statement on flood prevention in Clwyd West? (OAQ21102)

**Sue Essex:** It is for the operating authorities, the relevant local authorities and the Dee and Clwyd Local Flood Defence Committee to decide what flood prevention schemes to bring forward. I have increased the grant rates to local authorities to 85 per cent to encourage them to bring forward schemes. Additional financial support is also available for schemes promoted by local flood defence committees.

### **Off-shore Windfarm near Porthcawl and Port Talbot**

**Q12 Alun Cairns:** What representations has the Minister received over the planning issues for which the National Assembly is responsible, surrounding the proposal to establish an off-shore windfarm near Porthcawl and Port Talbot? (OAQ21103)

**Sue Essex:** The Assembly has received about 50 letters, mainly from local members of the public. A range of issues have been raised in the correspondence and most are letters of objection. No application for the proposed windfarm has yet been submitted.

### **Contaminated Land in Wales**

**Q13 Peter Black:** What work is being carried out to catalogue contaminated land in Wales? (OAQ21124)

**Sue Essex:** Statutory guidance issued by the National Assembly for Wales in November 2001, under powers contained in Part 11 (a) of the Environmental Protection Act 1999, requires local authorities in Wales to produce contaminated land inspection strategies. We expect all local authorities in Wales to have produced their strategies by February 2003. The implementation of these strategies will provide detailed information on the extent of contaminated land in Wales.

### **Rail Passenger Committee for Wales**

**Q14 Gwenda Thomas:** What discussions does the Minister have with the Rail Passenger Committee for Wales? (OAQ21110)

**Sue Essex:** I am in regular contact with the Rail Passenger Committee for Wales and I receive briefing from it on issues relating to the development of rail services. Clive Williams, the secretary, is a member of the Transport Forum and I gave evidence to its review of the Great Western main line services earlier this year. I welcome the role played by the committee in assisting the Assembly with our vision for rail transport in Wales.

### **Global Convention on Biological Diversity**

**Q15 Mick Bates:** What steps has the Minister taken, in addition to the £25,000 set aside by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, to fund hedgerow surveys, in line with the UK's commitment to the global convention on biological diversity? (OAQ21131)

**Sue Essex:** In addition to the £25,000 being provided by DEFRA to fund hedgerow surveys across the UK, the Welsh Assembly Government is playing a full part in helping the UK Government meet its obligations under the convention. On 28 November, I announced the publication of the list of species and habitats of principal importance for the conservation of biological diversity.

The Welsh Assembly Government is also providing financial support for the preparation and implementation of local biodiversity action plans and supporting the work of the Wales Biodiversity Group.