

## **Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 17 November 2004**

[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**

#### **Delivering the Local Authorities Agenda**

**Q9 Brian Gibbons:** How does the Welsh Assembly Government work with local authorities in order to deliver its local authorities agenda? (OAQ39401)

**The Finance Minister (Sue Essex):** The Welsh Assembly Government has a strong and effective partnership with local authorities in Wales, and this delivers the radical, modern agenda put in place to provide high-quality, cost-effective public services in Wales.

The local government partnership scheme, approved by the National Assembly in March, provides the overarching framework through which we work in partnership to deliver the shared strategic vision set out in 'Wales: A Better Country.'

#### **The Impact of Council Tax Re-banding on Cardiff**

**Q10 Jenny Randerson:** Will the Minister make a statement on the impact of council tax re-banding on Cardiff? (OAQ39367)

**Sue Essex:** In Cardiff, as in the rest of Wales, properties have been re-valued for the first time since 1991 to create a fairer distribution of council tax. The transitional arrangements that I have instituted will mean that eligible dwellings will not face more than one council tax band increase next year.

#### **Local Government in Swansea**

**Q11 Val Lloyd:** Will the Minister outline what the Welsh Assembly Government has done to facilitate achievements in the field of local government in Swansea? (OAQ39380)

**Sue Essex:** The Wales programme for improvement is helping local authorities to provide services more effectively, with better support. Policy agreements between each local authority and the Welsh Assembly Government are focused on the real results being achieved in key services such as education and social care.

Financial support through revenue support grant and national non-domestic rates for Swansea City Council has increased by 26.4 per cent in the period 1999-2000 to 2004-05, and in total amounts to £1,259 million over that period.

#### **Council Tax Levels**

**Q12 Glyn Davies:** What discussions has the Minister had with the Welsh Local Government Association about next year's council tax levels? (OAQ39393)

**Sue Essex:** The level of council tax is a matter for each individual local authority, and not the Assembly. I have regular meetings with the leader of the Welsh Local Government Association at which a wide range of issues are discussed, including council tax and the local government settlement. You were present at the discussion last week at the partnership council.

### **Improving Local Services**

**Q13 Brynle Williams:** How is the Welsh Assembly Government supporting local government in its aim to improve local services? (OAQ39376)

**Sue Essex:** The Welsh Assembly Government is supporting local government in a number of ways as it strives to deliver high-quality, cost-effective public services. We have established a partnership framework for modern local government in Wales that is underpinned by the Wales programme for improvement, community strategies, policy agreements, a more mature approach to performance measurement, plans rationalisation and a wide range of other policies aimed at delivering continuously improving local services.

### **The Development of Public Services**

**Q14 Leanne Wood:** What recent discussions has the Minister had with local government regarding the development of public services? (OAQ39413)

**Sue Essex:** I have regular discussions with local government on how to develop further the framework that we have developed in partnership that will deliver high-quality, cost-effective public services for the people of Wales. In particular, 'Making the Connections' was discussed as an agenda item at the partnership council on 11 November.

### **Delivery of Good Quality Services**

**Q15 Irene James:** What action has the Minister taken to support local authorities to deliver good quality services? (OAQ39395)

**Sue Essex:** The Welsh Assembly Government is supporting local government in a number of ways as it strives to deliver high-quality, cost-effective public services. We have established a partnership framework for modern local government in Wales that is underpinned by the Wales programme for improvement, community strategies, policy agreements, a more mature approach to performance measurement, plans rationalisation and a wide range of other policies aimed at delivering continuously improving local services.

## **Questions to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning**

### **Top-up Fees**

**Q9 William Graham:** Will the Minister outline how her policies on university top-up fees will reflect the view of the National Assembly for Wales that they are, in principle, wrong? (OAQ39484)

**The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning (Jane Davidson):** Our manifesto commitment that no variable fees will be charged in Wales during the current Assembly term is in keeping with the motion passed by the Assembly on 2 November. Our future policy will be informed by the findings and recommendations of the independent Rees review.

## **Lifelong Learning**

**Q10 John Griffiths:** Will the Minister make a statement on progress with lifelong learning in Wales? (OAQ39506)

**Jane Davidson:** We continue to make good progress in promoting lifelong learning against the targets set out in 'The Learning Country'. We are supporting a wide range of initiatives, such as the RISE learning network in the former county of Gwent, to increase access to learning for all ages and groups in Wales.

## **The Teaching of Modern Languages**

**Q11 Janet Davies:** Will the Minister make a statement on the teaching of modern languages? (OAQ39467)

**Jane Davidson:** The numbers of pupils learning foreign languages after the age of 14 has been in decline for some years. Our national modern foreign languages strategy 'Languages Count', which I launched in April 2002, aims to increase the take up of languages learning at key stage 3 and beyond through provision of specifically tailored resources and support for teachers and students.

## **School Bus Services in South Wales East**

**Q12 Laura Anne Jones:** Will the Minister make a statement on the number of school bus services available in South Wales East? (OAQ39466)

**Jane Davidson:** Local authorities are responsible for school transport arrangements. The Assembly does not hold detailed information, but responses to a survey in 2003 suggested that around 270 school bus services were being operated by the six local education authorities in the area. This figure does not include arrangements made by LEAs for pupils to travel on public service buses.

*Question 13 (OAQ39501) withdrawn.*

## **Assistance for Student Teachers**

**Q14 Kirsty Williams:** Will the Minister make a statement on assistance for student teachers? (OAQ39482)

**Jane Davidson:** The Welsh Assembly Government offers teaching incentives in specific areas to help attract the best quality, highly committed students to train and teach in Wales, particularly onto courses where there is, or may be, difficulty recruiting. The incentives also recognise the increased competition for graduates from other career possibilities.

## **The Rees Commission**

**Q15 Peter Black:** Will the Minister make a statement on the guidance that she has offered to the Rees commission on the structure of course fees in Wales after 2007? (OAQ39465)

**Jane Davidson:** The Rees review group is considering the full range of options on university tuition fees from 2007/08. The terms of reference for the review are published on the Assembly website.