

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 19 October 2000

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

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Funding to Implement the Assembly's Resolution on Homelessness

Q5 Christine Humphreys: What considerations has the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities given to allocating sufficient funding to ensure the effective implementation of the Assembly's resolution of 20 June on homelessness? (OAQ7191)

The Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities: Following the resolution the consultation paper 'Tackling Rough Sleeping in Wales' was published in August. It draws attention to the requirement for local authorities to assess the need for both support and additional housing in relation to bids for social housing grant and / or supported housing revenue grant.

Where new capital projects are required, for example, housing for young people, such proposals can be included in local authority proposals for the social housing grant programme and would displace other schemes. Decisions on the priorities for SHG schemes are matters for the local authority. The level of funding for homelessness will be addressed in the draft budget proposals.

Implementation of Housing Stock Transfer (Representations from Housing Associations)

Q9 Geraint Davies: What representations has Edwina Hart received from housing associations with regard to the guidelines for the implementation of housing stock transfer? (OAQ7124)

Edwina Hart: The draft housing transfer guidelines were issued for consultation on 7 September. The consultation period runs until 27 October. Only one response has been received to date from housing associations.

Funding Provision required to end Homelessness in Wales

Q10 Nick Bourne: What estimates have been made of the level of funding provision required to end homelessness in Wales? (OAQ7077)

Edwina Hart: The report of the secondee, Paul Bevan, entitled 'Rough Sleeping in Wales' was published by the Assembly in February 2000. The report examined in detail both estimated need and the supply of services at local authority level.

The sum of £3.6 million has been made available in the current financial year for local authorities to develop better strategic approaches to tackling homelessness and the budget for voluntary organisations working with the homeless—section 180 of the Housing Act 1996—has been increased to £1.85 million, to take forward the priorities identified by the Bevan report.

Foyer Concept (Detailed Analysis)

Q11 Janet Davies: What progress has Edwina Hart made in carrying out a detailed analysis of the foyer concept? (OAQ7193)

Edwina Hart: The Assembly has worked closely with the Foyer Federation in Wales to develop a 'made in Wales' approach to foyer development. The first two purpose built foyers in Wales—at Swansea and Wrexham—have both had some early management problems. A review of the operation of the Swansea foyer has been carried out by the Assembly.

Working with the Foyer Federation, registered social landlords, the wider voluntary sector and the local authorities, I have sought to ensure that the very best practice in supported housing is developed and encouraged in relation to foyer development.

New By-laws for the Vale of Glamorgan

Q12 Lorraine Barrett: Can Edwina Hart make a statement on the progress made with regard to new by-laws for the Vale of Glamorgan? (OAQ7087) *Transferred for written reply by the Minister for Environment*

The Minister for Environment (Sue Essex): The proposals in respect of dog bans, removal of canine faeces, and dogs on leads relate to over 100 locations in the Vale of Glamorgan. Following objections from local residents, officials are seeking information on the adequacy of alternative areas that are available for dogs.

Constraints to the Review of the SSA Formula

Q13 Elin Jones: Will Edwina Hart make a brief statement on constraints to the review of the standard spending assessment formula? (OAQ7111)

Edwina Hart: The Assembly plans to debate these issues later this month.

Proposed Changes to Categories of Homeless People (Response to Consultations)

Q14 Peter Black: Will Edwina Hart make a statement on the response to consultations on the proposed changes to priority categories of homeless people? (OAQ7043) [R]

Edwina Hart: The National Assembly for Wales issued a consultation paper upon the proposal to extend the categories of homeless people, regarded as being in priority need of accommodation under section 189 of the Housing Act 1996, in August 2000. Responses were called for by October 2 2000. Thirty three were received and are currently being evaluated in detail.

An initial examination of the responses suggests that there are no fundamental issues arising which will affect the secondary legislation, which is currently being drafted.

Work of the Partnership Council

Q15 Huw Lewis: Will Edwina Hart make a statement on the work of the Partnership Council? (OAQ7103)

Edwina Hart: The Partnership Council has had six meetings to date, including one in Wrexham and one in Haverfordwest. It has agreed the local government partnership scheme, which provides a clear and comprehensive framework for the Assembly and local government to work together for the people of Wales. It has overseen the development of a new funding formula for local government on which we now have substantial agreement and launched the concept of

policy agreements between the Assembly and local government.

It has also debated robustly and openly some of the big issues facing government in Wales, including the implementation of the European funding programmes and the future of local education authorities. It has led to work being undertaken jointly between local government and the Assembly on key areas such as the promotion of health and well-being and, most recently, narrowing the gap in schools' performance.

The working groups and officer groups established under the aegis of the Partnership Council have also worked productively on Best Value, the creation of a local government statistics unit, local government finance and the modernisation of local government under the Local Government Act 2000.

Families Living in Sub-standard Housing

Q16 Helen Mary Jones: What information does Edwina Hart have on the numbers of families living in sub-standard housing across Wales as a result of unfair rents? (OAQ7115)

Edwina Hart: Information relating the standard of housing to rental levels is not held centrally. However, figures from the 1998 Welsh House Condition Survey show that a total of 35,200 homes in the social and private rented housing sectors are unfit.

Assembly's Resolution on Homelessness

Q17 Michael German: What steps does Edwina Hart intend to take to ensure the effective implementation of the Assembly's resolution of 20 June on homelessness? (OAQ7190)
Withdrawn.

One Voice Speaking for Town and Community Councils

Q18 Janet Ryder: What discussions has Edwina Hart had with the National Association of Local Councils and the Wales Association of Town and Community Councils on the possibility of one voice speaking for town and community councils? (OAQ7120)

Edwina Hart: Peter Law met representatives from the National Association of Local Councils and the Welsh Association of Town and Community Councils on a number of occasions over the last year. I have let them know my views on the importance of a single representative body in Wales to act as a strong voice for town and community councils, to facilitate dialogue with the Assembly and to provide more advice and support. I welcome the work done to date in setting up the Local Councils Forum which brings together these organisations and I hope this will be seen as the beginning of a move towards a single all-Wales body to represent all town and community councils in Wales.

Monitoring the Human Rights Implications of Local Authorities' Work

Q19 Brian Hancock: Who will be responsible for monitoring the human rights implications of local authorities' work following the implementation of the Human Rights Act 1998? (OAQ7118)

Edwina Hart: It is for each local authority have in place procedures to ensure that its decisions and actions comply with the European Convention on Human Rights and to minimise the risk of challenge on the grounds of a breach of these rights.

Local Council Structures (Discussions with Local Authority Representatives)

Q20 Jenny Randerson: What discussions has Edwina Hart had with local authority representatives about local council structures? (OAQ7104) *Withdrawn*

Separate Funding Formulas for Local Education Authorities and Schools

Q21 Jonathan Morgan: Will Edwina Hart establish separate funding formulas for local education authorities and schools? (OAQ7056)

Edwina Hart: Part 6 of the Cabinet's paper, 'Simplifying the System: Local Government Finance in Wales', on which we are consulting until the end of December, raises the question of funding arrangements for LEAs and schools. The Cabinet will want to consider responses to the consultation before making any statement on this matter.

Developing a Voluntary Stock Transfer Policy for Wales

Q22 David Lloyd: Will Edwina Hart make a statement on consultation with housing associations and other interested parties in developing a voluntary stock transfer policy for Wales? (OAQ7125)

Edwina Hart: Draft housing transfer guidelines were issued for consultation on 7 September to housing associations and other interested parties. The consultation period runs until 27 October.

SSA Formula Review (Collection of Accurate Data)

Q23 David Lloyd: What progress has been made towards ensuring the collection of accurate data as part of the standard spending assessment formula review? (OAQ7112)

Edwina Hart: The Distribution Sub-group has taken account of the Assembly's views, expressed at the plenary debate on 5 July, about the need to collect the data that will permit full exploration of all the recommendations of the original Swansea University/Pion Economics review of the formula. The DSG has made recommendations in its final report that local authorities should collect ward-level social services data from next April, which will permit DSG to consider in 2002-03 whether a new formula can be derived from this data for social services.

Maintaining a Committee System of Government

Q24 Jenny Randerson: Will Edwina Hart consider giving unitary authorities in Wales the option of maintaining a committee system of government? (OAQ7108) *Withdrawn*

New Measures to Improve Accountability and Transparency in Local Government

Q25 Huw Lewis: Will Edwina Hart make a statement on the working of new measures to improve accountability and transparency in local government? (OAQ7102)

Edwina Hart: I will be making a statement in due course.

Mandatory Rate Relief for Village Pubs

Q26 David Davies: Will Edwina Hart recommend mandatory rate relief for village pubs during the forthcoming review of local government finance system on Wales? (OAQ7085)

Edwina Hart: The Assembly Cabinet's consultation paper 'Simplifying the System: Local Government Finance in Wales' indicates that we will consider extending the scope of the rural rate relief scheme to other types of rural businesses including village pubs and petrol stations.

The Local Government and Housing Committee will have the opportunity to consider this further in the light of the responses received. However, the rural rate relief scheme is enshrined in primary legislation, which the National Assembly for Wales has no powers to amend.

Response to Consultations on the Local Government Funding Formula

Q27 Peter Black: Will Edwina Hart make a statement on the response to consultations on the local government funding formula? (OAQ7042) [R]

Edwina Hart: The Assembly plans to debate a motion to approve the new standard spending assessment formula later this month.

Future of Housing and Disability Grants in Wales

Q28 Brian Gibbons: Can the Minister give us an update on the future of housing and disability grants in Wales? (OAQ7041)

Edwina Hart: The Government's recent housing Green Paper outlined a number of proposals for changes to private sector renewal including house renovation grants. We are currently considering the response to this proposal from Welsh local authorities and housing interests and will decide how they should be taken forward in Wales as part of the National Housing Strategy. There are currently no plans to introduce changes to disabled facilities grants in Wales.

Collection of Ward-based Data

Q29 Rhodri Glyn Thomas: When will ward-based data be collected from all local authorities in Wales? (OAQ7121)

Edwina Hart: The Assembly's annual statistics plan, published in July, identifies the development of small area data as a priority. Work is in progress in partnership with local authorities to improve the collection and imputation of electoral division level data for a variety of statistical measures.

This work includes the publication of the new Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation and the development of the standard spending assessment formula for social services. Progress will be reported on in the next annual plan. The availability of small-area data for Wales will also be high on the agenda for the new Welsh Local Government Data Unit.

Powers Devolved to the National Assembly

Q30 Jocelyn Davies: Is Edwina Hart continuing discussions with the Secretary of State for Wales on the subject of the powers devolved to the National Assembly under the Local Government Act 2000? (OAQ7116)

Edwina Hart: The only aspect of implementing the Local Government Act 2000 which requires such discussion is the extension of the Assembly's powers to amend statutory requirements on local authorities to produce plans. This is being pursued and I shall discuss any proposals with the Secretary of State or his Minister in due course.

Questions to the Minister for Environment

Considering the Needs of Children

Q7 Helen Mary Jones: What is the Minister for Environment doing to ensure that local transport plans take into consideration the needs of children? (OAQ7164) *Withdrawn*

Discussions with the Deputy Prime Minister

Q8 David Davies: What discussions has Sue Essex had with the Deputy Prime Minister regarding the recent fuel crisis? (OAQ7094)

The Minister for Environment (Sue Essex): I have spoken with Lord Macdonald, who has been dealing with the fuel crisis and, as you know, the First Secretary is a member of the Fuel Task Force. I also convened a special meeting of the Transport Forum to consider the underlying structural issues, which impact particularly on Wales. The meeting included representatives of both farming unions, an oil company, a food distribution company, and the protestors, who were represented by Brynle Williams and two of his colleagues. A report is being put together, which will reflect the range of views and findings of this group, which I will forward to Lord Macdonald shortly. I will place a copy in the Library.

Local Transport Plans

Q9 Peter Black: How many local councils have submitted a local transport plan to the Assembly? (OAQ7046) R

Sue Essex: All 22 local authorities have submitted their local transport plans. A copy of each local transport plan has been deposited in the National Assembly's library. I am very grateful to all authorities for the effort they have made in completing the plans on time, particularly given the many demands on their time.

Implementing a Biomass Strategy for Wales

Q10 Kirsty Williams: What progress has been made in implementing a biomass strategy for Wales? (OAQ7202) *Transferred for written reply by the Minister for Economic Development*

The Minister for Economic Development (Michael German): This will be considered within the context of the Assembly's draft strategic energy framework, once the report of the current study into renewable energy resources in Wales is received.

The study is being conducted by a consortium led by Sustainable Energy Ltd and seeks to identify and analyse the opportunities that renewable energy can offer to Wales. The period of

the study is from July 2000 to 10 November 2000, when the final report will be made.

Alternative Transport for the FA Cup Final

Q11 William Graham: Will Sue Essex oversee an effective alternative transport solution to the closing of the main rail route into Wales, because of engineering work in the Severn tunnel, on the day of the FA Cup Final being played at the Millennium Stadium, in Cardiff? (OAQ7200)

Sue Essex: No decision has been formally taken as to whether the 2001 FA Cup Final will be staged at the Millennium Stadium. Railtrack are aware that the event would clash with their essential programmed maintenance works in the Severn Tunnel, during the weekends of April and May 2001, but have confirmed that their engineers will consider rescheduling the works, once confirmation is received from the sporting authorities.

Public Transport Companies and Social Inclusion

Q12 Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Will Sue Essex report on what she is doing to ensure that public transport companies take social inclusion into account in planning services for rural Wales? (OAQ7165) *Withdrawn*

Local Authorities and their Waste Disposal Strategies

Q13 Jocelyn Davies: Will Sue Essex report briefly on any contacts she has had with local authorities about their waste disposal strategies? (OAQ7160) *Withdrawn*

A Biomass Strategy for Wales

Q14 Mick Bates: What progress has been made in implementing a biomass strategy for Wales? (OAQ7172) *Transferred for written reply by the Minister for Economic Development*

Michael German: This will be considered within the context of the Assembly's draft strategic energy framework once the report of the current study into renewable energy resources in Wales is received.

The study is being conducted by a consortium led by Sustainable Energy Ltd and seeks to identify and analyse the opportunities that renewable energy can offer to Wales. The period of the study is from July 2000 to 10 November 2000, when the final report is made.

A Biomass Strategy for Wales

Q15 Michael German: What progress has been made in implementing a biomass strategy for Wales? (OAQ7187) *Withdrawn*

Improving Transport Communications in South Wales

Q16 Jonathan Morgan: How does Sue Essex plan to improve transport communications in south Wales? (OAQ7071)

Sue Essex: Integrated transport packages are the key to delivering the National Assembly's integrated transport policy. The National Assembly is concentrating the majority of available transport grant resources for 2000-01 on these projects; some £18 million has been allocated in south Wales.

In particular, the National Assembly is keen to see local authority cross-boundary co-operation in providing transport solutions and has supported three consortia in south Wales—the South Wales Integrated Fast Transit consortium, the South-west Wales Integrated Transport consortium, and

the Transport Integration in the Gwent Economic Region consortium. Transport grant bids for 2001-02 have been received and are currently being considered. I expect to announce my decision around the turn of the year.

Protecting Pedestrians on the A44

Q17 Nick Bourne: What recommendations has Sue Essex received from the West Wales Trunk Roads Agency on the protection of pedestrians along the A44? (OAQ7073)

Sue Essex: A meeting was held on 3 October between representatives of the agency, the National Assembly, the new Penweddig Secondary School in Llanbadarn Fawr, Aberystwyth, and other interests, where a programme of road safety measures on the A44 near the school access was agreed. Penweddig New Schools Ltd will bear virtually all the cost of the programme of work, which is intended to be completed before the school opens in the new year.

Assessment of Local Transport Plans

Q18 David Lloyd: Will Sue Essex report on any assessment she has carried out of local transport plans? (OAQ7163) *Withdrawn*

Subsidising Bus Services in Urban and Rural Areas

Q19 Peter Black: What plans does Sue Essex have to increase the resources available to subsidise bus services in urban and rural areas? (OAQ7047)

Sue Essex: The Assembly is providing £5 million to local authorities in the current financial year under the bus subsidy grant scheme to enable them to boost the number and range of subsidised local bus services in Wales. This is additional to the £10 million authorities spend annually from their own budgets on bus subsidies. Of this £5 million, £3 million is required to be spent on services in rural areas, with the balance of £2 million available at authorities' discretion to be spent on rural or urban services.

Decisions on the funding of the bus subsidy grant scheme next year will be taken during the budget planning round.

Waste Disposal Strategies

Q20 Gareth Jones: Has Sue Essex held talks with local authorities about waste disposal strategies? (OAQ7161) *Withdrawn*

Regulating Cesspit Emptying Services

Q21 Janet Davies: Has Sue Essex any plans to regulate cesspit emptying services? (OAQ7169) *Withdrawn*

An Effective Solution to the Closure of the Main Rail Route into Wales

Q22 William Graham: Will Sue Essex oversee an effective solution to the closing of the main rail route into Wales, because of engineering work in the Severn tunnel, on the day of the FA Cup Final being played at the Millennium Stadium, in Cardiff? (OAQ7171)

Sue Essex: No decision has been formally taken as to whether the 2001 FA Cup Final will be staged at the Millennium Stadium. Railtrack are aware that the event would clash with their essential programmed maintenance works in the Severn tunnel, during the weekends of April and May 2001, but have confirmed that their engineers will consider rescheduling the works, once confirmation is received from the sporting authorities.

The Development of Brownfield Sites in Wales

Q23 Christine Gwyther: Will Sue Essex make a statement on the development of brownfield sites in Wales? (OAQ7074)

Sue Essex: Planning Guidance (Wales): Planning Policy, First Revision (April 1999), emphasises the importance of the countryside and makes clear that brownfield sites should, wherever possible, be developed in preference to greenfield sites. I am currently carrying out a review of planning guidance and there will be a need to consider, amongst other things, whether existing policies, as they apply to the use of brownfield sites, should be strengthened.

The study commissioned by the Assembly to advise on the feasibility of setting up a system to monitor the supply and re-use of previously developed land will be reporting shortly. It will help inform this review.

The Protection of Historic Monuments in Conwy

Q24 Christine Humphreys: What steps is Cadw taking to ensure the protection of historic monuments in Conwy? (OAQ7173)

Sue Essex: Cadw protects the fabric of monuments in state care through a programme of conservation maintenance, and takes steps to try to ensure their physical security. Following incidents of vandalism in Conwy, which have not been confined to historic monuments but which have affected Conwy Castle and the town walls, Cadw has taken the advice of the police in gating and fencing vulnerable areas and in appropriate security measures such as the arrangement of locks. Cadw has held meetings with the police and local action groups to explore ways in which community vigilance can contribute to a solution of the problem.

Restricting the Use of Lead Shot for Shooting

Q25 Glyn Davies: What steps is Sue Essex taking to restrict the use of lead shot for shooting in Wales, on the same basis as in England? (OAQ7081)

Sue Essex: I am considering whether to introduce regulations to restrict the use of lead shot in Wales, and I hope to make an announcement about the way forward within the next month.

Restrictions on the Use of Lead Shot (Discussions)

Q26 Glyn Davies: When did Sue Essex last discuss restrictions on the use of lead shot with the Welsh Clay Target Shooting Association? (OAQ7078)

Sue Essex: My officials held a meeting with interested organisations, including the Welsh Clay Target Shooting Association, on 4 July. The views that were expressed at that meeting will help inform my consideration on the way forward.

Ensuring that Local Transport Plans Promote Social Inclusion

Q27 Pauline Jarman: What is Sue Essex doing to ensure that local transport plans promote social inclusion? (OAQ7162) *Withdrawn*

Preparing for Any Future Petrol Crisis

Q28 Jenny Randerson: What plans are in place to prepare for any future petrol crisis? (OAQ7106) *Withdrawn*

Regulating Sewage Disposal Services

Q29 Owen John Thomas: How are services, which dispose of sewage from cesspits, regulated with regard to costs for the customers? (OAQ7170) *Withdrawn*

Technical Advice Notes Regarding Opencast Mining

Q30 Huw Lewis: Will Sue Essex make a statement on the drawing up of the technical advice notes in relation to opencast mining? (OAQ7184)

Sue Essex: Minerals Planning Policy Wales, which includes policies in relation to opencast coalmining, is expected to be published by the end of Jan 2001. The detailed technical advice note on coal, which will supplement this, will be issued in draft for consultation at about the same time. Interested parties will have the opportunity to comment on the draft coal technical advice note.