

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 24 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 to the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration

Question 11 (OAQ39700) withdrawn.

The Welsh Home Improvement Lending Agency

Q12 Mark Isherwood: Would the Minister make a statement on the Welsh home improvement lending agency? (OAQ39742)

The Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration (Edwina Hart): We are currently working with local authorities and existing intermediary lending agencies to develop pilots for loan arrangements in Wales. This approach was recommended by the Audit Committee and offers advantages to authorities without the need for a separate agency. I have recently advised the Social Justice the Regeneration Committee of the steps we already have, and which are continuing, including discussions with local authorities and intermediary agencies. We hope the pilots will be in place within the next six months or so.

Women's Aid

Q13 Sandy Mewies: Could the Minister make a statement on the support that the Welsh Assembly Government has provided to Women's Aid in Wales? (OAQ39725)

Edwina Hart: The Assembly Government values the work being done by Welsh Women's Aid in combating domestic violence in Wales and is providing this organisation with £341,640 of core funding in the present financial year. We are also providing Welsh Women's Aid with some £680,000 between 2003-06 for the provision of a free telephone helpline for the victims of domestic abuse in Wales.

The Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Q14 Alun Ffred Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the home energy efficiency scheme in Wales? (OAQ39689)

Edwina Hart: The home energy efficiency scheme is our main vehicle for lifting Welsh households out of fuel poverty. HEES has a budget of £14.1 million for the current financial year. I am pleased to be able to confirm that the scheme has met the target in the fuel poverty commitment for Wales to assist 38,000 households in Wales by March 2004.

We have commissioned research relating to fuel poverty and an interim evaluation of HEES, which will look into its delivery mechanisms and the adequacy of assistance offered. We hope to conclude the

reviews by the end of 2004, and the information of the reviews should be made available to committee on 26 January 2005.

Promoting the Voluntary Sector

Q15 David Melding: What meetings has the Minister had in connection with promoting the voluntary sector in South Wales Central? (OAQ39738)

Edwina Hart: Since being appointed Minister with responsibility for the voluntary sector, I have met with a wide range of voluntary organisations in different parts of Wales, including South Wales Central. For example, the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council met in Cardiff in July. I will continue to meet as many organisations as I can because I want a real and ongoing dialogue with the sector at all levels. I intend to make sure that the support that the Assembly Government provides meets their needs.

Questions to the Minister for Economic Development and Transport

Economic Research Advisory Panel

Q9 Irene James: Will the Minister make a statement about the work of the economic research advisory panel? (OAQ39821) *Transferred for answer by the First Minister.*

The First Minister (Rhodri Morgan): The economic research advisory panel is providing valuable advice to the Welsh Assembly Government on its programme of economic research. The panel's second annual report, providing full details of its activities, will be published in the new year. The panel was established in May 2002, with members appointed for a three year-period. The process of appointing members for a further period has just commenced.

The Training Needs of Employers

Q10 Janet Ryder: Will the Minister make a statement on the training needs of employers? (OAQ39768)

The Minister for Economic Development and Transport (Andrew Davies): The training and skills agenda is the responsibility of my Cabinet colleague, the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, but I can tell you that employers are fully engaged. This includes membership of National Council—Elwa and its regional committees, the Future Skills Wales employment forum and through the new skills for business network.

Cardiff International Airport

Q11 David Melding: Will the Minister make a statement on measures to promote Cardiff international airport? (OAQ39829)

Andrew Davies: The Assembly Government is committed to the development of Cardiff international airport. We are investigating the scope for a route development fund to support international services, as well as taking forward work on intra-Wales services. We are also improving surface access to the airport, including the re-introduction of passenger rail services on the Vale of Glamorgan line.

The Economic Benefits of the Wales Millennium Centre

Q12 Owen John Thomas: Will the Minister make a statement on the economic benefits of the Wales Millennium Centre? (OAQ39827)

Andrew Davies: The Assembly Government's capital and annual investment in WMC will result in jobs growth, increased spending on goods and services, and increased profiling for Cardiff and Wales.

In its first year of operation, WMC is anticipating total visitation of 600,000, which will bring around £3.5 million into the local economy.

The Effects of Personal Debt

Q13 Leanne Wood: Will the Minister make a statement on the effects of personal debt on the Welsh economy? (OAQ39770)

Andrew Davies: Most personal debt consists of mortgages on houses. A recent Bank of England study—for the UK as a whole—concludes that: households currently tend to borrow a lower proportion of the value of their property than in the past; the fall in inflation and in interest rates since 1990 means that repayments, as a proportion of disposable income, are lower than they were in 1990, on average, despite the rise in the debt to income ratio; and that fewer households now than in the late 1980s combine low collateral in their property with high debt repayment commitments.

There are no grounds for believing that current levels of indebtedness are having a material adverse effect on the Welsh economy.

Train Services

Q14 Ieuan Wyn Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on discussions that he has had with rail operators running train services in Wales? (OAQ39762)

Andrew Davies: The Assembly Government is making a significant funding contribution to the development of rail services, and I discuss how improvements will take place, including issues arising on punctuality and quality.

Question 15 (OAQ39813) withdrawn.