

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 27 June 2000

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

Questions to the First Secretary

Linking Policy, Development, Legislation and Implementation

Q1 Cynog Dafis: What progress has been made to meet the recommendation agreed in 'Betterwales.com' for an early examination of the extent to which the National Assembly is able effectively to link policy development, legislation and implementation in order to bring forward proposals for improvements? (OAQ6012)

The First Secretary: The Cabinet has considered a paper on influencing the future UK legislative programme and we will be bringing forward proposals for a new structure to generate Assembly proposals and to respond to the UK programme. This will mean a different procedure for the debate on the Queen's Speech than was conducted last year—one which should allow for the development by the Assembly of detailed input to the programme. This will be discussed in the Business Committee. Proposals have also been put to the Business Committee on keeping the Assembly informed of the progress of primary legislation.

On the wider issue of policy development, we now have an emerging process of engagement with experts, partners, and committees leading to formal consultation, reporting on the results of consultation, and eventual detailed implementation. I am now looking to give some more structure to this process. The 'Delivering Better Government' action plan produced by the Permanent Secretary sets out a series of measures which will be pursued to support a stronger policy process.

Policy Development Process

Q4 Jonathan Morgan: Will the First Secretary make a statement on the policy development process employed by the administration? (OAQ6006)

The First Secretary: We are developing a very distinctive policy development process making full use of the opportunities provided by the Assembly. The main elements of this process are the corporate planning and budgeting round in which we set strategic objectives; engagement with our partners across all sectors to develop detailed ideas; testing ideas or developing specific studies in the Subject Committees; using the schemes and themes to test how well individual proposals are measuring up; and conducting a programme of evaluation and review to inform future policy development.

Development Fund to Aid SMEs

Q10 Phil Williams: Can the First Secretary report on the progress of the setting up of a development fund to aid small and medium sized enterprises as mentioned in 'Betterwales.com'? (OQA6002)

The First Secretary: A great deal of work is being done on this project following the Economic Development Committee's approval of this project on 12 April. The Welsh Development Agency, working with the Objective 1 Regional Alliance, has published adverts for fund managers and funding partners in the Western Mail and other papers. Discussions are continuing with the Department of Trade and Industry and the European Commission regarding state aid issues and major project notification. The Shadow Finance Wales Partnership had its first meeting on 14 June and will meet again on 27 June to discuss the draft action plan. Drafting of the necessary legal documents and operational guidelines are underway. Negotiations regarding Finance Wales's headquarters are continuing and the WDA are putting

transitional arrangements in place. The next key stage is the submission of an application for the fast track procedure for European funds by the end of July and project plans have been prepared to meet this target so that the fund will be fully operational before the end of this year which is the target set in 'A Better Wales'. Fuller information will be provided by the partnership in a paper for the Economic Development Committee's meeting on 6 July.

Champion for Welsh Business

Q11 Alison Halford: Has the First Secretary had any discussions with the north Wales business community to consider a proposal to appoint a champion for Welsh business? (OAQ6025)

The First Secretary: I am the champion for Welsh business. I find the many visits I make to firms throughout Wales one of the most valuable, interesting and pleasurable aspects of my job. I also meet business representative organisations frequently, through the Business Partnership Council as well as on many other occasions.

Green Housekeeping (Assembly Buildings and Operations)

Q12 Brian Hancock: How does the First Secretary propose to encourage good practice in green housekeeping for the Assembly buildings and operations? (OAQ5993)

The First Secretary: The Assembly's policy is to apply, wherever practicable, best environmental practice in the management of its estate and associated operations. Explicit green housekeeping action plans are prepared annually to give practical effect to this policy. The plans encompass a wide range of activities and targets designed to achieve a higher level of environmental performance. The principal themes include: improving energy efficiency and conserving water; reducing waste sent to landfill; eliminating the use of ozone depleting substances in Assembly buildings and reducing pollution. All car purchasing and hire arrangements reflect concern for the environment. As indicated in the draft sustainable development scheme on which we have consulted, we shall be developing a green transport plan for the Assembly estate. The Assembly is also committed to operating a purchasing policy that gives full weight to environmental considerations in the procurement of goods and services and to sustaining a publicity campaign to raise staff awareness of sound working practices and encourage staff involvement in environmental action such as the recycling of paper and other office waste.

Including the Voluntary Sector in Policy Development

Q13 Geraint Davies: What efforts is the First Secretary making to include the voluntary sector in the National Assembly's policy development? (OAQ6013)

The First Secretary: I intend the voluntary sector to be a partner in policy development in every part of the Assembly's work. This role will be set out in the voluntary sector scheme which will shortly come before the Assembly for adoption.

A number of policy issues have already been discussed in the shadow Voluntary Sector Partnership Council, and the Council is making considerable input into the strategic planning round this year. The partnership principle of a third/a third/a third is one I would wish to see extended to all areas of work. The relevant parts of the voluntary sector are already engaged with working groups on such areas of policy development as young people; community regeneration; training and housing.

Support for Companies Using New Technology in Wales

Q14 Peter Black: What discussions has the First Secretary had with the Secretary of State for Wales regarding appropriate support for companies using new technology in Wales? (OAQ6000)

The First Secretary: I have frequent meetings with the Secretary of State for Wales to discuss a range of issues including support for companies using new technology in Wales. On 20 June, I gave a number of examples of the type of support available in my National Assembly statement on the Corus research and development centre at Port Talbot.

Recycling Targets for 2010

Q15 David Lloyd: Will the First Secretary make a statement on the recycling targets for 2010, given in 'A Better Wales'? (OAQ6015)

The First Secretary: Following on from the publication in May of 'Waste Strategy 2000 for England and Wales: Part 1', we are committed to preparing a Welsh waste strategy over the next 18 months. This will include policies aimed at maximising the amount of waste we recycle and meeting the recycling targets in 'A Better Wales'.

Banning Hunting with Dogs in Wales (Discussions)

Q16 Nick Bourne: What discussions has the First Secretary had with UK Ministers about the possibility of the Assembly deciding whether hunting with dogs should be banned in Wales? (OAQ6020)

The First Secretary: None. Hunting is not a devolved issue and any ban would require primary legislation. The Home Secretary did say in the Commons on 12 June that MPs could table an amendment to the Bill giving the Assembly power to decide on whether a ban should be introduced in Wales. However, that is a matter for Parliament to decide. Furthermore, it should be noted that the Burns report recommended that, unless there was a good reason on objective grounds, it would be unsatisfactory to have different legislative provisions in force in different regions of England and Wales.

Report of the Burns Inquiry (Effect on Wales)

Q17 Lorraine Barrett: Has the First Secretary had any discussions with the Secretary of State for Wales on how the report of the Burns inquiry will affect Wales? (OAQ6028)

The First Secretary: I would expect any discussions between Assembly Cabinet Members and the Secretary of State or his Minister to focus on whether emerging proposals for legislation following the Burns report take sufficient account of Welsh circumstances.

Decision on Hunting with Hounds (Discussions)

Q18 Alun Cairns: What discussions has the First Secretary had with the Secretary of State for Wales and the Home Secretary in relation to a decision on hunting with hounds being made in the National Assembly for Wales? (OAQ6018)

The First Secretary: None. Hunting is not a devolved issue. Any ban would require primary legislation.

Policy Making Process (North Wales's Involvement)

Q19 Christine Humphreys: How does the First Secretary propose to increase the involvement of north Wales in the Assembly's policy making process? (OAQ6011)

The First Secretary: I refer you to the answer to Nick Bourne's oral Assembly question (OAQ5458), answered on 6 June.

'Betterwales.com' (Meetings with Local Authority Representatives)

Q20 Janet Ryder: Has the First Secretary had any meetings with local authority representatives to

discuss the implication of 'Betterwales.com'? (OAQ6001)

The First Secretary: I have not specifically met with representatives of Welsh local government to discuss the implications of 'Betterwales.com'. The Finance Secretary has presented 'A Better Wales' to the Partnership Council with local government and my colleague Peter Law, the Assembly Secretary for Local Government and Housing, is in the process of discussing with representatives of the Welsh Local Government Association how policy agreements with each local authority could enable them to set out what they are doing to address the key objectives set out in 'A Better Wales', which they share.

Effect of Policies on Vale of Glamorgan

Q21 David Melding: Will the First Secretary make a statement on how the administration's policies are affecting the Vale of Glamorgan? (OAQ6005)

The First Secretary: The Assembly is working to create a society in which everyone feels valued and encouraged to play a full role. Our policies are aimed at producing a population which is well-educated, skilled, healthy and with access to efficient public services.

We intend these policies to affect all parts of Wales, including the Vale of Glamorgan. The Vale of Glamorgan is part of the area for which Objective 3 structural funds will apply, and will be able to benefit from projects supported by the European social fund, including actions designed to prevent and combat unemployment, promote business competitiveness and encourage lifelong learning. Parts of the area will also be eligible for transitional funding under the Objective 2 programme once that is agreed with the European Commission.

In addition, with the wind up of the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, the Vale of Glamorgan Council has regained responsibility for the economic, social and environmental regeneration of the whole of its area. A maximum of £7.5 million will be made available to the Vale of Glamorgan Council for the Penarth link scheme, a promenade comprising a pedestrian and cycle route along the foreshore beneath Penarth Head over five years, subject to the Council concluding a financial agreement.

Effect of the New Deal in Wales

Q22 Ann Jones: What discussions has the First Secretary had with the Secretary of State for Wales and other Ministers regarding the effect of the New Deal in Wales? (OAQ6009)

The First Secretary: Employment policy is reserved to the UK Government, which takes the lead on funding and delivery of the New Deal. In Wales, it does this in partnership with the National Assembly and contributing Welsh organisations.

I have regular meetings with the Secretary of State for Wales, where a range of topics are discussed, including the New Deal.

I am delighted to see that more than 21,000 jobless people in Wales have now found work following participation in the New Deal.

Appointing Further Political Advisers

Q23 Jenny Randerson: Does the First Secretary have any plans to appoint any further political advisers? (OAQ6016)

The First Secretary: No. The Civil Service Order in Council 1995, as amended in March 1999, permits the Assembly First Secretary or an Assembly Secretary to appoint up to four special advisers. As a result of the recent recruitment exercise, four appointments have been made.

Statement on Cabinet Changes

Q24 Owen John Thomas: Will the First Secretary be making a statement on his proposals for changes to the Cabinet sufficiently early for any necessary alterations to the Committee structure to be introduced before the summer recess? (OAQ5994)

The First Secretary: I refer you to the answer Andrew Davies gave to Rhodri Glyn Thomas on my behalf on 6 June 2000 [OAQ5474].

European Policies that Affect Wales

Q25 Ieuan Wyn Jones: What efforts is the First Secretary making to encourage a greater awareness of European policies that affect Wales? (OAQ5998)

The First Secretary: We have established a Wales Forum on European Affairs, which meets bi-annually with delegates from private, public and voluntary organisations. The Forum provides an opportunity to raise awareness of the pertinent European issues affecting Wales and also encourages discussion on major European topics.

The Assembly has also joined the Wales European Centre. Our subscription is enabling the Centre to develop and expand its information and lobbying services for all its partner organisations and assist them in developing a greater awareness of European policies that affect Wales.

Links between Various Layers of Government in Wales

Q26 Helen Mary Jones: How will the First Secretary nourish stronger links between the various layers of Government in Wales during the development and delivery of National Assembly policies? (OAQ6014)

The First Secretary: The Partnership Council is an effective way of discussing the development of policy with the local government sector and I have regular discussions with the Secretary of State about the policies of the Assembly and the UK Government. We are developing (at the initiative of the Welsh Local Government Association) policy agreements with each local authority in Wales which will focus on the delivery of key outcomes related to shared objectives. The Assembly's concordats with UK Government departments provide useful links with those departments when delivering policies.

Along with my Cabinet colleagues, I will keep these mechanisms under review to ensure that they continue to develop as stronger links.

Quality of Service of National Assembly for Wales

Q27 Richard Edwards: Will the First Secretary make a statement on the quality of service the people of Wales should receive from the National Assembly for Wales? (OAQ5991)

The First Secretary: From its inception the Assembly adopted the six service standards laid down for central Government which set out how, for example, we would deal with correspondence, consult our partners and handle complaints. In the autumn of last year, Sir Richard Wilson's civil service reform programme was launched under the banner of 'Modernising Government'. The reform programme was adapted to meet the special circumstances within the Assembly and re-branded to enable us to pursue our own distinctive agenda. In December, the Permanent Secretary announced the better government initiative.

The better government initiative will deliver the Assembly's vision for better public services in Wales. It will set the highest standards for excellence in public administration and public service, recognised as such by the public, our partners and Assembly Members; the Assembly will become a quality employer

with which people are proud to be associated; and a learning organisation in which standards are continuously being improved.

Following the launch, a comprehensive programme of consultation with all Assembly staff was undertaken. The consultation focused on the following seven areas for improvement, which have become the 'themes' for better government:

- Better Leadership
- Better Ways of Doing Business
- Better Ways of Managing Performance
- Building Equality into Policies and Practices
- Being More Outward Looking
- Better Working Conditions and Employment Practices
- Better Ways of Developing Policy

Following consultation, an action plan was submitted to the Cabinet Office with a bid for monies from the invest to modernise fund. The plan was well received and the Assembly has been awarded grants of £2.1 million, which compares very well with what has been awarded to other Departments.

Postal Services Bill

Q28 Kirsty Williams: What has been done to make the UK Government take into account the Assembly's concerns, expressed in its motion of 18 January, regarding the Postal Services Bill? (OAQ6017)

The First Secretary: I refer Kirsty Williams to my answer of 20 June to a similar question from Christine Humphries (OAQ5832).

I said that, although post offices are a reserved matter, they are of concern to all of us, and referred to the liaison there had been between Assembly officials and the Performance and Innovation Unit of the Cabinet Office during the preparation of its study of the national post office network which will be published shortly.

I referred to the meeting which is to take place between Assembly officials and the shadow Postal Services Commission. I said that I had written to Alan Johnson, Minister for Competitiveness at the Department of Trade and Industry to pass on concerns about the introduction of automated credit transfer; I am still awaiting a reply.

Links with Northern Ireland Assembly

Q29 Brian Gibbons: What plans are in place to ensure closer links between this Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly? (OAQ6019)

The First Secretary: I and my Cabinet colleagues look forward to developing strong relations with our counterparts in the Northern Ireland Executive. Relations between this Assembly as a whole and the Northern Ireland Assembly are not a matter for me, although I would welcome close ties.

Assembly's Strategic Targets (Role of Schools)

Q30 Pauline Jarman: Has the First Secretary had any discussion with schools regarding their role in fulfilling the Assembly's strategic targets? (OAQ5999)

The First Secretary: Schools were consulted fully over the education targets proposed in the education White Paper, 'Building Excellent Schools Together' and in the education and training action plan for

Wales. The targets set out in those documents have now been carried forward into the strategic targets for the National Assembly. The contribution that each school will make to the achievement of those targets will continue to be a matter to be agreed with their respective LEA.