

## Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 28 June 2001

[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 Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities

#### Social Exclusion in Anglesey

**Q10 Peter Rogers:** Will the Minister make a statement on social exclusion in Anglesey? (OAQ12258)

**The Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities (Edwina Hart):** Social exclusion affects all communities in Wales, but I am concerned that certain areas in Anglesey suffer from extreme levels of poverty and deprivation. Anglesey has six electoral wards in the 100 most deprived communities in Wales as identified by the index of multiple deprivation.

On 18 June, I announced the communities to be included in the Assembly's groundbreaking Communities First programme. This is targeted at tackling poverty and social exclusion in the most deprived communities in Wales and aims to bridge the gap between these communities and more affluent ones.

The six wards in Anglesey were selected for inclusion in the programme and therefore will be able to draw down Communities First funding.

#### Licensing Private Rented Housing

**Q11 Geraint Davies:** Does the Minister have plans to license private rented housing in Wales? (OAQ12188)

**Edwina Hart:** Our consultation paper 'Better Homes for People in Wales' makes it clear that the Assembly is committed to introducing licensing for houses in multiple occupation. We will also be consulting on proposals for selective licensing of other private rented properties where appropriate.

#### Mortar Quality of Newly-Built Homes

**Q12 Alun Cairns:** What representations has the Minister received from occupants of newly-built homes in Wales expressing concern over mortar quality? (OAQ12239)

**Edwina Hart:** I have received no direct representation. However, Housing Directorate officials have for some time been in correspondence with residents of a number of housing developments regarding soft mortar.

While this problem is not directly within the locus of the Assembly, officials, through the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales, have pursued residents' concerns with the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, now the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, most recently at a meeting between the Secretary of State and the Minister for Construction on 13 March.

DTLR now acknowledge the problem and are taking this issue forward with the National House Building Council, which provides warranties for new homes.

Further information on this can be found in paper (LGH-09-01), considered by the Local Government and Housing Committee on 20 June.

### **House Adaptations for Disabled Children**

**Q13 Geraint Davies:** What assistance is available to the parents of disabled children for necessary house adaptations? (OAQ12179) *Withdrawn.*

### **The Inquiry into Councillors' Allowances**

**Q14 Jonathan Morgan:** When is the independent inquiry into councillors' allowances expected to report back to the Minister? (OAQ12272)

**Edwina Hart:** I expect to receive the final report shortly.

### **Ethical Standards of Welsh Local Government**

**Q15 Richard Edwards:** What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that the public has confidence in the ethical standards of Welsh local government? (OAQ12256) *Withdrawn.*

### **Improving the Standard of Private Rented Accommodation**

**Q16 Janet Davies:** What plans does the Minister have to improve the standard of private rented accommodation by landlords in Wales? (OAQ12186) *Withdrawn.*

### **Business Rate Relief (Foot and Mouth Disease)**

**Q17 Ieuan Wyn Jones:** Has the Minister any plans to offer further business rate relief to areas affected by the foot and mouth disease crisis in Wales? (OAQ12187) *Withdrawn.*

### **Transferring Powers on Building Regulations**

**Q18 Jocelyn Davies:** Has the Minister discussed with the Secretary of State for Wales options for transferring powers regarding building regulations to the National Assembly? (OAQ12181) *Withdrawn.*

### **Reviewing Councillors' Allowances**

**Q19 Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Has the Minister any plans to review local authority councillor allowances in Wales? (OAQ12180) *Withdrawn.*

### **Discussions with House Building Companies**

**Q20 Alun Cairns:** What discussions has the Minister had with house building companies in Wales to alleviate any public concern over quality? (OAQ12238)

**Edwina Hart:** I have had no direct discussions, although I plan to do so following discussion of this topic at the recent Local Government and Housing Committee on 20 June.

Housing Directorate officials have, for some time, been aware of public concerns over build quality.

While this problem is not directly within the locus of the Assembly, officials, through the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales, have pursued these concerns with the DETR, now DTLR, and the National House Building Council, the industry representative body.

As a result of our involvement, the NHBC recognises the need to change some of its working practices and quality control procedures. We continue to maintain a watching brief.

Further information can be found in paper (LGH-09-01), considered by the Local Government and Housing Committee on 20 June.

### **Combating Poverty in Urban Communities in South Wales Central**

**Q21 Owen John Thomas:** Will the Minister make a statement on measures being taken to combat poverty in urban communities in South Wales Central? (OAQ12205) [W] *Withdrawn.*

### **Community Councils**

**Q22 Brian Gibbons:** How many community councils have been established and then closed between 1999 and 2001 in Wales? (OAQ12254) *Withdrawn.*

### **Consultation on Changing the Way in which Public Services are Delivered**

**Q23 Brian Hancock:** What guidance has been issued to local authorities regarding consultation with staff and their representatives following proposals to change the way in which public services are delivered? (OAQ12206) *Withdrawn.*

### **Reviewing the Council Tax Banding System**

**Q24 Jocelyn Davies:** Does the Minister plan to review the banding system in council tax? (OAQ12190) *Withdrawn.*

### **Home Energy Efficiency Scheme**

**Q25 Karen Sinclair:** What measures are in place to enable the Minister to review the progress of the home energy efficiency scheme? (OAQ12194)

**Edwina Hart:** The home energy efficiency scheme is proving an enormous success, with over 15,000 applications having been received. Against this background there is the need to ensure the scheme and Assembly funding are adequately and efficiently managed.

Officials within the Housing Directorate maintain a close working relationship with the scheme manager and, in these early days of operation, hold regular monitoring meetings. The scheme manager is also required to provide a quarterly progress report to the Assembly covering all aspects of the scheme.

To ensure that the scheme and scheme manager are meeting targets and objectives, we will, towards the end of the year, let an audit contract to independently examine the first year of performance.

### **The Care and Repair Scheme**

**Q26 Phil Williams:** Will the Minister make a statement on the funding available for the care and repair scheme in Wales? (OAQ12192) *Withdrawn.*

### **Directly-Elected Mayors**

**Q27 David Melding:** Will the Minister trigger referenda on the issue of directly-elected mayors in Wales? (OAQ12276) *Withdrawn.*

### **Discussions on Stock Transfer**

**Q28 Lynne Neagle:** What discussions has the Minister had with the new UK Minister for Housing, Planning and Regeneration on the issue of stock transfer? (OAQ12209)

**Edwina Hart:** None. The new UK Minister for Housing, Planning and Regeneration does not have any remit for stock transfer in Wales. This is an issue for the Assembly, and ultimately the tenants of our council houses in Wales, to consider.

### **Communities First**

**Q29 Lynne Neagle:** Further to her answer to OAQ11676, will the Minister give an update on the implementation of the Communities First programme? (OAQ12207)

**Edwina Hart:** I announced the communities for inclusion in the Communities First programme on 18 June and have written to all the local authorities confirming which areas are eligible to draw down funding. My officials are now inviting local authorities and their partners to apply for Communities First funding for a range of activities for preparatory work. Guidance for the programme is currently being developed. It is planned to issue this in September.

### **Community Initiatives (Corus)**

**Q30 William Graham:** Will the Minister make a statement on community initiatives introduced specifically for those communities affected by Corus's decision? (OAQ12274)

**Edwina Hart:** Work is underway to prepare a regional regeneration framework and two regeneration programmes for Blaenau Gwent and Newport. This work will assist in the identification and prioritisation of regeneration projects, including community initiatives, to be implemented in partnership with the local authorities and the Welsh Development Agency. The work will be substantially complete by October.

In addition, I have included three wards in Ebbw Vale in the Communities First programme to complement this strategic approach to regeneration. Although these areas are outside the 100 most deprived wards in Wales as defined by the Welsh index of multiple deprivation, I decided to accept the case put forward by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council in the light of Corus's decision.

These programmes will build upon the employment and training initiatives already underway.

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

### **Improving North-South Rail Links**

**Q7 Janet Ryder:** What steps is the Minister taking to ensure improved north-south rail links? (OAQ12235)

**The Minister for Environment (Sue Essex):** I have met the strategic rail authority on a number of occasions and have underlined our commitment to improving north-south rail services.

I will meet the SRA's executive director of external relations, Mr Chris Austin, on 5 July to discuss the Wales and Borders franchise and will stress to him the importance of taking north-south services into account in the negotiations for the new franchise.

### Monitoring the Impact of Jet Skis

**Q8 Ieuan Wyn Jones:** What plans does the Minister have to monitor the impact of jet skis on the offshore marine environment in Wales? (OAQ12232)

**Sue Essex:** Participation in jet skiing is informal and may take place on suitable coastal waters provided that local bye-laws, speed limits, zoning, launching and other policies are observed. Arrangements to monitor the impact of such craft are a matter for local authorities, harbour authorities and bodies like the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Royal National Lifeboat Institution and the police with regard to any reported incidents and accidents.

### Sites of Special Scientific Interest (Management Review)

**Q9 Gareth Jones:** Does the Minister have any plans to review the management of sites of special scientific interest in Wales? (OAQ12245)

**Sue Essex:** The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and the proposals for new financial guidelines for management agreements on sites of special scientific interest together establish a new framework for SSSI management in Wales. Officials will keep its implementation under review, in liaison with the Countryside Council for Wales.

### North-South Transport Links

**Q10 Janet Ryder:** Will the Minister make a statement on the current state of north-south transport links? (OAQ12233)

**Sue Essex:** The main road routes linking north and south Wales—the A470 and the A483—have undergone selective improvement in recent years. Consideration has been given, on both traffic and environmental grounds, as to whether additional priority should be given to those road links.

The Assembly's forward trunk road programme will be developed following publication of the transport framework and the results of the 2000 Bactie study will be taken into account in informing decisions on improvements to north-south links.

The Assembly currently provides funding for an additional north-south return train service via Wrexham.

### Policies Regarding the Use of Jet Skis

**Q11 Ieuan Wyn Jones:** What policies does the Minister have regarding the use of jet skis off the north Wales coast? (OAQ12264)

**Sue Essex:** The management of personal watercraft off the Welsh coast is essentially a matter for local authorities, using bye-laws and policies to work with those involved in the supply and use of the craft, and in the enforcement of high standards of marine safety.

The Government's 'Review of Byelaw Powers for the Coast' sets out a number of recommendations to improve the effectiveness of local authority bye-law making and enforcement in England and Wales. I hope that the Assembly can work with our partners in Government and other sectors to consider how best the report's recommendations can be taken forward.

### Protecting Biodiversity in Rural Areas

**Q12 Elin Jones:** What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that biodiversity is protected in rural areas? (OAQ12246)

**Sue Essex:** A wide range of measures is in place to promote the protection and conservation of biodiversity across Wales. These include the designation of specially protected sites and the promotion of their appropriate management, support for land management practices that are compatible with biodiversity conservation, such as Tir Gofal and the organic farming scheme (Wales), and revised draft planning guidance. In addition, the Countryside Council for Wales is supporting a wide range of biodiversity initiatives through its grant aid programme, at a planned level of over £850,000 in 2001-02.

### **‘Technical Advice Note (Wales) 8: Renewable Energy’**

**Q13 Mick Bates:** What is the expected completion date for the review of ‘Technical Advice Note (Wales) 8: Renewable Energy’? (OAQ12196)

**Sue Essex:** The background to the review of ‘Technical Advice Note (Wales) 8: Renewable Energy’ was set out in OAQ9259 on 1 February 2001. Good progress is being made by the technical advisory group, and I expect a revised draft TAN for consultation to be issued towards the end of 2001.

In parallel, ‘Planning Policy Wales’ is being redrafted to take on board a number of the issues already discussed by the TAG and to reflect the responses to the consultation process that have been received. ‘Planning Policy Wales’ will be issued in early 2002.

### **National Spatial Planning Framework Network**

**Q14 Lynne Neagle:** Will the Minister make a statement on the most recent meeting of the national spatial planning framework network? (OAQ12174)

**Sue Essex:** A very successful inaugural meeting of the spatial planning network took place at Cardiff International Arena on 20 June. The network includes a wide range of partner organisations invited to work with the Assembly on developing its national spatial planning framework. At the first meeting, researchers and officials gave presentations on possible ways forward. Delegates, including several members of local planning authorities, then took part in discussions and workshops to identify issues that the framework could address. Network members were invited to contribute views and ideas on an ongoing basis, but I also expect to hold a number of further meetings of the network at key stages during preparation of the framework, including at locations in other parts of Wales.

### **Safety on Roads in Mid and West Wales**

**Q15 Nick Bourne:** What is the Minister doing to improve safety on roads in mid and west Wales? (OAQ12223)

**Sue Essex:** Improving road safety is one of my priorities and I have allocated additional funding directly to local authorities to help them address road safety issues in their own areas. This year (out of a total of £3.038 million) Carmarthenshire will receive £225,000, Powys will receive £137,000, Pembrokeshire will receive £119,000 and Ceredigion will receive £89,000. Last year (out of a total of £3.662 million) those authorities received £262,000, £245,000, £165,000 and £119,000 respectively.

On the trunk road network, £1.5 million per annum has been ring-fenced for local safety schemes and the allocation of funds to specific schemes in mid and west Wales is under consideration.

### **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (Condition)**

**Q16 Cynog Dafis:** Will the Minister make a statement on the condition of sites of special scientific interest in Wales? (OAQ12224)

**Sue Essex:** Data on the condition of SSSIs that are also national nature reserves are reported in the Countryside Council for Wales/Forestry Commission publication, ‘A Living Environment for Wales’.

This data indicates where all the features were in favourable condition, but are not able to show whether other sites have improved since designation. Using additional resources provided by the Assembly, CCW is extending its monitoring programme to other SSSIs.

### **Preserving Wales's Industrial Heritage**

**Q17 David Lloyd:** Will the Minister make a statement on any recent discussions that she has had with Cadw regarding the need to preserve Wales's industrial heritage? (OAQ12263)

**Sue Essex:** I consulted Cadw prior to making a statement in the Assembly on the future of the Dunlop Semtex factory, Brynmawr on 21 June. I have also had discussions with Cadw recently about the programme of projects at Blaenavon ironworks, which is in state care and is a part of a world heritage site.

### **The Lack of Financial Assistance for the Road Haulage Industry**

**Q18 David Davies:** Has the Minister discussed with her counterparts in the other devolved administrations the lack of financial assistance for the road haulage industry? (OAQ12221)

**Sue Essex:** I have not had any such discussions. Officials have met the devolved administrations, the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and Her Majesty's Treasury to discuss the road haulage modernisation fund. There is no additional funding available this year. Each devolved administration will now consider how to take matters forward. We intend to consult the Road Haulage Association, Freight Transport Association and Transport and General Workers Union to determine the industry's needs in Wales.

### **Protecting Greenfield Sites in South Wales Central**

**Q19 Jonathan Morgan:** What steps is the administration taking to protect greenfield sites in South Wales Central? (OAQ12269) *Withdrawn.*

### **Increasing Levels of Biodiversity**

**Q20 Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** How does the Minister intend to ensure that sustainable development in Wales increases levels of biodiversity? (OAQ12225)

**Sue Essex:** Requiring environmental issues, including biodiversity, to be integrated into all aspects of the Assembly's work, in tandem with social and economic concerns, represents a major step forward. Our commitment to developing appraisal tools and indicators of sustainable development, including ecological footprinting, will help us deliver better outcomes in terms of biodiversity.

### **Waste Strategy for Wales**

**Q21 Helen Mary Jones:** When will the draft waste strategy for Wales be available for consultation? (OAQ12248)

**Sue Essex:** I intend to issue the new waste strategy for consultation on 4 July.

### **Awarding Blue Flags for Beaches in Wales**

**Q22 William Graham:** Will the Minister make a statement concerning the awarding of blue flags for beaches in Wales? (OAQ12252)

**Sue Essex:** This year 18 Welsh beaches (and four marinas) have been awarded a blue flag by the Tidy Britain Group (Keep Wales Tidy in Wales). Although that is disappointing in comparison to last year's

record achievement, Wales still has a high proportion of the UK's total of 55 blue flag beaches. Where there has been an apparent deterioration in water quality at European Commission-identified bathing waters, the Environment Agency Wales will investigate the reasons and report on them.

### **The Research Development Budget for Transport**

**Q23 Eleanor Burnham:** What is the research development budget for transport in Wales? (OAQ12249)

**Sue Essex:** The Transport Directorate is still considering its research requirements, particularly in relation to the information needed to support the transport framework. As a result, the budget provision for transport and road research has not yet been set, although a nominal figure is shown in the budget lines for 2001-02. That figure will be increased in-year from within the overall transport budget provision to match actual research programme needs, as and when they are agreed. The directorate is also collaborating in the transport research programmes of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the Highways Agency and the Scottish Executive.

### **Enhancing Transport Communications in South Wales Central**

**Q24 David Melding:** What steps is the administration taking to enhance transport communications in South Wales Central? (OAQ12271) *Withdrawn.*

### **Discussions with the Environment Agency (Crymlyn Burrows Incinerator)**

**Q25 Alun Cairns:** Will the Minister make a statement on her latest discussions with the Environment Agency over the Crymlyn Burrows incinerator project? (OAQ12217)

**Sue Essex:** I have discussed with the Environment Agency the need to ensure that appropriate consultation takes place with local communities. The integrated waste facility at Crymlyn Burrows is designed to increase recycling and composting, and to produce energy from waste, significantly reducing the amount of waste going to landfill. It will need to be authorised under the integrated pollution prevention and control regime before it can operate. Any authorisation by the agency will need to meet the stringent requirements of the Waste Incineration Directive established to protect human health and the environment.

### **Promoting Sustainable Development in Wales**

**Q26 Janet Davies:** What is the Minister doing to ensure that the Assembly takes a lead on promoting sustainable development in Wales? (OAQ12262)

**Sue Essex:** In line with the sustainable development scheme, we are looking to build the promotion of sustainable development into everything we do, particularly through new policies and programmes and, over time, by influencing partner organisations and steering the work of Assembly sponsored public bodies.

I anticipate that three specific pieces of work already in hand will help substantially to raise public awareness of sustainable development issues. An advisory panel on education for sustainable development was recently established by Jane Davidson. Consultation on a waste strategy for Wales is due to be launched next month. Wales's ecological footprint is being calculated, and should be ready by October, in time to feed into our preparations for the 2002 world summit on sustainable development.

### **Improving North-South Intermodal Links**

**Q27 Eleanor Burnham:** What proposals does the Minister have to improve north-south intermodal links? (OAQ12250)



**Sue Essex:** We are encouraging the rail franchise bidders to come forward with strong investment plans, to maximise the potential of the transport network, and to ensure good connections to other modes of transport.

The transport grant is aiding local authorities to improve intermodal links. For example, in the Newtown integrated transport strategy, Powys County Council has included proposals to improve bus links, journey times and waiting facilities at Newtown bus station, which will all contribute to improved intermodal north-south links.

The Assembly's forward trunk road programme will be developed following publication of the transport framework, and the results of the 2000 Babtie study will be taken into account in informing decisions on improvements to north-south links.

### **Developing a Waste Strategy for Wales**

**Q28 Delyth Evans:** What progress has been made in the development of a waste strategy for Wales? (OAQ12198)

**Sue Essex:** I intend to issue the new waste strategy for consultation on 4 July. It will include proposals for maximising opportunities for waste minimisation, recycling and composting.

### **Developing the National Spatial Planning Framework in Wales**

**Q29 Delyth Evans:** What progress has been made in developing the national spatial planning framework in Wales? (OAQ12199)

**Sue Essex:** A research project on possible means of developing the framework was completed in March this year. Based on the conclusions and on other views that I have received, I have been able to make initial progress on the framework as follows:

- a dedicated spatial planning unit has been established within the Assembly's Planning Division;
- a small management board for the framework has been established, chaired by the head of Planning Division and including representatives of partner organisations—the Countryside Council for Wales, the Welsh Development Agency, Environment Agency Wales, the Welsh Local Government Association, Wales Wildlife and Countryside Link, the Construction Industry Council, the Confederation of British Industry and academia—as well as Assembly officials with responsibilities for planning, transport, economic development and sustainable development;
- to secure wider input, a spatial planning network, including a broad range of environmental, economic and social organisations, as well as all local planning authorities in Wales and their regional groupings, has been established. The first meeting of the network took place on 20 June, as detailed in my answer to Lynn Neagle's question, OAQ12174.

The next steps, following consultation with Environment, Planning and Transport Committee members and the management board, will involve issuing a consultation document on the process and the issues that the framework will need to address. Further research to support development of the framework is planned. That will be based on the strategic direction set by the Assembly. It will consider the key drivers of change in Wales and its regions over the next 20 years, and the possible scenarios for spatial development arising from those. While much of the information needed to analyse these issues and find solutions is available now, the research will also identify, and find ways to plug, any information gaps.

My aim is to produce a draft spatial framework for wide consultation by Spring 2002.

### **Halting the Decline in Biodiversity in Wales**

**Q30 Cynog Dafis:** What policies does the Minister have to halt the serious decline in biodiversity in Wales? (OAQ12226)

**Sue Essex:** I refer you to my replies today to OAQ12274 and OAQ12227.