

Information Further to Ministerial Answers

**Information further to OAQ37566, issued by Rhodri Morgan, the First Minister,
on 21 October 2004**

To William Graham:

You will recall that I promised to write to you following your request for an update on the Commission for Racial Equality programme 'Race Equality in Wales: the Agenda for change 2004-06'.

My officials work in close collaboration with the CRE. By way of example, in October a series of specific meetings are taking place with the CRE to discuss the details of the draft of our revised race equality scheme with the aim of agreeing and finalising a draft that it is willing to endorse positively.

This is a real step forward and a confirmation that already much progress has been made on the drafting of the revised race equality scheme. Departments are currently preparing departmental race equality actions plans that will be separate from the scheme document but clearly referred to in the document and available at the time of publication and departments will be required to clear these plans with their Minister.

On 22 September, an event was held to discuss a draft version of the scheme involving lead officials in departments and external experts and contacts who acted as 'critical friends' in the discussion. The feedback is being taken into account in producing the draft scheme, which is due to be submitted to Ministers in early November.

We are actively taking forward the aim of 'Race Equality in Wales: the Agenda for Change 2004-06' through working in partnership with the CRE to enable the delivery of the public duty to promote race equality.

**Information further to OAQ37563, issued by Sue Essex, the Finance Minister,
on 6 October 2004**

To David Davies:

In the exchange following question 5 of the First Minister's questions on 21 September 2004 the First Minister indicated that I would write to you in response to your question regarding Assembly funding for Welsh local authorities in the light of council tax rebanding.

As you will appreciate, it is not possible for me to go into detail at this point on the increase in the revenue settlement for next year as the Assembly's budget for the next three years has not yet been published. How any overall increase in Assembly support for local government impacts on individual authorities is dependent on the settlement formula.

The distribution of the revenue settlement is dependent on the standard spending assessment for each authority. The SSA is an assessment of the need to spend by each authority to provide a consistent level of service across Wales. The level of revenue support grant provided to each authority is the amount required to make up the balance of funding after taking account of the assumed level of council tax income and the allocation of redistributed national non-domestic rate income.

The assumed level of council tax income will be based on the new property bandings. Therefore, if a property has moved up one band, the assumed level of council tax income that the council will be expected to receive in respect of that property will be the council tax based on that higher rate banding. Similarly, if a property moves down a band then the council tax income assumed will be based on the lower banding. Where an individual moves up two or more bands we will assume council tax income in line with that banding. In such cases the transitional relief scheme will provide the element of income to the authority in place of the additional income due from the householder resulting from moving up more than one band.

I hope that that answers your question.

Information further to OAQ37571, issued by Jane Hutt, the Minister for Health and Social Services, on 13 October 2004

To Kirsty Williams:

During the Assembly Plenary session on 21 September you asked a supplementary question to OAQ37571 on the issue of general practitioners withdrawing from out-of-hours cover of community hospitals. The First Minister agreed that I would write to you about this issue.

As I recently explained in my statement about the continuing of services by GPs in community hospitals on 28 September, there is a national framework of principles that allows for local arrangements in terms of negotiations with GPs, not only on remuneration, but on their role in providing local services.

Because community hospitals differ throughout Wales reflecting different needs and circumstances, local trusts must take the responsibility for negotiating the type and style of treatment to be made available so that the use of community hospitals is based on the care required by local populations.

Alternative arrangements have already been developed in some trusts, which are consistent with the health and social care wellbeing strategies for different localities. I appreciate that Powys is unique in its reliance on community hospitals, but I am aware that local negotiations began last week when it was agreed that existing rates of remuneration would continue to be paid until 31 December, which gives both sides a period of three months to negotiate a revised agreement that will be backdated to 1 October.

I have asked my officials to keep me informed of progress.

Information further to OAQ37571, issued by Jane Hutt, the Minister for Health and Social Services, on 23 November 2004

To Jonathan Morgan:

I am writing with reference to the question you asked the First Minister on 21 September 2004 in relation to Welsh ambulance service vacancies and what the Welsh Assembly Government intended to do to help remedy the situation. I am sorry for the delay in replying.

The number of vacancies in the Welsh ambulance service in March 2004 was higher than usual as some of the new intake of staff had not completed their training by the end of the financial year. The intake of new staff during 2003-04 was much higher than in previous years as a result of the additional £2.5 million revenue funding made available by the Assembly. This additional funding enables the Welsh ambulance trust to increase the number

of operational and control room staff by 326. New staff who had not completed their training in March were given start dates for future courses.

I hope my reply is helpful to you.