

## **Information Further to Ministerial Answers**

### **Information further to OAQ2081(FM) issued by Rhodri Morgan, the First Minister**

#### **To Helen Mary Jones:**

During my question session of 21 November you asked a supplementary question to OAQ2081 on foster care allowances, and I undertook to write to you with a detailed response.

The contribution made by foster carers in providing the security and comfort of a family home for some of our most vulnerable children is very much appreciated.

You will be aware that under existing regulations, local authorities have the responsibility for the approval of foster parents, and deciding the level of allowance to be paid to an approved carer to support the child or children placed by them with the carer.

We issued a consultation paper earlier this month, of which I enclose, on proposed national minimum allowances and effective practice in payment systems by foster care providers. We will need to look at the responses to that consultation before taking this work forward. We will continue to monitor the level of fostering allowances paid by Welsh local authorities and, if gross inequalities were to continue, the Assembly could draw up regulations under section 49 of the Children Act 2004 to set allowances

### **Information further to OAQ2070(FM) issued by Rhodri Morgan, the First Minister**

#### **To Owen John Thomas:**

Following the question you posed during my question time on Tuesday 21 November, I promised to look into the matter of British Sign Language (BSL) courses being available to parents. I apologise for the delay in responding.

I can confirm that free BSL classes for parents of children diagnosed as deaf could only be a positive step. A number of colleges already provide BSL courses free of charge but at the moment it is the responsibility of the individual colleges to make the provision available.

The Welsh Assembly Government has achieved great progress in securing funding for BSL this year: You may wish to be aware that:

- I have ensured that £192,000 has been made available over a 3 year period from September 2006 to the University of Wales, Newport to contribute to course fees for mandatory qualification training for teachers working with children and young people with either hearing or visual impairment.
- In February, the Equalities Minister, Jane Hutt announced up to £2.7 million (£1.6m from the European Union's Objective 1 programme and £1.1m match funding from the Welsh Assembly Government) for a scheme to increase the number of BSL interpreters in Wales, providing those who use the language better access to services across the country. 'BSL Futures' will fund 36 posts for Apprentice Interpreters to become qualified, and will support a further 9 trainees with grants to access courses. BSL Futures is making a large investment in BSL provision in Colleges. Some £300,000 will be spent on colleges' BSL provision over the 3 year life of the project.

I hope the information above answers your concerns.

