

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 10 January 2002

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

[W] signifies that the question was tabled in Welsh.

Contents

- 1 Questions on Economic Development to the First Minister
- 3 Questions on Finance to the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities

Questions on Economic Development to the First Minister

Introducing Fiscal Variations in Areas of Wales

Q7 Dafydd Wigley: Will the First Minister give an update on his attempts to deliver the commitment in the partnership agreement to introduce fiscal variations in areas of Wales? (OAQ14803)

The First Minister (Rhodri Morgan): My full report on this issue is to be discussed at this afternoon's meeting of the Economic Development Committee.

Attracting Inward Investment in Wales

Q8 Jonathan Morgan: What meetings has the First Minister had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry with regard to attracting inward investment in Wales? (OAQ14810)

The First Minister: I have not met Patricia Hewitt to discuss inward investment specifically. Assembly Government officials are in contact with Department of Trade and Industry opposite numbers regularly to discuss particular investment projects, and the role of Invest.UK in supporting overseas investment in Wales. Wales is also represented on the Committee on Overseas Promotion.

Attracting Large Research and Development Projects to Wales

Q9 Alun Cairns: Will the First Minister make a statement on progress made in attracting large research and development projects to Wales? (OAQ14814)

The First Minister: The Welsh Assembly Government has already set out in 'A Winning Wales' plans for encouraging increased levels of research and development activity. We are building on successes like the SMART Wales programme, the technium concept and the Wales regional technology plan. We will also launch a new technology commercialisation centre.

The Cohesion Report

Q10 Phil Williams: Will the First Minister make a statement on his response to the European Union's consultation on the cohesion report? (OAQ14800)

The First Minister: I wrote to the Commissioner for Regional Policy on 17 December on the issues raised by the commission's second report on economic and social cohesion. I am confident that, while the views in my response, which you and other members of the Committee on European and External Affairs had sight of before it was sent, are preliminary, the issues that I have raised have wide support in Wales.

Regeneration of the South Wales Valleys

Q11 Geraint Davies: Has the First Minister met with the chairman-designate of the Welsh Development Agency to discuss the regeneration of the south Wales valleys? (OAQ14833)

The First Minister: I have met and discussed the agency's future strategies with the chairman-designate. We covered a range of issues. I expect the agency to continue with its work to regenerate the south Wales valleys, alongside its other strategic priorities.

Objective 1 Projects in the Vale of Clwyd

Q12 Ann Jones: Will the First Minister make a statement on the progress in taking forward Objective 1 projects in the Vale of Clwyd over recent months? (OAQ14835)

The First Minister: Further to the answer given on 3 May (OAQ11113), another three European regional development fund projects have been approved, with a grant value of £700,000. The number of ERDF projects approved to date is 12, with a total value £12.1 million and grant value of £4.4 million.

In addition to the local projects approvals, there are a number of projects that have been approved for the whole of north-west Wales, which will also benefit the Vale of Clwyd area.

Technium Projects

Q13 Peter Black: Will the First Minister make a statement on the future development of technium projects? (OAQ14819)

The First Minister: I refer you to the answers that I gave to Alun Cairns on 25 October 2001 (OAQ13090) and 5 November 2001 (WAQ13826).

The Impact of Job Losses at Consignia

Q14 Jonathan Morgan: What meetings has the First Minister had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in connection with the impact of the 30,000 job losses at Consignia? (OAQ14809)

The First Minister: I have not been in contact with the Department of Trade and Industry to date. Consignia is still drawing up detailed restructuring plans and it is too early to say where the proposed job reductions will take place. However, my officials have been in discussions with Consignia's senior management in Wales and will be meeting with the Department of Trade and Industry early in the new year.

Objective 1 Projects in North Wales

Q15 Ann Jones: Will the First Minister make a statement on the progress in taking forward Objective 1 projects in north Wales over recent months? (OAQ14836)

The First Minister: Further to my answer given on 3 May (OAQ11112), another seven European regional development fund projects focusing on north Wales have been approved, with a grant value of over £2.5 million. The total number of ERDF projects approved to date is 30, representing grant value of £17 million.

In addition, many approved projects will be delivered throughout the whole Objective 1 region, which will also benefit the north-west Wales area.

Questions on Finance to the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities

Additional Private Finance Initiative Credits

Q9 Peter Black: Will the Minister consider making additional PFI credits available to the public sector in Wales? (OAQ14785)

The Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities (Edwina Hart): I will discuss the matter of future bidding rounds for local government PFI credits in Wales with the Welsh Local Government Association in the near future. I will also discuss with the Minister for Health and Social Services how we develop the means to identify and take forward public private partnerships in the health service within a strategic framework.

Preparing the Assembly Budget

Q10 William Graham: Will the Minister outline the discussions that she has had with the Government at Westminster when preparing the Assembly budget? (OAQ14786)

Edwina Hart: The preparation of the Assembly's budget is a matter for the Assembly alone and I do not discuss the matter with the Westminster Government.

Estimating the Total End-year Flexibility

Q11 Eleanor Burnham: Will the Minister give an estimate of the total end-year flexibility to be carried forward in the next financial year? (OAQ14795)

Edwina Hart: It is too soon to provide such an estimate with any degree of accuracy, but I am currently meeting my Cabinet colleagues to discuss full-year expenditure, on the activities for which they have responsibility, during this financial year. I have already announced that reducing underspending across the Assembly's budgets is one of my main objectives.

Reviewing Public Sector Capital Finance Requirements

Q12 Janet Ryder: Has the Minister any plans to review public sector capital finance requirements? (OAQ14788)

Edwina Hart: Funding of capital projects in the public sector in Wales is always subject to careful scrutiny and I keep this matter under constant review.

Question 13 (OAQ14783) withdrawn.

The Capital Value and Revenue Cost of PFI Projects

Q14 Dafydd Wigley: Will the Minister provide details of the capital value and revenue cost of private finance initiative projects in Wales? (OAQ14792)

Edwina Hart: I will write to you with the information that we hold on PFI projects and I will place a copy in the Library.

Financial Contingency Plans

Q15 Nick Bourne: What financial contingency plans has the Minister put in place to deal with any unexpected repeat of last year's flooding? (OAQ14794)

Edwina Hart: The Assembly has the power to provide financial assistance to help local authorities, including police authorities, take immediate action to cope with the effects of emergencies or disasters. Were a Bellwin scheme to be activated, I would seek the Assembly's approval to provide additional financial assistance in the usual way.