

Answers to Questions not reached in Plenary 27 June 2002

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

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

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Questions to the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities

Prudential Borrowing System

Q8 Elin Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the changes that the prudential borrowing system will bring to local authorities? (OAQ18533)

The Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities (Edwina Hart): The proposed system will enable local authorities to make their own decisions about how much they can afford to borrow. It will therefore provide them with a useful degree of additional financial freedom. Authorities will need to consider their capital investment in the round, taking account of the ongoing revenue support that it will require, and will need to involve their communities in these decisions.

Question 9 (OAQ18583) withdrawn.

Broadband Technology

Q10 Brian Hancock: Will the Minister make a statement on the role that local authorities have to play in ensuring access to broadband technology? (OAQ18514)

Edwina Hart: The Assembly is working in partnership with local authorities to build public sector national and regional broadband networks. Education is the main driver for the current network, but it has capacity to deliver broadband connectivity to a wider range of Welsh public sector bodies. This activity will stimulate not only awareness of broadband among a wide sector of the population but also stimulate the market for broadband suppliers in Wales. The Assembly, economic development agencies and local authorities are also working together to find ways to connect businesses, and particularly business parks, to the network.

Homebuy Scheme

Q11 Cynog Dafis: What discussions has the Minister had with housing associations regarding the homebuy scheme? (OAQ18507)

Edwina Hart: I have had no specific discussions with housing associations about the homebuy scheme. The use of the scheme is a matter for local authorities to determine, according to the needs and priorities for housing in their areas. Authorities wishing to use the scheme should liaise with registered social landlord partners on developing appropriate programmes for implementation.

Prudential Borrowing System (Impact)

Q12 Ieuan Wyn Jones: What discussions has the Minister had with the Welsh Local Government Association on the impact of the prudential borrowing system on local authorities? (OAQ18534)

Edwina Hart: I have regular meetings with the Welsh Local Government Association and with individual councils. These cover a wide range of topics including the proposed new prudential borrowing system. The WLGA supports the introduction of the new system and has undertaken to work with the Assembly in developing the operational details of the scheme.

Local Government Partnership

Q13 Rosemary Butler: Has the local government partnership been as innovative as was originally intended, and does the Minister have any plans to expand its remit? (OAQ18509)

Edwina Hart: The partnership council has played a key role in debating and developing proposals to tackle the most important issues facing local government and the people it serves. Local government has initiated, as well as contributed to, innovative approaches, such as the 22 policy agreements with the Assembly. Members will have the opportunity to debate these achievements when the annual report on the local government partnership scheme is considered in Plenary.

Commission on Electoral Arrangements for Local Government

Q14 Janice Gregory: Will the Minister make a statement on the anticipated date of publication of the report of the commission on electoral arrangements for local government in Wales? (OAQ18539)

Edwina Hart: I understand that the commission's report is to be published on 3 July 2002. It is my intention to make a statement on the report to the Assembly on 16 July.

Homebuy Schemes (Availability)

Q15 David Lloyd: How will the Minister encourage the availability of homebuy schemes all over Wales? (OAQ18506)

Edwina Hart: The use of homebuy is a matter for local authorities to determine according to the needs and priorities for housing in their respective areas. Where homebuy is used, local authority and registered social landlord partners should make suitable arrangements for publicity. To assist in this, the Welsh Assembly Government is preparing an explanatory leaflet on the operation of the scheme. The leaflet is expected to be available later this summer and will be issued to local authorities and appropriate RSLs to distribute as they consider appropriate.

Questions to the Minister for Environment

Proposed Hafod Bypass

Q7 Peter Black: What discussions has the Minister had with the City and County of Swansea concerning the proposed Hafod bypass? (OAQ18527) [R]

The Minister for Environment (Sue Essex): I met Councillor Burtonshaw and officers of the City and County of Swansea and the late Val Feld, Assembly Member for Swansea East, to discuss proposals for the Hafod bypass on 19 July 2000. At that meeting it was agreed that this proposal needed to be considered in the context of neighbourhood renewal and regeneration and other transport developments. The council was invited to seek funding for an integrated transport study, and £50,000 was allocated for this purpose in 2001-02, with a further £50,000 being made available for 2002-03 to enable the council to take forward work arising from the study recommendations.

Old Tyres

Q8 Brian Hancock: What plans does the Minister have to reduce the used tyre mountain? (OAQ18570)

Sue Essex: The new waste strategy for Wales identifies the need for greater capacity to deal with waste tyres and we are considering options with the Wales Environment Trust. Together with the UK Government, we are also consulting upon possible statutory producer responsibility arrangements.

Local Bus Services

Q9 Owen John Thomas: Will the Minister make a statement on her proposals to improve local bus services to meet the reported increase in demand following the introduction of free bus passes for pensioners? (OAQ18516)

Sue Essex: I am delighted that the new scheme is proving so popular, and that it is so clearly enhancing mobility and accessibility for pensioners and disabled people. Although it is too early to be confident about trends, I am monitoring the impact of the new scheme in partnership with the Welsh Local Government Association and the industry, and will be discussing any implications with our partners at the appropriate time.

Nuclear Power Stations

Q10 Mick Bates: Will the Minister make a statement on the environmental impact of any nuclear power stations in Wales? (OAQ18588)

Sue Essex: Environmental impact assessments must be carried out before consent can be granted for any nuclear power station. This also applies to dismantling and decommissioning. An environmental impact assessment has been undertaken as part of the decommissioning process at Trawsfynydd, and is available in the Library or from the local authority.

A470 Road Link

Q11 Nick Bourne: Will the Minister make a statement on proposed improvements to the A470 north-south Wales road link? (OAQ18556)

Sue Essex: We intend to award the contract for the A470 Dolwyddelan to Pont-yr-Afanc improvement later this summer. The trunk road forward programme, published in March, includes several schemes designed to improve north-south road links. Twelve schemes are programmed for the north-south corridor, including the A470, to be ready for start of work by March 2008, subject to statutory processes and availability of finances.

Erecting Telephone Masts

Q12 Ieuan Wyn Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the planning guidelines on the erection of telephone masts? (OAQ18565)

Sue Essex: Guidance on telecommunications development, including masts, can be found in sections 12.11 to 13 of 'Planning Policy Wales'. Proposed amending legislation, designed primarily to secure improvements to existing prior approval procedures for telecommunications development, is to be debated in Plenary on Thursday, 18 July. A revised 'Technical Advice Note (Wales) 19: Telecommunications', which will supplement the guidance in 'Planning Policy Wales', will be issued in parallel with the coming into force of the new legislation.

Recycling Abandoned Vehicles

Q13 John Griffiths: Will the Minister make a statement on the latest position with regard to the reform of the procedures for disposing and recycling of abandoned vehicles? (OAQ18589)

Sue Essex: The Assembly Government recognises the problems posed by abandoned vehicles in Wales and the difficulties faced by local authorities in removing and disposing of them. The National Assembly does not have all the powers necessary to amend all the notice periods in the Removal and Disposal of Vehicles Regulations 1986, but we are working with the UK Government to explore how reforms can be taken forward.

Question 14 (OAQ18542) withdrawn.

Dealing with Sewerage

Q15 Janice Gregory: What measures are taken to ensure that sewerage capacity is fully taken into account in the planning process for new housing developments? (OAQ18540)

Sue Essex: In accordance with sustainability principles, 'Planning Policy Wales' states that the capacity of existing infrastructure and the need for additional facilities should be taken into account in the preparation of unitary development plans and the consideration of individual planning applications.