

Answers issued to Members on 18 June 2007

[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 the Economy and Transport

Paul Davies (Preseli Pembrokeshire): Will the Minister confirm that the A487 between Fishguard and Cardigan will remain classified as a trunk road for the foreseeable future and are there any plans to make improvements on this road? (WAQ50038)

The Minister for the Economy and Transport (Brian Gibbons): There are no plans to De-trunk the A487 between Fishguard and Cardigan. There are a series of studies and localised improvements being undertaken along this route.

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Kirsty Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Will the Minister make a statement on the availability of free prescriptions to Welsh patients who access GP and pharmacy services in England? (WAQ50039)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Edwina Hart): Free prescriptions are available to patients resident in Wales whether or not they have a Welsh or an English GP. Patients who are registered with English GPs have been issued with 'entitlement cards' which means they pay no charge if they present the card and the prescription at a Welsh pharmacy.

The cards are not valid for presentation for dispensing in a pharmacy in England because the Welsh Assembly Government has no jurisdiction over pharmacists who are contracted to English Primary Care Trusts. They are governed by the English NHS (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) Regulations 2007 and currently have to charge patients £6.85 per prescription item unless they are exempt from charge under the criteria mentioned in those Regulations.

David Lloyd (South Wales West): Will the Minister make a statement on how she is prioritising an equitable provision of dental services? (WAQ50043)

Edwina Hart: Local Health Boards are responsible for commissioning the provision of NHS dental services and control their own dentistry budgets to meet the oral health needs of all members of their population. A new NHS dental contract was introduced in April 2006 and LHBs are able to use the flexibility in the new dental contractual arrangements to determine the level and location of primary care dental services. I also intend to look at the way dental services are delivered in Wales.

David Lloyd (South Wales West): Will the Minister make a statement on what support she has made available to Community General Dental Practice? (WAQ50044)

Edwina Hart: From 1 April 2006 a substantial investment of an additional £30 million in NHS dentistry from 2006-07 was made to support Local Health Boards (LHBs) and the introduction of local commissioning. This is an increase in the net spend in dentistry of over 89% since the Assembly was established in 1999. The un-audited total net spend on NHS dentistry for 2006-07 stands at £122 million. LHBs now control how NHS dental services are developed to meet local needs. The involvement of the Community Dental Service (CDS) in providing additional dental services is currently being developed through LHB partnership in a number of areas.

The salaried dentists who are employed under the CDS are employees of the NHS trusts and therefore their costs are amongst the general allocations issued to the LHBs.

Rhodri Glyn Thomas (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr): How many Senior Meat Inspectors are there in the Meat Hygiene Service in Wales? (WAQ50045)

Edwina Hart: There are 9 senior meat hygiene inspectors employed by the Meat Hygiene Service in Wales.

Rhodri Glyn Thomas (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr): Will the Minister make a statement on the (i) numbers, (ii) value of contracts being outsourced to private contractors in the Meat Hygiene Service? (WAQ50046)

Edwina Hart: In the period April 2006 to March 2007 the Meat Hygiene Service contracted work to 457 suppliers, with a value of £48,458,776 (including VAT).

Questions to the Minister for Social Justice and Public Service Delivery

Alun Davies (Mid and West Wales): How many affordable homes have been built in Mid and West Wales in the last 5 years and how many new affordable houses are planned at present? (WAQ50040)

The Minister for Social Justice and Public Service Delivery (Andrew Davies): Welsh Housing Statistics provide data on newbuild activity undertaken by the private sector, local authorities and housing associations but do not categorise it further according to affordability. Measures have been put in place to monitor affordable housing more effectively and the first data should be available in the autumn.