

Answers to the Written Assembly Questions for answer on 24 January 2011

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

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

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To ask the First Minister

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the First Minister supply details of his itinerary for his recent tour of North Wales, and set out how these visits were paid for. (WAQ56947)

Answer issued on 20 January 2011

I have not undertaken a 'tour' of North Wales. However, my most recent visit to North Wales was on 13 and 14 January. A copy of my itinerary is attached.

Costs were met from Assembly Government budgets in the normal way.

12.45 Visit Quay Nature Reserve, Connah's Quay

13:00 Visit Quay Shopping Centre, Connah's Quay

13.30 Official opening of Connah's Quay Civic Hall

14.00 Official opening of Private Health Care centre, The Quay Health Resource Centre, Connah's Quay

15.00 Meet Rhyl City Strategy Board

16.00 Visit East Parade Training Restaurant, East Parade Rhyl

16:30 Meeting with Llandrillo College students

20:00 Address Institute of Welsh Affairs North Wales Branch Annual Dinner, St George's Hotel, Llandudno

14 January 2011

10:00 Address Bangor University AGM & Launch Joint Centre for Teacher Training (with Aberystwyth University)

14:30 Visit to Youth Centre, Llandrindod Wells

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the First Minister supply details of his itinerary for his tour of North Wales in 2010, and set out how these visits were paid for. (WAQ56948)

Answer issued on 20 January 2011

I undertook a Public Services tour of Wales in July last year during which I visited North Wales on 29 and 30 July. A copy of my itinerary is attached.

Costs were met from Assembly Government budgets in the normal way.

Brynle Williams (North Wales): With reference to his most recent 'tour' of North Wales, will the First Minister detail (a) the cost of the tour, (b) what public engagements were included, (c) who was invited to attend these engagements, and (d) when does the First Minister propose to next visit North Wales. (WAQ56954)

Answer issued on 20 January 2011

I have not undertaken a 'tour' of North Wales. However my most recent visit to North Wales was on 13 and 14 January during which I undertook 10 Ministerial engagements. Invitations were extended by the organiser of each event. Costs outside of the normal working day for myself, my Private Secretary and official driver included overnight costs totaling £210.

I am due to visit North Wales again on 20 and 21 January.

To ask the Minister for the Economy and Transport

Brian Gibbons (Aberavon): Will the Minister provide a progress report on the provision of broadband in the Heads of the Valleys and the Western Valleys Regeneration Area. (WAQ56956)

Answer issued on 01 February 2011

The Broadband Support Scheme is addressing a number of notspots in the Western Valleys and Heads of the Valleys Regeneration Areas. In particular, I am aware that the Mawr community in the Western Valleys is currently working with my officials to develop a community scheme application.

There have also been developments within the market, including a recent BT announcement that the Pontycymmer exchange will be upgraded by Spring 2012, facilitating the provision of superfast broadband (up to 40Mbps).

I am committed to bringing next generation broadband to all businesses by 2016 and to all households by 2020. We have already begun the procurement process to purchase a next generation broadband solution for Wales and I expect to award the contract by Spring 2012.

To ask the Minister for Health and Social Services

Brian Gibbons (Aberavon): Will the Minister indicate what local authorities, if any, have failed to spend their Autism Strategy Grants allocation and by what amount. (WAQ56945)

Brian Gibbons (Aberavon): Will the Minister indicate the allocations to Local Authorities of Autism Strategy Grants over the last two years. (WAQ56946) ***Transferred for answer by the Deputy Minister for Social Services***

Answer issued on 05 April 2011

The Deputy Minister for Social Services (Gwenda Thomas): A Statement of Expenditure which issued to all Local Authorities on receipt of their Grant, and which would indicate any underspend, will not be available until the end of this financial year. Details of the underspend for the financial year 2009-10 are in the table below:

Payee	Underspend
Blaenau Gwent	nil
Bridgend	nil
Caerphilly	nil
Cardiff	*
Carmarthenshire	nil
Ceredigion	nil
Conwy	*

Denbigshire	*
Flintshire	nil
Gwynedd	*
Isle of Anglesey	*
Merthyr Tydfil	£3,724.00
Monmouthshire	£5,377.68
Neath Port Talbot	nil
Newport	£11,562
Pembrokeshire	nil
Powys	nil
Rhondda CT	*
Swansea	nil
Torfaen	nil
Vale of Glam	£20,052.00
Wrexham	nil

*denotes Statement of Expenditure yet to be received

Each Local Authority in Wales was given an Autism Strategy Grant of £40,000 for the financial year 2009-10, and a further £40,000 in this current financial year.

To ask the Minister for Rural Affairs

Brynle Williams (North Wales): Will the Minister detail what efficiency savings have been made within her portfolio during the third Assembly. (WAQ56952)

Answer issued on 01 February 2011

Efficiency savings have been made in a number of areas within the Rural Affairs MEG:

TB Compensation payments

Measures have been taken to contain expenditure on TB compensation. Procedures for valuation have been tightened, leading to a decrease in the average compensation payment; and carcass receipts have been increased. Compensation payments in future will be linked to farmers having good biosecurity measures. The measures taken to date have already secured savings of £1.1m per annum.

Forestry Commission

The Forestry Commission are instigating a range of efficiencies including the out-sourcing of maintenance activities, and a reduction in the number of staff employed on its core activities. Some of these staff are being redeployed to manage contracts for the development of new windfarms, which once operational will generate receipts of some £10m per annum to the Welsh Assembly Government.

Red Tape Review

The process of reducing Red Tape is ongoing - it is an ongoing commitment to ensure that reducing bureaucracy is mainstreamed within policy, operational and delivery activities undertaken by the Department for Rural Affairs which will bring benefits in making efficiency savings over time.

Downward pressure has also been applied to running costs. Despite this,

the proportion of Single Farm Payments being paid on the first day (1 December) has increased from 74% in 2007 to 80% in 2010.

Brynle Williams (North Wales): Will the Minister detail what steps have been taken to contain the spread of *Phytophthora Ramorum* and to eradicate it within Wales. (WAQ56953)

Answer issued on 01 February 2011

Biosecurity measures are in place across the Assembly Government woodland estate (AGWE). Forests have been kept open but signage has been erected at entry points to infected woodlands informing the public of the infection and asking for their help in controlling the spread, for example by keeping to designated paths. Forestry Commission Wales (FCW) have provided training to its field staff on how to recognise *Phytophthora ramorum* and the associated biosecurity measures and have rolled this out to all private woodland owners and managers. The transport and processing of infected timber is subject to regulatory controls to minimise the risk of spreading the pathogen.

FCW are managing the felling of infected trees using a number of different techniques on the AGWE.

The felling of infected trees from the AGWE commenced in the Summer of 2010 and FCW will complete the clearfelling of high priority stands by the end of March 2011. The remainder will be resurveyed in the Spring in order to determine whether any infected trees can be selectively felled or whether these stands will also need to be clearfelled before the trees emit spores in September and October.

All private landowners with infected trees have been issued with a statutory plant health notice by the Forestry Commission's Plant Health Service under the Plant Health (Forestry) Order 2005 to fell the infected trees before the end of March 2011. Applications for felling licences to fell other larch during this Winter have been suspended until the Spring to allow inspection before being issued.

The timber industry has been kept informed about the spread of the pathogen and it has been very willing to co-operate with FCW in order to deal with the problem. A timber marketing group has been set up including the Forestry Commission and industry representatives from England and Wales. Infected timber can still be processed and the majority of timber processors are now licensed and are processing the timber.

A grant scheme has been established to provide support for owners who require professional support to deal with infected trees and the clearance of young stands of larch that do not have any commercial value. Surveillance of larch throughout Wales will recommence in May 2011 after the trees have flushed, when identifying the pathogen is possible. FCW will continue to work with the Food and Environment Research Agency in the wider monitoring of other susceptible species, throughout all of Wales.

Press releases will also be issued in May 2011 to raise awareness of the pathogen and encourage all woodland owners to inspect their larch and report as suspicious symptoms of infection.

The management of *Phytophthora ramorum* is overseen by the GB *Phytophthora* Outbreak Management Team whose main aim is to develop the GB disease management strategy and oversee its implementation. To implement their guidance in Wales, FCW have recently convened a cross-cutting Wales Operational Response Team drawing its membership from a range of organisations and departments. Models are currently being developed in order to test the impact of different disease management strategies. It is anticipated that these will be completed by the end of January 2011 for discussion. Options include the felling of uninfected larch to act as a cordon sanitaire.

Updates in respect of progress on dealing with *Phytophthora ramorum* can be accessed via the FCW website at www.forestry.gov.uk/wales.

Brynle Williams (North Wales): Will the Minister provide an update on: a) the implementation of the electronic identification of sheep in Wales, b) related discussions with representatives of the European

Commission, and c) related discussions with representatives of the processing and agricultural sectors. (WAQ56955)

Answer issued on 01 February 2011

I refer you to my earlier response on 15 November 2010 to WAQ 56715, which confirmed a basic (paper based) system had been implemented from 31 December 2009. The only update is that from 1 January 2011 animals identified with Full EID must now have their individual identity included on the movement document, submitted to Local Authorities.

I met with Commissioner Dalli on 19 November 2010 and along with other UK Ministers made representations against the principle of individually recording sheep and goats as well as focussing on the more prescriptive requirements that have had to be implemented, including the risk to farmers' Single Payments, if the EID technology fails.

Following a positive exchange where it was accepted UK faces real difficulties in making this Regulation fit, officials have been tasked with agreeing the process whereby missed EID reads can be 'tolerated' within the cross compliance inspection regime, discussions are ongoing but are anticipated to conclude shortly.

The Food and Veterinary Office are visiting UK in April to assess the systems implemented. Their findings are expected to influence any decision taken on an additional request to postpone the date from when individual recording of older sheep (i.e. those not identified with full EID) is required, at present this is due to be introduced from 31 December 2011, although animals moving to slaughter are already exempt.

I have not specifically discussed implementation of sheep EID with the processing or agricultural sectors during this period, appreciating that the industry is still coming to terms with the new rules, which for many remains an unnecessary burden that has been imposed on them.

To ask the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister make a statement on his meeting with Welsh Members of Parliament on the Localism Bill on 13 January 2011. (WAQ56949)

Answer issued on 3 February 2011

The meeting in question was the MP and Peers Briefing for the Localism Bill, a key stage in the scrutiny process for the Bill. It was agreed between the previous Secretary of State for Wales and First Minister that this type of briefing meeting should take place where UK Bills contain Measure powers that confer legislative competence on the National Assembly. In such cases, the lead Welsh Minister and a Minister representing the Wales Office will meet backbench Welsh MPs and Peers in between first and second reading to discuss the Measure powers in further detail and to extend the opportunity for questions. This ensures adequate opportunity is provided for such powers to be scrutinised thoroughly.

The Localism Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 13 December and the Second Reading Debate was held on Monday 17 January. Three Measure powers and a further Wales only clause were discussed. The three Measure powers are in respect of the Council Tax Referendums Framework, the Development Management Planning and Enforcement Framework and the HRA Reform Framework. The other Wales only clause is in respect of Council Tax Revaluation.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister make a statement on how many officials accompanied him to the meeting with Welsh Members of Parliament on 13 January 2011. (WAQ56950)

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What was the total cost of the Minister's meeting with Members of Parliament on 13 January 2011, and by what mode of transport did you and your officials travel to/from the meeting. (WAQ56951)

Answer issued on 05 April 2011

My meeting in London on 13 January was to brief Welsh MPs and peers on the Welsh clauses of the Localism Bill. The Bill is cross-cutting and deals with matters not only in my portfolio but in those of the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing and the Deputy Minister for Housing and Regeneration. I was therefore accompanied by 7 policy officials so as to appropriately cover all aspects of the Bill's Welsh clauses.

I planned to travel to the meeting by train but used an official car when we became aware of the potential for significant train delays caused by flooding at Bristol. One official accompanied me in the car. The remaining officials travelled to and from London by train. I travelled home to North Wales by train after the meeting.

The total cost of all travel to and from the meeting was £1,000. This includes all train travel by officials (standard class) and an estimated fuel-only cost for the official car.