

Written Questions answered from 25 to 31 January 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 First Minister

Cabinet Reshuffle

Nick Bourne: What plans does the First Minister have to make his Cabinet more representative of Wales in his forthcoming reshuffle? (WAQ15465)

The First Minister (Rhodri Morgan): I have no plans to reshuffle my present Cabinet, which is wholly representative of the people of Wales.

Criticism of Government

Ron Davies: Will the First Minister make a statement on his policy of restraining public bodies from criticising his Government's policy? (WAQ15581)

Ron Davies: Will the First Minister publish the guidelines that he has issued restraining public bodies from criticising his Government? (WAQ15582)

Ron Davies: Will the First Minister publish a list of all those public bodies to which he has issued guidelines restraining public comment? (WAQ15583)

Ron Davies: Will the First Minister publish a list of public bodies excluded from his policy of restraint of comment? (WAQ15584)

Ron Davies: Will the First Minister state whether his policy of restraining public bodies from criticising his Government's policy shall apply when such bodies are offering private advice to Assembly Members? (WAQ15585)

Ron Davies: Will the First Minister state whether his policy of restraining public bodies from criticising his Government's policy shall apply when such bodies are submitting written evidence to Assembly Committees? (WAQ15586)

Ron Davies: Will the First Minister state whether his policy of restraining public bodies from criticising his Government's policy shall apply when such bodies are submitting oral evidence and appearing before Assembly Committees? (WAQ15587)

The First Minister: The Welsh Assembly Government has no such policy, nor has it issued guidelines.

Questions on Economic Development to the First Minister

Corus (Comprehensive Framework)

Alun Cairns: What progress has been made on a comprehensive economic, transport and spatial framework for the part of south-east Wales most affected by the closures and job losses at Corus? (WAQ15405)

The First Minister (Rhodri Morgan): The regeneration framework is in final draft form. I will make an announcement shortly.

Corus (Aid Available)

Alun Cairns: What aid is available to the Welsh workers who lost their jobs as a result of cutbacks at Corus plants in Wales? (WAQ15406)

The First Minister: The Welsh Assembly Government has provided £7 million for careers advice, training and re-skilling. A supplementary £5.3 million package has also been approved to help redundant Corus workers find new jobs. Direct aid has been made available to workers who have lost their jobs at Corus plants in Wales through the iron and steel employees readaptation benefit scheme.

An extra £10 million is to be made available for steel communities by UK Steel Enterprise Limited, the regeneration subsidiary of the Corus group, most of which will be spent in Wales.

Corus (Regeneration Aid)

Alun Cairns: What regeneration aid is available for the areas affected by the Corus steel closures, and what proportion of that aid has been spent? (WAQ15407)

The First Minister: That will be covered in a statement that I will make shortly.

Corus (Financial Assistance)

Alun Cairns: How many people made unemployed by the Corus closures have received financial assistance from the National Assembly? (WAQ15408)

The First Minister: Of the £50 million recovery package that I announced in May 2001, £7 million has been provided for careers advice, training and re-skilling. A supplementary £5.3 million package has also been approved to help redundant Corus workers find new jobs.

Over 700 affected workers have benefited from Education and Learning Wales-sponsored training courses, with some 150 people having received financial support from its employer recruitment subsidy.

Corus (Strategic Framework)

Alun Cairns: When will the strategic framework for south-east Wales, which the First Minister announced on 3 May 2001 during his statement on Corus, be published? (WAQ15421)

The First Minister: The final draft of the regeneration framework has been submitted and will be published in its final form in February.

2010 Ryder Cup

William Graham: What discussions has the First Minister held with representatives of the business community of south-east Wales to co-ordinate the economic investment opportunities that will arise from the area being associated with the 2010 Ryder Cup? (WAQ15575)

The First Minister: The successful Ryder Cup bid was based on a strong public-private sector partnership. The Assembly is continuing to work to implement the bid commitments and maximise the all-Wales economic benefits of bringing the event to Wales. That work will require a strong partnership between all sectors, including the business community.

Prevention of Job Losses

Rosemary Butler: What action has the First Minister taken to help prevent job losses at the Alcan plant in Rogerstone and the ESM plant in Duffryn? (WAQ15578)

The First Minister: I have encouraged a co-ordinated approach to solving the problems threatening jobs at both those companies, with the additional hurdle that Alcan is located outside the assisted area boundary. ESM is in the hands of receivers and I am keeping closely in touch with commercially

sensitive possibilities. The Welsh Development Agency, ELWa and the Welsh Assembly Government are involved in finding the appropriate solutions to preserve the maximum number of jobs.

Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan

Peter Black: How will the Strategic Rail Authority's strategic plan link in with the economic priorities of the National Assembly to bring greater prosperity to Wales? (WAQ15579)

The First Minister: The Strategic Rail Authority's strategic plan, which was published on 14 January 2002, ties in with our aims set out in 'A Winning Wales' and our transport framework. The priority being given to the Wales and Borders franchise indicates the SRA's commitment to Wales and will strengthen current services, enabling better transport links to be developed, for example within valley communities, which will enable people to travel to work without moving home. Improvements on strategic routes affecting Wales include those on the west coast and cross-country routes, which will provide better links from north Wales to London and from Cardiff to the North East, through Birmingham. The plan also encourages the development of freight business, which will reduce congestion.

Transport Schemes

Peter Black: What transport schemes are currently committed under Objective 1 funding? (WAQ15580)

The First Minister: A £1.5 million grant has been committed, but not yet formally approved, for a Swansea City and County Council project called transport modal interchange at High Street station and express bus route. The project involves a comprehensive transportation and infrastructure improvement at the northern approach to the city centre, focusing on the High Street station gateway. It will involve the provision of a public-private transport modal interchange, an improved public realm and an express bus route link to the council's park and ride site at Landore.

Questions to the Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language

Public Money spent on the Millennium Stadium

Alun Cairns: How much public money has been spent on supporting the running of the Millennium Stadium? (WAQ15445)

The Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language (Jenny Randerson): The Millennium Stadium received a grant of £46 million from the Millennium Commission. In addition, the Welsh Assembly Government provided £3 million towards the cost of the riverwalk, to ensure that the stadium could operate at full capacity for the Rugby World Cup. We also provided a further £0.25 million to ensure that the stadium's playing surface was brought up to a high standard for the FA Cup final and other major sporting events.

Financial Assistance for the Millennium Stadium

Alun Cairns: What plans does the Minister have to assist the Millennium Stadium financially? (WAQ15446)

Jenny Randerson: No provision has been made for further financial support for the stadium. I am aware that Mr Glanmor Griffiths, chairman of the Millennium Stadium, has concerns about the funding of the stadium and I have offered to meet him to discuss those concerns. Mr Griffiths has yet to take up that offer.

Questions to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

National Youth Voluntary Fund

David Davies: Has the Assembly released the budget to the national youth voluntary fund? (WAQ15431)

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning (Jane Davidson): The scheme of grants to national voluntary youth organisations in Wales, which supports their national infrastructure, is administered by the Wales Youth Agency. The overall budget for the scheme has risen from £301,000 in 2000-01 to £701,000 for 2002-03, and successful applicants have been notified of their grant allocations. The significant increase in the grant fund recognises the vital contribution of the voluntary youth sector to the successful and sustainable implementation of the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Extending Entitlement' agenda.

Questions to the Minister for Environment

Spending on Transport Infrastructure

David Davies: What proportion of the Welsh Assembly budget i) has been spent on transport infrastructure in each of the last two financial years, ii) will be spent this financial year, and iii) will be spent in each of the next two financial years? (WAQ15388)

The Minister for Environment (Sue Essex): I shall write to you with this information as soon as possible and will place a copy of the letter in the Libraries at Cathays Park and Cardiff Bay.

Disposal of Fridges

David Davies: How will the £600,000 for local authorities for the disposal of fridges be allocated? (WAQ15389)

Sue Essex: In the absence of robust information on which to base an estimate of need within each local authority, the £600,000 will be allocated by a formula based on the waste collection and waste disposal elements of the local government standard spending assessment formula. Allocations to individual local authorities were detailed in the motion debated in Plenary on 15 January 2002.

Crymlyn Burrows Incinerator (Licence)

Alun Cairns: When will the Environment Agency make a statement on the licence for the Crymlyn Burrows incinerator? (WAQ15394)

Sue Essex: A decision is expected in February.

Crymlyn Burrows Incinerator (Running Costs)

Alun Cairns: What contribution, if any, will the Assembly make to the running costs of the Crymlyn Burrows incinerator? (WAQ15395)

Sue Essex: None.

Crymlyn Burrows Incinerator (Funding)

Alun Cairns: Will the Assembly make any additional funding available to Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, over and above its existing settlement, which may be used by the authority to fund the Crymlyn Burrows incinerator? (WAQ15396)

Sue Essex: No.

Incineration of Refrigerators

Alun Cairns: What additional licences would an incinerator operator need to have before being able to incinerate refrigerators? (WAQ15397)

Sue Essex: The conditions of each incinerator permit are specific to that site. It would be the responsibility of the Environment Agency, as the regulator, to assess the implications of any proposal at a particular site and then determine whether a new permit, or amendments to an existing permit, were required.

Calling in Planning Applications

Nick Bourne: What criteria does the Minister employ when deciding whether or not to call in a planning application? (WAQ15418)

Sue Essex: The Assembly's powers to call in an application are discretionary and are used exceptionally. Requests are considered on a case-by-case basis, and call-in will generally be considered only where an application raises planning issues of more than local importance. The criteria used to evaluate requests to call in planning applications were set out in a response to a written Assembly question from Glyn Davies AM in October 1999. These include planning issues that,

- are in conflict with national planning policies,
- could have wide effects beyond their immediate locality,
- may give rise to substantial controversy beyond their immediate locality,
- are likely to significantly affect sites of scientific, nature conservation or historic interest,
- raise issues of national security, or
- raise novel planning issues.

The Assembly's call-in procedures were recently the subject of a consultation exercise. As part of that exercise, a review of the call-in criteria was undertaken, with a view to making them clearer. The results of the consultation will be available in the spring.

Disposal of Domestic Waste

Peter Black: What investigation has the Minister undertaken into alternatives to incineration for the disposal of domestic waste? (WAQ15419)

Sue Essex: The consultation paper for a new waste strategy for Wales, 'Managing Waste Sustainably', which the Assembly debated on 23 November 2001, considered many options, based on a preparatory scoping study carried out for the Assembly by consultants, for the reduction, management and disposal of domestic waste. In line with the preferred options in the consultation paper, the final strategy will set targets for high levels of recycling and composting of domestic waste. It will be for local authorities, in consultation with their local communities, to decide how to manage the waste under their control, bearing in mind those targets. A substantial residue of waste will still need disposal, despite the high levels of recycling and composting that we wish to achieve. It will be for local authorities, once again after local consultation, to decide how this should be disposed of.

Wind Baffles on the M4

Peter Black: What progress is being made on the study into wind baffles on the M4 at Briton Ferry, and when is a report expected? (WAQ15432)

Sue Essex: The windshielding feasibility study contract was awarded to the Flint and Neill Partnership on 25 October 2001.

The first stage report, assessing the effectiveness of windshielding options, will be submitted in early June 2002.

Following consideration of the relative merits of the options presented in the report, the contractor will be instructed to evaluate the extent of any strengthening works required to support one or more of the preferred options.

The second stage report should be submitted eight weeks after the instruction to proceed.

Contributions to the Costs of the Incinerator at Crymlyn Burrows

Peter Black: Is the National Assembly making any contributions to the revenue and capital costs of the Neath Port Talbot incinerator at Crymlyn Burrows? (WAQ15433)

Sue Essex: No.

Maintenance Works on the M4

Alun Cairns: Will the Minister list the maintenance works that have been carried out between junctions 38 and 42 of the M4 over the last five years? (WAQ15461)

Sue Essex: In addition to routine and minor maintenance work on that section of the M4, there have been a number of significant maintenance schemes in the last five years.

Kenfig viaduct received new waterproofing and surfacing in 1996, local safety schemes were implemented on the on and off slip roads at Pentyla in 2000 and 2001, several slip roads have been resurfaced and the section between Pyle and Groes (junctions 37 to 39) was resurfaced in 2000-01.

During the resurfacing of the Pyle to Groes section, defects in the embankment and drainage system were discovered. To avoid disruption to the contract and to enable detailed design to take place, remedial works to the drainage were deferred. A contract to remedy those defects began on 21 January 2002 and is scheduled for completion by the end of March.

Questions to the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities

Council Tax Settlements

Nick Bourne: What representations has the Minister received from Powys in relation to council tax settlements since the commencement of the National Assembly for Wales? (WAQ15413)

The Minister for Finance, Local Government and Communities (Edwina Hart): Since the commencement of the National Assembly for Wales, I have received a number of representations concerning the local government settlement, including from people in Powys.

Local Government Settlement (Rhondda Cynon Taff)

Christine Chapman: How much has Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council received from the Assembly in the local government settlement each year, and can the Minister please detail the increases and the amounts so that they are comparable? (WAQ15426)

Edwina Hart: The table below gives the absolute funding figures for Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council for 2001-02 and 2002-03, along with adjustments for transfers of function and new burdens to allow a like-for-like comparison. Figures for 1999-2000 and 2000-01 are available from the local government finance reports for those years.

Assembly funding for Rhondda Cynon Taff*					
	Revenue Support Grant	Non-domestic Rates	Total	Increase £	Increase %
2001-02	184,670,080	51,047,217	235,717,297	12,845,032	5.8
2002-03	196,453,507	46,766,646	243,220,153	7,502,856	3.2
Adjusted for transfer of functions and new burdens:**					
2001-02	175,617,200	51,047,217	226,664,417		
2002-03	195,070,166	46,766,646	241,836,812	15,172,395	6.7

* Total of revenue support grant, redistributed non-domestic rates and funding for the reduction of council taxes.

** Adjusted for transfers to Education and Learning Wales and Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales and new functions of preserved rights and residential allowance.

Costs Resulting from the Suspension of the New Assembly Building Project

Glyn Davies: What are the anticipated costs of site works, including such things as temporary road surfaces, resulting from the suspension of the new Assembly building? (WAQ15464)

Edwina Hart: There are no anticipated costs resulting from the suspension of the Assembly building project. The temporary works that have been carried out thus far were necessary to facilitate the permanent works and to provide a reasonable public domain during the period up to the completion of the permanent works. These works would have been necessary regardless of whether or not the project was suspended.

Dyddiad Ailgychwyn Gwaith ar Siambr Newydd y Cynulliad

Owen John Thomas: Pryd y bydd y Gweinidog mewn sefyllfa i gyhoeddi dyddiad ailgychwyn gwaith ar siambr newydd y Cynulliad? (WAQ15572) [W]

Edwina Hart: Bydd y gwahoddiadau i dendro ar gyfer penodi cwmni rheoli prosiectau yn cael eu hanfon yn fuan, a disgwylir i'r penodiad gael ei wneud ar ddechrau mis Ebrill. Yn dilyn hyn, bydd gwahoddiadau i dendro ar gyfer penodi contractiwr i gwblhau'r gwaith o ddylunio a chodi'r adeilad. Rhagwelir y bydd y penodiad hwn yn cael ei wneud yn yr hydref. Wedi'r penodiad hwnnw, bydd amserlen yn cael ei llunio ar gyfer y gwaith adeiladu.

Mae'n bwysig treulio amser yn penodi yn awr er mwyn symud ymlaen â'r prosiect, fel ein bod yn hyderus y bydd gennym adeilad y gallwn fod yn falch ohono am gost y cytunir arni.

Date on which Work on the New Assembly Chamber will be Resumed

Owen John Thomas: When will the Minister be in a position to announce the date on which work on the new Assembly chamber will be resumed? (WAQ15572) [W]

Edwina Hart: The invitations to tender for the appointment of a project management company will be issued shortly, with an appointment expected to be made in early April. This will be followed by invitations to tender for the appointment of the contractor to complete the design and construction of the building. It is anticipated that this appointment will be made in the autumn. Following that appointment, a construction timetable will be agreed.

It is important that time is spent now to make these appointments to take the project forward, so that we are confident that we will have a building of which we can be proud at an agreed cost.

National Gallery for Wales

Nick Bourne: Will the Minister make additional funds available for a national gallery for Wales? (WAQ15573)

Edwina Hart: The National Museums and Galleries of Wales is about to launch a public consultation exercise to explore various options for displaying its works of art in the future. I would need to consider any proposals for future developments during annual budget planning rounds in the usual way, and in the light of competing demands for resources.

Wanless Report

Peter Black: How will the Minister account for the recommendations of the Wanless report in determining future National Assembly budgets? (WAQ15574)

Edwina Hart: The Wanless report is an interim report at this stage and is the subject of consultation. It is intended that the final report will inform the UK Government's spending review decisions. The Minister for Health and Social Services will take account of the findings of the final report as appropriate when she draws up her spending plans for discussion in the Assembly's budget planning round later this year.

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Drug Supplies

Rod Richards: Are health authorities able to acquire the quantities of remicade and enbrel that they have ordered? (WAQ15273)

Rod Richards: Is there a shortage of supply to health authorities in Wales of the drugs remicade and enbrel? (WAQ15274)

Rod Richards: What, if any, is the delay in the supply of remicade and enbrel to each of the health authorities in Wales? (WAQ15275)

Rod Richards: With reference to WAQ15119, will the Minister list the suppliers and their differing costs for providing generic fluoxetine (prozac) capsules, 20 mg, packs of 30 capsules? (WAQ15277)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt): I shall write to you with this information as soon as possible and will place a copy of the letter in the Libraries at Cathays and Cardiff Bay.

People with Learning Difficulties (Guidance for Local Authorities)

Kirsty Williams: Will the Minister consider issuing new guidance to local authorities on the process of assessment, eligibility criteria and service provision for people with learning disabilities? (WAQ15428)

Jane Hutt: In late 1999, I established an external learning disability advisory group to draw up proposals for a framework for services for people with learning disabilities. The group's final report, 'Fulfilling the Promises', was received in summer 2001 and a 16-week consultation exercise on the proposals in the report ended on 18 January 2002. I will consider whether any further guidance may be required in the light of the proposals in the advisory group's report and the consultation responses.

Accommodation for People with Learning Difficulties

Kirsty Williams: Will the Minister confirm that village communities are an acceptable form of provision of accommodation for those with learning disabilities? (WAQ15429)

Kirsty Williams: Will the Minister give guidance to local authorities with regard to providing a range of accommodation options, including village communities, for those with learning disabilities, based on individual need? (WAQ15430)

Jane Hutt: The existing Welsh mental handicap strategy guidance states that a range of accommodation should be considered to meet the needs and preferences of people with learning disabilities. The guidance does not restrict such consideration to any specific type of provision.

Ultimately, it is for local authorities to determine such matters, taking into account their statutory responsibilities, the assessed needs and the views and preferences of the individual, the views of family or carers, relevant guidance and Best Value considerations.

A number of respondents to the consultation on the learning disability advisory group's report have raised the position of village communities. I will consider those points, together with the report's proposals and the other consultation responses, to see whether any further action is required.

Instruments in Writing

David Melding: Will the Minister state whether instruments in writing issued under clause 6(1) 16BC of the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill would be deemed legislative or non-legislative Assembly directions? (WAQ15434)

Jane Hutt: Instruments in writing issued under clause 6(1) could be deemed legislative or non-legislative directions. Non-legislative directions deal with routine matters and are issued under established procedures. I have already confirmed that subordinate legislation, including directions, dealing with the form and function of local health boards will be discussed in Committee.

Bradley's Practice

Rod Richards: With reference to WAQ15278, will the Minister make a statement on why Bradley's practice at Buckley health centre has not been included in the list of successful or unsuccessful bids independent of local authorities? (WAQ15462)

Jane Hutt: The list of successful and unsuccessful bids comprised those bids made independently of local authorities which, as stated, did not have a local authority as the lead organisation or as a main partner. The bid submitted by the Buckley health centre named Flintshire County Council as one of the partners that had agreed to be involved in the project, hence its exclusion from the lists.

Bradley's Practice (Inequalities in Health Fund)

Rod Richards: Will the Minister make a statement on what modifications are necessary to Bradley's practice, in Buckley health centre's project in order for it to be approved for funding under the inequalities in health fund? (WAQ15463)

Jane Hutt: You will be aware from your correspondence on this subject that the Buckley bid had much strength but, due to the overall number and quality of bids received, it narrowly missed the cut-off point for the fund's first portfolio of projects, along with a number of others. From the time of the original selection, the project has been as a strong candidate for any future support from the fund and, on 21 January 2002, I announced a second tranche of projects, which included the Buckley project. No modifications are therefore necessary.

Patients Categorised as ‘Delayed Transfers of Care’

Ron Davies: Pursuant to her reply to question WAQ15085, will the Minister indicate the circumstances of the previous under-recording of the number of patients categorised as ‘delayed transfers of care’ in Bro Taf Health Authority in November 2001, and will she indicate whether there was under-recording in any other health authority area? (WAQ15570)

Jane Hutt: Teething problems since January 2001 in administering the pilot system and in the software account for under-reporting in Bro Taf. Although those problems have been resolved and no other areas had a similar experience, all data should still be treated with caution, pending introduction of a new database in April.

Information Relating to ‘Delayed Transfers of Care’

Ron Davies: Pursuant to her reply to question WAQ15085, will the Minister indicate whether information relating to the number of cases of ‘delayed transfers of care’ for each Welsh health authority area in December 2001 is as yet available? (WAQ15571)

Jane Hutt: Data is not yet available. The census date falls on the third Wednesday of every month but several weeks are required for NHS and local authority colleagues to validate data, prior to submission.

Questions to the Minister for Rural Affairs

Meat Imports

Elin Jones: What additional resources have been allocated to check meat imports into the UK? (WAQ15424)

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Carwyn Jones): In the light of lessons learned from the foot and mouth disease outbreak, additional measures have been put in place to improve the UK’s ability to detect and prevent illegal imports of animal products, viz:

- extra publicity in third countries,
- improved publicity at ports and airports and further information targeted at individual travellers,
- improved information sharing systems between enforcement agencies,
- amendments to legislation to make it easier for local authorities to act when illegal meat is found on retail and wholesale premises.

In addition, an interdepartmental group has been established to consider what other measures might be employed in the UK and in Europe.