

Answers issued to Members on 18 March 2009

[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 Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister advise what actions he has taken with regard to the proposed redevelopment of the Old Post Office site in Aberystwyth? (WAQ53729)

The Deputy Minister for Regeneration (Leighton Andrews): Following its acquisition by the private sector, officers of Ceredigion County Council and Assembly Government officials have held discussions with the owners of the former Post Office site. The site is identified as being of strategic importance in the 2006 Aberystwyth Masterplan for potential regeneration to safeguard the future economic prosperity of the town. The Aberystwyth Masterplan has been subject to broad public consultation.

The developers have outlined a number of emerging options, including outline plans for the assembly of a larger-scale site that might potentially accommodate a department store to reinforce the economic vibrancy of the town centre. Whilst discussions have been held, it is too early to determine other than in principle whether financial or other support from the Welsh Assembly Government would be appropriate.

Mindful of the difficulties being faced by local businesses in the current economic climate, and with the sensitivities of the proposals in mind, I have asked my officials to ensure that they continue to listen to the views and wishes of local people in taking any discussions with the developers forward.

Kirsty Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Will the Minister make a statement on the review into Welsh Government funding for toilet facilities on the Welsh Trunk Road network, with particular reference to trunk roads in Brecon and Radnorshire? (WAQ53736)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport (Ieuan Wyn Jones): A review of the facilities to be provided on all trunk roads across Wales is still ongoing as part of the development of Route Management Strategies. As an interim measure the support provided to maintain key toilet facilities in Mid Wales will continue in 2009/10.

Questions to the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills

Jonathan Morgan (Cardiff North): What recent bids have been received by the Welsh Assembly Government from Cardiff County Council for school improvement? (WAQ53730)

The Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (Jane Hutt): Cardiff City Council submitted 10 bids for use of the capital funds supporting the transition process towards 21st Century Schools. These bids are currently being considered and I shall be making an Oral announcement to Plenary on 1st April 2009.

Cardiff City Council will also be submitting bids for use of their 2009-10 formulaic allocation of School Buildings Improvement Grant when the allocations are announced.

Jonathan Morgan (Cardiff North): How many schools in Wales have been (a) built (b) closed and (c) rebuilt since 1999? (WAQ53732)

Jane Hutt: This information is not collated centrally. Information is only available for projects where the Assembly Government has contributed towards funding—we do not have data for projects funded solely by Local Authorities.

In the last 10 years, there have been over 382 capital projects providing new schools, significant extensions or substantial refurbishment. Since 2002, 107 new schools have been built using Assembly funding.

There have been 118 school closures during the period 1999-2009.

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Rhodri Glyn Thomas (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr): What assessment has the Minister made of the concerns of community pharmacists regarding the role LHBs play in overseeing their services? (WAQ53738)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Edwina Hart): I have met with Community Pharmacy Wales (CPW) and have discussed contractor views on the delivery of pharmacy services in Wales. I have agreed to appoint a secondee to review and advise on the further development the role of community pharmacy services. I am giving further consideration as to how I can more fully engage with pharmacists.

Rhodri Glyn Thomas (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr): Will the Minister make a statement regarding the cost of unused medicines due to the extension of the traditional 28 day prescription time scale? (WAQ53739)

Edwina Hart: First may I comment on the 28 day 'extension'. Good practice is still to issue 28 day supplies for patients, however it is recognised that for patients with stable long term conditions larger supplies may be appropriate (that decision is taken on an individual basis).

Data regarding unused medicines and the cost implications is not held centrally. Local Health Boards have been encouraged to review their medicines management processes and to reduce the potential for wastage of medicines e.g. a number have run advertising campaigns to raise public awareness of the need to any request medicines actually required when asking for repeat prescriptions.

Rhodri Glyn Thomas (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr): What are the Minister's intentions in terms of reviewing pharmacy services in Wales? (WAQ53740)

Edwina Hart: I am considering appointing a Task and Finish Group to advise me on pharmacy issues.

Questions to the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government

Darren Millar (Clwyd West): Which Local Authorities have/had invested funds with Bernard Madoff or a company run/owned by him and of those who did invest how much have they lost? (WAQ53715)

The Minister for Social Justice and Local Government (Brian Gibbons): The Welsh Assembly Government does not capture data on local authority investments in particular companies or funds. The investment activity of individual authorities is a matter for them. Investment activity must be undertaken in line with relevant statutory guidance. The only investments I understand that have been reported as being committed to a company owned or controlled by Bernard Madoff are those of the Clwyd LA Pension Fund, which acts for Wrexham, Denbighshire, and Flintshire. The investment at risk has been reported as being around £1.9m.

Investments by local authorities in Pensions Funds are not a devolved matter. The Local Government Pension Scheme regulations (England and Wales) cover such investments.

Brian Gibbons: What progress has the Minister made on implementing the One Wales commitment to provide extra help for pensioners with Council Tax? (WAQ53718)

Brian Gibbons: We are considering options on how to provide Council Tax assistance for pensioners. We are in liaison with Welsh Local Government Association and at the Department for Work and Pensions so that any scheme takes into consideration the local impacts and possible effect on benefits.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Further to the Minister's answer to WAQ53525, does the Minister have plans to further increase the threshold for Small Business Rate Relief to help small businesses in the current recession? (WAQ53728)

Brian Gibbons: I have recently implemented in full the Assembly Government's One Wales commitment to enhance the small business rates relief scheme. There are no plans to make any further changes at present.

Jonathan Morgan (Cardiff North): What proportion of Cardiff County Council's budget, in each financial year since 1999, has been raised through council tax? (WAQ53731)

Brian Gibbons: The table below provides the information requested.

Council tax income as a percentage of gross revenue expenditure, Cardiff

Year	%
1999-00	15.0
2000-01	15.4
2001-02	15.2
2002-03	15.6
2003-04 (a)	16.0
2004-05	14.8
2005-06	16.2
2006-07	16.4
2007-08	16.7
2008-09	16.7

(a) From 2004-05 onwards, includes rent rebates granted to HRA tenants which is 100% grant funded.
Source: RO/RA returns, Local Government Finance Statistics.