

Answers issued to Members on 17 October 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 Deputy First Minister and the Minister for the Economy and Transport

Andrew R.T. Davies (South Wales Central): Will the Minister make a statement on the sources of funding for the 'Sustainable Travel Towns' initiative? (WAQ50475)

Andrew R.T. Davies (South Wales Central): How much funding has the Welsh Assembly Government put aside for the 'Sustainable Travel Towns' initiative and where does this funding come from? (WAQ50477)

The Deputy First Minister and the Minister for the Economy and Transport (Ieuan Wyn Jones): The Welsh Assembly Government will be working with the regional transport consortia to select the four towns in the Sustainable Travel Towns initiative and to develop detailed proposals for each. Funding will be made available from the Assembly Government's transport budget and other sources, including private and voluntary sector funding, at a level that reflects the delivery plans for each town.

Andrew R.T. Davies (South Wales Central): Will the Minister explain the timetable for selecting the five 'Sustainable Travel Towns'? (WAQ50476)

The Deputy First Minister: The Welsh Assembly Government will be working with the regional transport consortia over the coming months to develop detailed proposals for the Sustainable Travel Towns initiative. The intention is that one town in each of the four consortia regions will be selected as a Sustainable Travel Town and these will be announced next year.

Questions to the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing

Alun Cairns (South Wales West): Will the Minister make a statement on how much additional funding has been received by the Welsh block following the emergency flood measures in England? (WAQ50459)

The Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing (Jane Davidson): In the aftermath of the severe weather conditions which affected parts of England over the summer period, the UK Government announced a £46 million recovery packages to help those directly affected.

Those funds were distributed to the worst affected local authorities and were used to help those directly affected, to repair roads, to support schools and children's services and to help local businesses. This funding package was additional to funding made available to local authorities to help with exceptional costs incurred during such events.

Wales was fortunate to escape the worst of the severe weather. Additional funding to help local authorities with exceptional costs is available under the Emergency Financial Assistance scheme. The Vale of Glamorgan Council has submitted a request for consideration under this scheme.

The UK Government has announced as part of the CSR a significant increase in general investment on flood and coastal risk management in England. The current budget will increase from £600m to a minimum of £650m for 2008/09, £700m for 2009/10 and £800m for 2010/11. Further amendments may be made depending on the outcome of the flood review being led by the Cabinet Office. An associated consequential increase in the Welsh block is anticipated.

Alun Cairns (South Wales West): Will the Minister list the distribution per local authority of additional supplies given during the summer's extensive flooding? (WAQ50460)

Jane Davidson: Local authorities have powers to safeguard life and property during periods of severe weather. The distribution of supplies during such a period is a matter for local authorities and the Assembly Government holds no details of these.

Over the summer Welsh local authorities dealt effectively with the effects of the adverse weather, providing support to those directly affected where appropriate. Compared with England, Wales was fortunate to have escaped the worst of the severe weather and most local authorities in Wales coped using existing budgets.

Additional funding may be made available from the Welsh Assembly Government in the form of Emergency Financial Assistance to cover the immediate exceptional costs incurred by the local authorities during such events.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council has requested such support and a decision on that will be made when they have provided full details. No additional support has been provided to Welsh local authorities by the Assembly Government to date.

UK Government has prepared a bid against the EU Solidarity Fund for financial assistance that may cover some flood damage costs incurred during the summer floods. Damages sustained by four Welsh local authorities have been included. The results are expected during summer 2008.

Paul Davies (Preseli Pembrokeshire): Will the Minister consider making loft insulation free for pensioners who do not own their own home? (WAQ50470)

Jane Davidson: Grants under the Welsh Assembly Government's Home Energy Efficiency Scheme are available to any householder aged 60 and over who is in receipt of a specified passport benefit. The Scheme supplies heating and energy efficiency measures which include loft insulation. Grants are not restricted to home owners, as under the terms of the Scheme a 'householder' means a person who, alone or jointly with others, is a freeholder or tenant.

Kirsty Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Will the Minister make a statement on the impact waiting times for installation of central heating systems under a HEES Grant is having on applicants? (WAQ50478)

Jane Davidson: HEES is not an emergency service but each application is progressed as promptly as possible. The time taken to install or replace a central heating system depends on checks that need to be in place to assess eligibility, survey to determine the assistance that the scheme is able to offer, and scheduling work through the scheme's installer network.

Kirsty Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): What is the average waiting time for installation of a central heating system following application for a HEES Grant? (WAQ50479)

Jane Davidson: On average, heating installations are completed within 90 days of receipt of application. The time taken reflects the need to assess eligibility, survey to determine the assistance that the scheme is able to offer, including the fuel option available, and scheduling work through the scheme's installer network.

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Service

Alun Cairns (South Wales West): Will the Minister make a statement on overspend by Social Services in each authority? (WAQ50494)

The Deputy Minister for Social Services (Gwenda Thomas): The following table sets out the initial social services budget set by each local authority in 2005-6 (the latest full information available) and the reported outturn.

Local authority revenue outturn expenditure on social services, 2005-06 (£ million)

	Budget (a)	Outturn	Difference (b)	
Isle of Anglesey	26.5	27.7	1.2	5%
Gwynedd	44.8	45.9	1.1	2%
Conwy	49.4	49.9	0.5	1%
Denbighshire	42.1	42.1	0.0	0%
Flintshire	49.9	50.0	0.1	0%
Wrexham	46.5	46.5	0.0	0%
Powys	45.8	46.6	0.7	2%
Ceredigion	27.2	29.5	2.3	9%
Pembrokeshire	36.6	37.9	1.3	4%
Carmarthenshire	61.6	65.3	3.7	6%
Swansea	84.1	83.6	-0.5	-1%
Neath Port Talbot	57.8	59.9	2.0	3%
Bridgend	50.9	51.9	1.0	2%
Vale of Glamorgan	40.9	46.4	5.5	13%
Rhondda Cynon Taff	100.2	107.5	7.3	7%
Merthyr Tydfil	23.2	25.1	2.0	9%
Caerphilly	65.1	70.8	5.7	9%
Blaenau Gwent	31.1	31.0	-0.1	0%
Torfaen	34.5	36.9	2.5	7%
Monmouthshire	30.7	29.3	-1.4	-5%
Newport	52.3	57.8	5.5	11%
Cardiff	113.2	122.8	9.6	9%
Wales	1,114.5	1,164.7	50.2	5%

(a) Budget set before the start of the financial year.

(b) Differences between budget and outturn will include government grant funding announced after the start of the financial year. They will also include changes to decisions on the use of reserves to fund services.

It is a matter for each individual authority to manage its budget across the range of services it is responsible for. It is legitimate for an authority to have a higher outturn figure compared with its budgeted spend for a particular service provided that the authority's overall expenditure is managed within the resources available. The annual audit process which authorities are subject to provides the mechanism to ensure that local authorities manage the resources available to them appropriately to deliver the services they are responsible for.

Questions to the Minister for Heritage

Joyce Watson (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister make a statement on what the Welsh Assembly Government is doing to enable disabled people access to listed buildings? (WAQ50481)

The Minister for Heritage (Rhodri Glyn Thomas): The Assembly Government has the aim of making historic buildings providing services to the public accessible to all. Access to historic buildings is a matter

for individual owners but the Assembly Government's historic environment division, Cadw, issued guidance in 2002 to local authorities and service providers on ways of adapting historic buildings to improve physical access. This guidance will be reviewed shortly. My officials in Cadw are also willing to have informal discussions to help advise local authorities about alterations to listed buildings in advance of formal applications for listed building consent.

Questions to the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government

Joyce Watson (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister give an update of the Communities Facilities and Activities grant? (WAQ50482)

Questions to the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government (Brian Gibbons): The Community Facilities and Activities Programme (CFAP) is a grant scheme operated by the Welsh Assembly Government to help community or voluntary organisations provide facilities or carry out activities which will promote the regeneration of communities.

CFAP remains one of the Welsh Assembly Government's most popular grant schemes for the community and voluntary sector, owing to its ease of access, type of project that it can consider and the level of support from Assembly Government officials. Nearly £50 million has been committed to projects since its launch in 2002 including £4.09 million for 37 projects approved in the round which closed in April 2007. The current round closes to new applications on 19 October. All applicants will be notified of the outcome once the assessment process is complete.