

Answers issued to Members on 17 December 2008

[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

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What are the arrangements for the sharing of ministerial cars when Ministers are visiting the same event? (WAQ52898)

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What arrangements exist for ensuring Ministers share ministerial cars where it is possible and appropriate? (WAQ52899)

The First Minister (Rhodri Morgan): All Ministers share Official Cars where practicable.

Questions to the Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What is the Welsh Assembly Government doing to help small businesses in the current economic crisis? (WAQ52896)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport (Ieuan Wyn Jones): I refer you to the oral statement I made on Tuesday 9 December and the accompanying document that was sent to all Assembly Members.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister make a statement on road deaths and serious and minor injuries on the A470 for each of the years since 2000, giving details of where these have occurred? (WAQ52900)

The Deputy First Minister: Between 2000 and 2007 there has been an annual average of 207 personal injury collisions on Route A470 resulting in averages of 7 Fatalities, 35 serious and 165 slight casualties. Statistical checks have shown a general downward static trend.

Collisions were spread along the 279km length of this route and their locations are examined annually to identify clusters for analysis.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister make a statement on road deaths and serious and minor injuries on the A483 for each of the years since 2000, giving details of where these have occurred? (WAQ52901)

The Deputy First Minister: Between 2000 and 2007 there has been an annual average of 139 personal injury collisions on Route A483 resulting in averages of 5 Fatalities, 23 serious and 111 slight casualties. The collisions were spread along the 173km length of this route and their locations are examined annually to identify clusters for analysis.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister make a statement on road deaths and serious and minor injuries on the A487 for each of the years since 2000, giving details of where these have occurred? (WAQ52902)

The Deputy First Minister: Between 2000 and 2007 there has been an annual average of 155 personal injury collisions on Route A487 resulting in averages of 3 Fatalities, 26 serious and 126 slight casualties.

The collisions were spread along the 199km length of this route and their locations are examined annually to identify clusters for analysis.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the First Minister make a statement on any representations he has made to the UK Government about fiscal systems for small businesses? (WAQ52944)

The Deputy First Minister: The Secretary of State for Wales has attended all three Economic Summits and as a member of the National Economic Council has fed the concerns of businesses in Wales directly to the UK Government.

Questions to the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): How many people are awaiting assistance with regard to Home Energy Efficiency Schemes, and how many were waiting 12 months ago? (WAQ52904)

The Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing (Jane Davidson): In December 2007, there were 1,742 households awaiting surveys under the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES). All of these households have had their surveys completed and measures installed.

There are currently around 3,350 householders awaiting surveys. Eaga, who manage the scheme on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government, have assured me that more assessors are being recruited for Wales, which will enable work on completing the surveys to be accelerated. This should have an impact on numbers waiting by the end of January. In the meantime, Eaga is prioritising those applicants over 80 years old and those known to have no heating.

The number of householders applying to HEES increased substantially following the Prime Minister's announcement of a home energy savings package in September. Prior to the announcement there were around 1,040 households awaiting surveys.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What publicity is being given to the HEES, giving details of any promotion schemes, any advertising and the costs of these? (WAQ52905)

Jane Davidson: The Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) is promoted primarily through partner organisations such as the Energy Saving Trust (EST), which provides free impartial advice on reducing energy bills and saving energy, charitable organisations such as Age Concern, and the Citizens Advice Bureau. These organisations have systems in place to refer householders to different grant providers and can ensure that callers are directed to the most appropriate grant scheme to meet their particular needs.

One of the key messages in our consultation on the National Energy Efficiency and Savings Plan will be the need to further improve linkages and referral systems between agencies involved in providing advice and support to householders likely to be vulnerable to fuel poverty, and how we can best achieve this.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): How is the Minister assessing the effectiveness of any promotion or advertising scheme in relation to the HEES? (WAQ52908)

Jane Davidson: HEES has proved to be extremely popular with a record number of households (18,647) receiving energy efficiency improvements under the scheme in 2007-08.

While the success of the scheme indicates that we are reaching households in need of assistance, I want to look at options for how the scheme can best be promoted in the future. My officials are currently developing a National Energy Efficiency and Savings Plan, which will go out to public consultation in February. As part of this plan, we will be reviewing all aspects of the current HEES scheme.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister give details of any publicity campaigns in relation to the mortgage rescue scheme giving details of advertising and other forms of promotion and costs and success of these schemes? (WAQ52906)

Deputy Minister for Housing (Jocelyn Davies): The operational arrangements for the Assembly Government's Mortgage Rescue scheme have been discussed and agreed with the members of the Mortgage Rescue / Repossessions Task Group that I set up earlier this year in response to the downturn in the economic climate. The Task Group includes representatives from key stakeholders; Community Housing Cymru, Welsh Local Government Association, Shelter Cymru, Citizens Advice Bureau, National Landlords Association, National Homelessness Network Co-ordinator and the Principality Building Society. A fact sheet about the scheme has been produced and is available for downloading free of charge from the Assembly Government's website.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister make a statement on how she is measuring the success of any promotion scheme relating to the mortgage rescue plan? (WAQ52907)

Jocelyn Davies: The Welsh Assembly Government's 10 year Homelessness Plan, which is currently out for consultation, has taken into consideration the need to address the issue of mortgage repossessions.

Earlier this year I announced the allocation of £5 million to establish a new mortgage rescue scheme in Wales, and last week I increased this funding to £9.5 million. The additional funding will mean that more families can benefit from this assistance in the near future. It is difficult to predict the number of owners who could benefit from the scheme due to the variety of their circumstances, but we estimate that up to 100 families could benefit from the funds I have allocated to the scheme.

In May this year I established a task group to develop an action plan to address the issue of mortgage repossession. The Group have agreed a number of key priorities, under which specific actions have been outlined to help address the problem.

The Mortgage Rescue Action Plan will be published in the New Year, and the Task Group will continue to meet regularly to oversee the implementation and monitor the effectiveness of the Action Plan.

Questions to the Minister for Rural Affairs

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister make a statement on any representations she has had with regard to promotion of local food as well as food from outside Wales where a local equivalent is available? (WAQ52894)

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Elin Jones): My officials in Food & Market Development Division attend and manage a range of 'Trade' and 'Consumer' food exhibitions which are aimed at promoting quality Welsh Food and drink as part of a wide Trade Development programme. Food producers exhibit on the True Taste stand at these events within Wales, throughout the UK and international markets. The 'True Taste' Food & Drink Awards take place annually to enable the promotion of award winning produce through national PR campaigns. The Awards scheme and Trade Development programme does not exclude produce from outside of Wales due to EU State Aid regulations, however, the support cannot be subsidised to the same level as Welsh producers.