

Answers issued to Members on 20 November 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 Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills

Kirsty Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Will the Minister make a statement on capital funding for schools? (WAQ52752)

The Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (Jane Hutt): 'One Wales' commits the Assembly Government to continue a major capital investment programme to upgrade schools buildings, exceeding the sums provided previous years.

The total amount of investment supported by the Welsh Assembly Government in the period 2008-09 to 2011-12 is £706 million (including the capital value of PFI schemes).

In addition each Authority can decide, in the light of local priorities, to fund projects from within their existing resources. This could be via their own general capital funding, access to prudential borrowing and/or capital receipts.

The Assembly Government is committed to working in partnership with the Local Authorities to not only ensuring that schools are now fit for purpose but create 21st Century learning environments that engage and inspire young learners, teachers and the wider community.

A clear definition of 21st century schools will enable Local Authorities a standard to work towards which will allow for effective strategic planning by local Authorities and improved asset management planning.

The investment programme under the banner of 21st Century schools will encompass reformation of capital funding processes which will assist Local Authorities to develop capital investment programmes that not only address the well recognised and long standing problem in relation to the condition and suitability of schools in Wales but assist Local Authorities in their plans for school re-organisation.

It is equally important that Authorities also develop robust plans for capital investment in schools which take account of the sharp decline in pupil numbers, and the need to focus investment in schools which are viable, have a secure future and can deliver high quality education as well as providing facilities for community use.

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Chris Franks (South Wales Central): Will the Minister a) give an update on testing for bowel cancer and b) consider whether screening tests for bowel cancer could begin at 60 instead of the current 65? (WAQ52769)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Edwina Hart): On 27 October, bowel cancer screening throughout Wales for men and women from 60 to 69 years began its roll-out with home screening kits posted out, so that users can test themselves in the privacy of their own homes. After two years, the bowel screening programme will be extended to people aged up to 74 and by 2015. It will be offered to everyone who lives in Wales between the ages of 50 and 74.

Rhodri Glyn Thomas (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr): Does the Minister have any plans to relocate the money returned by Carmarthenshire LHB from its dentistry budget at the end of the 2007/8 financial year for improvements for orthodontic services for the next financial year? (WAQ52757)

Edwina Hart: There are no plans to do so. Resources allocated for NHS dental services are ring-fenced. If an LHB is not able to spend all of its allocation then the balance is returned to the Welsh Assembly Government. The re-allocation of such resources is then considered in the light of all of the pressures on the health and social services budgets.

Questions to the Minister for Heritage

Peter Black (South Wales West): Will the Minister confirm that Heritage Lottery Fund applications have been closed and, if so, when they are due to re-open? (WAQ52754)

The Minister for Heritage (Alun Ffred Jones): As part of their new strategic plan ('Valuing our Heritage: Investing in our Future. Our Strategy 2008-2013') Heritage Lottery Fund launched revised grant programmes in April 2008. Most of these programmes remained open to applications throughout this period of change, but, in Wales, decisions on two small grants programmes were suspended for a period of three months to allow for a smooth progression between application materials and to ensure clarity for applicants. The small grants programmes affected were closed between July and September and are called 'Your Heritage' and 'Young Roots'. Both are now open to applications.