

Answers to the Written Assembly Questions for answer on 20 July 2010

[R] signifies that the Member has declared an interest.

[W] signifies that the question was tabled in Welsh.

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To ask the Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): In respect of Welsh Assembly Guidance Circular No 021/2009 p20, and the consultation on Ysgol Llwngrwil, Gwynedd, will the Minister consider the advice given in the most recent ESTYN report on the school. (WAQ56230)

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): With regard to the consultation on Ysgol Llwngrwil, Gwynedd, how will the Minister check and verify that the information provided to them by the local authority is from the most recent ESTYN report on the school. (WAQ56231)

Answer issued on 03 August 2010

It would not be appropriate for me to take a view on, or comment on, any consultation exercise currently underway in Gwynedd. If that local authority were to publish statutory proposals to reorganise schools, involving the closure of Ysgol Llwngrwil, and there were objections, I would be under a duty to determine whether those proposals should be approved, rejected or modified. I must keep an open mind until such time as any proposals are submitted to me. When statutory proposals are published, local authorities must submit evidence of consultation. In reaching any decisions which it is my duty to make, I consider all the relevant evidence, including whether consultation was sufficient, and information included in Estyn reports.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister make a statement on the bids for funding made by Gwynedd County Council to the Welsh Assembly Government for assisting them with their schools' re-organisation programme. (WAQ56232)

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): When should bids for funding from Gwynedd County Council in respect of assisting them with their schools' re-organisation programme be received by the Welsh Assembly Government and what is the deadline. (WAQ56233)

Answer issued on 03 August 2010

A letter was issued by the Welsh Assembly Government to all local authorities in Wales on 1st April 2010 setting out the submission process and timescales for applications for third tranche capital funding support. This third tranche is the final round of capital funding to be deployed through transitional arrangements. Future Assembly Government grant support will then be deployed through the new 21st Century Schools Programme.

The deadline for receipt of applications by the Welsh Assembly Government was Friday 28th May 2010. Gwynedd County Council submitted three bids for consideration. Of these proposals, one bid has been approved in principle for funding. The announcement regarding which projects will be funded was made on the 14th July 2010.

The deadline for submission was 28th May 2010. The submissions from Gwynedd County Council were made within this time. All local authorities have also been invited to submit Strategic Outline Programmes for consideration under the 21st Century Schools Programme by the 29th October 2010.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What considerations does the Welsh Assembly Government take into account before making any decision about whether or not to give funding to local authorities to assist them with schools re-organisation proposals. (WAQ56234)

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What has the Welsh Assembly Government considered in respect of Gwynedd local authority's bid for funding to assist with their schools' re-organisation proposals. (WAQ56235)

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What are the criteria required for local authorities to bid for funding from the Welsh Assembly Government to assist with their schools' re-organisation programmes. (WAQ56236)

Answer issued on 03 August 2010

The assessment process for considering applications for funding was set out in the letter to local authorities in April 2010. The application forms were based on the principles of the HM Treasury 5 Case Business Model. Proposals had to demonstrate a robust case for investment and show a clear strategic approach is being taken by the local authority. Consideration of how the authorities' proposals fit with the transformation agenda, school reorganisation strategies and provision of Welsh Medium Education was taken into account during the assessment process.

As with previous capital funding allocations the funding is targeted to support large scale strategic projects. Prioritisation for funding was made to projects that could demonstrate potential benefits such as a reduction in the number of surplus school places and a reduction in running costs where there are significant backlog maintenance issues and/or a rationalisation in the size of the school estate. Additionally proposals that have the capacity to demonstrate projects of the 21st Century School standard will be prioritised for funding. This is in line with the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to provide schools that demonstrate innovation in technology intensive learning, design and construction. All bids received from Local Authorities were assessed against the same criteria.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Does the Welsh Assembly Government look at each individual school's catchment area within a local authority area (e.g. within Gwynedd - Y Gader catchment) when considering funding bids from local authorities for schools' re-organisation proposals. (WAQ56237)

Answer issued on 03 August 2010

The Welsh Assembly Government does not look at each individual school's catchment area when considering the funding bids from local authorities. Where funding for a new school is being considered, then approval is given in principle subject to the local authority completing all necessary statutory procedures. It is the responsibility of the local authorities to decide on the prioritisation of proposals that are submitted for funding.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): How long does the Welsh Assembly Government expect to deliberate over whether or not a bid for funding to assist with schools' re-organisation is acceptable and how long would a local authority be expected to wait for any such decision to be made by the Welsh Assembly Government. (WAQ56238)

Answer issued on 03 August 2010

All proposals for the latest tranche of schools capital funding were received by the deadline of the 28th May 2010. The assessment process was completed by the Welsh Assembly Government and local authorities were informed of the outcome of the process on the 14th July 2010.

All offers of funding are without prejudice to any decisions that Welsh Ministers might be under a duty to make in connection with any statutory proposals for school organisation, or decisions on other approvals that might be necessary in order for the project to proceed. Where statutory proposals for school organisation are necessary and have been completed, the offer of funding is conditional on the successful completion of such statutory procedures as are required.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): When a decision is made by the Welsh Assembly Government in respect of funding local authorities to assist with their schools' re-organisation proposals, where is this information published. (WAQ56239)

Answer issued on 03 August 2010

The decision report is published on the Welsh Assembly Government website. A full list of the approved projects will also be published on the website.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What steps is the Minister taking to redress the £500 deficit in education funding per pupil between England and Wales. (WAQ56240)

Answer issued on 08 March 2011

There is a variation in funding levels between England and Wales when looked at on a per pupil basis. However, direct funding comparisons are misleading as the statistics for England and Wales include different elements of spend and are not made up in the same way. Devolution has made it possible for us to take forward a distinctive policy agenda in Wales which has been widely welcomed. We take decisions on the basis of what we believe is right for Wales, not by reference to developments in England.

However, the Welsh Assembly Government places a high priority on educational funding and the First Minister made a commitment in his manifesto to refocus educational investment to ensure that monies are well spent and are targeted to the front line. He also committed to increase spend on those front line services by 1% in comparison with the amount received in the Welsh block.

With this in mind I commissioned a review of the cost of administering the education system in Wales. All education spend including the allocation of funding to schools was within the scope of the review. The first phase of the review has been completed and a report was published on 18 May. The report identifies a range of opportunities for change and we are now seeking to implement the findings of the review to achieve a shift in funding across the education system from support to front line services. A project framework is being developed to provide the leadership and strategic direction needed to drive the changes required and inject momentum into the process.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Given that Gwynedd local authority has indicated that there are currently 5 sites under consideration in respect of building an area school within the Tywyn Catchment Area, will the Minister make a statement on the fact that there are no firm proposals for a new site for a school even though consultations in respect of school closures are underway within the area. (WAQ56241)

Answer issued on 03 August 2010

It is for local authorities to conduct consultation as they consider is appropriate, and they must have regard to guidance on this matter which is published in Circular 9/99. It is for local authorities to decide what options to include in any consultation exercise.

It is for local authorities to decide what expenditure should be incurred on consultation and anyone seeking information on that expenditure should make enquiries of the relevant local authority.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What assessment has the Minister made of the Head of Gwynedd Education Department's recent statement that even if their present bid to the Welsh Assembly Government fails he would direct the local authority to meet the cost of the new school for the Dyssynni area. (WAQ56242)

Answer issued on 03 August 2010

The responsibility for decisions relating to the financing of capital projects rest with individual local authorities, through the utilisation of their own general capital grant (GCF), which is un-hypothecated; prudential borrowing; section 106 agreements; or the use of capital receipts. Grant provided by the Welsh assembly Government is in addition to an authorities own capital resources.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister detail any assessment he has made of how much Gwynedd County Council has spent on schools' consultations in respect of their schools' re-organisation programme, and where this information is published. (WAQ56245)

Answer issued on 03 August 2010

It is for local authorities to conduct consultation as they consider is appropriate, and they must have regard to guidance on this matter which is published in Circular 9/99. It is for local authorities to decide what options to include in any consultation exercise.

It is for local authorities to decide what expenditure should be incurred on consultation and anyone seeking information on that expenditure should make enquiries of the relevant local authority.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Will the Minister detail any assessment he has made of how much money Gwynedd County Council anticipate will be saved as a result of their schools' re-organisation programme within the Tywyn Catchment Area and where this information is published. (WAQ56247)

Answer issued on 03 August 2010

Gwynedd County Council estimate that the Tywyn funding proposal will deliver annual revenue savings of £220,000 plus savings in annual maintenance costs of £33,000. Total backlog maintenance of £344,000 will also be eliminated. The total number of surplus school places will be reduced by over 200. This information is not published by the Welsh Assembly Government and further details can be requested from the local authority.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Given that Gwynedd County Council's Head of Education has indicated that there is sufficient capital funding (£5.8m) to proceed with the schools' reorganisation programme within the Tywyn Catchment Area, what considerations will the Minister give in respect of the local authorities remaining catchment area. (WAQ56249)

Answer issued on 03 August 2010

The timing and funding of the schools reorganisation programme in the remaining catchments areas is the responsibility of the local authority.

As the Welsh Assembly Government moves towards the implementation of the 21st century Schools Programme, all local authorities have been asked to submit Strategic Outline Programmes by the 29th October 2010 detailing their long term strategic plans for schools capital investment in support of their school reorganisation plans. Ultimately it will be for Gwynedd to determine its priorities according to local needs and circumstances and to formulate strategies in relation to the remaining catchment areas to create school improvement and successful outcomes for children and young people.

To ask the Minister for the Economy and Transport

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): With reference to the requirements of the Welsh Assembly Government Circular 21/2009 in relation to school closures and alternative provision, what specific details of any arrangements in relation to school transport will the Minister wish to consider. (WAQ56243)

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): Regarding the Welsh Assembly Government Circular 21/2000, will the Minister consider the state of the roads along which children would be transported, the age of the children concerned, whether or not transport is supervised (buses), and whether or not every seat on a bus has a seatbelt in relation to school closures and alternative provision. (WAQ56244) *Transferred for answer by the Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning*

Answer issued on 08 April 2011

The Minister for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning (Leighton Andrews): Every statutory proposal for school organisation is considered on its individual merits taking into account the factors set out in Welsh Assembly Government Circular 21/2009, the information provided by the promoter of the proposal, and matters raised by any objectors.

The relevant factors set out in relation to school transport require my consideration of the nature of journeys to alternative provision, and resulting journey times for pupils, (in particular whether primary pupils will have one way journeys in excess of 45 minutes or secondary school pupils journeys of over an hour) ; the provision of, and accessibility to, safe walking and cycling routes, public transport, and, where relevant, the home school transport arrangements proposed by those bringing forward proposals.

I would expect any school transport to be provided by local authorities specifically as a result of school organisation to be of an equivalent standard to other transport already provided, and for detailed arrangements to be made in the light of the condition of routes, age of pupils and any other relevant factors. In considering proposals, I would examine detailed matters such as those to which you refer if specific concerns were highlighted by those opposed to the proposals, but I would in any event expect local authorities to arrange school transport for pupils at all times in ways which gave a high priority to the safety and welfare of pupils as a matter of course.

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): How many children under seven years of age does Gwynedd local authority transport to school and back by (a) minibus, (b) taxi and (c) bus and what are the figures between age seven to nine and nine to eleven. (WAQ56250)

Answer issued on 03 August 2010

We do not hold this information centrally.

To ask the Minister for Health and Social Services

Nick Bourne (Mid and West Wales): What progress is being made in implementing the Service Development Directives for Epilepsy in Wales and how is this improving the treatment of epileptics in Carmarthenshire. (WAQ56229)

Answer issued on 03 August 2010

LHB's progress against key actions within the Epilepsy Service & Development Directive was reported in September 2009. This showed that some good progress had been made within Hywel Dda LHB but also identified areas requiring further attention which they are currently addressing. Full implementation of the Directives are to be met by all LHBs by the end of this year. Specific work on epilepsy is being

undertaken in the Cardiff National Demonstrator and results of this will be shared across Wales in the Autumn 2010.