

## Written Questions answered between 21 and 28 September 2006

[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 Culture, Welsh Language and Sport

**Owen John Thomas:** Pa gamau y mae'r Gweinidog wedi'u cymryd i gyflawni targed Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru o sicrhau cynnydd o bum pwynt canran yn nifer y siaradwyr Cymraeg erbyn 2011? (WAQ47825) [W]

**Y Gweinidog dros Ddiwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chwaraeon (Alun Pugh):** Mae 'Iaith Pawb' yn nodi sut y byddwn yn gwireddu ein gweledigaeth o Gymru wirioneddol ddwyieithog, gan gynnwys y nod o gynyddu nifer y siaradwyr Cymraeg gan 5 y cant erbyn 2011. Mae'n cynnwys dros 60 o gamau penodol dros nifer o feysydd polisi ac mae wedi'i ategu gan £28 miliwn ychwanegol i gefnogi'r Gymraeg yn uniongyrchol rhwng 2003-06. Yr wyf yn adrodd bob blwyddyn ar berfformiad yn erbyn yr ymrwymadau yn 'Iaith Pawb' a chynhelir adolygiad trwyadl o 'Iaith Pawb' yn 2007.

**Owen John Thomas:** What steps has the Minister taken to achieve the Welsh Assembly Government's target of increasing the number of Welsh speakers by five percentage points by 2011? (WAQ47825) [W]

**The Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport (Alun Pugh):** 'Iaith Pawb' sets out how we will achieve our vision of a truly bilingual Wales including the aim of increasing the number of Welsh speakers by 5 per cent by 2011. It includes over 60 specific actions across a number of policy areas and has been backed by an additional £28 million in direct support to the Welsh language between 2003 and 2006. I report annually on performance against the commitments contained in 'Iaith Pawb' and a thorough review of 'Iaith Pawb' will be held in 2007.

**Ann Jones:** Will the Minister make a statement about the display of the works of the late Sir Kyffin Williams?  
(WAQ47827)

**Alun Pugh:** I have expressed my support for the Isle of Anglesey's proposal to extend Oriel Ynys Mon, Llangefni to display Sir Kyffin Williams's works.

### **Questions to the Minister for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks**

**Alun Cairns:** Will the Minister publish the inspector's report on the trunking of parts of the A48, and if so, when? (WAQ47887)

**The Minister for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks (Andrew Davies):** I will publish the inspector's report at the time I issue my decision as part of the statutory procedures process and expect to do so by the end of the year.

### **Questions to the Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills**

**Carl Sargeant:** What is the Welsh Assembly Government doing to ensure that young people are health and safety savvy before entering employment? (WAQ47810)

**The Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (Jane Davidson):** Young people are given information and advice about the importance of health and safety in employment as part of work-related education, an element of the basic curriculum for all registered pupils at maintained schools during key stage 4. The framework for work-related education for 14 to 19-year-olds in Wales states that all pupils should be given the opportunity during key stage 4 to undertake work experience of at least one week. The framework also notes the importance of following safe working practices.

As part of their preparation for work experience, pupils are provided with briefing and information emphasising the importance of health and safety in the work place. This might be provided by the school or with the support and direct involvement of Careers Wales. These messages are reinforced during the experience itself and may also be picked up again during subsequent debriefing on return to school.

**Ann Jones:** Will the Minister make a statement on the allocation of funding for Rhyl College? (WAQ47869)

**Jane Davidson:** Following a successful bid submission via the Department for Education and Lifelong Learning and Skills strategic capital investment fund, Coleg Llandrillo have been awarded £2.62 million in grant funding towards redeveloping its Rhyl campus. College funds in the sum of £1.2 million will supplement the balance of this circa £3.8 million project.

Briefly, the project will include the development of a new state-of-the-art construction skills centre, a hairdressing and beauty therapy suite, new student support facilities, and the centralisation of existing training

facilities to the Rhyl campus.

This substantial contribution from the Welsh Assembly Government is a clear sign of our commitment to improving skills and training provision across the whole of Wales. I am sure that when the new development at Rhyl College is complete it will be exemplar, providing Denbighshire with a centre of excellence for vocational and academic studies.

**John Griffiths:** Will the Minister make a statement on progress with 'early years' education? (WAQ47874)

**Jane Davidson:** I fully recognise how vital the early years are and the need to provide the right environment and opportunities for children to learn, develop and flourish. Through the early years grants that have been provided to local education authorities we have ensured that a free part-time education place is available for all children from the term following their third birthday. This year revenue grants totalling £17.6 million and capital grants of £6 million are available to local education authorities to deliver their early years education places.

We will build on this early years provision when the foundation phase is introduced from September 2008. The foundation phase will deliver a curriculum and in an environment that will enable children to acquire and develop skills which will equip them for their future learning opportunities.

### **Questions to the Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside**

**Peter Black:** Will the Minister make a statement on the implementation of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005? (WAQ47814)

**The Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside (Carwyn Jones):** Many provisions of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 are already in force in Wales, including those concerning the extension of the offence of dropping litter, changes to the statutory defence relating to the unlawful display of advertisements, offences relating to the unauthorised or harmful depositing, treatment or disposal of waste, enforcement action in relation to the sale of aerosol paints to children, the award of costs incurred in relation to the investigation, clean-up and enforcement of fly-tipping, and local authorities' waste disposal functions

In addition, the Government will be proposing to the Assembly in October a further delegation of functions under the Act. These will include provisions relating to abandoned vehicles, illegally parked vehicles, fly-posting, transport and deposit and disposal of waste, dog control, noise, statutory nuisances and abandoned shopping and luggage trolleys.

**Karen Sinclair:** Will the Minister make a statement on what the Welsh Assembly Government is doing to encourage waste recycling in Wales? (WAQ47816)

**Carwyn Jones:** The Assembly Government published 'Wise about Waste: the National Waste Strategy for Wales' in 2002. In terms of municipal waste, the strategy sets the policy and strategic framework that encourages waste recycling. This is supported by funding to local authorities through the sustainable waste management grant, a specific grant to promote local authority recycling. To date this grant has provided nearly £140 million and this year alone is providing more than £32 million.

This grant is supported by other Assembly Government funding through the strategic recycling scheme and funding development of markets for recyclates through the Wales Environment Trust and the waste and resources action programme. This includes, for example, demonstration composting facilities capable of accepting food waste and developing markets for the compost product.

The Assembly Government has set challenging recycling and composting targets in line with EU targets for landfill diversion and has recently confirmed that some home-composted materials may be counted towards these targets. Promotion of the policies and strategy of the Assembly Government is being undertaken through Waste Awareness Wales, through media advertising and a range of promotional initiatives.

**Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Will the Minister make a statement on his decision to call in the planning application for the redevelopment of Stradey Park, Llanelli, and will he detail the precise timing of his decision? (WAQ47911)

**Carwyn Jones:** I called in the planning application because the proposal raises issues that appear to be in conflict with planning policy. I took the decision as soon as I considered that I was aware of all the relevant facts.

The case is now with the planning inspectorate, and arrangements are in hand for a public local inquiry. I expect that a decision will be reached in the first half of 2007.

**Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Will the Minister detail what documents he considered before making his decision to call in the planning application for the redevelopment of Stradey Park, Llanelli? (WAQ47912)

**Carwyn Jones:** Having received copies of the planning application and associated documents, plans and maps setting out the proposals, my officials advised me on the main issues in the context of 'Planning Policy Wales'. We also received many call-in requests, correspondence from interested parties (both for and against the proposal) and a petition, and the content of all these representations were also taken into account.

**Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Will the Minister detail when he had sight of the letter sent from the Environment Agency dated 26 July regarding the planning application for the redevelopment of Stradey Park, Llanelli, and can he confirm whether this was before or after deciding to call in the planning application? (WAQ47913)

**Carwyn Jones:** The letter from the Environment Agency to Carmarthenshire County Council was dated 25 July and we received it the following morning. I discussed the letter with officials before I made my decision. However, the Environment Agency also wrote to the County Council on 15 May and 15 July and these letters expressed both objections to and concerns about the proposals.

### **Questions to the Finance Minister**

**William Graham:** Will the Minister outline guidance to be given to authorities for determining council tax precepts for 2007-08? (WAQ47845)

**The Finance Minister (Sue Essex):** I have not issued any guidance as to the level of council tax for 2007-08.

**Ann Jones:** Will the Minister make a statement on the administration of discretionary hardship grants for non domestic rates in Wales? (WAQ47846)

**Sue Essex:** The Local Government Finance Act 1988 gives local authorities the power to grant relief to businesses on real grounds of hardship. The Assembly funds 75 per cent of any relief awarded, and the local authority funds the remaining 25 per cent from council tax receipts. Local authorities must be satisfied that the ratepayer would sustain hardship if the relief is not granted, and that it is in the interest of council tax payers for it to do so.

**Nick Bourne:** Will the Minister update us on the funding of local government in Wales? (WAQ47847)

**Sue Essex:** The provisional local government finance settlement for 2007-08 will be published following the publication of the draft Assembly budget later this year.

**Nick Bourne:** Will the Minister update us on her discussions with local authorities in the wake of the Beecham review? (WAQ47848)

**Sue Essex:** I have visited most of our local authorities over the summer period and the response to Beecham has been on the agenda at every meeting. Each authority was briefed and prepared to discuss the agenda. They await with enthusiasm the Government's imminent statements on public services and local government.

**Michael German:** What plans does the Minister have for encouraging further cooperation between local authorities? (WAQ47849)

**Sue Essex:** We are already supporting a number of major initiatives that encourage greater collaboration across Wales between local government and their partners. These include the 'Making the Connections' improvement fund, Wales spatial plan programme, community planning and the Welsh Local Government Association regional partnership boards.

I intend to publish a local government policy statement in the spring of 2007. This will set out in detail how local government should discharge its key role in delivering the Beecham vision, and how we will support it in doing so over the next three to four years. An extensive consultation programme will start later this month with local government and other partners to shape this policy statement. It will look to address the need to:

improve the delivery of public services regardless of who delivers them:

the need for the Assembly Government, local government and other partners work together effectively on the strategic long-term development of the key sub-regional areas across Wales.

ensure that community strategy partnerships really do become the partnership of partnerships at a local authority level and are effective in delivering the agreed objectives for their area.

**Owen John Thomas:** How does the Minister ensure collaboration between the Welsh Assembly Government and local government? (WAQ47850)

**Sue Essex:** The National Assembly for Wales is required by section 113 of the Government of Wales Act 1998 to make a scheme setting out how it proposes, in the exercise of its functions, to sustain and promote local government in Wales. The Act also requires the National Assembly to establish and maintain a body known as the Partnership Council for Wales. The scheme clearly demonstrates the Assembly Government's commitment to promote and work in partnership with local government and requires the National Assembly at both member and official level to consider the interests of local government in all aspects of its work.

Additionally, we have set out our shared objectives and aspirations with each local authority in the policy agreements that we have concluded with them. Under the agreements, each authority is entitled to a share of a £31 million fund in return for making adequate or better progress towards the targets in them.

**Eleanor Burnham:** Will the Minister make a statement on the provision of Welsh Assembly Government funding for new local government responsibilities? (WAQ47854)

**Sue Essex:** I issued a joint statement with the WLGA in 2003 underlining the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment that future new initiatives and new responsibilities will be fully funded before they are passed on to local government. The Welsh Assembly Government remains committed to this principle.

**Ann Jones:** Will the Minister make a statement on the conduct of electoral registration by local authorities in Wales? (WAQ47855)

**Sue Essex:** As you are of course aware, this matter has recently been the subject of discussion both at our elections planning group and at the Local Government and Public Services Committee. I share with you concern at the extent of non-registration, although indications are that this is lower in Wales as a whole than in England and Wales as a whole.

Although the Assembly does not have any devolved functions in relation to registration, I hope that the new duties placed on registration officers in the Electoral Administration Act 2006, the additional funding provided by the Department for Constitutional Affairs and the performance standards being developed by the Electoral Commission will serve to improve matters to some degree.

It is crucial that the publicity build up for the Assembly elections, both by the Electoral Commission and, since the introduction of the Government of Wales Act 1998, the Assembly itself, plays a role in increasing registration in the period leading up to the election.

**Carl Sargeant:** Will the Minister make a statement on the Welsh Assembly Government's achievements in the

field of local government in Flintshire? (WAQ47856)

**Sue Essex:** Flintshire County Council's performance against its policy agreement targets were sufficiently strong last year for me to agree payment of its performance incentive grant of £1,468,919.

My officials are still reviewing Flintshire's performance for 2005-06 but early indications are that the authority's performance is continuing to improve. I am particularly pleased that Flintshire has exceeded its targets in the services it provides to young people. For example, secondary school attendance has increased; the number of children leaving education without a qualification has decreased; and the number of children in the authority's care that experience one or more changes of school has also decreased.

Similarly I was pleased that the authority has once again demonstrated strong performance against energy efficiency targets. Flintshire has reduced carbon-dioxide emissions from its buildings and has achieved top quartile performance in reducing energy consumption in its housing stock.

**Carl Sargeant:** Will the Minister make a statement on the future of town and community councils in Wales? (WAQ47857)

**Sue Essex:** Community and town councils in Wales enhance the local government system as a whole and provide important benefits to the communities they serve. This is of special significance now at a time when the Assembly Government's top priority is improving public services in the coming years.

Citizen focus and collaboration are at the heart of our approach and we are clear that this course fits better with Wales's size, values and attitudes.

Within this agenda, community and town councils are closer to the electorate than any other tier of government. This means that they have many direct ways of identifying and delivering the citizen's and the communities' priorities for services, engagement and activities. Sir Jeremy Beecham's recently published report of his review of local service delivery, 'Beyond Boundaries', recommends that local authorities should engage with community councils as citizen advocates and service providers where they have the capacity to fulfil these roles. The Assembly Government commissioned this review last year as part of the action plan for implementing our 'Making the Connections' strategy and we will be issuing our response later this year.

I look forward to community and town councils continuing to make a valuable contribution to the quality of life of their communities and to the strategic agenda of the Welsh Assembly Government.

**Peter Black:** Can the Minister report any progress made since the publication of the Sunderland report on local government electoral arrangements? (WAQ47859)

**Sue Essex:** The Commission on the Local Government Electoral Arrangements, chaired by Professor Sunderland, produced a report in July 2002, which contained 33 recommendations relating to local government electoral arrangements. A detailed response was provided to the then Local Government and Housing Committee and updates provided subsequently to the Local Government and Public Services Committee, all of which can be obtained from the Assembly website.

A motion put to the then Local Government and Housing Committee to accept all 33 recommendations of the

Sunderland report failed. This was owing to disagreement over proportional representation. The Assembly Government expressed its intention of not pursuing the implementation of proportional representation.

A great deal of work has been done in response to the recommendations. These include:

the preparation of detailed analysis of the local election results in 2004;

ongoing work with the Electoral Commission aimed at young voters, including a Democracy Day I am attending in Cardiff on 28 September;

voting hours have been extended until 10pm for council elections;

a campaign is underway with the WLGA, Solace and the Electoral Commission aimed at increasing awareness of and candidacy in the local elections of 2008, including contact with employers aimed at making it easier for those in full time jobs to consider council membership; and

our elections planning group is promoting electoral pilots at the 2008 elections.

**Laura Anne Jones:** Will the Minister make a statement on local authority services in South Wales East? (WAQ47860)

**Sue Essex:** It is hard to generalise about a wide range of services being provided by six different local authorities. The standard of services in those areas is, however, broadly good and improving. For instance, I am particularly pleased to note that Newport City Council achieved nearly all of its stretching policy agreement targets in 2005-06, and was among the first authorities in Wales to receive its performance incentive grant. It is also gratifying to witness the successful and rapid turnaround in the performance of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council following its well-documented problems a few years ago.

I am also very pleased with the level of commitment that local authorities in south-east Wales have shown to collaboration and joint working, whether through the spatial plan, the WLGA regional co-ordinating committee, the Heads of the Valleys initiative, and otherwise. Further developments in this area will be essential to maintaining a standard of services that meets public need.

**Peter Black:** Will the Minister make a statement on business rate reforms? (WAQ47875)

**Sue Essex:** The Assembly Government is consulting on proposals to introduce an all Wales small business rate relief scheme to replace the rural rate relief scheme that was enhanced in 2002 to help rural communities recover from foot and mouth disease.

A copy of the consultation paper and draft regulations were sent to Assembly Members on 14 September 2006 and they can be viewed on the Assembly Government website.



## Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

**Leanne Wood:** Will the Minister state, for each year since 2000, (a) how many and for which ailments people have received plastic surgery on the NHS and (b) the cost to the NHS of plastic surgery on the NHS? (WAQ47804)

**The Minister for Health and Social Services (Brian Gibbons):** Plastic surgery is carried out by the NHS for a wide range of conditions, including burns, congenital malformations, injuries requiring surgery, traumatic amputations as well as many malignancy associated conditions and other illnesses or conditions requiring plastic surgery.

Information on the number of Welsh residents who received plastic surgery is given in the following table. As more than one diagnosis can be given for each patient it is not possible to provide data centrally on which particular diagnosis the plastic surgery was required.

Welsh residents who received plastic surgery

Year	Number
2000	3,931
2001	4,212
2002	4,075
2003	4,165
2004	4,673
2005	4,834

Source: Patient Episode Database for Wales.

Note: A resident may be included in more than one year.

The cost to the NHS of plastic surgery over the last five years is shown in the table below:

2000-01	£12.592 million
2001-02	£9.394 million
2002-03	£13.890 million
2003-04	£10.602 million
2004-05	£13.303 million

Source: Specialty and programme costs (TFR2) return from NHS trusts in Wales 2000-01 to 2004-05 (latest

available data).

Note: the costs are for patients treated in Welsh NHS trusts only.

**Carl Sargeant:** What is the Welsh Assembly Government doing to meet the mental health needs of older people? (WAQ47833)

**Brian Gibbons:** The national service framework for older people was launched on 20 March. One of the 10 standards concerns mental health in older age, addressing the specific issues faced by older people and their carers. The standard supports the promotion of mental well being in the general population, as well as specific measures to prevent depression and dementia, which are common in old age. The standard aims to improve the identification, treatment and care of older people with these conditions, and the transition of care for adults with an enduring mental illness as they enter old age. This standard complements the adult mental health national service framework, which now covers all adults. It focuses on the issues of dementia and depression.

The Assembly Government is also participating in an inquiry into mental health and well being in later life. This was launched in Wales by the Deputy Minister, John Griffiths. This is a joint initiative between Age Concern and the Mental Health Foundation. It aims to influence national and local policy, planning and practice to secure better mental health for older people; raise the profile of mental health issues for this group; and provide an authoritative basis for future policy, research and service development in the UK. This inquiry published the first part of its work on the promotion of mental health and well being in July. The second part has been commissioned by the inquiry and has recently got underway. It will consider the research evidence on prevention of mental health problems for at-risk and vulnerable groups of older people, and the provision of support and services to those experiencing such problems.

**Michael German:** Will the Minister make a statement on the health of Welsh schoolchildren? (WAQ47836)

**Brian Gibbons:** Health and well being data for Welsh school children are available from two main sources. The most comprehensive is the health behaviour in school-aged children survey, supported by the World Health Organization. The survey provides a range of health and health behaviour indicators for 11 to 15-year-olds in countries across Europe and North America. The most recent international findings from 2001-02, including those for Wales, can be found at <http://www.hbsc.org/publications/reports.html>. Data on those being treated for a range of illnesses and accidents are available from the Welsh health survey for children up to the age of 16. Figures for 2004-05 were published recently and the full report can be found at <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/health-survey2004-05/?lang=en>. In addition to these two national surveys, other data sources are available and have been summarised by the National Public Health Service for Wales in its profile of the health of children and young people in Wales. The full report is available from <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites/documents/368/ChildrenProfile200407.pdf>.

**William Graham:** Will the Minister outline his criteria for monitoring ambulance services in Wales? (WAQ47837)

**Brian Gibbons:** The Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust is subject to the same performance management requirements as other trusts and local health boards in Wales. National targets for NHS Wales are set through the

service and financial framework and these include ones specific to the ambulance trust. Additionally the trust has its own balanced scorecard, which includes a set of indicators to monitor performance.

Responsibility for the day-to-day performance management of the trust rests with the Department for Health and Social Services' north Wales regional office.

The trust also reports its performance against targets for publication on the StatsWales website.

**William Graham:** Will the Minister outline his considerations for the future of Health Commission Wales?  
(WAQ47838)

**Brian Gibbons:** Health Commission Wales is responsible for commissioning specialised healthcare and this complements the role of local health boards, which commission secondary and community services. Health Commission Wales will continue to commission a range of services although the exact nature of its portfolio will be reviewed as commissioning arrangements develop. Its evolving role will be actively reviewed in the context of the proposed new commissioning guidance which is due to be issued soon.

**Eleanor Burnham:** Will the Minister make a statement on the provision of renal treatment in Wales?  
(WAQ47839)

**Brian Gibbons:** Prompt access to high-quality renal services is an integral part of the Assembly Government's strategy for world-class health services.

We are developing the renal services national service framework to improve the quality of care for those with or at risk of renal disease. We have established the all-Wales renal advisory group, which will develop programmes of action at a national level to support the delivery of the national service framework standards.

**Karen Sinclair:** Will the Minister make a statement on the drugs approval process in Wales? (WAQ47840)

**Brian Gibbons:** The all-Wales medicines strategy group provides me with advice on strategic medicines management and prescribing. Their current mechanism for the review of high cost medicines has been in place for three years and has provided considerable support to the work of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence in England and Wales.

In order to improve the system further I have recently approved a bid from the all-Wales medicines strategy group to develop structures and procedures for the assessment of specific groups of medicines in addition to the high-cost medicines already covered by the present process. One such group is the anti-cancer agents. Treatments for cardiovascular disease will also be considered in this way. This will enable treatment networks in Wales to adopt a harmonised approach to the availability of medicines in order to develop national management plans and pathways of care. The new system will expand the capacity of the drugs approval process and provide NHS Wales with a prompt appraisal of a total of 32 cancer, cardiac and high costing drugs per annum.

**Jonathan Morgan:** What assessment has the Minister made of the charges levied on patients using telephones in NHS hospitals? (WAQ47841)

**Brian Gibbons:** No assessment has been made with respect to the charges levied to patients using telephone services during their stay in hospital. Wales has made no statutory commitment to establish bedside telephony services and it remains a matter for individual NHS trusts in Wales whether such systems are introduced.

**Nick Bourne:** Will the Minister make a statement on reducing the debts of local health boards across Mid and West Wales? (WAQ47843)

**Brian Gibbons:** The financial performance of all NHS bodies is monitored on a monthly basis by the Department for Health and Social Services. The regional offices, which are responsible for monitoring performance of individual NHS bodies, are in regular discussion with those bodies to ensure that financial pressures are fully understood and they are currently working with NHS bodies on their recovery plans and on the financial pressures being faced in 2006-07.

The Department for Health and Social Services, through its regional offices, provides substantial support to NHS bodies facing financial difficulties. However each body is statutorily responsible for ensuring that it manages within its financial resources and all NHS bodies must ensure that this is achieved.

The latest NHS position with regard to deficits, the 2006-07 outlook and prospects for 2007-08 were discussed in a bilateral meeting with the Finance Minister in May 2006 as part of the budget planning round. The figures for 2006-07 and beyond are only indicative at present and the regional offices and individual NHS bodies are working to identify how all financial pressures and risk will be addressed to ensure that a balanced position is achieved.

The Assembly is committed to ensuring that the past NHS deficit culture is avoided. There are financial pressures facing NHS bodies in 2006-07 that need to be managed. 'Designed for Life' identifies the need to modernise NHS services across Wales and it is through this strategy, assisted by the significantly increased capital investment funds, that the NHS will ensure that significant improvements are made to clinical services and the financial position.

**Nick Bourne:** Will the Minister update us on the Welsh Assembly Government's policies for reducing waiting times in Wales? (WAQ47844)

**Brian Gibbons:** One of our prime aims is to improve patient access and continue to reduce waiting times. The current target in Wales is that by March 2007 no-one should wait more than eight months for a first out-patient appointment or eight months for in-patient/day-case treatment.

12 months is the current maximum target waiting time and the latest published waiting times for the end of July 2006 show that continued Assembly investment in our health service, and the hard work of NHS staff, has resulted in major reductions in waiting times since last year.

At the end of July 2006, there were no patients waiting over 12 months for in-patient or day-case treatment, a reduction of 1,170 from July 2005. Only 290 patients have been waiting over 12 months for a first out-patient appointment, a reduction of 13,269 over the year from July 2005.

At the same date, over 78 per cent of patients on the in-patient/day-case waiting list and over 83 per cent on the out-patient waiting list have been waiting for less than six months.

By December 2009, the target total wait from GP referral to treatment—including waits for diagnostic tests and therapies—will be a total of 26 weeks.

We are concentrating on implementing new ways of working that will deliver long-term, sustainable benefit for patients. As part of the performance management arrangements for the NHS in Wales, a delivery and support unit has been established. The unit will work with the three regional offices in carrying out the performance management of those NHS organisations which either need support to achieve these targets set by the Welsh Assembly Government, or which may have not managed to achieve a specific target.

**Irene James:** What action is the Welsh Assembly Government taking to reduce the level of sexually transmitted diseases among teenagers in Wales? (WAQ47876)

**Brian Gibbons:** The Assembly Government runs an ongoing sexually transmitted infection prevention campaign targeting teenagers and young adults. Posters and information leaflets are displayed in the toilets of pubs, clubs, universities and colleges, youth clubs and various healthcare settings throughout Wales. A modernisation programme of sexual health services aims to ensure accessible sexual health advice for young people.

**Leanne Wood:** Will the Minister list all the NHS capital projects funded by the private finance initiative or public private partnerships since 2003, including the details of the dates on which contracts were awarded, the cost of the contracts to the NHS and the project delivered? (WAQ47877)

**Brian Gibbons:** No public-private partnership schemes with a contract start date since 2003 have been disclosed. The private finance initiative has funded two NHS Wales schemes since 2003. Details are included within each NHS trust's annual published accounts for 2005-06 and extracts are set out below:

	<b>Conwy and Denbighshire: Renal Unit</b>	<b>North Glamorgan: Energy Scheme</b>
Total cost (£'000)	1,673	995
Contract start date	September 2004	April 2004

**Leanne Wood:** Will the Minister state the total value of all NHS contracts awarded to the private sector for each year since 1999? (WAQ47878)

**Brian Gibbons:** This information is not collected centrally.

**Nick Bourne:** Will the Minister make a statement on the import of long-grain rice from the United States following the discovery of LLRICE601 in some supplies? (WAQ47881)

**Nick Bourne:** What are the potential implications for public health in Wales of the discovery of LLRICE601 in exports of long-grain rice from the United States? (WAQ47886)

**Brian Gibbons:** I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that all imports of long grain rice from the United States of America to any EC country should arrive with certification showing it to be free of GM rice LLRICE601. Any consignments that arrive without certification are being held at ports until they can be certified to be free of LLRICE601. The European Commission is leading discussions with the US authorities to ensure that no further products containing unauthorised GM material are exported to Europe. In addition to this the Food Standards Agency is commissioning a survey of American long grain rice in the UK at rice mills, to ensure that any rice that was imported before the incident came to light is free from the unauthorised GM rice.

The Agency sought urgent advice from members of the UK independent expert committee that advises Government on GM food safety issues. They advised that, based on the current evidence, the presence of low levels of this GM material in the food supply is not a safety concern.

The European Food Safety Authority has recently published its detailed opinion on LLRICE601. Its expert panel concluded that the consumption of long grain rice containing trace levels of LLRICE601 is not likely to pose an imminent safety concern to humans or animals.

The European Commission has indicated that it will convene a further meeting with Member States to re-evaluate the situation in light of EFSA's opinion and as more monitoring data from member states becomes available.

**Lisa Francis:** Would the Minister make a statement on the rights of patients in Conwy to see an NHS dentist? (WAQ47888)

**Lisa Francis:** What options are available to dental patients unable to register with an NHS dentist? (WAQ47891)

**Lisa Francis:** Would the Minister making a statement on availability of NHS dentists in Conwy? (WAQ47889)

**Brian Gibbons:** The treatment offered under the NHS must be clinically necessary to establish and maintain the oral health of a patient. Dental professionals are responsible for putting the patients' interests first and acting to protect them while respecting their dignity and choices.

The provision and level of all NHS services is a matter for the individual local health board, which is responsible for planning and prioritising services within their surrounding area. The LHBs' new commissioning role following the introduction of the new dental contract allows them the ability to shape and grow the service to meet the needs of the local population. If anyone needs to find a dentist who provides NHS care then they should contact their LHB as they are better placed to inform their residents of the level and location of service provision. The LHB will also be able to provide details on where patients can access out of hours and emergency dental treatment if they are not registered for NHS dental treatment.

**Lisa Francis:** Would the Minister make a statement on the postcode lottery in provision for dental patients in Conwy? (WAQ47890)

**Brian Gibbons:** I am not aware of any restrictions on people obtaining NHS dental treatment in the Conwy area dependent on factors such as where they reside. To seek dental services outside a resident's LHB is not uncommon as many patients access treatment where they work or shop as it is more convenient.

The LHBs, as local commissioners, can elect to give priority to improving dental access for patients in their area as they expand access to routine dental care. However, priority access for particular groups of patients, such as their own residents, would be on a temporary basis while the services are expanded.

**Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Will the Minister detail what funding has been provided to new practices in Carmarthenshire since the development of the new dental contract, and what funding is currently available for the establishment of new practices? (WAQ47905)

**Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Will the Minister detail what funding has (a) been made available, and (b) spent) for (i) general dental services, (ii) personal dental services since March 2006 for Carmarthenshire? (WAQ47906)

**Brian Gibbons:** LHBs were issued with dental budgets, which included an element for growth, for 2006-07 in April. This funding was matched with an additional investment in the new contract of £30 million from 2006-07. This represents an increase of the net spend in dentistry of over 89 per cent since the Assembly was established in 1999.

£3 million of the additional £30 million investment was allocated to improve access to NHS dentistry, in areas where access is still difficult. Carmarthen LHB has submitted a proposal for its share of the funding and the full amount of £375,085 which has now been released. These additional resources are ring-fenced for NHS dental services and will enable the LHBs in the area to purchase additional dental services through the local commissioning arrangements to reflect local needs and priorities.

**Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Will the Minister provide a timetable for the implementation of the rural elements of the pharmacy contract? (WAQ47908)

**Brian Gibbons:** The pharmacy contract is regularly reviewed on both a national and local level. I remain committed to ensuring that rural areas are well served by their health professionals and officials are currently working up proposals taking into account the responses to the consultation on 'control of entry' which will ensure that this continues to happen.

### **Questions to the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration**

**Leanne Wood:** Further to WAQ47692, will the Minister a) state the outcome of each study listed, b) publish any reports produced from the studies listed and c) detail the terms of reference of each study? (WAQ47805)

**The Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration (Edwina Hart):** The information that you require is contained in the table that is published as further information to this file.

**William Graham:** Will the Minister outline discussions held with the UK Government concerning the security of prisons in Wales? (WAQ47811)

**Edwina Hart:** I have been in correspondence with Gerry Sutcliffe, Secretary of State for Criminal Justice and Offender Management, in relation to recent incidents at Prescoed. I asked him about the recent abscondments, and whether the Home Office would review its policy to transfer potentially dangerous offenders to open prisons. He assured me that such prisoners would only be transferred after careful scrutiny and on the specific recommendation of the parole board. The Home Office will not be reviewing this policy but I have asked to be kept informed of the inquiry into the recent escape from Prescoed.

**Carl Sargeant:** Will the Minister make a statement on the Welsh Assembly Government's progress towards its aim of eradicating child poverty? (WAQ47921)

**Edwina Hart:** We have a significant number of policies and programmes in place across the Assembly Government aimed at combating child poverty. My Deputy Minister has developed a child poverty implementation plan that comprises a range of general and specific policy proposals, such as child-poverty proofing all new Assembly Government initiatives, family-income maximisation and recommendations on summer holiday activities and play provision. I also propose to provide a paper to Cabinet shortly on a range of cross-cutting targets and milestones to monitor and measure progress towards our aim of eradicating child poverty in Wales by 2020.

**John Griffiths:** Will the Minister make a statement on progress in addressing alcohol and drug abuse in Wales? (WAQ47923)

**Edwina Hart:** Last week I provided the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee with my fourth substance misuse annual report. This is available on the intranet.

**William Graham:** Will the Minister outline this Assembly's strategy to tackle alcohol abuse? (WAQ47932)

**Edwina Hart:** Last week I provided the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee with my fourth substance misuse annual report. As well as progress to date, it also included details of some of the future work that is planned. The report is available on the intranet.

**Rosemary Butler:** What is the Welsh Assembly Government doing to help prevent drug and alcohol abuse in Wales? (WAQ47935)

**Edwina Hart:** Last week I provided the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee with my fourth substance misuse annual report. This is available on the intranet.



**Eleanor Burnham:** Will the Minister make a statement on levels of indebtedness in Wales (WAQ47937)

**Edwina Hart:** I am concerned about the levels of personal over-indebtedness particularly in our poorest communities. An analysis of credit use in Wales undertaken by Welsh Consumer Council in December 2003 found that more households in Wales (57 per cent) had active credit commitments than the British average (47 per cent). Furthermore, 60 per cent of Welsh households had at that time been struggling to either avoid or manage arrears for six months or more. These findings necessitated the Deputy Minister's review of over-indebtedness. A statement made on the delivery of recommendations outlined in the review will be made to Social Justice and Regeneration Committee on 19 October.