

Written Questions answered between 26 June and 3 July 2003

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

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

Contents

2	Questions to the First Minister
3	Questions to the Minister for Economic Development and Transport
10	Questions to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning
11	Questions to the Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside
19	Questions to the Finance Minister
21	Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services
25	Questions to the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration

Questions to the First Minister

Subordinate Legislation

David Melding: During the National Assembly's first term (1999-2003), how many pieces of Assembly subordinate legislation were made and how many of these Orders were dealt with via the full procedure, the standard procedure, the accelerated procedure, and the executive procedure? (WAQ26569)
Transferred for answer by the Business Minister.

The Business Minister (Karen Sinclair): The First Minister has asked me to respond on his behalf. Between 1 July 1999 and 30 April 2003, a total of 697 Assembly general statutory instruments were made, broken down by the four categories of general legislation procedure used:

Standard	185
Accelerated	209
Extended	12
Executive	291 (*)

* Includes 85 statutory instruments made by the Assembly in connection with the tightening and subsequent relaxation of animal health controls, in response to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

For the purposes of clarification, the key steps under each of the four business handling procedures are described below.

Standard Procedure

- Notification of draft Order to Members, in accordance with Standing Order No. 22.1;
- Consideration by the Business Committee of draft Order, explanatory memorandum and any regulatory appraisal(**), and determination by the Deputy Presiding Officer in accordance with Standing Order No. 22.5;
- Consideration and submission of report to Assembly by the Legislation Committee in accordance with section 66(5) of the Government of Wales Act 1998 and Standing Order No. 22.10; and
- Consideration in Plenary, under section 66(2) of the Government of Wales Act 1998 and Standing Order Nos. 22.14 to 22.24 with debate prior to a vote.

Accelerated Procedure

- Notification of draft Order to Members, in accordance with Standing Order No. 22.1;
- Consideration by the Business Committee of draft Order, explanatory memorandum and any regulatory appraisal(**), and determination by the Deputy Presiding Officer in accordance with Standing Order No. 22.5;
- Consideration and submission of report to the Assembly by the Legislation Committee, in accordance with section 66(5) of the Government of Wales Act 1998 and Standing Order No. 22.10; and
- Consideration in Plenary under section 66(2) of the Government of Wales Act 1998 and Standing Order No. 22.25 without debate prior to a vote.

Extended Procedure (with formal Subject Committee scrutiny)

- Notification of draft Order to Members, in accordance with Standing Order 22.1;
- Consideration by the Business Committee of draft Order, explanatory memorandum and any regulatory appraisal(**), and determination by the Deputy Presiding Officer in accordance with Standing Order No. 22.5;
- Formal reference to and consideration of the draft SI by subject committee in accordance with Standing Order Nos. 22.6 and 22.7;

- Consideration and submission of report to the Assembly by the Legislation Committee in accordance with section 66(5)(a) of the Government of Wales Act 1998 and Standing Order No. 22.10. Consideration in Plenary under section 66(2) of the Government of Wales Act 1998 and Standing Order Nos. 22.14 to 22.24 with debate prior to a vote.

Executive Procedure (Procedural Disapplication)

- Formal determination by the Cabinet, under the provisions of section 67(1) of the Government of Wales Act 1998, and Standing Order No. 22.27 that, in the particular circumstances, it is not reasonably practicable to comply with any of the relevant procedural requirements in relation to the subordinate legislation;
- Standing Order No. 22.28 provides for the Legislation Committee's consideration and report to the Assembly in cases where an Order is made without prior Legislation Committee consideration and report; and
- In cases where an Order is made without the draft being approved by resolution of the Assembly beforehand, section 67(3) of the Government of Wales Act 1998 and Standing Order No. 22.29 provide for any Assembly Member to table a motion (within 40 working days of the date on which the Order is made) that the Order be revoked.

** regulatory appraisal prepared in accordance with section 65 of the Government of Wales Act 1998 and Standing Order No. 22.2.

Questions to the Minister for Economic Development and Transport

Railway Link to the A55

Brynle Williams: What analysis has the Minister made of the cost of any form of railway link to the A55? (WAQ26350)

The Minister for Economic Development and Transport (Andrew Davies): I am not aware of any rail proposals affecting the A55, but I will reply further if specific information can be given.

Electrified Railway Link from Crewe to Holyhead

Brynle Williams: Would the Minister make a statement on any plans or policies to extend an electrified railway link from Crewe to Holyhead? (WAQ26351)

Andrew Davies: Electrification of the north coast main line is one of the long-term aims of the Assembly Government. However, such works have been estimated to cost in excess of £235 million and are not believed to offer value for money, given the marginal performance improvement that is likely over and above existing investment plans. Electrification of the line is also not a priority for investment for Network Rail.

While electric trains have traditionally had better acceleration than diesel trains (essential for reducing journey time where the station spacings are already close on the line), with recent developments in technology, the acceleration of the new diesel rolling stock represents strong competition.

Line speed improvements made to the north coast main line, supported with Welsh Assembly grant, mean that Virgin Trains and First North Western Trains are now able to make best use of the new faster diesel traction rolling stock that they have bought for this route. As part of the Strategic Rail Authority's west coast route modernisation project, the number of trains each way from London Euston to Holyhead stations will increase from three to five daily from winter 2004. The Assembly Government has been pressing strongly for this announcement, given all the certainties about the new services to north Wales and the timing of their introduction.

Whilst I welcome this improvement on the current level of service, I will be continuing to press the Strategic Rail Authority and operators Virgin Trains to deliver the original planned timetable of seven trains per day in each direction. In the meantime, I also look forward to the SRA's announcement on the successful bidder for the Wales and Borders single rail franchise, which will deal with rail services across Wales.

Capacity of the A55

Brynle Williams: Would the Minister make a statement on the capacity of the A55 in comparison to usage? (WAQ26352)

Andrew Davies: The usage of the A55 varies along its length and during different times of the day and year. Over the majority of its length, the usage is below the capacity.

The PFI Section of the A55

Brynle Williams: What is the estimated annual cost to the public purse of the private finance initiative section of the A55? (WAQ26354)

Andrew Davies: The cost during the last financial year (2002-03) was £16 million.

The Welsh Development Agency

Alun Cairns: What discussions has the Minister had with the Welsh Development Agency in relation to the proper use of public funds? (WAQ26534)

Andrew Davies: I have regular meetings with the WDA at which we discuss a wide range of issues. The Permanent Secretary has appointed the chief executive as accounting officer of the WDA and also meets the chief executives of Assembly sponsored public bodies regularly. The Permanent Secretary also wrote recently to all ASPB accounting officers reaffirming the need for them to ensure regularity, propriety, and good value for money in the conduct of their business.

Road Safety on Trunk Roads

Nick Bourne: What measures are being taken to promote road safety on trunk roads in mid Wales? (WAQ26535)

Andrew Davies: My officials work with the Mid-Wales Trunk Road Agency to maintain and improve the trunk road network to promote its safe and efficient use by all users. Each year, a large number of schemes are pursued, ranging from minor footway improvements and speed limit changes, carried out under the rural town and village initiative, to larger road improvements, such as those listed in our trunk road forward programme 2002.

Repair and upgrade schemes occupy the middle ground, such as at Esgairdraenllwyn Bends on the A483, which has been the site of single way working under traffic lights for several years. A contract has just been awarded here and work will be starting within the next few weeks.

We also work in partnership with other bodies such as the police in our trunk road safety working group, which seeks to identify solutions to road safety problems.

Rail Services in West Wales

Nick Bourne: Will the Minister make a statement on the provision of rail services in west Wales? (WAQ26536)

Andrew Davies: The former Minister for Environment, Sue Essex AM, met all the shortlisted bidders for the Wales and Borders franchise and used that opportunity to press for improved train services, including those to west Wales. I am committed to securing an efficient and reliable rail service for Wales over the lifetime of the franchise. These are key components of our aspirations for the franchise, which we have also made clear to the Strategic Rail Authority. A decision by the SRA on the successful bidder for the franchise is expected shortly, with implementation expected by November 2003.

Free Bus Pass (Residency Criteria for Entitlement)

Ann Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the residency criteria for entitlement to a free bus pass? (WAQ26537)

Andrew Davies: Local authorities are responsible for determining applicants' entitlement through residency, and age or disability. A working group, comprising local authority and bus operator members, is overseeing the administration of the scheme in Wales. Under the auspices of this group, authorities are seeking to develop common eligibility criteria in respect of residency that can be commended as best practice throughout Wales.

Road Safety Strategy

Ann Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the road safety strategy for Wales? (WAQ26538)

Andrew Davies: The Welsh road safety forum has met to monitor progress of the strategy's action commitments and has agreed sub-groups to examine child safety and speed management in detail. To help local authorities deliver the aims and objectives outlined in the strategy, the Welsh Assembly Government has continued funding, through the local road safety grant, of £6,086 million for 2003-04.

Congestion Charging

Jenny Randerson: Will the Minister make a statement on congestion charging in Wales? (WAQ26539)

Andrew Davies: Local authorities may introduce charging schemes, either individually or jointly, in respect of local roads. A local charging scheme may only be imposed if it helps facilitate the policies within authorities' local transport plans. No local authorities in Wales included plans for charging in their local transport plans. Although Cardiff is now considering this as part of its long-term thinking, the Assembly Government will need to confirm any charging scheme before it may be implemented.

The Assembly Government is funding significant bus and rail improvements so that travellers have an opportunity to leave their cars at home. Developments such as park-and-ride schemes and dedicated bus lanes, underpinned by quality bus partnerships agreed between local authorities and bus operators, are essential before any serious thought is given to introducing charging.

Mail Distribution via the Rail Network

Jenny Randerson: Will the Minister make a statement on the use of the rail network for mail distribution? (WAQ26540)

Andrew Davies: As part of a strategic and logistical overhaul of its UK-wide postal distribution network, Royal Mail announced that it is to cease use of rail services in the delivery of all first and second-class mail. The decision was reached after protracted negotiations between Royal Mail and rail freight operator

English, Welsh and Scottish Railways. I regret the loss of business for the rail-freight sector, but this is purely a commercial decision for the Royal Mail and I cannot intervene.

Around 90 jobs in Wales could be affected by the decision. That figure encompasses 22 jobs at Royal Mail sites in Cardiff and 25 in Swansea, with up to a further 40 jobs with English, Welsh and Scottish Railways. The Royal Mail hopes that compulsory redundancies will be unnecessary and that it will be able to offer affected employees either redeployment or early redundancy settlements.

It is estimated that switching mail from rail to road will add 47 lorry journeys and 3,475 lorry miles per day to the road network in south Wales, which is a small proportion of the total average lorry journeys on the M4 from south Wales of 788,400 per day. The Royal Mail has indicated that it is committed to mitigating the environmental impact of increased road usage through more efficient use of its road vehicles. Planned changes in its multi-modal transport network across the UK over the next year are expected to lead to a one-off reduction of 35 per cent in carbon dioxide emissions, from over 900,000 kg per day to under 600,000 kg per day. An alternative vehicle technology strategy has now been integrated into the Royal Mail's wider transport strategy. As a result, it will increase the proportion of electric, liquefied petroleum gas and compressed natural gas vehicles in its fleet as they become due for replacement.

While the decision to switch mail from rail to road is disappointing, I understand that the Royal Mail has not ruled out a return to rail for some elements of the mail distribution network in future.

Network Rail

Peter Law: What discussions has the Minister had with Network Rail about the rail network in Wales? (WAQ26541)

Andrew Davies: None as yet. However, I plan to meet with Ian McAllister, Network Rail's chairman shortly to discuss the Welsh rail network. This will provide me with an opportunity to reinforce the Assembly Government's commitment to the reopening of the Ebbw valley and the Vale of Glamorgan railway lines for passenger use and other developments.

Economic Inactivity in the Rhondda

Leighton Andrews: Will the Minister make a statement on the level of economic inactivity in the Rhondda? (WAQ26542)

Andrew Davies: According to the Labour Force Survey, 31.7 per cent of the working age population in Rhondda Cynon Taf was classified as economically inactive in 2001, compared with 26.6 per cent for Wales as a whole. More recent statistics are available for the claimant count. The claimant count in Rhondda Cynon Taf in May 2003 represented 2.5 per cent of the working age population (compared with 2.6 per cent for Wales as a whole). The claimant count level in the Rhondda has fallen by 43 per cent since May 1999 (compared with a 31 per cent drop for Wales as a whole).

Philips LG Factory in Newport

William Graham: Will the Minister make a statement concerning the possible future uses of the Philips LG factory in Newport? (WAQ26543)

Andrew Davies: At this point, the company still has contractual obligations and production will continue at the plant until late August 2003, after which the plant will be decommissioned. Realistically, the building will not be available for sale until late this year and, as such, it is too early to say what future use may be made of the factory.

European Funding Schemes

Jonathan Morgan: How many businesses in Cardiff have succeeded in gaining support through European funding schemes? (WAQ26546)

Andrew Davies: A breakdown of information is unavailable in this format. However, businesses in Cardiff can benefit from the Objective 2 (and transitional) and Objective 3 programmes directly and indirectly. For example, a number of Objective 2 intermediary schemes are run by the Prince's Trust, the Welsh Development Agency and Cardiff County Council, which will directly benefit businesses in the form of grant schemes, business advice and support, information and communications technology and environmental management systems.

Objective 1 Programme (Jobs Created)

Jonathan Morgan: How many jobs have been created since the start of the Objective 1 programme in the public sector and the private sector? (WAQ26547)

Andrew Davies: Although information is collected on jobs created by the Objective 1 programme, it is not broken down by sector. To date, some 770 projects have been approved and these have reported the creation of 10,500 gross new jobs.

Winter Maintenance of Roads

Mick Bates: What plans does the Minister have to bring forward secondary legislation on the winter maintenance of roads, such as has been passed in Scotland? (WAQ26554)

Andrew Davies: Inquiries of the Scottish Executive have not revealed any recent secondary legislation in Scotland relating to winter maintenance of roads. A clause in the Railways and Transport Safety Bill currently proceeding through Parliament, which will apply generally in the UK (with certain exceptions in Scotland and Northern Ireland), includes the following:

‘After section 41(1) of the Highways Act 1980 (c.66) (duty of highway authority to maintain highway) insert—

“(1A) In particular, a highway authority is under a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage along a highway is not endangered by snow or ice”.’

The above clause mirrors the current duty in Scotland applied by section 34 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984.

Road Improvements on the A458

Mick Bates: Will the Minister make a statement on the progress made with road improvements on the A458 between Wales and the border? (WAQ26555)

Andrew Davies: The A458 Buttington Cross to Middletown scheme is in phase 3 of the trunk road forward programme published in March 2002. This means that it is high ranking but needs further studies, and is unlikely to proceed before April 2008. The scheme has now been extended over the border to Wollaston Cross in Shropshire. In April, we awarded a consultancy commission to Symonds Group Ltd to investigate route options with a view to announcing a preferred route. We expect to be able to do this next year. Improvements to this trunk road between Sylfaen and Cyfronydd are also in phase 3 of the forward programme. In the interim, traffic-calming measures and speed limits have been introduced on the A458 under the town and village initiative. We are also considering upgrading a short section between Garreg Bank and Middletown.

The Four Crosses Bypass

Mick Bates: Will the Minister make a statement on the progress made with the Four Crosses bypass in Montgomeryshire, scheduled for 2008? (WAQ26556)

Andrew Davies: Preliminary investigations in preparation for the Four Crosses bypass are continuing. There is a significant amount of vital environmental work to be done before an acceptable scheme can be drawn up. The Mid-Wales Trunk Road Agency, as our design agents, will shortly be starting work on the ecological surveys needed for the environmental statement. That will then be followed by a period of design work leading to the preparation and publication of the draft statutory orders required for the scheme. If objections to the orders were made, a public inquiry would be needed before such objections could be confirmed and before further work on the scheme could be undertaken. A start on the works is unlikely before 2008, as indicated in the trunk road forward programme.

Special Highways Grants

Mick Bates: Will the Minister make a statement on whether there are any plans to introduce another special highways grant to help authorities with resurfacing? (WAQ26557)

Andrew Davies: Repairing and maintaining local roads is a matter for local highway authorities. Resources are provided through the local government settlement and it is for local authorities to determine their own priorities. However, in recognition of the backlog in such work and the deteriorating state of some county roads, a special grant of £25 million was made available over two years (2001-02, 2002-03) for repairs over and above those already planned for transport corridors. There are no current plans to allocate resources in future years.

Special Needs of the Blind and Partially Sighted

Brynle Williams: What measures are being taken to encourage businesses and service providers to encompass the special needs of the blind and the partially sighted in building websites, as is required by legislation? (WAQ26561)

Andrew Davies: As you are aware, the Welsh Assembly Government is committed to social inclusion and equality of opportunity, and the Assembly has already undertaken a great deal of work. The implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was an important milestone in securing better rights for disabled people. Although, the Assembly does not have policy responsibility for the Disability Discrimination Act, that does not prevent the Assembly from promoting and encouraging exemplary practice throughout Wales. That is why, in 2002, the Assembly's equality policy unit, working in partnership with the Disability Rights Commission and Disability Wales, organised four seminars for public bodies and service providers across Wales, with the aim of raising awareness of the new legal duties. Those conferences demonstrated the unique partnership of Government, statutory bodies, the voluntary sector and private enterprise working together for the benefit of the people of Wales.

Section 21 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was introduced on 1 October 1999, placing a duty on service providers to make information about their services accessible to blind and partially sighted people. Businesses want to be successful and therefore it makes good business sense to cater for all customers, including the disabled, by ensuring that websites are accessible to all. That can result in increased revenues and profits and, at the same time, avoid the possibility of being involved in a lawsuit. Given that there are 8.5 million people in the UK with some level of disability, ignoring this issue could mean a loss of this potential revenue.

The Welsh Assembly Government supports a number of programmes that help to raise the awareness of the benefits of information and communications technology to businesses and which offer support and advice on how best to implement eBusiness solutions. For example, over 90 ICT advisers deliver the Objective 1-funded Opportunity Wales programme. These advisers have recently been attending the

Making Information Technology Accessible workshops on best practice web design for disabled visitors. Developed in conjunction with the Cardiff Business School, the eCommerce Innovation Centre and the University of Dundee, MITA Cymru's workshops train website designers to create or modify websites for businesses to make them available to people with sight loss (to include an audio option), deafness (where British Sign Language is the first language), learning difficulties and so forth. The workshops are unique within the UK, if not globally. Some charities have previously worked on making websites accessible for their client group but this has not applied across all disabilities. MITA Cymru hopes to expand its training course to all web designers in Wales, so that we are at the cutting edge of accessible websites and e-commerce.

Hallmarking Precious Metals

Nick Bourne: Will the Minister make a statement on whether there are any proposals by the European Union that would affect the hallmarking of precious metals? (WAQ26593)

Andrew Davies: Proposals for a hallmarking directive, allowing the free movement of precious metal products within the European Union internal market, were made in 1993. The proposals sought to protect consumers from purchasing substandard goods, by introducing proper verification procedures across the EU. The British hallmark is one of three certification procedures allowed under the draft proposals. Contrary to recent reports, there is no EU directive that threatens to ban the British hallmark.

Royal Mail

Peter Law: What discussions has the Minister had with the Royal Mail regarding the transport of mail? (WAQ26663)

Andrew Davies: As part of a strategic and logistical overhaul of its UK-wide postal distribution network, Royal Mail announced that it is to cease using rail services in the delivery of all first and second-class mail. The decision was reached after protracted negotiations between the Royal Mail and rail freight operator English, Welsh and Scottish Railways. I regret the loss of business for the rail-freight sector, but this is purely a commercial decision for the Royal Mail and I cannot intervene.

Cardiff to Ebbw Vale Rail Link

Laura Anne Jones: Would the Minister make a statement on the progress of the Cardiff to Ebbw Vale rail link? (WAQ26667)

Andrew Davies: We remain absolutely committed to ensuring that the Ebbw valley line reopens, and we will do all that we can to assist this process in the earliest possible timeframe. The overall objective is to allow passenger services to commence in 2005. Stage 1 would provide one train per hour between Ebbw Vale Parkway and Cardiff Central by 2005. Stage 2 would add one train per hour between Ebbw Vale Parkway and Newport by 2009, or earlier if practicable.

The delivery of a rail passenger service is a key facet of the regeneration of Ebbw Vale, opening up opportunities for people to seek jobs while still living in their communities. We have committed to meet the full capital costs of the project and to provide revenue funding to operate the stage 1 Ebbw Vale to Cardiff train service for its first three years. There is also a bid for Objective 1 support.

Concessionary Fares for Older People

Lisa Francis: What is the cost of concessionary fares for older people to the Welsh Assembly Government? (WAQ26807)

Lisa Francis: What is the cost of concessionary fares for older people to the 22 local authorities? (WAQ26808)

Andrew Davies: We provided £24.1 million to local authorities in 2002-03 to fund the first year of our mandatory scheme guaranteeing free travel for elderly and disabled people on local bus services. In 2003-04, the allocations total £33 million. The Welsh Local Government Association has confirmed that these allocations meet in full the costs that it has estimated will accrue to authorities. In addition, local authorities have discretionary powers to operate other concessionary travel schemes and receive unhypothecated sums for those through the annual revenue settlement.

Questions to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

LEA Funding Formula

Jonathan Morgan: What is the timetable for the Minister's review of the use of the funding formula by local education authorities? (WAQ26548)

Jonathan Morgan: Does the Minister intend issuing further guidance or regulations on the use of 'deprivation' as a criteria within the funding formula used to allocate money to schools? (WAQ26549)

The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning (Jane Davidson): Consultation on replacing the Financing of Maintained Schools Regulations 1999 (as amended) ended on 13 June 2003. We are currently evaluating the responses. Draft regulations prepared in light of comments received will be the subject of further consultation in July, with a view to new regulations coming into force for the financial year 2004-05.

The question of whether each local authority should be required to include a deprivation factor in its local formula for distributing resources to schools was raised as a specific issue in the consultation. The further consultation on the draft regulations will take account of the responses received.

Children Taking Insulin Injections at School

Leighton Andrews: What provision is available for children needing to take insulin injections in schools in the Rhondda Cynon Taf area? (WAQ26560)

Jane Davidson: 'Supporting Pupils with Medical Needs: a Good Practice Guide' was issued to schools and local education authorities in 1997. This is designed to help schools to draw up policies on managing medication and put in place effective arrangements for individual pupils through healthcare plans. Welsh Office Circular 34/97 (Welsh Health Circular 97/31) sets out the legal framework for the health and safety of pupils and school staff. Governing bodies need to formulate their own arrangements in light of the school's statutory responsibilities. The guidance provides some basic information about diabetes, but is not designed to give detailed medical advice. The needs of individual pupils must be separately assessed.

School Transport Policy

Alun Cairns: What review, if any, is the Minister conducting into school transport policy? (WAQ26576)

Jane Davidson: There is no specific review of school transport underway but a number of Ministers have an interest in the subject. Against this background, and in light of current concerns, the Cabinet sub-committee on children and young people is looking at the issue. The Education and Lifelong Learning Committee is also considering an investigation into school transport. At its meeting on 18 June, the Committee decided to look into the possibility of joint work with the Economic Development and Transport Committee and the Local Government Committee.

Post of Director of Finance at ELWa

Mike German: When will the post of director of finance at ELWa be filled on a permanent basis? (WAQ26594)

Mike German: Will the Minister make a statement on whether the present director of finance at ELWa is on a temporary promotion from the post of head of internal audit? (WAQ26595)

Mike German: Can the Minister make a statement on whether the post of director of finance at ELWa is held on a permanent basis? (WAQ26596)

Jane Davidson: I can confirm that the present director of finance at the National Council—ELWa is on temporary promotion from the post of head of internal audit. Following the decision to appoint full-time chief executives and directors of finance to the National Council—ELWa and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, the then director of finance opted to move to full-time employment with HEFCW. The National Council—ELWa rightly looked first to its existing resources in seeking a suitable candidate to backfill the director of finance post on a temporary basis. It decided that the head of internal audit had the best range of skills and experience to fill the vacancy while the process of recruiting a permanent replacement was underway. I understand that vacancies for senior posts at the council will be advertised later this month.

Compensation for HE Institutions (Increased Pension Costs)

John Marek: What plans does the Minister have to compensate higher education institutions that were formerly under local education authorities for the increased pension costs that have arisen over the last 12 months, and can she give an assurance that these higher education institutions will be compensated at the same rate as other further education institutions? (WAQ26920)

Jane Davidson: I can give assurance that the Welsh higher education institutions that were formerly under the auspices of local education authorities will be compensated for increased pension costs at the same rate as further education institutions in Wales. The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales has already received the first tranche of funding to cover some of the cost, and the remainder will be provided within this financial year.

Questions to the Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside

Compulsory Sheep Dipping

Brynle Williams: Would the Minister consider the reintroduction of compulsory sheep dipping to combat the increase in scab? (WAQ26545)

The Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside (Carwyn Jones): The Sheep Scab Order 1997 already requires owners of sheep that are visibly affected with scab to treat them and all other sheep in the flock as soon as is practicable. Veterinary advice is that proper treatments, correctly applied, are effective in limiting the scale of infection and spread. Local authorities can also assist farmers in dealing with confirmed sheep scab on common land by ordering the clearance of the commons and requiring that sheep be treated for scab before they are permitted to return.

The Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations

Glyn Davies: How many instances of legal action have been taken against individuals for not complying with the environmental impact assessment regulations for the use of uncultivated land and semi-natural areas for intensive agricultural purposes? (WAQ26562)

Glyn Davies: How many instances of enforcement actions have been taken to comply with the environmental impact assessment regulations for the use of uncultivated land and semi-natural areas for intensive agricultural purposes? (WAQ26563)

Glyn Davies: How many applications under the environmental impact assessment regulations for the use of uncultivated land and semi-natural areas for intensive agricultural purposes have been refused? (WAQ26564)

Glyn Davies: How many applications have there been to carry out treatment of land under the environmental impact assessment regulations for the use of uncultivated land and semi-natural areas for intensive agricultural purposes? (WAQ26565)

Carwyn Jones: No applications for consent under the environmental impact assessment regulations have been received. Consequently no applications have been refused. The Welsh Assembly Government has received four screening applications, two of which are currently being determined. Officials have investigated 39 reported breaches of the regulations and two reinstatement notices have been issued. No other legal action has been taken against individuals in Wales for not complying with the environmental impact assessment regulations.

The Forestry Policy

Nick Bourne: Will the Minister make a statement on the current forestry policy? (WAQ26568)

Carwyn Jones: The Welsh Assembly Government's forestry policies are set out in 'Woodlands for Wales', the Assembly's long-term strategy for trees and woodlands, which was published in July 2001. The strategy was unanimously adopted as Assembly policy in Plenary on 8 November 2001. A woodland forum has been established under my chairmanship, and is tasked with implementing the programmes from the strategy.

Legal Action against 'Dot's Diner'

Glyn Davies: What was the total cost to the National Assembly for the legal action against 'Dot's Diner' for the removal of plants and ornaments displayed at the roadside cafe on the A489 between Welshpool and Machynlleth? (WAQ26571) *Transferred for answer by the Minister for Economic Development and Transport.*

The Minister for Economic Development and Transport (Andrew Davies): The legal action referred to was brought against Dot's Diner by Powys County Council, acting on our behalf as the Mid-Wales Trunk Road Agency. The action sought the removal of a number of planters and ornaments that had been placed by the café owners on our roadside verges. Both the council and the transport directorate see these unauthorised items as potential hazards, but the café owners had refused to remove them. The magistrates agreed that the items complained of were an obstruction, but decided that they did not constitute a nuisance, and found for the café. The cost to the National Assembly of this action was made up of two parts, £2,400 being incurred by Powys County Council in pursuing the case, and £2,058 being the café's legal costs. No appeal is being pursued.

Meat Illegally Imported into the UK

Brynle Williams: What plans are in place to reduce the huge quantities of meat that is illegally imported into the UK? (WAQ26624)

Carwyn Jones: The UK Government, in co-operation with the devolved administrations, has committed an additional £25 million over three years to an action programme for improving controls over illegal imports. This plan included:

- transferring responsibilities for anti-smuggling controls for meat and animal products to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise;
- strengthening enforcement strategies;
- ongoing risk assessment and further intelligence gathering and sharing;
- continuing to develop a coherent publicity strategy to publicise the risks for humans, animals and plants, and the regulations that apply;
- provide guidance, advice and training to minimise the risks; and
- a range of measures to improve detection and control.

I am shortly meeting the director of Customs and Excise in Wales to discuss issues at Welsh points of entry, and the illegal imports plan will be reviewed and updated under the umbrella of the outline animal health and welfare strategy, which is due to be published shortly

Ruthin Flood Alleviation Scheme

Brynle Williams: Will the Minister outline the projected timeframe and costs for completion of the Ruthin flood alleviation scheme? (WAQ26639)

Carwyn Jones: The Ruthin flood alleviation scheme is being promoted by the operating authority, Denbighshire County Council, with financial support from the Welsh Assembly Government. Issues relating to timescales and completion costs are the responsibility of the local authority.

Genetically Modified Hypoallergenic Ryegrass

Glyn Davies: What research is being conducted into genetically modified hypoallergenic ryegrass? (WAQ26640)

Carwyn Jones: Ryegrass pollen is a widespread source of airborne allergens and is the major cause of hay fever and seasonal allergic asthma. Following research in Australia, I am advised that perennial and Italian ryegrasses have been genetically modified so that one or both of the two main hay fever allergens have been reduced. These low-pollen allergen transgenic ryegrasses will be evaluated in a planned field release in 2003 in the USA.

A National Fallen Stock Collection Scheme

Glyn Davies: When does the Minister plan to put in place a national fallen stock collection scheme? (WAQ26643)

Carwyn Jones: A UK-wide subscription scheme, run by the industry on behalf of its members, remains the most efficient and cost-effective solution. Response rates by the industry to the original proposals were insufficient for the scheme to be viable. We are now reviewing options for alternative arrangements and are discussing these with key stakeholders.

The Environment Agency

Glyn Davies: What responsibility does the Environment Agency have to take into account economic benefit when considering development proposals by the private sector? (WAQ26644)

Carwyn Jones: The Environment Agency is under an overriding statutory duty (section 39 of the Environment Act 1995) to have regard to costs and benefits in exercising its powers, which include its consideration of development proposals. Recent statutory guidance issued by the Assembly to the Environment Agency (under section 4 of the Environment Act 1995) requires it to deliver environmental requirements and goals without imposing excessive costs (in relation to benefits gained) on regulated businesses or on society more widely. The guidance also sets an objective for the agency to protect or enhance the environment taken as a whole, which takes account of economic and social considerations. The guidance recognises that such requirements and objectives apply insofar as they are consistent with the agency's legal obligations, for example, the need to implement European directives.

The Countryside Council for Wales

Glyn Davies: What responsibilities does the Countryside Council for Wales have to take into account economic benefit when considering development proposals by the private sector? (WAQ26645)

Carwyn Jones: The Countryside Council for Wales is responsible for providing statutory independent advice to local planning authorities on planning applications from both the private and public sectors. In carrying out this responsibility, the council is expected to have regard to economic and social needs. A very small percentage (less than 3 per cent) of all the planning applications commented on by the Countryside Council for Wales are rejected.

Low-incidence BSE Risk

Glyn Davies: Does Wales qualify as an area of low-incidence BSE risk of less than 100 animals per million over 24 months old? (WAQ26646)

Carwyn Jones: The UK continues successfully to apply a robust programme of BSE control, eradication and education measures. This has ensured public safety and rapidly reduced the total number of BSE cases. The number of BSE cases born after 1 August 1996 is low, and remains in line with the Scientific Steering Committee's expectations.

The UK is currently placed in the highest BSE risk category, but under new Office International des Epizooties thresholds, and with a sustained downward trend in BSE incidence levels, the UK expects to fall below the threshold for moderate BSE risk by September 2003. The UK also meets all other requirements for moderate risk status.

The GM Debate

Glyn Davies: How many public meetings in Wales as part of 'The GM Debate' are to be held? (WAQ26648)

Carwyn Jones: I understand that at least five public dialogue meetings are currently scheduled for July; however they are being organised independently of Government and the Assembly may not be informed of the details of all the meetings.

Environmental Impact Assessments

Mick Bates: What guidance has the Assembly given to local authorities on the implementation of the Environmental Impact Assessment (Uncultivated Land and Semi-natural Areas) (Wales) Regulations 2002? (WAQ26651)

Mick Bates: What has the Minister done to publicise the importance of environmental impact assessments of landowners? (WAQ26652)

Carwyn Jones: When the regulations were implemented the Welsh Assembly Government wrote to all local authorities in Wales advising them of the new regulations and making arrangements to consult them on all screening applications.

Prior to the introduction of the regulations, discussions were held with the farming unions and others involved in agriculture in Wales. When the regulations were implemented, the Welsh Assembly Government issued a number of press releases. In addition articles have appeared in *Gwlad*, which is sent each month to all farmers in Wales.

The farming unions and the Country Land and Business Association have been sent details on how the regulations are implemented, and the regulations and guidance documents are available on the Assembly website and from divisional offices.

The Reform of Common Land

Mick Bates: Will the Minister make a statement on the reform of common land in Wales? (WAQ26653)

Carwyn Jones: Following the issuing of the common land policy statement in July 2002, which proposed that a stakeholder working group should be set up to make recommendations on the agricultural management of common land, a working group was convened last November, and issued its report in April 2003. The report may be viewed at <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/issues/common/legislation/swgreport-apr03.pdf>.

The UK Government intends to consult on proposals for the agricultural management of common land, having regard to the working group's recommendations, during the summer. Legislation will be required to achieve many of the proposed reforms to the law relating to common land and town and village greens, and this will depend on the availability of parliamentary time.

Payments of Organic Producers

Mick Bates: From which budget will the maintenance payments of organic producers be financed? (WAQ26654)

Carwyn Jones: The new organic maintenance payments will be included within the organic farming scheme, the budget for which has been set at £3.01 million for 2003-04.

Environmental Impacts of Tir Gofal

Mick Bates: What is the timetable for the evaluation of the environmental impacts of Tir Gofal? (WAQ26655)

Carwyn Jones: Baseline data is currently being collected and this process will continue until 2005. There will then be two resurvey exercises; the first will take place between 2005-09 and the second between 2009-13. Reporting on the environmental impacts of Tir Gofal from this monitoring exercise will form a rolling programme during both the resurvey periods.

Tir Gofal (Economic, Social and Environmental Outputs)

Mick Bates: What various economic, social and environmental outputs are being monitored for Tir Gofal? (WAQ26656)

Carwyn Jones: The Countryside Council for Wales will shortly be undertaking a small pilot study to look at the overall economic impact of Tir Gofal on farm businesses as well as the effect of the scheme on rural employment both on and off farm. The environmental monitoring is targeted at a representative spread of wildlife habitats from across Wales and includes woodlands, heathland, grassland and scrub.

Tir Gofal (New Entry Level)

Mick Bates: Will the Minister make a statement on a new entry level Tir Gofal scheme and a timetable for setting this up? (WAQ26657)

Carwyn Jones: I intend to consult shortly on proposals for a new entry-level agri-environmental scheme. Subject to the outcome of that consultation, and subject to the availability of resources to implement the proposals, I expect to take decisions on whether to introduce such a scheme in time for its possible introduction in 2005-06.

The Environmental Opportunities Review

Mick Bates: Will the Minister give an update on the level of environmental services delivered by Farming Connect and the latest developments with the environmental opportunities review? (WAQ26659)

Carwyn Jones: Under Farming Connect, environmental advice will be provided by the 'Environmental Opportunities Review' initiative. Each review will include the identification of specific wildlife habitats and appropriate management advice, an explanation of legislative requirements, an assessment of pollution control features such as slurry, manure and dirty water storage, and advice on the management of any archaeological and historic sites and public access. An application for support from Objective 1 was submitted in May and is currently being considered by the Welsh European Funding Office.

The Agricultural Management of Common Land

Mick Bates: Will the Minister make a statement on whether he has received the report of the stakeholders working group on the agricultural management of common land? (WAQ26661)

Carwyn Jones: The stakeholders working group issued its report in April 2003. The Government intends to consult on proposals for the agricultural management of common land, having regard to the working group's recommendations, during the summer.

Public Register of Screening Decisions

Mick Bates: Will the Minister make a statement on whether there are any plans to publish a public register of screening decisions in relation to the Environmental Impact Assessment (Uncultivated and Semi-natural Areas) (Wales) Regulations 2002, as DEFRA has done in England on its website? (WAQ26662)

Carwyn Jones: The Welsh Assembly Government keeps a record of all screening applications and details can be provided on request. A computerised database is being developed which will make information readily available to the public.

Pollution from Emissions

Peter Black: When will the Government be publishing an action plan and timetable to implement the pledge in the 2003 Labour Assembly manifesto to 'extend programmes to reduce pollution from emissions and to contribute to the management of climate change in Wales'? (WAQ26666)

Carwyn Jones: In 'Working Together for Wales', Welsh Labour's manifesto 2003, we said that in our second term, the Labour Government of the Assembly will extend our programmes to reduce pollution from emissions and to contribute to the management of climate change in Wales.

We are taking forward this policy on a number of fronts.

We shall continue to implement the Wales waste strategy. Our waste strategy emphasises the importance of recycling and the reuse of materials, which will reduce the energy required in the manufacture of products. Reducing the amount of biodegradable municipal waste being disposed of in landfill sites will reduce the emissions of methane, a powerful greenhouse gas.

I am looking to improve our arrangements for delivering flood and coastal defences services in Wales to enhance our ability to respond to the impacts of climate change and will be consulting further on options. The Assembly Government is funding a programme of catchment flood management plans, which are being prepared by the Environment Agency, improving the ability of the agency to manage flood defence on a catchment basis. In addition, a revised draft of Technical Advice Note 15 containing detailed planning advice in relation to development and flood risk is about to issue for consultation.

Since the air quality strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland was published in 2000, work has continued on developing and amending the strategy as new evidence becomes available. By introducing regulations and issuing guidance, the Welsh Assembly Government has provided a clear and simple policy framework for improving air quality with realistic but challenging objectives, underpinned by monitoring and research. The third daughter directive, 2002/03/EC, relating to ozone in ambient air, sets target values and long-term objectives for the protection of human health and vegetation and must be transposed into UK law by 9 September 2003. I will be inviting the Assembly to take this forward through the Air Quality (Ozone) (Wales) Regulations 2003, which are due to be voted on in Plenary on 16 July 2003.

The Welsh Assembly Government is closely involved in the development of the water quality improvement programme for Wales, which will be allowed for as part of the water industry price review for 2005 to 2010. We are also working toward transposing and implementing the water framework directive, which is set to have a major beneficial impact on water quality in Wales for many years to come.

The Wales Consumer Council Report

Mick Bates: Further to the findings of the Wales Consumer Council report in April 2003, what action will the Minister be taking to promote sustainable development to the Welsh people? (WAQ26797)

Carwyn Jones: The Wales Consumer Council reported that 30 per cent of the population knew about sustainable development and that people who did not know the term were nevertheless taking appropriate measures in their day-to-day life. I find this moderately encouraging, though clearly more needs to be done.

I intend to use the opportunity of the review of the sustainable development scheme to test how we could do better and to show what sustainable development can offer a country like Wales.

Next March, Wales will be hosting a conference of the global network of regions for sustainable development that we co-founded last year at Johannesburg. This will provide an opportunity to focus attention on the issue within Wales.

Tir Gofal Scheme (New Entry Level)

Mick Bates: Can the Minister make a statement on the level of funding available for the new entry level Tir Gofal scheme, and how this will be sourced? (WAQ26798)

Carwyn Jones: I will be consulting on proposals for an entry-level agri-environmental scheme in the near future. The affordability of such a scheme, whether from modulation or from other sources, will be one of the key issues for consideration.

Farming Financial Subsidies

Brynle Williams: Will the Minister outline the source of farming financial subsidies if the payments are not made to farmers within the specific window period stipulated by EU regulations? (WAQ26806)

Carwyn Jones: For EU farming subsidy purposes Wales is part of the UK member state. In order to ensure full reimbursement of expenditure, EU member states are required to spend 96.14 per cent by value of the subsidy before the closure of the relevant EU window. If the UK as a whole fails to meet this requirement a proportion of payments made after the closure of the payment window may be charged to the member state (i.e. the UK Treasury). A sliding scale of ‘corrections’ (disallowance) applied by the European Commission has been established in article 4 of commission regulation 296/96, which increases with the length of delay and applies to all member states.

Bovine Tuberculosis in Monmouthshire

David Davies: Will the Minister make a statement on proposals to tackle bovine tuberculosis in Monmouthshire? (WAQ26825)

Carwyn Jones: Following the outbreak of foot and mouth disease, the target has been to eliminate the backlog of overdue tests across Wales. This remains the focus in advance of consultation on revised proposals to tackle the disease, due out later this year.

Flintshire County Council

Janet Ryder: Can the Minister confirm whether the Assembly Government notified Flintshire County Council that it had no interest in planning application 035311 before the council meeting on 3 June 2003; whether any notification to the council was prior to the above meeting; and could the Minister tell me on what grounds the application was made? (WAQ26850)

Carwyn Jones: Application 035311 related to the conversion of a derelict convent to apartments and dwellings at St Clare’s, Pantasaph. Normally the Assembly Government would not consider calling-in any planning application unless we receive a request to do so. The council scheduled a planning committee meeting for 11 June to determine the application. The Assembly Government received a request to call-in the application on the afternoon of 9 June. We completed our consideration of the request on the morning of 11 June and we notified the council—before the committee meeting started—that we did not intend to call-in the application. The request sought call-in on the basis that the application was a major departure from planning policy.

Suckler Cow Premium Scheme

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Will the Minister make a statement on the availability of pre-printed forms to applicants of the 2003 suckler cow premium scheme? (WAQ26900)

Carwyn Jones: Pre-printed forms for the 2003 scheme will be issued later in the application period, which runs from 1 July to 6 December, after the majority of 2002 subsidy applications have been validated against the British Cattle Movement Service cattle tracing system. This will mean that they will contain the most up-to-date information on individual animals and therefore help farmers to avoid penalties for inaccurate claims. Farmers who wish to apply for subsidy before the pre-printed forms are available should ask their local divisional office for a blank form.

Questions to the Finance Minister

Council Tax

Brynle Williams: Does the Minister plan to review the rating system of long-term holiday/mobile home dwellers for council tax contribution purposes? (WAQ26297)

Brynle Williams: What measures is the Minister taking to ensure that long-term dwellers on caravan sites contribute towards local services through council tax? (WAQ26299)

The Finance Minister (Sue Essex): I do not propose a review. Caravans kept on a caravan site are already liable to local taxation in the form of non-domestic rates. The value of the site is taken as a single unit so that one value is determined for all the caravan pitches together with any facilities, such as shops.

The site operator is responsible for paying the non-domestic rates on the whole site and may seek a contribution from the caravan dwellers/owners in respect of individual pitches.

The Criminal Records Bureau

Alun Cairns: What estimates has the Minister made concerning the total cost paid by local authorities to the Criminal Records Bureau? (WAQ26581)

Sue Essex: We do not produce estimates of local government expenditure to the level of detail that identifies the amounts paid by local government to the Criminal Records Bureau.

The Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure Fees

Alun Cairns: What estimates has the Minister made about any increased costs to local authorities as a result of the increases in the Criminal Records Bureau disclosure fees? (WAQ26582)

Sue Essex: Detailed information on existing costs is not collected. As a consequence it has not been possible to make any detailed estimates of the increased costs. However, I believe that the 9.2 per cent increase in non-hypothecated funding provided to local government in 2003-04 will provide authorities with sufficient resources to meet the additional costs.

The Criminal Records Bureau Fee Structure

Alun Cairns: What representations has the Minister received from local authorities expressing concern over the Criminal Records Bureau fee structure? (WAQ26583)

Sue Essex: None, however I am always prepared to discuss any concerns local government has on this or any other matter.

Disclosure Fees from the Criminal Records Bureau

Alun Cairns: What additional funding does the Minister intend to make available to local authorities to meet the increase of disclosure fees from the Criminal Records Bureau? (WAQ26584)

Sue Essex: Local authorities in Wales received an increase of £261 million in unhypothecated resources in 2003-04—an increase of over 9 per cent. This should enable authorities to meet any increased costs of disclosure fees from the CRB.

Business Improvement Districts

Glyn Davies: What plans does the Minister have to develop business improvement districts in Wales, when is the next business improvement districts tripartite group meeting and who serves on it? (WAQ26641)

Sue Essex: We have established a working group comprising representatives from local government, the business community and Assembly officials to develop a model for business improvement districts in Wales. The group's terms of reference are to investigate the introduction of BIDs in Wales within the legislative framework, to produce formal working proposals for the BIDs system in Wales and to produce a report to be submitted for review before any consultation exercise can take place.

The group is working closely with the Swansea city BID pilot scheme to ensure that any lessons learned can feed into the BIDS guidance. This guidance will outline the Assembly's proposals and also provide practical advice on setting up and operating a successful BID. I intend to consult on this later in the summer. Early next year, following consultation, I will introduce secondary legislation for Wales in relation to BIDs, in order to supplement part 4 of the Local Government Bill.

The next meeting of the BIDs group is to be held during July in Swansea with members of the Swansea BID project team.

The members of the BIDs tripartite working group are: David Rosser, Confederation of British Industry Wales, Victoria Lloyd, Chamber Wales, Rob Halford, Employer's Engineering Foundation Wales, Russell Lawson, Federation of Small Businesses, Emma Nelson, Bridgend County Borough Council, Jill Shuker, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Will Godfrey, Welsh Local Government Association, Derek Wooley, City and County of Swansea Council, David Fletcher, Chair, Welsh Assembly Government, Ruth Gow, Welsh Assembly Government, and Paul Olsen, Welsh Assembly Government.

The Funding of Welsh Culture

William Graham: Will the Minister consider a review of the funding of Welsh culture? (WAQ26813)

Sue Essex: The culture budget was streamlined during the last budget planning round to provide the necessary flexibility to achieve the long-term aims set out in the culture strategy, 'Creative Future: Cymru Greadigol'. The new culture fund within the culture main expenditure group amalgamates the programme and capital budgets of the cultural Assembly sponsored public bodies to create a single new fund. It provides a mechanism that enables the Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport to determine his own priorities and to allocate funding.

As part of the budget planning round 2003, the culture fund will be reviewed and this will be reflected in the Assembly's published budget later in the year.

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Policies for Older People

Ann Jones: Will the Minister make a statement on the Assembly Government's policies for older people in Wales? (WAQ26366)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Jane Hutt): The Assembly Government gives a high priority to older people. We have launched a comprehensive strategy for older people in Wales supported by dedicated funding of £10 million over three years to assist implementation. The strategy sets out a wide range of policies and plans across the National Assembly's responsibilities to better reflect the needs of older people and their contribution.

Death in Wales (Causes)

Jonathan Morgan: During the past four years, how many people have died in Wales from: a) cancer; b) heart disease; and c) a stroke; and what measures is the Government pursuing to reduce these figures? (WAQ26514)

Jane Hutt: The link below to the Digest of Welsh Statistics 2002, Chapter 1: Population and Migration provides information on deaths in Wales.

<http://www.wales.gov.uk/keypubstatisticsforwales/content/publication/compendia/2002/dws2002/dws2002-ch1/dws2002-ch1.htm>

These tables show figures up until 2001. Information for 2002 is not yet available.

Improving the quality of and access to cancer and coronary heart disease services in order to diagnose and treat these conditions quicker and better through the implementation of standards is a priority for the NHS in Wales. One of the standards set in the national service framework for older people focuses on stroke. We will be establishing a planning and implementation group to advise on the development of the delivery strategy, a sub-group of which will specifically address stroke. The sub-group will include a range of expertise on stroke, to help identify future directions for Wales.

We are taking action to encourage lifestyles changes that will reduce the risk of these illnesses. A comprehensive programme is in place to reduce smoking. The nutrition strategy 'Food and Well Being' sets out an action plan to improve diet and we have recently consulted on the healthy and active lifestyles action plan, which aims to encourage more active daily living.

Local Health Boards

Jonathan Morgan: How does the Minister intend monitoring the progress of the newly created local health boards? (WAQ26515)

Jane Hutt: The NHS Wales Department's three regional offices are responsible for the operational performance management of the NHS in Wales, including the local health boards. This will be carried out through several processes, including day-to-day contact between the regional offices and the LHBs, quarterly reviews of each individual LHB by regional office staff, and an annual conference involving all NHS organisations in Wales. Regional offices will also performance manage the LHBs through the service and financial framework and performance agreement process.

Stroke Units in Hospitals

Jonathan Morgan: What plans does the Minister have to ensure a consistent approach to the provision of stroke units in hospitals? (WAQ26516)

Jane Hutt: This will be taken forward in the national service framework for older people.

Health Authorities and Local Health Boards

Jonathan Morgan: Would the Minister provide details on: a) the individual debt of each local health authority by March 31, 2003; and b) the individual debt acquired by each local health board, as a result of the winding-up of health authorities, during the current financial year? (WAQ26517)

Jane Hutt: Only two health authorities held debt in respect of repayable loans issued by the Welsh Assembly Government at 31 March 2003. These were Dyfed Powys Health Authority (£1.8 million) and Bro Taf Health Authority (£5.2 million). The loans were issued in 2002-03 to finance deficits arising in that year. Loans were also issued in 2002-03 to the following trusts to finance their deficits: Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust (£3.5 million); Carmarthenshire NHS Trust (£6.0 million); Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS Trust (£0.9 million); Pembrokeshire and Derwen NHS Trust (£2.4 million); and Powys Health Care NHS Trust (£0.4 million). Thus, the total amount of loans issued in 2002-03 by the Welsh Assembly Government to the NHS in Wales was £20.2 million. In addition, I announced in January 2002 that loans totalling £41.2 million issued prior to 1 April 2001 would not need to be repaid. Of this amount, £23.7 million was held by the former Dyfed Powys Health Authority, £6.7 million by the former Bro Taf Health Authority and £10.8 million by NHS trusts. The loan held by the former Bro Taf Health Authority related to deficits incurred by Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust, so this loan was transferred to the trust in 2002-03. No conditions were placed on the write-off of loans held by health authorities, but trusts are required to demonstrate that they can achieve two years financial balance before their loans are written off. The loan held by the former Dyfed Powys Health Authority was written off in 2002-03. Thus, at 31 March 2003, health authorities had debt with the Welsh Assembly Government totalling £6.9 million, all of which was in respect of loans issued during 2002-03, and trusts had debt of £30.8 million, of which £17.5 million is in respect of loans issued prior to 1st April 2001 and £13.3 million is in respect of loans issued in 2002-03. In line with the announcement I made in January 2002, all loans issued after 1 April 2002 will be repayable. Trusts and local health boards recovery plans will need to demonstrate repayment of these loans within an agreed timescale.

The amount of health authority debt acquired by each of the local health boards will not be confirmed until the health authority accounts for 2002-03 have been finalised and audited, which will be in late summer.

The Financial Position of Bro Morgannwg NHS Trust

Alun Cairns: Will the Minister make a statement about the financial position of Bro Morgannwg NHS Trust? (WAQ26553)

Jane Hutt: Bro Morgannwg trust recently submitted draft accounts for 2002-03 which have yet to be audited. Within these accounts the trust has reported a surplus of £15,000 for the financial year which ensures it has met its break-even target. It has also managed its resources to ensure the external financial limit is not exceeded.

The trust is currently in discussion with the Assembly regarding the 2003-04 service and financial framework and all parties in the health community are working towards achieving a balanced financial position.

Diabetes Patients (Retinopathy Reviews)

Leighton Andrews: Will the Minister make a statement on whether the target of an annual review for retinopathy for diabetes patients is being met in the Rhondda area? (WAQ26559)

Jane Hutt: Every person with diabetes who is registered with a general practitioner in the Rhondda, and whose name has been forwarded to the retinopathy screening service, will have been offered an

appointment for screening to detect evidence of diabetic retinopathy. Approximately 10 per cent of those offered appointments have not attended.

The frequency of subsequent screening appointments is phased between one and two years based on a clinical decision. Recall is determined on the findings at the first screening. People with type 2 diabetes who have no lesions have been offered a follow-up appointment in 18 months to two years. Those with lesions are seen annually.

The all-Wales Diabetic Retinopathy Screening Service has recently moved to new premises in Upper Boat and extra mobile units and cameras have been procured which should help improve the service further across Wales.

Bro Morgannwg NHS Trust (Financial Difficulties)

Alun Cairns: Will the Minister state what recent discussions she has had with Bro Morgannwg NHS Trust regarding the financial difficulties it may be facing? (WAQ26566)

Jane Hutt: I have not personally been in discussions with Bro Morgannwg trust regarding the financial difficulties it may be facing, but my officials have been discussing the 2003-04 service and financial framework with trust managers. I have received a letter from the trust chairman to which I have responded.

Bro Morgannwg Health Authority

Alun Cairns: Will the Minister make a statement on any recent discussions she has had with Bro Morgannwg health authority regarding any financial difficulties it may be facing? (WAQ26567)

Jane Hutt: You may be referring to the former Iechyd Morgannwg Health Authority, which was replaced on 1 April by the Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend local health boards.

I did not have discussions with the authority prior to its abolition on its financial position. My officials have informed me that provisional figures for the 2002-03 annual accounts identify that the authority made a surplus of £0.4 million in its final year.

The Draft National Strategy for Autism

David Melding: If the Minister will state when she expects to publish the draft national strategy for autism in Wales and what arrangements will be made for consultation? (WAQ26570) [R]

Jane Hutt: A date has not yet been set for the publication of a draft strategy. This work is being progressed by an expert working group and I would expect a draft document to be ready by the end of the year. Key stakeholders are involved in the formation of the strategy and it will be circulated widely during consultation.

Free Nursing Care

Jonathan Morgan: How many people in Wales are eligible for free nursing care? (WAQ26572)

Jane Hutt: Since December 2001, everyone who is assessed as requiring nursing care in a care home is eligible for free nursing care.

For each resident who funds his or her own care, the home receives £100 a week from the local health board to fund the nursing element of the care. The resident pays for the remaining accommodation and personal care costs.

For those supported by the local authority, the nursing element of the care is fully funded by the local authority and does not enter the calculations of the resident's contribution to care. Depending on their capital and income, residents contribute towards the cost of their accommodation and personal care. From April 2004, the nursing care for these people will also be funded by the LHB following a transfer of funds from the local authority.

Local Health Boards (Continuing Healthcare)

Jonathan Morgan: What budgetary provision has been made by each local health board for the cost of assessing and delivering NHS continuing healthcare in Wales in the financial year 2003-04, and can the Minister provide a breakdown? (WAQ26573)

Jonathan Morgan: What specific budgetary provision has been made by the NHS Wales Department for the cost of assessing and delivering NHS continuing healthcare in Wales for the financial years 2003-04 and 2004-05? (WAQ26574)

Jane Hutt: Continuing NHS healthcare involves delivering a range of service provisions in hospital, care homes and community settings. Such services are not necessarily part of one specific budget, but may be an element in several. Many services will be provided or purchased under the hospital and community health services allocation to local health boards, which then determine the distribution of funding according to local need.

For these reasons, it is not possible to separately identify continuing NHS healthcare budgets and costs in Wales.

NHS (Continuing Healthcare)

Jonathan Morgan: What was the cost of assessing and delivering NHS continuing healthcare in the financial years 2001-02 and 2002-03? (WAQ26575)

Jane Hutt: This information is not collected centrally.

'Agenda for Change'

Jenny Randerson: Further to the answer to my supplementary question to OAQ24195 on 21 May 2003, how and when does the Minister intend to report back to the National Assembly on the extent to which 'Agenda for Change' will impact upon the pay and conditions of practice nurses? (WAQ26587)

Jane Hutt: When the Welsh agenda for change implementation team has completed their discussions with local health boards on this issue, I will report the outcome in my monthly report to the Health and Social Services Committee.

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Glyn Davies: How many cases of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus were confirmed in each district hospital in Wales in each of the last five calendar years? (WAQ26649)

Jane Hutt: Wales has in place two surveillance schemes for MRSA. One, a voluntary scheme introduced in 1996, is for all new isolates of MRSA, which is collected by laboratory, not by hospital. The scheme includes community as well as hospital samples and is influenced by screening policies for MRSA.

In April 2001, a second scheme providing mandatory surveillance of staphylococcus aureus bacteraemias was introduced in Wales. MRSA bacteraemias are a subset of the total of patients with MRSA. Patients with bacteraemias are likely to have serious infections due to MRSA. These data are not collected on a

district hospital basis, but by acute trust and by acute hospital (in some cases this is an acute hospital group where more than one hospital with acute beds report their data).

A feature of the surveillance programme agreed with trusts is the decision not to publish individual trust data because the data itself does not reflect underlying factors such as case mix, that bear on the bacteraemia reports.

Asperger's Syndrome

Leighton Andrews: What estimates does the Minister have of the number of children and adults in Rhondda Cynon Taf with Asperger's Syndrome? (WAQ26804)

Jane Hutt: Information on the number of people with Asperger's Syndrome in Wales or parts of Wales is not held centrally.

Smoking (Pregnant Women)

Jonathan Morgan: What work has been undertaken to discourage smoking: a) among pregnant women in Wales, and b) in Welsh households in which pregnant women live? (WAQ26838)

Jane Hutt: The Assembly Government has recently commissioned the National Public Health Service for Wales to run local smoking cessation services in Wales. The need to continue to target and provide support to pregnant women has been highlighted in guidance.

Last October I launched a campaign to provide mothers and mothers-to-be in Wales with information about the risks of passive smoking in the home and help in giving up smoking. This campaign is supported by the Royal College of Midwives (Welsh Board), the Community Practitioners' and Health Visitors' Association, and the Royal College of Nursing.

Blood Transfusion

Ann Jones: What information on blood transfusion alternatives is offered to patients in Wales? (WAQ26869)

Jane Hutt: The Welsh Assembly Government has produced no specific written information for patients about the alternatives to blood. The decision made on the type of treatment is that of the clinician involved in the patient's care, who would be expected to discuss appropriate alternatives.

Questions to the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration

Substance Misuse (Discussions with Police Forces)

William Graham: Will the Minister outline discussions she has held with police forces in Wales concerning substance misuse? (WAQ26521) [R]

The Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration (Edwina Hart): I meet chief constables and other representatives of the four police authorities in Wales on a regular basis to discuss a range of community safety issues, including substance misuse.

Last year I also had meetings with the chief constables specifically to discuss Operation Tarian—the strategic response of the three southern Wales forces to the threat of an influx of class A drugs from the south-west of England.

Welsh Credit Unions

Ann Jones: What powers does the Assembly have to provide Welsh credit unions with practical help and support with initiatives, such as business rate relief? (WAQ26522)

Edwina Hart: The Local Government Finance Act 1988 states that organisations must be non-profit-making to qualify for business rate relief. As credit unions charge interest and redistribute it to members, they are not considered non-profit-making organisations and therefore are not eligible to benefit from business rate relief. I have raised this issue with the Secretary of State for Wales.

The Welsh Assembly Government is continuing to help fund the development of credit unions in Wales and the services they provide, by virtue of section 8 of the Industrial Development Act 1982, in conjunction with the Government of Wales Act 1998.

Through this legislation the Welsh Assembly Government, together with structural funds support, is investing £3.5 million in developing and strengthening Welsh credit unions and also the services they provide. This has helped membership of credit unions in Wales increase from 12,000 in 2001 to over 24,000 to date, well on course to meet their target figure of 36,000 members by December 2003.

In addition to this, Welsh credit union loans and savings have both increased by approximately 150 per cent.

Tackling Substance Misuse

Peter Black: How is the Minister liaising with UK Government departments in tackling substance misuse in Wales? (WAQ26525)

Edwina Hart: I am a member of the drugs sectoral group of the British-Irish Council. In addition, officials in my department meet and speak regularly with officials in other Government departments. A new senior-level cross government forum has recently been set up and the Assembly is represented on this.

Combating Drug Abuse

Alun Cairns: Would the Minister make a statement on Assembly policy to combat drug abuse? (WAQ26526)

Edwina Hart: The Assembly's policy on combating substance misuse is set out in its strategy, 'Tackling Substance Misuse in Wales'. The strategy has four main aims: children, young people and adults; families and communities; treatment; and availability.

The Drug Abuse Resistance Education Programme

Leighton Andrews: Will the Minister set out the terms of reference for the evaluation of the DARE programme? (WAQ26529)

Edwina Hart: Preliminary discussions are almost complete and we will shortly be ready to start the evaluation of DARE.

Substance Misuse Initiatives

Leighton Andrews: Will the Minister make a statement on substance misuse initiatives? (WAQ26530)

Edwina Hart: My main focus remains the work I started last year to deliver the four key aims of the Welsh substance misuse strategy which are: children, young people and adults; families and communities; treatment; and availability.

I have already announced a number of new initiatives that contribute to the achievement of these aims. These include the Rhondda treatment initiative, which is taking a holistic approach to the development of substance misuse treatment facilities in the Rhondda; a scheme to provide support prisoners with substance misuse problems in Cardiff and Swansea prisons; a transitional care scheme that will provide a mentoring service to substance misusers on their release from prison, and a pilot project in the Valleys to assist young people with substance misuse problems.

The Criminal Records Bureau

Alun Cairns: What estimates has the Minister made about the total cost voluntary organisations pay the Criminal Records Bureau? (WAQ26577)

Edwina Hart: This is a matter for the Home Office.

Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure Fees

Alun Cairns: What estimates has the Minister made about any increased costs to voluntary organisations as a result of the increases in the Criminal Records Bureau disclosure fees? (WAQ26578)

Edwina Hart: This is a matter for the Home Office.

Criminal Records Bureau Fee Structure

Alun Cairns: What representations has the Minister received from voluntary organisations expressing concern over the Criminal Records Bureau fee structure? (WAQ26579)

Edwina Hart: I have received no formal representations on this matter.

Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure Fees

Alun Cairns: What additional funding does the Minister intend to make available to voluntary organisations to meet the increase of disclosure fees from the Criminal Records Bureau? (WAQ26580)

Edwina Hart: We have provided funding for the police checks unit to enable voluntary sector organisations to carry out checks on staff or volunteers they employ. This unit will begin to provide a service from September 2003. The matter of further funding cannot be determined until this service is operating.

Social Deprivation in Rhondda

Leighton Andrews: Will the Minister make a statement on initiatives to tackle social deprivation in the Rhondda constituency? (WAQ26664)

Edwina Hart: I am considering a range of measures to further regenerate deprived areas of Wales, including the Rhondda and the Welsh Assembly Government's Communities First programme, which continues to support work aimed at improving conditions in our most deprived areas, with £7,406,202.17 allocated to 21 Communities First areas in the Rhondda.

The Present Devolution Settlement

Mick Bates: Will the Minister make a statement on the present devolution settlement in regard of powers over policing? (WAQ26665)

Edwina Hart: Although the police authorities of Wales are part-funded by the National Assembly, responsibility for the police service is not devolved and remains with the Home Secretary.

British Sign Language

Lorraine Barrett: Can the Minister make a statement on British Sign Language? (WAQ26668)

Edwina Hart: On 18 March, Andrew Smith, the Secretary of State for the Department of Work and Pensions, and Maria Eagle, Minister for Disabled People, gave a position statement on British Sign Language.

In the statement the Government recognises British Sign Language as a language in its own right and will give careful consideration to any proposals that the Council of Europe's charter for regional or minority languages might make.

Assembly funding has been made available through the grants for education, support and training programme for children with special education needs to undertake relevant training.

In addition, BSL is also available on request for all Assembly proceedings and meetings that are open to the public and have cross party involvement.

Officials are meeting the General Teaching Council for Wales to ensure that systems are adequate to monitor achievement of mandatory qualifications.

Cardiff County Council

Owen John Thomas: Will the Minister give a detailed breakdown of how Cardiff County Council spent its Communities First funding allocation for the fiscal year April 2002 to April 2003? (WAQ26669)

Owen John Thomas: Will the Minister confirm the amount of funding allocated to Cardiff County Council under the Communities First programme for the fiscal year April 2002 to April 2003 and April 2003 to April 2004? (WAQ26670)

Owen John Thomas: Will the Minister make a statement on the number of quarterly returns submitted to the National Assembly by Cardiff County Council demonstrating how it spent its Communities First funding allocation for the fiscal year April 2002 to April 2003? (WAQ26671)

Edwina Hart: Cardiff County Council was awarded the following amounts:

2002-03	£318,632.30
2003-04	£408,790.00

To date the council has spent £16,525 of its 2002-03 allocation on a consultation exercise in Ely and Caerau in respect of establishing learning facilities. The council has submitted a progress report covering the 2002-03 financial year.

The Expansion of Credit Unions

Michael German: What is being done to support the expansion of credit unions? (WAQ26672)

Edwina Hart: The Welsh credit union strategy is being delivered through a partnership between the Welsh Assembly Government, the Wales Co-operative Centre and the Association of British Credit Unions Ltd.

The Assembly Government, including structural funds support, is investing £3.5 million in developing and strengthening Welsh credit unions and also the services that they provide. This has helped the membership of credit unions in Wales increase from 12,000 in 2001, to over 24,000 to date, well on course to meet the target figure of 36,000 members by December 2003.

In addition to this, Welsh credit union loans and savings have both increased by approximately 150 per cent.