

Answers issued to Members on 21 February 2008

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

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

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

Jonathan Morgan (Cardiff North): What is the annual cost of maintaining and updating IT equipment in Business Eye premises across Wales and will the Minister provide a detailed breakdown? (WAQ51306)

The Deputy First Minister and Minister for the Economy and Transport (Ieuan Wyn Jones): The estimated cost of maintaining and updating information communications technology equipment in Business Eye premises across Wales in 2007-08 will be £332k. This estimated cost is broken down as follows:

IT equipment and support in local centres (inc support). Average annual cost over 3-year contract	£203,492
Business Eye website consultancy, support and maintenance	£98,149
Business Eye Directory of Business Support Services	£23,161
IT Helpdesk services to Welsh Assembly Government staff working on Business Eye (notional amount)	£7,000
Total	£331,802

Jonathan Morgan (Cardiff North): What is the projected cost of Business Eye to the Welsh Assembly Government over the next three years? (WAQ51307)

The Deputy First Minister: The estimated cost of Business Eye to the Welsh Assembly Government in 2008/9 is £5.3m. This includes the cost of central services and staffing delivered directly by the Welsh Assembly Government, and contracted services (for example local centre provision) delivered by partner organisations (predominantly local government).

Costs beyond 2008/09 will be dependent on the conclusions and recommendations of the current Business Eye review and the strategy which will flow from this.

Jonathan Morgan (Cardiff North): What assessment has the Minister and his department made of the effectiveness of Business Eye? (WAQ51308)

The Deputy First Minister: Since its inception in 2003, Business Eye has focused on customer satisfaction as its major driver and key performance measure.

From the commencement of the programme until early 2007, all enquirers were invited to complete a self-completed customer satisfaction questionnaire.

This process has now largely been replaced by a telephone-based customer survey of a sample of clients, this being undertaken by independent researchers.

Survey findings published in October 2007 showed an increasing number of repeat clients contacting Business Eye and a generally high level of satisfaction with the service (68% of those interviewed were very satisfied and 18% fairly satisfied).

In late 2007, the Welsh Assembly Government commissioned an independent review of Business Eye. Work on this is ongoing and during the course of the review, consultants are engaging with businesses, local staff, contractors and a wide range of stakeholders (including the Welsh Local Government Association and business umbrella groups such as the Federation of Small Businesses).

Jonathan Morgan (Cardiff North): Of those people who have sought advice from Business Eye for business start-up schemes, how many have a) a currently established Business with projected profits, b) failed to form business, c) formed a business which has subsequently failed? (WAQ51309)

The Deputy First Minister: Business Eye is an information and signposting service and has responded to 75,170 enquiries between April 2004 and the end of January 2008.

Business Eye clients looking to start up new businesses will be provided with information helping them to do so, and usually referred for further advice to other organisations, including the Welsh Assembly Government.

Information on what happens to all Business Eye clients once they have been referred to other providers is not held centrally, but the Welsh Assembly Government's main business start-up programme has created 12,084 businesses across Wales from 1 April 2004 to date.

Further, there is a very significant correlation between people looking to start in business who sought (public/private) support prior to establishment and those surviving at two years.

85% of start ups supported by the Welsh Assembly Government's main start-up programme (and that of its predecessor organisation) survive after one year, and 70% after two years. Generally this is 15% than the survival rate for start-up businesses which have not sought assistance.

Jonathan Morgan (Cardiff North): How many people have sought advice from Business Eye in the last year for which figures are available and what has been the annual figure since Business Eye was established? (WAQ51310)

The Deputy First Minister: 24,628 clients contacted Business Eye in 2006-07, the last full year for which figures are available. Figures for previous years are 16,012 (2005-06) and 11,055 (2004-05).

In 2007-8 to date, Business Eye has received 23,475 new enquiries.

Jonathan Morgan (Cardiff North): What is the cost of advertising the services of Business Eye and will the Minister give an annual breakdown of a) television advertising costs, b) newspaper advertising costs, and c) the cost of all other forms of advertising used? (WAQ51311)

The Deputy First Minister: Anticipated spend on advertising Business Eye in 2007/08 is £728,692.

This can be broken down as follows:

Television advertising	£80,000
Newspaper advertising	£196,175
Outdoor advertising	£91,680
Radio advertising	£241,283
Other advertising (magazines, directories etc)	£19,554
Advertising design and planning	£100,000
Total	£728,692.00

Jonathan Morgan (Cardiff North): What has been the cost to the Welsh Assembly Government of establishing Business Eye? (WAQ51312)

Jonathan Morgan (Cardiff North): What has been the total cost to the Welsh Assembly Government of financing Business Eye in the last year for which figures are available, and will the Minister give an annual breakdown of this figure since Business Eye was established? (WAQ51313)

The Deputy First Minister: The total cost to the Welsh Assembly Government of Business Eye since its establishment in September 2003 is £29,268,646. This includes the costs of providing a national website and contact centre, 28 local centres, and a supporting central/regional team.

Year-on year figures are as follows:

Year	
03/04	£4,521,116
04/05	£5,386,113
05/06	£5,994,695
06/07	£6,922,793
07/08 (estimate)	£6,443,929
TOTAL	£29,268,646

Jonathan Morgan (Cardiff North): How many people are employed, directly or indirectly by Business Eye across Wales and will the Minister provide an annual breakdown of the salary bill? (WAQ51314)

The Deputy First Minister: In 2006/7 108 people were employed across Wales by Business Eye broken down as follows:

Function	Number of staff	Salary cost
Assembly Government Team (including contact centre/website team, central/regional management team)	27	£895,446
Local centres (contractor staff, employed predominantly by local authorities)	80	£2,393,372
Total	107	£3,288,818

Mike German (South East Wales): Further to the then Minister's statement on a Chepstow bypass in 2003, (a) are there any plans before the detrunking of the A48 / A466 through Chepstow and (b) if not, can the Minister provide us with the latest details of the detrunking proposal? (WAQ51322)

The Deputy First Minister: The Welsh Assembly Government has no plans for a Chepstow bypass especially since the Highways Agency recently detrunked the A48 across the border back to local authority control, removing it from their strategic highway network.

We have a similar view to the Highways Agency on the strategic importance of the A48/A466 at Chepstow. Our policy is to detrunk the routes thereby removing them from the strategic highway network in Wales and allowing Monmouthshire County Council to manage the routes as they think fit. If this is to proceed Monmouthshire County Council will have to agree the change of status and their becoming the responsible highway authority.

Questions to the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills

Kirsty Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Does the Minister have plans to pilot new approaches to mental health support in schools, along the lines of the Targeted Mental Health in Schools project being rolled out by the Department for Children, Schools and Families in England? (WAQ51319)

The Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (Jane Hutt): The Welsh Assembly Government's key approach to improving mental health within the school system is the development of a national counselling service.

Consultation on a draft strategy took place from February to May 2007 and the responses to this along with a specially commissioned analysis on current provision will inform the final strategy, which is due to be published in April this year.

Funding over the period 2008-09 to 2010-11 of £1m, £2.5m, £3m has been set aside to implement the strategy and the Welsh Assembly Government is currently in the process of discussing with local authorities the most effective use of the funding in their area. In the short-term £200,000 a year was provided to local authorities in 2006-07 and 2007-08 for the sole purpose of providing extra counselling sessions through existing providers.

Work is also currently underway to develop guidance for schools, local authorities and other partners on the emotional health and well-being of pupils, including those in nursery settings. The guidance will cover aspects such as whole-school approaches to promoting positive emotional mental health, recognising early signs of mental health problems and distinguishing between different types of mental health problems and describing the necessary referral systems. It is intended that the guidance will be put onto the internet for comments and improvements early in 2008.

The Welsh Network of Healthy Schools Scheme (WNHSS) is also a key part of the Welsh Assembly Government's approach to improving mental health through schools. The Welsh Assembly Government has developed the WNHSS by providing funding and guidance to help health and education services working in partnerships to set up and run local healthy school schemes in all areas of Wales. Promotion of mental and emotional health is one of the major aspects of the scheme. These local schemes help schools in their area to make changes for good health.

Additional funding has been provided to health and education services to support the target for 75 per cent of maintained schools to be involved in WNHSS by March 2008 and all by March 2010.

Questions to the Minister for Health and Social Services

Paul Davies (Preseli Pembrokeshire): What provisions are currently in place to assist people who have given up work to act as a carer in getting back to work? (WAQ51320)

Paul Davies (Preseli Pembrokeshire): Are there any proposals to change the provision of assistance for people who have given up work to act as a carer in getting back to work? (WAQ51321)

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Edwina Hart): Matters relating to employment are not devolved.

Kirsty Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Will the Minister make a statement on funding prostate cancer services? (WAQ51324)

Edwina Hart: Funding for cancer services forms part of Health Commission Wales and Local Health Board funding allocations. It is for these organisations to determine at a local level how this funding should be spent in the treatment of cancer patients, which will include treatment for prostate cancer.

Alun Cairns (South Wales West): When does the Minister expect Barry High Street's medical surgery's plan to relocate to Barry Waterfront to be complete? (WAQ51345)

Edwina Hart: I have not received a copy of the bid for this scheme and for this reason I am unable to comment.

Questions to the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government

Kirsty Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Will the Minister make a statement on the impact of the Rating (Empty Properties) Act 2007 in Wales? (WAQ51328)

The Minister for Social Justice and Local Government (Brian Gibbons): The Rating (Empty Properties) Act 2007 will reduce non domestic rates relief for empty properties from the existing relief of 50% to nil % of the standard rate from 1 April 2008. It applied the changes to England and Wales, but gave the Assembly Government powers to make regulations to change the rate of empty property relief back to 50% or to any amount between nil% and 50%. The Act also exempts empty properties used by charities and sports clubs from paying rates.

Kirsty Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Does the Minister intend to introduce regulations to minimise the tax burden on businesses from the Rating (Empty Properties) Act 2007 in Wales. (WAQ51329)

Brian Gibbons: The Rating (Empty Properties) Act 2007 reduces the amount of rates relief available to owners of properties that are empty—it does not introduce a business tax. The Non-Domestic Rating (Unoccupied Property) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations 2007 raised the rateable value of empty properties that are exempted from non domestic rates from £1,500 to £2,200.