

Information Further to Ministerial Answers

Information further to OAQ1931(FM) issued by Rhodri Morgan, the First Minister

To Lisa Francis:

I am writing in response to the supplementary question you raised on 17 October on the new Welsh Assembly Government fund of £50,000 for links between health services in Wales and health services in sub-Saharan Africa. You asked what specific initiatives will be put in place to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS, which both of our countries could learn from, especially insofar as education is concerned.

The Welsh Assembly Government has committed itself to help with the delivery of the UN Millennium Development Goals, to halve global poverty by 2015 through the Wales for Africa Framework. The funding scheme is a part of the Framework.

Applicants for funding will have to demonstrate clearly how their project supports one or more of the Millennium Development Goals, one of which is to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. We will consider applications from existing and new hospital twinning projects aimed at exchanging good practice and developing understanding of other healthcare systems.

Education is of key importance in the fight against HIV/AIDS. We believe that both the NHS in Wales and the partner country will benefit hugely from link projects. There will be an opportunity for Welsh organisations to look at the way developing countries deal with the HIV/AIDS problem in order to use the knowledge in their own programmes. For the overseas partner benefits could include education and training support provided by individual practitioners, hospices, and academic centres, sharing of information and knowledge and supply of equipment.

One of the greatest challenges for developing countries is overcoming the ignorance and prejudice shown towards HIV/AIDS sufferers which acts as a barrier to successful treatment. We hope that funded projects will aim to tackle this problem. The health service in Wales can also benefit from this as it will help us to develop services that take into account different cultural approaches.

We are looking forward to receiving applications for funding for projects that will focus on the fight against HIV/AIDS.

For further information and guidance on the Welsh Assembly Government's policy for links with sub-Saharan Africa please visit www.wales.nhs.uk/subsaharanafricalinkprojects

Information further to OAQ1920(FM) issued by Edwina Hart, the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration, on behalf of Rhodri Morgan, the First Minister

To Leanne Wood:

I am writing in response to your question to the First Minister on 17 October in relation to increased demand for services for homeless people.

We have received no specific information with regard to increased demand for services from rough sleepers such as soup kitchen facilities. However, we do recognise that there may be additional pressures on the use of hostels to meet the needs of people to whom local

authorities owe a statutory duty. It is the responsibility of local authorities to manage their resources to meet those needs through effective planning and their local homelessness strategies. We have continued to provide substantial funding, in addition to guidance and best practice advice to support local authorities in their endeavours to meet their responsibilities.

In addition, local authorities will be required to undertake rough sleeping counts in their areas in March 2007. This will provide more information and evidence to enable local authorities to plan more effectively to meet the needs of rough sleepers.

Information further to OAQ1920(FM) issued by Edwina Hart, the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration, on behalf of Rhodri Morgan, the First Minister

To Laura Anne Jones:

I refer to your question raised at the First Minister's question session on 17 October 2006 in which you expressed the view that 'it is vital that we ensure that our rural communities have sufficient affordable and social housing available for local people and that social housing, or any new social housing, should be prioritised for those who have lived and worked in the area all of their lives'. As Minister with responsibility for housing, I have been asked to reply.

Firstly, our planning advice makes provision for new affordable housing in rural areas provided through the planning system to be reserved for local needs. TAN 2, which was published this Summer following extensive consultation, requires local planning authorities to set out in their development plan their definition of 'local need' for affordable housing, with the overall aim of contributing to sustainable communities.

Secondly, I have set out below an explanation of the legal and regulatory context within which social landlords (local authorities and housing associations) must operate in terms the allocation of social housing and local connection.

Local authorities are responsible for the allocation of council housing and providing homelessness assistance. The Assembly Government provides guidance to local authorities on how to implement the law by issuing a Code of Guidance on Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness.

Local authorities are able to nominate applicants for housing to housing associations who are required by the Assembly Government to make up to 50% of their housing stock available to the local authority for housing people from their waiting list. Housing associations are required to adhere to the Assembly Government's Regulatory Code when allocating their homes either to local authority nominees or to those who apply for housing directly.

In terms of allocations, authorities are required by the Housing Act 1996 (1996 Act) to allocate properties in accordance with a published scheme which is available to the public. Authorities are responsible for setting their own rules governing such schemes, but must give reasonable preference to a number of categories in housing need. Under the 1996 Act local connection should not be used by local authorities as a means of determining whether or not a person can access the housing waiting list. However, local connection may be used to determine priority for rehousing providing that such secondary allocation criteria are not used in a way that negates the effect of giving overall reasonable preference to people in housing need.

Local authorities have a statutory duty to secure permanent accommodation for people whom they deem to be 'unintentionally homeless and in priority need' where that person also has a local connection with the area. Consequently, most people being housed due to becoming

homeless will be local people. Local connection is defined under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 as a person who is, or was, normally resident in the area, and that residence is, or was, of his/her choice; he/she is employed there; there are family associations; or there are special circumstances.

The Assembly Government's Regulatory Code requires housing associations to work in partnership with local authorities to meet housing need. It would be expected that housing associations would not apply any local connection criteria more onerous than those imposed by the relevant local authority.

The law and Assembly Government guidance gives sufficient flexibility to enable social landlords to meet a range of needs. For example local authorities may allocate accommodation to people of a particular description, whether or not they fall within reasonable preference categories. Key workers such as teachers, nurses and police officers could be allocated accommodation within a reasonable travelling distance from their work in areas where high housing costs might otherwise price them out of the communities they serve.

The overriding aim of social allocations and homelessness services is to meet housing need. The law and guidance makes provision to help those in housing need with a local connection to gain access to housing in the area they have a connection with providing this is not done in a way that overrides the main aim. The Assembly Government does not provide for the blanket exclusion of applicants in housing need from accessing publicly subsidised housing purely because they do not have a local connection.

I hope the above clarifies the position.

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To Michael German:

During Plenary on 17 October, you asked whether the technology being developed by G24 Innovations might be retro-fitted into public buildings in Wales. I undertook to enquire and come back to you.

While the company is considering the integration of solar technology into its new building as part of an ongoing strategy of providing an on-site education and learning visitor centre, at this stage it is too early to say with any confidence whether the technology could be retro-fitted into the public estate in Wales. There can be issues with silicon-based technologies, including the need for the reinforcement of properties, which, the lightness of G24 Innovations' product might well avoid.

International Business Wales and our Estates team are in touch with the company to discuss the retrofit matter. I will get back to you with more definitive advice in due course. Clearly, we would have to follow public procurement rules in any potential engagement with the company.