



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
The National Assembly for Wales**

**Y Pwyllgor Plant a Phobl Ifanc
The Children and Young People Committee**

**Dydd Iau, 21 Chwefror 2008
Thursday, 21 February 2008**

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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,
cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Eleanor Burnham	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Christine Chapman	Llafur Labour
Helen Mary Jones	Plaid Cymru (Cadeirydd) The Party of Wales (Chair)
Lynne Neagle	Llafur Labour

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Maria Battle	Comisiynydd Plant Cymru Dros Dro Acting Children's Commissioner for Wales
Gareth Jones	Swyddfa Comisiynydd Plant Cymru Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales
Tracey Rogers	Swyddfa Comisiynydd Plant Cymru Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales
Keith Towler	Darpar Gomisiynydd Plant Cymru Children's Commissioner for Wales Designate

Swyddogion Gwasanaeth Seneddol y Cynulliad yn bresennol
Assembly Parliamentary Service officials in attendance

Claire Griffiths	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Tom Jackson	Clerc Clerk
Kathryn Potter	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil yr Aelodau Members' Research Service
Helen Roberts	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.49 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.49 a.m.

Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Helen Mary Jones:** Croesawaf bawb i'r cyfarfod hwn o'r Pwyllgor Plant a Phobl Ifanc. Atgoffaf bawb bod croeso i chi gyfrannu yn Gymraeg ac yn Saesneg. Mae clustffonau ar gael er mwyn gwrando ar y cyfieithiad, a hefyd er mwyn gwrando'n well os oes eisiau help arnoch.

Helen Mary Jones: I welcome everyone to this meeting of the Children and Young People Committee. I remind everyone that you are welcome to speak in Welsh and in English. Headsets are available to listen to the interpretation, and for amplification of the proceedings if you need it.

[2] Atgoffaf yr Aelodau, a phobl yn oriel y cyhoedd, i ddiffodd ffonau symudol neu ddyfeisiadau electronig eraill. Nid yw'n ddigon da eu rhoi ar 'tawel', oherwydd mae

I remind Members, and people in the public gallery, to turn off mobile phones or any other electronic devices. It is not sufficient to put them on 'silent', because they can still

modd iddynt amharu ar y cyfieithiad. Well i mi sicrhau fy mod wedi gwneud hynny fy hun.

interfere with the interpretation. I had better check that I have done so myself.

[3] Nid ydym yn disgwyl ymarfer larwm tân y bore yma. Felly, os ydym yn clywed larwm tân, bydd rhywbeth o'i le. Dilynwch y tywyswyr: byddent yn sicrhau eich bod yn gadael yn saff.

We do not expect a fire alarm drill this morning. Therefore, if we hear a fire alarm, it means that something is wrong. Follow the ushers: they will ensure that you leave safely.

9.50 a.m.

[4] A oes angen i unrhyw Aelod ddatgan buddiant? Gwelaf nad oes. Diolch yn fawr iawn i chi. Yr wyf wedi derbyn ymddiheuriad gan Angela Burns, gan nad yw'n dda o hyd. Yr wyf yn siŵr ein bod yn dymuno'n dda iawn i Angela. Hoffwn roi groeso cynnes yn ôl i Lynne, ar ôl y profedigaeth yn y teulu. Yr ydym yn falch i'ch gweld yn ôl.

Does any Member need to declare an interest? I see that no-one does. Thank you very much. I have received an apology from Angela Burns, who is still not well. I am sure that we all wish Angela well. I would like to give a warm welcome back to Lynne, following her family bereavement. We are pleased to see you back with us.

[5] Mae Angela wedi ymateb ar bapur i'r adroddiad ar eiriolaeth. Yr ydym yn ddiolchgar iawn iddi am gymryd yr amser i wneud hynny.

Angela has responded in writing to the advocacy report. We are grateful to her for taking the time to do that.

[6] Mae tri pheth ar yr agenda heddiw. Y cyntaf yw cytuno ar yr adroddiad yr ydym wedi ei drafod. Yna, mae gennym sesiwn eithaf hir gyda staff presennol Swyddfa Comisiynydd Plant Cymru. Yr wyf yn arbennig o falch i gyhoeddi ein bod wedyn yn disgwyl gweld Keith Towler, sydd wedi ei benodi'n Gomisiynydd Plant Cymru. Credaf y bydd yn dechrau yn ei swydd ar 1 Mawrth. Cawn gyfle i drafod gyda Keith y materion y mae ef yn disgwyl gweithredu arnynt yn y swydd.

There are three things on the agenda today. The first is to agree the report that we have discussed. Then, we have quite a long session with the current staff of the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales. I am especially pleased to announce that we are then expecting to see Keith Towler, who has been appointed as the new Children's Commissioner for Wales. I believe that he takes up his post on 1 March. We will have the opportunity to discuss with Keith the issues that he is expecting to deal with in his post.

9.51 a.m.

Gwasanaethau Eiriolaeth i Blant a Phobl Ifanc yng Nghymru Advocacy Services for Children and Young People in Wales

[7] **Helen Mary Jones:** Credaf ein bod wedi cytuno ar gynnwys yr adroddiad. Hoffwn roi'r cyfle i Aelodau ychwanegu unrhyw sylwadau am y broses. Bydd hefyd yn gyfle i adrodd yn ôl yn gyhoeddus ar rai o'n hymweliadau i grwpiau plant a phobl ifanc.

Helen Mary Jones: I believe that we have agreed on the content of the report. I would like to give Members the opportunity to add any comments to the process. It will also be an opportunity to report back publicly on some of our visits to children and young people's groups.

[8] We agreed the content of the report in the informal session. However, we have a few minutes before our visitors are due to arrive, so I would like to invite any comments that Members might like to make about the process, or to put on record some of our experiences from the rapporteur visits.

[9] **Eleanor Burnham:** I would like to thank the Chair for making this such a pleasurable and interesting experience. We have all, in our own way, had contact with vulnerable young people. I found it particularly interesting to go across north Wales to look at two different aspects of the work that is already going on, which is a reflection of how devolution is bringing about something as vital as advocacy for young people. We all hear in our post bags and constituency work harrowing tales relating to the lack of decent services for some of these young people. We have had a very productive committee report, and I think that we have all worked towards the same aim, which is to improve these services. I would like to highlight that this is not about complaining; it is about allowing the voices of the young people who desperately need improvements to services to be heard. As one of the spokespeople from the Welsh Local Government Association eloquently put it, it is not about complaining, it is just about getting the true equality for youth that we desperately need to give them in areas that we know are not working at the moment. Thank you, Chair. It has been a great pleasure and a privilege.

[10] Yr wyf yn siŵr ein bod ni i gyd yn gwerthfawrogi eich gwaith chi a gwaith y bobl ifanc. Hoffwn ddiolch i'r grwpiau sydd wedi siarad â mi. Edrychaf ymlaen at ymateb bositif y Llywodraeth i gwrdd ag anghenion pobl ifanc, sydd wedi bodoli ers talwm. I am sure that we all appreciate your work and that of the young people. I would like to thank the groups that have spoken to me. I look forward to the positive response of the Government to meet the needs of young people, which have existed for a long time.

[11] **Christine Chapman:** I would like to echo what Eleanor has said. This inquiry has been great as it has raised the profile of advocacy. I am sure that the evidence that we have received from witnesses will help to raise the profile of advocacy, which is what we all wanted.

[12] I visited Tros Gynnal in Merthyr. It was great to talk to the young people there. The main point that I brought back from that was how empowered those young people felt, compared with how they felt previously, when they tended to feel that no-one was listening to them or to what they really had to say. That is the difference with advocacy: real advocacy is about letting young people's voices be heard and it has a huge impact on their lives. Some of these young people are very vulnerable and this inquiry will make a difference to their futures. I have been very pleased to be part of this.

[13] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you all very much. I would like to add and put on record my thanks to everyone who has contributed to the inquiry. The witnesses who came to give evidence formally to the committee were open and positive and, although there were different views about how best to achieve the outcome, it was heartening to see the shared vision, as Chris has said, of wanting to give children and young people a chance to get their voices heard. That was very valuable.

[14] Now that the report is approved, it will have to go through all of the practical process of translation and publication, and, with Members' permission, we will have a look at diaries and see what we can do by way of a publication date. We have been sending some bits of the report into the translation system already and the staff have had a cover designed. I wanted to ask Members what they thought, and we may face practical issues here, about perhaps inviting some of the children and young people who participated in preparing the report to join us for a small reception, a sandwich lunch or something. We would invite not only them, but the others who came before us to give evidence. However, I am particularly

thinking of inviting the children and young people, because it feels very much like their report and it is about getting their voices heard through this committee. It might therefore be rather nice to have some of them here when we hold the launch and publish the report.

[15] I was also going to ask the committee's views on whether it feels that it would be appropriate, given that there is a certain amount of urgency on this, that we give the Government a draft of the report before the formal launch, because it may be that we will have the report ready and we might, because of other committee reports or something happening in the same week, want to delay the launch by a week or two. My view is that we could trust the Minister with an in-confidence copy of the report so that she can begin preparing her response and begin, hopefully, to look at some of the recommendations. I realise that it is slightly unorthodox, but we are working on a tight timescale here and we want to start getting these changes made for children and young people. I would not want to see that delayed by our need to have a proper launch, but, on the other hand, I would not want us not to have a proper launch because we were rushing to get the report out. What do Members feel about that? Would you be content with that?

[16] **Eleanor Burnham:** I do not have a problem with that, but will it not set a difficult precedent?

[17] **Helen Mary Jones:** If we wait until it is in its publishable form, and it is just that we have not had the publicity event to launch it, I do not think that that sets a difficult precedent. Government Ministers have been supportive of this review and have provided a lot of evidence for us that they were not obliged, by any means, to provide. So, in the interests of getting the work up and running, I think that it would be appropriate on this occasion for the committee to reciprocate, if you are happy.

[18] Before we move on to the next item, because we are almost out of time, I would like to say a big thank you to all of the staff who have been involved—the Members' research service and our clerks. They have done a great job of pulling together, in a very good, readable and approachable format, some quite complex and difficult issues. This report sets a good starting point for our committee's work. We have achieved a lot in a very short time and we can demonstrate, by using the rapporteur visits and using slightly different ways of doing things, that we have been able to achieve a strong outcome, perhaps rather more quickly than we would have done had we stuck to more conventional methods. So I say a big thank you to the staff. I know that it has been a big rush, in that we have been trying to get things done as quickly as possible, but I am very grateful and I am sure that Members are also.

[19] We will contact Members with some suggestions about a publication date. With that, I thank again everyone who was involved.

10.00 a.m.

Comisiynydd Plant Cymru—Adolygiad Blynyddol 2006-07 The Children's Commissioner for Wales—Annual Review 2006-07

[20] **Helen Mary Jones:** Bore da. **Helen Mary Jones:** Good morning. I Croesawaf Maria Battle, comisiynydd plant welcome Maria Battle, acting children's dros dro Cymru, ynghyd â Gareth Jones a commissioner for Wales, along with Gareth Tracey Rogers. Deallaf nad yw Sara Reid yn Jones and Tracey Rogers. I understand that dda, felly nid yw yma heddiw. Yr ydym yn Sara Reid is not well and, therefore, is not dymuno'n dda iddi. here today. We wish her well.

[21] Yn y blynyddoedd sydd i ddod, yr In the coming years, we intend to allow more ydym yn bwriadu caniatáu mwy o amser i'r time for the committee to discuss the

pwyllgor drafod adroddiad blynyddol y comisiynydd. Byddwn am gael mwy nag un sesiwn arno a byddwn, efallai, yn gofyn i Weinidogion ddod i ymateb i rai o'r pryderon yr ydych yn eu codi. Hon yw ein blwyddyn gyntaf fel pwyllgor ac mae hyn i gyd wedi bod yn dipyn bach o *rush job*, gan ein bod yn awyddus i drafod yr adroddiad yn y pwyllgor cyn iddo fynd gerbron y Cyfarfod Llawn. Felly, yr ydym am godi llawer o faterion gyda chi yn ystod yr awr nesaf, a gwnawn ein gorau i fynd drwy gymaint ohonynt ag y gallwn.

commissioner's annual report. We will want to hold more than one session on it and we might want to ask Ministers to come in to respond to the concerns that you raise. This is our first year as a committee and this has been a bit of a rush job, because we are keen to discuss the report in committee before it goes before Plenary. Therefore, we want to raise many issues with you over the next hour, and we will do our best to go through as many of them as we can.

[22] A wnewch chi gyflwyno eich hunain yn swyddogol? Would you please formally introduce yourselves?

[23] **Ms Battle:** I am Maria Battle. I am currently the deputy and acting Children's Commissioner for Wales.

[24] **Mr Jones:** I am Gareth Jones, policy officer in the policy and participation team.

[25] **Ms Rogers:** I am Tracey Rogers, the acting manager of the advice and support team for the legal investigations team.

[26] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you. I extend a warm welcome to you all. We have had the report for some time, so there is no need for further introduction. We will go straight into questions, the first of which will come from me. The questions will fall into two sections, roughly. We will concentrate on aspects of the commissioner office's work and then we will look at some of the policy issues that you raise as matters of concern.

[27] The number of individual cases that were dealt with appears to have gone down somewhat this year. Is there any particular reason for that that you have identified and is it a matter of concern at all?

[28] **Ms Rogers:** We have identified reasons for the figures for this year. The 2005-06 report shows the number of active cases. At the time, in December 2005, a dedicated team was brought into the advice and support team and that identified that several of these cases had been resolved, and they were duly closed. The cases reported in the 2006-07 report are a truer reflection of the number of cases that were opened during that period, and that is because of the implementation of the database system.

[29] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is helpful. So, really, it was about tidying up the administration of the system. The following question has been raised with you in previous committee meetings. Can you tell us a bit about how the office balances the resources that go into individual casework as opposed to the broader policy work that might impact on a larger number of children? What is your view on whether that balance is right at present?

[30] **Ms Battle:** It is quite complex; it is not as simple as it might seem from the resources. If you take me out of the equation, about 18.5 per cent of the budget goes to the policy work and 18.5 per cent goes to the casework. We work in project teams so, although there are four specified teams, three of them—the policy team, the communications team and the casework team—work together. The bullying review, for example, had active involvement from the three teams, and the play and leisure review, which will shortly be published, has again involved the three teams working together. The unofficial exclusions review involved the

casework and policy teams working together, ‘Someone to Listen; Something to Do’ involved the casework and communications teams working together, and ‘Somebody Else’s Business’ involved the policy and casework teams working together. So, although the resources may be dedicated to paying the salaries of members of different teams, they do project work together.

[31] We find that one of the benefits of casework is that it gives us evidence about policies that are not being implemented, so that we can say with confidence that an implementation problem is affecting the outcomes for children. Similarly, it identifies where there is a policy gap, and then we can systematically advocate for that gap to be filled. I have some examples of that: there is the policy gap around advocacy and counselling, where we are picking up the cases, and on asylum, and some issues around looked-after children. Policies are not being implemented in child and adolescent mental health services, for example, where children are being placed out of county without any planning—we are still picking up cases like that today. That kind of evidence can inform our policy and investigative reviews, so that we get a fuller picture, and the views of children and young people can have an input into policy.

[32] However, we are also dealing with children who find that the system is failing them, either because the system needs better policies or resources, or because policy is not being implemented. What I have tried to do this year, in order to assess whether it is an appropriate division of resources, is to gather a lot of evidence. As you know, having attended some of our meetings, we listened to 450 children in north and south Wales about what they think the priorities should be for the next commissioner. We have also had a residential weekend away, with our advisory group—similarly, we asked where they thought our corporate plan should be going, and what our priorities should be. We have also had a three-year independent evaluation of our work, led by Swansea University and the University of Central Lancashire. They interviewed a lot of the stakeholders, and that was led by children and young people. We have also had awaydays with staff, and all this information is being fed to the new commissioner—he will then set the priorities, both for resources, policies and our corporate plan, over the next three years.

[33] Having spoken with Keith Towler on a number of occasions, I anticipate that we will go forward thematically. We will pick a number of key policy areas and continue the project work, but perhaps do even more of it. That is based on the evidence, and the way that we have trialled this, and listened to everybody else, including the children—that is probably the way that we will go forward. I hope that that helps to explain a bit more about how we work.

[34] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is great—especially the information on the process.

[35] **Eleanor Burnham:** It is interesting to note that most of the cases are brought by others on behalf of young people. What are the reasons for such a relatively small proportion of direct contact with children?

[36] **Ms Battle:** There are a number of reasons for that. In order for a child to approach an adult, there usually has to be some relationship of trust. Those adults who come to us are advocating on behalf of children whom they know. The children know them, and the adults are aware of the children’s rights, and of what needs to change—they have usually tried everything that they can to bring about that change, and we seem to be a last resort.

[37] There is also the issue of children’s knowledge of their rights, and about us, fundamentally. The Funky Dragon research shows that only 8 per cent of children know about their rights. I know that our independent evaluation will show that far too few children know that we exist. We are hoping, with Keith coming in, and having recruited a number of staff this year, one of whom has expertise in public relations, that we will have a campaign to raise knowledge. We have a DVD to send out to every school, and we will use it to raise Keith’s profile, because children need to see his face and know who this person, this commissioner,

is. Obviously, Keith will get around Wales a lot as well, and we are looking at having a bus with cellophane around it, and all those exciting things—poor Keith does not know this yet, and he has yet to agree to it, but we will discuss that when he starts on 3 March.

10.10 a.m.

[38] Children need to know about us. We have a freephone and free text facility; it is about other professionals who work with children knowing that that exists and telling children about it. It is also everyone's responsibility—including the Assembly and schools—to know what helplines, and so on, are available for children and young people. I am disappointed that so few come, and I hope that, with a publicity campaign, more children will come to us directly.

[39] **Eleanor Burnham:** Children in Need, for instance, has a huge amount of money at its disposal. Are you able to tap into that kind of money for your PR, in excess of your core budget?

[40] **Ms Battle:** No, not that I am aware of, but I will look into it. The children in need are some of the most vulnerable children—

[41] **Eleanor Burnham:** You are dealing with those children.

[42] **Ms Battle:** Children gave evidence to your committee last week. One of the major things that they said is, 'Why did we not know about the children's commissioner? Why did we not know about our rights?'. Once one child knows, and things change, they tell other children; that is trust again—it is the word of mouth. Therefore, one of our major challenges—as it is for everyone—is to raise awareness of rights and what we can do for children and young people in Wales; we are there for them.

[43] **Eleanor Burnham:** Is it possible to incorporate all this information into the Assembly education service's visits on our behalf to schools? That service is making inroads in all our areas. Could we suggest that?

[44] **Helen Mary Jones:** One thing that we could do, if committee members thought that it was a good idea, would be for me to write to the Assembly Commission, because we get hundreds of children coming here, and the education service goes out to visit schools. The Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee is thinking of using that resource for consultations on issues that might be relevant. We will raise that, and I will report back.

[45] **Ms Rogers:** I wanted to go back, if I may, to your initial question on adults and professionals contacting the organisation. We are reliant on that continuing. Many of the children that we assist are vulnerable; they may be vulnerable due to mental illness. We have had several calls about young people being put on adult mental health wards, and we are reliant on professionals bringing that to our attention. There are also issues around young children, children with disabilities, and children with special educational needs. Therefore, we are reliant on adults—either parents or professionals—contacting us also.

[46] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you, that is helpful. Chris has the next questions.

[47] **Christine Chapman:** On the number of young people and children who contact you, there are apparently more males than females. Looking at the statistics, in 2006-07, 57 per cent of the young children and people who contacted you were male, compared with 43 per cent who were female; in 2005-06, 54 per cent were male, and 46 per cent were female. There seems to be a trend there. Are there any thoughts on why there is this gender difference?

[48] **Ms Battle:** Many of the cases are to do with education. My own feeling—and this is not evidence-based—is that boys have a particularly difficult time growing up; they have a lot of pressures on them, they are less likely, perhaps, to show their true emotional feelings and to express the difficulties that they are having, and they have a lot of pressure on them to perform. We discussed, internally, the possibility of looking at the pressures that boys face in society. They tend to have fewer outlets, except that there may be some more harmful outlets for the pressures that they are under. Many of the education cases tend to be—and Tracey can confirm this—adolescent boys who are finding it difficult, and the support networks are not there to support them through that period. However, it is not evidence-based; it is just my perception.

[49] **Ms Rogers:** Many of the young people who contact us, particularly boys, struggle in the early years of high school. It may be that something extra is needed. Maria mentioned that we are working with a steering group, which is evaluating the service. We are looking at the data that we should be recording in the future. This may be looked at internally to see whether there is a link between age and the type of matter that is being raised with the organisation.

[50] **Christine Chapman:** This is a real issue. There is some research, which is quite old, on the ways in which girls and boys present themselves in classrooms. Sometimes boys exhibit quite visible behaviour whereas girls who are in trouble sometimes stay quiet. There is some research to suggest that this is the case. If you are going to look at some research, I think that you need to look at both sides, because it does not mean that the problem is not there. I would be interested to see what comes out of that. It is good that you are pursuing this.

[51] **Helen Mary Jones:** Further to that, coming back to Eleanor's question about self-referral and referrals by adults, I know that the number of young people referring themselves directly is quite small, but is the gender split significant—picking up on Christine's point that boys will often make a lot of noise whereas girls will often suffer in silence? Would you be able to collect that information? That would be interesting to see.

[52] **Ms Rogers:** In discussions with the evaluation group, Dr Nigel Thomas has indicated that he would welcome working with us to record similar statistics and in working towards looking at our current database system in order that we can get a clearer grasp of ages, genders, and the types of problems and difficulties that are being brought to the organisation.

[53] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you. That is really helpful. We will look forward to that.

[54] **Eleanor Burnham:** Hoffwn ofyn cwestiwn am y Gymraeg a materion ethnig. A ydych yn casglu data a gwybodaeth am nifer y plant sy'n dod o gefndiroedd ethnig neu sy'n gofyn am gyngor drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg?
Eleanor Burnham: I would like to ask a question about the Welsh language and ethnic matters. Do you collect data and information regarding the number of children from ethnic backgrounds or who request advice through the medium of Welsh?

[55] **Ms Battle:** I will outline the philosophy behind this service, which will help to answer the question. I am sure that Tracey can say some more on this point. When the office was established, Peter was passionate that it should be a service that was not bureaucratic and that it should assist and try to solve problems as quickly as possible for the child. When we designed the recording tool, he did not want there to be a list of questions for children as soon as they picked up the phone. So, although we are able to record, we use our professional judgment as to whether or not we should even ask that question. It depends on where the child is in their life and so on, and what the problem is.

[56] We see ourselves as being there first and foremost to assist that particular child, and

the recording of it is secondary. We take as much information as we feel is necessary to help to resolve the problem. Obviously, sometimes, we will need the child's age, address, or name. Sometimes, if it is a call asking for advice, we do not need any of that information. It is about keeping the child there. Having said that, when we think that we can record the information, we do so. For example, in cases relating to asylum, immigration, or migration cases. We know where the child is from because we need that information to try to resolve the issues that the child may have with health, education, or the immigration services.

[57] With regard to services through the medium of Welsh, we will know that a child is a Welsh speaker because the communication will generally be in Welsh. However, we do not necessarily always concentrate on the recording.

[58] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yr ydych yn darparu gwasanaeth ffôn drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg os bydd rhywun yn gofyn amdano. **Eleanor Burnham:** You do provide a phone service through the medium of Welsh if people request it.

10.20 a.m.

[59] **Ms Battle:** Yes.

[60] **Eleanor Burnham:** A ydych yn gofyn a ydynt eisiau siarad Cymraeg neu Saesneg, ac, os ydynt o gefndiroedd ethnig arall, a ydych yn medru darparu gwasanaeth mewn ieithoedd gwahanol? **Eleanor Burnham:** Do you ask whether they want to speak in Welsh or in English, and, if they are from other ethnic backgrounds, are you able to provide a service in different languages?

[61] **Ms Battle:** We can, and do, provide a service in Welsh. I think that half the staff, if not more, are first-language Welsh speakers. With regard to other languages, we have provided a service where necessary, but that has not happened a lot. Similarly, if a child is profoundly deaf, for example, we will pay for the necessary aid to communicate with that child, and we have done that.

[62] **Lynne Neagle:** In terms of individual complaints that you have received, education and social services again figure highly, as well as family law and child and adolescent mental health services. Have you seen any improvements in those key policy areas in the period of the last report?

[63] **Ms Battle:** I think that the independent investigation service has led to improvement for many children who have raised allegations or complaints internally within schools. We still have some concerns, which I have raised directly with the Minister and her officials, and with the local education authority and trade unions, about the impact on a child of raising a complaint that is not malicious but where they have been subject to repercussions as a result of having raised their concerns. That has been an improvement in the education field.

[64] In terms of child and adolescent mental health services, we have produced the scoping report this year. We have been meeting regularly with Healthcare Inspectorate Wales and with the Wales Audit Office, and have been helping them by feeding in individual case information and our report, and so on. With the Healthcare Inspectorate Wales and WAO review, and with our report, I hope that we can stop the reports—let us implement this and fund it in order to make a difference, and let us help children and stop talking.

[65] I would dearly welcome it if this committee could raise the conclusions with the Government. Some of the conclusions of our scoping review do not have to wait for the review of Healthcare Inspectorate Wales and the WAO. For example, giving the service to 16 to 18-year-olds who are not in full-time education should be done now, particularly in the

light of circumstances in our country. I would be grateful if you could pick up our conclusions in that report—they have been fed into the general review, but some of them should be implemented immediately. So, we are not seeing many improvements in CAMHS.

[66] What was the other area? Was it social services?

[67] **Lynne Neagle:** Yes.

[68] **Ms Battle:** Case wise, in social services, it is mainly that policies are not being implemented.

[69] **Ms Rogers:** With many of the complaints that come in, we tend to be the last port of call, and the parents and young people who contact us are quite desperate. That tends to be because they are not receiving the services that they had expected; for example, the leaving care regulations may not have been followed. We have a case where a young person was placed out of county after the guidance was issued by the Welsh Assembly Government in July, therefore the guidance were not followed. The county concerned was not aware that she was there and was not aware of the mental health issues that accompanied her. She ended up on an adult ward and in an argument over funding. So, these types of cases are still coming to the office.

[70] **Lynne Neagle:** I want to link that with the whole issue of Assembly Government implementation and your role in monitoring that. Children in Wales made the case clearly that it felt that the Assembly Government was strong on drawing up excellent strategies and policies, but that there was a real weakness in terms of implementation. That is a view that I share, and I think that you can see that with CAMHS, with child poverty and with disabled children across the board. I would be interested to hear your views on that and your comments on whether you feel that there is anything more that you can do to put pressure on the Assembly Government, because these themes come up every year in your reports. It must be very frustrating for you. Is there anything else that you think that your office could do to ensure that we finally see some progress on this?

[71] **Ms Battle:** I totally agree with what you have just said and I highlighted this in the foreword. Most other organisations, including non-governmental organisations, the United Nations convention on the rights of the child report that has come from the NGOs, and our own report, which has not yet been published, highlight that implementation gap. We should be very proud in Wales of the policies. When it comes to social policies and children, we are ahead of the game, but the issue is about implementation.

[72] On our role, we are restricted by our powers vis-à-vis enforcement and some of the areas that we can go into. As you know, I gave a paper to the Proposed Vulnerable Children LCO Committee asking it to consider looking at our powers. I see us working in partnership and this committee as crucial. We can bring evidence, have media campaigns and highlight the issues, but we cannot force anybody to do anything, which is a limitation. I see this committee, the NGOs and us as working in partnership to keep raising it and raising it, without waiting for children to suffer. I do not want to be bringing evidence of children suffering. We know that it is happening and, surely, together, we can ensure that there is a focus and that the resources and the strategies are implemented where they need to be implemented. Child poverty, as we all know, is the kernel of all the other issues. That is the centre of everything, including children and adult mental health services and looked-after children. We just need to close the gap and get the implementation there. As an organisation, we need you to help us to do that. We will keep getting the evidence, doing the research, raising the issues and standing up and being a voice for children, but we cannot make the Government do that.

[73] **Helen Mary Jones:** Can you expand a bit on that, as it would be useful? Your description of the role of this committee fits in very much with how we have seen ourselves. There is a lot of good policy out there, but it is about following it through. Do you have any views, as a commissioner's office, on what the blocks are to this implementation? As you say, we have very good policy that is agreed across political parties. It is not about, for example, a local authority of one colour not wanting to implement policy that comes from the centre, because it is usually policy that is agreed overall. I use that as an example because it has certainly been the case in some places in England. Do you have any thoughts about what the blocks are? If you can give us some ideas about that, it might help us, as a committee, to identify the pressure points where we can most usefully push things with the Government.

[74] **Ms Battle:** I will go back to the scoping exercise that we did in CAMHS, which specifies the blocks. That could assist the committee. An example is the non-sustainable, three-year funding for core services. We cannot attract staff because it is short term. Another is the fact that some of the developments are piecemeal and not co-ordinated. For example, as I have mentioned in the report, we currently have a suicide prevention strategy. We have some of those in Wales—Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot have developed them—but it is about the comprehensiveness of it and the sustainable funding to assist.

[75] On social services, again, it is a funding issue. You need an adequate cohort of social workers who are paid and supported adequately so that they can do a very difficult job. It is those sorts of issues. Gareth might want to say something, as he is writing things down there.

[76] **Mr Jones:** There are also issues around the training of staff who work in local authorities and raising their awareness, particularly of the UNCRC. We have talked about children's awareness of UNCRC through Funky Dragon, but it is also about the professionals' understanding of children's rights and how those are implemented on the ground and how you take a rights-based-practice approach to issues. Rights to Action is obviously the Government's underpinning philosophy for delivering children's services and all the policies around that. We have to ensure that professionals have that rights-based approach within their working practices so that they can take this forward.

10.30 a.m.

[77] However, there is also an issue with time for the practitioners. We constantly get guidance from the Welsh Assembly Government that professionals are expected to implement, but there is already a mass of guidance out there. It is difficult for them to take all of that new guidance on board, and do their professional job while retaining awareness of the existing guidance. I know that Tracey and her staff on the advice and support team find that, although guidance may have been issued by the Welsh Assembly Government, professionals do not necessarily know about it, or may not have had the time or training to understand how it impacts on their work with children and young people.

[78] **Ms Rogers:** A number of professionals refer cases to us, and very often we can give general advice, direction or guidance to assist them. It is quite worrying that they are not aware of guidance, given that they are the people doing the job on the ground. That may be because it has not filtered down to them, or because no adequate training has been given to them, or just because people higher up have not generally taken it on board, or not seen its relevance to particular departments.

[79] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is helpful, and that leads on to your next question, Chris—unless you have a supplementary.

[80] **Christine Chapman:** It will lead into my next question. You talked about professionals in organisations, like those in local government. I have spoken to such

professionals, and the feeling that I get, quite often, is that the rights and priorities of the child are not as central as they should be in such organisations. In the media, young people and vulnerable children are often talked about as troublemakers. There are huge difficulties to be overcome, and it is great that we now have the children's commissioner and this committee, but we still have a long way to go to convince people that it is important that we do this.

[81] **Ms Battle:** I agree, and sometimes it needs to come from the bottom up. To give an example, I went to two schools that were part of the UNICEF Rights and Results programme, and met all the headteachers of the feeder primary schools, and I found that every lesson given to children from nursery age to age 11 was based on the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. These children knew more about their rights than I did. It was endemic. They also knew about other people's rights, and how to respect those rights, both at school and in the community. However, the headteachers said that that would all have changed by the time those children got to secondary school, because their communities would have changed. So, as well as our looking at the adult level, we also have to look at the children's level, because rights benefit everybody, and we have to respect each other's rights.

[82] You were asking earlier about certain issues, and it is all to do with funding, valuing staff, and taking the time to listen to children. For example, looked-after children need a relationship with an advocate who is there for them and is on their side, and with a social worker. So, they need stable relationships with the same adults in their life, and they need sustainable and secure placements, where they feel valued and safe, and where they will not need to change school. This is about ensuring that every child is looked after as you would look after your own. These things are quite simple, and that is what children say as well, but funding is the problem.

[83] **Christine Chapman:** You have partly answered my question, Maria. Our concern was that the UN convention on the rights of the child is now 18 years old, yet your research shows that only 8 per cent of young people have been taught about it. I see the value of feeding that through the system and, in so many years' time, those young people will be fully au fait with it, and can have an influence. However, can we afford to wait for these young people to grow up, rather than educating the current adult population? It will take a while, so should we be tackling this from the top down as well as from the bottom up? That is an issue, is it not?

[84] **Ms Battle:** Yes, we need to tackle it at all levels. Another thing that I forgot to mention is that we also have a report on the UN convention on the rights of the child, which is being fed to the committee. The priorities in that report are all based on evidence from the four UK countries, but the Welsh part will inform our work programme for the next three years. We will be discussing those things that you have just mentioned, Chris, and our role in trying to take that forward.

[85] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is helpful. Did you want to come back on this, Chris?

[86] **Christine Chapman:** Yes, please. Part of the UN convention on the rights of the child is to do with the physical punishment of children, and so, on the ongoing debate and campaign to end that, I was rather disappointed when I read the report, as I did not see any reference to that in it. It might just have been an omission, but I hope that you have not pulled back from that commitment.

[87] **Ms Battle:** No, not at all. As you know, given that we all—as a Welsh Assembly Government, as Assembly Members, as non-governmental organisations in Wales, and as the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales—feel that we should be allowed to ban the physical punishment of children in our own country, we made an oral submission to the Proposed Vulnerable Children LCO Committee, that, if it could be done legally, we should

use the UNCRC as a vehicle to that end. The matter has not gone off the agenda. It is also included in our UNCRC report, so there are no secrets about that. It is one issue on which we will hold the UK Government to account, particularly given that we are more advanced in our parental education campaign in Wales. As a nation, we are more advanced in our feeling that we want to abolish it in Wales, generally. The only thing preventing us is the legal difference between the two countries. Therefore, it has not gone off the agenda at all.

[88] **Helen Mary Jones:** I am sure that we are all pleased to hear that. The committee might want to explore those issues with you and the commissioner's office in the future.

[89] We will move on now to look at three of the main areas that you highlight. We will look again in more detail at some of the mental health issues that you have raised, and then we will have some questions about looked-after children and child poverty. I think that Members will be aware of the Minister's announcement in a written statement this week that we will be having a suicide prevention plan for Wales, which we would all welcome warmly. Could you highlight some of the work that the commissioner's office has done on these issues, which you think should be included in that plan, particularly as it relates to children and young people?

[90] **Ms Battle:** Before I go on to that, I will just explain some of the work that we have done in this area. I wrote a report in August, and, as you know, highlighted the issue at the time. We have been active in liaising with police and the local safeguarding children board in the Bridgend area, as well as the coroner. I want to commend everyone in the local area on the amazing work that they have done under difficult circumstances. I have been appalled by some of the media's coverage of recent events. A few weeks ago, I wrote to every media outlet reminding them of their responsibility to report the news responsibly, and of the possibility of a connection between sensationalist reporting and further tragedies. I referred them to the press guidance, and asked them to revisit it. I invited them to ask themselves when issuing a report that a vulnerable person might read, 'Could this report result in someone having to seek help?' and asked them to include all the relevant helpline numbers. So, I have been in close contact, particularly with the police, and that will continue.

[91] I welcome the Minister's statement on the national suicide prevention strategy. There are several things that I would be grateful if the committee could take up as well, and I will be writing to the Minister on those things. I notice that there is a timescale of three months, and one issue is that experts should assist us in putting this strategy together. We have some renowned experts in Wales who could be involved, and we should use their expertise. A comprehensive strategy has shown to result in improvements: Scotland is the example that, I think, the Minister used. A national suicide prevention strategy also needs to have measurable objectives, as well as age-specific targets, which would obviously include children and young people.

10.40 a.m.

[92] The implementation of the strategy needs to be monitored; we do not want a strategy that is not implemented. A group needs to be identified to monitor the implementation of that strategy, and we need to have confidence in that group, so it should include experts and some representatives of non-governmental organisations. For example, the Samaritans have been very active, as have Papyrus—Prevention of Young Suicide. The group needs to comprise people who are knowledgeable about what is happening on the ground, as well as policy makers, and it needs to monitor the implementation of the strategy. Those are the main things that I would say about the suicide prevention strategy. There is a lot of goodwill and expertise out there that we need to harness. Sustainable funding for that strategy is also needed.

[93] In addition to the strategy, we keep raising the need for parallel services alongside the

strategy, such as counselling. As you know, Peter Clarke recommended that in 2004. We have the strategy, which we welcome, but we must now get it out into schools. That recommendation was based on evidence given by children and young people, who said what they would have done and to whom they would have gone. It was also based on evidence from the caseloads. Child and adolescent mental health services are central to this, so the CAMHS recommendations that will come from the review, the recommendations that have already been made, and our conclusions have to be implemented on the ground. It is complex, and involves all of the services. Social services also need to be adequately funded, and practitioners need to be trained. The ASSIST programme is going on in some areas. Our staff are being trained in that, because children have also come to us, and we have intervened and tried to support them. So, it involves all of the services working together to ensure that the strategy is implemented universally.

[94] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you. Before I bring Eleanor in, I want to associate myself with everything that you have said about the unfortunate publicity surrounding recent events in the Bridgend area. However, I must say that some of the Wales-based media outlets have handled things differently. I think that they have been much more open to representation from you, from the Government, and from other key players in the Bridgend area. I hope that I speak for everyone when I add the voice of this committee to those appealing to some of the British media outlets who have treated this in a sensational way please to consider the consequences of what they are saying. There is a public interest element to reporting some of these events, but you asked a valid question, Maria, about whether young people, having read the reports, would be more likely to look for help, or whether another outcome is more likely. I really hope that we can put some of that sensationalist reporting behind us. I know that the Minister has also made representations to some of the UK outlets to ask them please to look again at the Samaritans' guidelines on how suicides should be reported and to implement them, because the evidence that they suggest exists does not exist. I also want to commend the local response in Bridgend and that of the Assembly Government, which has been measured and appropriate.

[95] I will now bring in Eleanor. You have made a couple of suggestions, Maria, about things that you would like the committee to do, so, before we leave the issue of mental health, we will decide whether to take those forward.

[96] **Eleanor Burnham:** I am a mother, and I also used to deal with vulnerable children in different schools in north-east Wales. Surely we need to take account of the parallel universe in which many young people live. I am not technical, but it is as though they are living in cyberspace or whatever, with the appearance of blogging platforms, and so on. Can you advise the Government on keeping up with all of these lifestyle trends and the use of up-to-date information technology and how that affects young people? I do not know whether the media are right or wrong, and I understand your reservations, but I read in one of the papers the other day that there are sites out there that permit, even urge, youngsters to take this ridiculous course of action. I am concerned about that, and wonder whether you are keeping the right people, including the police and the Government, up to date with all of these things.

[97] **Ms Battle:** As you know, those sites do not fall within the Suicide Act 1961, whereas a person encouraging you face to face would. So there is that issue of the general law, although that would be difficult to implement. I am meeting the police shortly to discuss in great detail how our office may be able to work with them to look at issues more fully. I would rather not say any more than that at the moment.

[98] **Eleanor Burnham:** That is great. I am grateful to the Chair for her indulgence.

[99] My other questions are about the adequacy or otherwise of the Assembly Government's response to some of the concerns expressed in your successive reports, which

Lynne alluded to earlier, and what further action is needed by either the Assembly Government or service providers. I refer, in particular, to pages 8 and 9 of the report, and I looked with great interest and horror at some of the key issues and trends that you referred to. On page 8, the table shows that education, for instance, accounts for 55 per cent of the total number of cases, but on page 9, when you analyse the categories in the table there, and I came across this a great deal when I was working with vulnerable kids, special educational needs provision features prominently. A legislative competence Order is traversing through the custard of Westminster procedures, and let us hope that that can be of benefit, because, in the table on page 9 particularly, SEN is definitely top of the pops, and complaints follow closely. Are you content that enough is going to be done? You have already mentioned the adequacy or inadequacy of funding and the continuation of funding. The situation is quite horrifying, really. I would have thought that bullying would have been top, but bullying, thankfully, is way down. So, what is going wrong and what are you hoping that the Government and local authorities, in particular, in providing these services, can improve on?

[100] **Helen Mary Jones:** Before I bring Maria and the team in, I remind Members that this item is scheduled for roughly another 15 minutes, and we have quite a few areas that we want to cover, so I ask for brief questions and responses from witnesses.

[101] **Eleanor Burnham:** I think that this is an important issue.

[102] **Helen Mary Jones:** It is indeed, Eleanor, but we need to try to keep questions and responses fairly brief. Maybe if there is more detail that the witnesses want to provide in answer to any Member's question, you can give us a written note.

[103] I ask you to focus on mental health and also to pick up on Eleanor's question on special educational needs, and the adequacy of the Government's response and specific actions that you think that service providers need to be taking. You mentioned that there are some things, particularly in relation to mental health, that you feel need to be being done now and do not need to wait for the review.

[104] **Ms Battle:** Have you all received a copy of our scoping report?

[105] **Helen Mary Jones:** We will have done, and I am sure that the committee team can make it available to people if they have not picked it up.

[106] **Ms Battle:** Okay. Within the scoping report, which is evidence based, we have drawn a number of conclusions and I think that those would assist you. There are reasons behind the conclusions, and they are things that we have said in the past, for example, conclusion 3 was that all 16 to 18-year-olds should have access. We raised the commissioning arrangements again, and there is a review of Health Commission Wales. However, there are some things that can be changed immediately, for example, with regard to eating disorders, children who are very much at risk only get six weeks of funding, but specialist placements will not take children without 12 weeks of funding. Those are the sorts of issues, but I will not go into detail because it is in the report. I think that it would really assist you. There are two pages of conclusions, on pages 47 and 48.

[107] **Mr Jones:** There are two conclusions that we would very much like to highlight. First is the lack of an approach with regard to children and young people with sexually harmful behaviour. We have raised that issue over the last few years, but we have yet to see a coherent response from the Welsh Assembly Government on this. This is a public health issue, and we want the Government to deal with it and address it when it responds to our report. The second one is around self harm and the variation of practice in terms of the assessment via CAMHS professionals of children and young people who may have been admitted for self-harming behaviours. We know that it is a cry for help, and we know that that

is telling us that there is something going on within the child's experience that needs to be addressed. The physical manifestation of it can be treated, but we need to deal with the issues behind that and we need to get a consistent picture across the board.

10.50 a.m.

[108] **Ms Battle:** At present, some children are assessed before they are discharged and some are not. One of the conclusions that we came to was that all children have the right to that assessment before they are discharged. Similarly, children with learning disabilities are excluded from CAMHS. That is totally contrary to their rights, it is unacceptable and it should be addressed immediately, and the money that is ring-fenced for the forensic team needs to be released so that the forensic team has sufficient capacity. At present, there is only one nurse in south Wales, I understand. Those are the sorts of issues.

[109] There are special educational needs cases every single year. It is a very difficult process. You talked about traversing custard in Westminster; parents would probably agree with that description in terms of the SEN process. From the children's side, or the side of those who are representing children, it is a very difficult process to get through, to get the assessment and then to get the services that the children need. With the cases that we have assisted in, we have managed in, I would say, over 90 per cent of cases, to help the children get to that stage. However, the issue is that it should not need us to do that. It is about making that process more accessible to children and families and to schools, because they want this additional assistance, too. Do you want to come in on special educational needs, Tracey?

[110] **Ms Rogers:** A lot of the difficulty that we have is that parents contact us, again, very much as a last resort, because they feel that they cannot get the information that they need to support their child in this situation. There is a lack of understanding generally in the schools about the process and there seems to be nobody there to provide information directly to the parents. Very often, it is a matter of simply giving the information to the parents and that is then sufficient to empower them to take matters forward themselves, but there seems to be a general lack of training and information sharing to make the process easier. Schools also struggle with it, because there seems to be a lack of understanding as to how the funding works and schools try to manage it under school action plus rather than accepting that the child may need assessment, and there seems to be a lack of understanding that more provision and funding would be available to assist them in supporting a child if they went through the process. So there generally seems to be a lack of understanding.

[111] **Helen Mary Jones:** The committee may wish to come back to some of the educational issues, because we have the legislative competence Order on additional powers and the Assembly Government's plans for introducing a simplified system. With regard to some of the things that the office of the children's commissioner has told us about child and adolescent mental health services and what should be in the suicide prevention strategy, do Members feel that it would be helpful for me to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services about those issues? We are aware that the review is ongoing, but the office of the children's commissioner is telling us that there are things that could be done now that do not need to wait for the outcome of the review. Would Members be content for the team to draft a letter? We will then circulate it and, if Members are happy with the contents, we will get it to the Minister. I see that you agree with that. I believe that the Minister will welcome our input, so I think that that would be helpful. I will bring Chris in and then we will deal with a series of issues about looked-after children that arise out of the report and which you may want to raise questions about.

[112] **Christine Chapman:** In the report, it is acknowledged that the Welsh Assembly Government is now investing a lot into the issues surrounding looked-after children. Nevertheless, the report says

[113] 'we are still continuing to fail too many children.'

[114] What more do you think should be done to improve outcomes for looked-after children? You know the examples as well as I do, but we are talking about statistically poorer health, educational achievements and disrupted placements. From some of the work that I have been doing recently, I have realised that some of these young people, under the age of 18, are drifting into things such as prostitution. That is really worrying. Many of them have come from the care system. So, there is a whole range of concerns there. What more do you think the Welsh Assembly Government should be doing to address those issues?

[115] **Ms Battle:** Looked-after children and their needs and so on should be very high up in the vulnerable children strategy. We have attended a few meetings with the Assembly and with stakeholders about the way forward for the vulnerable children strategy. There has also been some research, which surprised me, showing that some of the outcomes for children are better while they are in care than beforehand or afterwards. The key seems to be to try to focus on early intervention, to prevent children from coming into care and to prevent the damage that is done to children before they come into care. So, there is a lot more emphasis on enabling the services to provide the support that is needed as early as possible. That is obviously the right way forward in theory—it is a question of how it will actually be implemented in practice. That includes the retention and recruitment of social workers, and the advocates available, because these are children in need, and at the moment we do not have an advocacy service for children in need. We tend to pick up those cases, but an independent advocacy service should be there to ensure that the services that are needed by the child, and by the child's family, are available. That means CAMHS, counselling, and the focus, resources, training, and support for staff, because they are on the front line. As well as looking at outcomes for children, we also look at any serious case reviews and analyse how agencies have worked together. Then we present that analysis back to the agencies to try to improve practice, and it goes back to CSSIW so that it can scrutinise the agencies as well in accordance with our views. So, it is about the same universal issues—it is about focus, and resources.

[116] **Christine Chapman:** I know that the numbers of children going into care in Wales are increasing all the time. There are two ways of looking at that: it might be a good thing in some ways, because problems are being acknowledged earlier, or it might be a bad thing. What is your view?

[117] **Ms Battle:** There are different views on that, Chris. Some directors of social services think that we live in a risk-averse society, and so we are more likely now to bring children into care than we were previously. Some may see it as evidence that we do not have sufficient staff to do the intervention work that needs to be done, or which might have been done 20 years ago. There are different views on it. However, once we are looking after children, we are the corporate parent, and I go back to my comment earlier—we need excellent foster placements, stable school placements, social workers that children have a relationship with, and who have time for them, and listen to them, and we need advocacy services, and all the things that you provide for your own children. That is what has to happen.

[118] **Christine Chapman:** Are we doing enough in terms of the early interventions? I suspect that we are probably not. That is the issue—that is where we really need to concentrate.

[119] **Ms Battle:** I do not think that we are, and I think that that is acknowledged. That is where the focus will be—that is what I am getting from the vulnerable children strategy group meetings. There is a lot of goodwill out there, and there are a lot of people who want this to work, and we are working very closely together. Would you say that that was the case,

Gareth?

[120] **Mr Jones:** Yes.

[121] **Christine Chapman:** So, people should not complain about the nanny state, because we need to make interventions—there is a need for a kind of nanny state, in a way, is there not? I agree with you—

[122] **Ms Battle:** It is a balance. Sometimes we do not take children into care who should be taken into care.

[123] **Ms Rogers:** With the casework that we are getting in this area, what we find generally is that there is not enough inter-agency working, and, very often, we are called upon to bring the agencies around the table to discuss things. So many times we have a child who has a social worker, who is aware that there are difficulties at school and health difficulties, and youth offending teams are involved, but not one of the people involved is speaking to another, so most of our intervention in that way is literally asking for the people involved to come around a table and discuss the child as a group working together. Sadly, that tends to be the case for most looked-after children.

[124] **Helen Mary Jones:** Sorry to cut across you there, but I am aware that we are running out of time. Are you able to stay with us for a few more minutes, because I know that Lynne has some issues that she would like to raise? At this stage I would like to welcome Keith Towler, who will, in a few days, become the new Children's Commissioner for Wales. Keith, while we are pursuing some of the issues that we have with the current report, would you like to join us around the table? That may assist us in taking forward our discussions with you, as we look at the way ahead.

11.00 a.m.

[125] Thank you for coming to meet us, Keith, before you officially take up your post. After we finish this agenda item, looking retrospectively at the report, we will give you an opportunity to say a few words, if you would like, about how you see the way ahead for the commissioner's office, and particularly the relationship that you would foresee with this committee. I will bring you in a little later, Keith. Lynne Neagle has the next questions; I know that you have at least three areas that you want to look at, Lynne. Let us start with child poverty, and we will then pick up on the other two.

[126] **Lynne Neagle:** We have mentioned the child poverty strategy briefly, and I welcome what you said about this being the kernel from which many of the other issues and problems that we have talked about flow. We seem to have been talking about having an operational child poverty strategy ever since I became an Assembly Member, but we are still not there, which is worrying. Do you have any general comments on how the Assembly Government is taking this issue forward, particularly implementing the child poverty implementation plan?

[127] I also have a question about the target and milestones document, which is meant to apply to all Assembly departments. Do you have any observations to make on whether departments are working towards those targets, and whether they are making sufficient progress? I understand that the expert group will start meeting in April. I believe that that group will need the commissioner's backing in pursuing these issues with the Assembly Government. Finally on child poverty, how do you see your continuing role in monitoring implementation in this most important of areas?

[128] **Mr Jones:** We welcome the fact that there are several elements in the vulnerable children LCO, where the Assembly Government has outlined the further steps that it will

take, and the requirement that it will place on local authorities to demonstrate how they are contributing to eradicating child poverty. We know that the Welsh Local Government Association, working with the Welsh Assembly Government, is trying to do some work on that. That will take time to come into effect, because of the LCO and Measures, but we welcome the fact that local partners and local delivery agents will be getting a much more statutory duty to report on what they are doing; that is key.

[129] We welcome the fact that Communities Next has taken child poverty on board; it is a theme in the consultation document, and it is important that it is there, because we know that that is targeting some of the most deprived pockets of Wales. However, we need to see the universal services contributing much more to eradicating child poverty. The percentage of children in poverty in Wales is still too high, and we will probably not hit those targets in 2010. I know that Keith, who will come into post shortly, has some strong feelings about that, and he might want to come in at this point on the expert group. However, we are concerned that we are still not getting the ball rolling quickly enough down the hill to start to meet those tough targets. It must be a universal approach; as well as a targeted approach, the universal services have to help lift these children out of poverty.

[130] Keith might want to come in at this point.

[131] **Mr Towler:** First of all, thanks for the invitation to be here—it is fantastic to have this opportunity to talk to you before I take up my post.

[132] On child poverty, the point that I wish to make loudly—and will do when I start in post—is that we are so far behind on getting to this target that we have some entrenched issues in Wales that we are not impacting on, and some of the debate that you were having earlier, which I was listening to in the public gallery, is crucial. There are things that we should expect the Welsh Assembly Government to deliver on, and there are things that we should expect local authorities to deliver on. We need the Welsh Assembly Government to keep up the pressure in relation to the Westminster Government. Some of the things that the Welsh Assembly Government has done in that regard are fantastic in terms of keeping that pressure. However, we are not going to make 2010, and we are not going to make 2020.

[133] We cannot get a quick-fix on this either—we cannot just chuck money at it. This is not just a financial issue; this is about the poverty of experience, the poverty of hope, and all kinds of ways in which children and young people are just not getting the kinds of services that they should expect.

[134] You talked earlier about the UNCRC. This year is a huge year in terms of reporting to the UN on the CRC. Child poverty will be one of the crucial issues. We should expect the UN to be really hard on the Welsh Assembly Government and the Westminster Government, and we should welcome that, because unless we have that kind of focus and we raise this to the point where people are beginning to listen, we will not make the necessary inroads.

[135] **Helen Mary Jones:** Eleanor, I ask you to be really brief, because we are already over time.

[136] **Eleanor Burnham:** My point echoes yours. Is this not an issue about the complexities of the UK Government tax credit system and low wages?

[137] **Mr Towler:** Absolutely. In the Welsh Assembly Government, there are some strong issues in relation to economic regeneration. We have to match economic regeneration opportunities in Wales to education and skills. These are not things that we should deal with separately, but things that we need to bring together. Children and young people need to have a series of offers made to them during the course of their life as they grow up. We can have as

many qualified hairdressers in the world as we want, but if we do not have enough salons, then there is no point in their qualifying in that way. So, we have to match work on economic regeneration to real skills and opportunities for children and young people, and we have to do this at the earliest opportunity. You are right to say that it is about tax credits and about what the Westminster Government can do, but we need to be a bit cleverer on matching up what we are preparing our children for with future opportunities. At the moment, it seems that we have these things running in parallel and there is little communication between them. We have to do something that brings that together.

[138] **Helen Mary Jones:** I remind Members that we have already identified child poverty as something on which this committee will do a substantial piece of work. If Members are content, I know that Lynne has a couple of specific issues to raise with the acting commissioner and the team before we move on to discuss the broader way ahead with Keith.

[139] **Lynne Neagle:** Yes. I will raise them both together, in view of the time constraints. The first relates to disabled children. You will be aware that, before Christmas, Every Disabled Child Matters Wales ran a vigorous campaign around the weaknesses that exist in services for disabled children and the funding that we hoped would flow from the announcement in England of a significant funding package. That campaign was supported by Assembly Members from all parties. I would be interested to hear your observations on the state of play with regard to services for disabled children. I know that there is a task and finish group, but I already have some concerns about the speed at which that is looking at this issue when we already know clearly what the weaknesses are. So, I would be grateful for your observations on that.

[140] I also want to raise neonatal care. You have highlighted some serious concerns in the report on neonatal care. You said that services are underfunded, underdeveloped, under-resourced, and reliant on informal networks with babies having to be transported some considerable distances. I would be grateful if you could tell us whether anything has changed since you wrote the report as a result of the review. Being mindful of the time, and what Helen Mary said earlier, could we maybe have a note from you on that? It is a stark, worrying statement. It would be helpful to the committee if we could have a note on how you came to that view.

[141] **Mr Jones:** The review that we mentioned in the section on neonatal care has not been published to date. We recently met with the charity BLISS, and we work with neonatal nurses. We know that the situation in Wales is worse than it is in the rest of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland, Scotland and England have moved further on. We also have to be aware that, since we wrote that, there has been a review of maternity services in England, which will impact on the neonatal service in Wales. At the moment, we are gathering all of that information together to see how we can take that forward and how we can make representations. We will, obviously, provide the committee with a further note on that.

[142] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you. What about the question on disabled children?

[143] **Ms Battle:** We are also watching the task and finish group. We thought that the reports that have come from the Assembly regarding disability in children have been excellent. We know what needs to happen. I echo everything that you have said. One of the areas that we have taken forward as an organisation—a report on which will be published shortly and which was voted for by children and young people—is play and leisure for children with disabilities. We have met with many children with disabilities, including some of the children who gave evidence to the Assembly. We know what needs to be done, we just have to make it happen. That is part of the work. I am reluctant to say what we will be doing in the future, but I am sure that some of us will be scrutinising that particular task and finish group and trying to apply pressure to make it happen.

11.10 a.m.

[144] **Helen Mary Jones:** Do committee members think that it would be helpful for us as a committee to write to ask Ministers for a timeframe on the task and finish group? I have an ongoing concern about task and finish groups that seem to task but never finish. The intention, before Christmas, was that this would be a fairly short, focused piece of work, picking up on what the acting commissioner said about us not having to work out what needs to be done. We need a timeframe. So, if Members are content, I will write to the Minister and ask her to give us a timeframe of when she expects a finish to the task and finish group.

[145] **Lynne Neagle:** That letter should urge the points that we have made; we know what needs to happen and it needs to happen quickly.

[146] **Helen Mary Jones:** Yes, we can find a way of making the point that the task and finish group does not need to do any new research, it needs to be putting in place the implementation mechanisms to deliver on some of the good work that has already been done. We will happily do that.

[147] I bring this agenda item to an end by, once again, thanking Maria, Gareth and Tracey for their contributions. The committee would also like to thank Maria for doing a sterling job, having had to step in given the sad loss of Peter; that loss was particularly sad, because he was getting better and we lost him at short notice, as so often happens with patients who are seriously ill. I know that that was traumatic for all staff at the children's commissioner's office, and for many of the children and young people with whom you work. The committee is grateful to you, Maria, and to the rest of the team for the way in which you have not only held the fort, but also maintained the momentum of the children's commissioner's office for quite a long time after Peter's passing, until the post was filled.

[148] The committee would also like to put on record that we would not expect such a long gap the next time that an appointment needs to be made. There is a balance to be struck in ensuring that the most rigorous processes are adhered to. We commend the Assembly Government for the way in which children and young people were involved in the appointment process for the commissioner, which inevitably makes it longer, but we hope that, when Keith's term of office comes to an end, we do not have to wait quite so long for the appointment of the next commissioner.

[149] Thank you, Maria, for all that you and the team have done, and thank you for your evidence today. I am sure that we will be seeing a lot more of the three of you, because I know that, as a committee, we see our relationship with the children's commissioner's office as an important and dynamic one. We are grateful to you for your help in our short life so far, and we will be coming back to you on many of the issues that we have discussed today, such as mental health, child poverty, looked-after children, special educational needs, and a whole range of issues. Diolch yn fawr. Thank you.

[150] I thank Members for their questions. We have some agreed action points in terms of issues to be taken up with Ministers. I think that we would all anticipate that, in future years, we would be able to spend more time on the commissioner's annual report. We have identified points where we wish to write to Ministers, but I will also seek an opportunity next week—I think that the debate will be held next week—to contribute to the debate on this issue, to raise some of the points that we have agreed to raise with Ministers. As I said, in future years, we will probably want to ask Ministers to come in to respond to some of the areas of concern that the children's commissioner's office has raised. The issue of implementation, which has been picked up before, has been raised again this morning. The issue is not what the policy is, but why things are not changing fast enough as a result of the

policy.

11.12 a.m.

Comisiynydd Plant Cymru
The Children's Commissioner for Wales

[151] **Helen Mary Jones:** Hoffwn eich **Helen Mary Jones:** I welcome you, Keith; it croesawu, Keith; mae'n hyfryd eich gweld is lovely to see you here. yma.

[152] Members might be interested to know that Keith and I have known each other for a long time. Keith was my employer, sort of, many moons ago, when I was working on what we then called a youth crime prevention project—we could not get money for youth participation in the 1980s, so we had to call it something else. Keith and his colleague, Bill Walden-Jones, at the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders were part of my management group, in the long and distant days in the Cynon valley. It is very good to see you here. Having known Keith for that long, I am in a position to speak confidently about his personal commitment to children's rights and to a rights-based approach for working with children and young people.

[153] We are grateful to you, Keith, for making time to come to see us. I know that you must be having to do an awful lot to tie up the loose ends at Save the Children before you can move on. We appreciate the work that you have done there, and the work that Save the Children does as an organisation, particularly with some of our most vulnerable children and young people, such as Gypsy, Traveller and asylum-seeking children. That said, Save the Children's loss will be the gain of the office of the children's commissioner and of the children and young people of Wales, I am sure.

[154] I will invite you to say a little about some of your initial thoughts. Maria and the team were saying earlier that a lot of preparatory work has been done, particularly with children and young people, which will guide your priorities, but I know that, in preparing to apply for the job, you have given extensive thought to how you see the role rolling out. Perhaps you can spend a few moments talking us through some of your ideas and, particularly, any views that you have about the relationship between the office that will become your office and this committee and then, hopefully, Members will have some questions and comments to make. Diolch yn fawr. Thank you for being here. The floor is yours.

[155] **Mr Towler:** Thank you for this fantastic opportunity to come and talk to you as a Save the Children employee still. I start as the commissioner on 3 March. Today is, in fact, my last day at Save the Children. I am going to have a week off and will throw my mobile phone in a bucket of water, and then I will emerge as the commissioner on 3 March.

[156] I have had the opportunity to pop down to the office to meet Maria to talk about some of the issues that the team have outlined today. There is a bit of work for me to do in familiarising myself with all of the aspects of the work and getting my head around all of the issues that the office is raising. I would like to give you a few opening thoughts.

[157] It is a very daunting prospect to become the second children's commissioner for Wales, and it is even more daunting to follow Peter Clarke. I would echo everything that you have said, Helen, about Maria and the team during what has been a really difficult time. They have maintained momentum. I have a very strong feeling about not messing anything up when I start, which is a great testament to what the team has come up with and delivered. It is fantastic. As you say, I gave this some thought during the application process and in relation

to what I have been lobbied on since the announcement of my appointment. It strikes me that the office needs to do several things, including, for example, thinking carefully about how we take forward a programme of work for children. The thing that really attracted me to the post, apart from the opportunity to have more of a profile of these issues than in any work that I have done previously, was the fact that it is a seven-year term, and that I could question myself about what I would like to achieve in that seven-year period.

[158] In terms of the way in which the office works, I would like it to become a bit more strategic. I would like us to think about having thematic work streams. One such stream could be on child poverty, so that would be a focus for the office in relation to our work and contribution. It would involve some of the preparation work that the staff have done and some of the input that the children and young people have had recently into what they think their priorities are and how they are communicating that. We are going to start a process of thinking through what our three-year operational plan needs to deliver on. I want to create a focus, from an office point of view, on asking, ‘What are the pressure points that I can bring to bear, and what is it that my influence and powers can achieve in relation to these thematic areas?’. I am not going to go into the office—aside from the concern about child poverty—to predetermine what those thematic areas are going to be. It is really important to match up what children and young people are telling us to what practitioners in the field are telling us, and to think about what our thematic priorities ought to be. I believe that we need a thematic approach. So, I very much want to maintain the kind of advocacy that is there, ensure that children and young people feel comfortable in raising issues with us and talking us through them, but I want to drive forward a programme of work that can begin to see real, substantive change.

[159] I would echo everything that I have listened to you talk about. The theme for me is going to be practice and outcomes for children. I do not want to spend my time developing new policies and strategies for children and young people—we have those. It is now about moving this on and creating substantive change. If, in seven years’ time, when I hand over to my successor, in quick succession, we are having the same debate about why we have not achieved any change for children, I will be a very disappointed man, and I think that this committee will be sad as well. So, it has to be about practice, outcomes, and substantive change, and that is what I want to think about in the thematic areas of work.

11.20 a.m.

[160] Chair, you asked a question about the blocks. What is it that prevents this policy intent, and causes this frustration that practitioners and children feel? What is it that is preventing us from doing what we all agree needs to be achieved? There needs to be a real focus on practice.

[161] As part of my work at Save the Children, I, and a number of other people, lobbied hard for the establishment of this committee. I am very pleased to see you here and to see the function that you have, and I believe that the relationship between this committee and what will become my office will be critical. I hope that we can spend a lot of time meeting, discussing the issues, monitoring progress, raising areas of mutual concern, and thinking through, tactically, how we can bring your role and mine to bear to achieve greater change for children. So, I see our relationship as a critical one, and this is a fantastic opportunity to come and meet you before I start—thank you for that. I hope that that is helpful in terms of the direction in which I would like to go, but for me, it is all about practice and outcome change.

[162] **Helen Mary Jones:** From my point of view, as Chair, that is certainly very positive. The theme that has emerged, in everything that we have discussed, is implementation.

[163] **Christine Chapman:** It is great to see you, Keith, and we look forward to working

with you. I was pleased with what you said about delivery, because many of us have been echoing that sentiment—although there are fantastic policies coming from this institution, it is now about delivery. We know that child poverty is a huge issue, and I think that it was Huw Lewis who said recently that it is about not just the Assembly signing up to eradicating child poverty, but our partners who have to deliver—local government, health, and so on. You have talked about how we address that, so do you think that there are any barriers there? What practical measures should we look at in terms of delivery? It is a huge question, I know.

[164] **Mr Towler:** It is a huge question, and it is a huge challenge in particular for officials of the Welsh Assembly Government. We need to look at the bureaucracy that flows from the policy and strategies that we have, and we need to ask ourselves, in terms of practice, to what extent some of the bureaucracy is a problem. I am not saying for one minute that we do not need to monitor progress or ensure that services are working in the way that we want them to work, but I get a real sense of frustration at the extent to which, in the field, we spend a lot of time facing this institution and reporting to this institution. There is a real gap between front-line practitioners and senior and middle managers on that. I do not say this in a critical way, but if, for example, you gather together any cross-agency group of practitioners and ask them about the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, about Extending Entitlement, or about Rights to Action, they will look at you blankly, and not because they do not care about those issues, but because there is a gap in understanding. So, they will see the Welsh Assembly Government and the National Assembly for Wales as having a concern about something, but that gap between practitioners, middle managers and senior managers is quite significant.

[165] Helen referred earlier to our days at NACRO, and in those fantastic days I spent a lot of time, as Helen did, being very concerned about the number of children and young people who were locked up in custody. We drove a process of change—and this has been evidenced, and researched, and there are academics who have made careers out of this—and it was practitioners who raised the issue of the number of children and young people who were locked up in custody, and it was practitioners who had the strength of voice to ask what was going to be done about it. They created a practice dynamic that was then followed by policy. You could argue that we have gone full circle and, as we now have lots of young people locked up in custody again, we have lost the plot on that. However, it was a significant experience for me to see how practitioners, when they have the ability, freedom and creativity to get on with things, can create change. I do not know anybody who works in a statutory or voluntary organisation that comes into the job not wanting to do the best for the children and young people on whose behalf they work. However, I do know many practitioners who are incredibly frustrated by what they describe as their inability to get on with their job. That is a big issue; it is too big for us to resolve now, but we have to focus on what practitioners are saying about that.

[166] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is a useful point. Did you want to come back on that, Chris?

[167] **Christine Chapman:** Yes. I was listening to a debate on the radio last week about young people and troublesome young people. It is getting even worse now because of the polarisation whereby these young people are seen as yobs as opposed to children. I believe that we are losing this debate, because it can be difficult for people to know how to react. We have to capture this debate; these young people are damaged, and unless we look at them in a long-term way, as opposed to coming out with some easy soundbites, we are in difficulties. Somehow, I would like to see this committee, and your office, trying to capture the debate, because we will not solve these things just by being overcritical of young people.

[168] **Mr Towler:** No, you are right.

[169] **Christine Chapman:** It may sell newspapers, but it will not solve things.

[170] **Mr Towler:** No, it is not moving anything forward. One thing that saddened me, in my experience at NACRO of working in the criminal justice system, in prisons and youth establishments, was that an incredible percentage of the children and young people sitting in prison—and you were talking about looked-after children earlier—were from a looked-after background. Therefore, if you have a debate that talks about ‘offenders’ and ‘yobs’, and you have a debate that talks about the experience of children living in poverty, of looked-after children, and of vulnerable children—whatever labels we want to put on them—they are actually the same group of children. We are talking about the same group of children, but we label them differently.

[171] As Helen will know, I have met many young people and children in prison and talked to them about their lives and the circumstances that led them to be there. They cannot read, they cannot write, their hope is zero, they do not know what they will be going back to, and they have fractured, chaotic backgrounds. Is it right that the prison service should be the first port of call where people get decent health screening and a decent education? The answer is ‘no’; it should not be happening in that way. However, they are the same children, and you are right to say that the debate must be more honest.

[172] **Eleanor Burnham:** We are living in complex times, where we have a *Daily Mail* syndrome relating to every area of life. I agree with what Christine said. I used to be a magistrate in Wrexham—and you know the provision in that neck of the woods better than I do. We used to go down to Stoke Heath to watch these kids, and it used to horrify me. I was institutionalised, but in a positive way—I went away to school. I know all about institutionalisation, and I know how, subliminally, it changes you completely; it changes your outlook.

[173] The vulnerability of people in certain institutions is horrendous, and I hope that you can work hard on that. I was privileged to write a small article in the north Wales rag before the media again decided that the chief constable of North Wales Police was wasting money on telling everyone what he was doing, even though I thought it was brilliant. Therefore, I wrote exactly the same about the criminalisation of youth and this polarisation. There is only a small percentage of evil people in life, thankfully, but a huge percentage of those people, who you are well aware of, are criminalised and then become a part of that syndrome.

[174] What struck me as a magistrate was that for many of these people with chaotic lifestyles, going into an institution was almost a haven, because, as you said, they had television, showers, three meals a day, and so on. However, the actual effect of the institutionalisation, and the vortex that ensues, is frightening. I hope that you can do something about this. I read the other day—and this baffled me; it was a farce, but it is horrifying—about an English village that stopped cricket being played because the nice people living in nearby areas could not put up with the repetitive noise made by those training in the cricket nets. I thought, ‘My God, where are we going?’. That is the attitude held by the media and society. I hope that you, as our commissioner, can do something to get us out of this. It is horrifying. We are becoming so risk-averse in a negative way. Christine, you are a social scientist, and I am sure that you have a huge knowledge of these statistics.

11.30 a.m.

[175] I am a mother, and my two kids were just as naughty growing up as I was. I am sure that I was naughty when I was a little girl. I think about the things we used to get up to, like scrumping, but if kids did that now, they would get an anti-social behaviour order. Where do we go from here? It is very frightening. That, for me, is the important issue, apart from child poverty generally, which I find quite baffling. I really worry about child poverty, and I know that it is at the top of Lynne’s list, too. I am very concerned about how you get out of the

vortex, and change attitudes. If it were that simple, it would have been solved by now, would it not? Thank you, Chair, for your indulgence.

[176] **Mr Towler:** I agree with a lot of what you said. Going back to the debate about children and young people, the recent attack—and I think that that is the right word to use—on Sir Al Aynsley-Green was quite staggering. I know that that was in relation to a debate that he pursued about the mosquito device, but I do not want to go on about that—

[177] **Helen Mary Jones:** Oh, go on.

[178] **Mr Towler:** Okay. [*Laughter.*] The good folk of that town are annoyed by the repetitive sound of a ball hitting a bat, and yet the idea is to use a device that will drive young people to distraction to get rid of them or move them on, and that appals me, to be frank. Alongside that is a complete lack of understanding about what it is like to be a child and to grow up. We were all kids and every one of us can remember scrumping apples and being naughty. It is all part of growing up. It is our fault that we have created this environment in which people want to demonise children for growing up and for wanting to have such experiences.

[179] We are also at fault—and this is where the entitlement issue is so critical—for not ensuring that children get the right offers at the right times in their lives. So many children living in poverty do not get such opportunities, not even to have a positive residential experience like going away with your friends. As a parent, I have just paid another £100 so that my daughter can go to Italy on the next school trip. Not everyone can do that, but every child should have that opportunity. There is no doubt in my mind about that. How else will children and young people get the experiences that will inform who they want to be as adults? Much of the debate that you and Chris have talked about is absolutely critical. The attack on Sir Al Aynsley-Green is incredible. However, my role as children's commissioner is to stand up and talk publicly about issues that are of concern to children and I give you an assurance that I will do that. To get immersed in that debate, I will have to equip myself for some pretty tough surroundings, but that is how I see my role.

[180] **Helen Mary Jones:** You can certainly rely on this committee to support you in any rigorous debate. I do not think that we will offer to buy you a riot shield, but we need some rigorous debate and we will support you in that.

[181] **Mr Towler:** All offers of support are gratefully welcome.

[182] **Christine Chapman:** I would just like to make a couple of points. First, I was taken with your earlier observation that it is not just about chucking money at the problem, which is great, because there is never enough money to go around. To hear that there are other solutions that can be looked at, which do not always require lots of money, really fills me with a lot of hope. We need to talk about these things and we need to organise and debate them. Perhaps you would like to come back on that.

[183] We also need to acknowledge that some young people can cause misery to others, and we would be dishonest if we did not say that. On the poverty front, poorer communities tend to suffer disproportionately at the hands of some troublemakers—and I say 'some', because most young people are great. We need to look at practical solutions, such as the design of housing estates. If we were building them now, we would never design them in the same way. There are many ways in which design can affect anti-social behaviour. For this campaign to gain credibility, we also need to acknowledge that there are real difficulties. There are troublesome teenagers out there who drink to excess, because of the laws—or lack of laws—surrounding that, as well as for all sorts of other issues. We need to engage with that agenda, and not just say, 'Oh, children will always be children'. Every era has elements of

yobbishness, but we should be a bit more educated now, and we should know how to solve some of these issues; otherwise, we will just be labelled once again as liberal do-gooders. You will not capture hearts and minds in that way. So, we need to look at those two things.

[184] **Mr Towler:** I agree. It is not always about new resources, although it is a lot of the time. A critical thing that we need to be looking at is the single plan arrangements, which ought to be the opportunity for statutory providers and the voluntary sector to start being cuter about the resources that they have and how they deploy them.

[185] Before I joined Save the Children, I did a report for Peter Clarke and Barbara Wilding, called 'Someone to Listen: Something to Do'. I spent a lot of time talking to people about their frustrations with multi-agency working, over such things as reconfiguring services and thinking through how much money is spent, and how it is spent.

[186] The duplication of assessment processes is a fantastic example, because each time a vulnerable child moves through the system, he or she is assessed about four or five times in the course of a year. Building or transferring that knowledge from one assessment to another does not necessarily happen, so people have to go back to square one. It must be terribly frustrating to go through those assessment processes. If we were a bit cleverer about how we share information, we could probably think about using those resources a bit better. So, it is not always about new money; there are ways in which we can improve our practice without necessarily thinking that we need more cash all the time.

[187] I agree with you that there are children and young people whose naughty behaviour gets us to a point at which we need, as adults, to provide them with boundaries. They respond positively to good boundary setting. Having worked in the criminal justice system—probably the most extreme boundary of all—I know that you can get children and young people to behave quite well in some of those institutions, but, as soon as they go home again, where there are very few boundaries, everything goes pear shaped. This has to be about boundary setting for children and young people in their communities and in their homes. So, while we are thinking about the design of estates, we should also be thinking about the quality of life for children and young children, and for the community. We need to get children and young people involved in their community.

[188] When Helen and I worked together all those years ago, we were getting children and young people in areas in south Wales working in their communities. We both worked for NACRO, and we did not want to be labelled as being there because we were concerned about crime, because we felt that that would be a difficult label to work with. We were talking about improving the quality of life of children, in the hope that getting them more involved in their communities would result in fewer referrals to the police and what became the youth offending teams having lower caseloads. I am absolutely convinced that it worked. It was evaluated, and we were really pleased with the progress that we made, but then everything changed—the political whim changed. Where we are now, with anti-social behaviour orders and the demonisation of children because they wear a particular piece of clothing, is completely out of step with what they should expect. So, it is about boundary setting, and acknowledging that some children's behaviour can cause real anxiety to older people.

[189] The fear of crime is a particularly interesting issue. Many children and young people do not appreciate that their behaviour has such a big impact on others. Just seeing a gathering of children can be quite a hostile experience for older people, and they will avoid the group because they are quite fearful of a group of young people. However, those young people would have no idea that their behaviour would provoke that kind of response. So, we have a lot to do to raise awareness, and I cannot help but feel that a child-rights approach is absolutely the right way to go on this.

11.40 a.m.

[190] I listened to your debate earlier on about the UNCRC and raising awareness of it. We have so got to do that, and do it through schools. This is not about being labelled as do-gooder social workers trying to do our best for children and forgetting everybody else; it is about saying that these children and young people have a set of rights and entitlements. It is our responsibility, as adults, to make those entitlements and rights a reality, but we also have to set boundaries for children, and that is our responsibility as adults. It is quite simple, in a sense. The extent to which we have demonised children is quite incredible, and it has to stop.

[191] **Helen Mary Jones:** Christine is right to say that you cannot dismiss the communities' concerns, but you need to have a proper debate with communities about what works. If you slap an anti-social behaviour order on a child and say, 'You cannot misbehave in front of this particular set of shops', that child will just go off and misbehave somewhere else. You need to engage with that young person about his or her entitlements or needs, as well as about the effect of their behaviour on others and how they can change that. We know that that is much more likely to work, from the community's point of view. So, in a sense, it is not about being soft. In some ways, it is easier for a child to be given an anti-social behaviour order, which is seen as a badge of pride in some communities, than it is to make that young person sit down with the shopkeeper whose windows have been broken and talk about how it made the shopkeeper feel. Keith, we both have experiences of young people walking off community service penalties and saying, 'I cannot do this; it is too tough, and I would rather be in an institution', because that is easier than facing the consequences of their behaviour.

[192] We have had a very useful initial debate with Keith and, unless other Members have issues to raise with him or comments to make, perhaps we could bring the meeting to a close. I thank Members for their help and contribution. I thank Keith very much for being here with us. I did not realise that today was your last day with Save the Children, Keith, so I particularly appreciate your making the time to come on what must be a very busy day for you. It has been a useful first dialogue, and we will want to take forward many of the issues that you raised with us about the behaviour of Government and other public bodies. As a committee, we also want to keep a scrutinising eye on the commissioner's office and to have a positive dialogue with you to ensure that we are supporting you in making that strategic difference that you spoke about. We are very grateful to you for that.

[193] I thank all the staff here. I neglected to mention Helen Roberts from the Legal Division earlier. This is her first meeting, and we are very glad to see you here, Helen. Thanks, as always, to the Record of Proceedings, who keep a note of everything that we say and do. As an historian, I am particularly grateful to the Record for that. Thanks to our clerks and the Members' research team.

[194] Bydd ein cyfarfod nesaf ar 6 Mawrth. Our next meeting will be on 6 March.

[195] That is when we will begin our discussions with the Assembly Government on child poverty. Brian Gibbons, the Minister for social justice, will be coming to give initial evidence. Committee members will remember that we had originally asked Jane Hutt, who has overarching responsibilities for children's issues, to come, but the Government felt that it would be more useful to have an initial discussion with Brian Gibbons, as he has the lead responsibility on child poverty. However, the Minister for children has made it very clear that she would be more than happy to come along if there are broader issues that we want to raise with her. I am sure that we will want to ask her, because, picking up on some of our earlier discussions, there are actions that need to be taken across the Government portfolios, not only in Brian Gibbons's department. I am sure that we will want to identify some of those next time.

[196] We will soon publish our report on advocacy, which has specific recommendations for the Government, very much in line with previous reports from the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales. I thank the Members who were able to take part in the rapporteur visits. My visits were very enlightening. I thank everybody who took part and gave evidence to our review, especially the children and young people.

[197] Diolch yn fawr iawn i chi i gyd. Thank you all very much. That brings the Mae'r cyfarfod wedi dod i ben, funud cyn yr meeting to a close, a minute early.
amser.

Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 11.44 a.m.
The meeting ended at 11.44 a.m.