



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

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

**Dydd Mawrth, 31 Mawrth 2009
Tuesday, 31 March 2009**

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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

Christine Chapman	Llafur Labour
Ann Jones	Llafur (yn dirprwyo ar ran Lynne Neagle) Labour (substitute for Lynne Neagle)
Helen Mary Jones	Plaid Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) The Party of Wales (Committee Chair)
Kirsty Williams	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Piers Bisson	Pennaeth yr Is-adran Cynllunio Ariannol, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Head of the Financial Planning Division, Welsh Assembly Government
Suzanne Chisholm	Pennaeth y Gangen Hawliau, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Head of Rights and Entitlements Branch, Welsh Assembly Government
Elin Gwynedd	Pennaeth yr Adran Eiriolaeth, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Head of the Advocacy Unit, Welsh Assembly Government
Jane Hutt	Aelod Cynulliad, Llafur (Y Gweinidog dros Blant, Addysg, Dysgu Gydol Oes a Sgiliau) Assembly Member, Labour (The Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills)
Ruth Studley	Pennaeth Ystadegau Cyllid ac Allbwn y Sector Cyhoeddus, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Head of Public Sector Output and Finance Statistics, Welsh Assembly Government
Elizabeth Williams	Pennaeth Strategaeth Plant a Phobl Ifanc, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Head of Children and Young People's Strategy, Welsh Assembly Government

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

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

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.30 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.30 a.m.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Helen Mary Jones:** Bore da a chroeso i gyfarfod olaf y tymor hwn o'r Pwyllgor Plant a Phobl Ifanc. **Helen Mary Jones:** Good morning and welcome to the last meeting of this term of the Children and Young People Committee.

[2] Atgoffaf bawb fod croeso i chi ddefnyddio'r Gymraeg neu'r Saesneg yn y cyfarfod. Mae offer cyfieithu ar gael a all fod o gymorth os ydych yn cael problemau wrth glywed y trafodion yn yr ystafell bwyllgor neu yn y galeri cyhoeddus. Gofynnaf i bawb—yn dystion, Aelodau ac unrhyw un yn yr oriel gyhoeddus—ddiffodd unrhyw ffonau symudol, 'mwyar duon' ac ati. Nid yw'n ddigon da i'w rhoi ar 'tawel' gan eu bod yn amharu ar yr offer darlledu. Nid ydym yn disgwyl ymarfer tân, felly os clywch y larwm tân, mae'n golygu bod problem go iawn a byddaf yn gofyn ichi ddilyn y tywyswyr a staff allan o'r ystafell. I remind everyone that they are welcome to speak in Welsh or English in the meeting. Simultaneous translation equipment is available, which can also help if you are having problems hearing the proceedings here in the committee room or in the public gallery. I ask everyone—witnesses, Members and anyone in the public gallery—to switch off mobile phones, BlackBerrys and so on. It is not sufficient to switch them to 'silent' as they interfere with the broadcasting equipment. We are not expecting a fire drill today, so if the fire alarm sounds, it means that there is a real problem and I will ask you to follow the ushers and staff out of the room.

[3] Gofynnaf i Aelodau ddatgan unrhyw fuddiant o dan y Rheolau Sefydlog priodol. Gwelaf nad oes unrhyw fuddiannau i'w datgan. I ask Members to make any declarations of interest under the relevant Standing Orders. I see that there are none.

[4] Yr ydym wedi derbyn ymddiheuriadau gan Angela Burns. Croesawaf Ann Jones unwaith eto, sy'n dirprwyo yn barhaol ar ran Lynne, ond deallaf fod Ann yn gorfod ein gadael yn gynnar; disgwyliwn Kirsty Williams unrhyw eiliad. We have received apologies from Angela Burns. I welcome Ann Jones, who is substituting permanently for Lynne, but I understand that Ann has to leave early; we expect Kirsty Williams any second.

9.31 a.m.

Ymchwiliad i Gyllidebu ar gyfer Plant Inquiry into Children's Budgeting

[5] **Helen Mary Jones:** Croesawaf Jane Hutt a diolchaf iddi ar ran y pwyllgor am roi cymaint o'i hamser i ni gan y bydd yn aros ar gyfer ein trafodaeth ar eitem 3 nes ymlaen y bore yma. Gwerthfawrogwn hynny. Croesawn hefyd ei swyddogion, Suzanne Chisholm, Ruth Studley a Piers Bisson. Croeso cynnes i chi a diolch hefyd i'r Gweinidog am ryddhau gymaint o'ch amser chi. **Helen Mary Jones:** I welcome Jane Hutt and I thank her on behalf of the committee for giving so much of her time to us, as she will stay for our discussion on item 3 later this morning. We appreciate that. I also welcome her officials, Suzanne Chisholm, Ruth Studley a Piers Bisson. A warm welcome to you and thanks also to the Minister for releasing so much of your time.

[6] Diolch am eich papurau. Cafodd yr Aelodau gyfle i ddarllen y papurau felly nid Thank you for your papers. The Members have had an opportunity to read the papers

oes angen i chi wneud datganiad agoriadol. therefore you do not need to make an opening
Felly, trown yn syth at y cwestiynau. statement. We will therefore move straight to
questions.

[7] I will ask the first question. From the Government's perspective, in what way has the work that you have undertaken on identifying the amount and proportion of the budget spend on children been useful?

[8] **The Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (Jane Hutt):** First, I would like to say how much I welcome the committee's inquiry, because it will help to guide us. We are very much at the beginning of a journey in terms of being open and transparent about children's budgeting and we are looking forward to what this committee brings forth. We decided to embark on this route to understanding children's budgeting not only to analyse how much we were spending on children and young people in order to make it transparent and to raise its profile, but also—and I say this as Minister with responsibility for children—to put children at the forefront of budget setting.

[9] It is early days in terms of the work that we have done so far. However, in terms of the statistical article that we published on 10 March, we in Wales really are ahead of the game. There is nothing comparable being done elsewhere, certainly not in the rest of the UK. We have been very much guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in terms of the children's budgeting expectations. We recognise now that, although we have an analysis in terms of spend per child and we have engaged effectively, ministerially and officially, on rights and entitlement headed by Suzanne and by the finance and statistics directorate, by Piers and Ruth—and Ruth, in particular, is an expert on this—this is an opportunity for the Government to prioritise and to see where the spend is. Also, importantly—you asked how helpful this has been so far—we have to translate that into an analysis of the impact of this spend. I note from some of the evidence that you have had that this is a key question. We can see how much we spend and there is a lot more that we can do to refine it, but is it making a difference to children's lives? I think that the Proposed Children and Families (Wales) Measure in particular will make a difference with its focus on child poverty. Save the Children has done useful work on targeting spend at children's needs. We will have to move on to look at how we can have a methodology that looks at the impact of the spend.

[10] **Ann Jones:** Minister, can you provide any examples of direct changes that have been made during the policy development phase as a result of your Government's work on children's budgeting?

[11] **Jane Hutt:** I will start with one of the points that I made earlier in response to Helen Mary, if I may. I think that bringing out the analysis of children's spend has in itself been a bit of a breakthrough. Engaging with others through the Cabinet committee on children and young people, which I chair, to focus spend on children across all budget areas has been a major step forward. However, the link between spend and tackling child poverty has come through very strongly in the analysis—and I will not go over the point about impacts at the moment—and recognising that has led us to look at particular aspects, such as disabled children. As Minister, I have steered and co-ordinated a response to the Disabled Children Matter Wales campaign, through which we have had to identify actual spend on disabled children. We have a long way to go as far as that is concerned, but I think that the focus on child poverty as a result of this has been crucial. How we take this forward also goes back to methodology and to the questions that have been raised, such as what this means for delivery and spend by our partners at a local level. At the end of the day, I feel that the next step forward has to be to engage much more closely with the Welsh Local Government Association and probably the voluntary sector, particularly Save the Children. We need to have a cross-departmental team to take the next steps on this journey.

[12] **Christine Chapman:** Will the work that the Government has carried out on children's budgeting be incorporated in the Assembly Government's annual budgeting process? How will it be monitored in future, to look at trends?

[13] **Jane Hutt:** It is very early days for this. I might bring Ruth in on what impact she feels that it has had on the budget-setting process, but, as far as I am concerned, as lead Minister and the chair of that Cabinet committee, I hope that it has ensured that this is a priority for all Ministers when setting their budgets. For example, for the last draft budget, I met each Minister who I thought could specifically have an impact on the priorities of the Disabled Children Matter Wales campaign, and I told them that short breaks and play for disabled children were priorities, as was a specialised campaign on the take-up of benefits by families with disabled children, and so they all found their way into the budget. Play for disabled children was my responsibility, but the other priorities found their way into the budget thanks to the other Ministers and their officials. I think that the analysis that has come through the statistical review will now start to have an impact. I do not know whether Piers or Ruth would like to say something.

[14] **Mr Bisson:** What we try to do in the budget-setting process is build in all the analysis that is available to us. So, the work on children's budgeting will give a real focus to this work, enabling us to do it ever better, going forward. We want to repeat the analysis once we get more information and feedback from the committee and others. It will enable us to look at the total amount of money spent, but also at the different programmes that contribute and the potential synergies between them, as the Minister has outlined and discussed in the Cabinet committee.

[15] **Jane Hutt:** Ruth, do you want to add anything on that?

9.40 a.m.

[16] **Ms Studley:** I do not really want to add anything on the budgeting process. It is fair to say, however, that, although we are ahead of the game, publishing that article has allowed us to get feedback so that we can continually improve the information that we have.

[17] **Ann Jones:** Minister, your paper suggests that, based on existing spending plans until 2010-11, the proportion of the budget allocated to children is projected to remain around 28 per cent. Is that figure higher or lower than you expected, and what does it now tell us?

[18] **Jane Hutt:** Children make up 21 per cent of the population. No-one has done this before, so it was hard to know what to expect, but one can say that we should take the percentage of the population who are children as a baseline. At the end of the day, it goes back to the priorities that we set for children in the Assembly Government. The feedback from the statistical analysis and the review that we published have shown us that there are areas where we have to test the figure of 28 per cent. That information is being taken back by financial officials. Looking at the amount of money spent, however, we have to take account of population change because, despite the falling birth rate, certain population increases are also emerging. We need to do further work to see whether we have it right with that figure of 28 per cent, but it seems to be a fair start to me.

[19] **Ann Jones:** It has been suggested to us in evidence that a budget analysis could follow a similar structure to that set out in the child wellbeing monitor, which gives information on outcomes for children. Do you have a view on the feasibility of that suggestion?

[20] **Jane Hutt:** That is a very good suggestion, because the children and young people's wellbeing monitor is new. It was published in November, and Wales is the first country to

take this approach. It gives us a baseline for children's experiences. It will be updated regularly, and there will also be a three-year review. That would be a helpful suggestion from the committee, as a tool for us to use as the basis for analysis.

[21] **Ann Jones:** Shall move on, Chair? I promise that I will be quiet after this.

[22] How robust is the methodology that your Government has used to ascertain the spend on children? Would you accept that the method for allocating indirect budget expenditure lines—by basing estimates on population breakdown to ascertain how much of the baseline is attributable to children—is inevitably inaccurate?

[23] **Jane Hutt:** That goes back to my point about population change. Ruth, you might want to come in on the technical point.

[24] **Ms Studley:** Certainly. We feel that it is robust and a good starting point. As you know, we allocate in three ways, so we know who has benefited from certain spending, be it direct or indirect. Where we have statistical data, we have used them, but the difficulty is that statistical, age-related data do not exist for everything, and we would really welcome feedback that helps us to make improvements. We have been able to use statistical data for most of the health budget, and that is a large proportion of the overall budget, so we feel confident that this is a fairly robust start.

[25] **Jane Hutt:** I know that Professor David Reynolds commented on the accuracy of this, and it is important that we welcome that feedback from him, because we need to be scrutinised and we need questions to be asked. In his article in *The Times Educational Supplement*, he gave the example of cancer services, claiming that the figures may be skewed because they were calculated too simplistically. However, if we use Ruth's example of the NHS allocation spend for treating cancer—and not just the budget, but the actual spend—I can reassure committee members that we believe that the figure for children is correct, because it is based on spend, and not on the whole of the cancer spend or a spend on allocations. So, that is the sort of thing that we can clarify, hopefully. As Ruth said, the NHS statistical spend analysis is very helpful to us, so we need to be able to access that type of technical spend analysis across the board. I am not the expert in this regard; Ruth and Piers are. I do not know in which other areas you feel that we could get more clarity and accuracy.

[26] **Ms Studley:** We have used statistical data for much of the education spend, and, building on the Minister's point with regard to cancer, we have learned from that that there might have been a little misunderstanding. The spend on the treatment of cancer is allocated appropriately using the correct statistical data and age-related data. The lesson that we need to learn is that, where we describe our spending lines, we have not included what that means. There was a spending line that said 'cancer', and it is understandable that you would think that that included all cancer, but it did not necessarily include the treatment of it. We are looking for more statistical age-related data that we can use all the time to improve this analysis.

[27] **Helen Mary Jones:** To explore another example of where you are using 21.6 per cent as the basic percentage, such as the renewal of roads and bridges and bus revenue support lines, it could be argued that children and young people use a lot more public transport than the average base of the population, and therefore, arguably, they would get less from the expenditure that benefits primarily private vehicles, such as cars. I would be interested to explore the extent to which the 21.6 per cent basic figure needs more unpacking if we are to get an accurate picture.

[28] **Ms Studley:** Yes, I think that is right. We need to look at it in more detail. For that particular spend area, there was no age-related data available, but that is what we need to do

and that is the position that we are in. The reason we publish it is so that we can be open and transparent to gain that sort of feedback and to engage in those sorts of discussion.

[29] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you, that is helpful. On the data that you have to work with, we have heard that figures are not recorded in ways that make it easy to separate budgets between children and adults, and it has been put to us that, to a certain extent, any kind of historical analysis for the less obvious budgets is difficult because you cannot look back unless you have the information. To what extent are age-specific data collected? I am thinking particularly beyond things such as the education budget, where it is fairly easy to highlight it, or it should be. Is it possible to disaggregate the data that you present in your paper any further into specific groups of children and young people? The Minister mentioned disabled children, but I am thinking of whether we can disaggregate the statistics into children living in poverty by gender or by different age ranges? It would be useful to know the difference between that spent on children from birth to age three compared with that spent on 15 to 18-year-olds.

[30] **Jane Hutt:** Ruth touched on this in response to earlier questions. We are trying to look increasingly for age-specific data in setting the budget. Budgets are mostly set on a programme basis, but looking at age-specific data would be easier for health, education and children's services. It would be more difficult with regard to transport, which is a very good example. We know that children, young people and elderly people make the most use of our buses. We should also be able to tell how many young disabled people and carers use buses, because they are entitled to a free bus pass. This is where we need to unpick some of the information that we have, because we have not got into that kind of detail, but we could. We do not have that kind of detail on disabled children and young people, but we want to explore layers of detail as part of the development programme.

9.50 a.m.

[31] Perhaps we should not just say that we can do it all, as the committee might want to ask us to drill down to the specifics. It is useful to relate it to the priorities that children and young people are bringing forward to us. I am sure that that will also be part of your questions, but the engagement of children and young people on what their priorities are and trying to ensure that we can engage them locally as well as nationally must be the way forward.

[32] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you for that, Minister. You have mentioned the importance of partners in delivering and in providing information. It has been suggested to us that, in order to have more accurate analyses to enable you to do children's budgeting effectively, the Government could require statutory agencies to provide separate data on the spending on adults and children. Do you have a view about that at this stage?

[33] **Jane Hutt:** I am sure that our partners in local government, the health service and so on would have a strong view about that. On requiring that, at the moment, the majority of the funding that we provide to local government goes through the revenue support grant and the national non-domestic rates, but we have, at present, an improvement agreement grant and a deprivation grant, elements of which relate to children. This goes back to why we want to do this, which is that we want to improve outcomes and to ensure that, as we go take our proposed children and families Measure through the Assembly, we are tackling child poverty. As part of that, we must decide what we should consider as duties or requirements on our public sector bodies in order to deliver those better outcomes. I am not convinced, at the moment, of the need to require them to produce that data. We need to get a voluntary agreement first, and I am sure that that will come forth. I do not know whether Ruth or Piers want to comment on that issue of the requirement.

[34] **Mr Bisson:** I would not add much to that. We are aware of the views of other bodies about requirements being placed on them, so we would not do it lightly, but we would consider it in line with what the Minister outlined.

[35] **Jane Hutt:** Perhaps one could also say, regarding the duties that we are putting on authorities in relation to child poverty, for example, that they signed a voluntary agreement with Brian Gibbons last Thursday. Moving forward to a duty for them to demonstrate how they are tackling child poverty is a huge step forward in legislation. To do that, they will have to have statistical analysis, as we will. One thing that I wanted to say to the committee, and will hopefully be able to say in response to your report when it comes out, is that I want to take this forward in partnership with local government and the voluntary sector. We can improve our analysis and techniques on children's budgeting, but we must engage with our partners, otherwise it will be disjointed and we will not impact on the delivery. There is an issue with the debate about hypothecation and, when a programme moves into the revenue support grant, people are concerned about what happens to the funding and whether it will go to the children. This is a timely point to have that debate.

[36] **Kirsty Williams:** We have heard evidence in this inquiry that there is a lack of transparency about timescales and procedures during the pre-budget process and, in particular, how the voluntary sector can feed information into that. To what extent is the pre-budget process transparent enough for organisations to be able to contribute meaningfully?

[37] **Jane Hutt:** There are a number of vehicles, such as the partnership council and the expectation for Ministers to meet the voluntary sector partners at least biennially, where the whole issue about the pre-budgeting process comes up and is clearly expressed in terms of priorities that come through from the voluntary sector. I have mentioned—I am not sure whether you were here at the time—that, because I have been working with the Disabled Children Matter Wales campaign, we worked through the pre-budget process with the campaign so that we could identify priorities. I then raised those issues with Ministers, and it was translated into the draft budget in terms of things like the specialist campaign for take-up of benefit for disabled children and their families and the extension of short breaks. Those Ministers, of course, responded in terms of their draft budgets. We also have a responsibility, through the committee, to ensure that there is an opportunity. However, in terms of the Government, we need to work through how we can make that transparency much more of a reality.

[38] **Kirsty Williams:** It is interesting, Minister, that you should bring up the example of the Disabled Children Matter Wales campaign, because it was its evidence that explicitly stated how confusing it found the whole process. You are holding it up as an example of good practice and how you and your department engage in that process, but from the other side of the table, that organisation found the process lacking in transparency and did not feel that those discussions with you had led to a meaningful ability to provide information and to influence the agenda setting. Why do you think that there is that mismatch between your experience and the campaign's experience of that process?

[39] **Jane Hutt:** In some ways, Kirsty, it is not surprising that that might have been its evidence to you, because it is a campaign group, if you like, that has got very close to Government. I have met with the group regularly over the past year so that it can really try to get a hold on how it could influence Government. Budgets are obviously key to that. Probably, for the majority of the voluntary sector and the general public, the question of how you influence budgeting is still a mystery. The examples that I have given of direct input into the Minister's draft budget is as a result of the Disabled Children Matter Wales campaign. Clearly, it could be better, and we learn from the lessons, but it resulted in that direct contact and explanation. Timelines are crucial, because we are now starting the pre-budget process for 2010-11, not to mention 2009-10. That is where we probably could do more. Perhaps

Piers could elaborate on how we can further open up the budgetary process.

[40] **Mr Bisson:** I will refer, perhaps, to two elements in a more generic context. First, all departments have varying levels of ongoing dialogue with external groups. It is from that ongoing dialogue that views and experiences can be picked up, rather than from a bespoke exercise. In terms of improving the transparency around the budget, last autumn, when we published the draft budget, we also—for the first time—published a draft budget report, of some 50 pages, trying to set out what the money was going towards in all of the different departments. That was welcomed by the Finance Committee, although, clearly, we want to look at what more we can do in the future. As I say, it is part of the journey. There are elements where it can work. Others clearly have had some experiences where it has not worked as well as they would have liked, and we are happy to try to pick up on that and build on it in terms of the formal documentation produced and in terms of the wider process.

[41] **Kirsty Williams:** As we all know, the budget that is published, and the budget that the Assembly votes on, does not necessarily reflect what is actually spent on a particular service in reality. For instance, one only has to think of what happened with post-16 education funding last year. There was a certain amount in the budget, and the Government subsequently recognised that that would not be enough; therefore, between December and the allocation in April, it scabbled around to find more money to fill the gap. Do you understand how that can be extremely frustrating for organisations that are trying to keep a track on how money is being spent, even if the budget that we vote on does not necessarily end up being the money that we spend on a particular area?

10.00 a.m.

[42] **Jane Hutt:** This is probably a technical point, but I would also say that estimations of budgets have to be checked, and not only through the use of formulae, but also data. That is crucial, and we have been through that process with the foundation phase and post-16 funding. The data that we collect on pupil spend is crucial to what emerges, not just in terms of a draft budget, and sometimes the final budget, but actually making those figures accurate. There has to be flexibility, and that is where we have to engage not just with local government, but directly with schools, particularly in relation to pupil spend, whether it is on the foundation phase or through to post-16. That is the territory of the schools funding committee, which some of you are involved with. The openness and transparency of budget-setting for schools and education is crucial.

[43] **Christine Chapman:** I want to ask about the involvement of children and young people themselves in these discussions. We have had suggestions from children and young people that, sometimes, they cannot relate to the discussions that they have with officials. Do officials and Ministers do enough during those discussions or consultations to explain the financial situation, so that children and young people can get involved in a more realistic way?

[44] **Jane Hutt:** That is where we have to move forward. Children and young people are so involved in the planning around the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; they went to Geneva, they gave their response, they heard the results, and they saw that we were making an effort. We have started on the journey of getting children's budgeting out in the open and making it transparent. Only now, through Funky Dragon and schools councils and youth fora, are they beginning to get a grip on budgeting—not just on policy, but on the money that is spent. I hope that we can see some national examples as well as local ones. A few weeks ago we had a conference called Let's Get it Right, which involved children and young people, and many voluntary organisations, like Save the Children. We asked them to work with us to make a five-year action plan on how we respond to the UN convention's concluding observations, and what should be our key focus for the next five years. Children and young

people are more and more sophisticated in their expectations of Government, which is absolutely right. Again, when young people came to the Cabinet committee, we asked them for their priorities for action, and they included access to play, tackling bullying, and looking at personal and social education in the curriculum. They did not say that they wanted to see how much we were spending. They wanted to set policy priorities. I hope that participatory budgeting, which is what it is called, will now take us forward, and that we see some good examples, particularly through Funky Dragon, but also with schools councils and Cymorth budgeting.

[45] **Helen Mary Jones:** To take that a little further, one witness said that he was not entirely convinced of the need to get children and young people involved in the budget-setting process. Another witness, a young person, said very clearly that children and young people were involved in setting policy priorities, but were doing so without knowing the resources available. She had reached the point where, having been quite extensively involved in discussions with the Assembly Government, she almost felt that there was no point in talking about policy if you did not know how realistic it was, because you did not know the size of the funding cake to be sliced.

[46] Looking at those two perspectives, where one person says that they are not convinced that children and young people need to get more involved, while the message that this committee is getting from children and young people is that they want to get more involved with budgeting as a reality check against the things they are asking the Government and, indeed, local government for, what is your view, Minister? Should we be involving children and young people more in that very realistic setting of priorities from within the resources available, or is it, as our other witness suggests, not really their business?

[47] **Jane Hutt:** I think that it is definitely their business, and we are signed up to it through the UN convention. If you are going to give young people rights, they will also want to take responsibility. If you talk to the children and young people on school councils who have been asked to budget, as some of them have, you will know that they have to decide between priorities. In fact, they come here to the education centre. As many of you will know, they have a really good exercise where the children are told that they have £100,000 and asked how they want to spend it—on play, senior citizens and so on. It is part of education and part of democracy. Suzanne is in charge of rights and entitlement, so she may wish to say something.

[48] **Ms Chisholm:** Yes, it is very interesting to hear that a young person gave you that view, because it is not a view that has been expressed to us. Therefore, we look forward to hearing more from you in your report. As officials, we will provide advice to the Minister about ways in which we might be able to gradually increase the involvement of children and young people in all the budgeting processes, because it gives them skills. They are so sensible when they do this, in my experience. They are quite realistic in the lines they suggest we should take forward. So, I see it very much as a developmental process. It will also help towards the skills agenda, because the more that we and other partners do it, the more children and young people get involved in this process of developing and practising financial management skills, which are part of their learning.

[49] **Helen Mary Jones:** I do not often express a view from the chair, but I am very relieved that the Minister thinks that this is the business of children and young people, because I was quite concerned to hear from other witnesses that they did not think that it was. Minister, earlier you mentioned the role of the Cabinet sub-committee on children and young people. Can you tell us a bit more about how that sub-committee participates in the budgeting process, and how it influences the budget to reflect the cross-cutting priority for children and young people?

[50] **Jane Hutt:** That is a very important question, because that Cabinet sub-committee brings together all the Ministers to try to get a co-ordinated approach to setting priorities, in policy and budgeting terms. We play a full part in the budgeting process. It obviously then influences individual Ministers who sit around the table, but it also has an impact—and I am sure that Piers will want to come in on this—on the whole budget-setting process.

[51] **Mr Bisson:** To pick up on that, there would be a range of Cabinet committees, including that sub-committee, that would meet during the budget-setting process. Those discussions would also be picked up bilaterally by the Minister for Finance and Public Service Delivery and the relevant portfolio Minister. There would also be discussions in Cabinet. Therefore, all Cabinet committees feed off the Cabinet and input to it, so exactly how the process works will depend on the individual budget round, but there is certainly that ability and the mechanism for that to happen.

[52] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is helpful. I wish to stretch that a little further, Minister. Obviously, those Ministers who sit around the table on the sub-committee are going to be focusing on children and young people's issues, but not all Ministers do. If you, as Minister, and the sub-committee were concerned about the priority being given to these issues in another Minister's budget, are the mechanisms that Piers has just outlined sufficiently robust for you, as the Minister for Children, to be able to go to the Minister for whatever—I cannot give an example because people will think that I am singling out a particular Minister—to say 'Hey, we are not very happy with this. What are you going to do about it?'.

10.10 a.m.

[53] **Jane Hutt:** In the end, the Minister for Finance and Public Service Delivery is the arbitrator of all the ministerial representations that are made in budget setting, but the final arbitrator in developing a draft budget is the full Cabinet. That is the point at which we can exercise our ministerial influence in terms of priority. In a sense, we have to get there much earlier in the process. Priority setting is based on the 'One Wales' programme of government, and we are delivering that as we go through this Assembly. We have to look at the big picture and ensure that our priorities are clearly at the forefront, which, for me, means priorities related to my responsibilities for children and young people and lifelong learning. The Cabinet committee on children was the first one to be set up, and I have chaired it since the beginning. It has an influence on the budget setting and the ministerial priorities that are raised around the table, and it feeds into full Cabinet meetings. It is underpinned by whatever programme of Government you are working to. It also has to be evidence based. I hope that this committee is going to move on to have a much clearer focus on how we can measure the impact and benefit of this spend. Once we have identified the priority and the spend and we have the right data—going back to clarity on technical points—we will need to have some kind of methodology to start assessing the impact that the spend has made. No-one else is developing that, although something is being done in South Africa; we ought to be doing it here.

[54] **Helen Mary Jones:** I think that the South African example is on a slightly smaller scale than what we are trying to achieve here, but it is very interesting.

[55] One thing that has been put to us is that it is not always easy to see from the outside how financial decisions follow declared policy priorities. Are you satisfied that there is sufficient communication and collaboration between policy and finance officials within the Government in terms of developing policy and then resourcing it?

[56] **Jane Hutt:** The work that we have done and the fact that we have officials here from the finance statistics and rights and entitlement departments demonstrates a real step forward in joined-up government, and we can demonstrate that with examples. With regard to the

recent student finance report, for example, a huge amount of work was undertaken with finance colleagues, with the very clear agenda of responding to a review with objectives to widen student participation. There had to be engagement not only at a ministerial level—obviously that was key—but also at official level, so that a great deal of work could be done to see how we could fund it and deliver it into not just policy but implementation.

[57] **Kirsty Williams:** Minister, does the Government have a view as to whether local authorities should undertake children's budgeting more routinely?

[58] **Jane Hutt:** We would certainly encourage that.

[59] **Kirsty Williams:** To what extent do the Government and local authority departments work jointly to identify areas of spend on children and young people? If we are saying that local government should do it, what processes will be involved in supporting that and undertaking joint work in that area?

[60] **Jane Hutt:** It is again about coming together. The Minister for Social Justice and Local Government meets with the Welsh Local Government Association on behalf of local authorities in Wales to hear what their priorities are, as you know, Kirsty, early on in the budget-setting process, and that is linked to our budget-setting priorities. We set the guidance, the legislation and the funding programmes where there has to be negotiation, but I would hope that the discussions that we are having now, and the children's budgeting vehicles that we are developing, can be translated at local-government level. Ruth, do you want to add something about the impact that that process has?

[61] **Ms Studley:** In the work that we have done previously, which you have seen, we use local government information because we have a lot of detailed expenditure information from local government. We are keen to work more closely with local government—either individually or otherwise—to improve that, because we can then get a better feel for what is happening across the piece.

[62] **Kirsty Williams:** I am concerned that the Government's view is that local authorities would be encouraged to undertake children's budgeting more routinely, but the evidence that we have from the representatives of local government is that they routinely do not undertake children's budgeting exercises on a comprehensive scale. Will the Government be making a more explicit statement about its expectations or desires to see local government do this?

[63] **Helen Mary Jones:** I think that that, again, is a question for the Minister.

[64] **Jane Hutt:** Definitely. We can look to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, our seven core aims, and to the fact that our guidance is supporting the development of the children and young people's plans. The development of those plans—and we have the first ones coming through now—clearly raises the whole issue, not only of children and young people's participation, but also of budget-setting. All that I am saying with regard to encouraging local government to undertake children's budgeting, rather than requiring them to do so, is that we have to take local government forward on this mission—and it is a journey or a mission. As a result of this, I would—together with Brian Gibbons who sits on our Cabinet committee—want to engage the Welsh Local Government Association with the working group that I am setting up with officials across the whole of the Welsh Assembly Government. Many local authorities and children and young people's partnerships want this to happen, because it is a way that they can deliver the priorities that they have set.

[65] **Helen Mary Jones:** The final question in this session is from Christine Chapman.

[66] **Christine Chapman:** A few of our witnesses, and one in particular from Save the

Children, said that there needs to be much more education about the budget-planning process. Are you satisfied with the extent to which children and young people have the opportunity to learn about budget literacy within the current education curriculum?

[67] **Jane Hutt:** Following on from what Suzanne said, I think that this is part of their skills development, and now that we have financial literacy firmly embedded in the curriculum, they will also expect much more engagement. So, the financial inclusion strategy and the financial education unit that we are setting up will all pave the way to a much greater interest in children's budgeting.

[68] **Helen Mary Jones:** Diolchaf i Suzanne Chisholm, Ruth Studley a Piers Bisson am eu presenoldeb a'u cymorth i'r pwyllgor heddiw. Croesawaf Elin Gwynedd ac Elizabeth Williams i'r bwrdd i gefnogi'r Gweinidog yn y sesiwn nesaf.

Helen Mary Jones: I thank Suzanne Chisholm, Ruth Studley and Piers Bisson for their attendance and the assistance to the committee today. I welcome Elin Gwynedd and Elizabeth Williams to the table to support the Minister in the next session.

10.19 a.m.

Yr Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Weithredu Argymhellion Adroddiad y Pwyllgor: 'Darparu Gwasanaethau Eirioli i Blant a Phobl Ifanc yng Nghymru'
Update on the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Committee Report: 'Provision of Advocacy Services for Children and Young People in Wales'

[69] **Helen Mary Jones:** Diolchaf i Elin Gwynedd, Elizabeth Williams, ac i'r Gweinidog am neilltuo amser i fod yma gyda ni. Trown yn syth at y cwestiynau.

Helen Mary Jones: I thank Elin Gwynedd, Elizabeth Williams, and the Minister for making time to be here with us today. We will go straight to the questions.

[70] Minister, when it comes to advocacy, the key difference of opinion between stakeholders, the Government and the committee has been about what constitutes independence of advocacy services, and consequently what commissioning arrangements are the most appropriate to ensure that independence. What monitoring processes will be used to determine whether looked-after children and other vulnerable children consider the new service framework for advocacy services that you are putting place to be truly independent?

10.20 a.m.

[71] **Jane Hutt:** Before I respond to that, I would like to say that I am particularly pleased to welcome Elin Gwynedd to the committee this morning, because Elin is now the head of the advocacy unit. She is based in St Asaph and was previously the head of a children and young people's partnership in north Wales. So, it is great that Elin is now leading the unit. I would like to bring her in, particularly to talk about independence.

[72] To address your concerns, which are absolutely legitimate, I have stressed the importance of our getting the independence right, particularly of specialist advocacy services. The arrangements have to have the confidence of children and young people; they have to feel that the service is independent. One of the most encouraging developments, which has occurred very recently, is that young people have now applied in quite large numbers and, having gone through the public appointments process, have been appointed to our national independent advocacy board. There were well over 40 applicants, who were very keen to play a part and to be independent. Those who have been chosen are now taking on a very responsible role and they know that their role is to ensure independence and they will also

have an overview of the arrangements for setting it up. Alongside those who have been appointed, we will have an extended virtual group of young people. Do you want to say something about that, Elin?

[73] **Ms Gwynedd:** Over 40 young people applied. They were from a variety of backgrounds—some have a youth justice background, some have disabilities, many are in the care system and some sit on advisory boards for current advocacy services. We felt that if we took only four to sit on the board, we would lose a lot of the expertise that these young people were willing to give. So, we have asked those who were not successful in being chosen to sit on the board to be a part of a virtual group, an e-group, of advisers. Hopefully, they will be able to guide or advise on specific pieces of work to gather a wider range of opinion.

[74] **Jane Hutt:** The role of children and young people on the board and the wider advisory group are critical to the independence and the monitoring. We can then go on to talk about the ways in which we are developing the commissioning process, because that is the key route to independence. However, that is a matter for you.

[75] **Helen Mary Jones:** We will come back to that.

[76] **Christine Chapman:** Minister, have evaluation criteria been built into the new service framework? In what specific ways will the Government review effectiveness?

[77] **Jane Hutt:** That is key to the development. I have talked about the oversight of the board, but I also promised in my statement on developing the unit and the board that we would review, after a three-year period, how things were going. However, the evaluation of the delivery and the setting up of this new and unique set of arrangements for advocacy has to be ongoing. I do not know whether you want to comment on that, Elizabeth.

[78] **Ms Williams:** I think that there will be a number of ways in which we could do this. As we firm up the arrangements and as we issue new guidance over the next period so that we start to ensure a more coherent and consistent approach, we will build in some success criteria so that all of the commissioners at a national, local and regional level are working to the same vision of what it will be like. We are quite clear about what it will be like. We need to set those down as a series of success criteria. That will be the basis for any evaluation that we take. We will look at evaluation at a local level and we will enable young people to look at local services and to assess whether they are meeting these criteria. That will also be the basis for external evaluation. We have been looking at the appropriate time to build a revisit into this series of events. We have done a review, so we will decide when we need to revisit this to ensure that the services that are put into place as the commissioning takes place are assessed against a set of criteria that we would want to be publicly available and known about so that we all know what we are working towards. So, that is part of our work in progress that we will share as we deliver the guidance.

[79] **Helen Mary Jones:** Could you give us an indicative timescale on that, because that is obviously key?

[80] **Ms Williams:** We will work on the success criteria, which will be available later this year. As we work on publishing the guidance; we will be able to work on that. So, I hope that that will be available in the summer.

[81] The evaluation timetable will be included in that so that everyone knows at what point we will come back and do that. As part of that, we need to set out in more detail what I have just said about the different degrees of evaluation, because external national evaluation is not the only, and possibly not the most effective, answer. It is also about the scrutiny arrangements at a local level and if we can produce some best practice guides on that as part

of this process and as part of setting out the expectations and evaluation, then we will have a model that will enable all of us, at all levels, to look at what is happening.

[82] **Kirsty Williams:** Minister, your paper makes no mention of the costs for setting out and implementing the new service framework. How much money has been allocated and from which budget line?

[83] **Jane Hutt:** I need to be reminded of the budget that you have got, Elin.

[84] **Ms Gwynedd:** I work to the counselling and advocacy budget expenditure line; the budget is within that. I have been allocated £800,000 for the next financial year and £850,000 for the following financial year. That is to look at all aspects of advocacy, including universal promotion, the advocacy board and everything.

[85] **Helen Mary Jones:** The advocacy development and performance unit has a staff of three, Minister. Are you satisfied that that unit has the capacity and seniority to deliver effectively on all of the functions that you are allocating to it?

[86] **Jane Hutt:** Yes, and I am pleased to welcome and introduce Elin as the head of the advocacy unit. She has now recruited her full team. Therefore, it is fully staffed and is supported by Elizabeth Williams as the head of the children, young people and schools effectiveness division of the Department of Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills. We have provided the internal resources as well as the external budget to Elin and I have made this a priority in terms of children and young people, not just in terms of universal advocacy, but also the specialist advocacy services that are developing. We must also recognise that there is already the funding that is going towards advocacy locally and nationally, therefore the teams across Wales will deliver in support of Elin and her team.

[87] **Christine Chapman:** The advocacy development and performance unit will not be subject to inspection arrangements, therefore could you tell me how the independence of that unit will be guaranteed?

[88] **Jane Hutt:** This takes us back to the national independent advocacy board. That will lead—and the staff are there to support it—policy development and the implementation of the advocacy strategy and service delivery. It is clear that this national independent advocacy board, and we have already asked the young people, will be high profile, very public and transparent in terms of its work and its decision making. Clearly, some of its work will include making recommendations to me as Minister, but I believe that we now have in place the credibility, authority and financial backing to ensure that the unit is held to account. That is a key point. It will ultimately hold the Minister to account in terms of delivery. I stress the fact that I see this as a key priority, as your Minister. So, ultimately, I am held to account, but I think that Elin probably feels that the transparency is quite robust.

10.30 a.m.

[89] **Ms Gwynedd:** I feel that we are working to the advice given by the board, especially the children and young people. The board will be independent because the process used for recruiting the people to the board was the public appointments process—it is very robust. We have external advisers on public appointments within that. I hope that the board will be holding us and the Minister to account on independence.

[90] **Helen Mary Jones:** Chris, I think that you have a couple of factual questions around the nature of the board and to where it will report.

[91] **Christine Chapman:** We are talking about independence. Can you confirm that no

active commissioners or current service providers are eligible for appointment to the national independent advocacy board?

[92] **Jane Hutt:** I think that that is true.

[93] **Ms Gwynedd:** Yes, it is stated in the advertisement.

[94] **Christine Chapman:** Will the national independent advocacy board report independently to the National Assembly for Wales? What are the reporting arrangements?

[95] **Jane Hutt:** That is something that we could certainly look at. I feel that it would be good for the board to be able to report to the Assembly via the Minister. I would want to consider all these suggestions from the committee very carefully. It would be nice to introduce you to the national independent advocacy board, when all its members have been appointed. We could certainly bring them to the Senedd and introduce them formally and informally to Members, and perhaps to this committee specifically. I certainly would encourage them to come before the committee to meet you. We have asked for people to apply for membership of the board and to indicate who would be interested in the chair's position. We have a strong field of people who are also very interested in the chair's position. I think that this is a real opportunity to put this board at the forefront of public life.

[96] **Christine Chapman:** May I just check something? Elin has talked about the role of children and young people on the board. What arrangements are in place to provide them with the support that they might need to fulfil that role?

[97] **Ms Gwynedd:** In the letter that was given to them, offering them a place, we asked them to indicate what support they needed and we suggested some things that they could put, for example, if they wanted a parent, guardian or carer to come with them. There is one person with special needs, so we asked all of them if they wanted any specific equipment, venues, access arrangements or food and if they had any allergic reactions. We have asked them about everything that we could think of and then we left a blank space in case we had not thought of something. We will be willing to support them in any way to enable them to fully participate. The other thing is that we are doing quite a lot of work with them to make sure that it is a participative group and that everybody will be given an equal opportunity to be involved.

[98] **Helen Mary Jones:** May I ask a specific question about that? Will the young people who are on the board be enabled to meet separately to the adults, the professionals, prior to the meetings? My experience of these things is that young people will often have a different perspective that they want to develop and bring together, and it can be easier for them to do that together, rather than as individuals. Is that sort of support mechanism for them envisaged? Can there be a young people's group meeting before they go into the full board meeting?

[99] **Ms Gwynedd:** My experience tells me that they would want to be full members of the board and therefore we will be asking them how they want to play it. So, we will be guided by them. The meetings will be conducted in a very different way to normal board meetings to enable them to take part. We hope that they will be enabled in the meeting rather than before it.

[100] **Jane Hutt:** Obviously we will explore with them what would make them feel comfortable. The fact that they are the first people to be appointed is quite significant because they feel that they are the board now and they will then be joined by a whole range of people. From our experience of interviewing for the role of Children's Commissioner for Wales, Chair, we know how they often needed to have time out for preparing for events, interviewing

arrangements and responsibilities. I think that this is all open for them to influence, as you said, Elin.

[101] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you for that.

[102] **Kirsty Williams:** The paper states that the advocacy and performance unit is looking at different options to extend advocacy to all children and young people. Those options will be considered by the board in June, which will then create the specification for an innovative and effective advocacy service. How long do you believe that that will take, and can you confirm that the service will be delivered in 2009-10, as you have previously indicated?

[103] **Jane Hutt:** That lays out the tasks ahead. One issue that we have had to deal with, which is also in the paper, is the impact that the reorganisation of the NHS will have on this. Community health councils currently have responsibility for the advocacy role for children and young people, and so we must now make changes. I am meeting with the Deputy Minister for Social Services to look at the impact of those changes and to issue directions to the new local health boards to make arrangements. I have said that it must be delivered in 2009-10, but we must work our way through the legislative process and we will then produce statutory guidance. However, we are not waiting for that before developing the partnerships; they are already up and running. It might be useful if Elin said something about the fact that there is interest in working together at a regional level.

[104] **Ms Gwynedd:** We have already had people telephoning and asking about the joint commissioning of services on a regional and sub-regional basis. We are looking at big regions in some instances, such as the whole of north Wales, for commissioning an advocacy strategy.

[105] **Kirsty Williams:** For absolute clarity, I understand that other departments might create difficulties for you in your timing, but you stated in the Government's response to the committee's report that the service would be in place by 2009-10. Is that still your intention?

[106] **Jane Hutt:** That is certainly our intention, if all goes well with the legislation.

[107] **Ms Williams:** There are several layers to this if we are to reach all children and young people, and we will need to come back to you with more detail as these things come on-stream. On the national element, we will be working to ensure that we get everything in place as fast as we can for 2009-10. With the other arrangements, which depend on the statutory guidance, we will seek to get as far as we can on the requirements before we get to that point of introducing the legislation. We hope that the legislation will come in and confirm the final enforcement rather than being the instigator. So, we will be moving forward on all levels in a consistent way, as far as we can.

[108] **Jane Hutt:** In addition, there are issues on which we are working, such as the way in which we deliver. We referred to an advocacy phone line, for example, and Elin is talking to the board, which is considering the best way forward. There are discussions with ChildLine and the CLIC project. Young people are already saying that they want to start thinking about different ways of accessing information from us, such as text messages. We must change our model, if appropriate, to respond to the interests and views of the young people whom we are now engaging.

[109] **Kirsty Williams:** May I ask you a specific question on those mechanisms for getting in touch? It was envisaged that contact would be via telephone or a text service, seven days a week, for all children. Can you confirm whether that service will be free to call, particularly from mobile phones?

[110] **Ms Gwynedd:** We will be exploring that, but that is certainly how we want to do it.

We have not found out that information yet, but we will. We are committed to looking at that.

[111] **Jane Hutt:** There is a budget line for the advice and information service, which should ensure the funding for it. I do not have those figures with me at the moment. Elizabeth, do you have them?

10.40 a.m.

[112] **Ms Williams:** Yes. It is £800,000 for 2009-10, and £850,000 for 2010-11.

[113] **Jane Hutt:** Including the information and advice.

[114] **Ms Williams:** It is about how the young people want to receive the information, and the different layers that we need to put into place.

[115] **Ms Gwynedd:** It is about putting a number of things in place to create a holistic service.

[116] **Kirsty Williams:** I am just a bit a concerned that you are spending that sum of money on doing lots of different things.

[117] **Jane Hutt:** I am happy to bring you information on how the proposed budget allocations are panning out. We are also working on a guide, which is not ready now, but will be in the next few weeks. In annex 1, we have given you an advocacy model, which tries to lay out the direction on this, but we are also producing a guide on the model for delivering advocacy services for children and young people. I hope that that will be ready for publication within the next few weeks. Again, we could produce not only a breakdown of the budget, but also this guide. It will have to go through the first meeting with the young people, and I also have to approve it.

[118] **Helen Mary Jones:** That information would be helpful, particularly on the budget lines and the intention to use them. I think that our concern is that, whichever method is in place, it has to be free of charge; otherwise, the young people who need it the most will not be able to access it. Not everyone gets through as many top-ups on their mobile phone as my daughter seems to be able to. [*Laughter.*]

[119] You may be able to deal with this next question as further information, Minister, so you could come back on this. The arrangements that we are putting in place to deliver advocacy services are multilayered and complex—and I do not think that anyone is suggesting that they should not be, because we are talking about general advocacy and very specific services for young people who need them—but what steps will you take to ensure that children and young people understand how and when to access the help that they need?

[120] **Jane Hutt:** The answer to that goes back to the issues that we just talked about, around openness and having a communication strategy to ensure that children and young people become aware of this. However we do it, whether through telephone lines or text messages, there will also be messaging websites and information leaflets, and the children's commissioner also has a challenge to publicise the role of his office. We have to do the same kind of promotion with this new service. Children and young people's partnerships will drive this at a local level, and will have a statutory duty to do so. They will work with the other partnerships as well, and the young people on the board will be at the forefront of advising us as to how we can make this as public and accessible as possible. We have several routes available to communicate with young people, such as schools councils, Funky Dragon, and the youth forum, but that will be the big task as we launch this.

[121] **Christine Chapman:** The committee recommended that, through service level agreements set by the advocacy unit, the Assembly Government should ensure that children and young people normally have choices about the identity of their advocate. Can you guarantee that that will happen, and can you tell us how that recommendation will be implemented?

[122] **Jane Hutt:** Elin, do you want to answer that?

[123] **Ms Gwynedd:** The national minimum standards were developed in 2006 for children's services specifically, but they are relevant to any advocacy service. The national minimum standards state specifically that children and young people should be able to choose their advocate and, in most cases, as you can see from the model in annex 1, they do have a choice. They can choose the parent, the carer, the youth worker, the teacher, whether as lay or informal advocates or as formal advocates. With the layer of more independent or professional advocates, such as those who would be available to children in care, for example, it gets more complex. We are looking into it, but it may not always be possible for children to access the person whom they want at that stage, because they would not know the people. We will be guided by the board on this, but I feel that it is more important that they get good service and independent advocacy rather than getting to choose a specific person. So, in many ways, they would get to choose the more informal advocate, but it becomes more complex as we move towards more independent and professional advocacy.

[124] **Helen Mary Jones:** I want to follow that up, because the evidence that we took from children and young people suggested that they did not very often get a choice. I completely take Ms Gwynedd's point that, when you first come into contact with an advocacy service, you may not know who you will be offered. However, it is very important to children and young people to be able to change their advocate if they feel that the person is not really speaking up for them. Will the national standards ensure that, if a young person is unhappy, he or she would not have to go through a long and complicated process of explaining why they are unhappy and want to change and could just say that they do not trust a certain person and that they want somebody else?

[125] **Ms Gwynedd:** It is a different thing. Yes, of course they should be able to do that, and if they are unhappy with their advocate, they should be able to change them.

[126] **Jane Hutt:** I will take that back as a key point, to ensure that it is part of the commissioning guidance. I know that this committee will be reporting to us anyway, but it is the key point on independence and choice.

[127] **Helen Mary Jones:** It is important, Minister, that they should not have to give a complicated explanation. Young people have told us very clearly that that is the last thing that they want to do.

[128] **Kirsty Williams:** Minister, it is very encouraging to hear that people are coming forward to look at the consortia commissioning arrangements, and that is to be welcomed. You said in response to the committee that a one-off grant would be made available to develop those consortia and build capacity for organisations to come forward. Do you have an indication of how much that grant will be? Is it coming out of your £800,000 this year and your £850,000 for next year?

[129] **Ms Williams:** Unfortunately, it came from the social services budget, and it was last year. The timescale for that has run out, and neither we nor our partners were in a position to get to the point at which we could use that money. So, we think that we have moved forward from that now. We are moving into the whole process, and the grant was time-limited so it will be finished at the end of this year.

[130] **Kirsty Williams:** Was that grant ever accessed?

[131] **Ms Williams:** No.

[132] **Kirsty Williams:** So, no money was drawn down to support the consortia?

[133] **Ms Williams:** I would need to confirm that, but no, not as far as I am aware.

[134] **Jane Hutt:** This was another ministerial budget, so we need to check out the details. Supporting the development of the commissioning regionally is critical to what we were setting out. So, I want to go back to look at that point.

[135] **Helen Mary Jones:** We would welcome that, Minister. As you know, we were not sure whether the children and young people's partnerships, if they were commissioning individually, would be able to be independent. You reassured us that they would not be commissioning individually, but working through consortia. So, from the point of view of the independence of the service, that is a key issue for us. If it is possible to get those consortia up and running without specific grants, this committee would not have any problem at all with that. However, we would have a problem if children and young people's partnerships were commissioning on an individual basis, because young people told us that that was exactly what they felt made it impossible for the service to feel properly independent.

[136] **Christine Chapman:** What assessment has been made of the skills and capacity of the partnerships to undertake effective commissioning? Have the partnerships received the necessary statutory guidance and tools to assist them in commissioning?

[137] **Jane Hutt:** I will bring in Elin and Elizabeth on this in a moment. We are certainly at an early stage with the statutory guidance, because of the legislative changes that have to take place. However, the guide that we are about to publish will be public, and we will share it with you first. We will be laying out the non-statutory guidance on commissioning arrangements, and we will be very clear about the delegation of responsibility for the commissioning and the lead local area partners within the children and young people partnerships. There is already interest, for example, in the north Wales authorities, so this is beginning to develop, is it not, Elin?

10.50 a.m.

[138] **Ms Gwynedd:** Yes. They are beginning to look at regional commissioning, and a commissioning toolkit is being developed to support children and young people partnerships in doing this. That is being done jointly with children's health and social services in the Welsh Assembly Government, and it will look at all the aspects of advocacy. The commissioning will also be supported by the partnership support unit. So, the partnerships will have quite a lot of support and a toolkit to put this into place.

[139] **Helen Mary Jones:** The final question on this section is from me. Minister, you will remember that some of the evidence that this committee received from some voluntary sector providers suggested that the funding arrangements as they stand make it difficult for those providers to be perceived as genuinely independent, particularly when they are funded on an annual basis by the local authority. In your written statement, you said that, through regulation, you would require local or regional arrangements to be commissioned on at least a three-year basis. I understand from the evidence that you have given us this morning that those statutory arrangements are not in place yet. Can you confirm that it is still your intention to require, through regulation, those commissioning arrangements, whether they are local or regional, to be made on at least a three-year basis?

[140] **Jane Hutt:** Yes. I am looking again at the draft guide, and it is quite clear that it is going to be on a three-year basis. We are saying that it will be a three-year commissioning cycle that is flexible enough to extend or reduce, if necessary, to allow stability and continuity for the children and young people accessing a service. That is a key part of the commissioning guide.

[141] **Helen Mary Jones:** I think that the committee will appreciate that being made clear.

[142] Deuaf ag eitem 3 i ben drwy ddiolch eto i'r Gweinidog am ei phresenoldeb a'i hatebion clir a gonest. Yn ôl y disgwyl, Weinidog, byddwn yn cadw llygad barcud ar yr holl brosesau hyn. Yr wyf yn dymuno'r gorau i Elin Gwynedd yn ei rôl newydd. Yr wyf yn siŵr nad hwn fydd y tro olaf i chi ymddangos yma, Elin. Diolch hefyd i Elizabeth Williams am ei phresenoldeb. Diolch i'r tair ohonoch. I will bring item 3 to an end by thanking the Minister again for her presence and her clear and honest answers. As you would expect, Minister, we will be keeping a close eye on all these processes. I wish Elin Gwynedd all the best in her new role. I am sure that this will not be the last time that you appear here, Elin. I also thank Elizabeth Williams for her presence. Thank you to all three of you.

10.53 a.m.

Cynnig Trefniadol Procedural Motion

[143] **Helen Mary Jones:** Cynigiaf fod **Helen Mary Jones:** I move that
y pwyllgor, o dan Reol Sefydlog Rhif 10.37, yn symud i sesiwn breifat i drafod yr adroddiad ar y cynllun gweithredu rhianta. *the committee, under Standing Order No. 10.37, goes into private session to discuss the report on the parenting action plan.*

[144] A oes gwrthwynebiad i hynny? **Are there any objections to that? I see that**
Gwelaf nad oes. **there are not.**

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 10.53 a.m.
The public part of the meeting ended at 10.53 a.m.*