



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

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

**Dydd Iau, 23 Hydref 2008  
Thursday, 23 October 2008**

**Cynnwys**  
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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<br>Welsh Liberal Democrats                  |
| Angela Burns      | Ceidwadwyr Cymreig<br>Welsh Conservatives                                  |
| Christine Chapman | Llafur<br>Labour   |
| Helen Mary Jones  | Plaid Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor)<br>The Party of Wales (Committee Chair) |

**Eraill yn bresennol**  
**Others in attendance**

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| Gail Bennett | Cydgysylltydd Strategaeth Rhianta, Cyngor Sir y Fflint<br>Parenting Strategy Coordinator, Flintshire County Council |
|--------------|---|

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

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| Tom Jackson    | Clerc<br>Clerk   |
| Rita Phillips  | Dirprwy Glerc<br>Deputy Clerk                              |
| Kathryn Potter | Gwasanaeth Ymchwil yr Aelodau<br>Members' Research Service |

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 10.32 a.m.*  
*The meeting began at 10.32 a.m.*

**Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon**  
**Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions**

[1] **Helen Mary Jones:** Bore da, gyfeillion. Mae croeso ichi siarad yn Gymraeg neu yn Saesneg. Mae modd defnyddio'r offer cyfieithu i glywed y sain yn well hefyd os ydych yn drwm eich clyw. Gofynnaf i bawb ddiffodd pob ffôn symudol neu ddyfais electronig arall. Nid yw'n ddigon da eu tawelu, oherwydd maent yn amharu ar yr offer cyfieithu a recordio. Nid ydym yn disgwyl ymarfer tân, felly os clywn larwm, bydd argyfwng go iawn a gofynnaf i chi ddilyn y tywysyddion.

**Helen Mary Jones:** Good morning, friends. You are free to speak in Welsh or in English. The translation equipment can also be used to amplify the sound, if you are hard of hearing. I ask everyone to switch off their mobile phones or any other electronic device. It is not good enough to put them on silent mode, as they interfere with the translation and recording equipment. We do not expect a fire drill, so, if an alarm sounds, it will be a genuine emergency, and I ask you to follow the ushers.

[2] A oes gan Aelodau unrhyw fuddiant i'w ddatgan cyn inni fynd ymlaen? Gwelaf nad oes. Yr ydym wedi cael ymddiheuriadau gan Lynne Neagle, sydd ar gyfnod mamolaeth o hyd. Ann Jones a fu'n dod yn ei lle hi, ond, yn anffodus, mae'n methu â dod y tro hwn. Felly, yr ydym un Aelod yn brin.

Do Members have any interests to declare before we go any further? I see that you do not. We have received apologies from Lynne Neagle, who is still on maternity leave. Ann Jones, who has been substituting for her, is unfortunately unable to attend today, which means that we are one Member short.

10.33 a.m.

### **Ymchwiliad i'r Cynllun Gweithredu Rhianta Inquiry into the Parenting Action Plan**

[3] **Helen Mary Jones:** Yr wyf yn croesawu Gail Bennett o Gyngor Sir y Fflint. Diolch yn fawr i chi am ddod. Dyma ein hail sesiwn dystiolaeth ac mae gennym gwestiynau yn barod, felly trown yn syth atynt, os yw hynny'n iawn gyda chi, Gail. Diolch hefyd am eich tystiolaeth ysgrifenedig a oedd yn ddefnyddiol iawn.

**Helen Mary Jones:** I welcome Gail Bennett from Flintshire County Council. Thank you very much for coming. This is our second evidence session, and we have prepared questions, so we will turn straight to them, if that is okay with you, Gail. Thank you also for your written evidence, which was very useful.

[4] Your paper outlines that Flintshire County Council has been progressive in taking parenting work forward. Can you outline why it has been able to work so positively and in such a progressive way?

[5] **Ms Bennett:** It was recognised by the people on the children and young people's partnership that an awful lot of work on parenting was happening in Flintshire, as there is in a lot of authorities, but no-one could put their finger on quite what was happening or on who was delivering which service. So, with Cymorth funding and as a result of the parenting action plan, there came an opportunity to develop a post, which is my post, to take the main lead on co-ordinating the development of the parenting strategy and action plan, to look at the services that were available, and then to identify the gaps and develop the action plan. That is what I initially came in to do, but, while carrying out the needs assessment for the single plan and for the parenting action plan, I realised how much more work there was yet to do. So, I have funding for another three years to take forward that work. Locally, people recognise the need, and one of the main drivers was the parenting action plan. It was good just to be able to hold the document and say, 'Look, this is what is being said nationally'.

[6] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is very useful. Thank you. To what extent was the parenting action plan itself a key driver of the work locally? Do you think that the Assembly Government has provided a sufficiently coherent national strategic lead on parenting in Wales?

[7] **Ms Bennett:** I think that it was the main driver for those people who knew about it, of which there was a limited number. When I was looking at my job advertisement and thinking about applying for it, it took me some time to search out the parenting action plan and to find it. When I did find, I read it and it made sense. It is logical, and I do not think that there is anything in there that you can argue with. However, people's awareness of it is quite limited. When we had our first parenting strategy group meeting, some people said, 'I do not actually know why I am here', but when we went through the parenting action plan and used that as a basis for discussion, they said, 'Right, I get it now; now I understand why I am here'. People then became aware of it, and the issue was bringing those people together and sharing that. That was in February 2007, so we are a good way in by now. Things are happening, but I do not think that many people realise that they are a result of the parenting action plan. I hope that that makes sense.

[8] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is very interesting. Those are things that we might want to recommend in the next stage.

[9] We have received evidence about the lack of resources attached to implementing the parenting action plan. Do you have any concerns about your ability to sustain the work that is

taking place in Flintshire in the longer term, because of funding issues?

[10] **Ms Bennett:** Yes, I do. Before I took on this role, I was in a parenting role in Cheshire, funded through Cheshire County Council, and I could see the differences. I do not have a dedicated budget to manage; the budget that I have is just for my salary, and that is it. In one respect, that is good because it forces me to bring people together and to pool moneys, time and resources, and we have done a lot thanks to people's goodwill. However, if we want to develop this action plan, and it includes many actions, we cannot sustain our current position. For example, we wanted to be involved in the pilot scheme for the Incredible Years toddler programme. The resources, the books, were purchased for us by the Welsh Assembly Government, and, given that I am a single point of contact, I received them, which was a benefit, as I was able to use them to spread awareness of the programme to other people. Some authorities said to me, 'We do not know where they are', which is dreadful. So, we received them, and we contacted Bangor to say that we would really like to be involved in the pilot scheme. We recognise that there is a need for a parenting programme, and, if we get it right in these early years, fewer parents will need to attend the basic programme for 4 to 11-year-olds. That is what we want to focus on.

[11] So, we had the training and the resources, which were funded by the Welsh Assembly Government, and we wanted to be involved, but the cost of delivering a parenting programme can range from £5,000 to £17,000. The figures have just come out in the recent evaluation of the pathfinder projects in England, and it cost £17,000 just for one programme. We are doing that without any budget at the moment, so we are trying to pool our spending. We managed to find a crèche for £1,900 for one programme, and we bid for the Save Christmas campaign, to get £3,000 to put towards the delivery of the pilot. That is how we are moving at the moment. It is always a case of thinking 'Okay, if we want to do this, where can we find the money from?'. People are still quite precious about their own budgets, because they are fighting for voluntary services and for their own projects. In my role, I can take the overall view and say, 'If you just give a little bit here, we can strengthen that there, and you will then be in a better place, and we can promote your service through that'.

[12] That was a long answer, but it was just to give you a practical example of what we have just gone through. We have managed to deliver the programme, because we had some money left. We had a little bit of slippage and we were able to buy some resources, so we bought the books.

10.40 a.m.

[13] The people who are delivering are doing so through goodwill. One project is through Flying Start, so that is fine, and it involves a health worker and a Sure Start family worker working together. However, if an authority were to say, 'Sure Start is not to move out of its boundary', we would have an issue, because the set-up that we have is to mix family workers and health visitors, and that is all done through goodwill, in the main. I do not think that people realise the cost of delivering a programme yet, and that is the next bit of work that we need to do.

[14] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is really helpful. Do not worry about giving us a long answer if it is as comprehensive and useful as that was.

[15] **Eleanor Burnham:** Good morning, Gail. It is nice to see you. We have seen quite a bit of each other over the summer. Your evidence states how many areas of the parenting action plan have not been completed or have been partially completed. You would like to see all of these areas fully implemented, but are there any particular that need our most urgent attention?

[16] **Ms Bennett:** Yes. One area is seriously lacking attention and is not included at present, namely workforce development. We have lots of practitioners and people who are professionally trained, but working with parents sometimes does not come up within any of the training, and so we are working with some our local colleges on that. So, workforce development is one area that needs attention to take it forward and to have a structured plan. I am saying that because we want to develop parenting programmes, but we cannot deliver those programmes if we do not offer training in group facilitation skills, for example, or training on the services that are available and who to signpost people towards. For example, we will deliver a 12-week parenting programme, parents will go on it and that will be it—off they go. There needs to be far more than that if any one of us is to break a habit or change our behaviour. It is crucial for us all to be delivering the same message, to have the same awareness, and, through promoting more multi-agency work and sharing, to offer training.

[17] I want to provide you with some details on the paper that has just come from the National Academy for Parenting Practitioners in England, because I think that they are useful. The academy has just published details of its programme of free training and support, aimed at reaching more than 6,000 practitioners in England over the next two years. That programme includes training places on proven evidence-based programmes—so, it is offering more than just one programme—for 3,400 senior experienced practitioners who will definitely deliver the programme. That commitment to deliver the programme once they have had the training is absolutely crucial.

[18] It also lists a number of services that we would expect to see included, such as community-focused schools and Sure Start, and the level at which practitioners should be, namely graduates, ideally, or people who have professional qualifications in the relevant field or who have completed foundation level 3. That has just happened and is just coming out now. They should be working and co-facilitating with a qualified and trained professional, so there is an element of mentoring. We are trying to develop that across our services. It states that they should be well supported and supervised, which is another area that is lacking for us. People who deliver parenting programmes might be carrying an awful burden of what has been divulged during the sessions and so the document states, as you would expect, that they take an empathetic, non-judgmental and collaborative approach to working with parents.

[19] Post-training support is also offered, with good-practice workshops on evidence-based practice. Some of those will include work with black and minority ethnic groups, parents of children with disabilities, parents of substance misusers, teenage parents, and fathers, as well as examining evidence-based practice. So, that is about evaluating and measuring our work, because I am sure that we have all had really good training, but the manual then gets placed on the shelf, and we do not do anything with it. We want to ensure that training is making a difference.

[20] Finally, the programme offers advice and guidance to parenting commissioner, who are the commissioners in England. We have the children and young people's partnerships and parenting co-ordinators to take the lead here so that we know what is out there, which parenting programmes are available, what is happening in the Assembly, what would help, and what can be co-ordinated locally. So, it is about having people at a regional level to take the lead and to work with national agencies on improving the training available on working with parents, and on developing those qualifications. We can use a lot of the skills that we have, but our work with parents requires a different skillset. It is a career in itself. That would be the main point, along with developing the parenting programmes. Initially, the focus was to be on getting information out there; hence, the support for the parent information points and the need to develop those first. We will use them as our key communication channel for everything else that is happening in the parenting world.

[21] **Eleanor Burnham:** I know that your time is precious, because you have a lot of

partnerships to work around. As we saw, one of them is Home Start, which is a charity, as are many of your other partners. We heard that day that Home Start is short of cash, and this is one area where I assume you would like to see more money going in.

[22] **Ms Bennett:** Yes.

[23] **Eleanor Burnham:** I also noticed that the bilingual helpline could do with some more money. Would you agree?

[24] **Ms Bennett:** Yes. I think that Parentline Plus is an absolutely superb universal service. We have promoted it in Flintshire because, when I worked with parents in Cheshire, I found that they used it. It is a service that is there for them. They do not have to be at crisis point to use it; it could just be that they had a horrendous time getting out in the morning, and they need advice on how to make the house calmer, so that the child goes to school in a better frame of mind. The parent can pick up the phone and have a chat about that kind of thing. Parentline Plus offers parent-to-parent coaching, and we can avail ourselves of that in Wales—although I do not think that we are contributing to it at the moment, but that situation may have changed.

[25] So, we have promoted that line, and I think that we should promote the bilingual line as well. A number of authorities are using the Parentline Plus programmes and workshop materials as well, because it is a well established service that has been built up over the years. It has received funding for three further years, and I am sure that it will continue. So, yes, we need to do more there. However, I would be fearful that we could lose that free service in these discussions. That would be my fear, Eleanor.

[26] **Eleanor Burnham:** In north-east Wales, I suspect that you are the beacon of good practice, are you not?

[27] **Ms Bennett:** I am the only parenting co-ordinator across the local authorities in north Wales at the moment, although south Wales has far more. Last night, I stayed with Llinos Davies, the parenting co-ordinator for Torfaen until recently. My job description was based on hers, and we have developed a good friendship over time. However, when I first arrived, I picked up the phone and then wondered who I could talk to—

[28] **Eleanor Burnham:** Did you say that you are the only parenting co-ordinator in north Wales?

[29] **Ms Bennett:** At the moment, yes. There is a lady in Wrexham, and other local authorities have been looking at this but have not yet made a decision.

[30] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you. We will have to move on. The next question is from Chris Chapman.

[31] **Christine Chapman:** Good morning, Gail. In your evidence, you discuss a parenting strategy for Wales. Why do you think a revised national parenting action plan is necessary, and what kind of resources will be needed to ensure its delivery? What specific areas should a revised plan focus on?

[32] **Ms Bennett:** First, the document itself should continue in some form. If you look at the Flintshire strategy, you will see how we have used it to form the basis of our work and to bring the national and local levels together. It has been invaluable in that regard. We have pulled out the national priorities, based on what parents have said to us and on what we know is happening, to ensure that the people reading the strategy are well aware of them. They do not have to read the full document; they can just read the relevant box, if necessary. We have

mapped the national priorities onto the local priorities as well.

[33] The strategy is a useful umbrella, and we can continually refer to it, enabling co-ordinators across Wales to join forces and improve our strength. That is what we have been doing these past 12 months—learning from each other, finding out what is happening in other areas, and assessing whether it will work in ours. If I have an issue with evaluations, I can ask whether a colleague has done any work on that. We have shared a lot across Wales, which has been invaluable. The strategy is about recognising those jobs, in whatever form, whether everything filters through from the children and young people’s partnership, or through a co-ordinator or someone in a similar role. We can look at the areas set out in the strategy, and assess whether we are sufficiently committed to reaching our goals. That kind of approach is invaluable in all 10 areas.

10.50 a.m.

[34] On the parenting programmes, I would like to see more done on the evidence-based programmes and more piloting based on local need, together with the resources locally to develop that. Any parenting co-ordinator would tell you that they would want to use researched, well evaluated programmes. However, for one-off workshops, there are other materials that are good and that have been produced locally, but there was not a lot of money to spend on them. The important areas are getting the information out, workforce development, and schools.

[35] **Christine Chapman:** It is important to put a profile on parenting.

[36] **Ms Bennett:** Absolutely. I am really pleased that, in Flintshire, during the needs analysis, parenting initially sat within core aim 1. That was providing a flying start, but, as we went through the needs analysis, parenting kept popping up. It crosses all the core aims, and you cannot just put it into one. That was recognised, which led to a separate parenting strategy and action plan that supports the single plan, and so parenting is contained within the single plan. There are slightly different priorities—and we talked earlier about breastfeeding—in which case, we would pass that over and work with health on that side, but it all still fits together.

[37] **Christine Chapman:** I would like to move on. You mentioned the evaluation research, which leads quite nicely to my next question, which relates particularly to the Webster-Stratton Incredible Years programme, which has been evaluated based on evidence. What is your view, Gail, on the implementation of the Incredible Years programme?

[38] **Ms Bennett:** When I came into post, I knew that we had an offer on the table of 10 WAG-funded training places. We had a small peer support group that met and supported those who were delivering Incredible Years. There were probably around three or four regular attendees and maybe six or seven people who would go out of interest. Children’s services picked up the programme and have been delivering it. They offer two programmes a year, plus one at the advanced level. For the other programmes, people have received training. Some of them are quite passionate about delivering the programme, but others have said that it is not for them.

[39] When I took up my post, I realised that we had 10 places, and that I had to find out who was trained in Flintshire, as we did not know at that time. So, we established the current position. Following that, we identified who wanted to continue to deliver and who could do so. We are still in that place, really, because many of the people who would like to continue cannot do so because of capacity. We then had to identify to whom we could offer the 10 places. We asked everyone who undertook that training to commit to delivering at least one programme. That has happened except for two behavioural support teachers, but they came



with the view that they would raise their awareness of it so that they could signpost people to the programme. There are others who deliver other programmes, such as the Dina programme in schools.

[40] The delivery has been difficult, and, again, I come back to the resources and the price of delivering a parenting programme. We have people who are trying to deliver it as part of their main job, so we have a lot of work still to do to build around that. Around a day and a half is required for the delivery of the Incredible Years programme. I do not know whether you have looked at the Incredible Years materials, but there is a big file with information that you have to pull out and make into session plans. We did that and created a local master pack so that someone who wants to deliver can just take away the pack and does not have to waste time. So, at least we have that as a master pack for people, which was invaluable, but we had to do that locally, and I know that many other authorities will tell you the same. We still have a lot of work to do to get management to buy in to it and to get people to realise the benefits of early intervention. It might be expensive to run a parenting programme, but, if we do not do it, what will be the cost later on? We still need to get that message out.

[41] **Christine Chapman:** So, it is a resource issue, not an issue with the programme itself.

[42] **Ms Bennett:** Absolutely.

[43] **Christine Chapman:** You are perfectly happy with the programme.

[44] **Ms Bennett:** I think that we still need to decide whether the programme itself is the right programme to deliver universally. My answer, at the moment, is that I am not sure.

[45] **Christine Chapman:** Despite the evidence, because it was based on—

[46] **Ms Bennett:** It is for children with conduct disorders, so you then have to consider what a conduct disorder is and look at that. Do we want to say to parents, ‘Right, you come along to this programme because your child has a conduct disorder’, or do we want to widen it to remove the stigma? That is where we are at the moment, thinking locally about how we really want to use Incredible Years and what else we want to offer on a menu of other programmes, such as Parentline Plus workshops, which offer programmes of one to six sessions. It is a good engagement tool and it also follows the principles of Incredible Years, so anyone who had undertaken any of those workshops could then move into Incredible Years, if necessary. They would be building upon the knowledge that they already had. The other programme that has been used extensively is the Triple P—Positive Parenting Programme, which is another evaluated programme. Another is Strengthening Families, but I do not know an awful lot about that one.

[47] The reason that we developed the literature review was because we wanted to look at all the programmes available, all those that had been researched and evaluated. I do not know if you have seen that paper, but I can certainly provide it to you because we have provided it to other co-ordinators and they found it invaluable. It was something that was promised in the parenting action plan, but it did not happen, so we decided to do it locally. We have a full list of programmes that have been evaluated. The second part is another list of programmes that parents have asked for, which may be on sex and relationships, internet safety and drugs and alcohol. We have selected other programmes that we think we could at least look at and consider. So, that is where we are.

[48] **Helen Mary Jones:** It would be useful to have that paper, thank you. Angela, I know that you have to leave the meeting early and that you were particularly keen to look at the group of questions clustered around question 6, so do you want to come to those first?

[49] **Angela Burns:** Yes. Gail, thank you for your paper, which was both informative and made for very cheerful reading, after some of the stuff that we are given to read. You are, as Eleanor said, very clearly a beacon of excellence, which made one of the bits of information in your paper all the more telling; even though you are a beacon of excellence, you still recognise that there are a significant number of parents to whom the support is not accessible and you identified some of them, such as parents living in rural areas. What do you think we could do to ensure that all parents can get a universal service, which is really what would be the success of this programme?

[50] **Ms Bennett:** I think that it is about taking steps really. Quite often, we can look at this and want everyone right down there, very quickly, implementing things, but it is about taking small structured steps, hence the action plan. Parents told me last year, ‘We do not know what services are available’, ‘We do not know where to get information’, and, ‘We do not have access to a computer’, so we developed the parent information points—we are currently developing them. There will also be a website, where we will put tip sheets, website details, service details and parenting programme details. We will deliver training on that to parent groups in schools and also to practitioners. So, the initial point for us is to get out the information that is available. We are going to put the Welsh Assembly Government parenting booklets on there as well, so they will be universally available to somebody who can access that. We have thought it through. It is a touch-point screen, so it is very easy to use and it should be three touches to get to the source of information that somebody would want.

[51] **Angela Burns:** Would that, however, address the needs of parents who feel very stigmatised for trying to access the service or who are just not technologically literate and struggle to set a foot outside their front door, let alone access services like that?

11.00 a.m.

[52] **Ms Bennett:** We are continuing to develop that through the family information service, which we have just recently structured. We had a new appointment this week. We will be using that service to develop a lot of the resources about going out into communities and standardising information boards to carry this message across the services, reminding practitioners that these services are available, and then working with national services such as Netmums.com, which launched a service in north-east Wales last year. I think that it is a charity, but it has launched its website for north-east Wales. I know that I am talking about technology, but parents might be feeling isolated in places like Connah’s Quay, Mold or the Gronant area, which seems to come up quite a lot. So, when I and children’s information services are looking at it, we know where some of the issues are. We are trying to develop groups and parent champions in the playgrounds, because that is where mums mainly do their talking.

[53] **Angela Burns:** That is a very good idea. We took evidence last week from someone who is a parent champion, who had had an amazing amount of success on that. She pointed out that she was able to get to the parents that other people could not reach, because she is just there, being a mum. It worries me that there is an enormous drive to corporatise all of this information, and people cannot access it. You do not mention grandparents in your evidence, but we have taken evidence that says that grandparents are receiving very little support. Do you agree with that?

[54] **Ms Bennett:** I do. I also wish to raise a point. I only looked at this material the other day, but when I was over in Northern Ireland I read a newspaper article that mentioned a parents centre—I think that it is [parentsadvicecentre.org](http://parentsadvicecentre.org), but I can provide that to you. The centre offers a telephone line and an appointment—so it is face to face—but it is restructuring, and it has a volunteer network that is always available one day a week. So, it

has an appointment-based system and a drop-in centre, run by local parents as volunteers. So, it spreads a little of the message out.

[55] I am sorry, but I have forgotten your question.

[56] **Angela Burns:** It was on grandparents; they care for a growing number of children these days.

[57] **Ms Bennett:** We have close links with the Grandparents Association, and I had the honour of going to 10 Downing Street for its twenty-fifth anniversary celebration last year, which was really good. We want to work with the association, because it is good on the contact side of things in cases where there is divorce or separation. It recognises the good work that grandparents do. We are looking at working with that organisation in Flintshire. We have been trying to arrange a meeting to discuss what we can do. With schools and family learning, letters are sent home addressed to parents, but it is often the grandparents who take the children to school and pick them up afterwards. So, if they were to get involved in family learning, they could also take that on board. I was at a family learning session at my children's school last Friday, and a number of grandparents were there, which was good to see—they were getting involved and were enjoying themselves. We are trying to work closely with family learning so that parenting is another learning opportunity.

[58] **Angela Burns:** Do you think that parents with disabled children also face the same issues, or do they tend to get mopped up by other services, due to the fact that they have a child with a disability?

[59] **Ms Bennett:** In Flintshire, we have the children's integrated disability team service, CIDS, which recently won an award for the service that it provides. It has its own booklet of all the services available. We will be putting together material specifically for children with disabilities, but I would turn that around, and say that one area that we still need to look at is parents with a disability.

[60] **Angela Burns:** The Disabled Children Matter Wales campaign is quite strong on that. As a quick aside on this subject, do you feel that foster parents who are also parents need to be targeted in any way, or, because of the fact that they are trained to do their job as foster parents, do you feel that they have already gone through all of the disciplines and are, therefore, less likely to be isolated and unsure of what to do and do not need to learn how to be positive?

[61] **Ms Bennett:** That is an interesting question. Foster parents receive training and they have a network to which they can easily turn to ask questions—that is what the training offers. We were part of the pilot scheme for the Incredible Years programme—looking into looked-after children—last year, and the research paper on that has just come out. Basically, it shows that foster parents—they said themselves that they were a difficult set of clients, as did the facilitators—were challenged by the delivery, because of all their knowledge. What came out of the results was that it was really good for us to sit back and to look again at play and praise and how important they are. While they understood the discipline and the boundaries, they refocused on play and praise. It would be a good model to look at and consider how we can spread it out.

[62] **Angela Burns:** My final question is on information services, which we have touched on quite a bit. You raised several points in your evidence about the accessibility and appropriateness of the information available; section 2.7 of your paper is very detailed on this. One of the points that you raise is that you believe that the national renaming of the service will assist in its promotion. Can you explain why that should be so?

[63] **Ms Bennett:** I will first speak to you as a parent, who was totally unaware of these services not many years ago. My background is in finance strategy. I was walking down our high street in Flint at the event to launch the Christmas lights, and I got talking to representatives of children's information services who were there with a stand of teddies. They said, 'We provide information on services for your child—playgroups, horse riding, anything; give us a call'. I was never told, as a parent, that I could contact such a person to be given parenting information. If you read through what children's information services offer, it does say 'and services for parents', but that information is hidden behind the focus on childcare and careers in childcare. My response was to think, 'I must phone them up to find out what is available locally', and that is all that I ever did. It was only when I went to work with the Genesis project in Wrexham for a short time that I realised that children's information services offer far more than what I had perceived as a parent. That is why I think that it will make a difference.

[64] When we did the services review, I asked all services whether they were aware of children's information services, and the answer was 'yes'. I asked whether they used them, and the main answers were 'sometimes' and 'no'. I asked what type of information they would seek through these services, and the answers were 'childcare' and 'playgroups' and so on. So, they did not see it as a channel. We are now promoting it as a single point of contact, and doing so with practitioners. I have to tell them not to waste their time looking for something, but to phone the children's information services, because they are the professionals in terms of researching.

[65] **Angela Burns:** Would you like to see the renamed service incorporate the bilingual telephone line that Eleanor has already mentioned and Parentsnet, because they are two aspects of the parenting action plan that have not been implemented in any way? Would you like to see those as separate entities or incorporated into children's information services under the new guise?

[66] **Ms Bennett:** Renaming it families information services would make it obvious that it was for the whole family as opposed to only the children. As to whether I would like to see those aspects incorporated, I only saw a snapshot of Parentsnet, and then it disappeared, so I am trying to remember what was on it. I think that it would be good; it would certainly fit in with the education promotion work that we are doing. We promote Parentline, the telephone line, through the service, but I am not sure whether we would want to have dedicated work there. It would work, but we would need to have the right skills set. I would need to think about that one.

11.10 a.m.

[67] **Angela Burns:** Once you have had a chance to think about it, I would be interested in your views, simply because one of the things that keeps coming out from the evidence is that we are missing a bundle of people. For whatever reason, they are not accessing information. Although there is a wealth of information and help out there, it is so disguised that people cannot access it. I wonder whether we could have one universal port that people could pass through, which would be a wide enough door for all sorts of people to access, and then the reception desk, as it were, would have the skilled workers to direct people towards all these services. My heart sinks when I read reports that list all of these fantastic things, because unless you are prepared to sit down with a telephone book or a yellow pages, or you have a really good health worker, you just will not come across many of them. I am a parent of young children, and I do not know about half of this stuff, yet there are so many good things out there. At a meeting last week, I picked up a book for toddlers, and when there was a particularly bad tantrum at the weekend, it was excellent. So, the resources are there, but we are missing a huge number of vulnerable people—those isolated in rural areas, for example, or with disabled children, or those who feel stigmatised and pressurised by society. They

probably need help more than thee or me. They need access to that help, so I am keen to talk about those two areas, because I feel that there is a wealth of good stuff out there, but we are not marrying up those areas.

[68] **Ms Bennett:** If we look at parenting programmes, we can certainly get parents to attend, but my concern is whether it is the right parent, the right programme and the right time. I do not think that those questions are being asked. It would be a good idea to take the opportunity to filter these services through a single point of access, regardless of who delivers the parenting programme.

[69] **Eleanor Burnham:** Some of the issues relating my question have been discussed already. You are, as I said, a beacon, and I am concerned that a lot of your work is not being done elsewhere. Barnardo's Cymru has described the success of the parenting action plan as modest. We have a Barnardo's person in the gallery, do we not?

[70] **Helen Mary Jones:** It would be better to address the people in the room, surely.

[71] **Eleanor Burnham:** I wonder how we will overcome a lot of the barriers that you mentioned. You are obviously doing everything that needs to be done. You touched on the timing of parenting training, and childcare, and I see that point 10 in the paper refers to the Parentsnet website, which has not been delivered—in fact, it has been discontinued. We are told that parents had not really heard of Parentsnet, while professionals could not find its location, or find any signs of development. All in all, given your worthy work in Flintshire, I would like some suggestions as to how we replicate your work elsewhere. We have discovered lots of gaps in provision, although this is a worthy programme. Apart from funding, what else should we be doing?

[72] **Helen Mary Jones:** We are thinking particularly of the barriers mentioned in the paper, as Eleanor said—such as the timing of courses.

[73] **Ms Bennett:** It is about the promotion of parenting, and seeing it as being as valuable as the work on children and young people. It is essential that we get parenting right, so that it all fits together. With any co-ordinator role, you can be seen to be doing something, and looking across the whole area, without everyone knowing quite what you do. It is one of those roles that can be seen as—

[74] **Helen Mary Jones:** It is like housework—you only notice it when it is not done.

[75] **Eleanor Burnham:** It is also like a regional Assembly Member, if I may be so bold.

[76] **Ms Bennett:** I was having a chat—I do not know whether I should say this as it is being recorded; I will say it anyway without the names—with a couple of co-ordinators, and it seems that some authorities see it as worth while and some do not. Some will plug it into another job. That happened in Flintshire. It was attached to the role of the parenting co-ordinator in the youth offender team, and she was meant to undertake that role in addition to her caseload. That cannot happen. It is important that it is seen as being important. It is about placing it—

[77] **Eleanor Burnham:** It is about making it a preventative role rather than, as you say, a role where you discuss people who have already been stigmatised.

[78] **Ms Bennett:** That is right. I am located with the educational psychologists at the present, so I am within the education department, but I will be relocating in a couple of weeks, and I am going to move to, interestingly, the family information service and the Genesis project, so I will be based in the Westwood Centre, in Buckley. We are doing that to

try to bring those services together so that we can make books available to practitioners and parents and so that we can get newsletters out. I will be co-ordinating that, but it will be the role of the family information service to deliver that. So, it is about identifying the post, agreeing what the responsibilities and remit are, keeping it strategic—although some people may argue with me on that one—and perhaps a little operational work, because that keeps your hand in and teaches you good practice, but is also about the location.

[79] **Christine Chapman:** You made a really good point there about the priority that, for example, local authorities would give to good parenting. I passionately believe that if we sorted parenting out, we could resolve many issues, but the problem is, as you said, that it is not always a priority. How would you influence people to make this a priority? Should we undertake a big campaign as a start? All of this is part of it. I think that it is vital, but sometimes it is seen as an alternative approach, really.

[80] **Ms Bennett:** The parents during the consultation said, ‘Can you help employers recognise the importance of parenting? We would be really pleased if you could do that, and then perhaps you could help us by providing some information on negotiating part-time hours. What is available to us?’, and, ‘I am really keen on my career; how do I negotiate and show my employer that I still am keen on my career? I have a fantastic job that I also want to commit my time to’. So, it is about removing the stigma and saying that it is okay. We tried to do that with the Parentline Plus poster campaign, and it made a difference. We got more calls in Flintshire as a result of that.

[81] Again, it comes back to funding. While we share resources, it is about having a pool of money that we know is for parenting work and then distributing it. A lot of the money is already there. It is about how we distribute it better. We need to get over some of the preciousness and see strength in working together.

[82] **Christine Chapman:** I am not sure whether we are looking at this, but I mentioned some months ago that we might need to look at the employer and the work-life balance aspect of this, because there is definitely a link there. I do not know whether we would have time to look at that.

[83] **Eleanor Burnham:** I saw an article last year in one of the Sunday newspapers discussing this very issue, namely that a lot of people—and a lot of women—who have chosen not to have children are against mothers who want flexibility at work to ensure that their parenting is effective.

[84] **Helen Mary Jones:** I am sure, of course, that those people who have chosen not to have children will be very grateful when our children are paying their pensions. That is a very good point, Chris. Should we, in this report, signpost that as something that we need to do next, because there is a whole issue about how parenting is perceived, whether it is important and whether we all think that it is important, because, as you say, there are benefits.

11.20 a.m.

[85] **Ms Bennett:** I come from a corporate background, and I know that area very well. I think that it is very important that we work with corporations, and we want to do that, because we cannot forget that pressure is being put on the worker as a parent—and there is usually a partner who will also be affected. My husband manages a group, which is mainly made up of men, and there are many health and mental health issues that they may be going through as a result of stresses at home because their partner is not finding the right services. So, we have work to do there in promoting information at the early stages through midwifery and through working with corporations to get the information out in wage slips or whatever.

[86] **Helen Mary Jones:** It may also enable those men to be a bit more supportive of their partners, who might not be quite so stressed if they were able to be there more, which is a big issue, is it not? There is the question about fathers' roles. That has come up in a lot of the evidence that we have received. Chris, you have some questions on good practice.

[87] **Christine Chapman:** In your evidence, Gail, you talk about the need to learn lessons from other parts of the UK. Will you tell us more about this and why you think Wales should link up rather than set up a separate national parenting academy?

[88] **Ms Bennett:** That is a conflict, is it not? I could debate that one in the parenting coordinators' meeting. It is possibly because I was working in England. Although I have always lived in Wales, I have worked in England, and that is where I picked up the parenting work. When I moved into Flintshire, I kept my eye on a number of initiatives that were happening in England, such as the parent support advisers, which was a fantastic pilot scheme. There were a couple of errors. I was pleased to see that one that was picked up on was that the information source was not right at the beginning. We want to get that right before we think about parent support advisers. However, we are currently looking at it through community-focused school moneys.

[89] Parent support advisers are something that we definitely want to have a look at over time. There are a number of other initiatives, such as the parenting programme in the pathfinders, where three parenting programmes have just been evaluated. It is a matter of keeping your eye on what it happening. It is only across the border, and quite a number of parents may be living on the border, and so get some of their services from England. I am willing to say, 'If you have a friend over there, and they want some help, and you will get support from that friend by attending a group together, I am okay with that'. Some people would not be as lax as that, and I know that people would argue with me on that.

[90] The same is true for the boundary between Denbighshire and Flintshire. We deliver something in Gronant, but they go to high school in Prestatyn, in Denbighshire. I have sources of good information, one of which is the Parenting UK newsletter, from which I get a lot of information. When I read it, I often think, 'Oh, I wish we could do something like that here'. There are so many schemes. If I gave you some to look through, you would think, 'Oh that would be great to do'. We can learn from what has been already done and work from that. I do not know whether we could do that in Wales, based on some of the things that already exist. I was talking to Gill Harrison from the children and young people's partnership, who mentioned some regional groups—the names of which I have forgotten—but perhaps that could happen. I do not know enough.

[91] **Christine Chapman:** I may be wrong, but one area where we are probably different in Wales is in our attitude towards the physical punishment of children. Some of the organisations that you deal with in England might have the same ideas. However, there is a slight divide opening up in that regard. Last week, I read about research that had been undertaken which showed that there is now a slightly different attitude towards the physical punishment of children in Wales. Do you feel that that might make a difference? Would your views be the same because of that? That is one example that I see as being fundamental. I appreciate that it may also be a position that is held by some people in England.

[92] **Ms Bennett:** We have to look at what is happening in Wales. We can look at other areas and gain from what they have done. We may want to dismiss some things because of what is happening—we have to follow that lead—but there are also benefits from looking across to England and identifying good projects.

[93] I mentioned the parent support advisers, and there is a good book out on that, so you read it and think, 'Yes, I can go with that; that sounds like good sense'. So, instead of

duplicating work, trying to reinvent or even to create it, that is a good model for us to take forward so that we do not have to do that work—although we may tweak it. The only reason I say that is because so much money is spent on the parenting academy in England that it would be very difficult to replicate it in Wales, and so there are benefits to doing that.

[94] **Helen Mary Jones:** There are issues about needing to work in both languages. Twenty five per cent of our parents raise their kids through a language that is not English. Well, those are the Welsh speakers, without counting the people who speak other minority languages. Chris, did you want to come back in on that?

[95] **Christine Chapman:** I have a supplementary question. I heard your views on that, which is fine, but I was just wondering whether this good practice is being shared in reality across Wales and further afield. Are there things that we can do to improve the sharing of good practice? There is some excellent work going on. Do we need to do more, or does the Government need to do more to communicate that good practice?

[96] **Ms Bennett:** Yes. The link persons within the Welsh Assembly Government could work with the co-ordinators in the field. We established the parenting co-ordinators meeting not really as a break-out group, but as another group from the Fforwm Magu Plant, given that Fforwm Magu Plant had a different agenda. Many of us still attend that forum, but we realised that there was a need for parenting co-ordinators to look specifically at parenting work and to share best practice on what is happening. We need to strengthen that. That is currently co-ordinated by Lucy Akhtar from Children in Wales. Lucy does a great job, but she is stretched—I think that she works three or four days a week on co-ordinating all the national parenting work for Wales.

[97] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you, Gail. We have only a few minutes of the meeting left, so I will ask you something completely unfair now, and, if you feel that you cannot answer, we will understand. You have given us some very useful evidence, both here and in your paper, and we are very grateful for that, and the function of the committee is to take evidence and then to make recommendations to the Government. Are there two or three key recommendations that you would like the committee to make to the Government about driving parenting work forward in Wales? I said that it was a horrid question, did I not? I said that it was unfair.

[98] **Ms Bennett:** Just two or three recommendations.

[99] **Helen Mary Jones:** I suppose that I am asking for your recommendations if you had to prioritise, if we could not do everything. Are there key things that you would recommend?

[100] **Ms Bennett:** The first one would be to get the framework structure set up. We were talking about a link with the Welsh Assembly Government filtering down into the regions, and then working within the local authorities to make the best use of what we have. So, I would like to look at that and at how we communicate what is happening to share best practice, such as the newsletter from Parenting UK. Parenting UK is England based, so we have to filter out a lot. I would like to be able to sit at my desk and have at my fingertips what is happening in Wales, what I can use and what is going on. That would be really important.

[101] I would actually like to see my second and third recommendation linked, namely those on workforce development and the parenting programmes, to develop more improved infrastructures around those frameworks, because you cannot develop a parenting programme if you do not have the right training. So, those would be my three.

[102] **Helen Mary Jones:** Well done. That is always an absolutely horrible question, and that was really useful. On behalf of the committee, I thank you very much, Gail, for making



the time to come here. Eleanor always reminds us what a very long way it is from north-east Wales, so we do appreciate it and we also feel that it is important that we get a national perspective on this. As you say, there are more co-ordinators working in the south and we felt that it was really important to get you here, so we are very grateful to you for giving of your time. You know the process from here on in: we will consider the evidence, draft a report, and then the Government is obliged to respond within a set timeframe. So, the time and effort that you have put in will be useful. I know that the Minister is very glad that the committee is doing this work and she is anxious to see what our recommendations will be. I think that we can be quite optimistic that many of them will be accepted. So, thank you very much for your time and effort.

**Ms Bennett:** You are very welcome. Thank you.

11.30 a.m.

[103] **Helen Mary Jones:** Mae ambell beth bach i'w drafod cyn dirwyn y cyfarfod i ben. Yr ydym wedi anfon adroddiad y pwyllgor hwn at y Pwyllgor Cyllid ar ôl siarad gyda'r Gweinidog am faterion ariannu. Bydd Aelodau yn cofio y bu inni gytuno y baswn yn siarad â Chomisiynydd Plant Cymru i weld a oedd yn fodlon gyda'r ffaith bod ei gyllid yn aros yr un fath. Nid yw'n meddwl ei fod yn gallu rhoi ei farn yn gyhoeddus, ond tynnodd ein sylw at rai o'r pethau a ddywedodd y Cenhedloedd Unedig o ran pwysigrwydd sicrhau bod gan gomisiynwyr plant ddigon o arian i fod yn gwbl annibynnol. Felly, dyna pam yr ydym wedi cynnwys hynny yn ein adroddiad i'r Pwyllgor Cyllid.

**Helen Mary Jones:** There are a few other small items to discuss before I close the meeting. We have sent this committee's report to the Finance Committee after discussing budgetary issues with the Minister. Members will recall that we agreed that I would discuss with the Children's Commissioner for Wales whether he is content that his budget has flat-lined. He does not think that he can give his opinion publicly, but he drew our attention to some of the things that the United Nations has said about the importance of ensuring that children's commissioners have sufficient funding to remain completely independent. That is why we have included that in our report to the Finance Committee.

[104] Bydd y cyfarfod nesaf ar 13 Tachwedd, pan fyddwn yn trafod adroddiad y comisiynydd, ac mae'r Aelodau wedi ei dderbyn. Os bydd materion ynddo yr ydych yn arbennig o awyddus i'w trafod, byddai o gymorth pe baech yn rhoi gwybod i'r clerod, achos mae cymaint o bethau ynddo y bydd gofyn inni ganolbwyntio arnynt.

The next meeting will be on 13 November, when we will discuss the commissioner's report, which Members will have received. If it includes issues that you are particularly keen to discuss, it would be helpful if you could inform the clerks of that, because there are so many things in it that we will have to focus on.

[105] Buom hefyd mewn cysylltiad â swyddfeydd Aelodau i drefnu amser pan fyddwn i gyd ar gael i lansio'r adroddiad am dlodi plant ac addysg. Yr ydym yn bwriadu ei lansio yn y ganolfan Dechrau'n Deg yn y Barri, sydd wedi cynnig croeso i ni. Caiff hwnnw ei gynnal ar 12 neu 13 Tachwedd.

We have also been in contact with Members' offices to arrange a time when are all available to launch the report on child poverty and education. We intend to launch it at the Flying Start centre in Barry, which has extended a welcome to us. It will be held on 12 or 13 November.

[106] **Eleanor Burnham:** Pryd fyddwn ni'n mynd i'r Barri?

**Eleanor Burnham:** When are we going to Barry?

[107] **Helen Mary Jones:** Y bwriad yw mynd ar 12 neu 13 Tachwedd ar hyn o bryd,

**Helen Mary Jones:** The intention is to go on 12 or 13 November at the moment, but that is

ond nid yw hynny'n bendant, felly bydd swyddogion y pwyllgor yn cysylltu â'ch staff. not set in stone, so committee officials will be in touch with your staff.

[108] **Eleanor Burnham:** A fydd yn cael ei gynnal drwy'r bore, oherwydd mae gennyf gyfarfod o'r Pwyllgor Archwilio— **Eleanor Burnham:** Will it be held all morning, because I have a meeting of the Audit Committee—

[109] **Helen Mary Jones:** Byddwn yn trefnu hyn y tu allan i'r pwyllgor yn hytrach nag yn ystod y cyfarfod. Fodd bynnag, y bwriad oedd gadael ichi wybod, a rhoi ar goedd ein bod yn trafod hyn ac yn bwriadu lansio'r adroddiad cyn bo hir. **Helen Mary Jones:** We will sort this out outside of committee, rather than during this meeting. However, the intention was to keep you in the loop, and to place on record that we are discussing this and that we intend to launch the report soon.

[110] Diolch i Ryan sydd ddim yn yr ystafell ar hyn o bryd ond efe sydd wedi bod yn gofalu amdanom yn absenoldeb Linda. Mae'r ferch oedd gydag ef, Michaela, newydd ddechrau gyda'r gwasanaeth pwyllgorau, felly croeso iddi hi. Diolch yn fawr i bawb, ac i'r staff, fel arfer. I thank Ryan, who is not currently in the room, but he has been looking after us in Linda's absence. The woman who was with him, Michaela, has just started with the committee service, so we welcome her. Thank you all, and thanks to the staff, as usual.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 11.32 a.m.  
The meeting ended at 11.32 a.m.*