



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

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

**Dydd Iau, 11 Rhagfyr 2008
Thursday, 11 December 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. Mae hon yn fersiwn ddrafft o'r cofnod. Cyhoeddir fersiwn derfynol ymhen pum diwrnod gwaith.

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. This is a draft version of the record. The final version will be published within five working days.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Eleanor Burnham	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Angela Burns	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Christine Chapman	Llafur Labour
Helen Mary Jones	Plaid Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) The Party of Wales (Committee Chair)

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Sara Vaughan	Home-Start
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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	Ymgynghorydd i'r Pwyllgor Legal Adviser to the Committee

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.31 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.31 a.m.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Helen Mary Jones:** Bore da, gyfeillion. Dyma gyfarfod olaf y Pwyllgor Plant a Phobl Ifanc y tymor hwn. Dechreuaf drwy atgoffa pawb fod ganddynt hawl i ddefnyddio Cymraeg neu Saesneg. Mae cyfieithiad ar gael drwy'r clustffonau, ac mae modd eu defnyddio i glywed yn well. Atgoffaf bawb i ddiffodd unrhyw ffonau symudol, BlackBerrys a dyfeisiau electronig tebyg yn llwyr. Nid ydym yn disgwyl ymarfer tân, felly os clywch y larwm, bydd yn golygu bod problem go iawn, a gofynnaf i chi ddilyn y tywysyddion a'r clerc o'r adeilad.

Helen Mary Jones: Good morning, colleagues. This is the final meeting of the Children and Young People Committee for this term. I start by reminding everyone that they are free to use Welsh or English. Translation is available via the headsets; it is also possible to use the headsets to amplify the sound. I remind everyone to completely switch off their mobile phones, BlackBerrys and any such electronic devices. We are not expecting a fire drill, so, should you hear an alarm, there is a real problem, and I ask that you exit the building by following the ushers and the clerk.

[2] Wrth ddod â'r sylwadau agoriadol hyn i ben, a oes gan Aelodau unrhyw fuddiant i'w ddatgan? Gwelaf nad oes.

As I conclude my housekeeping comments, do Members have any declarations of interest to make? I see that there are none.

[3] Yr ydym wedi derbyn ymddiheuriad

We have received apologies from Lynne

gan Lynne Neagle, sydd yn dal ar gyfnod mamolaeth. Yr ydym hefyd wedi derbyn ymddiheuriad gan Ann Jones, sydd fel arfer yn dirprwyo ar ei rhan. Yr wyf yn ddiolchgar i Ann am gamu i mewn, ond nid yw'n gallu bod gyda ni heddiw.

Neagle, who is still on maternity leave. We have also received apologies from Ann Jones, who usually substitutes on her behalf. I am grateful to Ann for stepping in, but she cannot be with us this morning.

9.32 a.m.

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

[4] **Helen Mary Jones:** Tystiolaeth gan Home-Start yw'r eitem nesaf. Croesawaf Sara Vaughan yn gynnes iawn. Diolch i chi am eich papur defnyddiol. Os yw'n iawn gyda chi, symudwn yn syth at gwestiynau, gan fod Aelodau wedi cael cyfle i ddarllen eich papur.

Helen Mary Jones: This item is evidence from Home-Start. I warmly welcome Sara Vaughan. Thank you for your useful paper. If it is okay with you, we will move immediately to questions, as Members have had an opportunity to read your paper.

[5] I will start with the first question. For the record, can you briefly tell us a bit more about how Home-Start is organised in Wales? For example, how many volunteers do you have in how many schemes, and in which local authority areas?

[6] **Ms Vaughan:** We have 22 local schemes, and we are organised very locally. We have a— [*Interruption.*] I need to say that I am recovering from a terrible cold.

[7] **Helen Mary Jones:** Would you like a warm drink?

[8] **Ms Vaughan:** No, I will be fine, but you will have to excuse my coughing. I am sorry about this.

[9] **Helen Mary Jones:** We are all coughing and spluttering a bit, so you will be in good company.

[10] **Ms Vaughan:** We are organised locally. All our branches have local autonomy, although they are part of a national network, and that is a UK-wide network. In Wales, we are organised under a Wales committee, which is a sub-committee of our national trustee board. That is a recent development. We have had a national committee in Wales for 18 months. We have about 3,000 volunteers in Wales working with children and families, but I cannot give you the exact figure at this moment in time, because we are currently doing this year's statistics.

[11] **Helen Mary Jones:** How do you recruit your volunteers?

[12] **Ms Vaughan:** When we start a Home-Start scheme in a new area, it is usually a difficult job. We have recently set up a new scheme in Blaenau Gwent. It has been a campaign of newspaper advertisements and there have even been public relations campaigns in the local Asda supermarket, where we recruit people by getting them interested in what we do. We have public meetings and we generate enough people for our first volunteer course. We usually have 12 people at a time on a course, which runs for 10 weeks and is quite an intensive course. It is the same course across Wales and the United Kingdom. Over time, once we reach 20 to 25 volunteers in a scheme, it sort of reaches a critical mass. There are enough people volunteering for Home-Start in an area that word of mouth starts to generate more volunteers. We usually only have to do recruitment campaigns once a year.

[13] **Helen Mary Jones:** Once the volunteers are in place and they have had their initial training, what sort of support is available to them? I imagine that some of the volunteers have to deal with some quite difficult situations sometimes.

[14] **Ms Vaughan:** We have very strict benchmarking, which means that our organisers, who are our scheme managers and supervisors, are only allowed to work with 20 volunteers. So, as soon as we go over 20 we have to find the funding to put another organiser in to support the volunteers. In effect, we are saying that one manager can support 20 families—or 20 volunteers. That supervision entails constant telephone supervision when a volunteer works with a family, and a supervision report every four to six weeks, which is recorded, monitored and supervised further up the chain.

[15] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you.

[16] **Eleanor Burnham:** I have met your wonderful organisation in Flintshire and I was very impressed. For most people these days, funding is obviously an issue. Do you have any concerns about your level of funding and its sustainability, particularly in view of the credit crunch?

[17] **Ms Vaughan:** I have concerns about the sustainability, but not necessarily due to the credit crunch. My concerns are based around two things, the first of which is the move towards tendering and procurement, which means that Home-Start schemes are now competitively tendering for their services. Schemes across the UK that have provided services for 30 years have to tender for the service. No-one else actually does the Home-Start service, so there is a sort of a nonsense to it in one respect, but other organisations are competing. If you just consider an organisation like Barnardo's, which will say, 'We can do a home visiting service', you will see that it is far more ready to meet sustainability targets for competitive tendering because it is such a big organisation. So, there is less risk about funding a project run by one of the very large voluntary organisations than those run by small neighbourhood community schemes. Have I explained that properly?

[18] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes.

[19] **Helen Mary Jones:** I know that the move to competitive tendering is the norm in England, but we would not expect that to be the case here. Are you also facing the same problems here?

[20] **Ms Vaughan:** Yes.

[21] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is an interesting point that we can take up.

[22] **Eleanor Burnham:** As you say, you are unique, because you go into the home. I am sorry, the scheme that I saw was not just in Flintshire; it was also in Wrexham. I am just concerned, because this competitive tendering probably takes a lot of your energies, time, effort and funding, I suspect.

[23] **Ms Vaughan:** It does, and it is also taking the manager's eye off the work. I would not want to do them a disservice but that is bound to be the case; they are worrying about their future funding in a way that they have not had to worry for some years. That is one aspect. There has been a tender out in Powys, I think that Gwynedd has had a tender out, and Wrexham is tendering. Flintshire has just done an application but the paperwork was along the lines of a competitive tender, but the process itself was not a tender, although it was moving towards that.

9.40 a.m.

[24] **Eleanor Burnham:** Chair, is this something that we should bring to the attention of the Minister?

[25] **Helen Mary Jones:** Yes, that is certainly something that we can do. You talk about who is doing the tendering; is that from the children and young people's partnerships or from the counties directly?

[26] **Ms Vaughan:** It is a combination. Local authorities are putting out the tender documents, but they are very involved in the process of their single children plans and developing what they want. There are different limits on the competitive tendering, so different counties have set them differently. In the more rural areas, the tender limit is set higher. So, in Ceredigion, the tender limit is between £65,000 and £75,000, so only over that limit do you have to put in a competitive tender. However, in Cardiff, I think that the limit is about £12,000, which, I think, is to do with staffing. In a rural area, perhaps, it makes more economic sense for the council to set those limits higher, because of the amount of tenders that they have to deal with.

[27] **Eleanor Burnham:** That is quite worrying.

[28] **Helen Mary Jones:** Yes, that inconsistency is worrying.

[29] **Ms Vaughan:** In England, which is about 12 months ahead, Home-Start has lost quite a few schemes already, and we are talking with the Government in England about that. We are not the only voluntary organisation that is having this problem. What we have to do to respond is to start consortia grouping and convince our schemes that, possibly, what they need to do is merge. That is fine on a business level, but it actually undermines the community model that has been the strength of the organisation.

[30] **Eleanor Burnham:** When you talk about consortia groupings, with whom would you consort?

[31] **Ms Vaughan:** With each other to begin with. We have looked at eight groupings that would loosely follow the proposed health boards in Wales. We are saying that schemes need to get together in groups of six or seven, so that they can form a legal body to do the tender, which makes them more viable. However, that starts to undermine their local services.

[32] On funding, moving £7 million from Cymorth into Flying Start, which happened recently, means that a lot of our funding is again at risk, which is a problem for us.

[33] **Helen Mary Jones:** These are some issues that we can raise with Ministers, although we will need to look at the detail. County councils have to work within their own very tight budgets, but I am sure that those are things that people will want to raise with them.

[34] **Christine Chapman:** You say in your paper that the families that you work with require sustained support over considerable time. How do you measure and evaluate the success of your work and what sort of outcomes are you aiming to achieve? Do you have any long-term evidence for the success of Home-Start?

[35] **Ms Vaughan:** That is a difficult issue for us, because the organisation did not start looking at evidencing its work early enough. We have recently put an awful lot of money into that, centrally, and we have a director of research. We know that what we do works, but we have not had good enough research done to show it; that is what we are in the process of doing at the moment. However, we know that, when we start working with families, by

putting into a family someone who is not seen as a professional—many of these families are very resistant to professionals—and who befriends them, stands alongside them and does not judge them, the families are not threatened by them and they open up and tell us more information. We can then slowly begin to work with them. It is a slow process. It costs about £1,000 a year to provide a Home-Start service for a family, but, in that time, social services can relax, knowing that the children are being checked two or three times a week, that they are safe, and that if there is a problem, it will be brought up, because the volunteer is with the family, and is accepted and trusted by them. They become a member of the family, and they share their parenting and life skills, giving the family something that they have not had access to before. That is something that other organisations are not doing. What they are doing is the next step. We are getting people ready to go on a parenting course, and that is often where they go after they have had a Home-Start volunteer with them for six or seven months. They then have the confidence and trust to go on a parenting course.

[36] **Christine Chapman:** I do not know whether this will come up later, but when you take on a volunteer, how much do you discuss their parenting skills? You said that they share them with the family that they live with.

[37] **Ms Vaughan:** We have a huge amount of discussion about that. Our training covers all the parenting know-how and the current thinking on parenting skills, but our volunteers present it in a far more user-friendly way to the families. It is not like being in a classroom taking a course—they pass those skills on in the home. This may be anecdotal evidence, but we have masses of supervision notes that show families making progress. At the beginning, the volunteer goes in and Mum is in her pyjamas all day, there is a cupboard in the kitchen full of crisps and biscuits, and the children help themselves. There is no play, and the television is always on. Six months later, Mum is up in the morning, she has done some housework, the children have breakfast, and the family is starting to find some pattern and some organisation. However, that is the result of sustained work—you cannot do that with one visit a week or one visit a month.

[38] **Angela Burns:** We have received a lot of evidence that indicates that there has not been a proper mapping of the parenting services that are available throughout Wales, showing where they are and what they provide. Would you agree with that? If so, how can we investigate that further, to get a better picture of what is available and how successful each of these different concepts are?

[39] **Ms Vaughan:** It is patchy. A competitive element has perhaps come into service provision over the last five years, which has not helped. Although we talk about partnerships and collaboration, it does not happen a lot on the ground. That is probably to do with the nature of funding—people are protective of their own patch of work, and worried about that. Perhaps what went wrong was that we did not look at what was there in the first place, map the services that were available, and which worked, and perhaps roll some of them out. For example, we have gone through Sure Start and, to an extent, Flying Start, and all over Wales they ask us, ‘How do we do that? How do we reach these families?’ That is very frustrating for us, because we have been doing it for a long time, and now they want to do the same thing. Flying Start and Sure Start will come to our group meetings, speak for 10 minutes at the end, and then the parents will be counted as their clients. That competitive double counting seems a little silly. Perhaps I am being naive, but I do not think that that is doing the best for our children.

9.50 a.m.

[40] **Angela Burns:** Would you say that people are protective of their funding, and also quite protective of their methodology and that there is a lot of competition, with people saying, ‘We think that we have the best way of doing it’.

[41] **Ms Vaughan:** There is definitely an element of that, certainly in parenting organisations across the UK, with people saying that this or that parenting course is the best, or that they have the holy grail in that regard. Our view is that it is horses for courses. Those parenting courses might be very good for some families but not for others. I had a safeguarding issue with a family recently. The family had been on a parenting course and had really grasped the issue of the star chart. They were doing fine, the start chart was on the fridge and they were really working well with it. When the volunteer asked, 'So, what is John doing to earn his stars?' the Mum said, 'He's picking up the dog poo from the garden'. So, that illustrates how, for some families, those courses are missing the point and are not necessarily the right thing for everyone, but they are the right thing for some.

[42] **Helen Mary Jones:** Eleanor, your next question about the partnerships follows on from that, does it not?

[43] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes. What you have just said is quite striking, and it is a sad reflection of our age in terms of funding and the territorial strategies that people have to adopt. You obviously have a very strong record of reaching isolated and vulnerable people, and you are the only group working within the home. Let us reassert that. The others are doing other things.

[44] On partnership, you have already made the point that these are difficult times for you. What do you think the next move should be? We are looking at this to monitor spend and the efficacy of the Government's partnership approach, and we are trying to do the best, which is why we are taking all this evidence. What do you think the next move should be?

[45] **Ms Vaughan:** We are one of the few organisations getting to the hard-to-reach families, and I think that we should be working more in partnership with the statutory agencies in all of the counties. There is no point in competing against each other for these things, because we are doing something different, and I think that we complement what is being done. Our schemes have been doing this for over 30 years, so we know what we are doing, and there is sustainability there. We get a lot of referrals from the health sector and a lot from social services, but we also get a lot through word of mouth. I am currently dealing with an issue among a set of families in a group of six villages in Carmarthenshire. All those families came to Home-Start through each other. One family said, 'You really need to go', because they trusted us, and those families were spread out among a set of rural villages. Those referrals would not be made any other way. So, as a front-line service, we can, and we absolutely do, try to move our families through into other services, but we could do that in a more co-ordinated way and more in partnership. I would like to see us working in that way.

[46] **Eleanor Burnham:** That would not be the way you have just described, whereby bodies come and greet you and say warm words, and, then, statistically, claim that as part of their programme.

[47] **Ms Vaughan:** That is a silly way of working. I know that it is driven by the economic climate and by people wanting to measure what they are doing. You ask for evidence, and we could tick boxes for ever; other people are ticking boxes. However, what we have are family stories. We have stories of family that move you. You would be moved by hearing any story that a family would tell you of how they have felt re-engaged with society by the work of just one friend going in there and working with them.

[48] **Eleanor Burnham:** Let us be honest, I would imagine that £1,000 per family per year is extremely good value for money.

[49] **Ms Vaughan:** Yes, it is.

[50] **Eleanor Burnham:** You could almost say that a situation such as that in Haringey, for instance, should never arise with people like you around.

[51] **Ms Vaughan:** Yes, I believe so. I am sorry if a lot of what I am saying is anecdotal stories, but I believe that situations come to life in that way. I was recently due to meet the manager of our service in Ceredigion. She rushed into the building where she was meeting me, and said, 'I'll have to go—we've lost one of our families'. I looked at her and asked her what she meant. She said, 'There's a new boyfriend on the scene, the family has completely disappeared; we don't know where mum is, and we haven't seen the children for five days. I'll have to go'. Later in the afternoon, she said, 'I found them in Aberystwyth'. I do not know anyone else who is looking and ensuring that things such as that are not going wrong. The organiser's alarm bells—and she is very experienced—had rung, because she knew that the new boyfriend was a potential problem. That is the reality of our work—it is quite different, and quite unusual.

[52] **Christine Chapman:** I spoke about research earlier, but there needs to be a warning that any research needs to be qualitative—we need to talk about stories, as opposed to just statistics. That is the danger sometimes—it might look good on paper, but you need those stories.

[53] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is powerful evidence. On partnership working, you say that you think that you could work more systematically in partnership, and that you would like to do that. What could the Assembly Government do to make it easier on the ground for organisations such as yours to work collaboratively with each other, and with statutory bodies? If you are competing for funding, it is difficult to put in competitive bids against each other one day, and then to sit around the table working together the next. As Eleanor said, the function of our committee is to scrutinise what the Government is doing, and then to make recommendations, not only about the Assembly Government but also about local government in Wales, and even about central Government on things such as benefits, and so on. However, do you believe that the Assembly Government could put structures in place to make local partnership working easier and more effective?

[54] **Ms Vaughan:** It is difficult to say, other than making it clear to local authorities that partnerships with existing service providers would be preferable to trying to set up new, competing services.

[55] **Eleanor Burnham:** We do not need to reinvent the wheel.

[56] **Ms Vaughan:** Absolutely. A lot of money has been spent on that in the last few years.

[57] **Helen Mary Jones:** We do not like reinventing the wheel on this committee—we take a rather dim view of that. Angela has the next question.

[58] **Angela Burns:** We have heard evidence from the Minister that the implementation of the parenting action plan has been pretty successful; you also note in your paper that you feel that it has been successful to a larger and greater extent. However, we have also had an awful lot of evidence from other witnesses who say that they do not feel that it has been wildly successful, particularly in relation to things such as the website, the bilingual helpline, and so on. Why do you believe it has been so successful, and which elements, if any, do you believe have not been successfully implemented?

[59] **Ms Vaughan:** I suspect that our view is coloured by the fact that most of our families are working under the level of the parenting action plan, to an extent. They are accessing it

after we have been working with them for quite a while. They are not ringing helplines. We have set up some text-buddy schemes, where parents can text for help and support, which is working well. That might be a more appropriate way of supporting families than telephone helplines.

10.00 a.m.

[60] We have found that, if the families have access to a mobile phone, the volunteer can text them and say, 'Have you put the kids to bed yet?', and that will remind them to do it if they have not, which is helpful. We sometimes forget how young some of the parents whom we deal with are, how they access and use technology, and what their lives are like. Most of the families that we work with find it quite hard to access formal support, even through telephone helplines, for example. Parenting courses are certainly hard for them to get to.

[61] Bilingual issues do not seem to be so high on our agenda in the problems that parents have. I suspect that that is because, particularly in areas of west Wales, where we have a higher incidence of families wanting our service in Welsh, we find it very easy to find Welsh-speaking volunteers. So, we do not have a problem with that, and we are not hearing from those families that they have had problems with the bilingual service that you are talking about. Our view is that Wales is doing better than England, Northern Ireland and Scotland, as it always does in its response to children's matters. When I speak to colleagues, I think that we are doing fairly well. I am likely to start a war here. [*Laughter.*] I hope that none of my colleagues reads the transcript. I know that my counterpart in England tends to think that they invented children's commissioners and the like, and that they got there first, but no, they did not. There is that belief in England that England did it first, that it knew what it was doing, and that it invented Sure Start and did the whole thing. Of course, there has been the razzmatazz this week about the changes in the curricula—

[62] **Helen Mary Jones:** We did that years ago.

[63] **Ms Vaughan:** Absolutely. I go to weekly national meetings, and the England branch is by far the biggest part of our organisation, and it has a lot more schemes. However, the English representatives will say that they have just done something, and I will say, 'If you remember, we have already done that'. That is quite a nice place to be. So, I suspect that some of my responses will reflect the fact that, although there is probably a long way to go, Wales is not doing too badly within the UK-wide remit.

[64] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is encouraging. In response to Eleanor or Angela, you talked about a volunteer texting a young family at bedtime, saying, 'It is now 7.30 p.m., so have you put the children to bed?'. Does that imply that, for some families, you provide almost around-the-clock support? If it has got to 10 p.m. and the young mum still has not managed to get the children into bed, might she be texting her volunteer to say that she has done everything and still cannot make him stay in his room, and to ask what should she do?

[65] **Ms Vaughan:** Yes, where we provide such a service, it will be on that basis. For some mums, that service will mean texting them to ask whether they are up yet. She will respond to a text but she might not respond to a knock on the door, because the knock on the door might be a social worker, the police, or someone they do not want to talk to. It is the same with letters. Many of these mums have come through the school system in the past 10 years, and many of them have poor literacy skills and cannot read the documents that come through. They do not open brown envelopes; they will just put them in a drawer and leave them there. So, if you do nothing else, change the colour of the envelopes.

[66] **Eleanor Burnham:** What about pink?

[67] **Ms Vaughan:** That would work.

[68] **Eleanor Burnham:** You are more aware than anybody of the fact that the Government's parenting action plan is a three-year affair. You must have a view on the Government's running of it and perhaps you feel that it could have been more ambitious. What lessons are there to be learned? You have already explained your view very comprehensively, and perhaps you have answered my question already, but what should the Government be doing now to work with you particularly?

[69] **Ms Vaughan:** I think that it should be brave enough to say what has worked and what has not worked and to change what is not working.

[70] **Eleanor Burnham:** What is not working? Remind us.

[71] **Ms Vaughan:** To me, what is not working is the support for the very hard-to-reach families. I think that the way in which Sure Start and Flying Start support is provided stigmatises families. It is a bit like being the person at school who gets free school meals. There is something about it that feels very much part of the establishment for the families, and they do not necessarily always trust it.

[72] **Eleanor Burnham:** So, in many respects, for all the reasons that you have already explained, what you are doing is much more anonymous and there is no stigma attached, and it is very accessible because you are there.

[73] **Ms Vaughan:** I have worked for several large voluntary organisations and nobody ever knows who I work for. When I say who I work for, the silly ones say, 'Is that part of the AA or something?'. They have no idea. They think that I have become a motor mechanic. *[Laughter.]*

[74] **Eleanor Burnham:** You mean the Automobile Association—

[75] **Ms Vaughan:** Yes, not Alcoholics Anonymous. People do not know about Home-Start and that is part of the beauty of it really, because people do not say, 'Oh, you have got Home-Start in' in the way that they would about some other services. The families do not feel as though they are being done unto. One thing that I should just say, following what we were saying about supervision earlier, is that our organisers match the volunteers to the family, so it is not just a case of a family referral coming through and the organisers looking to see which volunteer is free. If the organiser feels that a volunteer is not right for a family, they will not be matched. When recruiting volunteers, we interview them in their own homes and find out an awful lot about them, because we need to know what they are like before we put them in with other families. It is important that the Government is brave enough not necessarily to take a u-turn on things, but to say, 'Well actually, no, that was not the best way to do it, and we could do it better'. I do not think that people would think of that as failure; they would say, 'Oh, that sounds like common sense'.

[76] **Eleanor Burnham:** Particularly as you have already explained to us that the beauty of it is that it is extremely cost-effective, for goodness' sake. The amount of good that you do for £1,000 per family is quite striking.

[77] **Christine Chapman:** I might have missed this earlier, but do you envisage any future problems in getting volunteers? Given that a lot more women are working now, it can be quite difficult for them to get involved in voluntary or charity work. I just wondered whether you have encountered that.

[78] **Ms Vaughan:** We have not seen that so far. This may be an area that the credit

crunch will start to hit, but, so far, we are working successfully in partnership with other organisations. We are in partnership with Boots and it has an employee volunteering scheme. Its employees are given time to be volunteers, doing all sorts of things. They may not be appropriate people to do family volunteering, but it may be great for a team from Boots to go in and decorate a house. We have those sorts of projects going on as well, with commercial organisations. I think that we have a big one coming up with another organisation very soon. Those sorts of things help. TimeBank has done some volunteer recruitment campaigns with us as well. We find it a lot easier to find home visiting volunteers than trustees. I would like some tips on that.

10.10 a.m.

[79] **Helen Mary Jones:** I think that I can see why that might be. Do you turn volunteers away, or do you find that your volunteers are, in a sense, self-selecting, and so the kind of people who put themselves forward are those who are likely to have the basic skills that you need anyway?

[80] **Ms Vaughan:** Not always; we counsel people out on the preparatory course. The managers do the prep course, so they get to know people very well, and they will counsel people out if they are not appropriate.

[81] **Helen Mary Jones:** Is there a typical profile of your volunteers, of what he or she is like, or is it more varied?

[82] **Ms Vaughan:** They always have parenting skills, and that would be the typical skill. They have to have been parents but that parenting role can take many forms, including step-parents, or very hands-on aunties. However, they must have parenting skills. Beyond that, there is no typical profile. Our age range is very wide. We have a huge number of retired people doing this, but we also have young mums as well. We also have a great amount, and an increasing amount, of families becoming volunteers.

[83] **Christine Chapman:** Is it mainly women?

[84] **Ms Vaughan:** Yes, it is, but we do have men as well. It is not uncommon for volunteers to be men. Depending on the type of scheme and the type of area a scheme is working in, we will have more male volunteers. We certainly would not turn them away, because we have as many dads who need support as we have mums.

[85] **Helen Mary Jones:** Chris, you have question 8. You started to touch on this subject.

[86] **Christine Chapman:** I just want to hear your views on how you would like the Assembly Government to take the parenting work forward. Would you like to see a renewed action plan, for example? If so, what areas would you like to see included in it?

[87] **Ms Vaughan:** The Assembly needs to look to the future to concentrate on some of the very young mums in hard-to-reach areas. I appreciate that the Incredible Years programme is important, but we must also concentrate on those young people who miss that provision and who are now parents themselves. They need something. I know that we have widening access for adult education, but we need ways of supporting young women particularly to understand their parenting responsibilities, and we need to help them to do what they want to do because, actually, they all love being mothers and want to be good mums.

[88] **Helen Mary Jones:** Going back to Chris's point about stories, it is important when we talk about this work to remember that these are young families who love their children

very much and want to do it right, but they may not have had the experiences to prepare them for parenthood.

[89] **Christine Chapman:** We talked about parents responding to text messages and information and so on, and your paper points to the fact that parents are not always able to access the information that they need. When the Minister came before the committee, she told us that parenting information would be included as part of her department's web pages on the Assembly Government website. What is your view of that, bearing in mind some of your earlier comments?

[90] **Ms Vaughan:** How many of these families have a computer? However, I would say that they all have a television. If there was a sensible way of having web access on television, they may use the web, but the preferred communication tool for most of these families is the mobile phone and text messaging. That is how they access technology. We are talking with Boots about its voucher scheme, the idea being that, if our families presented their card when they went into Boots, they could get something out of it. We must be more imaginative, because if you put technology into many of these homes, the problem will be solved. We should be realistic; I am not being judgmental, because it is a fact—the problem will be solved and it will disappear. It is not something that will be used day in, day out. It is difficult for some to get out of the house to access the parenting information. There are young mothers with families in parts of the Cardiff bay area living in flats that were designed and built for single men. The lifts are not big enough for a double buggy. If you have more than one child with you, do you leave one at the bottom of the stairs? These women are physically trapped as well as being trapped in a vacuum of information. They cannot get out, and if there is more than one buggy on a bendy bus, you cannot put another one on. So, sometimes they cannot even get on the bus if they go out to catch it—if someone else already has a child and a buggy on there, it is no use. So, they are very stuck.

[91] We have a partnership with Sainsbury's and we have been doing a healthy eating project in Northern Ireland. The results from that with regard to how young families are accessing food are quite alarming. Because they cannot get to supermarkets, they have to use corner shops. I do not know whether you have ever tried to do a weekly shop at the corner shop—try it once and you will realise what a premium these families pay. They are hit in all ways, and it is very difficult for them. Poverty is a huge problem for the families that we work with, and I am not sure that the parenting action plan could necessarily address that; I think that it is a wider issue for the Assembly.

[92] **Eleanor Burnham:** My question is almost redundant, but based on your vast experience, how would you address the gaps in the service provision?

[93] **Helen Mary Jones:** It is not specific to your organisation, but how do you think that the gaps should be addressed by the Government?

[94] **Ms Vaughan:** There should be more joined-up thinking. I know that there has been an attempt at that, and that is why I am not decrying this in my paper—I do not think that we should rubbish people who are attempting to try to do it right, because that is the way in which we work. There should be more joined-up thinking about the types of family we are dealing with; you need to find out what the families you are trying to reach are really like. There is a great deal of misconception about what their lives are like and what they need. Those judgments are often made by fairly young social workers who do not have the life experience to make assessments of some of the families they visit. I also think that there needs to be a big link between mental health, mental illness and disability awareness with regard to many young families, because mental health issues are very prevalent in the families with whom we work. We also have many parents with learning difficulties.

[95] **Eleanor Burnham:** I am interested in the fact that many of your referrals are self-referrals or by word of mouth. In an ideal world, if a young mother has been through the health services that are provided, should they not be picked up in plenty of time, by health visitors or anyone associated with them when they access any basic health service?

10.20 a.m.

[96] **Ms Vaughan:** If we ever have to close a Home-Start scheme, the people who scream the loudest are the health visitors, because they use us more than anyone else. They have huge case loads, and they cannot spend the time that they would wish with clients. I cannot give you the case load numbers by borough in Wales but, if you do not know them, it might be worth trying to get those figures, because health visitors are desperate to refer families to Home-Start, and they say that sometimes they would have no idea how to do their jobs if they could not refer families to Home-Start.

[97] **Eleanor Burnham:** If you had more money for your wonderful service, you could provide a cost-effective way of helping all the people at risk and all the people who health visitors say that they want to move through the system. You could be of huge benefit.

[98] **Ms Vaughan:** Absolutely. There is another benefit too in that every Home-Start volunteer loses all their judgments based on what they have read in tabloid newspapers about these families after they have spent four months working with a family—they know what rot most of what is reported in the newspapers is. Therefore, it also helps the rest of society in terms of educating people about what poverty is like.

[99] **Helen Mary Jones:** I am sure that there are lots of people who would not believe some of the things that your volunteers see on a daily basis. What you said in your paper—and you also said this today—about being on the family's side and standing with the family without judging was quite striking. Where professionals are involved—if you get a referral from a health visitor, for example—what is the relationship between the health visitor and the volunteer, because there can be a tension, can there not, by being on the family's side? Obviously, if one of your volunteers felt that a child was being physically abused or something like that, there would be a clear child protection duty. However, there are lower levels of difficulty, so how easy is it for them to draw those boundaries in such cases?

[100] **Ms Vaughan:** The volunteers report everything back to their manager. It is the manager of the scheme who liaises with the referrers. We have a very low turnover of staff, so one of the things that local authorities buy when they buy Home-Start is someone who has been around on the patch for a long time, so they know everyone and they know what is going on. That gives the managers a real instinct for when something represents a serious issue. We have safeguarding training and we take the safeguarding of children exceptionally seriously, but we also believe that you should not lose sight of common sense. When you are with a family, you can use your common sense to guide the mum to do the right thing when she is choosing to do something that is not right. We will report everything back. In some local authorities, we are working with them, as part of a package, for families that are high up the tiers of support and in need of intensive support, and we are part of a multi-agency approach there. The volunteer is the eyes and ears in the house.

[101] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is interesting. You mention in your paper that black and ethnic minority parents are not always well catered for and that they sometimes feel that services are not appropriate for them, do not work for them or do not meet their needs. What do you think needs to be done and by whom to address the issue of support for black and ethnic minority parents and carers?

[102] **Ms Vaughan:** The bulk of our experience with black and ethnic minority parents in

Wales is in Cardiff, particularly in the scheme that covers Cardiff bay, Butetown, Grangetown and Riverside and that whole patch. We are working there in 23 different languages. One of our difficulties is the cost of the service. We have to recognise that more money is needed when anyone works with these families because the translation costs alone double the cost of the service. That money is not always easily accessed.

[103] Those families have different problems. You must know a lot of this; I do not want to be teaching you to suck eggs. The children in those families do not necessarily have birthdays because, culturally, that does not happen. Therefore, trying to work out whether someone is under five years old is not actually that easy to do. There are children in the junior school here who are taller than you and I, where the parents claim that they are under 10 years of age. Part of that is to do with asylum-seeking reasons. There are all sorts of muddle and chaos in those families.

[104] We work with immigration and deal with forced marriage issues; we liaise with police and immigration officials; we help families to make sense of what is happening and we work with children who, if you sit them down to draw a house, will draw a house with dead bodies and soldiers all around it because that is their life experience. We work in a very different way in this area. Perhaps it is the one area where Wales has been hit last. In England, London, Leicester and Bradford have dealt with many of these black and minority ethnic communities previously. It is becoming a much bigger issue in Wales. We have just had a lottery grant for the work that we do in Cardiff so that we can expand it here and then expand it further across Wales.

[105] **Helen Mary Jones:** Are you able to recruit volunteers from within communities?

[106] **Ms Vaughan:** Yes; with some provisos. Most Arabic and African languages do not have a word for 'confidentiality'. There is a huge problem with trying to explain what that is. The word 'secrets' is not right. If you use translators, they would think nothing about then going to the Imam with that. We have to be very careful. The manager in this area is extremely skilled in working with those issues. I think that we are still learning. I would speak confidently about the service that we have provided, which I have spoken about all morning. However, when we work with black and minority ethnic families we are also learning all of the time, and we are learning that there are some other serious issues for these families. You may be aware that there is a drug called Qat, which causes a huge problem in our families. All of our mothers would say, 'Please stop the Qat'.

[107] **Helen Mary Jones:** It is a leaf that is chewed in certain Arabic countries and Somalia. It can be quite a strong narcotic—

[108] **Ms Vaughan:** Yes it can.

[109] **Helen Mary Jones:** It is culturally acceptable but it creates some of the same sort of difficulties that heavy cannabis use can create over time.

[110] **Ms Vaughan:** It is legal in the United Kingdom.

[111] **Helen Mary Jones:** It is lawful.

[112] **Ms Vaughan:** It is not legal in many other European countries, but you can buy a blue carrier bag of it for £5 in a grocery store nearby if you wish. It causes a huge problem for the women in the families in this area. It may not cause a problem for the men but it causes a problem for the women and children. The police cannot do anything about it.

[113] **Eleanor Burnham:** Can you remind us of the effects of Qat? Alcohol makes people

more aggressive, but different drugs have different effects.

10.30 a.m.

[114] **Ms Vaughan:** Its effect is like that of alcohol and cannabis; it is drug-induced stupor really. However, people are driving and they are in the family environment while under its effect, but they are not participating in family life.

[115] **Helen Mary Jones:** It is more like the effects of marijuana, which means that you are not with it; you are not participating. It does not tend to have the same effect, say, as alcohol, which can precipitate violent responses in some people.

[116] **Eleanor Burnham:** I just thought that it would be useful to mention it here, because we are discussing it.

[117] **Ms Vaughan:** The use of this drug is very prevalent in the black and ethnic minority communities in Wales, and it is an issue for those families.

[118] **Helen Mary Jones:** Some of the confidentiality issues there might also apply in very small rural communities. For example, in Carmarthenshire, where I live, there would be confidentiality issues if you recruited people from a small community to go into local families. So, I do not think that those difficulties around confidentiality would be exclusive to any particular group of people.

[119] **Ms Vaughan:** Yes, that is the issue. We have that problem within rural communities and we have to match very carefully and closely. So, as you started off the meeting with a declaration of interest, we also do that with our volunteers. However, it is slightly different in BME communities. We are doing a lot of very good work with those families and making a real difference to the lives of women who have no confidence to go out. So, just feeling that they can go out to the shops and to take the children out makes a huge difference to their lives and begins their integration into UK society.

[120] **Helen Mary Jones:** To go back to my broader question, I assume from what you have said about the service that you provide and the learning curve, that you would think that many other mainstream services would need to go through the same sort of learning curve, to provide services that are culturally appropriate and which address the issues in those communities that might be different from other communities.

[121] **Ms Vaughan:** Absolutely, and to be aware of how those communities are moving around Wales. Members of the Somali community have moved into Swansea and various communities are now moving to Wrexham. They are definitely moving around, and it is about being responsive and helpful when those people arrive, because they are very isolated.

[122] **Helen Mary Jones:** Have you any experience of working with migrant-worker families? In my constituency, in Llanelli, we have had a big upsurge of people, mostly from Poland. They are mostly young single men who work for a few months and then go home, but there are also families. I know that the Committee on Equality of Opportunity has just done a big piece of work on some of the isolation issues and problems with accessing services. Is that something that Home-Start has experienced in Wales?

[123] **Ms Vaughan:** We have had small numbers of migrant-worker families. Our scheme in Carmarthenshire, in Llanelli, will be one that has done some work on that, and there has been some work in Wrexham. The rest of our schemes tend to deal with things as and when they come up. Our Ceredigion scheme is dealing with a fair percentage of women from the far east who have come over as brides for farmers. They are completely isolated in Welsh-

speaking communities, as they are unable to speak Welsh and have perhaps only a little English. They have been brought over and the men are keeping them very isolated on the farms, so we are having real trouble getting volunteers in and bringing those women into groups, where they could meet other people. Wales has some very multicultural issues.

[124] **Helen Mary Jones:** They are not necessarily the ones that we would expect.

[125] **Angela Burns:** I was going to ask your view on experience elsewhere, particularly England, Ireland and Scotland. However, you have answered that succinctly already, so I will put some other questions to you. What happens if you have a problem where one of your volunteers goes into a family, and it looks like it will work, but it does not? How fast can you redress that situation?

[126] **Ms Vaughan:** Do you mean in terms of the match between the volunteer and the family? We would pull them out quite quickly.

[127] **Angela Burns:** How would you know that it was not working?

[128] **Ms Vaughan:** The manager will ring up the family and check that they are okay. That is part of the supervision. We also have review visits, so the maximum length of time that a situation could continue when it was not working would be a month—and that would be unusual, because the volunteer would know that it was not working.

[129] The most common instance of this not working is where the family wants Home-Start, and agrees to it, but the mum has been bullied into it. Then she will not be around, and it takes quite a while to get into such families.

[130] **Angela Burns:** Can I posit a substitute question? Would it be fair to say that the ones who have been bullied into Home-Start would be unlikely to access any other service? Home-Start is the most basic service, so if they are not willing to use Home-Start, they will not be using anything.

[131] **Ms Vaughan:** That is right.

[132] **Angela Burns:** I will put my final question in extreme terms to make my point. Reading your paper and listening to your evidence, I see Home-Start as an intelligent buddy system. Everyone needs friends, even the toughest among us, and this is a way of reaching people where it matters most: at home. Would we not be better off taking all the money that we spend on other schemes, chopping them in half or getting rid of them altogether, and putting all the money into Home-Start, so that we would have an intelligent friend in every single home that wanted help? We have already said that those who do not want help from Home-Start are unlikely to go to Flying Start, or any other 'Start'—they will not go anywhere. Many of your introductions come through health visitors; having two children myself, I know that health visitors seem to get to everyone at some point, and they can tell in a flash if there is a problem. They could make you aware of problems, so that even if there is no knock on your door for months, you would have them on your radar. If we could put a friend into everyone's house, an intelligent friend who can gradually take them down the path to integration, would we not be taking a huge step towards solving all our problems? There will always be someone who falls through the net, but it is better than waiting for people to turn up at Flying Start.

[133] **Ms Vaughan:** That would be our dream—it would certainly be our founder's dream.

[134] **Angela Burns:** I do not understand why we are not doing it.

[135] **Ms Vaughan:** I do not understand, either.

[136] **Helen Mary Jones:** One of the reasons that we are not doing it, going back to an earlier question from Christine, might be that it has not been properly evaluated. We have anecdotal evidence that strongly suggests that it works, but we might want to suggest to the Government that it put some resources into evaluating Home-Start projects in Wales. For example, you could do some desktop research on a particular scheme, where you went through the supervision reports from the volunteers, and that would show you how the families were or were not progressing. Then you could take some evidence from referrers, such as health visitors, and people like that. The lack of evaluation might be part of the problem, and one of the reasons why the Government will say that it has put so much into Incredible Years is because it is evaluated. The Government knows that it works. With Home-Start, you know that it works, but we have not yet got that down on paper. Incredible Years started in an academic environment, so it has been evaluated all the way through.

10.40 a.m.

[137] **Ms Vaughan:** There is also a difficulty because conventional research that Governments like—including the Welsh Assembly Government—requires a test group to evaluate against. At Home-Start, we will not tell a group of parents that we can see that they need help, but that we will not give it to them because we want to use them as a test group. We cannot do that.

[138] At last year's summer school there was a speaker who used storytelling to evaluate services, and one of the people who works with me is looking at that. It is important to tell the story of the journey that our families undertake, and we have to acknowledge that families are not lab rats—they are human beings, and we cannot evaluate them as if they were being tested for lip gloss. We have to ask what works for particular families. Some families might get there on their own, but experience suggests most would not. Having a volunteer with them is a catalyst and makes a difference.

[139] **Eleanor Burnham:** You have made a good point. You often hear 'You will be better in a few days if you take antibiotics, or in a week if you do not take them', and that is all very well. Christine is an erudite academic in these matters, and made a good point earlier, that we should not get too bogged down with qualitative measurements. We are not counting bricks here. If you consider Incredible Years, the work is fantastic, but should that approach be applied to your formidable way of working? Surely, you have enough evidence to show that you are doing good work, and it would be a shame if the Government did not take note of that, which obviously supports what you are doing.

[140] **Helen Mary Jones:** Sarah would probably be the first to say that this is just one perspective.

[141] **Ms Vaughan:** Absolutely.

[142] **Helen Mary Jones:** There are other organisations with other perspectives. This is a service that prepares people to access other services that they might not be ready for.

[143] **Ms Vaughan:** I do not want to be in competition with the other organisations in childcare, because I do not feel that we are competing. We are getting a lot of families to access all the other services that everyone else provides. Someone has to get hold of those families if they are not ready for the other services, and many of them are not—that is our role.

[144] **Christine Chapman:** What has struck me today, and I think that we have spoken

about this before, is the value that we put on this kind of skill: going into the home and working with the parents. It is great to have volunteers, but the fact that these people do not get paid surely says something about the value that we place on this. Would you get volunteer businesspeople? It says something about how we need to change the culture around this.

[145] **Ms Vaughan:** It is the nature of the volunteering that makes it accessible. Those families know that their volunteer wants to be there, is offering to be there, and is not there because he or she is being paid, so the situation feels different for them. That is one of the reasons why they accept it—it feels entirely different to them. Someone is doing this for them because they want to.

[146] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is an interesting point.

[147] **Angela Burns:** It leads on to the comment that I was going to make. My fear is that, now that we have given exposure to Home-Start, the Government will put its heavy hand on it, and will start doing things differently. I take the point about pay, and evaluation, and so on, but as soon as we start taking these great ideas and making them Government ideas, and paying people, then they will spend all their time filling in reports, going to meetings and so on. They will lose their essence. You mentioned business, but with the self-employed businessperson, whether they are a plumber or a multimillionaire, their essence is that inspiration, their drive to get on and do it. You have a group of people whose essence is to get off their backsides and help someone else, because that is what is inside them. It does not matter what flavour of politician we are, we, the Government or the big, heavy, civil service-type sector of society can squash that so easily, and I am terrified that we could do that; I would be very sad if we did.

[148] **Ms Vaughan:** Our managers do make risk assessments and all of that.

[149] **Angela Burns:** It is about priorities and attitude.

[150] **Ms Vaughan:** The contract that the volunteer enters into with the family enables them to have a slightly different relationship. I do not think that the average family would accept their social worker saying, 'What are you doing? Stop that.', whereas a friend has a different quality of relationship, one that is right for the level of work that we are doing.

[151] **Christine Chapman:** On the volunteering element, are there parts of Wales where you think that there is a greater demand for volunteers? Are there some areas where it is easy to access volunteers, and other areas where it is more difficult? What factors are involved in that?

[152] **Ms Vaughan:** Finding volunteers to do the work is really not our biggest problem. The scheme managers are not coming to me saying that they cannot find enough volunteers.

[153] **Christine Chapman:** So, in areas where there are real pockets of poverty, you would have as many volunteers as you would in other areas?

[154] **Ms Vaughan:** Yes.

[155] **Christine Chapman:** So that is not a problem?

[156] **Ms Vaughan:** No, it is not.

[157] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is interesting, is it not? It is almost counterintuitive.

[158] **Angela Burns:** The other comment that you made that made my heart soar was that

many of your volunteers are retired people, because, although this is the Children and Young People Committee, I have a thing about the fact that, as a society, we marginalise and neglect older people. Once they are retired, we say, 'Thanks very much', and that is that. Experience comes together with youth and inexperience here. It is wonderful that we can go through this circle, towards the end of which we can feed our knowledge and experience back into society, so that it can start percolating through again. I wanted to make that point, because it was such a great comment, which cheered me up, because—

[159] **Eleanor Burnham:** You have a little while yet before you retire. [*Laughter.*]

[160] **Angela Burns:** Yes, but our society seems to be in separate strands, and it is great when you see those strands knitting into one another.

[161] **Ms Vaughan:** As I said earlier, we have just appointed a research director. She is looking at doing some work in Wales on health visitor referrals as one of her first projects, which might be useful for us, but she also wants to do some work on what she calls this 'grandparenting' relationship—it does not exist with all our volunteers, but it is there—and how it is working.

[162] **Helen Mary Jones:** I am struck by the fact that a family that would not accept a professional coming into the house will accept someone who they know is choosing to be there, and who they also know that they can kick out. If a social worker is visiting you regularly because your child is perceived to be at risk in some way, you must let that social worker in, or, in the end, the child will be taken into care, whereas if the relationship breaks down with a Home-Start visitor, it breaks down and there is no consequence for the family except that loss, which is a key to this.

[163] I have a final question about process. You work across the UK as an organisation. As such, how easy is it for Home-Start to respond to an increasingly different Welsh policy agenda? I ask this with some fellow feeling, as someone who spent a lot of my professional life, while I still had a proper job, as the Welsh representative of England and Wales, UK or GB organisations. It was not always easy to get people to understand that things were different here. Is that ever a problem for you in Home-Start?

[164] **Ms Vaughan:** No, it is not. It has done well; it has put in national directors and the national directors of the four nations have the same status, as do the national committees, even though they have different numbers of schemes.

10.50 a.m.

[165] That is an important part of the organisation. It sees itself as a four-nation organisation. We have put a Welsh-language scheme in place and the organisation is happy to work to that. Traditionally, we have expected the national directors and the staff, particularly in Wales and Scotland, to make policies Wales-friendly or Scotland-ready, but increasingly that is changing and the national staff in our head office in Leicester are expected to do that on a four-nation-wide basis. So, I think that it works quite well. I certainly take a fairly bossy approach and do not let them get away with anything because, of course, people will if they can. I make sure that the Wales perspective is taken very seriously in everything that we do, and I think that there is a real acceptance that that is how we work now.

[166] **Helen Mary Jones:** I am very glad to hear that. I will draw this item to a close by thanking you again, Sara. It has been a really useful session, and it is nice to have some positive stuff because, on this committee, we hear quite a lot of doom and gloom. That is part of what committees do, of course, but this session has been really valuable. Thank you again for your written evidence.

[167] **Ms Vaughan:** Thank you very much.

[168] **Helen Mary Jones:** We look forward to preparing the report, and we will ensure that you receive a copy of it. Thank you very much.

10.51 a.m.

Cylch Gorchwyl ar gyfer yr Ymchwiliad i Gyllidebu ar gyfer Plant Terms of Reference for Inquiry into Child Budgeting

[169] **Helen Mary Jones:** This item is on the draft terms of reference for the inquiry into child budgeting; we have a paper that Kath has worked on. I invite Kath to say a few words about what child budgeting is and what we might be looking at. I hope that we will then be able to agree the terms of reference because we would like to begin taking evidence on it as soon as we get back next term.

[170] **Ms Potter:** I have drawn some very broad terms of reference, based on what Members have said in the past. I have also gathered some initial information to help Members to shape the scope of the inquiry. There has not been a great deal of work done on children's budgeting, although the Assembly Government has done some work, which I will come back to in a second. The more that I looked into this, the more it became clear that the proportion of spend on children and young people should underpin all policy decisions, if a children's rights agenda is to be realised. It struck me that this committee's work is essentially all about that.

[171] Save the Children, for example, has said that while policies matter, budgets matter even more. The committee's work is particularly timely because the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has said that there should be more transparency in children's budgeting, so it is very much in line with that work. All I have done in the paper is to set out what I have found on children's budgeting and how important it is to realising a children's rights agenda. Members have already identified a lack of transparency in the Assembly Government's budget and in the spend on children and young people. The key section is section 3, where I have identified the work that the Assembly Government has done that is in the public domain. It has released some information, but not a lot of it is a matter of public record, as yet. We have requested a paper from the Government so that we can start work on that as well.

[172] I could identify only one other piece of work that has been done on this, and that work was done in 2003 by Save the Children. It identified a growth in spend, but it also identified a number of questions about the lack of transparency in non-children-specific services, where it is less obvious where the spend is on children. That is something that the committee may want to look at.

[173] In section 5, I have just jotted down some questions that the committee might want to consider in the course of its inquiry. It struck me that we need to look at the impact of demographic change on children's budgeting and at whether there are lessons that we could learn from the experience of gender budgeting. We could look at that too. That is what I have so far.

[174] **Eleanor Burnham:** Will we be able to drill as far down as to look at the allocation of moneys by local government, not just central Government? The delivery of services is within the local government sphere, and I believe that it would be extremely pertinent and valuable to do that, because then we could really get to grips with what is happening. My belief is that more of us women prodding in the right places in local government, as well as in

Government, making sure—

[175] **Helen Mary Jones:** Yes, it is much needed.

[176] **Eleanor Burnham:** I will give you a very pertinent example. I recently attended Flintshire local authority's presentation on how it is improving all its towns. The first thing that struck me was the fact that nobody was speaking about facilities for youth. They were all talking about shops and how to improve the streets, but play areas for kids and improved facilities did not receive a mention. It is an important part of our remit, so we should drill down to see whether we can really work on that.

[177] **Ms Potter:** I suggest in the paper that we look at this at national and local levels, and we could get some evidence on that. How much evidence we will be able to get, I am not sure.

[178] **Helen Mary Jones:** I take a fairly broad view of what we can recommend and to whom. My main function is to make recommendations to the Assembly Government, but if we find that something is going badly wrong with the benefits system, for example, I am quite happy to make recommendations to our Government and to ask it to raise the matter with Westminster. There is an issue with non-children-specific services. How much thought is given to children and young people in setting the regeneration budget, for example? One could say that, in this regard, what applies to the Assembly Government would also be applicable at the local level given that local government is funded in large part by the Assembly Government. That being the case, if we find issues with regard to services that are not specifically aimed at children, we can clearly recommend that those areas be looked at in the funding formulae that are applied to sort out the revenue support grant and perhaps ask how much, if any, of the revenue support grant can be hypothecated. We can do things like that, depending on what we find.

[179] **Eleanor Burnham:** I was talking recently to the new female superintendent at the north Wales police division that covers Flintshire and Wrexham, Ruth Purdie, a very enlightened woman. She explained how they engage in community partnership schemes to look at and address social issues. That is the kind of illumination that we need to ensure that everything we do is not just to do with money, but with changing attitudes and engaging with all the appropriate partners as well.

[180] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is important. One of the things that Save the Children says is that it is all very well to change policy, but unless you change how you spend the money, not even the best policy in the world will deliver. That is one of the things that I hope we will get out of this.

[181] **Christine Chapman:** I agree with everything here; this is a really good piece of work, but I am slightly concerned because this is also a huge piece of work. If we just do local government one week and something else another week, it is not going to come up with anything really different. Would it not be better to look at this in a very structured way, because I know from when I was involved in this a few years back that there is a difficulty with local government, although I totally agree with Eleanor that that aspect is crucial? It is how you do it that matters, because if you say to WAG, 'Tell us how you spend the money as far as WAG policy is concerned', there is still a difficulty with local government. If they come back and say, 'Actually, we don't know; we need to write to them', what do we do? Do we wait for them? It is a bit complicated, and I was wondering how we are going to approach it.

[182] **Helen Mary Jones:** We will probably start at the national level to see what information can be drawn out, because the Government is probably not collecting all the

information that it needs. It may not be a question of the Government withholding it from us, but more that it may not know. We might bring out of this the questions that ought to be asked when budgets are being examined for economic development or planning or whatever it is, and if that works at the national level, then the same set of questions could be applied at the local level. With the setting up of the children and young people's partnerships and other things of that nature, the Government might be able to issue statutory guidance to local authorities about the information that ought to be collected. In terms of getting my head around things, this will probably be one of the most difficult things that we will have done. It is a big challenge, and unless we can get the resources to follow the policy—and when I say 'we', I mean the national and local political community—the gap between policy and practice is going to remain.

[183] I was going to ask Kathryn whether we have managed to identify anywhere else in the world that has tried this. [*Laughter.*] I do not mind Wales being the first place in the world to do it this way, but if there has been any sort of work done on children's budgeting elsewhere, we can learn from the gender budgeting stuff.

11.00 a.m.

[184] It is the sort of thing that you suspect that the Scandinavian countries might have got up to at some point; they may not, but it would be worth finding out. Do you have any insight into that, Chris?

[185] **Christine Chapman:** I seem to remember something about that, at the back of my mind.

[186] **Helen Mary Jones:** Could you have a think about that, as you have been talking about this issue for some years?

[187] **Christine Chapman:** Yes.

[188] **Helen Mary Jones:** Therefore, is everyone content with that? The terms of reference are as broad as anything. However, I suggested to Kathryn, Tom and the rest of the team that, because this is so groundbreaking, the last thing that we want to do is to give ourselves a tight set of terms of reference and then find out that what we need to do is not included and have to start again, or have people say to us, 'You cannot ask us that because it is not in your terms of reference'. Therefore, it is better if the terms of reference are broad. We have some areas to address already identified—thank you very much for that, Kath. We are lucky as a committee to have the team that we have around us; your work is very much appreciated. I believe that this will be a brain-expanding piece of work, which is something to look forward to in the new year.

[189] Moving on a little, we need to consider whether we might want to do a review of how it is going so far, a year on. One idea that I had was that we could meet as committee members—without the staff—over sandwiches one lunchtime to talk through what we think is working well and whether there is anything that could be done better. We could then perhaps come together as committee staff and Members to discuss that. I believe that we are being pretty effective and that we are getting through enough work in enough detail to begin to see that we are making an impact.

[190] **Eleanor Burnham:** Perhaps we should ask Sir Roger Jones whether he thinks that we are making enough impact.

[191] **Helen Mary Jones:** Well, I am quite happy to be a scrutineer, as he would say. [*Laughter.*]

[192] We are making specific recommendations to Government. The stuff around advocacy was interesting; we did not get all our recommendations accepted, but the model that has come out is very different from what was originally proposed. However, it is not a bad idea to look back over a year, to see where we are. Therefore, can we consult our diaries, to see whether we as Members can get together once we are back in January to talk things through? I will also ask the staff to get together without us; obviously, committees would be easier to run if you did not have to cope with Members. *[Laughter.]* However, there may be things that you think that we could sharpen up on, or there may be different ways of doing things. In the new year, we will have a new time slot, so we will have to be really focused in meetings from now on. Tom, can you remind us—will we be meeting at the crack of dawn on Tuesdays?

[193] **Mr Jackson:** The meetings will be on Tuesday mornings, from—

[194] **Eleanor Burnham:** They will not be as early as the Subordinate Legislation Committee, which meets any time after 8 a.m..

[195] **Mr Jackson:** Our meetings will run from 9.30 through to 11.00 a.m..

[196] **Helen Mary Jones:** We will have our pre-meetings at 9.15 a.m., and the actual meetings will run from 9.30 a.m. through to 11.00 a.m.. Therefore, slots of an hour and a half might mean that we end up having to do some more work outside committees. However, we cannot stretch to anything other than that, because people have group meetings to go to at 11.00 a.m.. Therefore, our next formal meeting will be on 13 January—the first day of term—at 9.30 a.m.; we will have a pre-meeting at 9.15 a.m.. We will look at the forward work programme then and also take some evidence on the children's budgeting inquiry.

[197] Members will remember that a group of young people from Bridgend are coming in at 11.30 a.m. today. If anyone can spare some time between 11.30 a.m. and 12.30 p.m., that would be great; if you cannot come for the whole bit, just come and say 'hello'. It is being filmed by the BBC, so it would be nice if as many of us can be there as possible.

[198] **Eleanor Burnham:** Could you remind us where we are meeting them?

[199] **Helen Mary Jones:** We are going to meet in the Oriel.

[200] **Eleanor Burnham:** Could you wait for 10 minutes?

[201] **Helen Mary Jones:** We will be there, depending on what is happening with the protests and so on outside. The BBC may find it difficult to film and record there because of the sound in the gallery—you can have a one-to-one conversation quite easily, but it is difficult to have a group conversation. However, we will see how that goes. If we are not in the Oriel for any reason, we will ensure that someone is there to signpost Members to wherever we are.

[202] Tynnaf y cyfarfod i ben drwy I draw the meeting to a close by wishing you ddymunio nadolig llawen a blwyddyn newydd all a merry Christmas and a happy new year. dda i chi i gyd.

[203] I hope that we all have a good Christmas break, and we look forward to seeing you in the new year. Once again, I wish to put on record our thanks as a committee to our staff team, including the Record of Proceedings, and all the people who are behind the scenes—the recording people, and so on—who make all this happen. We are very lucky in our staff; we would not get the half of it done without you all. Therefore, thank you very much, and merry Christmas to you all.

Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 11.05 a.m.
The meeting ended at 11.05 a.m.