

Y Pwyllgor Cyfle Cyfartal

The Committee on Equality of Opportunity

Dydd Iau, 24 Ionawr 2008
Thursday, 24 January 2008

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

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

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol Committee members in attendance

Eleanor Burnham	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Christine Chapman	Llafur Labour
Mark Isherwood	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Bethan Jenkins	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Ann Jones	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Lynne Neagle	Llafur Labour
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour

Eraill yn bresennol

Others in attendance

Amy Barrett	Aelod o'r grŵp cyfeirio Member of the reference group
Sue Dye	Cydraddoldeb a Hawliau Dynol—Cymru Equality and Human Rights Commission—Wales
Stephen Dyer	Aelod o'r grŵp cyfeirio Member of the reference group
Paul Elliott	Pennaeth Llywodraeth Leol, Unsain Cymru Head of Local Government, Unison Wales
Heather Graham	Aelod o'r grŵp cyfeirio Member of the reference group
Richard Horrigan	Aelod o'r grŵp cyfeirio Member of the reference group
Hannah Kubler	Aelod o'r grŵp cyfeirio Member of the reference group
Gareth Morgans	Aelod o'r grŵp cyfeirio Member of the reference group
Sara Pickard	Aelod o'r grŵp cyfeirio Member of the reference group
Simon Richards	Aelod o'r grŵp cyfeirio Member of the reference group
Jessica Roberts	Aelod o'r grŵp cyfeirio Member of the reference group
Tim Ruscoe	Barnardo's Cymru
Robert Surrey	Aelod o'r grŵp cyfeirio Member of the reference group
Derek Walker	Pennaeth Polisi ac Ymgyrchoedd, TUC Cymru Head of Policy and Campaigns, Wales TUC

Judith McNamara	Gweithiwr cymorth Support worker
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Swyddogion Gwasanaeth Seneddol y Cynulliad yn bresennol Assembly Parliamentary Service officials in attendance

Claire Griffiths	Dirprwy Clerc Deputy Clerk
Tom Jackson	Clerc Clerk

"Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.33 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.33 a.m."

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau, Dirprwyon a Datgan Buddiannau Introduction, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

<p>Ann Jones: Good morning. I welcome everyone to the Committee on Equality of Opportunity. I remind Members that you need to switch off pagers, mobile phones, BlackBerrys, and anything else that might interfere with the broadcasting or sound equipment.</p>
<p>I formally welcome Eleanor Burnham to our committee. Eleanor acted as a substitute at the end of last term, but this is her first committee as a full member. You are very welcome, Eleanor. It is also Tom Jackson's first committee as our new clerk, so if you have not met Tom before, you will certainly be seeing a lot of him from now on. You are welcome, Tom.</p>
<p>The usual housekeeping rules apply. We are not expecting a fire alarm test, so if the alarm sounds, the ushers will guide us to the nearest assembly point. There is no-one in the public gallery at the moment, but the same would apply to them.</p>
<p>I have received apologies from Angela Burns and Helen Mary Jones. Does anyone have a declaration to make? I see that no-one does.</p>

9.34 a.m.

Yr Ymgyrch Cyflog Cyfartal Equal Pay Campaign

<p>Ann Jones: It is a pleasure to welcome Sue Dye, Derek Walker and Paul Elliott. Sue is from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, and is no stranger to the committee; neither is Derek Walker, the head of policy and campaigns at the Wales Trades Union Congress. Paul Elliot is the head of local government at Unison. You are all welcome.</p>
<p>You have given us a paper—will one of you briefly speak to that?</p>

Mr Walker: Thank you, Chair, and thank you for inviting us here today. I will kick off and say a few words at the start, and Sue will talk for a few moments about where we see the campaign progressing. We thought that it would also be useful for Paul to say a few words about the situation in local government, because we felt that that would be of particular interest to the committee. We promise not to go on for too long, to allow time for questions; I have been told off at this committee before for talking for too long, so I have learnt my lesson.

The latest phase of the campaign was the third phase of the Close the Pay Gap campaign, which ran from April 2005 to March 2007. There were two previous phases of the campaign and there have been gaps between them, which has caused some issues in terms of its momentum. The Minister decided that this phase should focus on the public sector, and we felt that that was the right decision in terms of the size of the sector in Wales and our potential for making a difference.

I will not go through all of the activities of the campaign, but I will give you a flavour of the types of activities that we undertook. Early on, we organised an equal pay summit, which brought together the key public sector organisations from across Wales, at chief executive level, to look at the current situation, and to understand the barriers that these organisations faced in tackling the pay gap. The intention was also to focus on a number of factors, such as risk, capacity, priority and funding. Following that summit, as part of the campaign, we endeavoured to ask these organisations to make a public commitment to what they would do over the next year to tackle the pay gap. The staff employed as part of the campaign monitored their progress over that period of a year, against the Equal Opportunities Commission's key pay stages, of which there are five.

The cross-party working group, made up of members of this committee, oversaw the campaign and provided political leadership and accountability for it, which was important in terms of having a united political voice in support of its work. The leadership of the Minister was crucial throughout the campaign.

In November 2006, towards the end of this phase, we held our equal pay conference, bringing together about 100 participants from across the public sector to look at progress, to see what they had achieved over the last 12 months, and also to look at further solutions to address the persistent pay gap. One of the key moments of the campaign was at that conference, where we had invited Mick Brodie from the North East Regional Employers Organisation to speak. He painted a picture of the future in Wales, and he said that to do nothing is not an option. He set out the situation in terms of what was happening in the north-east of England—over 5,000 equal pay claims in tribunal, women still not receiving the cash that they deserve because of the pay discrimination, and the administrative and financial nightmare that they faced because they had not come to a collective agreement around equal pay.

Finally, we also organised a seminar with academics to start to look at the economic benefits of addressing the pay gap and how it would affect the economy, families and so forth. We also built capacity in terms of training and conferences among trade unions to support their work in taking forward equal pay. One of the legacy documents from the campaign is a CD-ROM that helps trade union representatives to understand equal pay and how to take it forward with their employer, which will be something that we can continue to use.

9.40 a.m.

So, our objective from the beginning was about getting money into the pockets of women who had been discriminated against, but that has not happened for many women in Wales. However, we have made progress and we have moved forward in bringing that day nearer for far more women. The independent evaluation of the campaign confirmed that it had contributed some tangible benefits. I will quickly go through those. The report confirmed progress and achievement towards the aims of the campaign. In respect of value for money, the report says that the return has been positive and compares favourably with larger investment in Scotland. The campaign has been successful in raising awareness and increasing understanding of equal pay issues in public sector organisations. In particular, it recognised the partnership approach as being fruitful in bringing high-level buy-in from across the public sector. It also said that dedicated resources, paid for by the Assembly Government, were crucial to the campaign's impact.

So, to summarise, according to the evaluation report, key factors in the campaign's success were the leadership by the Minister, the partnership approach, the leadership and accountability of this committee and the cross-party working group that was set up to oversee the campaign, and the Assembly-funded, dedicated staff resources. We all recognise—and the evaluation report said this—that huge issues still remain, particularly in terms of finance and the time required to resolve the pay gap, particularly in local authorities. However, we feel that we made a significant contribution during this phase of the campaign.

Ms Dye: I was going to address the forward look for the campaign, but before I do that, I thought that it might be helpful if I briefly summarised where the Equality and Human Rights Commission feels that we are in terms of equal pay, because, at the commission, we are currently concerned about the position on equal pay across the UK. We feel that the Equal Pay Act 1970 is failing to deliver results for women. The tribunal system is approaching meltdown. There are 50,000 claims at the moment across England and Wales; we expect that to rise to 150,000 by the end of the year. In Wales, 9,000 claims are currently lodged at Cardiff and Shrewsbury tribunals. We anticipate that an already painfully slow system will seize up completely.

Hundreds of thousands of women who are waiting, and have been waiting 10 years for equal pay, will not see the results and will lose out and suffer a long delay. We feel that the winners in this, if there are any, are the lawyers, who are earning enormous fees. One local authority in England has estimated its legal bill, so far, at £2 million. That is the size of the problem. However, we are determined, from a commission's point of view, to generate a sense of urgency around this and to secure some results.

We have identified three steps towards progress. First, to cut through the legal nightmare of the tribunal system, we are seeking leave to intervene in a key court case, which is around introducing transitional arrangements to protect the pay of existing employees. This is an absolutely key case, because hundreds of local authorities are watching it. It has been in the courts for four years and they are waiting to see what will happen with it before they move on equal pay. So, we want to intervene and suggest the introduction of short-term transitional arrangements to deliver equal pay in local government. We believe that that will lead to negotiated settlements and a well-managed process for the introduction of equal pay.

Secondly, recognising that the Equal Pay Act 1970 is past its sell-by date, we call for representative actions, so that hundreds of cases can be heard in the tribunal system at the same time. We anticipate that that will reduce the traffic to tribunals by around 90 per cent.

The third initiative is a high-level summit, led by Government, to identify solutions that can help to move us forward and speed up the process. I thought that it would be useful to outline that before I take a forward look at the campaign.

We and the Wales TUC welcome the overall recommendation from the evaluation report that the campaign should continue. Although we have achieved a lot, much remains to be done. During the last phase of the campaign, we committed ourselves to moving equal pay forward across the public sector, because over 200,000 women in Wales work in the public sector. So, we suggest that the focus is retained for the next phase of the campaign. We all recognise that the biggest challenge for us is in local government. Paul will paint a picture for us of the current state of play in local government. However, two local authorities have settled backpay.

I would like to pick up the recommendation for a pilot project. The aim of the pilot project would be to look at the benefits to both employers and staff in settling equal pay claims and moving us away from the idea that equal pay is just an expensive problem with no benefits. We have begun discussions with one local authority that is interested in undertaking a pilot project with us.

I will not comment in detail on the specific recommendations in the paper—I hope that we can bring some of those out in discussion—but I will mention the cross-party working group and the role of the Minister. The cross-party group and the Minister played absolutely crucial roles in setting the direction for the campaign in the last phase. We would like the cross-party working group's advice on how we can engage with public sector leaders and get them onto more of a solution focus. After the local government elections in May, we would like to see a summit in Wales that brings together council leaders and chief executives and which has an input from the cross-party working group and the Minister and focuses minds more on solutions, setting equal pay as a priority and taking some action on it.

Another powerful driver for delivering results on equal pay would be the specific duties that sit under the gender equality duty. The committee discussed with the previous Minister with responsibility for equalities a set of specific duties for Wales, which required action on equal pay in a way that more closely aligned with the policy of the Government and this committee. That duty would be legally enforceable. We have not achieved those specific duties yet; we know that it takes some discussion with Whitehall and Westminster, but we feel that they are an important lever in moving the agenda forward in Wales. So, we are asking for urgent action in securing those specific duties.

Finally, the paper recommends continuity in the campaign until the next Assembly election, and with dedicated resources. We hope that the committee feels that it can support that. Wales has led the way in terms of the partnership approach that we have taken. The evaluation, as Derek said, points to some of the dividends of the partnership approach. We have achieved a lot, but, as I said earlier, there is a long way to go. Thousands of women and their families in Wales are still waiting for fair pay. So, we hope that we can build up some momentum until the next Assembly election.

I will leave it there and hand over to Paul.

Ann Jones: Okay. Paul, the floor is yours.

9.50 a.m.

Mr Elliott: We believe that the close the pay gap campaign, which was supported and endorsed by the Welsh Assembly Government, and which the cross-party working group had a lot of influence on, was and is successful. It has raised people's consciousness about equal pay. It has alerted people to the fact that the Equal Pay Act was introduced in 1975, and yet here we are in 2008 and thousands of women workers have not enjoyed the benefits of that legislation. The publicity materials that were produced—'Close the Pay Gap' and the second edition of it—were very good in raising consciousness about people who have legitimate claims, and who have been discriminated against for many years, and also in raising the consciousness of employers.

Some progress has been made. In the health service, much progress has been made in Wales through 'Agenda for Change'. Many women have been put into the right pay groups, and payments have been made. In the higher education sector, a lot of progress has been made in Wales in respect of those arenas through HERA, the higher education role analysis programme. Progress has also been made in local government. I wish to put on record our thanks to Jane Hutt, the former Minister with responsibility for the equalities agenda, for her efforts in encouraging local authorities' chief executives and leaders to recognise their responsibilities for this issue, and to make it a priority for local authorities. I believe that she visited every local authority in Wales, had personal meetings with the appropriate people, and urged them not to stick their heads in the sand, but to ensure that they start to get to grips with addressing this issue.

Therefore, some progress has been made. However, the Equal Pay Act came in in 1975. On 10 July 1997, we had the new single status agreement, which was supposed to bring in equal pay, but here we are, 11 years on, and it is still not fully introduced. In April 2004, we had a three-year pay agreement with local authorities, during which time local authorities were supposed to negotiate the equal pay issue, resolve it and get it settled by 1 April 2007. As a consequence of the campaign, the activities of the cross-party working group, and the initiatives taken, which Derek outlined, local authorities are now more attuned to their responsibilities, and most of them are taking positive actions to try to resolve this.

However, the problems that we have relate to financing and funding this issue, because equal pay costs money. Many women were inspired by the sight of the two wallets, or purses, on the front cover of the initial document. That is what it is about—it is about the discrimination that women have suffered, and putting that right by using the law, or by negotiating.

To date, none of the 22 local authorities in Wales have fully completed the whole process. Several authorities have made significant advances. For example, Neath Port Talbot and Torfaen local authorities have made substantial payments for past discrimination to large numbers of women workers. The unions could not, unfortunately, entirely endorse the payments being made, because of the activities of no-win, no-fee lawyers, who are running around all over the country seeking to make money out of this issue for themselves.

We have had to be careful about the advice that we give our members on their rights in relation to employment tribunals and what they might expect from an employment tribunal. The employment tribunals provide for six years' worth of backpay for cases of discrimination. The offers made by Neath Port Talbot and Torfaen were good offers, but because they did not correspond with what women could claim legally, we were not in a position to recommend them. However, we co-operated and negotiated with the local authority on how the payments should be made. In the case of Neath Port Talbot, I think that all but two women of over 2,000 in total accepted the offers. The total of payments in Neath Port Talbot was £6.7 million, I think, which was paid out to women workers, and some men who piggy-backed on this process, over four weeks. That was a huge boost to the local economy. For these low-paid women workers, who are hard-working people, committed to their local authority, this was fantastic. People were going down to the travel agents and booking holidays, and going into Currys and Comet and buying fridges and washing machines, and so I am sure that the economy benefited from that payment, as well as its rectifying a long-standing injustice. The same applied in Torfaen, where I think a total of £5.2 million was paid out to around 1,500 women workers. That money was only paid out as a consequence of the ability of the local authorities to capitalise those payments and to seek money via the Welsh Assembly Government, which ring-fences capital money, which they could repay over 10 years.

Other authorities are in the process of getting there. Swansea is proposing to make payments to the women that it has identified as having claims for past discrimination. Gwynedd is in the process of making offers to women who have been identified as having legitimate claims for past discrimination. We anticipate that the process will escalate over the coming months, through this year and the beginning of next year.

That is only part of the process, however. The other part is establishing equal-pay-proofed salary structures, in other words looking at the mess that the salary structures are in now, ensuring that new salary structures are introduced by way of negotiation and consultation with the trade unions and that there is no discrimination in those new salary structures. The Welsh Assembly Government, I am pleased to say, did make some provision within previous financial settlements to assist local authorities in meeting this objective. An element was built into the settlement of a 1.5 per cent increase in the wage bill, year on year, over three years, providing for an increase of 4.5 per cent in the wage bill, which was designed to assist local authorities in meeting their legal and statutory obligations to end pay discrimination and introducing new equal-pay-proofed salary structures. The money, however, was not hypothecated or ring-fenced, but was part of the general budget, with a recommendation that it ought to be earmarked. Of course, local authorities have many competing demands on their resources. We advised our local negotiators to ask, through their consultative machinery, 'How much does that equate to in terms of your local authority? Have you got it? Have you earmarked it for this process?'. Some said, 'No, we do not really have it—we have used it for some other purposes'.

10.00 a.m.

Some were more diligent, understood their responsibilities, and had ring-fenced this money. However, local government employers are suggesting that the increase necessary to establish equal-pay-proofed salary structures is approximately 7 per cent, so local authorities often have to find extra money in order to resolve this issue. Local authorities are working hard on this, and negotiations are ongoing, with the exception of one or two backwoodsmen. They tend to be men, because there is only one woman chief executive in Wales, and most of the directors are men. That might have been one problem historically with the structures: the hierarchy was largely male, and, regrettably, far too many of our elected members are men. That is one of the barriers that the Assembly and the Wales TUC have faced in getting across the importance of this.

The activities of no-win, no-fee lawyers have given local authorities a bit of a jolt, and certainly the Welsh Local Government Association has been proactive in encouraging local authorities to get to grips with this problem, and having dialogue with everyone in the process. We are worried, especially given the funding settlement that has been reached, with an increase of 2.4 per cent per authority on average. We are pleased that authorities such as those of Powys, Ynys Môn and Conwy have had their settlements increased from 1 per cent to 2 per cent—that gives them a bit more of a lifeline. However, the settlement is below the level of inflation, and compares unfavourably with the settlement in England, which is an average of 4.2 per cent. Of course, when local authorities are trying to find the money for the backpay for past discrimination, as well as for the new pay line, then they are under a lot of pressure. We are worried that, in some areas, local authorities are saying, 'Fine—we will introduce equal-pay-proofed salary structures, but in order to pay for it, we have to review terms and conditions'. So, we have the ridiculous situation whereby homecare staff, residential staff, who work weekends—who have historically received enhancements in the form of time-and-a-half, or double time—are regraded, because they do comparable work to men who are on a higher grade, and receive a nice salary increase, but then, effectively, lose it because the authority decides to take away the enhancements from their terms and conditions. It is therefore a Pyrrhic victory: equal pay has been achieved, but the extra money in the purse does not materialise.

People therefore become rather disillusioned. We are trying to avoid that, and we have told authorities that we are not prepared to accept cuts in terms and conditions to pay for equal pay, because we do not think that that was the intention of the legislation, and it is morally wrong and indefensible. However, the local government settlement does put local authorities under a lot of pressure, and, regrettably, we have had reports, since the provisional settlement was announced in December, that a number of local authorities will be looking to make cuts and redundancies some time this year. So, it makes it more difficult for us to negotiate this situation.

Ann Jones: Okay, Paul—I will stop you there, and I will tell you off now, because Derek was told off last time. You have done exactly what trade unions always do, which is to come in and talk so long that you do not get questioned. I have been on that side of the table, and I have done that too. Obviously, you have the opportunity to ask questions, but we need to develop this discussion. What you were saying is quite right, and I do not think that anyone here would distance themselves from it. However, we are not here to discuss the revenue support grant—we are here to push equal pay up the agenda. The revenue support grant will be discussed elsewhere, believe you me.

Christine Chapman: Just to start off with the comments that you made, Paul, I have heard that, in some local authorities' negotiations, there has almost been a backlash against the issue. I do not know whether that is just something that I am reading into it, or whether it is a fact. It is a victory, but sometimes these things can also bring problems and I hear that there has been a backlash against women workers, in particular. How effectively are the unions monitoring this to ensure that it will not put people off from going forward with these claims?

Ann Jones: Before I bring you in, does anyone else have questions for Paul on that theme? I have a couple of questions on the broader campaign, but I will come in at the end.

Joyce Watson: I do have a question but it is not the only one that I have.

Ann Jones: If we deal with this issue that there may be a backlash against women workers coming forward to make claims, which is the thrust of this matter, we will then come back to the other issues.

Joyce Watson: I can give you the figures on the men to women ratio in local government, because I have done the research, but are you highlighting the issue to councillors? When that budget goes through a council, they will not know, so are you letting them know at the point at which councillors agree their budgets and staffing conditions? Most councils do not even have a committee, which they used to have, to look after their staff.

Eleanor Burnham: We are running up to a sensitive political time in local government. Following on from what Joyce asked, how will councillors—I am choosing my words carefully—be encouraged to see the huge plus of doing all of this? Whether the Chair allows it or not, in view of the difficulties that male-dominated local authorities face—I have asked these questions on many occasions, as have others—it is ridiculous to think that there is only one female local authority chief executive in Wales. There are very few females who are important in any leverage position in local authorities, so how will you encourage them in the next few months, particularly in view of the funding difficulties and lack of hypothecation in local government?

Mr Elliott: In response to Christine's points on the potential backlash to this issue, there are problems and difficulties, particularly where there are large groups of male workers in local authorities on bonus incentive schemes. Ironically, these schemes were introduced to alleviate low pay in the early 1970s, but they were self-financing—only the groups where you could make savings enjoyed bonus schemes. Where there is a big density of bonus schemes—for example, in Swansea, where there are 1,500 male workers on bonus schemes—they have led to discrimination, and authorities are saying that the bonus schemes must end, because they are discriminatory. For those male workers, a large proportion of their take-home pay is a bonus. The way in which we resolve that is a difficult problem that local authorities, trade unions, the Welsh Local Government Association and the regional local government trade union committee are trying to address.

It is difficult, because you cannot allow pay discrimination in the new pay structures, so bonuses must end. If you have 1,500 male workers who are disaffected because their pay has gone down, despite the fact that there may be an element of protection, it creates all sorts of tensions. However, the issue must be addressed. Do we buy out the bonus scheme? Do we look for some type of job enrichment where we can develop their jobs so that they get onto a higher pay band, to alleviate some of the hardship of that reduction in salary?

10.10 a.m.

If those mechanisms are applied to men, they must be applied to women, so it is a difficult problem. I know that my regional organiser colleagues, who are dealing with this, with local authorities, are looking for the magic answer and there is not one, so this transition period is going to be difficult. The more money that local authorities can put into the new pay line, the easier it will be, because everybody will move up in that process. However, the money situation is going to be tight.

On local authorities, as Derek indicated, under phase three of the campaign, meetings of chief executives and leaders were convened, and we were pleased with the response. One or two authorities—we have identified them and put them in the black book—did not attend, but other authorities did. The representative from the north-east branch of Local Government Employers was absolutely brilliant. He left them in no doubt that this was an issue. I suppose that the worst authority that we are dealing with at the moment is Newport City Council, which has stuck its head in the sand like an ostrich, and is not moving forward. We have had Britain's leading expert on job evaluation, Sue Hastings, into Newport to try to help and to get a process started, and I think that a process has now been started. However, Newport has been very backward in its approach. According to Newport, its pay systems are okay and there is no problem.

In relation to changing the composition of local authorities, we have the elections on 1 May and local authorities will be going into purdah. Once those new authorities are up and running in June—and this comes back to Joyce's question, in some respects—we want to get leaders and chief executives together to have another go at saying, 'Where are we? Let's try to focus on this and get it sorted by 2008, or 2009 at the latest'.

Ann Jones: Sue—

Eleanor Burnham: May I just ask a supplementary question?

Ann Jones: No, because I am bringing Sue in first. I might bring you back in afterwards. Sue, you wanted to comment. Do not sigh, Eleanor, or you will not be called at all.

Ms Dye: To respond to Eleanor's question about the local government elections and the new situation that we will be facing in May, I believe that we were successful in our approach at the leadership level, in getting leaders to understand the risk that they were facing in not addressing equal pay—the risk from no-win, no-fee solicitors and the sorts of costs that that process could incur for them. I really think that we need to approach leaders after the election. The summit would bring together council leaders and chief executives in the same room as the Minister, hopefully, and members of the cross-party working group, and we could look at solutions that could move things forward. What comes out clearly from the evaluation report is that face-to-face meetings between the Minister, political leaders and council chief executives are very important in moving equal pay up the local government agenda. Any amount of letters and circulars are not going to achieve it; it is about the face-to-face contact that the campaign was able to generate. So, we need to engage immediately after the council elections.

We could go further. We could, for example, prepare briefings for local authority cabinets. We also need to look at the bottom-up approach. We need to do awareness raising with local authority staff, so that women are not perceived as being to blame for pay or bonus cuts. I believe that we would all want to avoid, at all costs, a situation where equal pay became the thing to blame for deteriorating terms and conditions. It is a serious problem and we need to develop an awareness-raising strategy around that.

Ann Jones: You may ask a question very briefly, Eleanor. You do not shout in in my committee. Wait to be called in future. You may come back this once.

Eleanor Burnham: This is a democracy, which is not led by a despot, hopefully.

Ann Jones: If you carry on like that, Eleanor, I will not call you again. This a Committee on Equality of Opportunity meeting and everybody has a right to ask a question—

Eleanor Burnham: Including me?

Ann Jones: You have asked one question; there are people who have not asked questions yet.

Eleanor Burnham: I will leave it then, Ann.

Ann Jones: You may ask your question.

Eleanor Burnham: You are very kind, I am sure, Chair.

Ann Jones: Indeed I am. Carry on.

Eleanor Burnham: I am just concerned about raising awareness, which you have all mentioned, and how that is done in the media. Quite a lot of the powerful people in the media are male. We, as politicians in the Assembly, are not flavour of the month anyway. Is there a role in that sphere? Thank you, Chair.

Ann Jones: You are welcome. Derek, are you taking that question?

Mr Walker: Yes, I am happy to take that one. Absolutely. We have been very careful, because it is the right thing to do, to ensure that the messaging throughout this campaign is about the discrimination that women have been facing over many, many years and addressing that.

We have considered the point about the backlash and I think that we would like to consider it for the next phase of the campaign. What has been very powerful about the partnership approach is our ability to be able to respond to press that suggests that this is in any way the fault of the women concerned. It is extremely important that the Assembly Government, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, or the Equal Opportunities Commission as it was, and the Wales Trades Union Congress say that as part of the partnership, but we try to keep on top of it throughout the campaign phases. We have done more public media work in previous phases of the campaign. We have done poster campaigns, which were very good at raising awareness, but they are not targeted. Information on the backs of buses can raise everyone's awareness, but does not target those women who are particularly affected by the pay gap. Those things are useful, but we think that a targeted approach is useful too.

Christine Chapman: One of the concerns that I have is that, with any equality measure—we have also seen this with political parties—unless you tackle the underlying culture, it is always going to be difficult. You can go in and say, 'Right. We are going to do this', but if you do not address the culture and people's understanding, you are on a hiding to nothing. I would hope, and I am sure, that you are doing that. We need seriously to consider the culture. Joyce and Eleanor have raised issues about local government and that has been very traditional for many years, and still is, and there is an awful lot of work to be done, including at officer and member level. A lot of research has been done on this. We need to try to change the culture. This is a good opportunity to do that.

Bethan Jenkins: Thank you for the presentations; they were very informative. Could you expand on your perception—you have touched on it—of the no-win, no-fee aspect of this issue and how it affects the campaign? I saw a BBC programme last week outlining how women are going about doing this and putting a positive spin on it, because they were getting much more money through those no-win, no-fee claims. So, that is about media perception and the impact on the women involved.

I have seen some media reports on the new Equality and Human Rights Commission. You have touched on the law courts and your new ideas for that. Some questions arise because the equality bodies have been amalgamated, and there have been suggestions that the responsibilities of the new body have been watered down. I am not suggesting that that is the case, but what is your perception and how will you target that perception?

10.20 a.m.

Ann Jones: Who is doing that one? Derek first, and then Sue?

Mr Walker: I will go first and then perhaps Sue can follow on.

There is no doubt that no-win, no-fee solicitors have had an impact on what has happened and on the number of cases that have been taken. You would expect me to say—and it is absolutely the right thing—that women will be compensated for this discrimination far more quickly through collective agreements involving trade unions. No-win, no-fee solicitors take a big slice of the compensation that women are entitled to and do not address equal-pay-proofed pay structures for the future; they just take the easy pickings and look at the backpay. So I think that we are all agreed that women will be compensated for discrimination far more quickly through collective agreements. That is why the TUC has welcomed—and we have lobbied on this also—the call for representative actions. Women are far more likely to be compensated for discrimination if we get rid of the backlog within the new tribunal system.

Ms Dye: We need to remember that the no-win, no-fee lawyers do not have equal pay at the heart of what they do; their aim is to make money for themselves on the back of discrimination against women. Some cases have been stuck in the courts for years, and so women are still not getting the redress that they need. We are currently intervening in a case that has been in the courts for four years without a sign of a decision. It is now at the Court of Appeal. We have had the Equal Pay Act 1970 for over 30 years, but it has not delivered. We now have a logjam of court cases and it is unlikely that these will deliver. Meanwhile, women who have worked for and have given their commitment to local authorities over a number of years are retiring and dying without getting their settlement. It is important that we hold on to the fact that, as Derek mentioned, the no-win, no-fee lawyers are interested only in backpay; they are not interested in fair-pay systems for the future, because it is from backpay claims that they take their cut. This is why the commission has decided that, rather than coming in on the side of the women or the local authority, we would intervene in this case as an honest broker. Our top priority is to get money into pay packets for women as soon as possible, not being jammed up in the court process. We are intervening by suggesting that there should be transitional arrangements that allow the employer to move the workforce on from where it is now to a fair pay system over a foreshortened period.

Again, it relates to the perception of blaming equal pay for cuts. We are anxious to avoid the notion that, in order to fund equal pay, men's pay has been cut or jobs have been cut. We are quite anxious that there be a short period of transitional arrangements that could get everyone into a forward-looking, fair pay system. So, that is why we have made the decision to intervene in the court case that is currently ongoing.

Mr Elliott: Unison, GMB, the Transport and General Workers' Union and Unite—the three local government trade unions—are undertaking mass litigation on behalf of women workers across Wales in every local authority. We are doing this not because we do not necessarily want to reach a negotiated settlement with local authority employers, but because of the actions of no-win, no-fee lawyers: the unions have to protect their positions, because, in the north of England and in the Midlands, no-win, no-fee lawyers have taken action against the unions, suggesting that they have failed their members by either recommending low settlements or by not taking any action to try to resolve equal pay issues. So, in July 2007, we embarked upon mass litigation.

The main solicitor is called Stefan Cross, who has now changed his company's name to Action 4 Equality and is expanding his business across England. I am pleased to say that Offa's Dyke is currently standing up to this and Stefan Cross has not been active in Wales. One firm of no-win, no-fee solicitors, Leigh Day and Co, had meetings in Cardiff and Swansea. They did not get much of a response, because, in both of those authorities, the trade unions have been proactive in trying to resolve this issue. Ultimately, Leigh Day and Co met with us and agreed that it would not pursue claims on behalf of union members and, if they picked up any union members, it would refer those claims to the unions. Thompsons solicitors is acting on behalf of Unison and the GMB and Leo Abse and Cohen is acting on behalf of the TGWU. That has created some problems because the local authorities feel a bit aggrieved that, on the one hand, we are in negotiations, but, on the other, we are taking litigation. However, there were some good articles in "The Guardian" on 2 January, and I have copies here if you would like them, that epitomise the problem that we have got into. Sue has already mentioned this in terms of how the law has created this problem.

Ann Jones: Joyce, you wanted to come back on that. Please be brief because I am aware that Mark also wants to come in.

Joyce Watson: I wanted to move the debate on with my question.

Ann Jones: In that case, I will bring Mark in first.

Mark Isherwood: Thank you, Chair. I wanted to develop this area, and I have to leave early. I wanted to explore three points. On backpay and the legal position, can you remind me of the current case law? You referred to mass litigation, but am I right in thinking that a case, I think in north-east England, was brought jointly against employers and trade unions and was won by the litigators? The unions and employers lost it on the grounds that both parties had been agreeing unequal pay agreements for 30 years or whatever. You referred to the tribunals being able to award six years' worth of backpay, are the legal precedents applying to periods longer than six years or is how they are being settled in England a precedent for Wales now?

Secondly, you referred to capitalisation and we know from answers put to the Assembly Government, collectively and individually, that only three councils have so far applied. Do you have any understanding of how much further forward the others are? Eleanor and I met with the leaders of one authority before Christmas, who told us that they did not intend to apply because they believed that they could meet the cost from within their own resources. Without identifying the councils, do you feel that there are councils and how many would be able to do that in terms of the future and backpay?

10.30 a.m.

Thirdly, you referred to equal-pay-proofed salary structures and job evaluation, but I believe that there has been litigation threatened where the evaluation has led to certain people being above the salary scale, and therefore being—as I found myself in my previous employment—in a position, effectively, where they get below-inflation-increases until everyone else catches up. Those left behind complain that they should now be getting the same pay as the people frozen at the top. How is that dealt with? I believe that there is litigation, but you have not referred to it.

Ann Jones: Who is taking that one?

Mr Walker: I can do the first bit.

Ann Jones: You will do the easy bit, and leave the difficult stuff to Paul.

Mr Walker: That is what I was thinking. ["Laughter."] I believe that the case to which you refer is Allen versus the GMB. I believe that the situation has moved on from how you describe it. The GMB was taken to Employment Tribunal and was accused of discriminating indirectly against women members by settling at a lower level than it was claimed that it could get for its women members. That happened, but that has now been overturned by the Employment Appeals Tribunal, which found in favour of the GMB; it said that the GMB had not discriminated, and that it had acted 'proportionately'—that is the key word—in that case. However, that drags on, and it will now go to the Court of Appeal later this year. It has just been granted leave of appeal to go to the Court of Appeal, but we do not have a date for that. However, this is hanging over equal pay settlements across Great Britain, and leading to a great deal of uncertainty.

I hope that that answers the first part of your question.

Mr Elliott: I was talking to our head of local government in London a few weeks ago about negotiations that we are having in Wales to try to resolve this issue. Every negotiated settlement that we reach with local authorities—every proposed settlement—has to be put through our legal department. I was rather frustrated because I did not like the views of our legal department. I was told politely that, as a consequence of no-win, no-fee lawyers, and particularly the Allen versus the GMB case, where Mr Stefan Cross represented Mrs Allen and several others, 'The lawyers are now running the union, Paul—get used to it'. It is problematic. These articles are spot on in terms of the situation that we have got into as a consequence of the interpretations made by the law.

On backpay, if a woman who has a legitimate claim proceeds to an employment tribunal—and Sue made this point—it takes several years to resolve it through the employment tribunal, and with the number of cases in the system at present that period will be extended. Therefore, we could be speaking about four, five or six years before it even gets resolved. If a woman won the claim, she would be entitled to six years' backpay in relation to the element of discrimination, and that would be added to by inflation—she would accrue the inflationary element over that period.

On the settlements that are being offered, the Torfaen settlement was very good—it was 80 per cent of six years' backpay. Therefore, some women there were getting between £17,000 and £20,000 in compensation for past discrimination. Regrettably, some authorities are coming up with offers of 30 per cent, which we cannot recommend at all; it is nowhere near what the woman would be entitled to. The offers vary. In north-west England, just before Christmas 2006, several local authorities offered derisory elements of backpay of 20 or 25 per cent for past discrimination, even though the woman would be entitled to six years' backpay in an employment tribunal. The trade unions recommended rejection. However, you can imagine that, just before Christmas, with all the financial pressures, many low-paid women workers accepted those offers, because for them that was a big sum of money in their lives—it was a one-off opportunity.

There is a problem with capitalisation. We had a meeting with Brian Gibbons, local government and the trade unions in December to discuss this issue and the settlement. With capitalisation, there is £25 million available this year for local authorities to bid for. I think that there are only about four authorities in Wales that have the necessary reserves and moneys available to meet their commitments under the equality legislation. We have a specific problem with the capitalisation rules, which we raised with Brian Gibbons, the Minister, insofar as, in Wales, it is very rigid. Local authorities have to submit their bids by the middle of December and decisions are made by 31 December as to whether their bid is granted, but then the money has to be distributed to the claimants before 31 March. There is a very short window within which local authorities have to organise these offers of payment for past discrimination against women.

Regrettably, our situation is further complicated by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. We have had meetings with ACAS jointly with the Welsh Local Government Association and the local government trade unions. ACAS has very limited resources; as you know, it closed its Swansea office last year as an economy measure and it has reduced the number of its staff. ACAS has to be involved, to give impartial advice to the women on their rights in relation to going to tribunal and what signing the COP 3 agreement means. If we have five or six authorities all paying out moneys to groups of women workers, in a complicated time-consuming process, it should, quite rightly, be properly resourced. The process went on for four weeks in Neath Port Talbot—Mondays to Saturdays, from 9.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.—with groups of 15 women meeting the unions, authority officers and ACAS, going back to sign their COP 3 with ACAS, and then collecting the money. It was a big operation. We have a problem with ACAS, because it cannot provide the resources. We have tried to get the Minister and the Assembly Government to ease the restriction, so that, even though the authorities would be given that money, they could move the expenditure over to the 2008 financial year. Apparently, we have had representations this week that that cannot be done. It seems nonsensical to us that we have this ridiculous administrative block on helping to resolve a major problem; we will be taking that up again with Brian Gibbons, the Minister.

Ms Dye: On capitalisation, every equal pay review that I have been involved in has highlighted a pay gap. Closing that pay gap costs money—additional funding is needed to put in place a fair pay system. So, it would be helpful if we could all face in the same direction, particularly as far as local government is concerned, in getting the maximum flexibility around capitalisation. We understand the strains on local government in terms of its finances, so the biggest amount of flexibility around capitalisation, for example on the amount that can be borrowed and the repayment period, would be helpful in digging us out of this situation.

Mark Isherwood: If a council or a local authority applied to the Assembly Government for authority to access capitalisation, could the Assembly Government say 'no' if it did not comply with Treasury rules?

Mr Elliott: When Jane Hutt was the Minister with responsibility for equality, we had regular meetings with ACAS Wales, Equal Opportunities Commission Wales, as it was then, local government trade unions and the WLGA, to consider these issues and to see how we could move forward. If too many authorities made bids for that current £25 million, some choices would have to be made as to which authority was successful, but because it would seem that insufficient authorities have made bids, some money will be returned, because it cannot be used by 31 March 2008. There will then be further bids for the financial year beginning in 2008. We are seeking some flexibility here, because they have it in England, where the money can be rolled over into the next financial year; the Minister in England made a statement on that in September 2007.

10.40 a.m.

Ann Jones: Thank you. Joyce will ask a question, and then Lynne, and I am aiming to finish this item within five minutes, because we have run over.

Joyce Watson: Clearly, we must close this paper. We have had legislation on the table since 1970, and it has not worked. Clearly—and this will not go down well—the unions have not been on the side of the women fighting for equal pay since 1975. We have had systems in place to look at addressing single status issues since 1997. Those are facts, on the table.

What we need to do now is move forward, and it has been my experience in life that it is not easy to move local government, which is comprised mostly of men at the decision-making level. Therefore, it is no great surprise that it is male workers who have had additional pay and bonuses negotiated by the unions. I must say this, because it is what I think; this is the situation that we are in. So, let us deal with where we are.

At the moment, we have weak legislation. In Wales, we have a general duty, but not a specific duty, in relation to gender. We will not achieve equal pay until we have that specific duty, with criteria that have some clout behind them, so that women are empowered to say, 'This is our right'. We know that it is their right, but for some obscure reason they have never been able to exercise it, because everything has been set up to prevent them from doing so. As an Assembly, we are charged with doing something that gives that power back to those people. Fundamentally and immediately, we need to ask why we do not have the specific duty that Jane Hutt, for reasons, I believe, that were right at the time, wanted to put in place. It was specifically needed to tackle this issue. We need to move that agenda forward, and we all know that we have the second round of convergence funding approaching. The largest employer in Wales is the public sector; if women are being paid less than their male counterparts, but make up the majority of employees within the public sector, then we have to address this in order to raise GDP. So, the logical arguments are there, and that is what I would propose that we look at. We should ask Jane Hutt how we move from the general duty to the specific duty and the things that were asked for previously.

Ann Jones: It is for the Minister, really, rather than Jane Hutt, because we have moved on.

Joyce Watson: I am sorry—I keep forgetting that there is a new Minister.

Ann Jones: I will bring Lynne in to ask a question, and then we will wind up.

Lynne Neagle: You referred to Torfaen, and as the Member for that constituency I am delighted that Torfaen County Borough Council has been at the forefront of settling these claims in such a positive way. However, there have been some issues of implementation locally, and I wanted to raise a few of those. The first relates to women who have left the employment of the local authority and have missed the deadline to make a claim. Through no fault of their own, they were simply unaware that they could claim, and it does not seem that there was any responsibility placed on anyone to inform them of that entitlement. Quite a few women in that situation have come to me, and I have taken it up with the authority and various other bodies, but I have not been able to get anywhere with it. However, it seems unfair that, through no fault of their own, these women have lost out on quite significant sums of money to which they were entitled.

The other issue relates to church schools, where the staff are paid, and have contractual arrangements, through the LEA, but were told that they were not eligible for this money because they had a slightly different status to staff in other schools, and that there is a lack of male comparators. I realise that it is a complex issue, which I have also taken up with authorities in England to see if there was anything that could be done to help the staff, but do you have any comments on their predicament?

Ann Jones: There are a couple of questions there on which you can perhaps suggest some ways forward.

Mr Walker: You would expect me to come back on what you said about the role of the trade unions, Joyce; the vast majority of cases that have been taken on equal pay and those that have led to women being compensated for that discrimination have been taken by trade unions. We have long called for mandatory pay reviews in the public sector. We are not getting that from the UK Government; we hoped that this would happen with the gender equality duties, and I support your call for clarity on what is happening. We are looking to a single equality Act for that to happen, but if that is to lead to a long process, we should look to the specific duties under the gender equality duty; if the committee can get some clarity on that, it would be extremely helpful.

Ms Dye: I agree with Joyce—the specific duties for Wales would be a very powerful lever in moving us forward in local government, but also elsewhere in the public sector. They would be a very helpful mechanism in moving equal pay up the agenda and getting some action and delivery for it.

In terms of Lynne's question, we are struggling with the gap between the law and best practice. There is an anomaly for the groups of women that you have talked about, namely those who have left or missed their deadline and those working for faith schools. I think that we can pick that up as a legal anomaly, but I am anxious that we get some best practice in Wales around these settlements. We have only done two settlements on backpay in Wales, so there is an opportunity to draw those lessons, share them around and get some best practice for the other 20 settlements as they develop. I agree that it has not felt fair in any sense.

In concluding, it has been a helpful discussion and I hope that the committee feels that it can support the paper. We look forward to working again with the cross-party working group and getting the partnership up and running so that we can push the agenda further forward.

Mr Elliott: In relation to the six-month rule, the legal position is that, unless an individual employee has made a claim within six months of their change of contract or leaving the employ of the authority, they would not be able to pursue a claim. We have endeavoured, through the channels available to us as a union, to advise members of their legal rights, and to advise them to register if any changes affect their contractual position. We have a magazine, called "U," which is mailed directly every quarter to all members—it is possible that people sometimes do not read it—and in which we have provided consistent information over the past two or three years that if your job changes or if you leave, make sure that you register in relation to your employment tribunal equal pay rights.

10.50 a.m.

In relation to church schools, when we had the payments in Torfaen and Neath Port Talbot, that was the most difficult issue that we had to confront. If the individual is employed by the school, then the legislation, as determined by the Employment Tribunal, determines that the individual does not have a claim because a comparison cannot be made, given that it is not the same employer. In Neath Port Talbot, we had a problem in that the school meals were provided by the school meals staff, who were employed by the direct labour organisation. So, we had large Catholic primary and comprehensive schools where the women who prepared the school meals received backpay, but the mid-day supervisory assistants, who were employed by the school, did not get anything because they were employed by the school. That created tremendous angst in that workplace and we had to go down there and say that we were sorry. The local authority was quite sympathetic. Neath Port Talbot council was quite prepared to make payments to those individuals, but the district auditor advised them that it would be an illegal payment, ultra vires, and that they would be surcharged for making that payment. Regrettably, because of the law on that, there is no way around it. We flag that up now for all the other areas, and I have advised our organisers and branches to give advanced notice to faith schools and to brief them well in advance about this situation. It is a legal situation and we cannot change it, unfortunately.

I would just like to say that this committee is an important one. Under section 77 of the Government of Wales Act 2006, there is a responsibility for pursuing an equalities agenda and ensuring that that goes all the way down through all of the organisations that the Assembly funds. The new public sector equality duties, which have recently come into law, are very important. We know from our experience on the ground that many public sector employers are not fully au fait or up to date with these responsibilities and we think that this committee can do a very good job in taking these issues forward and constantly reminding people of the need to ensure that equality is among the top priorities.

Lynne Neagle: I am grateful to have heard what Sue said because the issue here is to learn the lessons for the future. However, on what Paul said, I accept that you regularly communicate with your members, but when people leave employment, although I would like to think that everyone keeps up their trade union membership, they often do not and we are talking about low-paid women here. The women in question in Torfaen had let their union membership lapse. It still seems wrong that no responsibility was placed on someone—it clearly was no longer the union's responsibility to inform them—to notify those women that they had an entitlement. I hope that that can be taken forward.

Ann Jones: That can be picked up in best practice or in the pilot scheme that you talked about, which is something that I want to do.

We have run over time, which shows the importance of this issue. We will consider these points and write to the Minister again, if Members agree. I do not see anyone dissenting on that. We will urge the Minister to form the cross-party working group and to look at working again to retain the level of consciousness. It will be interesting to see what happens with the next 20 that come along, if we can get best practice in. That is the most important point and to pick up the points that Lynne just made, even though the legal duties may no longer apply, there are sometimes ways around that. So, we can do that and ask for regular updates. Is everyone happy with that? I see that you are.

We will now break. I ask everyone to return by 11.10 a.m.. The reference group will be here after the break. Thank you.

"Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10.54 a.m. ac 11.13 a.m.
The meeting adjourned between 10.54 a.m. and 11.13 a.m."

Y Ddarpariaeth Gwasanaethau ar gyfer Pobl Ifanc Anabl

Service Provision for Disabled Young People

Ann Jones: I remind everyone around the table that, if you switched your mobile phone, pager or BlackBerry on during the break, please switch them off now. It is lovely to see the reference group here—a very warm welcome to you all. I saw you yesterday afternoon, and it is great to have you back. You have seen the Deputy Minister for Social Services, Gwenda Thomas, and one of the clerks has come back to see you, which is quite nice. We hope that you will enjoy this part of our meeting.

I remind everyone that you do not need to press the buttons on the microphones—they are part of our new technology, and are automatic; they come on as soon as you start to speak. We will wait to see whether that happens, though I am sure that it will, because we have fantastic broadcasting and sound people in the booth behind us.

So, we now come to the main part of the meeting, which involves asking you, as the very special reference group that undertook the report, which Members have—'Service provision for disabled young people: 'Why is it that disabled young people are always left until last?'. As a committee, we would like to ask you whether you think that this report has made any difference to your lives. So, we will let you tell us what you think in your own way. Tim, are you going to leave it to the young people to tell us?

Mr Ruscoe: I think that I will kick off. Thank you for inviting the group back—they were pleased with the invitation and got stuck into a huge amount of work yesterday. They will now go through the work that we did yesterday, and also some work that had been done with other groups of young people when we realised that we were coming back, to try to get some views about what we felt had changed, if anything.

The young people will take turns to speak, and we are going to test the technology, because it will go from mike to mike. Without further ado, I will hand over to Amy.

Ms Barrett: We are pleased to be invited back to meet with the new committee, and to meet up with our friends from all over Wales. We have tried to see if anything has changed for us. Some of us have spoken to other disabled young people who we know to get their ideas. We do not know what the Assembly has done since the report was written about the recommendations, but we know if things have changed for us. It is still true that things are different for us all, depending on who we are, where we live, how old we are and which organisations support us. It was difficult to think about what had changed and not what still needs to be done, so some of what we will say will still be about what we need or problems that we have.

Ms Graham: In terms of college, school, training and employment, we have all had different experiences. When we talked about this area, bullying is still an issue.

Mr Morgans: College was not a good experience. I was promised I could do my choice of courses but I was let down. My only option after finishing college is a day centre.

Mr Horrigan: There is a big difference between teachers. It depends on the tutors as to whether we do interesting and useful things and how we find out about options for the future.

Ms Barrett: Young people in Pembrokeshire thought that, in terms of careers advice, there was no change at present, but we are currently organising meetings with the local careers advisers, which is a result of the work that we did for the transition conference. Work experience is becoming more difficult due to health and safety policies, so we cannot see any improvement.

Mr Richards: On learning to use buses by myself, I am happy with the support that I have received, but I am not happy that I was only able to do this as some information about me was not known. Now that it is known, I am unable to do any more training, which I need.

Mr Dyer: Some of the group are now employed with organisations. I am now in Mencap Cymru, with a really good job with better support and I get paid.

Ms Pickard: In my job I go to schools, colleges and youth groups, where I train young people to know and learn more about politics and voting.

<p>Ms Roberts: There are still not many job opportunities for people with learning difficulties.</p>
<p>11.20 a.m.</p>
<p>Mr Surrey: We have not noticed any real change in general. Some individuals have been given limited options to try new activities such as rowing. This has happened because we are part of an established forum group within the county and the youth worker that we work with knows where to find out information. Others would like to try new things, but do not have the opportunity.</p>
<p>Ms Roberts: It is still difficult to get to centres from rural areas. There are still not enough changing rooms for disabled people. Some felt that support workers were a positive change, but sometimes support workers can put their own interests first.</p>
<p>Mr Morgans: Free passes would be great.</p>
<p>Ms Graham: In Denbighshire, Barnardo's provides play and leisure activities for children and young people from ages four to 19. From 19 onwards, very few leisure activities are provided by the council.</p>
<p>Mr Surrey: Leisure support should be ongoing for life; I am 19. When I come home from residential college for the seven-week summer holidays, I live with my Nan and Grandad. They always think that I am unhappy, but it is because I am bored; there is nothing to do.</p>
<p>Ms Graham: On housing, no-one wants to live with their parents forever.</p>
<p>Ms Pickard: Not many of us are trying to buy or rent our homes at the moment, but we would like to think that we might be able to when we are ready to leave home.</p>
<p>Mr Dyer: We do not think that there is enough advocacy to help us to make the choice.</p>
<p>Mr Morgans: We do not think that there are enough good houses that we could afford or information to help us.</p>
<p>Mr Richards: On transport, again, the experiences of the group depend on where they live. However, the following are some positive points about the service.</p>
<p>Mr Morgans: Buses run on time in the Rhondda and in Cardiff.</p>
<p>Mr Horrigan: Buses in Cardiff are regular and there are no problems using my bus passes with other companies as well as Cardiff Bus.</p>
<p>Mr Richards: Timetables are better in Cardiff and are shown at most bus stops.</p>
<p>Ms Pickard: The buses where I live are good and do turn up most of the time. The drivers are always polite and mainly helpful.</p>
<p>Mr Dyer: I can get a bus to college rather than a taxi.</p>
<p>Ms Barrett: Pembrokeshire has a new service called town rider. This service is for disabled people and it will pick you up and take you to where you want. People can access this service through the internet or by telephone. It needs to be booked in advance and is available only three times a week. It is free if you have a disabled bus pass.</p>

<p>Ms Roberts: Also in Pembrokeshire, Gennex, the youth forum, is currently working on a transport project for young people called ticket 2 ride. The aim of this project is to create transport solutions for young people in Pembrokeshire through a range of different methods.</p>
<p>Mr Richards: There are the following points about what is not a lot better.</p>
<p>Ms Graham: Bus timetables are still hard to read.</p>
<p>Mr Surrey: Bus drivers need to be trained on the routes because they are not local.</p>
<p>Ms Barrett: Some bus drivers are rude to people.</p>
<p>Mr Morgans: Whether you get a bus pass depends on where you live.</p>
<p>Mr Horrigan: We ordered some taxis last Friday. They usually pull up outside the office. However, on Friday, they parked on the other side of the road. Simon and I crossed the road. I sat in the front. An angry taxi driver shouted at Simon telling him to go to the other side to get in. So, some taxi drivers are rude and park on the other side of the road.</p>
<p>Mr Richards: Some routes are really busy and some seats are too small or there are not enough of them.</p>
<p>Ms Pickard: Trains are too expensive; we think that they should be cheaper.</p>
<p>Ms Roberts: Some buses are full of rubbish.</p>
<p>Mr Dyer: Buses are too expensive when travelling short distances.</p>
<p>Mr Surrey: There are not enough spaces for wheelchairs, and wheelchairs are not secure enough.</p>
<p>Ms Graham: Online timetables are impossible to understand.</p>
<p>Ms Roberts: A group of young people were waiting for a bus and the driver went straight past us.</p>
<p>Mr Surrey: The lifts at the railway station are switched off at 8 p.m..</p>
<p>On equipment, the positives are:</p>
<p>Mr Dyer: The corset used for back pain.</p>
<p>Mr Richards: The equipment that is available for people who really need it and that makes that person feel better has improved. There is more equipment available.</p>
<p>Ms Barrett: Car adaptations seem to be happening quicker and people can now order a car with the adaptations already made.</p>
<p>Mr Surrey: The negatives are:</p>

Ms Graham: Hospital crutches are impossible to use as they are old.

Mr Surrey: There is a need for more equipment to support people with back pain.

Ms Barrett: We have not seen any changes. For example, one of the young people from our group has to order shoes that are individually designed for them. They ordered a new pair at the end of October and they have to pick them up in the next few months.

Ms Roberts: With regard to access to information, some things have got better. Access to the internet is good but could be better. Here are some of the things that could help young people access information.

Mr Richards: Attractive information boards.

Mr Horrigan: We need to get rid of jargon.

Ms Graham: There could be big writing and more pictures.

Ms Roberts: There could be fewer words.

Ms Barrett: We would like local newspapers for young people that are easy to read and interesting.

Ms Pickard: We would like simple information about things that we are entitled to. It is often hard to understand and confusing.

Mr Dyer: Young people should be involved in the design process.

Mr Surrey: Perhaps the Assembly can set an example and make its documents easier to read.

11.30 a.m.

Mr Morgans: We have not noticed any change in this since last year's report. We hope that this will change in time with the work done at the transition conference, and the backing of the equality report.

Mr Richards: Changing from child services to adult services is really confusing, and has caused problems for whole families, especially when access to those services is already severely limited for people like me and my brother.

Ms Pickard: After leaving college and school, and gaining qualifications, I feel that these qualifications have opened more choices and opportunities for me.

Mr Surrey: I am in school in England, and I feel that, because I am Welsh, when it comes to work experience and college links, I am left until last.

Mr Horrigan: My old teacher in Willows—the school that I used to go to—tried to force me to go to Bridgend College, but I said 'no', because I wanted to go to a college that was close to where I live in Rhymney, which is Coleg Glan Hafren. I am now going to Coleg Glan Hafren in 12 weeks' time.

Mr Morgans: At college, I have not always got the support that I need, so I have to ask my friends, which I have been told I should not do.

Mr Surrey: When I am at home, things are set up so that I can be very independent. However, when I need to do something outside my normal routine, for example, go on a train or stay in a hotel, it is impossible to do it independently, because things are not set up right. I do not mind asking for help, but I find it very uncomfortable.

Ms Barrett: Since becoming an adult, which is at the age of 18 in public health, I have not been able to get an appointment to see my specialist in Bristol Southmead Hospital. This is because I live in Wales. NHS Cymru has to give clearance every time, which means going from my GP to the local health board, and then finally to the Welsh authorities for them all to give permission for me to receive treatment. I have always been under this specialist, and have been having treatment from him for the last 15 years. I have not seen the specialist for 18 months. I would like to know why this happens and why it takes so long. I am sure that I am not the only person that this is happening to.

Ms Pickard: On poverty, we have no evidence of any change being made in this area. Poverty affects the whole family, not just the disabled person.

Ms Graham: No improvements in areas such as transport, health, education and training means that disabled young people still have more chance of being in poverty.

Mr Morgans: Maybe the real change in this will be noticed when all of the other areas have improved.

Mr Richards: Try to solve lots of other issues, and this may get rid of poverty.

Mr Dyer: To conclude, when going through all the key areas, we have noticed that not much has changed, but we recognise that it has only been 12 months, and some things take time to change.

Mr Richards: We only hope that the Committee on Equality of Opportunity keeps pushing this report and makes Ministers aware of our needs.

Mr Horrigan: Also, we want as many people as possible to be made aware of the recommendations.

Ms Pickard: It would be useful to know whether any organisations have made any changes as a result of the report.

Mr Surrey: Not everything affects all of us, so we might not be aware of the changes in some areas. It would be good if there were some way for that information to be gathered.

Ms Graham: People need to communicate with us and with each other.

Mr Ruscoe: That concludes the young people's presentation. They are open to answering any questions that any committee member would like to ask about the presentation or anything that might have been implied. They were representing other people in their presentation, so when they said 'I', they were not always referring to themselves but also to the words of those people.

Ann Jones: Thank you very much. That was a fantastic presentation. The sound technicians kept up with you, so that was a good test for them as well. Well done; it was really good. Some thoughts will come out of that, and I am sure that committee members will now want to make comments and ask questions.

Christine Chapman: I congratulate all of you; it was a terrific presentation. I could ask lots of questions today, but I will only ask one, because I know that my colleagues also want to ask questions. I think that it was Gareth who talked about the move from school to college and the fact that his college had let him down in terms of what he thought that he wanted from it. Do any of you have any comments on how the experience of moving from school to college has been for you and whether it could have been better?

Ms Graham: Could you repeat the question please?

Christine Chapman: Did you think that the experience of moving from school to college was a good thing or a bad thing, in terms of what you expected it to be?

Ms Graham: It was a good experience for me because, normally, I find it hard to make friends, but when I moved to college, I made friends quite quickly.

Ms Barrett: When I left school, I had to go on to a supported bridging course, which was not what I expected. I then moved on to a mainstream course and, since then, I have done a couple of different courses. I am now doing a diploma in digital applications, which is a really good course because they treat me differently to how I was treated at the start. So, for me, studying a mainstream course is better than being in a supported vocational group.

Mr Morgans: I found it quite difficult to move to college, simply because I did not get on well with my tutor—I found it quite hard to get on and do the work. At the end of the college term, I missed around two weeks of college because I did not want to go in, and I even sacrificed my education funding by not going in.

Mr Surrey: As I said, I go to school in England but, because I am Welsh, when it came to work experience, it was very difficult. I want to ask the person who is in charge of transition whether they know that this is happening and, if not, what they will do about it now that they know.

11.40 a.m.

Ann Jones: That is a good point. I do not know what I can do about England, Robert, but we will take Wales first and we will ask the Minister for education in Wales what colleges are being told to do to help people to find the courses that they want to follow. I think that a recommendation in the report mentions that, so, if Members agree, we will write to the Minister. When we receive a reply and she has explained what she is doing, we will send it to Tim and he can circulate it. Is that okay?

Mr Surrey: Thank you.

Ann Jones: Okay; so that is an action point. Eleanor has a question.

Eleanor Burnham: I am sorry, but I have to leave in a minute. I wanted to thank the group—it is very touching that you have come all this way. I understand that Robert, Heather and Jessica have come from north Wales—I am also from north Wales. It is wonderful to see you here. I wanted to ask what you felt about providing training for some of the people who you thought were rude to you, such as taxi drivers and bus drivers, whom you mentioned.

Ms Graham: I think that it is a good idea to train staff.

Eleanor Burnham: Do you think that they do not realise that you have certain difficulties that they do not have?

Ms Barrett: Yes. When I was taking a course at college last year, my tutor was very rude to me and would not let me sit exams.

Ms Graham: I would like to say that you should deal with people as you would like them to deal with you. If people are being rude to us, should we be rude to them? The answer to that is 'no'.

Mr Surrey: I have two things to say. First, it is okay to train people, but will they stick to what they have been trained to do? Secondly, I am my own person, and although I have a disability, many of my friends see me and not the disability. I would like to ask why everyone cannot see it that way.

Ann Jones: That is a very good question. Simon, did you have a point to make?

Mr Richards: We had another experience with buses when Richard, me and others from Cardiff travelled on a megabus to London. On the way back, we had a bad experience with the driver. One of our group is epileptic and she was about to have a fit. The leader of our group asked whether she could sit on the bus early, and the driver said she could not get on because she might have a fit. We were all extremely unhappy—we got on the bus anyway, but we were unhappy and we made a complaint about it.

Ann Jones: Those are issues that we need to look at.

Mr Surrey: Going back to Richard's and Simon's problem with the taxi driver, I know that it might seem to go against human nature, but I think that if a taxi driver is horrible to us, it should be easier to name and shame him or her.

Ann Jones: That is a good point.

Ms Barrett: When I became a member of the reference group, I had an issue with a taxi driver who was rude to me. After that, I was not sure about going in taxis, but, since then, I have been in a taxi and I feel more confident. Most of the taxi drivers who pick me up are nice because I use the same ones; it is just one or two who are really grumpy and rude.

Mr Dyer: On page 24 of the report, it says that I needed the support that I needed, but I was told that the carpentry course that I wanted to follow would be too hard for me because of my disability.

Ann Jones: So, that goes back to the fact that you did not get the support to do what you wanted to do in college.

Mr Dyer: Yes.

Joyce Watson: I have a question for Amy. You said that you have had problems getting your health treatment—

Ms Barrett: No, that was one of my friends whom I used to work with.

Joyce Watson: Okay; you are obviously here to speak for everyone. Is she still having the same problems that you mentioned?

Ms Barrett: I will ask Judith to answer on my behalf.

Ms McNamara: Amy was speaking about another person who is a member of the youth forum in Pembrokeshire. This young man understands that there are different funding issues and that he could probably get an appointment to see a consultant, but the treatment is a big issue, because, presumably, England would want Wales to pay for it. This is not always made clear to young people. He is an articulate young man, but he is finding it difficult to understand why he has to go through the whole process to get what he needs. As we know, the whole process of waiting for treatment can be very drawn out, and it can take a long time for anything to happen. He wants to know why it takes so long and, as you said, he is probably not the only person who feels that way.

Mr Surrey: I do not know why, but I find the situation to be very different.

Joyce Watson: Do you know whether many people have those types of problems?

Ms McNamara: Not everyone will require medical treatment.

Ann Jones: We will look at the Record of Proceedings, and this might be a point that we may need to bring up when writing to Ministers.

Mr Ruscoe: We do not have enough information about this. As care workers and young people around the table, it is something that we need to investigate to ensure, as Robert says, that people are not being discriminated against and that their rights are not being impinged. The really sad thing about the case that Judith highlighted is that this person has received this service for 15 years, but it stops when he becomes 18 years old. Where is the rights perspective in stopping a service when you reach the age of 18?

11.50 a.m.

Ms McNamara: I think that this young man feels that they would probably offer him similar treatment in Wales, but because it is quite a complex issue and he has every faith in this person. The fact that he would not be able to carry on is an issue.

Ms Graham: Why do things seem to stop at 18? I know that that is adulthood, but life does not usually stop at 18.

Ann Jones: We have tried to look at that issue, Heather, in terms of keeping services for people who need them. That is a good point because life does not stop at 18, in fact, it broadens out so much more that there is much more that we can do. We are looking at that and each area where you live sometimes have different ideas about how they should handle this. However, this is about how we get the best for everyone. I think that we are aware of that; it is a good point that we will consider. Are there more questions?

Bethan Jenkins: I have a question. Thank you for your presentation; it was informative. I know that there is a long way to go in terms of these recommendations, so I do not want to go into one particular issue because I know that they have all been highlighted. I wanted to find out what you thought about the communication between you and us. I know that you are all here today, but do you think that there is enough communication between the people who make decisions, like politicians, and you? We have these recommendations, but we think that we could do more as Assembly Members. I know that it is a big question, but how can we improve that communication so that we have conversations all the time and not just at these committees, which are formal? What do you think we can do to make this less formal?

Mr Surrey: I found it quite nice yesterday because the clerk, the deputy clerk and the Chair came to one of our meetings that we hold before this meeting. If we have another meeting like this, I think that I speak for everyone when I say that AMs should be involved with our side of the meeting. I think that that is the way forward.

Ms Graham: I think that Robert is right, because there are two sides to every story at the end of the day.

Bethan Jenkins: So, you want more AMs to come to your meetings.

Ms Graham: Yes.

Ms Barrett: Yes, because we all enjoy voicing our opinions so that others know what we go through. When we do that, perhaps you could come and join in and see that for yourselves.

Mr Ruscoe: The process that the young people have been through with the committee has been a good example of how the young people's and the children's capacity to be involved in such processes has improved. Also, the capacity of the Assembly Members and standing members of the previous committee to work in different ways changed. That is a good example of what needs to happen. It is a meeting in the middle and a change. People have to develop an ability to represent themselves and to allow and support people to represent themselves and to take that extra step.

Ms Barrett: What about locally, when we go back home and so on, if you know what I mean?

Ann Jones: Following on from what Bethan said, I was going to ask you about that. When you go back home and when you are not part of this group, how many of you get involved with your local Assembly Member? Do you communicate with them or ask to speak to them?

Mr Richards: We do not know how to do that.

Ms Graham: It would be good if we could communicate with them so that we could keep up with what is happening.

Mr Ruscoe: We did a piece of work yesterday asking people about the groups that they were involved with outside of this one. This group is involved in a huge number of other groups, because they are active and are supported in doing that. They get to meet a number of people—not necessarily Assembly Members—from the locality who might be able to influence decisions or may be decision-makers themselves. However, it is down to the support that the group receives in order to be involved in such processes. Not everyone has those opportunities.

Ann Jones: We need to consider the point about support mechanisms to ensure that we make contact with everyone.

Lynne Neagle: Thank you for your presentation. As other Members have said, it was very informative and helpful for us as Members.

A couple of you have talked about difficulties in college. Do you have any views on the quality of the advice that you received before you decided about going to college or taking up work placements? Do you feel that the information, advice, and support that you received before reaching that stage was good enough?

Mr Horrigan: I had an experience. It was not the college's fault. My first work experience placement was a day a week in sports development. It was nice, because I like sport. Therefore, I enjoyed every Monday that I spent on the placement. I used to hate sport. The next placement was with Cardiff People First. I was in the school secretary's room one afternoon, when my headteacher called me into his room. I asked whether I was going to be told off, but he said that Cardiff People First had telephoned to ask if I would like to be a part of its group. I said 'yes'. This would not have happened without the group, which I joined when I was 18. I am now 22. I go to different meetings. Gareth and I go to Welsh network meetings. I really enjoy that.

Ann Jones: Gareth, do you want to add anything?

Mr Morgans: Can you repeat the question, please?

Lynne Neagle: You talked earlier about difficulties when you get to college. I wanted to ask about the advice and information you were given before you made the decision about which courses you wanted to do or what work placements you wanted to undertake.

Mr Morgans: I received all of my advice from school, because the college could not be bothered to give me the advice. That was the bottom line. Because of our needs, the tutor came in to discuss the courses that we could take. The advice was available only in the few weeks before I left school to go to college. I think that you should have a few months to decide what you want to do, not a couple of weeks. It would be better for us to receive the information earlier and to have more support in lessons.

Ms Barrett: I am now 21; I left school when I was 16 and in year 11 doing my GCSEs. The school that I went to decided to suspend the sixth form for people with learning difficulties. The school did not think that I could go into the main sixth form, so I had to have meetings to find out what I could do. I was not able to do a job and there were no college courses for me. The only course that was recommended to me was the bridging course, in Pembrokeshire College. I was told how much fun it was, and about the different aspects of the course. However, when I did that course, it was nothing like what I had been told—it was not for me. I did it for two years, and I found that it just did not mix. Now, being on a mainstream course, I am trying my best, and I am having less support now than I would have done at the beginning.

12.00 p.m.

Last year, there was a work placement, but I was not able to do it. All of my course went out on a work placement for a week, and I stayed at home, because my tutor was not really nice to me, and she stopped me from going on everything. This year, my course and everyone have got me on a placement, and I will be doing it in three weeks' time, for a week, working with my Gennex group, which will be good.

From leaving school to college, there is not much for people to do. I have been in college for five years now, so I have moved up and up. I am now on a course that I really like, and I hope that I will be able to take it further.

Mr Surrey: A careers officer came to my school once a year, but mainly I see careers option officers from England. I do not see why I should see them, they are not valid. They are trying to make me go to a college in England, but the course it provides is not suitable. I know that they are the same sorts of things, but they do not see the difference between that course and the one that I want. I am tired of being pushed around. What can I say? If I say anything, I get told off. Why should these people decide where I go?

Ann Jones: That is a good point.

Ms Pickard: I went to a mainstream school, and then went on to a mainstream college. As a person with a learning disability, that proves to most people that it does not matter if you have a learning disability or not, you can still go through education, and do well. I left Radyr school with 10 GCSEs, and I was really proud of that. I wanted to get that point across.

Mr Richards: I went to a private school just outside Cardiff city centre, called Kings Monkton School. Like Sara, I also left school with 10 GCSEs. I then went on to college to do A-levels, but it did not work out. The workload was much more than I expected, and I eventually decided that enough was enough and left before the final exams. I then had a look at other places, and I was lucky enough to find a place at Bridgend College, in the residential area, called Weston House. Two of our Cardiff People First group now are themselves there right now, and they are really enjoying it too.

I went to UWIC right after college. It was a real backwards step and I found it hard to mix with people. I thought that the support that I received was very good, and it had to be because, otherwise, I would never have got through it. I lost all interest in the subject that I was doing just before I finished, which was computer studies. From there, I went to Vision 21, which informed me about Cardiff People First. I mentioned to the people there that I was interested in music and asked whether there were any opportunities in radio, and they discovered opportunities for me with Radio Glamorgan at the University Hospital of Wales. I have been working there now for the past two years and I am really enjoying it.

The things that I have learnt from organisations such as Vision 21 and Cardiff People First, which, like Richard, I have been with for several years now, and from other organisations and groups that I have been involved with since then, have been far more important and useful to me than anything that I learnt before. I think that there should be more focus on things like that for us.

Ms Kubler: I go to a residential college in Oswestry. I was given good advice but now I do not feel that I am enjoying the college in every way. I do not think that it operates as a college for disabled people because, when we finish lessons, we only get half an hour at break time and an hour at dinner time to do other stuff, which is not enough time for me. When I finish a lesson, I have to get my coat on and I do not have enough time to have my break and do the other stuff that people have to do. Health issues are important. For example, at dinner time, I cannot swallow quickly, but by the time that I have finished my lessons, there is a big queue for dinner and I have to push in. I live in a bungalow and walk to college with two other people. Because the three of us were late one day, they told us all off, even though I told them that I needed those people to walk with me.

Another issue is the fact that I am 19 years old but I do not have stuff to do and I get bored. I would like to know why that is happening. I was also told that I was not supposed to ask my friends to help me to do things—I was actually told off. We wanted to go to Derwen College so that we could be independent and help each other out, but now they are saying that I am not supposed to ask my friends to help me and that I have to rely on staff. If we are learning to live independently with friends, we should be able to ask our friends to give us a helping hand.

Ann Jones: Heather, you want to add something. We have run over time and we have a photographer waiting to take a photo of you. We will take Heather's question and then I will allow Tim to finish off.

Ms Graham: I went to a special school, but that did not stop me because I went to the high school next door and took a mainstream GCSE course, for which I received a C grade. I am now in college and doing really well. I will be doing a mainstream course next year, which I am proud of.

12.10 p.m.

Ann Jones: That is very good and a very positive thing to end on. Tim, I understand that you are going to pull everything together.

Mr Ruscoe: I think that the process that the young people have been through with the Committee on Equality of Opportunity has been a very good example of how people can work together and improve on something that has been good, and it has been a very good start. What you might not necessarily see, as a committee, is that this piece of work has been hugely beneficial on an individual basis for the members of the reference group. Each one of them will talk about being more confident, having been through this process. They were confident to start with, but this has been another step for them. It is a very good example of how adults can enable children and young people to work in partnership together to achieve what we need. In Wales, we need to ask ourselves what we must do to achieve the social model of disability. Are we strong enough in enforcing and monitoring? Are there pieces of law and legislation that we need to be actively seeking? The process has been incredibly positive. The young people are really sad that their involvement is not going to continue, but they are happy that they are the foundation for other people's involvement in such processes. In summing up, Amy just wants to say one thing.

Ms Barrett: Gwenda has asked me to say to the committee how pleased and proud she is of the young people in the reference group and their hard work, and that the report could not have been done without us.

Ann Jones: Well done. Gwenda has been promoted and is now a Deputy Minister, but, before I came in, she said to me how very proud she was of all of you, for all that you have done and for all the time that you have spent on that report. As the people who are on the Committee on Equality of Opportunity now, we will work with Gwenda and the Government—Gwenda will not let us forget it anyway—to make sure that these recommendations, which you helped to formulate, will help to change everybody's lives. Thank you very much for being the first reference group. We have learnt a lot from that. It is a marvellous piece of work and I am sure that many more young people will come through the system on the back of what you have done. You will have been leaders in making sure that governments listen to young children. Well done, everybody, and thank you for the presentation today.

Lynne Neagle: I just wanted to ask about our action as a committee. We need to feed in the concerns raised by the young people today, but it is also important that those concerns are fed into the task group that has been set up as a result of the Disabled Children Matter Wales campaign. It would be good if we could send a strong message as a committee that we hope that the group will be able to finish its work quickly and that the Minister and the Government will respond quickly to it. I read somewhere in these papers that the Minister will come before us to discuss this in the summer term, but I do not think that that is soon enough. I would like to hear from the Minister earlier than that, so that we can discuss the issues arising from the session today and the outstanding problems that we know exist.

Ann Jones: I am sure that we will take that on board and do that.

Ms Graham: May I just say thank you? I do not think that this would have been possible without the Assembly Members continuing to invite us back down to Cardiff. I have made some brilliant friends and I hope to keep in touch with them.

Ann Jones: That is very good and is a positive note to finish on. We must also say 'thank you' to Tim and all the other members of staff who have come down with you. That just leaves me to say that we will take up the recommendations that Lynne made: we will ask the Minister to come in earlier and move the forward work programme around. We will send a note to Tim on anything that we do as a result of this, so that he can keep in touch with you. Thank you very much. Members, after the meeting is formally closed, we will go into the Chamber to have a photograph taken with the reference group. Thank you very much. The meeting is now closed.

"Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 12.14 p.m.
The meeting ended at 12.14 p.m."