



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

**Y Pwyllgor Cyfle Cyfartal
The Committee on Equality of Opportunity**

**Dydd Iau, 16 Hydref 2008
Thursday, 16 October 2008**

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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
Bethan Jenkins	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Ann Jones	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Nick Ramsay	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Heulwen Blackmore	Is-adran Cydraddoldeb a Hawliau Dynol, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Equality and Human Rights Division, Welsh Assembly Government
Brian Gibbons	Aelod Cynulliad, Llafur (Y Gweinidog dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol a Llywodraeth Leol) Assembly Member, Labour (The Minister for Social Justice and Local Government)

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

Tom Jackson	Clerc Clerk
Rita Phillips	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Denise Rogers	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil yr Aelodau Members' Research Service

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

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Ann Jones:** Good morning, everyone. I welcome you all to this meeting of the Committee on Equality of Opportunity. To start with the usual housekeeping rules, I ask everyone around the table to switch off their mobile telephones, pagers, BlackBerrys and anything else that may affect the sound system. As usual, we can use either Welsh or English and there is a translation facility available. We are not expecting a fire drill, so, if the alarm should sound, we will take our directions from the ushers. Rest assured, I will be one of the first people out of the door so you can follow me.

[2] We have had no apologies for absence. Are there any declarations of interest by Members? I see that there are none.

[3] At the start of the meeting, I should apologise for the fact that the First Minister, who was due to appear for item 4 on our agenda, will not be here. He is hosting the economic summit and the timings were not suitable. So, we have agreed to postpone the First Minister's session on the equality provision from the 'One Wales' document. The Office of the First Minister has assured us that it will do everything to make sure that that becomes a priority, and that he comes to a future meeting—that is, in the near future rather than the distant future.

9.33 a.m.

Craffu ar y Gyllideb Ddrafft Scrutiny of the Draft Budget

[4] **Ann Jones:** We are pleased to welcome Dr Brian Gibbons, the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government. Brian, you such a regular attendee of the meetings of this committee that we might get a nameplate made for you. [*Laughter.*] Thank you for taking the time out to discuss the budget with us. Do you want to say anything to start, Minister?

[5] **The Minister for Social Justice and Local Government (Brian Gibbons):** I just want to draw Members' attention to the 'Who do you see? Living together in Wales' document that was released by the Equality and Human Rights Commission yesterday. It is based on a survey of around 1,600 people in Wales and covers attitudes about a wide range of equality of opportunity areas. It makes fascinating reading and provides some encouragement about the attitude of people in Wales towards minority groups. We are not there yet but, for most people, it is an encouraging document, and I think that committee members would be interested in it.

[6] **Ann Jones:** Thanks. I am sure that the commission will send us copies, but we will also chase it up.

[7] **Eleanor Burnham:** I want to put my name down for some questions.

[8] **Ann Jones:** I think that the Minister wants to make a statement first.

[9] **Brian Gibbons:** Over the past 12 months, a number of important milestones have been achieved, and next year's budget will try to give effect to the changes that have been taking place this year. For example, the developments include the work that has been done on the single equality scheme for the Assembly Government, covering the seven new strands on which we are concentrating that work. The preliminary work is now coming to an end and all departments across the Assembly Government have developed their action plans, which, from next year, will be part of the implementation process.

[10] On Gypsy Travellers, we have made the announcement on upgrading traveller sites and we have made extra money available for new sites. The refugee inclusion strategy has been published during the year and that is now proceeding to implementation and will carry over into next year.

[11] Money has been put aside to develop a social cohesion strategy. That work is at a fairly advanced stage and will flow over into next year. The budget for the promoting equalities fund has not been substantially increased, but the way in which that money will be spent will change to a certain degree, and will continue over into next year. We are all conscious of the imperatives in relation to child poverty and financial inclusion, and the extra money that has been made available for that is outlined in the paper, taking into account the bigger picture in terms of the £45 million across Wales for Want to Work and the £70 million or £80 million for the Genesis project for people who struggle to achieve equal opportunities

because of social and economic disadvantage.

[12] **Ann Jones:** Thank you, Minister. I will start off with a few questions before I bring Members in—I know that Eleanor has already indicated that she wants to come in.

[13] Given that this is a very tight budget—we are aware of that across all portfolios—what work has been done by the Assembly Government to evaluate previous budgets in reducing inequalities across Wales? How will you maintain equality proofing across all of the departments if budgets are tight?

[14] **Brian Gibbons:** All policy, as it is introduced, must be subject to the inclusive equalities approach; that is built into the way that we do business. Heulwen and her colleagues work across all Assembly Government departments, and we expect all departments to have champions and lead officials for equal opportunities, so that there is monitoring and leadership within the department. I do not know whether Heulwen would want to add any more on the monitoring.

[15] **Ms Blackmore:** On the impact assessment of policies, we have done quite a lot of evaluation work on our pilot scheme, and the document that the Minister has sent to Cabinet includes a consultation on how we carry out our impact assessment. That is crucial in identifying where the inequalities are and what work needs to be done. We are suggesting a substantial enhancement of the way in which that is done by policy makers. There is intense scrutiny as the policy starts, because we have been conscious that it has happened quite late in the day in the past. We are hoping to influence how policy deals with inequalities in that way.

[16] **Ann Jones:** Joyce wants to follow up on that question, but I will come to you afterwards, Eleanor.

[17] **Joyce Watson:** Thank you for your paper, Minister. It makes for some pleasing reading, in places, for all of us.

[18] My question is a follow on from what Heulwen has just said about the earlier impact assessment. If you want to know if something is being taken seriously, my theory has always been to follow the money. When you are doing that early impact assessment, are you also looking at the agenda budgeting aspects? That is a key element of any early indicators about where the money is going and it is a good indicator of outcome-based results, which is what we all want.

9.40 a.m.

[19] **Brian Gibbons:** Work is ongoing in the Assembly on gender budgeting and child budgeting. I have seen some in-house work, trying to get a better feel for where the money is going. It is not the first time that this has been done, but there was a feeling that, although the tracking has been satisfactory up to a fairly high level in the budgetary process, it just is not possible to track the money beyond that point. Primary care would be an example. We know that women use primary care more frequently, but making a decision about the allocation of money to primary care can be quite difficult. You could argue that the best evidence suggests that women make up 60 per cent of consultees in a general practitioner's surgery, so primary care funding should be divided 60-40 along gender lines.

[20] So, the money is trackable to a certain point, but then it becomes more difficult. I do not know how complete that work on gender budgeting is. Perhaps you could make a more specific inquiry, and we will clarify that for you.

[21] **Ann Jones:** How confident are you that, given the reduction in the equalities budget

expenditure line, and the fact that it remains static for the following year, we will still be able to mainstream equality across all Assembly Government departments?

[22] **Brian Gibbons:** There is no doubt that we are on the verge of a sea change. There is a growing awareness of equalities, particularly given the work that Heulwen and her colleagues have been doing on the single equalities scheme. All departments have had to contribute to developing that scheme and the action plan, in addition to the other changes that I have mentioned—the inclusive policy-making process, and so on. The profile of equal opportunities in policy-making has never been higher, and crucially, there is an awareness of the importance of maintaining that momentum.

[23] **Ann Jones:** Thank you. Eleanor, you have been waiting patiently.

[24] **Eleanor Burnham:** I am concerned about equality for older people. How will you ensure that they are not disproportionately affected by any real-term reductions in funding for health and social services? There are issues about unpaid carers, and although we were discussing young carers yesterday, older people also act as carers. How can we tackle the inequalities around that?

[25] **Brian Gibbons:** That is not quite my portfolio. You specifically mentioned health, and we know that health and social services has had the single biggest uplift of all the portfolios in this budget round. One of the main drivers of that—but not the only one, by any means—has been the demographic pressure on health and social care, and we know that an extra £50 million has been provided to address the issues around the Grogan judgment. Another £50 million was provided for enablement, particularly of older people—allowing them to stay in their homes, keeping them on their feet and so on. The Minister for Health and Social Services has made bids for extra funding in support of that enablement money; I do not know the details, but I am sure that that is something you could approach her about, and that she will be willing to give you the information once decisions have been made.

[26] **Eleanor Burnham:** With regard to carers, my understanding is that there is a reduction in funding available for the implementation of the national carers' strategy. In what way will that have an impact? What can be done?

[27] **Brian Gibbons:** I think that you will appreciate that carers are not one of my portfolio responsibilities.

[28] **Eleanor Burnham:** We are looking at this issue.

[29] **Ann Jones:** I think that the Minister will answer as far as he can from an equality perspective, but perhaps we need to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services.

[30] **Brian Gibbons:** I do not think that I can add any more to what I have said. We are aware that the Assembly Government has a carers' champion, the Deputy Minister for Social Services. I know that she takes a very keen interest and has a personal commitment to carers' issues. I may be mistaken, but I think that the Welsh Assembly Government was one of the first governments anywhere to establish a carers' champion at Government level. Therefore, we have a very active champion who has a keen insight and a commitment to the issues involved.

[31] **Nick Ramsay:** Following on from Joyce Watson's question on trackability and following the money, on the proportion of the draft budget going to local authorities, given the current economic situation—I think that we all appreciate that funding is even tighter for local government than it has been in previous years—are you confident that sufficient resource is being made available to local authorities for the equality agenda?

[32] **Brian Gibbons:** Yes. However, we have always said that the budget being made available to local government of itself is not going to cover all of the pressures. It would be a mistake to pretend that that is the case. Clearly, in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, the money will go some way towards addressing the pressures, but, equally, the way in which local government does business will have to change to adapt to the economic pressures. Local government, and individual local authorities in particular, have been very engaged with, for example, Gypsy Travellers and, in particular, with refugees. We are working with local government on areas such as child poverty. You may be aware of the web-based tool called 'child poverty solutions Wales', which is helping local authorities to start addressing child poverty, that the Welsh Local Government Association and Save the Children were actively involved in developing. That is something that I think the committee will be very interested in, and we are very grateful for the WLGA's engagement in developing that tool.

[33] **Nick Ramsay:** You mentioned child poverty, and I mentioned equality issues. These are large areas, requiring substantial funding. You said that you have spoken to the WLGA about this. Is it happy with the levels of funding that you have proposed in the draft budget for tackling child poverty?

[34] **Brian Gibbons:** I hardly need to answer that question. No. Every sector has a responsibility and a duty to argue for the maximum amount of resources, and the WLGA would be negligent if it did not ensure that the voice of local government is heard in that context. However, looking at the money available in the Assembly Government's budget, and taking into account the fact that the indicative increase for local government was 2.5 per cent, we are now in a position to offer it 2.9 per cent, which amounts to an extra £110 million. I think that an extra £110 million is considerable by anyone's book, and that is just in the revenue support grant; extra money is also being made available for the foundation phase and ring-fenced programmes, for example. Everybody would like to have more money, without a doubt, but, given the situation of 1 per cent reserves and the fact that we have been able to increase funding above anticipated levels of the RSG, we have made a fair contribution to helping local government. However, it cannot be the case that we will provide extra resources to cover every pressure; that cannot be the way in which Government proceeds.

[35] **Ann Jones:** Joyce, did you want to come in on this point?

9.50 a.m.

[36] **Joyce Watson:** My question is on the same theme—it is about local government, so it is good as a follow-through. We quite rightly delegate money down to local government. This is the same sort of theme about tracking money and service delivery. Year on year, until recently, we have given significant increases to local government through this portfolio. Sometimes, we do not see the improvements that we would expect from our investment. My question is to you as the Minister with responsibility for local government and equality, because local service delivery is mostly about delivering services fairly and equally to the most vulnerable in society. We often see failures, but we do not see those failures in service delivery locally until many years after. Therefore, how can we as a Committee on Equality of Opportunity, and you as a Minister, be assured about delivery earlier in the process?

[37] **Brian Gibbons:** That is a crucial question. That is one reason for bringing forward the proposed Local Government (Wales) Measure, which we laid before the Assembly at the beginning of September. At the heart of that Measure is the proposal that local authorities will produce real-time reports on their improvement agendas across their main service areas. That will be in the public domain, and will be subject to scrutiny by auditors and inspectors; equally, it will be subject to public scrutiny.

[38] The Measure also provides additional opportunities for local authorities to deliver improved collaboration. The Measure tries to get rid of any outstanding legal barriers to collaboration between local authorities and other public bodies in order to deliver the improvement agenda. It also provides us as an Assembly Government with additional measures allowing us to provide assistance to local government in advance of a local authority having a major service failure. At present, we can only intervene when a major service failure occurs. You cannot just stand on the platform and watch a train crash happen; if local authorities are struggling to deliver improvement, the Measure will, hopefully, allow us to be more than spectators. However, the emphasis will be on local authorities being responsible for their own performance monitoring and improvement. Therefore, the ball is in their court, and what we are talking about are fallback measures, should failure occur at that level.

[39] **Bethan Jenkins:** My first question follows on from that, in terms of the relationship between the Government, local authority and social services. As you know, there is a protocol between the Welsh Assembly Government and local authorities, but that does not include areas outside of the budget allocated by the Welsh Assembly Government. Are there any movements to tighten that protocol, or will that come in with the Measure that you have just outlined?

[40] **Brian Gibbons:** We are interested in further developing the relationship between the Assembly Government and local government. In his speech on governance in July, the First Minister indicated our interest in developing that relationship further, and putting it on a more formal basis. However, we are very much at the start of that journey, and are trying to get a clearer picture as to the shape that that new relationship will take. Therefore, even though work is starting, I cannot give you an overall picture of what that will look like. However, the only formal relationship between the Assembly Government and local government is the so-called Essex-Jones protocols, which are basically two sentences. I think that there must be scope to build on that. We are deciding how we would like to move in that direction. Once we get a view on that, we will engage with local government on how we can better develop it.

[41] **Bethan Jenkins:** Will you be able to report back to this committee on how the equalities agenda fits into any new development?

[42] **Brian Gibbons:** Yes. I do not know whether you know this, but there is the performance framework for local government, in which performance on around 150 to 200 indicators are published every year. It was published on 2 October this year, and is available on the local government data unit website. Those cover several parameters. The information on the website is provided by service area, in the main, so if you want to look at how an individual local authority is performing, it is not that easy to do so. However, the data unit is trying to bring together the information in such a way that you can look at an individual authority's performance in the round as well as the service area, which is how it is currently set out. So, all of that is on the local government data unit website; perhaps it is not the easiest information to examine, but it is all there for you to find if you are keen enough.

[43] **Ann Jones:** Before you go on, Bethan, Nick wants to ask a question on this.

[44] **Nick Ramsay:** I am glad that you mentioned the proposed Local Government (Wales) Measure, Minister, because it will clearly be a significant piece of work for the Assembly Government and for the committee that deals with it. You mentioned real-time reports and that there will be an onus on local authorities to self-monitor and self-evaluate. In the context of equality, and this committee, would you hope that equality issues will be prioritised in those reports and how do you see that happening?

[45] **Ann Jones:** Our focus is straying a little beyond the budget, but, as we have time, you can answer that question, Minister.

[46] **Brian Gibbons:** There are two answers to that question. Equality issues must be mainstreamed into every area—there is an equality dimension to all service areas. The equalities agenda must be embedded in even the most mainstream service areas.

[47] Local authorities have a special responsibility for vulnerable groups and a key role to play in many parts of Wales with refugees, asylum seekers, Travellers and Gypsies and so on. Local government has to mainstream the equalities agenda, as well as looking at the needs of specific and vulnerable groups.

[48] **Ann Jones:** We will come back to Bethan now. Could you stick to the budget? I am sure that we will discuss the Local Government (Wales) Measure in further detail at a later date, Nick.

[49] **Bethan Jenkins:** You have outlined specific developments with regard to child poverty and I welcome those. Do you think we will be able to reach the targets on eradicating child poverty outlined in 'One Wales' through the current programmes? I have spoken to many campaigners against child poverty, and they believe that a child poverty unit should be set up in the Government. I have talked to Jane Hutt about this. Do you think that a unit dedicated to child poverty would help to ensure that all of these areas in the budget are properly scrutinised and delivered effectively?

[50] **Brian Gibbons:** I do not know what the difference between a team and a unit is, but there is currently a child poverty team in the Assembly Government and another person has been seconded to it to further develop its work. So, there is a dedicated group of officials working solely on child poverty issues; they do not work on anything else. Similarly, the Cabinet committee chaired by Jane Hutt brings together all of the various policy areas that affect child poverty. There is also the expert group on child poverty, which has started to produce work that will come before us. So, there is a considerable amount of dedicated provision to develop child poverty policy.

10.00 a.m.

[51] I would be interested to know what a unit could bring to that beyond what is brought by the team, the expert group and the Cabinet committee. However, if people feel that a unit could contribute over and above the team and what I have already mentioned, let us listen to what they have to say.

[52] **Bethan Jenkins:** I know that the stakeholder group has been set up with regards to the Disabled Children Matter campaign, but it is clear that there is insufficient money in the budget to answer all of the concerns. I believe that what they are trying to say is that if there were a dedicated unit dealing with these issues, the Government would not need to be starting up groups here there and everywhere, and there would be a port of call for them to go to. I believe that they have struggled in the past with the fact that there has sometimes been only one person to answer their calls on child poverty, when they have needed more of a strategic approach. That is where they are coming from and I am just relaying their concerns, to be honest.

[53] **Brian Gibbons:** It may have been the case in the past that there was just one person, but that certainly is not the case now. Things have moved on and, as I say, only recently—in the last three to four months—an extra person has been seconded in to develop the work on child poverty, particularly in relation to the statutory duties to deliver on child poverty that will be included as part of the legislative competence Order on vulnerable children. If it was a

practical concern, related to difficulty in contacting people, I think that the extra staffing in the child poverty team at the moment addresses that issue. I hope that that is the case anyway.

[54] **Bethan Jenkins:** What is your opinion on the concern about the budget with regard to disabled children? There has been £2.75 million dedicated to this area, but that is not the amount that was called for. What discussions, if any, have you had with that group?

[55] **Brian Gibbons:** I have not had any, because Jane Hutt is the Minister with responsibility for children. I meet Jane Hutt on an ad hoc basis—probably two or three times over the last two or three months—to discuss issues around the Disabled Children Matter campaign. So, we do meet, but Jane Hutt is the lead Minister and I know that she and her officials are very actively involved because, when I am present at meetings, she has a team of officials with her that clearly work specifically on this. I am not saying that that is all that they do because, for certain, it is not—they are doing other work as well—but she certainly does seem to have officials with her who take an interest in this and try to co-ordinate the issues around disabled children. I think that you would have to ask her for the precise details of how that is being done.

[56] **Ann Jones:** Following on from that, how sure are you that there is sufficient provision in the budget, across portfolios, to implement the recommendations made by this committee on improving the provision of services for disabled children? It is about the task and finish group that the Minister, Jane Hutt, set up, which worked through an action plan. Has all that been accounted for in the draft budget?

[57] **Brian Gibbons:** I have tried to answer that. Jane Hutt has ministerial responsibility for disabled children. I have been party to several of the meetings on an ad hoc basis. There is £0.5 million to encourage the uptake of benefits for disabled children. It is predominantly a benefit uptake scheme for children in general, but we realise that the evidence suggests that a child who is disabled is more likely to live in poverty. Equally, there is a fair bit of evidence that if those children were to take up all of their benefit entitlements, their risk of being in poverty would be substantially reduced. So, the benefit uptake scheme was a recognition of that. I have portfolio responsibility for that scheme, but it was developed in partnership with Jane Hutt, as the Minister for children, who leads on the needs of disabled children. She was very keen that we develop such a scheme, from her point of view, and I was keen to develop such a scheme from the perspective of the child poverty agenda, and we have been able to deliver it, thankfully.

[58] **Ann Jones:** Can we just go back to the issue of play provision for disabled children? I know that this comes under Jane Hutt's ministerial responsibilities, and, when she was before the Children and Young People Committee, she mentioned that £250,000 would be available over the next three years to help local authorities. She expects them to match-fund that sum, taking it up to £500,000. Given that that goes down to local authorities and the fact that their settlements are tight, how confident are you, as the Minister with responsibility for equality, that disabled children will get that play provision? Is that the right way to be doing it, or should you, as the Minister with responsibility for equality, or the Assembly Government be directing that to ensure that play provision is available to disabled children?

[59] **Brian Gibbons:** Play provision is definitely in Jane Hutt's portfolio. The £250,000, or the £500,000 with match-funding, over two years has been provided for child benefit uptake. We have established a financial inclusion working group with some very eminent people in the past couple of weeks, and one of the group's early tasks will be to advise us on how best to use that money. The shape of the package that will be delivered for benefit uptake has not yet been decided. On the play programme, I am afraid that you will have to speak to the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills.

[60] **Ann Jones:** I will probably write to her to ask. Thanks, Minister.

[61] **Joyce Watson:** I welcome the money being made available for disabled children, because the sums are significant and it is money that was not there before. I have a saying that goes, 'Look where the money goes and you'll see the commitment.', and it is fair to say that the commitment is clear for everybody to see in this case. The fact that the money in the budget is rising next year from £2.75 million to £3.2 million shows a real commitment. In recognising that commitment to disabled people and the fact that they are more likely to be in poverty, the obvious question is this: how will the child poverty and the financial inclusion BEL be used to tackle child poverty. We know that we have the money, because we can see it, and I know that you said that one part of it is about benefit take-up.

[62] **Brian Gibbons:** Many of the key delivery areas of the child poverty agenda rest outside the social justice and local government portfolio, coming instead under education, for example. The Genesis programme is under the education portfolio, while Want to Work comes under the economy and transport portfolio. Work with vulnerable children in the integrated family support services initiative—the new, innovative approach to dealing with very vulnerable families—is something that, on the back of the child poverty programme, we are beginning to develop, and that is in the social services portfolio.

[63] Driving forward, we all know that, with children in financial disadvantage, it is very rare that they are visited with just one aspect of disadvantage, unfortunately. In most cases, if you have one form of disadvantage, you have many. So, to tackle child poverty, you really have to advance on a broad front and, in doing so, we have to be able to bring together the various Assembly Government portfolios. One of the big challenges for the child poverty team, as well as coming up with specific programmes and driving forward the legislation, which it will also be doing, is to pick up the policy areas that need to feed into, and work with, other portfolios to make a difference to the life chances of the most disadvantaged children.

10.10 a.m.

[64] The front on which we are trying to advance to tackle child poverty extends way beyond just the social justice and local government area, but we hold the ring with regard to ensuring that the child poverty agenda is mainstreamed into other activities, proposed policy and service development, with a view to tackling child poverty in Wales.

[65] **Eleanor Burnham:** To follow on, I appreciate that you are sincere and I have no doubt that people in other departments are also sincere, but it appears from the work of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and other worthy people that child poverty is not being eradicated. The Governments in Westminster and Cardiff have said that they will halve child poverty by 2010 and eradicate it by 2020. I appreciate that it is a complex scenario, but, despite your sincere aspirations and all of the worthy initiatives, because it is focused, a great deal of this is a postcode lottery, which in itself can bring many problems.

[66] During the summer, I visited a part of my region where they were just outside the worthy ward, but they were almost falling into the same trap. During recess, we learn a lot about what is going on out there, and there are some wonderfully worthy initiatives, but there are often too many of them and they are often timed, so that when they come to an end there is a problem. For much of the provision, it can be confusing. Do you not think that it is time for you to use the cash—which is obviously not endless—to streamline these worthy programmes, because many people are still not getting the money that they deserve? I was with a parenting co-ordinator in a school recently, and she said that the provision was not sufficient. She is doing wonderful work with teenage mothers in school, but it makes my heart bleed to think that there are many wonderful things going on that are not getting enough

support. Perhaps it is time for the Government to take a real initiative by trying to bring all of these initiatives together to make it easier.

[67] As the Minister pointed out, much of it is outside his portfolio. However, what discussions are you having and what influence do you have in Westminster? We know that many of the issues are welfare benefit-based. It is a shame, because I know that you and your colleagues are doing your best. However, when you look at the budget—

[68] **Brian Gibbons:** I can see that you are looking at a table—

[69] **Eleanor Burnham:** I am looking at the interesting table on page—

[70] **Brian Gibbons:** I do not have the table that you are looking at. To respond to some of your points, there is a case for better co-ordination, which is why we have established a four-nation group on child poverty across the United Kingdom with officials from all of the jurisdictions coming together to pool knowledge and expertise in relation to child poverty activities.

[71] Notwithstanding that, I am not sure that I fully agree with the points that you are making, because we realise that, if we are to tackle child poverty, we must tackle the areas that have not been tackled up to now. For example, you could integrate the Flying Start programme with something else, but I think that you would lose the whole point of the Flying Start programme if you tried to integrate it. One of the great challenges of the Flying Start programme was to maintain the intensity of support for those 17,000 or 18,000 most vulnerable children in Wales. You could spread that money to 50,000 or even 70,000 children, but the point is that there was a clear commitment that, okay, it was only 17,000, but the investment in those 17,000—who were identified as being in absolutely the most vulnerable communities—would be intense and substantial in order to make a real difference.

[72] Equally, I am not sure that I agree with you with regard to the development of the integrated family support services. You mentioned teenage mothers with particular problems. The concept behind the integrated family support services is to work with those particularly vulnerable children before the wheels come off the wagon; that is, before their lives fall apart, and if they have children, their lives fall apart. The integrated family support service aims to work on the experience of programmes such as On Track, Option1 and so on, which have been operating in Wales and have been subject to evaluation on the basis of the evidence. They do not solve every single problem, but we know from the evidence of the evaluation that they can make a difference for the better. We are trying to target these bespoke programmes at the most vulnerable children and families so that their life chances will be improved and, in the long run, to tackle child poverty.

[73] **Eleanor Burnham:** For many of them, the money is not really there. The parenting co-ordinator that I mentioned said that she has insufficient funds and that, although she sees many of the girls, she is unable to get at the fathers. Obviously, it takes two to tango.

[74] **Brian Gibbons:** That is where Flying Start comes in. Chair, I know that we are wandering all over the place.

[75] **Ann Jones:** I was just thinking that, and I was going to pull you back to the budgets.

[76] **Brian Gibbons:** With regard to whether we are going to reach the child poverty targets—and it is important to know what the commitment is beforehand—the Assembly Government is committed to working with the UK Government to deliver on these targets. We are not so naive as to assume that a Welsh Assembly Government, on its own, will ever deliver on child poverty targets. We would be setting ourselves up to fail and beating

ourselves up unnecessarily if we were to pretend that we were going to do that. However, we can make a difference to children's life chances. We do not have all of the answers, but we can make a massive contribution in many areas, and we have to concentrate on that.

[77] In the last couple of rounds of budgeting from Westminster, an extra £950 million has been put into the budget specifically to target child poverty. This is why child benefit for the first child has gone up £20 and why some of the income-related benefits available, such as child maintenance, are being disregarded. So, a range of adjustments to the benefits system has taken place to target the individuals that you are talking about. I agree with you that it is possible to target a Flying Start area, if you want to call it that, but that there could be a person living in the next street who is outside a Flying Start area and who will not benefit. However, they will benefit from the extra money that the UK Government has given, for example, for child benefit, because that is on a child-by-child case.

[78] **Bethan Jenkins:** I want to move on to migrant workers. You are aware of our review, because you gave evidence as part of it. Could you expand a bit on where you see the money being allocated in the budget for community cohesion, specifically in relation to migrant workers? As we learned from the committee's investigation, many local authorities are put in a high-pressure position during different time periods because they have an influx of workers from European countries. Have you considered allocating an emergency fund, or will you consider this in future budgets if there are any additional pressures on local government with regard to migrant workers?

10.20 a.m.

[79] **Brian Gibbons:** The community cohesion strategy that you mentioned is important. Hopefully, the first completed draft will be available before too long. In some regards, we are struggling to keep it up to date, particularly in relation to eastern European workers. As you will realise, the changing economic circumstances in western Europe mean that issues that may have been relevant six or nine months ago will not be so relevant now. There is certainly anecdotal evidence of people migrating back to their own countries, particularly those working in the construction and hospitality sectors. These are less attractive sources of employment, and it is difficult to get work in those areas. Those countries of origin are often engaged in an active recruitment and come-home programme, so migrant workers feel a pull from their own country as well as a push from here.

[80] The community cohesion strategy recognises the importance of promoting diversity in Wales, as well as recognising that there are social and economic drivers that could split communities apart. The draft strategy is not finished, but it will contain mechanisms by which local authorities and community safety partnerships can profile their areas. That kind of population profiling can then be used to anticipate pressure points for community cohesion. Some work has been done on this in England, particularly by the police, and we are trying to capture that in the strategy so that local authorities and community safety partnerships can use it. It should give them an overview of their area, and help them to identify the potential points of tension. They will then be able to put measures in place.

[81] That is one purpose of the strategy, but another is to try to prevent us from reaching those pressure points in the first place. We need to promote Wales as a culturally diverse country. This report from the Equality and Human Rights Commission is interesting in the context of Bethan's questions.

[82] **Bethan Jenkins:** Does the current budget contain sufficient funding for community cohesion, or will it come in line with the next strategy?

[83] **Brian Gibbons:** We have put more than £200,000 into the budget to develop the

community cohesion strategy, and that is as far as we have got. However, other factors contribute to community cohesion, such as the nature of the labour market, housing, access to education, courses in English for speakers of other languages, and so on. We have looked at translation services and are considering programmes to promote them. However, we put £200,000 in specifically for community cohesion, and we are developing the strategy as a first step in bringing all of this together.

[84] **Bethan Jenkins:** Just to clarify, do you believe that that amount of money is enough to weather the storm? I know that some migrant workers will go back to their country of origin.

[85] **Brian Gibbons:** That depends on how big the storm is, and so on.

[86] **Bethan Jenkins:** Well, I should not call it a storm.

[87] **Brian Gibbons:** If there was a substantial storm, the £200,000 would not be adequate, but the purpose of the strategy is to prevent the storm, not to react to it. That is the whole point. If the purpose of the community cohesion strategy was to address conflict or storms, to use that metaphor, we would be targeting it in the wrong way. We have to stop storms from happening.

[88] **Ann Jones:** Nick and Eleanor will ask questions on migrant workers, and then Joyce has a question on a separate issue.

[89] **Nick Ramsay:** You will be pleased to hear that I will stick to the budget this time, Chair. Following on from Bethan Jenkins's point, you said in your answer, Minister, that we are where we are, regarding the £200,000 that you mentioned. When will you have a fuller picture on whether that money will be available?

[90] **Brian Gibbons:** The money will be available to develop the community cohesion strategy. We are in the process of writing up that strategy, and once we are happy, at a Government level, there will be a consultation on it, and that will take us into the next financial year. That is what the £200,000 is for—getting the strategy out there, and working with various partners on promoting it. As part of the strategy, activities will follow across the various public services, and third sector and private sector organisations. The money will not necessarily come entirely from the Assembly Government; as you know, all public bodies have equality duties and should be promoting diversity in their own right, so this should be a mainstream activity for them. However, the community cohesion strategy should give a focus to that work in a way that is not currently possible, and hopefully the action plan that is linked to the strategy will give real practical guidance to public bodies on contributing to community cohesion. As I said earlier, if there are potential flash points, it will be possible to identify them and put in remedial work before the storm brews.

[91] **Eleanor Burnham:** Is the £200,000 for the strategy money that would be used to help local authorities to monitor the numbers and locations of migrant workers? The one thing that struck me from the word go, when we were working on our report, was that the Office for National Statistics does not have a clue who is here, or where they are. As you rightly pointed out in your preamble, it is important to know where migrant workers are, so that provision can be made.

[92] **Brian Gibbons:** You are right, and it is difficult to track migrant workers. There is a workers registration scheme, and we have national insurance numbers, and so on, but, by and large, that kind of information tells you about people who arrive, and is not much good at telling you about people who leave. The action plan linked to the community cohesion strategy tries to suggest other ways in which that information could be collected, and it lists a

range of sources of information. They will not be perfect, as it is not an on-the-spot census. However, at least it tries to suggest possible sources for public bodies to pick up that information, and develop the most informed view of the make-up of their communities. Do you want to chip in, Heulwen?

[93] **Ms Blackmore:** I just want to mention that I have been involved with the steering group on the community cohesion strategy, and we have already identified where some of the funding will go. Some of it will go to existing projects, and, as you are probably aware, some has already gone to the extreme, sharp end of community cohesion, with some work around—

[94] **Eleanor Burnham:** Will that information be available to the committee, so that we can see where this money is being spent?

[95] **Ms Blackmore:** That information is in the public domain, because, as the Minister approves the money, it is published on the website.

[96] **Brian Gibbons:** I have one other point, Chair. I know that time is slipping by—

[97] **Ann Jones:** It is, and Joyce also has a question, but go on.

[98] **Brian Gibbons:** The promoting equality fund also goes to community groups across Wales, to encourage them to engage in a range of projects. That money mainly goes to diverse ethnic minority groups, women's groups, and so on, right across Wales, and it makes a significant contribution at grass-roots level.

10.30 a.m.

[99] **Joyce Watson:** I know a little about the money that you have just talked about. I want to move us back to the draft budget, which is where we should be, and to the older people's services spending programme area. I have looked at it, and I have a few questions. The key point is that, over time, the older people's services SPA reduces by 12.3 per cent to £4 million in 2009-10 and by a further 38.8 per cent, £25 million, in 2011. The obvious question is what will the impact be on older people in Wales of the reduction in funding available for the implementation of the older people's strategy and for the office costs for the Commissioner for Older People in Wales?

[100] **Brian Gibbons:** I was getting a bit worried about your question, because I am not familiar with that budget line in my portfolio, but now that you have come to the end of your question, I think that that it must come under the social services SPA.

[101] **Ann Jones:** Yes, I think that it does.

[102] **Brian Gibbons:** I think that Gwenda Thomas has made a statement on the older people's commissioner, so perhaps your questions could be directed to her.

[103] **Joyce Watson:** Okay, thank you.

[104] **Ann Jones:** We are out of time, but I have one last brief question on a hobby-horse of mine, namely polling stations and ensuring disabled access to them. How confident are you that the moneys that will go to local authorities will be spent on electoral registration and arrangements, and that disabled access to polling stations will allow those who want to attend polling stations to do so and to vote despite their disability?

[105] **Brian Gibbons:** I suppose that the committee has probably looked at the most recent Electoral Commission report on the running of, I think, the last local government elections in

Wales, which was published recently. I think that it reported an improving position, and part of the report dealt with access. I cannot remember the precise detail, but I remember looking at that part of the report as I knew that I would be appearing before the committee and I wanted to get a feel for the issues involved. I thought that the report was encouraging, even if there was room for improvement—as there clearly would be. I thought that the message from the report was that people appreciated the importance of a greater awareness of the need to ensure that everyone can be democratically involved. I was encouraged, without being complacent.

[106] **Ann Jones:** Thanks for that. I just could not let you go without mentioning polling stations. Thank you, Minister, for coming in to go through the draft budget with us and straying into other areas. We are very ill-disciplined on this committee, but it is all in the interests of the public good. I believe that you will be with us at our next meeting on 6 November, when you will talk about equal pay and accessibility to polling stations.

[107] **Brian Gibbons:** Never a dull moment. [*Laughter.*]

[108] **Ann Jones:** We look forward to seeing you on 6 November. Thank you for your time.

10.34 a.m.

**Ymchwiliad i Faterion sy'n Effeithio ar Bobl Hŷn yng Nghymru:
Cylch Gorchwyl a Galw am Dystiolaeth
Inquiry into Issues Affecting Older People in Wales:
Terms of Reference and Call for Evidence**

[109] **Ann Jones:** We need to agree the terms of reference and a list of consultees for our next inquiry, which is into home maintenance and adaptation services for older people. Paper 2 is relevant here.

[110] While you are looking at that, I wish to say that I will propose that we move into private session at the end of the committee meeting, to discuss what we are going to put in writing to the Finance Committee on what we have heard from the Minister on the draft budget. However, we are still in public session at the moment.

[111] Is everyone happy with the terms of reference for the inquiry into home maintenance and adaptation services for older people?

[112] Someone speak to me.

[113] **Joyce Watson:** Yes.

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

[115] **Ann Jones:** Thank you.

[116] **Joyce Watson:** I will speak to you, Ann. I am happy with the terms of reference. The second bullet point—waiting times for disabled facilities grants and the installation of adaptations—is something that we need to address very quickly. So, I am glad to see that as part of the inquiry, and we need a commitment that timely adaptations will be delivered. In Pembrokeshire, for example, the timeframe is over 1,000 days, and I remember working it out that the average wait is more than 200 days. Some people are waiting a couple of years, and that is having an impact on other budgets.

[117] I congratulate you, Chair, for putting this inquiry at the forefront of our work, where it clearly belongs.

[118] **Ann Jones:** I only wanted you to agree the terms of reference. [*Laughter.*]

[119] **Joyce Watson:** I think that it is brilliant.

[120] **Ann Jones:** Thank you.

[121] **Eleanor Burnham:** Obviously, we also congratulate you—

[122] **Ann Jones:** Okay, let us get back to real business. [*Laughter.*]

[123] **Eleanor Burnham:** To be serious, I presume that we will be looking at installations and applications from people in all kinds of homes. Obviously, they are older people, but will we be looking at it regardless of where they live?

[124] **Ann Jones:** Yes.

[125] **Eleanor Burnham:** I thoroughly agree about the importance of this. Forgive me for saying this, but, unfortunately, by the time the adaptations are to be done, people have often died.

[126] **Ann Jones:** Absolutely; that is what we will be looking at, and then we will try to make some recommendations.

[127] So, are committee members happy with the draft terms of reference, the consultation letter at Annex A and the list of consultees at Annex B?

[128] **Joyce Watson:** May I add a consultee to the list?

[129] **Ann Jones:** Yes.

[130] **Joyce Watson:** I wish to add the Wales Women's National Coalition.

[131] **Ann Jones:** That is fine. Thank you. Does anyone else have any bids? If, over the weekend, at 3 a.m. on Saturday, someone pops into your head whom you think should be consulted, make a note of it and let Rita or Tom know, so that we can add them to the list.

[132] **Eleanor Burnham:** I would be very surprised if you had left anybody out.

[133] **Ann Jones:** Is that all right with everyone?

[134] **Nick Ramsay:** What timescale are we looking at for this?

[135] **Ann Jones:** We are asking for written evidence by Friday 19 December.

[136] **Nick Ramsay:** I ask because we were going to do a number of shorter investigations were we not, rather than one long one?

[137] **Ann Jones:** Yes.

[138] **Bethan Jenkins:** Are they going to come together at the end or will they be individual inquiries?

[139] **Ann Jones:** I think that we will do individual ones, and we may then link them together in one final report. I think that that is what we agreed,

[140] **Bethan Jenkins:** Sorry. I was not here at the time.

[141] **Ann Jones:** No, that is fine. I believe that we agreed to do a series of short reports, come up with some recommendations, but then link them into one main report at the end. We can discuss that at the time. If there is something that we feel really cannot wait until we have done the three or four bits, and that we want the Government to take action on pretty quickly, we could always produce that as a mini report.

[142] **Bethan Jenkins:** I wish to put on record that, because of the current financial crisis, I would like to do something as soon as possible on fuel poverty and how it is affecting older people. I know that this is also an important issue but I would like to do that as soon as possible.

[143] **Ann Jones:** Okay. We will do that.

[144] **Joyce Watson:** I am not certain that another committee is not already doing that, and there is little point in our duplicating its work.

[145] **Ann Jones:** It is the Sustainability Committee. Ask whether you can give evidence; that option is available to all Members.

[146] **Bethan Jenkins:** Thank you.

[147] **Ann Jones:** So, we are happy with that.

10.39 a.m.

Cynnig Trefniadol Procedural Motion

[148] **Ann Jones:** I propose that

the committee resolves to exclude the press and public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order No. 10.37(vi).

[149] I see that the committee is in agreement.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion carried.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 10.39 a.m.
The public part of the meeting ended at 10.39 a.m.*