



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

**Yr Is-bwyllgor Datblygu Gwledig
The Rural Development Sub-Committee**

**Dydd Iau, 24 Ebrill 2008
Thursday, 24 April 2008**

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

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

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Alun Davies	Llafur (Cadeirydd yr Is-bwyllgor) Labour (Sub-committee Chair)
Michael German	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru (yn dirprwyo ar ran Mick Bates) Welsh Liberal Democrats (substitute for Mick Bates)
Alun Ffred Jones	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Brynle Williams	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Janice Gregory	Aelod Cynulliad, Llafur (yn dirprwyo ar ran Lorraine Barrett) Assembly Member, Labour (substitute for Lorraine Barrett)
John Clifford Jones	Prif Swyddog, Age Concern Gwynedd a Môn Policy Officer, Age Concern Gwynedd a Môn
Victoria Lloyd	Pennaeth Materion Cyhoeddus a Chyfathrebu, Help the Aged Cymru Head of Public Affairs and Communication, Help the Aged in Wales
Michelle Matheron	Swyddog Polisi, Age Concern Cymru Policy Officer, Age Concern Cymru
Ana Pazalon	Cyfarwyddwr, Help the Aged Cymru Director, Help the Aged in Wales

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

Joanne Clinton	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Claire Morris	Clerc Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 1.48 p.m.
The meeting began at 1.48 p.m.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Alun Davies:** Diolch yn fawr am eich presenoldeb. Yr ydym wedi derbyn ymddiheuriadau gan Mick Bates a Lorraine Barrett. Croesawaf Mike German a Janice Gregory, sydd yn dirprwyo drostynt y prynhawn yma.

Alun Davies: Thank you for your attendance. We have received apologies from Mick Bates and Lorraine Barrett. I welcome Mike German and Janice Gregory, who are substitutes for them this afternoon.

1.49 a.m.

**Papur Cwmpasu ar yr Ymchwiliad Arfaethedig i Ddeiseb P-03-089 ar Ysgolion
Cymunedol Powys**
**Scoping Paper on Proposed Inquiry into Petition P-03-089 on Powys Community
Schools**

[2] **Alun Davies:** Yr ydym wedi derbyn deiseb gan ddeisebwyr ym Mhowys yn trafod ysgolion yng nghefn gwlad. Paratowyd papur gan wasanaeth ymchwil yr Aelodau, a fydd yn cael ei gylchredeg i Aelodau y prynhawn yma. Hoffwn ofyn i Aelodau am sylwadau. Os oes sylw gennych, e-bostiwch ni a chawn drafodaeth ar hynny yn ystod yr wythnos nesaf.

Alun Davies: We have received a petition from petitioners in Powys with regard to rural schools. The Members' research service has produced a paper, which will be circulated to Members this afternoon. I would like to ask Members for their comments. If you have any comments, please e-mail us and we can have a discussion on that over the next week.

[3] **Alun Ffred Jones:** A ydych yn bwriadu e-bostio'r papur?

Alun Ffred Jones: Do you intend to e-mail the paper?

[4] **Alun Davies:** E-bostiwn y papur atoch y prynhawn yma. Mae gennym gopiâu caled ar gael, a byddant yn cael eu cylchredeg ar ddiwedd y cyfarfod. Hoffwn ofyn ichi anfon eich sylwadau ar y papur cyn diwedd yr wythnos nesaf drwy e-bost, os yw hynny'n bosibl. Os bydd problem neu anghytundeb ar y papur, cawn drafodaeth arno yn y cyfarfod nesaf.

Alun Davies: We will e-mail the paper to you this afternoon. We have hard copies available, and they will be circulated at the end of the meeting. I ask you to send your comments on the paper before the end of next week by e-mail, if possible. If there is a problem or disagreement on the paper, we will discuss it at the next meeting.

1.50 p.m.

**Ymchwiliad i Dlodi ac Amddifadedd yn y Gymru Wledig—Sesiwn Dystiolaeth ar
Bobl Hŷn**
**Inquiry into Poverty and Deprivation in Rural Wales—Evidence Session on
Older People**

[5] **Alun Davies:** Yr wyf yn croesawu'r pedwar tyst i'r cyfarfod. Gofynnaf i chi gyflwyno'ch hunain ar gyfer y Cofnod a dweud ychydig eiriau er mwyn trafod rhai o'r materion y bu ichi eu codi yn y papurau ysgrifenedig yr ydym wedi cael y cyfle i'w darllen dros y dyddiau diwethaf.

Alun Davies: I welcome the four witnesses to the committee. I ask you to introduce yourselves for the Record and say a few words to discuss some of the issues that you have raised in the written papers that we have had the opportunity to read over the past few days.

[6] **Mr Jones:** Fy enw i yw John Clifford Jones, prif swyddog Age Concern Gwynedd a Môn. Yr wyf hefyd yn gydawdur yr adroddiad ysgrifenedig a ysgrifennwyd ar y cyd â Phrifysgol Bangor. Mae llawer o'r wybodaeth a gasglwyd gan Age Concern wedi deillio o'r wybodaeth a geir yn yr adroddiad hwn.

Mr Jones: I am John Clifford Jones, chief executive of Age Concern Gwynedd a Môn. I am also the co-author of the written report that was jointly written with Bangor University. Much of the information collated by Age Concern derives from the information included in this report.

[7] **Ms Matheron:** I am Michelle Matheron, policy officer with Age Concern Cymru. I will highlight a few of the key issues that we think are the main points from our submission, which gives the background information. We are pleased that the committee has chosen to look in particular at the issues facing older people in terms of poverty in rural areas, in terms of lack of financial resources but also poverty by lack of opportunities for education, social activities, lack of access to public services, information and advice and transport issues. Those are some of the key issues that the committee should take on board.

[8] In particular, I wish to highlight access to local services and to post offices. The closure of post offices is something that Age Concern has campaigned on for a long time, and we have also written a number of consultation responses and submissions on it; it is certainly close to the hearts of the older people who contact us. Our research shows that 76 per cent of people over the age of 65 in Wales use their post office at least once a week, and in rural areas that percentage is even higher—it is 81 per cent in Gwynedd. Post offices are key to rural communities, particularly where the post office may also be the local shop. The closure of that service would have significant implications for older people.

[9] Transport is another issue that I wish to highlight. Transport is key in enabling older people to remain independent, to socialise, to access hospital appointments, to visit friends and so on. Many older people tell us that, while concessionary bus fares are welcome, the bus services in their area are not appropriate or accessible.

[10] Finally, on financial issues, costs can be much higher for older people in rural areas, in terms of shopping for day to day items and also for fuel and transport costs. There is a big issue in that regard around access to information and advice on benefits. Age Concern has a lot of experience of doing this locally, but our information and advice services are currently quite badly underfunded. There is a need to look at the role of the voluntary sector in providing information and advice to older people, and the knowledge and experience that they have of providing that service in rural areas.

[11] **Ms Lloyd:** I am Victoria Lloyd, head of public affairs and communications for Help the Aged in Wales. We have also provided a written submission. Many of the issues have been reflected in what Michelle has just said, but Ana will give you a brief overview.

[12] **Ms Palazon:** I am Ana Palazon, director of Help the Aged in Wales. Help the Aged is an international charity that works in Wales and across other countries, fighting to free disadvantaged older people from poverty, isolation and neglect. We research the needs of older people in Wales and in the UK, but also overseas, and we campaign for change in policy. Much of the data that we have collated to provide information to this inquiry emanate from our research and, particularly here in Wales, from our community development work undertaken directly with older people. So, we have provided evidence based on anecdote and on much more robust research.

[13] We will echo and complement the evidence that our colleagues in Age Concern Cymru present. We will also be looking at issues to do with fuel poverty, as we think that that is a particularly important aspect of rural poverty in Wales. We will also be looking at some of the strategic solutions that we feel have helped and could help, as well as focusing on older people's civic participation in finding those solutions.

[14] **Alun Davies:** We very much appreciate those opening comments and the written evidence that you provided. I will allow Members an opportunity to ask you questions on individual subjects to explore some of these issues in more depth. We will start with Janice Gregory.

[15] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you all for attending today, and for your written evidence. I am substituting on this committee today for a colleague. Having read the written evidence, and from experiences that all Members have in their constituencies, we know that there is evidence of poverty and deprivation in urban areas as well as in rural areas, but, obviously, this inquiry is about rural areas. To a certain extent, you have answered the question that I was going to pose to you, but I am sure that you would like to take a second bite at emphasising the issues that you feel particularly affect older people in rural areas.

[16] **Alun Davies:** Who would like to answer that?

[17] **Ms Matheron:** I will start.

[18] To go for some headline issues, I would mention a lack of services and a lack of access to services. Issues of loneliness and isolation, which the report that we submitted does try to make clear, are very separate things, as you can be isolated but not lonely, and you can be lonely but not isolated, or you can be both. Also, there is the increased cost of living in a rural area, such as not being on a mainline supply for fuel. On transport, many older people in rural areas actually own their own car, because that is the best way for them to participate and access services, so it may appear that they are not really using public transport, but it is almost as though they have not had much of a choice, and that is why they use a car. An issue does then arise if they are unable to continue to use their cars, or if one half of a couple passes away, leaving the other much more socially isolated.

[19] In terms of services, there are two points. One is accessing things such as hospital appointments, GP visits and the sorts of services that people need to remain healthy. The other concerns the softer side of things, such as social interaction, education opportunities and being able to get out and about to meet people. Those two things need to go hand in hand. I would say that significant investment is needed in preventative services. That is about trying, at an early stage, to help people who live in rural areas to remain independent and to continue with their social interactions, so that they do not then need more acute services or perhaps need to move into residential care or more intensive hospital-type services. Investment in prevention can be hard to evidence, but it is lacking, and it would benefit older people in rural areas greatly to have that investment.

[20] **Alun Davies:** Would you like to add to that, Mr Jones?

[21] **Mr Jones:** Un o'r pethau anodd i bobl sy'n byw yn y wlad yw cael gwasanaethau. Yn fwyfwy, gwelwn ei bod yn anodd i wasanaethau statudol a gwirfoddol ddarparu'r gwasanaethau hynny, oherwydd bod llai o bobl yn barod i weithio am gyflog neu'n wirfoddol, felly mae hwnnw'n cael effaith hefyd.

Mr Jones: One of the difficulties for people who live in rural areas is accessing services. Increasingly, we see that it is even more difficult for statutory and voluntary services to provide those services, because fewer people are prepared to work for a salary or on a voluntary basis, so that also has an effect.

2.00 p.m.

[22] Mae llai o bobl yn disgwyl cael gwasanaeth, ac, er bod yr asiantaethau yn ceisio darparu'r gwasanaethau hynny, nid ydynt yn gallu cael digon o wirfoddolwyr i wneud y gwaith. Mae'n bosibl y bydd y sefyllfa'n gwaethygu gan fod llai o bobl ifanc yn gweithio yn yr ardaloedd hynny a mwy o bobl hyn yn byw yno, felly mae'n anodd i'r

Fewer people expect to receive services, and, even though the agencies try to provide those services, they cannot get enough volunteers to come to do the work. It is possible that the situation will deteriorate, because fewer young people work in these areas and more older people live there, so it is difficult for those people to access the services that they

bobl hynny gael y gwasanaethau y mae need.
arnynt eu hangen.

[23] **Alun Davies:** Does anyone want to add anything before we move on to the next issue?

[24] **Ms Lloyd:** May I talk a little about transport? Michelle mentioned the high number of people who have cars in rural areas, but the point that we would make is that the cost of running a car has increased. A high proportion of older women still do not drive, which can leave them isolated and deprived, particularly if they are bereaved and widowed.

[25] I would echo the need to invest in preventative measures, and I would also throw into the mix the issue of housing in rural areas. There is a lack of extra-care housing and local care homes for people, as well as care homes in a community so that people can be either relatively close to their own home, or close to a community that they can still interact with.

[26] We also included in our submission information on the number of homes in rural Wales that are still without basic amenities. Through the rest of our response, we talk about how these factors are hidden, because older people in rural Wales may know that those factors exist, but they have coping mechanisms to hide the factors from investigations and surveys, and even from the public at large.

[27] **Alun Davies:** To move things on, the Welsh Assembly Government has produced many different initiatives and strategies that are targeted at older people, and could you give us your view on the effectiveness of these strategies and initiatives, particularly on how they impact on and improve the lives of older people in rural areas?

[28] **Ms Palazon:** The first initiative that comes to mind for us is the strategy for older people, which was launched in 2003. I will start with a critique of why problems of rural poverty and deprivation have not been solved and then look at the positives.

[29] One aspect of the strategy for older people that failed to offer a solution to rural poverty is the lack of data from which we can start to measure whether rural issues have been tackled. It was meant to be a strategic approach to solving many of the issues faced by older people in urban Valleys and rural areas, but, to start with, we do not have the baseline data.

[30] Secondly, there was no focus on rurality per se as part of the strategy, and we also lack the longitudinal studies that would give us an indication of whether the strategy has been effective in tackling the issues that we have addressed through our responses.

[31] The other part of the problem is that, by and large, the strategy for older people has been implemented on a project-based approach. So, local authorities have been given investment through dedicated funding and have, in turn, developed projects but have not necessarily worked at a strategic level. Another problem that has been alluded to is the fact that the strategy's funding has been allocated to local authorities using a formula based on population numbers, but we all know and have discussed here that providing services in rural areas is more expensive than providing them in urban areas. Therefore, if a funding formula is based on population number, it does not take into account the additional cost of meeting needs in rural areas.

[32] Having said all that on the negative side, the positive side is that there is a strategic approach to working to tackle the issues of discrimination and disadvantage that older people face across Wales, and some initiatives, although they are set up on a project basis, give us a lot to learn from. The renewed phase 2 of the strategy will give local authorities an opportunity to do more work across borders, more strategically. We have acknowledged that

the second phase of the strategy gives us an opportunity to work more strategically and to look more specifically at the problems of rural life.

[33] **Ms Matheron:** I just quickly want to add that there are a number of strategies that tick the boxes on this work. There is the strategy for older people, and I know that a financial inclusion strategy is now being developed. Both our organisations, from the beginning of the strategy for older people, have been keen to stress that older people's issues are not just about health and social care, and the Welsh Assembly Government has made some progress in trying to make local authorities think about that, and to think about that itself. The solutions to issues around rural deprivation for older people are not just about one particular strategy that comes under one department; it is important that the social justice, health and social care, education and transport departments and local authorities take a co-ordinated approach to this. Each of those departments has to see this as its issue. Only then can it really be solved across the board.

[34] **Ms Palazon:** Could I just come back on the positives? Another initiative that the Welsh Assembly Government has been developing is the single equalities scheme. We welcome that with open arms, because we believe that, if services across Wales—and particularly in rural areas—are equality-proofed and age-proofed, we will start to remove the barriers that are preventing older people from leading fulfilled lives, and that will apply equally to rural and urban areas. However, given the particular disadvantages that rurality brings, and looking at the age-proofing and equality-proofing of services, there are definitely some welcome initiatives coming from the Welsh Assembly Government.

[35] I also believe that the Assembly Government should consider approaching pensioner poverty and the rurality issue in a similar way as the approach taken to child poverty. They could be treated in a similar way. We know that the UK Government has pledged and committed to eradicate child poverty by 2020. Here in Wales, the Assembly has put a positive duty on public bodies to promote the eradication of child poverty, and we believe that the same approach should be taken to pensioner poverty across Wales.

[36] **Michael German:** The questions that I want to ask follow on from the question that you just put, which is about whether the overarching strategy for older people—the one that we are looking at here—pays enough attention to issues of rurality. I want to push you a little more, Ana, if I may, because I think that you were saying that it does not distinguish in that regard, because we do not collect the information. Therefore, you could see it as an all-Wales strategy, but you could not see anything specific to rural areas in it. Did anything come out of the first phase that led you to believe it should be addressed in the second phase? Was there any information coming out of the first phase that should have put the pressure on, and indicated that more work needed to be done in a certain area? If so, was it addressed? Are we likely to see anything special in the second phase of the strategy to address differences in rural areas?

[37] **Ms Palazon:** One particular issue that came across persistently during the first phase was transport, and so access to services in rural areas, although it is a problem that can affect urban areas. The introduction of free bus passes highlighted how even a very successful and welcome initiative was not much use in areas where there are no buses. So, one policy area that was highlighted during the first phase was the provision of integrated, accessible and affordable transport, particularly for rural areas, and that was taken through to the second phase.

2.10 p.m.

[38] We had an example during the first phase of the strategy when funding was made available for buses and community transport services across Wales, and we believe that there

is still much that can be done in that area, through phase 2. I think that that has been acknowledged, but it is a wider problem because the lack of integrated transport in rural areas affects people of all ages. That has definitely been looked at, and I believe that it will be worked on during phase 2.

[39] **Michael German:** May I turn the question on its head? If you think that that has been or will possibly be taken up in phase 2, what is not included in phase 2 that you would like to see, in respect of older people in rural Wales?

[40] **Ms Palazon:** The strategy takes a national approach, but it has to be given to localities to deliver. I would want to see a more strategic approach in phase 2 after it has been devolved to the local level. Local problems require local solutions, and those solutions will vary. However, if we continue to work using a project-based approach, we will have come up with some solutions that will have helped some people, but we will not have solved the problems in a strategic way and, in 10 years' time, we will still be talking about the same problems of rurality.

[41] We need a more strategic approach to tackling isolation. The fact is that younger people are moving away from rural areas and older people are staying, without having the necessary networks and support mechanisms. I think that the intergenerational aspect of the work that the strategy for older people is promoting during phase 2—and there is renewed emphasis on intergenerational work—will also be critical in helping to maintain those networks. We need to start moving away from thinking about people only and think in a much more community-based way.

[42] In my view, the strategy for older people is fundamental in tackling age discrimination and creating a level playing field for older people. However, at the same time, we are at risk of compartmentalising them and not moving towards accepting that older people are also members of the community; they have to interact, and they are at the receiving end of what happens in any community. For example, there is one issue that can help to highlight this. We are all familiar with the number of people who retire from other parts of Great Britain to Wales, and we know the reasons for that, in that, up until now—although that may be changing soon—the cost of housing is cheaper here and Wales has a beautiful countryside. We also have a problem in that the incomers who settle in Wales do not communicate through Welsh, and so cannot integrate with the indigenous Welsh-speaking communities. We have evidence of this from the areas where John works particularly: indigenous Welsh-speaking communities may be marginalised, but the English-speaking retirees are also not integrated. As we know, women live longer than men, and so situations then arise of women being widowed without having integrated in their new community; they do not drive and so they become far more isolated, away from their families and their networks, and that is when health and mental health problems start to develop.

[43] What I am trying to highlight is that the strategy for older people will be effective in tackling some issues, particularly age discrimination, but the wider problems have to be tackled at a national strategic level, in the context of other strategies and not just that for older people.

[44] **Alun Davies:** Thank you. Would anyone like to add anything to that?

[45] **Michael German:** Yes, just that that concluded the strategy issue, because there are clearly gaps and you have outlined the changes that you would like to see in the strategy. May I address another issue that relates to rural Wales, namely pensioner poverty? We know that 20 per cent of pensioners are living in relative income poverty in Wales. We know that more older people live in rural Wales than in urban Wales, therefore, you would assume that there is more poverty in rural Wales. First, do you agree with that, and, if that is the case, what do

we do about the problem in rural Wales of pensioners not taking up pension credit, which is the supplementary support that you might expect them to pick up, and who should help in this matter?

[46] **Mr Jones:** Mae dwy neu dair ffordd o edrych ar hyn. Yn gyntaf, yr ydym wedi ceisio cael pobl allan yn y gymuned i fynd i weld a thargedu pobl y gwyddom eu bod yn byw ar ben ei hun. Mae'n bwysig i gael canolfannau, ond, mewn ardaloedd gwledig, pan ydym yn sôn am bobl ag anableddau, pobl sydd yn methu mynd allan, a phobl nad ydynt yn gwybod beth yw eu hawliau, mae'n bwysig fod staff neu wirfoddolwyr yn gallu mynd i'w hymweld yn eu cartrefi. Cawsom gefnogaeth gan Help the Aged i sefydlu'r cynllun ac mae wedi dod â thua £1.5 miliwn o arian ychwanegol i mewn i'r ardal dros y tair neu bedair blynedd diwethaf. Golyga hynny bod pobl yn cael annibyniaeth, a'u bod wedyn yn gallu dewis pa fath o wasanaethau y maent eu heisiau a pa fath o wasanaethau y maent eisiau prynu i mewn i fod yn fwy annibynnol. Unwaith eto, mae'r math hwn o wasanaeth yn costio llawer mwy na'r gwasanaeth lle mae pobl yn galw i mewn.

[47] Un o'r pethau da arall sydd wedi digwydd yw'r bartneriaeth rhwng asiantaethau fel ni a'r gwasanaeth pensiwn. Mae gennym syrjeri dwywaith y mis i bobl i ddod i mewn, yn ychwanegol at yr ymweliadau cartref. Mae'n rhaid cofio bod angen gwneud mwy o ddefnydd o fudiadau gwirfoddol. Yn aml, mae pobl hŷn yn fwy barod i ymweld â gwasanaethau gwirfoddol gwahanol megis Cyngor ar Bopeth, Age Concern a mudiadau arall sydd yn gweithio gyda gofaldwyr ac yn y blaen. Felly, mae angen sicrhau bod pobl yn gwybod am y gwasanaethau hyn. Mae cyrraedd y boblogaeth sydd yn byw yno yn anodd, ac efallai bod angen defnyddio dulliau gwahanol. Mae gan y rhan fwyaf o bobl ffôn a gallwch eu ffonio, ond mae hefyd angen defnyddio gwybodaeth cymunedau lleol—mae grwpiau bach lleol ym mhob ardal sydd yn gwybod am bobl sydd mewn angen.

[48] Mae hefyd gan y bobl hyn y dewis i dderbyn neu wrthod gwasanaeth, ac mae gan y wasg le i fod yn fwy cadarnhaol o ran gadael i bobl wybod bod arian ar gael i'w cynorthwyo ac nad ydynt yn begera o'i gymryd. Mae pobl hŷn, yn draddodiadol,

Mr Jones: There are two or three ways to look at this. First, we have tried to get people out into the community to visit and target the people that we know are living alone. It is important to have centres, but, in rural areas, when we are talking about people with disabilities, people who cannot go out, and people who do not know what their rights are, it is vital that staff or volunteers can visit them in their homes. Help the Aged gave us support to establish the scheme and it has brought around £1.5 million in additional funding into the area over the past three or four years. That means that people are given independence, and that they can then make choices as to what type of services they require and what type of services they want to buy in to be more independent. This kind of service costs far more than the drop-in service.

One of the other positive developments is the partnership between agencies such as us and the pension service. We hold a drop-in surgery twice a month, in addition to the home visits. It must be borne in mind that more use should be made of voluntary organisations. Older people are often more willing to visit different voluntary organisations, such as Citizens Advice, Age Concern and other bodies that work with carers and so on. So, we need to ensure that people are aware of these services. Reaching out to the population living out there is difficult, but perhaps we need to use different methods. Most people will have telephones, and you can phone them up, but we also need to use local communities' knowledge—there are small local groups in every area that know who has need of services.

People also have the option to take up or reject a service, and the press could be more positive in terms of letting people know that funding is available to assist them, and that they are not asking for charity if they take it up. Traditionally, older people have been

wedi arfer â thalu ffordd, ac mae arnynt dipyn bach o gywilydd i ofyn am help. Fodd bynnag, nid cardod mohono, mae'n arian sydd ar gael iddynt. Mae angen inni gael y negeseuon cadarnhaol hynny allan i'r bobl yn y gymuned.

[49] **Brynle Williams:** Dyna'n union yr hyn a oeddwn am ofyn. Mae pryderon fel arfer gan bobl sydd yn byw mewn pentrefi, yn enwedig yr henoed, bod cywilydd yn hyn o beth. Yn y syrjeris, a ydych wedi gweld bod pobl yn cymryd mantais ohonynt a dod i mewn i eistedd a siarad yn breifat gyda chi? Mae'n wahanol os ydynt yn gorfod teithio i'r dref, pan maent yn meddwl bod elfen o gywilydd yn perthyn i hyn. Fodd bynnag, fel y dywedaso, dyna yw eu hawliau nhw, nid oes cywilydd yn perthyn iddo o gwbl.

[50] **Mr Jones:** Y peth pwysig yw eu bod yn teimlo'n llawer brafiach yn trafod hyn yn eu cartref eu hun, a hefyd eu bod yn teimlo ei fod yn hollol gyfrinachol, ac yn gwybod y bydd yn mynd dim pellach, a'u bod yn gallu derbyn yr hyn sydd yn ddyledus iddynt. Efallai bod hefyd angen edrych—ac efallai bod hyn yn fater i'r Cynulliad ac i'r Senedd yn Llundain—ar wneud y broses yn llai biwrocraidd, fel bod llai o waith llanw ffurflenni. Gellid cael un ffurflen ar gyfer gwahanol fathau o fudd-daliadau, fel nad oes yn rhaid i rywun gael gwahanol bobl i ymweld â hwy. Mae angen gwneud y peth yn llawer mwy syml fel bod pobl yn fwy parod i ofyn am help.

2.20 p.m.

[51] **Alun Ffred Jones:** I fynd yn ôl at bwynt Mike German ar greddyd pensiwn, mae'r ffigurau sydd gennym fan hyn yn awgrymu bod llawer llai o bobl yn derbyn credyd pensiwn yng nghefn gwlad nag mewn ardaloedd trefol, ac yn arbennig o'i gymharu â'r Cymoedd, fel y cânt eu diffinio. Yr ydych wedi awgrymu mai un rheswm am hynny yw bod pobl un ai â chywilydd neu nad ydynt yn gwybod am eu hawliau. Ai dyna'r rheswm, neu a yw pobl yng nghefn gwlad, at ei gilydd, yn well eu byd na'r rheini yn yr ardaloedd trefol?

[52] **Mr Jones:** Nid wyf yn credu bod pobl yn well eu byd yng nghefn gwlad. Yr

used to paying their own way, and they can feel some shame about asking for help. However, this is not charity, this is funding that is available to them. We need to get those positive messages out to the people in our communities.

Brynle Williams: That is exactly what I was going to ask. People who live in villages are usually worried, especially older people, that this is shameful. In the surgeries, have you seen that people take advantage of the opportunity to come in to sit down and talk to you privately? It is different if they have to travel into the town, when they feel that there is something shameful about this. However, as you said, these are their rights, and there's no shame in this at all.

Mr Jones: What is important is that they feel far more comfortable discussing this in their own homes, and that they also feel that it is completely confidential, and know that it will go no further, and that they can take what is rightfully theirs. Another thing that may need to be looked at—and perhaps this is a matter for the Assembly and for the Parliament in London—is making the process less bureaucratic, so that there is less form filling to do. There could be one form for various kinds of benefits, so that people do not have to have visits from several people. We need to simplify the system much more, so that people are more willing to ask for help.

Alun Ffred Jones: To return to Mike German's point on pension credit, the figures that we have here suggest that far fewer people receive pension credit in rural areas than in urban areas, especially when compared with the Valleys communities, as they are defined. You have suggested that one reason for that is that people are either ashamed or are unaware of their rights. Is that the reason, or are people in rural areas, on the whole, better off than those in urban areas?

Mr Jones: I do not believe that people are better off in rural areas. What happens is that

hyn sy'n digwydd yw bod pethau'n cael eu cuddio fwy yn y wlad, felly nid yw pobl yn gwybod. Mae'n siŵr bod pobl dlawd yn y byd amaethyddol, ond mae pawb yn meddwl bod pob ffermwr yn gyfoethog—

things are hidden in rural areas, so people do not know. I am sure that there are poor people in the agricultural industry, but everyone thinks that every farmer is affluent—

[53] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Fel Brynle Williams?

Alun Ffred Jones: Like Brynle Williams?

[54] **Mr Jones:** Efallai ei fod yn eithriad. [*Chwerthin.*]

Mr Jones: He might be an exception. [*Laughter.*]

[55] Mae pobl sy'n byw ar eu pennau eu hunain yn dawel, ac ddim yn barod i ofyn am help.

There are people who live alone, quietly, and are unwilling to ask for help.

[56] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Yr wyf eisiau pwyso arnoch ar y pwynt hwn. A oes gennych brawf mai dyna yw'r gwir, ynteu meddwl hynny ydych chi?

Alun Ffred Jones: I want to press you on this point. Do you have proof that that is the case, or do you just think that it is?

[57] **Mr Jones:** Mae gennym brawf, oherwydd pan ydym yn ymweld â phobl, a phan ydym yn cael y budd-daliadau hyn i bobl, yr ydym yn sylweddoli yn aml y dylai pobl fod wedi cael y budd-daliadau hyn rhwng pum a 10 mlynedd ynghynt. Maent wedi colli allan yn aml, yn enwedig os ydynt yn gofalu am bobl. Yn y trefi, mae gwasanaethau yn nes at bobl, ac mae mwy o asiantaethau yn barod i'w helpu, ond nid yw pobl yn barod i deithio. Dyna pam ei bod mor bwysig bod asiantaethau yn ymweld â phobl yn eu cartrefi.

Mr Jones: We have proof, because when we visit people, and when we acquire these benefits for people, we realise often that people should have received these benefits between five and 10 years earlier. They have often lost out, particularly if they are carers. In towns, services are closer at hand, and there are more agencies willing to help people, but people are unwilling to travel. That is why it is so important that agencies visit people in their own homes.

[58] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Mae tystiolaeth bod incwm pensïynwyr yn is ar y cyfan yng Nghymru nag yn Lloegr. Yr wyf braidd yn amheus o wneud cymariaethau syml rhwng Cymru a Lloegr, felly a oes tystiolaeth yn eich adroddiad—ac nid wyf wedi ei ddarllen, er ei fod gennyf—bod incwm pensïynwyr yng Ngwynedd a Môn, er enghraifft, yn is nag yn ardaloedd cyfatebol yn Lloegr, nid Lloegr yn gyfangwbl?

Alun Ffred Jones: There is evidence that pensioner income is lower on average in Wales than in England. I am somewhat dubious about making simple comparisons between England and Wales, therefore is there evidence in your report—and I have not read it, although I have a copy—that pensioner income in Gwynedd and Môn, for example, is lower than in similar areas in England, not England as a whole?

[59] **Mr Jones:** Yn y gwaith ymchwil yr oeddem yn ei wneud, yr oeddem wedi hyfforddi pobl hŷn i wneud y gwaith. Yr oedd pobl yn llawer mwy parod i ddweud wrth eu cyfoedion am eu problemau. Yr hyn yr oeddem yn ei weld oedd bod llawer o bobl weddw neu wedi ysgaru mewn llawer gwaeth cyflwr na phobl â phartner, neu ŵr, neu wraig, gan bod mwy o incwm yn dod mewn.

Mr Jones: In the research that we conducted, we trained older people to carry out that research work. People were far more willing to explain their problems to their peers. What we saw was that many widowers or divorced people were in a far worse state than those who had a partner, a husband or a wife, because there was more income coming in. For people living alone, the costs of

I bobl sy'n byw ar eu pennau eu hunain, mae'r costau o gynnal cartref yn llawer uwch. maintaining the home are much greater.

[60] Mae pris olew wedi codi bron i 85 y cant ers diwedd y flwyddyn ddiwethaf. Mae pobl yn dod atom ar hyn o bryd yn dweud, 'Yr ydym wedi gorfod newid ein harcheb sefydlog o £40 y mis i £160 y mis'. Pan ydych yn cymharu'r incwm sy'n dod mewn â'r arian sy'n mynd allan, mae'n dangos y broblem. Felly, mae gennym brawf bod pobl yn llawer mwy tlawd yng nghefn gwlad. The price of oil has increased by almost 85 per cent since the end of last year. People are coming to us at present saying, 'We have had to change our standing order from £40 a month to £160 a month'. When you compare the income coming in with the money going out, it demonstrates the problem. Therefore, we have proof that people are much poorer in rural areas.

[61] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Diolch yn fawr. **Alun Ffred Jones:** Thank you.

[62] **Alun Davies:** Ms Palazon, did you want to come in on that?

[63] **Ms Palazon:** Yes, thank you. I just want to emphasise that there is research that demonstrates that older people in rural areas are reluctant to be dependent on the state and have also adapted to relative levels of hardship, living with less and playing down that hardship. That, in itself, will affect the living standards to which people aspire. The lack of social housing in rural areas also means that there is less access to information about the benefits that are available and benefit take-up. That also exacerbates poverty among older people in rural Wales.

[64] **Brynle Williams:** I am very disturbed by what you said about this alarming increase in the cost of central heating fuel alone and about what will happen. As you rightly pointed out, it has gone up £220 per 1,000 litres since Christmas alone in my particular area. I, like everyone else here, know of people who are having to decide whether to eat or heat. It is as simple as that. I do not know how you are going to address this problem. It is about trying to get over to these people that help is available, but how we do that, I do not know.

[65] **Ms Palazon:** There is another problem that has been developing recently. We only have anecdotal evidence of it, and I do not know how much other colleagues have come across it, but crime is increasing in rural areas in terms of siphoning off fuel from people's properties. That has become a problem of late.

[66] **Alun Davies:** We are familiar with that in Ceredigion.

[67] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Yr ydych wedi sôn am un agwedd ar y problemau sy'n wynebu'r henoed mewn ardaloedd gwledig, sef unigrwydd a'u bod nhw'n bell oddi wrth wasanaethau, er eich bod yn dweud y gallwch fod yn unig er eich bod yn nghanol pobl; nid yw'n dilyn eich bod yn unig oherwydd eich bod yn byw yn bell oddi wrth bobl eraill. Beth yr ydych yn meddwl y dylid gwneud er mwyn trio ymateb i'r broblem honno o bobl yn teimlo eu bod nhw ar eu pennau eu hunain ac yn bell oddi wrth wasanaethau? **Alun Ffred Jones:** You have referred to one aspect of the problems facing older people in rural areas, namely loneliness and the fact that they are far away from services, although you say that someone can be lonely in the middle of people; it does not follow that you are lonely because you live far away from other people. What do you think should be done in order to try to respond to that problem of people feeling that they are on their own and are far away from services?

[68] **Ms Matheron:** Age Concern was involved with some research with the Mental Health Foundation on what leads to positive mental health in later life. Two of the things that came out from that is that social isolation in itself is a big risk factor for a whole range of

mental health problems, and the other is that participation in meaningful activity is key to good mental health. Some of the things that can be done to counter loneliness and isolation are about being able to be involved in something that you want to be involved in within your community. One issue that older people contact us quite regularly about is the lack of lifelong learning services in their community. The lack of funding for lifelong learning provision is a big issue at the moment for older people. It means that either the lifelong learning options that are presented are only things such as information technology, because that is what is perceived to be the need, or the costs are too high for people to be able to engage in courses. There needs to be a range of provision. In rural areas, this is even more of an issue because you cannot lay on a whole range of services as you might be able to in Cardiff, but being able to provide people with some sort of activity that they actually want to do is key to helping people to engage.

[69] Also key are services such as those which Age Concern run around befriending, good neighbour schemes and so on, which give people places to interact, and which are not necessarily labelled as 'come and have some social interaction; it is good for you'. I was talking about post offices earlier. They are key meeting places for people; they are seen as community hubs, as are lunch clubs and day centre services. People might go there to get a meal, but what they also get is 10 or 15 different conversations and interactions. Therefore, funding for those services, and thinking imaginatively about what those services could look like in responding to local needs, are key in terms of helping people to remain socially active, and giving them reasons to get out of bed in the morning.

2.30 p.m.

[70] **Ms Lloyd:** To add to what Michelle said, older people are the prime supporters of other older people, so it is about providing those sorts of opportunities, and those befriending services, so that they can get out and interact. While they may require low levels of funding, they do require funding.

[71] **Alun Davies:** There was an objective in the Welsh Assembly Government's strategy for older people to increase engagement with older people, and to empower older people. How successful do you believe the Welsh Assembly Government has been in stimulating that sort of empowerment? Again, we are discussing the rural context here. Do you believe that there have been differences in how successful the Welsh Assembly Government strategy has been in stimulating empowerment and participation in decision making in rural and more urban areas?

[72] **Mr Jones:** Mae'r strategaeth wedi ein helpu i gryfhau'r fforymau ar gyfer pobl hŷn. Mae'r fforymau hynny wedi galluogi pobl i ddod at ei gilydd, ac wedi rhoi cyfle hefyd i bobl mewn ardaloedd gwledig, gan ein bod wedi rhoi cyfle iddynt ddod mewn bysus neu geir i sicrhau eu bod yn gallu cyrraedd y cyfarfodydd hyn. Nid oes diben cael cyfarfodydd heb wneud yn siŵr y gall y bobl hyn gyrraedd, a sicrhau eu bod yn cael y pŵer yn eu dwylo eu hunain.

Mr Jones: The strategy has helped us to strengthen the fora for older people. Those fora have enabled people to come together, and have also given people from rural areas an opportunity, because we have given them the opportunity to come in buses or cars to ensure that they are able to get to these meetings. There is no point in having a meeting unless we can ensure that people can get to that meeting, and also ensure that they have the power in their own hands.

[73] Mae'r adroddiad yr ydym wedi ei baratoi yn esiampl o sut yr ydym wedi defnyddio pobl hŷn i wneud y gwaith hwn. Mae hyn yn unigryw, ac yn wahanol i unrhyw beth arall sydd wedi cael ei wneud; y

The report that we have prepared is an example of how we have used older people to carry out this work. This is unique, and it is different to anything else that has been done; it is the older people themselves who have

bobl hŷn eu hunain sydd wedi rhoi'r gwaith hwn at ei gilydd, ac wedi gwneud y gwaith.

put this work together, and who have done the work.

[74] Yn ei dro, yr ydym yn defnyddio'r gwaith hwn fel math o lawlyfr ar gyfer rhoi pethau yn eu lle yn ein hardal. Mae Cyngor Gwynedd a Chyngor Sir Ynys Môn yn edrych ar yr hyn sydd wedi ei grybwyll yn yr adroddiad hwn er mwyn symud ymlaen. Mae hynny'n grymuso pobl hŷn, gan fod y syniadau sydd wedi cael eu canfod yma yn cael eu gweithredu ar lawr gwlad. Dyna mae pobl hŷn eisiau ei weld—nid ydynt eisiau gweld rhywbeth symbolaidd; maent eisiau gweld rhywbeth y maent hwy wedi ei roi at ei gilydd yn cael ei weithredu, ac maent yn gweld fod hynny'n gwneud gwahaniaeth iddynt.

In turn, we are using this piece of work as a kind of handbook in order to get things in place in our own area. Gwynedd Council and the Isle of Anglesey County Council are looking at the issues mentioned in the report in order to move forward. That empowers older people, because the ideas uncovered here are being implemented at grass-roots level. That is what older people want to see—they do not want tokenism; they want to see something that they have put together being implemented, and they then see that that makes a difference to their own lives.

[75] Yr ydym hefyd yn defnyddio gwestai lleol mewn ardaloedd gwledig i gynnal gofal dydd, clybiau cinio a gweithgareddau eraill. Mae hynny hefyd yn helpu'r economi leol; wrth ddefnyddio'r gwestai hyn unwaith neu ddwy yr wythnos, mae hynny'n cadw pobl mewn gwaith yn yr ardaloedd hynny hefyd.

We also use local hotels in rural areas for daycare centres, lunch clubs and other activities. That also helps the local economy; using these hotels once or twice a week keeps people in work in those areas too.

[76] Mae ffyrdd eraill hefyd o gael gwasanaethau i bobl. Ar un amser yr oedd gennym fws cinio a oedd yn mynd i saith gwahanol ardal wledig. Yn anffodus, oherwydd nad oedd digon o gyllid i gario ymlaen, yr oedd yn rhaid i ni ddod â'r gwasanaeth hwnnw i ben. Fodd bynnag, yr oedd hwnnw yn ffordd o fynd â gwasanaeth i gymuned anghysbell, ac o ddod â phobl at ei gilydd; hwy oedd yn dod â'r gymuned at ei gilydd.

There are other ways also of getting services to people. At one time we had a lunch bus that would go to seven rural areas. Unfortunately, as there was not enough funding to continue, we had to bring that service to an end. However, that was a way of taking services to remote communities, and of bringing people together; it was they who were bringing the community together.

[77] Felly, mae enghreifftiau cadarnahol o sut i weithredu, ac i newid sut yr ydym yn rhoi gwasanaeth i bobl.

Therefore, there are positive examples of how to take this forward, and to change how we provide services to people.

[78] **Alun Davies:** A yw strategaeth y Llywodraeth wedi bod yn llwyddiannus o ran cyflawni'r amcanion y mae wedi eu gosod ar ei chyfer ei hun?

Alun Davies: Has the Government strategy been successful in achieving the targets that it has set for itself?

[79] **Mr Jones:** Credaf ei fod yn rhannol gyfrifol am rai o'r llwyddiannau. Fodd bynnag, mae pethau eraill y gellid eu rhoi yn eu lle. Y broblem fwyaf yw nad oes digon o gyllid i gyflawni'r hyn yr ydym eisiau ei gyflawni. Dyna yw byrdwn pawb sy'n dod atoch i siarad mae'n siŵr, ond dyna yw'r

Mr Jones: I believe that it is partially responsible for some of the successes. However, there are other things that could be put in place. The major problem is a lack of adequate funding to achieve what we would like to achieve. That is what everyone tells you, I suppose, but that is the truth in this

gwir yma hefyd.

case as well.

[80] **Alun Davies:** Felly, yr ydych yn credu bod y strategaeth yn iawn, ond bod angen mwy o flaenoriaeth ariannol.

Alun Davies: Therefore, you think that the strategy is fine, but that it needs greater financial priority.

[81] **Ms Palazon:** With regard to participation and the civic engagement of older people as a result of the strategy, there is a varying picture across Wales. We have examples where that very activity existed before the strategy. We have a history of independent fora, which have existed in various parts of Wales and which have successfully campaigned and influenced the local authorities to improve services, such as local transport and so on. On the other hand, we have this varying picture, but we do not have a consistent research base to tell us whether or not the strategy has succeeded in that target. I maintain that the reason for that, partly, is that, when local authorities were charged with looking at the establishment of older people's fora, they were not given consistent guidance as to what that meant and what the reason for that was. Was it empowerment, like you so acutely emphasised, or was it basically just about ticking boxes and saying, 'I have consulted' and not moving things on? There is a varying picture across Wales.

[82] With regard to rural areas, one of the barriers to preventing fora from developing in a vibrant way is access to transport, which has been highlighted. When that is resolved, activity and action happens. Another barrier is disposable income, because participation costs in terms of time, commitment and money. The sparsely populated nature of some communities in Wales has also made it difficult to have vibrant fora, because so very few people can get engaged in making things happen. However, there are certainly initiatives. Help the Aged has a 10-year programme of forum development and we have also worked very closely with local organisations, such as Age Concern in Gwynedd. We have supported developments, and we are particularly working in rural west Wales, where we are encouraging and supporting the development of fora that want to communicate primarily through the medium of Welsh, because that is something else that we have identified that has not developed at the same rate as English or bilingual speaking fora. The picture varies across Wales, and one thing that has been undertaken as part of phase 2 of the strategy for older people, going back to the questions that Mike German posed earlier on, is that the Minister has taken into account that more robust or consistent guidance on what fora were to be set up for is going to be developed during the second phase. That is something to be welcomed.

[83] **Ms Matheron:** Briefly, one of the ways in which older people are empowered is through fora and that decision-making process. One thing that is often mentioned to us is the importance of feedback. For example, when older people take the time and make the effort to contribute, whether it is very locally, or in some sort of national consultation exercise, they should actually see their suggestions being turned into changes and feel that they are getting some feedback from the process. It only takes one bad experience of that to make someone think it is not worth doing.

[84] The other issue, which I believe the second phase of the strategy is focusing on, is around recognising the contribution of older people, and not just assuming that, once everyone is retired, they sit there just wanting to enjoy their rural community. It is about recognising the role of older people as contributors to the economy, both as older workers and as carers and volunteers. In terms of empowering people, one of the things that is really important is that, when people make a contribution, it is recognised. It is about helping them to carry on making that contribution, which can keep them socially active and healthy.

2.40 p.m.

[85] **Ms Palazon:** Something else that the second phase of the strategy will be enabling us

to focus on is to engage with people who are currently completely outside the process of influencing local services decisions. People who reside in care homes are one clear example. That work is being developed, as a statement at a strategic level, as well as through agencies such as ours; we will be working to bring in people who are currently disengaged.

[86] **Alun Davies:** I have an additional question on that. You mentioned in an earlier reply that you see these fora, in some cases, as simply box ticking, and going through a process. Could you expand on that, and perhaps discuss why that is? Is it a cultural issue, where authorities are providing the service but are just not used to consultation working with people? Or is it a sense that, as an Assembly Government, there has not been full involvement in the determination of the policy or the strategy, and, as a result, people do not feel that they are a part of it?

[87] **Ms Palazon:** It is a combination of things. We have had examples of good practice in some local authorities. It is all to do with cultural issues. Local authorities hold a great amount of power and decision making in their localities, and some local authorities have provided services in a paternalistic way. In other local authorities, there has been an open way of approaching what the strategy calls for, and they have worked closely with older people, with a commitment to possibly sharing power. That is what participation is about—it is about being able to make decisions and influencing those decisions, thereby taking the balance of power more to the people.

[88] We have had commitment from some local authorities. For example, we have been able to pilot participatory budgeting, and we are promoting that with regards to strategy moneys, where older people should be having a say in directing how the funding is spent. Some other local authorities have found it challenging to have their own citizens telling them how they see the future, and have placed the decision-making process much more on the professionals—such as ourselves, who represent organisations working with older people—and have, in that process, excluded the real decision-making empowerment of older people.

[89] It has been a process of challenging cultural ways of doing things, and it will take time to do that. Some local authorities have had a real commitment in involving older people in the appointment process of strategy co-ordinators, and in developing the strategic plan; other local authorities have closed the doors, but have ticked the boxes having undertaken consultation on minor issues.

[90] **Janice Gregory:** An emerging theme from the evidence that this committee has gathered, and from your evidence this afternoon, is how crucial transport is. I believe that we all—as you did in your opening remarks—applaud the Welsh Assembly Government's concessionary fares scheme, which has proved to be hugely successful in all parts of Wales. However, the statistics are worrying; they show that there is a higher proportion of older people living in rural Wales, but a lower take-up in those local authorities of the concessionary fares. How could that be improved? I have a supplementary question to that, on an issue that you have all touched on in your evidence. What alternatives can you think of that would give older people in rural areas better access? That was also mentioned in your written evidence.

[91] **Ms Matheron:** On the bus situation, we welcome the concessionary fares, and they have been well received among older people. Looking at phase 2 of the strategy, in terms of what has worked well and should continue, that was one of the issues that older people were keen on.

[92] On bus services, one thing that has emerged is that, if you are going somewhere for the day, for a social event, from a rural area—maybe just for a visit, or a social trip to look around—using the bus service is probably appropriate and it will get you to where you want

to go. If you have some flexibility, it is fine, and that is good as it means that older people can take those sorts of trips. However, when you need to rely on those services for hospital or hairdressing appointments, or anything for which you need to be on time and you will probably only attend for half an hour before you need to return home, the bus service is not appropriate, as you may have to wait four hours before you can catch a bus back.

[93] Some other comments that came out of the report concerned the accessibility of buses. People were saying that they were not using them because of the bus times, but because they cannot get on the bus. Mention was also made of the lack of bus shelters or information about the services, including how frequently they run, and of whether that information was reliable. Older people are less likely to want to change appointments: they want to stick to things and want to be able, in essence, to honour their commitments and so they do not like to think that they might be late, especially to hospital appointments. In certain areas covered by the report, some people lived 50 miles away from a hospital.

[94] Therefore, generally, for things like days out, the bus schemes can work, but the problems arise when there are appointments to be kept. In that respect, access to hospital transport facilities is the key, as is actual knowledge about them. The report said that people did not know that there was a service that would help them to get to a hospital appointment. When people are sent a letter about a hospital appointment, does the letter tell them that there might be support or help available for them to get to that appointment? If not, perhaps it should.

[95] **Ms Palazon:** One possible reason for the low take-up of the concessionary fares scheme in rural areas is the fact that private transport is more prevalent in rural areas because it is a necessity. It could very well be that people are already relying on their own private transport to move from A to B. Another aspect that may be considered is that the low take-up may be in some areas where community transport is working at its best. Powys, for example, is the largest rural authority in Wales, and community transport serves the needs of the people who are living in rural areas. So, that could be another element affecting the low take-up of concessionary fares.

[96] I have a record here of an initiative that we developed a few years ago when working in partnership with Age Concern Gwynedd and Môn. To exemplify what Michelle was saying a moment ago with regards to public transport and hospital appointments, I have four scenarios of bus journeys that were taken by older people to visit a spouse who was ill in hospital. Journey 1, departing from Bryncreg and arriving at Aberystwyth, achieved only one hour and 47 minutes of visiting time, but took six hours and 47 minutes of travel. Journey 2 was again from Bryncreg to Aberystwyth; it achieved two hours and nine minutes of visiting time, but took a total of seven hours and 10 minutes' travel. There are two more examples. It is exhausting. Older people told us not only to look at the integration of transport, because you may have better connections, but also to analyse whether visiting times, for example, could be modified to coincide with bus journeys. There is a need to look more strategically across services, not only at transport and the integration of buses, trains and community transport, but at the other services that people need to access.

[97] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Mae'n rhaid i mi adael mewn munud. I fwrw ymlaen â'r sylwadau am gynlluniau trafniadaeth cymunedol—a, gyda llaw, tystiolaeth Help the Aged sy'n cyfeirio at fodel Powys—yr oeddwn yn meddwl, Gadeirydd, efallai y dylem wahodd pennaeth yr asiantaeth sy'n gweithredu'r cynllun hwn i'r pwyllgor. Mae'n rhaid i chi wneud ceisiadau am

Alun Ffred Jones: I will have to leave in a minute. To continue with the comments made about community transport schemes—and, by the way, it is the evidence of Help the Aged that refers to the Powys model—I was thinking, Chair, that perhaps we should invite the head of the agency that operates this scheme to the committee. You must make bids for schemes. You referred to one

gynlluniau. Yr ydych yn cyfeirio at un cynllun, Drws Agored, a oedd yn Nefyn. A wyf yn iawn i ddweud bod y cynllun hwnnw wedi methu â denu arian dwy neu dair blynedd yn ôl, ac felly nad ydyw bellach yn gweithredu fel ag yr oedd?

scheme, Drws Agored, which is based in Nefyn. Am I right in saying that that scheme failed to attract funding two or three years ago, and so it is not operating in the same way as it did?

2.50 p.m.

[98] **Ms Pazalon:** No, on the contrary; it was a successful scheme, which demonstrated the value of community development. The history of that scheme was that everyone was completely disenchanted with the local authority and so Drws Agored rolled up its sleeves and said that it would deliver the service itself.

[99] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Maddeuwch imi. Yr oedd y cynllun yn un llwyddiannus iawn, ond methodd yn ei ymdrech i gael arian grant dwy neu dair blynedd yn ôl. Bûm yn ymwneud â'r cynllun, a bu'n rhaid iddo dynnu'n ôl o'i weithrediadau ym Mhen Llŷn ar y pryd. A wyf yn iawn? Wel, gwn fy mod yn iawn, oherwydd bûm yn ymwneud â'r cynllun.

Alun Ffred Jones: Forgive me. The scheme was indeed very successful, but it failed in its bid for grant funding two or three years ago. I was involved with the scheme, and it had to withdraw from its operations in Pen Llŷn at the time because of that. Am I right? Well, I know that I am right, because I was involved with the scheme.

[100] **Ms Pazalon:** I appreciate what you are saying, but the scheme is still running and we are still helping it to acquire another vehicle. The group may have failed with that particular bid, but it did not fail with other bids. The value of taking a community development approach is that you do not become grant dependent; you develop a social enterprise and alternative solutions. There was a significant problem of rural isolation in that case, and I can guarantee you that the scheme continues and is still up and running.

[101] **Alun Ffred Jones:** Yr ydych yn nodi yn eich tystiolaeth,

Alun Ffred Jones: You state in your evidence,

[102] 'However, these are not consistent throughout rural Wales.'

[103] **Ms Pazalon:** No, absolutely. You are right, they are not.

[104] **Alun Ffred Jones:** A fedrwch ddarparu gwybodaeth inni—ac efallai nid heddiw ond ar ôl y cyfarfod—am yr ardaloedd hynny nad ydynt yn cael y gwasanaethau hynny? Mi fyddai hynny o gymorth inni.

Alun Ffred Jones: Could you give us some information—and not necessarily today, but perhaps after this meeting—about those areas that are not receiving those services? That would be of assistance to us.

[105] **Alun Davies:** Byddai'n help mawr pe baech yn medru gyrru nodyn ysgrifenedig atom ynghylch hynny.

Alun Davies: It would be of great assistance if you could send us a written note in relation to that.

[106] **Janice Gregory:** May I just go back to something that you said in answer to my question? I think that it was Ana who mentioned the access to visiting hospitals. Have you, as organisations, approached the trusts and the local health boards to ensure that this information is given to older people, and to work with them to see whether there is any flexibility on arranging hospital appointments and other issues? If not, do you intend to? If so, what was the response?

[107] **Ms Pazalon:** We work closely with independent older people's fora, and we know of some that have done precisely that, and tried to co-ordinate services, but it has not been done at the strategic level, I do not think. We have done it on a case-by-case basis, but it deserves consideration in that respect. It is a perennial challenge that health and social care do not necessarily co-ordinate, are we really going to achieve co-ordination between health and transport? It is an interesting challenge that needs to be tackled. We have heard of examples of hospitals providing free transport for their patients, but that is not consistent. We were discussing earlier an example in Newport, south Wales—which, admittedly, is not a rural area—and that scheme is very successful, but there is inconsistency in some parts of rural Wales as to who is served by the free transport and how often.

[108] **Ms Lloyd:** On transport, I just want to flag up the alternatives to bus travel. We talked about older people's difficulties in getting on and off buses, and their anxiety about using them, for example, because of the fear of encountering anti-social behaviour. UK colleagues have looked at alternative concessions, perhaps in the form of tokens that can be spent on other forms of transport, such as taxis, trains, where available, or other means of community transport, which would apply to the example on travelling to hospital appointments. So, we are not just looking at bus services, but at transport in a wider context. That would also help the interchange.

[109] **Mr Jones:** One thing that you mentioned was how we could improve the take-up. One suggestion in our report was to try to get the bus companies to set up a lobby group or a users' group, so that they can talk to those who are using the buses. Perhaps then they could try to get to grips with those who are not using the buses to identify why not. We have heard that, in rural areas, people are using their cars because they have to, and they have done so traditionally. However, the use of cars will become increasingly difficult, because of the prohibitive cost.

[110] **Janice Gregory:** I want to press you a little more on the hospital and there being more flexibility. I am concerned to learn that independent fora are trying to push this point, as it brings to my mind a David-and-Goliath type of battle. We all want to live in a world where a trust would say, 'You are absolutely right, and we will change our policy', but, being a realist, I do not think that is the case, is it? How do your organisations intend to take this forward? In the National Assembly, we have a Minister for Health and Social Services who listens, as I am sure you are aware. It fills me with absolute horror to think of an elderly lady or gentleman having to endure a bus journey of six hours to visit a spouse who is seriously ill in hospital, only to have the trauma of sitting by their bedside, watching someone whom they may have looked after and loved for 40 or 50 years quietly slip away.

[111] I am here as a substitute on this committee—and I will probably never be invited back—but I am concerned about this. How can this committee take that issue forward? It may be a small issue in the bigger scheme of things, but I am sure that, for Mrs Jones in wherever in rural Wales, it would be a massive help to have that flexibility. That is a very important issue for me; probably one of the most important issues to come through.

[112] I understand what you mean, and I think that we can tie that in with the comments made earlier about women in rural Wales who do not drive and who have always depended on their spouse or partner to drive them to places. Once that person is not there, they find themselves incredibly isolated. Before, they could walk out the front door, jump in the car, and be driven about—which is lovely—but they can no longer do that. Chair, I do not want to muddy the waters in any way, but perhaps the committee, or we, as individuals, could take up this issue of flexibility for clinic appointments, within and outside the trust area, with trusts and local health boards.

[113] **Ms Palazon:** I agree with you, and I welcome the opportunity to open this dialogue on flexibility. However, one very good aspect of having a strategy for older people is that it enables us to look at those sorts of problems, which involve more than one area of responsibility. Here, we are talking about health, transport, the environment, and the different responsibilities across different ministerial briefs. What was mentioned a moment ago in relation to Powys community transport is a good example of how you can tackle that issue through collaboration between the voluntary and the statutory sectors, and through thinking imaginatively. It is not just about buses; it is also about minibuses, taxis, token schemes, and going door to door to avoid those horrendous journeys, so that they are not a barrier to being with your loved ones when they most need you.

[114] **Ms Matheron:** As the report pointed out, the services are often there. Perhaps the local health boards and the trusts are providing some services to help people to get to appointments, but they may not be advertising them and people may not know about them. Are they informing all the agencies that they should inform of what services there could be for older people? Perhaps agencies like us can help to get the message across if we are more informed about what is on offer. It would be a shame if those services were available, but no-one was taking them up, and then for people to think that they were not needed.

3.00 p.m.

[115] **Brynle Williams:** To tag on to what Janice said, can you expand on your views on these tokens? I am trying to tie everything together. It relates to a problem that I see at home, and I would appreciate your views on this. Do you have discussions with councils and bus companies? I will briefly cite an example; we had a 15-seater bus that used to go through the village. The driver knew that Mrs Jones wanted to be picked up. All of a sudden, when we had got it working properly, someone decided, 'No, you will have a 52-seater bus that will run every hour instead'. There is no-one on it—we have been talking about resources not being used or being wasted.

[116] **Mr Jones:** Bus companies and service operators should probably be discussing such issues with the users, because it is a pointless exercise otherwise. You are wasting scarce resources by sending out a 50-seater bus that remains empty, when a 12 or 15-seater bus service would do the job, and more people would use it.

[117] **Brynle Williams:** The ladies in rural villages like to go shopping on a certain day, on the market day in Carmarthen, Mold, Chester or wherever, and have a set routine, so it is easy enough to provide the right service. I cannot understand it.

[118] **Alun Davies:** Brynle, did you want to address the role of the voluntary sector?

[119] **Brynle Williams:** Yes. Briefly, what do you see as the role of the voluntary sector in providing relief in rural areas?

[120] **Ms Matheron:** Part of the unique value of the voluntary sector is that, in having a local base, you can be in touch with the needs of local people. One of the issues around trying to tackle deprivation in rural areas is that you need to find local solutions, you need to know who you are dealing with, and you also need to try to work innovatively. Given the right funding, the voluntary sector is well placed to do that. A lot of innovative and good practice has come from the voluntary sector; the problem is trying to find funding for it—and sustainable funding, so that you do not have to write a new funding bid as soon as you have started a project.

[121] In addition, in terms of the information and advice issue that we have been talking about in relation to access to benefits, as John mentioned and our research has shown, older

people are much more likely to want to talk to the voluntary sector than statutory services. One of the issues around joining up services and having one-stop shops, although that can work, and it is great that people can get all of their benefits advice in one place, is that its success can vary depending on the label given to it. The voluntary sector is very much about having a grass-roots presence and being in touch with local needs, and being a trusted service provider. The services that the voluntary sector provides for older people in Wales are vast, and they vary in different authorities and areas because the needs are different, and I think that that is part of the value of the voluntary sector.

[122] **Ms Palazon:** I think that the economy would collapse without the contribution of the voluntary sector. I say that very seriously. To add to what Michelle said with regard to one-stop shops and the linking of provision, which was another aspect of the strategy for older people, that has been a solution for some people, but not for all. If you are receiving benefit advice through the voluntary sector, the likelihood is that, if you have difficulties, you will also receive an advocacy and representation service to follow that, which you will not necessarily get through statutory provision.

[123] **Mr Jones:** We should also look at examples of good practice in rural communities and maybe rolling that out in other areas. For example, our organisation has around 55 over-50s clubs affiliated to us, which cover the whole of both counties, more or less, so we have an input and there are around 7,000 members. So, we can reach older people and get their views. However, we also perhaps need not to take advantage of people's good natures. Everyone is becoming increasingly independent and tends to choose to be in their own homes, and to look at television and so on, so the community spirit of old probably does not exist any more. However, that can be changed around because once you give people incentives, and something that they feel that they can do to help their local neighbourhood, they will get stuck in. We have shown that it can be done in one or two of our projects, so it is not all doom and gloom. However, there is much more that we can do, and if we can replicate good practice in other areas, perhaps we could come to terms with some of the problems facing older people in rural areas.

[124] **Alun Davies:** Diolch yn fawr. Hoffwn ddirwyn y sesiwn i ben yn awr. Diolch am eich tystiolaeth y prynhawn yma—yr ydym yn ei werthfawrogi yn fawr, ac yr ydym yn gwerthfawrogi eich ymdrech wrth baratoi'r nodyn ysgrifenedig ac wrth roi tystiolaeth y prynhawn yma. Bydd trawsgrifiad ar gael o'r sesiwn hon, a gobeithiwn y bydd yn cael ei gylchredeg i chi yn ystod yr wythnos nesaf. Diolch am eich parodrwydd i gynnig tystiolaeth i ni y prynhawn yma.

Alun Davies: Thank you. I wish to bring this session to a close now. Thank you for your evidence this afternoon—we very much appreciate it, and we appreciate the efforts that you have made in preparing the written note and giving evidence this afternoon. A transcript of this session will be available, and we hope that it will be circulated to you next week. Thank you for your willingness to give evidence this afternoon.

[125] Hoffwn ofyn i Aelodau nodi'r papur yr ydym wedi ei dderbyn gan Fforwm Pensiynwyr Cymru, a gylchredwyd i chi. Bydd ein cyfarfod nesaf bore dydd Mercher, 7 Mai.

I ask Members to note the paper that we have received from Pensioners' Forum Wales, which has been circulated to you. Our next meeting will be on Wednesday, 7 May.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 3.06 p.m.
The meeting ended at 3.06 p.m.*