



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

**Y Pwyllgor Craffu ar Waith y Prif Weinidog  
The Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister**

**Dydd Mawrth, 16 Mawrth 2010  
Wednesday, 16 March 2010**

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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**

Sandy Mewies	Llafur Labour
Trish Law	Annibynnol Independent
Darren Millar	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Welsh Conservatives (Chair of the Committee)
Kirsty Williams	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Leanne Wood	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

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

Kate Cassidy	Pennaeth Materion Cyfansioddiadol a Chymorth Polisi, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Head of Constitutional Affairs and Policy Support, Welsh Assembly Government
Tim Jenkins	Swyddog Polisi, Materion Cyfansioddiadol a Chymorth Polisi, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Policy Officer, Constitutional Affairs and Policy Support, Welsh Assembly Government
Dr Tony Jewell	Prif Swyddog Meddygol Cymru Chief Medical Officer for Wales
Carwyn Jones	Llafur, Aelod Cynulliad, y Prif Weinidog Labour, Assembly Member, the First Minister
Neil Jones	Cydlynnydd Cadernid, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Resilience Co-ordinator, Welsh Assembly Government
Wyn Price	Pennaeth Cynllunio at Argyfwng, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Head of Emergencies, Welsh Assembly Government
Marion Stapleton	Pennaeth Busnes Cynulliad a Rheoli Deddfwriaeth, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Head of Assembly Business & Legislation Management, Welsh Assembly Government

**Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol**  
**National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance**

Virginia Hawkins	Clerc Clerk
Meriel Singleton	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 8.31 a.m.*  
*The meeting began at 8.31 a.m.*

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

[1] **Darren Millar:** Good morning, everyone. I welcome Members to the meeting. I also

welcome members of the public, and remind them that headsets for simultaneous translation and sound amplification are available in the public gallery. If anyone has any trouble using these, the ushers will be able to assist. Committee members and members of the public may wish to note that simultaneous translation is available on channel 1, while channel 0 is for the language being spoken. I would be grateful if everyone could ensure that mobile phones, BlackBerrys and pagers are switched off, so that they do not interfere with the broadcasting equipment. If it is necessary to evacuate the room or the public gallery in the event of an emergency, everyone should follow the instructions of the ushers, who will guide you to the nearest emergency exit. Finally, I remind witnesses and Members that the microphones are operated remotely.

[2] I have not received any apologies for this meeting, so we have a full house. I am delighted to welcome the First Minister and some of his officials to today's meeting of the committee that scrutinises his work. The First Minister is joined this morning by Tony Jewell, the Chief Medical Officer for Wales, Neil Jones, the resilience co-ordinator, and Wyn Price, the head of emergencies. Welcome to you all. Everyone has seen the papers that have been circulated for discussion, giving some background on this particular topic, and we have also received your papers, First Minister, which we appreciate. As time is limited, please try to keep questions and answers concise in order that we can get through each of the three items on the agenda.

8.33 a.m.

### **Cynllunio wrth Gefn Contingency Planning**

[3] **Darren Millar:** There was a lot of concern over the winter about the response of Government in Wales at all levels to the adverse weather that we experienced, and many people were asking what lessons had been learned from adverse weather the previous winter, and why measures were not taken as a result. Do you want to respond to that?

[4] **The First Minister (Carwyn Jones):** The first thing to remember is that this winter was unusual in that it was the worst for at least 30 years. Nevertheless, following last winter's weather, advice was given to local authorities that they should carefully examine the stocks of salt that they held. However, due to this year's weather, it is fair to say that the stocks held by local authorities and by us were put under some pressure. What happened was that, during the adverse weather, we were always looking to acquire stocks from elsewhere and, sure enough, we managed to make adequate salt available for local authorities and for the motorway.

[5] It might help if I explain the roles of Government and of local authorities in these situations. We directly procure salt and spread that on the M4 and the M48. That salt is procured from Ireland. All other roads in Wales are maintained and salted by local authorities. Trunk roads are salted by local authorities under agreements with us. Local authorities are responsible, however, for ensuring that they have sufficient stocks in place for those trunk roads, and local roads are maintained, naturally, by local authorities. As the adverse weather continued, there were daily meetings to monitor the situation, not just in Wales but across the whole of the UK, and to ensure that sufficient salt was made available.

[6] **Darren Millar:** Many people, First Minister, were astonished that there was no formal guidance issued to local authorities after the previous winter and the salt shortage across Wales at that time. Why was no guidance issued in the wake of last year's salt shortage?

[7] **The First Minister:** Following the severe weather in February last year, we were involved in discussions with local authorities to promulgate best practice in local authorities'

winter maintenance activities. A review took place at the UK level, and throughout 2009 we took steps to ensure that the winter period of 2010 should pass with minimum disruption. What did that mean practically? Well, it included filling salt barns on the M4 to near capacity to maintain spreading activities on the motorway throughout the winter. We also built in a reserve that was available for distribution to local authorities on a priority basis, and that reserve was used. We also encouraged local authorities to increase their salt stocks and to put in place mutual aid arrangements; many authorities did that. On top of that, we revised the trunk road maintenance manual, which represents best practice on the network in Wales. I think it is fair to say that local authorities responded to that guidance.

[8] **Darren Millar:** There was no formal guidance issued to local authorities.

[9] **The First Minister:** We worked with local authorities in order that they should follow best practice. We ensured that as much of the reserves as possible were made available. As I said, we also revised the maintenance manual, which local authorities should follow and which represents best practice in maintaining the road network in Wales. So, a lot of work was done with local authorities from February 2009 onwards to ensure that they were aware of what the situation might be if the weather worsened. I point to the fact that, even though salt stocks did run low and that across the UK there was a point during the winter when salt production could not keep up with salt demand, roads continued to be salted in Wales.

[10] **Leanne Wood:** You mentioned discussions that you have had with local authorities regarding the road network. Have there been any specific discussions about schools?

[11] **The First Minister:** With regard to schools, local authorities usually require the headteachers of schools to take decisions on whether schools should open or not. It is a decision for the headteacher of a school to take at that time. It is important to ensure children's safety, more than anything else, when taking a decision on whether a school should be open. I am sure that that was what headteachers bore in mind when they were deciding whether their schools should open.

[12] **Leanne Wood:** I would not be critical of headteachers who decided to close schools for health and safety reasons. However, during the bad weather, many parents had to take time off work at very short notice to look after their children, who were off school. Do you think that anything could be done, in terms of issuing new guidance or holding further discussions with local authorities, to ensure that there is some sort of childcare provision in place for next year? Children who are unable to go to their normal place of learning could perhaps go to a community centre or another local school that is staffed by suitably qualified people, who may not regularly work there but who live in the area, so that parents can avoid having to take time off work. As you know, in the current financial situation, many people are nervous about taking time off work, even those who are lucky enough to be able to work, take time off and still get paid. Many people lose pay, but others are nervous about taking time off work because they fear that in a time of job cuts they may be vulnerable. Is there anything that the Government can do to avoid people either having to lose pay or put their jobs in jeopardy?

8.40 p.m.

[13] **The First Minister:** Many of us shared that experience when schools closed. My two children were glued to BBC Radio Wales in the morning and the local radio station, Bridge FM in Bridgend, to learn whether their school was closed or not. It is difficult, because we can always see what could have been done after adverse weather conditions such as those we saw over the past few months. Ultimately, it is a matter for headteachers to decide whether their school should be open or not. If you look at providing childcare in a school setting, that

may not be safe to access either, and I suspect that it can be difficult for local authorities to organise in a situation such as that if they find that their own staff cannot get to a particular centre. We will look at this to see what can be done to make things easier in the form of guidance, but sometimes, on the ground, it can be difficult. I do understand, of course, having experienced it myself, the difficulties that arise for many parents when, suddenly, without warning, a school is closed.

[14] **Leanne Wood:** Are you aware of any guidance in the health authorities that tells staff to go to work at their nearest health centre or hospital during adverse weather conditions?

[15] **The First Minister:** I am not aware of such guidance, but we would always seek to encourage staff to make themselves available, particularly in the health service, where they can.

[16] **Leanne Wood:** Could something similar be worked out for education, so that staff would go to the nearest school? The problem these days is that many members of staff live a long distance away from the school where they work. They could go to the nearest school building on foot, and then provide childcare at that facility. That would take a lot of organising, but is it something that could be looked at?

[17] **The First Minister:** Yes, I think that could be looked at. You are right to say that many teachers will live in a different local authority area to that which they teach in. Co-ordinating all that would be some task, I suspect, but nevertheless we would be prepared to examine that to see whether things can be made easier should we have similar weather conditions next year.

[18] **Darren Millar:** Kirsty, did you want to come in?

[19] **Kirsty Williams:** Yes. Thank you, Darren.

[20] I want to return to the issue of the roads and how that was dealt with. First Minister, could you give us an understanding of the nature of the agreements that exist between WAG and county councils with regard to trunk roads? You said that there is an agreement under which they salt those roads that are to all intents and purposes the Assembly's. What guidance is given to those local authorities with regard to the decisions that they make about salting trunk roads versus their own county roads?

[21] You also mentioned good practice in local authorities. Are you satisfied with the level of collaboration between local authorities in sharing salt supplies and working across county where it was easier for one county to salt the roads of another, given the proximity of their bases?

[22] As for your relationship with national Government, the Salt Cell system kicked in the second week of January. Did your officials have any discussions with the Department for Transport earlier than that to ask for the Salt Cell procedure to be started? Could you give us an understanding of how discussions with the Department for Transport went with regards to Wales getting adequate supplies? Did you get all that you asked for at your first request, or was it necessary for you to make several requests to the Department for Transport before you got the amount of salt that WAG asked for?

[23] **The First Minister:** First, with regard to what local authorities do on their own roads, they are responsible for procuring enough salt to ensure that roads are kept open. Given the adverse weather conditions that we experienced, that was very difficult for a number of local authorities, and it is right to say that on several occasions authorities were within a day or so of running out of salt. That situation never arose, fortunately, but it is nevertheless fair

to say that. Where local authorities are under contract to us, you would expect them to keep those roads open. The trunk roads are the major arteries in Wales, and it is important that they are kept open.

[24] On mutual aid arrangements, such arrangements are in place for local authorities, but it is also fair to say that every local authority was under pressure, and each one found itself in a situation in which its stocks were running low. We were not in a situation where lowland authorities were perhaps experiencing better weather conditions than those topographically higher up.

[25] As for Salt Cell, we were more than happy with the share of salt that we had from Salt Cell. It was never a problem to procure the salt that we needed. I will ask Neil Jones to come in here, as he was the official involved with Salt Cell on a daily basis. Neil, perhaps you would like to give the committee some evidence on how you worked day to day.

[26] **Mr Jones:** We had a Salt Cell meeting twice a week, on a Tuesday and a Friday. That would set the scene for the following week. Initially, the Department for Transport was terribly reluctant to set up Salt Cell because of the burden that placed upon it. However, it quickly became obvious that it had to do it, and we encouraged it to do it. There were good days and bad days as far as deliveries were concerned. The impediments were that there were competing areas around the UK all demanding salt at the same time, the diminution of the salt reserve, which hindered deliveries, and the location of the salt supply itself in a community, with hundreds of trucks queuing up there, so there were difficulties there. However, in fairness, we sought a minimum of 10 per cent and we were getting 15 per cent and even 20 per cent to 25 per cent on some occasions of the salt available in the UK. So, there is no doubt that there were battles, but we came off very well indeed.

[27] **Kirsty Williams:** Given that we have had two winters during which we have experienced these difficulties and, as the First Minister said, in some cases we were down to having a day's supply left in some parts of Wales, does the Welsh Assembly Government intend to do something different in its preparations for next winter?

[28] **Mr Jones:** At the end of last year, which was the worst winter for 18 years, we suggested, along UK lines, that local authorities should hold six days' stock, and they did that. We all agreed that that would have allowed us to cope with last year's event. This year's event was a bit worse. The proposition at the moment is that local authorities should hold 10 days' stock, but that is not settled yet.

[29] **Darren Millar:** You say that local authorities were advised to maintain six days' supply. How is that policed? Do you monitor stock levels in local authorities? Do you know what their priority routes are for gritting purposes?

[30] **Mr Jones:** I cannot answer that question. I do not know. I only step in when it becomes an emergency. Our roads division, which handles that, is not represented here. I am sure that it has a policing system, but I am afraid that I cannot tell you what it is.

[31] **Darren Millar:** As I understand it, First Minister, there is no policing system at all requiring local authorities to report back on their stock levels. In the absence of guidance to local authorities, which tends to motivate them to ensure that there are sufficient supplies, this was a calamity waiting to happen, was it not?

[32] **The First Minister:** No. As Neil said, they are advised how much stock they should keep. However, we should also bear in mind the fact that local authorities have this responsibility, and local authorities are best able to make an assessment of the amount of salt needed for their roads. I think that it is right to say that the amount of salt needed in Powys is

greater than that needed in Merthyr because of their geographies. So, it is for local authorities to make the assessment of how much salt they need. I disagree with the use of the word 'calamity'. That would mean that roads were being closed because they had not been salted, but that did not happen. We were in a situation—

[33] **Darren Millar:** Well, there was a calamity—

[34] **The First Minister:** If I could finish—

[35] **Darren Millar:** There was a calamity in my constituency and in others, where—

[36] **The First Minister:** The situation was that major roads were kept open, at no time did local authorities run out of salt, and, as Neil has already said, we were in a situation where, if we asked for salt, we were provided very generously with salt from UK reserves.

[37] **Darren Millar:** First Minister, you say that there was no calamity, but large parts of Wales were not salted at all. That caused huge interruption to businesses and schools and disruption to the delivery of heating oil to vulnerable households in deep rural areas. It was a calamity of significant proportions, which could have been prevented or dealt with better had there been better supplies of salt in local authorities. However, that is not even monitored by the Assembly Government.

[38] **The First Minister:** I am not aware of any local authority that salts every road in its area. Local authorities work on the basis of salting what they see as their major arteries. It may well be that many roads in Wales were not salted. However, we should make it clear that it certainly is not the case that local authorities salt every single road that they are responsible for; they will seek to salt roads that they see as the important communication arteries in their areas.

8.50 a.m.

[39] **Darren Millar:** Let us discuss in a little bit more detail those people who might be vulnerable when roads are not salted, such as elderly people, those who find it difficult to get out and about, and those who rely on heating oil in deep rural areas. What was done to try to ensure supplies of heating oil to households like that?

[40] **The First Minister:** Where there are difficulties in getting lorries to particular areas, I would expect the companies involved to get in touch with local authorities and explain what the problem is to see if a way can be found to overcome it. However, as I have said, it certainly is not the case, nor has it ever been the case, that every single road is salted. There is a limited amount of salt that can be made available at any one time and it has never been the case that every single road is salted, no matter where it is.

[41] **Darren Millar:** Is anything being done by the Assembly Government to identify vulnerable households in particular in the event of a similar situation developing during future winters?

[42] **The First Minister:** To my mind, it is a matter for local authorities, because they are in the best position to identify such vulnerability. You have not given examples, but where there are examples of people being unable to receive a supply of heating oil, then I would expect companies to get in touch with local authorities and ask for provision to be made so that oil can reach those people.

[43] **Darren Millar:** So, has there been discussion with heating oil companies, for example?



[44] **The First Minister:** I am not aware of any examples where that has happened.

[45] **Kirsty Williams:** Given the fact that local authorities usually make provision—so, for example, if a local authority is aware of an elderly couple who receive social care and the carers cannot attend that property, once it is brought to the attention of the local authority, it will usually make an effort to identify those properties. Similarly with farms that need food supplies or feed stocks to be replenished. Do you issue any guidance at all, or would you consider issuing any guidance to local authorities regarding how they should go about identifying those people ahead of time and, perhaps, how they should be more proactive rather than waiting for calls to come in? The same people will face the most difficulty most years, I would suggest. You would rarely get big surprises. Is there any merit in local authorities trying to get ahead of the game and identifying vulnerable citizens or vulnerable properties and, perhaps, being a little more proactive in ensuring that salt supplies or gritters get out to those areas as well as trying to maintain the network?

[46] **The First Minister:** I think that there is some merit in that. Local authorities will be in a position where they know the people who are receiving social care. That is not something that we would know as a Government, but they would know that. It would be sensible for local authorities to identify such people and to take steps to ensure that, particularly in rural areas, they are helped to receive the assistance that they require.

[47] With farms, it is much the same. Farmers are sometimes in a better position, because they have the vehicles that can get through the snow. I am sure that there are examples of farmers using their vehicles to help others who are in vulnerable situations. So, yes, there is certainly sense in identifying those who might be vulnerable in adverse weather conditions and ensuring that people receive the services that they need.

[48] **Sandy Mewies:** First Minister, you seem to be saying that what will happen in the future is what has happened in the past: there is a clear demarcation of roles regarding who does what. Local authorities have always guarded jealously their rights to carry out services in the way that they have. One of the things that seems to cause a problem is that severe weather cannot be accurately predicted. It is as simple as that. When I was a county councillor, one of the things that we and the local authority had to think about carefully was contingency planning and how much money was put to one side to deal with heavy weather conditions. If you put too much in, you would be taking money from someone else's budget, and if you did not put enough in, then you would be criticised. The inquiries that I have made this year have led me to believe, as you have said, that all 22 local authorities in Wales took a decision to prioritise and most, if not all of them did not salt estate roads, for example.

[49] What I want to do now is to look ahead to what happens next, because it is about the lessons that have been learnt. Every time something like this happens, lessons need to be learnt. One of the things that I wanted to ask was: how do you get your severe weather warnings? Can that be improved in the future? I am not blaming anyone. People who think that weather forecasting is an exact science do not live in the real world. We cannot keep blaming people for this, but it is difficult. Are we now looking at better ways of communicating severe weather warnings and better ways of communicating with local authorities?

[50] I also want to go back to something that Leanne said when talking about schools and medical establishments. Do you agree that the best thing to do may be for people to travel to their nearest school, if they are teachers, and to their nearest medical establishment if they are clinicians or professionals in that sector? However, it may not be, because they may not have any of the skills needed in that establishment—it would be no good for a general nurse to go to a dental practice or for an intensive care unit nurse, a unit which should be protected, to go

into general nursing. That is not what they do. Leanne was talking about—I do not know if she meant it to sound as it did—teachers going to their nearest school to provide childcare. Do we have definitions of what their job is? Do teachers provide childcare? These are things that need to be defined for the future. I do not think that teachers provide childcare; I think that teachers teach. Are we looking at defining those roles for the future so that there is some clarity about what people could or should be doing?

[51] **The First Minister:** We always seek to provide clarity in terms of guidance, whether it is within the health service or education. Regarding the weather, we know that the trend is that the climate is getting warmer, but like any trend, there will be years when that trend is bucked, if I can put it that way. We know that over the past 20 years, if not more, the trend is that the temperature has been getting warmer and warmer, which is why we also have a heat wave plan for Wales. We experienced a severe heat wave in 2003. In the last two years, we have had severe winters and poor summers, but that certainly is not the trend that we have seen in the weather over the past few decades. Nevertheless, given the experiences of last year, and particularly this year, with gritters still going out on the roads at night even now because of the clear weather, we will obviously consider what can be done to ensure that there are sufficient stocks in future. As I have said, we were never in a situation where salt was running out; it is fair to say that it was close on occasions, but sufficient stock was made available for local authorities to be able to grit the roads that they normally grit.

[52] **Sandy Mewies:** Could I have an answer to the question on job definitions? Is there any work being done in medical establishments, for example, on whether what I outlined could happen, should happen or whether it is necessary for it to happen? Similarly, could somebody respond on education? The other thing is that I would still like to know how the Welsh Assembly Government is informed of impending severe weather. Is it told, 'Hey, look out, severe weather is on the way'? How is that communicated outwards from the Assembly?

[53] **The First Minister:** With regard to severe weather, it would be widely known, publicly, that a severe weather warning had been issued by the Met Office. That is done publicly, of course. I think that it is fair to say that the response from local authorities was good. As soon as a weather warning was issued, the gritters were out and it was the same for us on the M4 and the M48. It is not a matter of us knowing that severe weather is on its way and having to communicate that; it is usually communicated quite widely. The weather forecast is probably the most watched programme in the whole of Britain. People in Britain have more interest in the weather than almost anything else. We will obviously take action when we know that there is severe weather on the way and that will involve making sure that the right gritters are on the roads and the local authorities will do the same.

[54] **Darren Millar:** During the time that is remaining for this subject, we want to switch to discuss the preparation for a flu pandemic. Did you want to come in on this issue, Dr Jewell?

[55] **Dr Jewell:** Yes, by all means, Chair. I think that there are contingency plans in NHS organisations to maintain business continuity. There is no specific plan for local medical, nursing or other health professional staff to come in—I think that they deal with the situation on the basis of where they find it. So, for example, in severe weather conditions when people could not get home, staff stayed in hospitals and worked long shifts to try to provide cover. That is the type of arrangement that is made.

9.00 a.m.

[56] On weather forecasting and the heat wave plan, which the First Minister mentioned, we have a contract with the Met Office to provide weather predictions every week during the summer. Local government has the same arrangement for cold weather for gritting, so the

links to Met Office warnings is established.

[57] **Kirsty Williams:** On the issue of flu and the preparation and implementation of the vaccination programme, for the record, how many units of vaccine were purchased for Wales and the total cost of that? How many of the units of vaccine were used? Did the levels of take-up reflect what you anticipated, and if not, have you identified why people have not taken the opportunity to vaccinate themselves or members of their family, especially children? How much has been paid to GPs to implement the vaccination programme?

[58] **Dr Jewell:** This issue is slightly premature, because there are reviews being undertaken of the pandemic flu exercise within and outside the health service in Wales. A review is planned for the UK in terms of the strategic response to flu, which will hopefully report by mid summer. So, some of this information is still being worked up. There is also the issue that the pandemic has not stopped yet—the normal flu season finishes at the end of March, and the vaccination programme is still under way. Therefore, some of the information that you are asking for is not available at this time. However, we estimate that about 350,000 people in Wales have had the vaccine, which was targeted towards at-risk groups such as health and social care front-line workers, so the vaccination was prioritised. Some of that information is also subject to commercial negotiations as we speak, because when it realised that the pandemic was going away this winter, the UK Government tried to stop supplies that had been ordered. So, some of that is still subject to negotiation and not in the public domain. It will become available later when we do the reviews of the pandemic flu; the UK review will be completed by mid summer.

[59] **Kirsty Williams:** I am sorry if you think that we are being premature, Dr Jewell, but as you are well aware, the Assembly Government continues to put resources into this particular programme. This was most recently discussed at the last meeting of the Finance Committee, as well as the significant amount of money that went into the supplementary budget to pay GPs for the cost of administering the vaccination programme. I would not want to tempt you into making comments that would jeopardise any issues around commercial confidentiality or negotiations, but surely you are in a position to tell us how many doses of vaccine were purchased by the Welsh Assembly Government, how much of that stock has been used, whether that has met your expectation or if there has been a lower take-up, and how much GPs have been paid to date for administering the programme? I do not want you to tell us anything that would cause you difficulty, but I am sure that you would also expect us to ask questions on this issue.

[60] **Dr Jewell:** That information will become available later because we are part of a UK system, so Wales did not buy a vaccine supply for Wales. Wales was part of a UK response and was party to advanced purchase agreements before the pandemic came out, which put the UK in an advantageous position when there was intense international competition for the vaccine. So, it is better to say that we will come back with that information in the future, because these reviews are under way as we speak. I do not have the information because GPs continue to provide the vaccine, and they will continue to do so over the summer. You will be interested to know that the H1N1 variant is now being put into next winter's seasonal flu jab. This virus is still circulating and the vaccination programme will continue over the summer for those people who are in high-risk groups.

[61] **Kirsty Williams:** I am intrigued that Dr Jewell is being so coy with us this morning, because information is already in the public domain. I am interested in why you are not willing to put on the record information that was in your letter dated 24 February 2010, which provided some analysis of the percentage of take-up among specific groups that were identified in phase 1 and phase 2. Why the coyness? It is charming, but I do not understand it.

[62] **Dr Jewell:** It is because we do not have the full and accurate estimate, and that is

because the vaccination programme is still under way. I said that we had an estimate of about 350,000, and we think that that represents about 40 per cent of the groups that we want to take it up. It is at that sort of level, but those are not accurate data, because the returns are still coming in and vaccines are still being given, and, as I said, it will carry on over the summer. The campaign for healthy children between the ages of six months and five will go on until the end of March. After that is completed, we will have better data.

[63] **Kirsty Williams:** How does the healthy under-fives programme work? Is it based on advertising and parents self-presenting, or is there a call in—

[64] **Dr Jewell:** It is delivered through the GP system. GP practices will call their patients in. National information and publicity were provided through websites and so on, and on television and radio.

[65] **Kirsty Williams:** You will be aware of the controversy in the UK Parliament around this issue. You are in an almost impossible situation, because you purchased stock and if you had underpurchased and there was not enough to go around, you would be in a difficult position, but a suggestion seems to be floating around the UK that we overpurchased stock, therefore, valuable resources have gone into buying a vaccine that has not been taken up for whatever reasons. Do you buy into the concerns that have been raised? Do you think that we overpurchased the vaccine?

[66] **Dr Jewell:** This will be subject to the review that is under way, but I will offer you an example of one of the reasons why it happened, which is that we had to order the vaccine right at the start of the pandemic. No-one knew how it would turn out. We were advised that two doses of the vaccine would be required. After the trials and the experience in Australia, it was found that one dose was likely to be sufficient, so, immediately, there was a possibility that one ordered too much, because one was ordering enough for two doses, and then the manufacturer, once licensed, said that one dose would be sufficient for most people. So, at a stroke, there was an issue there. However, negotiations are still going on with the suppliers, and the stocks that have not been delivered have been stopped because of that risk. The vaccine will last and will still be useful until 2011-12, so we are considering keeping a strategic reserve anyway. That is part of current planning.

[67] **Kirsty Williams:** First Minister, are you confident in the processes that led to how this pandemic was managed? Are you asking the chief medical officer to look again at how those systems work or are you content that how they operated this time was sufficiently robust not to lead us into a situation in which we understock or overstock?

[68] **The First Minister:** I do not believe that we have overstocked, given that we know that more than 350,000 people have been vaccinated. It is also important to emphasise that the pandemic is not over yet. The World Health Organization has not declared the pandemic over and, as the chief medical officer has said, the vaccine is still in use. The difficulty with a situation like this is that virologists tell us that, at some point, there will be a very dangerous influenza outbreak across the world, as happened with Spanish flu at the end of the first world war. That is based on the statistics of outbreaks over the years. We do not know when that will happen; it could be at any time or it might not happen in our lifetimes. We just do not know. Swine flu is a particularly dangerous strain of flu. It was right that steps were taken in order to deal with it, and it is better, bluntly, that we have too much stock than not enough stock in terms of vaccine. However, it is an inexact science because no-one knows how widespread a pandemic will become in terms of its effect on numbers of people, and no-one knows when and if the virus will mutate and whether it then—and I am treading on scientific ground here—gets mixed with other viruses and how that will affect the virulence of any future flu outbreak.

9.10 a.m.

[69] We know that all viruses will mutate and some will mutate very quickly, which is why the great fear over avian flu was that it would mutate from being an illness that could be contracted through handling birds and through direct contact with them, to something that was airborne. No-one was able to predict when or if that would happen, and the same is true of swine flu, which is why it is prudent to ensure that you take the steps that you think are necessary to deal with an outbreak. If that means that you are in a position where you have more vaccine than you need for the time being, then that is better than not having enough.

[70] **Leanne Wood:** I am glad that we have gone into this area because my questions are about the flu peaking. It was predicted to peak last October; and I am not sure whether it did peak then or not, but have you had any advice on future peaks in swine flu? Could we expect another peak next winter? On the virus mutating or mixing with other viruses, what would happen if, suddenly in September, we discovered that something had mutated and all of the stocks of Tamiflu that we have in place were of no use for the new strain? What budget plans are in place to buy a whole stock of something else if that was available?

[71] **Dr Jewell:** We had a first wave, which peaked at the end of July. It was mid summer, and it was a relatively mild virus illness compared with what it might have been, and it could be that more people got it than we were aware of. Therefore, there was a first peak in July and, as you said, it came back in October. Since then, in November and December, it declined and has not so far returned this winter; it is not predicted to return this winter. However, we do not know whether we will get a third wave during the summer or whether it will return again next winter. So, that is why the World Health Organization has recommended the H1N1 variant—the swine flu vaccine gets put into the seasonal flu jab. The prediction is that it will still circulate over the next few winters and, as the First Minister says, we do not know whether it will drift and become a slightly more severe infection or not. If it were to drift slightly, the vaccine that we have ordered would still be effective against it—perhaps not as effective as it is against the current virus, but it would still be effective if it is a H1N1 variant.

[72] Tamiflu is different because it is one of the antiviral treatments and it is used for any virus. It is used against seasonal flu when people need it. So, the antiviral stockpile, in which we keep two drugs, would still be effective. Those drugs do not expire in a year, so they are kept in a stockpile and could be used for a different virus.

[73] **Leanne Wood:** What about the need to suddenly purchase new stocks of something completely different to deal with a new strain?

[74] **Dr Jewell:** We would not purchase new antivirals as our stock would apply to any virus. On the vaccine, we have an advance purchase agreement with more than one supplier to get preference for the production of a new vaccine. If there were another flu virus pandemic, we would use the same system as we did last time, which is to get the order. Vaccines take six months to produce because they have to isolate the virus and it then takes six months to manufacture it. That is why, with seasonal flu, we get the recommendations around February and March and it is ready in September or October. It always takes around six months to produce a new vaccine.

[75] **Leanne Wood:** What about the budgetary implications of having to do something like that?

[76] **The First Minister:** The difficulty is that it is impossible to predict how a virus will mutate, if it mutates at all. Secondly, if it mutates, it is impossible to predict how effective a vaccine that was developed to treat it in its original form would be. That is anyone's guess. Tamiflu is a little like aspirin or paracetamol, in that it is effective against a number of

viruses. It is not specific to swine flu, but it is a drug, as I understand it—and I am aware that I am sitting next to the chief medical officer as I say this—that mitigates or alleviates the symptoms of a virus. So, it is not specific to swine flu and can be used for a number of viruses. It is impossible to predict the budgetary implications of the mutation of a virus that led to the existing vaccine being partially or completely ineffective. However, what we do now is that, as the virus stands, the vaccine that is in place is effective, and, as the chief medical officer said, the vaccination programme will continue to run throughout the summer.

[77] **Kirsty Williams:** Chief medical officer, is it therefore correct to say that the 1.1 million doses delivered to local health boards in Wales was on the basis of the assumption that each patient would receive two doses rather than one?

[78] **Dr Jewell:** We only knew about the need for one dose once the licensing had happened. So, no, that was just to ensure that there were enough stocks available. Bear in mind that, because of the supplies, there have been two phases to the vaccine. The first phase was for people in the higher risk groups and the second phase was for children under the age of five.

[79] **Kirsty Williams:** I acknowledge that the programme is ongoing, but, to date, have any of the identified patient groups that the vaccine was destined for reached over 50 per cent take-up?

[80] **Dr Jewell:** No, not that I am aware.

[81] **Kirsty Williams:** So, none of those groups that you identified as needing the vaccine have reached 50 per cent take-up?

[82] **Dr Jewell:** That is right.

[83] **Darren Millar:** In closing this item, I ask you, First Minister, to provide us, once the paper has been produced at a UK level in July, with a further paper on the situation with regard to Kirsty Williams's questions on the cost and take-up and on what is left of the virus. We would appreciate that. Could you also provide us with an update within three months on the guidelines and guidance that has been developed for local authorities, including information with regard to access to schools, support for vulnerable people and access to health services in adverse weather conditions? We would appreciate that also.

9.18 a.m.

### **Rhoi Cytundeb 'Cymru'n Un' ar Waith Implementation of the 'One Wales' Agreement**

[84] **Darren Millar:** We have received a paper, which is an annex to a previous paper that we received in December on this issue. First Minister, do you want to introduce your paper?

[85] **The First Minister:** You should have before you the paper that was provided and the annex. I think that they are self-explanatory.

[86] **Darren Millar:** We will take this item section by section. First Minister, the biggest challenge that we face in Wales is the economic downturn and the lingering impact of the recession with regard to unemployment and the effect on businesses. Your annex provides an update on the One Wales Government's progress towards the implementation of the 'One Wales' agreement, and it includes references to overseas trading links. How far have things progressed with regard to the developments of overseas relationships? You mention the links with China and the United States of America, and developing links with India. Can you tell us

a little more about that?

9.20 a.m.

[87] **The First Minister:** We have International Business Wales offices in many cities across the world. They are extremely useful in terms of procuring business and creating contacts. To give just one example, the export of Welsh lamb to the United Arab Emirates was facilitated largely by the work of one Assembly Government official who worked in Dubai. He was very effective in the work that he did. Trade missions are also run, which will vary in size. They will also vary in terms of the places that they target. A number of those trade missions will leave Wales in the course of any one year. We also try to use the major events that we host from time to time as a showcase for Wales; the Ryder Cup is a prime example. It is a very good opportunity not just to promote Wales as a venue for sporting occasions or for tourism, but as a way of selling Wales to the world. We see it is a great opportunity to talk to businesspeople who will come here from around the world in order to interest them in looking at Wales as a place to invest in the future.

[88] **Darren Millar:** You mentioned one example of the relationship working with overseas trade. How many Assembly Government officials are posted overseas? What is the range of countries where they are located? Are they located within UK embassies? I know that the Assembly Government has offices in some countries, but can you tell us a little more about how you link in with the UK Government in terms of trying to attract trade to Wales?

[89] **The First Minister:** To my knowledge, we currently have two people in London. The number of people will vary according to where they are based. For example, in some offices in the US there will be two or three people. The figure varies; in some parts of the world there will be one person. That means that it is absolutely essential that we work as closely as possible with UK embassies and consulates across the world. Drawing from my own knowledge of how things operated in the United Arab Emirates, there was very close working, and we were indebted to the help that we received from the British consulate in Dubai and, further afield, from the embassy in Abu Dhabi. We will always look to work with UK representatives because it means that they are also able to open up contacts for us. It is certainly not the case that our officials would seek to operate entirely on their own without reference to any British representation in any particular country.

[90] **Darren Millar:** Do you wish to come in on this, Kirsty?

[91] **Kirsty Williams:** I would like to ask about Flexible Support for Business, because many of the commitments in 'One Wales' are about developing the private sector. They cover a whole myriad of areas. Are you content with the take-up of Flexible Support for Business to date?

[92] **The First Minister:** Yes; I am. I am aware that some issues have been raised in the Chamber, but a large number of inquiries have been put into the scheme itself. There has also been quite a significant uptake.

[93] **Kirsty Williams:** Could you give us some figures on resources given out in support of advice under Flexible Support for Business? Do you have any figures?

[94] **The First Minister:** Yes, indeed. At the moment, in our call centre, we expect to exceed the 20,000 calls that we would expect to receive during the course of the year. At present, over £100 million has been committed by the single investment fund, which, to us, represents a significant amount.

[95] **Darren Millar:** For the record, we have been joined at the table by Kate Cassidy, the

head of constitutional affairs and policy support, and Tim Jenkins, policy officer for constitutional affairs and policy support. Thank you for joining us this morning. I apologise for not formally introducing you earlier.

[96] **Leanne Wood:** I wish to look at the issue of grants for businesses, not specifically our grants. You are developing links with India and China; many firms that have been previously based in Wales and have received public grants have relocated to those countries. That is mainly because they can reduce their labour costs significantly by operating out of those countries, but it could also be that Governments or regional governments in those countries are offering similar grants to those offered here in the past. Is there anything that you can do to ensure that the playing field is not skewed by those countries offering grants for our companies to relocate to the far east?

[97] **The First Minister:** There is a skewed playing field. Wherever you get a system where grants are made available, it is bound to be skewed; just as it is inevitable that different rates of corporation tax in different countries will also have an effect. There is no point in attracting investment to Wales purely on the basis of a grant. If that happens, inevitably, once the grant has been spent and the grant period comes to an end, the temptation will be for that company to leave and go somewhere else. We have seen examples of that. Companies attracted into Wales in the 1980s and 1990s because of a generous grants system have now relocated—

[98] **Leanne Wood:** Was it just the grants system? Or did a lot of those companies come here because, relatively speaking, labour costs were lower as well?

[99] **The First Minister:** Yes, there is no question about that. That is why we see some companies relocating to eastern Europe and the far east, where wage costs are a lot lower—at a level with which we would not want to compete. The future for us, to my mind, lies in ensuring that our people have the highest skill levels possible. We should not just offer ourselves as a place to invest based on skills; we should also ensure that our own people are able to express their entrepreneurial spirit. I have come across many examples of people who have good ideas that could be developed into items that could be manufactured or created, employing other people in the process, but they do not quite have the confidence to take that step. That is a major issue for us in Wales; the money is one thing, but creating the level of confidence so that people will take that step is another challenge.

[100] **Leanne Wood:** I think that it is about keeping profits within Wales, as well, in the local area. Upskilling people in our communities is the way to try to encourage people to set up small businesses, rather than trying to attract large companies into Wales through the grants system.

[101] **The First Minister:** It is getting the balance right on the economy that is important. We still have a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises, and the broader the economic base, the better. The other issue that we need to take forward is to encourage some of our SMEs to become larger. There is still a tendency for them to remain at a level at which they are comfortable, and we have relatively few companies in Wales that would pass what I call the sports sponsorship test—that is, being big enough to sponsor the Welsh rugby team. There are a handful of them, whereas in Scotland, the number of companies that can do that is much larger. So, it is important to do that as well. There will still be a need for inward investment, we know that, and it will form an important part of the Welsh economy, but it is also important that we seek to encourage our indigenous business base and help it to grow.

[102] **Trish Law:** First Minister, I want to go back to the prosperous society described in the ‘One Wales’ agreement. My constituency, as I am sure that you are aware, is not prosperous—it is desperately in need of new job opportunities. I welcome the long-term goal



of full employment at a rate of 80 per cent that is outlined in the 'One Wales' agreement. You may be aware that we discussed this in a meeting with the previous First Minister, when we expressed concern that a labour market strategy for meeting that commitment had not been produced. When do you anticipate being able to produce a labour market strategy for consultation?

[103] **The First Minister:** The economic difficulties that the world has faced have not helped in ensuring a greater uptake of employment in Wales. However, it is fair to say that ProAct, ReAct, the six-month offer and other business support have certainly helped in moving towards that target. The Future Jobs fund will also be important in moving towards that 80 per cent target. I take your point, but what is important is that, when we look at creating more employment in Wales, we try to ensure that employment levels are consistent across the whole of Wales.

9.30 a.m.

[104] I worked in Blaenau Gwent in the early 1990s, and it was at that time an exceptionally poor place compared with the rest of Wales and the UK. What I see in Blaenau Gwent now are examples of areas that have seen a benefit. However, it is not a benefit that has translated across the whole of Blaenau Gwent. There are some parts of Blaenau Gwent that are clearly not as economically deprived as they were in the early 1990s, but there are parts where the change has not been that obvious, if I can put it that way. So, the big challenge is not just to increase prosperity across Wales but to ensure that that prosperity reaches all parts of Wales.

[105] **Trish Law:** I agree with an awful lot of what you say, First Minister. However, we must remember that Blaenau Gwent was suffering job losses before the recession. In some cases, four generations have been out of work. It is a big issue because, as we are all aware, it has a knock-on effect on things such as obesity, mental health and so on. Everyone needs to remember that we were in this position before the recession. We need full-time jobs in Blaenau Gwent. We get a lot of retail jobs, which we are grateful for, but they do not provide the income that people need to have a good quality of life.

[106] **The First Minister:** The issues faced by people in Blaenau Gwent are very similar to the issues faced across the whole of the Heads of the Valleys. I think that it is right to say that there have been difficulties in Blaenau Gwent for many decades, given the closure of most of the collieries in Blaenau Gwent—certainly the Tredegar mines—by the mid 1960s, the job losses in the steel works in the 1970s, and then the final closure of the steel works. It is not easy for any community to make up that level of job losses in a short space of time. That said however, there is much to be said about Blaenau Gwent that is optimistic. There is the new campus, the new hospital and the new railway line. If you make it easy for people to travel to work, it also makes it easier for people to live in those communities. However, we know that we face a challenge in Wales, and it is a challenge that is greater in some parts of Wales than in others.

[107] **Darren Millar:** I wish to return to the first point made by Trish Law, First Minister. Where is this labour market strategy? Are you going to publish a document that gives a clear direction of travel? It seems that the Deputy First Minister is very quick to claim credit when unemployment figures fall, but that he blames the UK Government when they rise. This is an issue that the UK and Welsh Assembly Governments have to respond to. Unemployment is not something that you have all the levers to address here in Wales. However, you have some of them, and you have a significant role in supporting the Welsh economy. So, where is this labour market strategy? Is it going to be published? If so, when? How will we be able to monitor the implementation of that strategy going forward? The development of some of the strands of action seems to be quite reactive at the moment.

[108] **The First Minister:** I think that that is inevitable. The first priority has been to deal with the economic downturn that we have seen, not just in the Welsh economy, but in the world economy. I would argue that, for example, ProAct and ReAct and the Future Jobs fund all form part of a strategy for dealing with the difficulties that we have faced over the past two years in the economy. The economic summits that have taken place have been very successful, and we now want to build on that work to see where we go in terms of a longer term strategy. I think that it is right to say that the first priority was to deal with the economic problems that we faced as a result of the situation across the world. Now that we are, I believe, beginning to see an upturn in the economy—I am careful in the words that I use on this—it is time to look at how we further develop our labour market strategy going forward.

[109] **Darren Millar:** How many individual beneficiaries of ProAct and ReAct have there been? How many people do you anticipate will benefit from the Future Jobs fund?

[110] **The First Minister:** There are more than 9,000 people in jobs who would otherwise not be in work as a result of ProAct. ReAct has clearly helped a significant number of people. It is difficult to give an indication on the Future Jobs fund at the moment, but, nevertheless, it is something that will be of great benefit to many people. ReAct is supporting more than 13,000 individuals. The record that we would put forward to the people of Wales is a good one. Not far off 9,000 people are now in jobs that they would not otherwise be in, and over 13,000 people have been able to benefit from the money that was put forward through ReAct.

[111] It would have been difficult when ProAct and ReAct began to have given an estimate of how many people could be helped because it all depended on how many people and companies would apply for help. What is clear is that both schemes have been a remarkable success at a time when, in so many other parts of the UK, people were losing their jobs.

[112] **Darren Millar:** The focus of both schemes is on larger employers rather than smaller ones, and most businesses in Wales are SMEs, as you have already mentioned, with a small number of employees. They might shed one or two jobs during the course of the economic downturn. What has been done to reach out to those individuals who are caught in that trap?

[113] **The First Minister:** As far as they are concerned, we have the business rate relief, for example. I am aware from the exchanges in the Chamber that this was an issue for some small businesses. The fact that the relief scheme has been put in place will be of benefit to them as well.

[114] **Darren Millar:** What about the individuals who face redundancy? They will lose their jobs. You mentioned around 13,000 people being supported by ProAct, ReAct, and the Future Jobs fund, but we have seen well over 100,000 people lose their jobs during the course of the recession. What about all those other people who have been swept into unemployment? How are you supporting them? What contact are you seeking to establish with those individuals who might have been laid off one at a time by small employers?

[115] **The First Minister:** Primarily, that will be a matter for the Department for Work and Pensions. Members of the committee will be aware of the six-month offer that is being put in place. We will seek to work with the DWP, which will be able to identify those individuals, to assist them. From where we stand, what is important is that we are able to assist businesses that are in trouble, whether that is through the rate relief scheme or through ProAct, and provide help for individuals through ReAct. If somebody is made unemployed, however, that is a matter for the DWP. We would seek to work with the DWP, of course, as much as possible to identify and help those people.

[116] **Kirsty Williams:** When the One Wales Government was drawn up, one of the well-

acknowledged structural weaknesses of the Welsh economy was the relatively high level of economic inactivity. Did it never strike you as strange that the labour market strategy was not one of the first priorities of the One Wales Government? I take your point that the Government was overtaken by events that it could not have foreseen. That is understandable, as it could not have foreseen the economic storm that would engulf us. Is it not therefore strange that, while you were getting on with ProAct and ReAct, it never struck anybody that it was even more important to have that comprehensive strategy? Given that the Department for the Economy and Transport decided, in the middle of all this, to review its economic strategy and its economic renewal programme, does it not strike you as odd that, with high levels of economic inactivity as the fundamental weakness in our economy, the labour market strategy was not the first thing that the Government should have been looking to publish?

[117] **The First Minister:** You are right to point out that it is a weakness in our economy, but if we look at how things happened, the One Wales Government was formed in July, and the following month we saw the first crisis that led to the economic crises around the world. It was in August 2007 that you saw all the bad debts suddenly accumulate in American banks, with the first collapses of American banks as a result of the sub-prime mortgages that they had sold people. Within a month of the One Wales Government coming into being, we were faced very quickly with a severe economic downturn, and the immediate priority was to put schemes in place such as ProAct and ReAct to ensure that the number of people who were economically inactive was not added to. That is why ProAct and ReAct were so important in helping more than 20,000 people to avoid economic inactivity.

[118] That was the priority. As things—as we hope—slowly begin to ease over the next months and years, we can begin to focus again on a longer-term strategy. However, there is no point in having a longer-term strategy if you have nothing in place to deal with a short-term crisis.

9.40 a.m.

[119] **Kirsty Williams:** I understand that the Government was taking steps to deal with the immediacy of the situation. One could not criticise the Government for doing that. I am just curious as to why this was not the first thing out of the blocks as far as the Department for the Economy and Transport was concerned, and why it is still not the main focus of the work of the Department for the Economy and Transport. After all, you will be aware that the Deputy First Minister has decided, mid term, to throw out everything; all of the old strategies, such as ‘Wales: A Vibrant Economy’ and all of the economic development strategies have been chucked out of the window and a new one will be published sometime this year. I am curious as to why an employment strategy would not go hand in hand with that work, or would not be seen as a priority. I am curious as to the thinking behind why this particular strategy, which exists to deal with the fundamental weakness of the Welsh economy, the high levels of people who are looking for work but may not have the skills, and the high levels of economic inactivity that are ingrained, in some cases, in generation after generation, has not been a priority.

[120] **The First Minister:** Given that the economic crisis began within a few months of the One Wales Government taking office, the priority was to deal with the immediate economic crisis that we faced. That was not a crisis—

[121] **Kirsty Williams:** Surely, the department can do more than one thing at a time. There are loads of people working there.

[122] **The First Minister:** The crisis was so severe that we needed to focus all of our efforts on ensuring that we dealt with it. The economic summits and, indeed, business and the trade unions would tell you that. It was essential to focus on the crisis in hand. Having said

that, it is fair to say that the world has changed since 2007 and it is important that our economic policies change with that. It is quite clear, as I said earlier, that we will not compete in terms of labour costs, nor should we try, nor should we compete on the basis of trying to attract low-skill work that can be easily exported elsewhere. So, the economic renewal programme will be looking at how we ride the upturn. That means ensuring that more people are economically active; that has to be a part of it. It is sensible to focus on economic renewal now, because we know how things have changed over the past two years and we have to ensure that our economic policies and our economic framework is right for the future, rather than looking at the way the world was before 2007.

[123] **Kirsty Williams:** Are you confident, given the economic climate that the Government has had to deal with, that you will still be able to deliver on all promises in the 'One Wales' agreement? If you are, are you confident that the 'One Wales' agreement and the priorities within that agreement are still appropriate for the challenges that Wales faces now? Given the budgetary constraints that will inevitably fall on the Welsh Assembly Government, are you confident that the priorities given to public expenditure within this document are the right priorities for what we are facing now?

[124] **The First Minister:** I would argue that most of the commitments have already been fulfilled. There is no shadow of a doubt that we will be facing budgetary pressures, but we will seek to fulfil the 'One Wales' commitments that are not yet fulfilled—and there are not many of them, but we will seek to fulfil those—but it is right to say that some very difficult decisions will have to be made in the course of this year as the budget process moves forward.

[125] **Leanne Wood:** The auditor general has issued a report this morning, which says that big cuts are coming and that they will be painful. I know that the Government has done an awful lot of work to try to protect jobs in the private sector and the ProAct and ReAct schemes have been very successful. However, because the public sector is so heavily dependent on staff, the cuts that are coming are bound to impact on them. Job losses in the public sector will hit Wales hard, as we are heavily dependent on the public sector for work. So, how can you ensure that any job losses in the public sector are minimised over the next four years? How can you ensure the continuity of front-line public services, particularly those that are delivered by local authorities? Finally, how can you work with trade unions and public sector workers to identify agreed savings?

[126] **The First Minister:** First, it is worth emphasising that there are tough financial times ahead, not just for the coming financial year, but for years to come. It would be wrong of me to say anything different. Do I believe that job losses should be the first thing that public authorities look at? No, I do not. Public authorities, ourselves included, should be looking carefully at what efficiencies we can make. For example, in terms of procurement, I am sure that there is scope for local authorities to look at joint procuring, and getting a better deal in that way. We see this in the waste strategy, where collaboration has led to savings that do not involve job losses. In the same way, we are aware that local authorities might have 20-odd different IT systems that are procured individually; is there scope there for joint procurement in the future that will save money without job losses? I have to be careful here, in that I do not want to somehow suggest that there will be no job losses at all over the course of the next year; that is not something that is within my remit, because local authorities will make their own decisions, as will other public authorities. However, I believe firmly that there are many areas that can be looked at where money can be saved without the need to consider job losses as the first port of call.

[127] **Leanne Wood:** There is a big difference between voluntary redundancy and compulsory redundancy. From a worker's perspective, they would prefer guarantees against compulsory redundancies. Are you in a position to offer such guarantees?

[128] **The First Minister:** I cannot do that as far as local authorities are concerned. They employ their own people.

[129] **Leanne Wood:** What about people directly employed by the Assembly Government?

[130] **The First Minister:** We have no plans to make people compulsorily redundant.

[131] **Darren Millar:** You were not able to give us an assurance that a labour market strategy would be published, which is one of the commitments in the 'One Wales' agreement, before May 2011. Could you confirm that that is the case?

[132] **The First Minister:** I would argue that it is being implemented. If you look at the—

[133] **Darren Millar:** Could we see some evidence that the strategy is in place? How can we measure you against a strategy that has not been published?

[134] **The First Minister:** You could look at ProAct, ReAct, the six-month offer, the Future Jobs fund; these are all things that—

[135] **Darren Millar:** They may be actions that are being taken, but where is the strategy that says that they are the actions that you will take?

[136] **The First Minister:** I would argue that that forms part of the strategy. In working with businesses and trade unions via the economic summit, we will consider whether we need to produce a document, which I think is what you are asking about. We will take soundings as to whether it is the right time to do that, and whether, having put ProAct and ReAct in place, for example, it is now time to look further ahead. I think that that is right. One of the issues that we must deal with now is how the economic summits will develop in the future; what relationship they will have with the Business Partnership Council, for example. We want to build on what I think has been a very successful model, producing schemes like ProAct and ReAct that have been supported by all sectors of business.

[137] **Darren Millar:** Turning to some of the other 'One Wales' commitments, one thing that struck me in your paper was the section on health and social services. You mentioned commitment 13, on moving to end the internal market within the NHS. However, in our previous evidence session with Rhodri Morgan, the former First Minister made it clear that the commitment to end the use of private hospitals did not extend to mental health hospitals, for some reason—although that was not something that was suggested in the paper. Astonishingly, you seem to suggest that one way that you will end the internal market within the NHS is through the new arrangements for community health councils. I was not aware that they had an impact on the internal market, as you call it, within the NHS. Do you want to explain how that fulfils that pledge?

[138] **The First Minister:** Community health councils are clearly important, but they also need to be effective. Do they form part of the internal market? Perhaps not. Do they form part of the mechanism whereby patients and members of the public influence our thinking on health policy? Clearly, they do. They represent the public, and it is important that we emphasise that our health service is based on patient input in terms of patient voice, rather than a market system.

9.50 a.m.

[139] **Darren Millar:** On the use of mental health hospitals, is that outside the remit of the commitment in the 'One Wales' document in your opinion? Private hospitals—

[140] **The First Minister:** There is further work to be done on ensuring that NHS patients in Wales no longer have to access private facilities, particularly those in England. It still remains our aim to do that.

[141] **Kirsty Williams:** Are you saying absolutely that those patients who currently receive their treatment in a privately run facility, commissioned by NHS Wales, will see their treatment come to an end before December 2011?

[142] **The First Minister:** That is the aim.

[143] **Kirsty Williams:** Does that include people who are in receipt of services for learning disabilities and mental health issues?

[144] **The First Minister:** We will always seek to provide those services in Wales. What we will not do is jeopardise people's ability to access those services. If that means that there is still a need to access services in private facilities outside Wales beyond December, then clearly that will have to happen. I do not want to see a Government aim, which is still in place and we still intend to carry it through, to mean that people lose out in terms of access to services. That clearly would go against the agenda that we have in place that patients should have a voice.

[145] **Kirsty Williams:** Cross-border stuff is a red herring. There are currently patients in Wales who, as a result of learning disability and mental health issues, are receiving services commissioned by NHS Wales but are provided by the private sector because the public sector simply does not have that type of provision. With all due respect, you need to be cautious when saying that those patients will suddenly start to receive their services in the NHS in Wales, because that would require a significant remodelling of some of those most specialist learning disability and mental health services. Therefore, I would like to give you another opportunity to possibly row back a little on saying that those patients will be receiving NHS services.

[146] **The First Minister:** All LHBs have prepared local plans to identify how they intend to eliminate the use of the private sector in the provision of mental health services and services for those with learning disabilities as soon as possible.

[147] **Kirsty Williams:** 'As soon as possible' is quite different to 2011.

[148] **Darren Millar:** May I ask about waiting times? You make a boast about commitment 30 in your paper, saying that:

[149] 'we have met the target to reduce waiting times to 26 weeks from referral to treatment including therapies and diagnostic tests.'

[150] Of course, you fail to mention some of the missed targets, such as the target that no person waits for more than 14 weeks for in-patient or day care treatment by January 2010. Apparently, about 13,500 people had been waiting for longer than 14 weeks as at the end of January 2010. Another commitment was to ensure that first out-patient appointments take place within 10 weeks, but that is another target that you missed, because at least 37,000 patients had been waiting for longer than that as at the end of January 2010, despite the fact that this was a commitment. You have already missed those targets. Will you tell us how you intend to achieve them?

[151] **The First Minister:** If you could refer to where in 'One Wales' those targets are mentioned—

[152] **Darren Millar:** These are targets that have been mentioned by the Minister for health and others on a number of occasions in the Chamber.

[153] **The First Minister:** They are not ‘One Wales’ targets—

[154] **Darren Millar:** Does that mean that all of the other targets are thrown out of the window?

[155] **The First Minister:** No, but we are dealing with ‘One Wales’ commitments. The ‘One Wales’ target is to reduce waiting times to 26 weeks from referral to treatment, including therapies and diagnostic tests. That happened in August 2009.

[156] **Darren Millar:** Is that at the expense of other commitments that the One Wales Government has given?

[157] **The First Minister:** No, not at all, but the ‘One Wales’ agreement seeks to put in place commitments that can be realised, and this is a commitment that has been realised.

[158] **Darren Millar:** So, are you saying that the other commitments are not realisable?

[159] **The First Minister:** No, not at all. The ‘One Wales’ commitment is clear and it has been realised. We will always seek to ensure that all targets that are in place are reached. It certainly is not the case that the targets are not realisable.

[160] **Darren Millar:** So, are you going to look at those other targets and commitments that have been given by the One Wales Government, and tell us how you are going to achieve those, given that they have already been missed?

[161] **The First Minister:** They are not commitments in the ‘One Wales’ agreement.

[162] **Darren Millar:** But they are commitments of the One Wales Government.

[163] **The First Minister:** We will always look, as I said, to reach our targets. There will be occasions when we do not reach our targets—clearly that is correct—but we will always seek to reach those targets. With regard to the discrete commitment made, which is commitment 30 in the ‘One Wales’ agreement, that target was reached last year.

[164] **Kirsty Williams:** I think that that is called ‘wriggle room’ in negotiation parlance. From what you have said, your focus seems to be on ensuring that everything that is written in the ‘One Wales’ agreement is done before you have to go back to the electorate, but some might argue that the difficulties that the next Assembly Government will face will be around the need to deliver services within a constrained budget. Is your Government doing anything to prepare itself and its services for those challenges? What processes are you going through, if any, to look at your administration and commitments? Last year, the First Minister made great play of his traffic lights system of red, amber and green. Are you involved in a similar process in preparation for cuts in the Welsh block?

[165] **The First Minister:** Yes, the budget process began some time ago. We are working to assumptions in terms of how much the block will be, although we will not know that until October. We are working on assumptions that we will receive a cut in funding. We do not know how much that cut will be—it depends on what happens after the general election—so we are working in the dark to an extent. We are looking at a very tight budget indeed. We will have some very difficult decisions to take as a Government—I do not shy away from that. The public in Wales would expect us to formulate a rationale as to why some areas are seen as important and should be preserved, and why other areas as seen as areas that cannot receive

funding for the next year or so. The budget process at the moment is that we are looking line by line at each thing that we fund in order to see whether or not a particular programme or funding stream is essential or something that cannot be maintained in a difficult financial climate.

[166] **Kirsty Williams:** Can you give us an insight into what the factors are in developing that rationale? What is guiding you in identifying what that rationale will look like? Is it what is written in the 'One Wales' agreement, or does it look at the challenges that Wales will face in the years to come?

[167] **The First Minister:** It is both. It will be guided by what we as governing parties think is important for the future. It is inevitable that we will take a view based on our principles and policies to support areas that we think are essential, and then look carefully at areas that are not essential. It will not be easy or painless—far from it—but it is a process that we are going through at the moment and which has been ongoing for some months.

[168] **Darren Millar:** The clock is beating us, so I am afraid that we will have to move on, even though there are plenty of other questions that could have been asked.

9.58 a.m.

### **Perthynas Llywodraeth Cymru â San Steffan The Welsh Government's Relationship with Westminster**

[169] **Darren Millar:** We touched on this briefly in our previous scrutiny session with the former First Minister. A great deal has been said about the Welsh Government's relationship with Westminster by many people, including Dame Gillian Morgan, Permanent Secretary to the Welsh Government, who described a culture of arrogance in some Whitehall departments and that Wales is off the radar in London, as far as she is concerned. What do you have to say about those accusations?

[170] **The First Minister:** I think that that is true in terms of certain departments. Knowledge of devolution across Whitehall is patchy, and it is not necessarily related to whether a Whitehall department has within its responsibilities devolved areas across different parts of the UK. For example, the Home Office has a good record in terms of looking at devolution issues. However, it is right to say that not all civil servants are aware of the different nature of the devolved settlements across the UK, nor are they always aware of the effect that a particular policy proposal or announcement would have in devolved areas. There are devolution guidance notes—I think that it is devolution guidance note no. 9—that circulate around Whitehall. It is probably fair to say that the situation has improved over the past decade, but there is still some way to go before we can say that every Whitehall department is completely au fait with devolution and its asymmetric nature across the UK.

10.00 a.m.

[171] **Darren Millar:** One challenge is that you, as a Welsh Government, have a legislative programme that you want to deliver that is partly reliant on certain powers or functions coming across to the Assembly. There have been, so far, significant delays with some of the legislative competence Orders that have been initiated here. Does that threaten your ability to deliver your legislative programme?

[172] **The First Minister:** It delays it; there is no question about that. There are three LCOs that have taken more time than we would have hoped. First is the LCO on environmental protection and waste management, and that is because it was a complicated one that needed input from a number of Whitehall departments. There were a number of areas that had to be



looked at very carefully. We know about the Welsh language LCO in terms of its passage, and there is what has become the housing and local government LCO relating to sustainable homes, which took longer than we would have expected. We all wait with bated breath to see what happens in the parliamentary wash-up in the course of the next month or so in Westminster.

[173] In general, the LCO system has certainly improved and has become swifter, following proper scrutiny by the Welsh Affairs Committee. However, when the system first began in 2007, and because it is unique as far as I am aware, it took some time to understand what legislative competence Orders were and for that to sink in to practice in Whitehall. By and large, that has happened now; it has happened largely because of the work of the Wales Office, without which it would be difficult to take forward any LCOs. Therefore, it has improved, particularly when we seek to draw down powers that are the responsibility of a number of departments in Whitehall. The time it takes to co-ordinate all of that can lead to delays, as we have seen, in powers being devolved.

[174] **Darren Millar:** We will come to the Wales Office and its future role later. Leanne Wood has the next questions.

[175] **Leanne Wood:** Thank you for acknowledging that there are tensions or problems between Cardiff and London, First Minister. You have said that it is mainly down to a lack of awareness. Is it that, or is there an attitude on the part of some in London that we are just a bit too small to be bothered with? Do you think that the problems are entirely on the civil service side or are there also problems on the political side? Do you think that political interference in the LCO system has caused problems, or have all the problems with the LCOs been on the civil service side?

[176] **The First Minister:** The problems relate to the understanding of civil servants. My direct experience of preparing the way for the environmental protection and waste management LCO was that the level of understanding among Ministers was a lot higher than the level of understanding among civil servants. There is no question about that. So, I do not think that there has been any political interference. From a political point of view, LCOs have progressed very smoothly, but there have been difficulties in terms of civil servants occasionally understanding what they are being asked to do by Ministers and, more often than not, of more thought needing to be given to the consequences of transferring a particular power. The example that I would use is that of the proposed vulnerable children LCO, where there was some debate as to whether it would have been possible, given the original wording of the LCO, to devolve to the Assembly the power to ban smacking. There was some debate on that; it was not through any political interference but through a genuine need to ensure that the issue was dealt with, which it was eventually. However, it was an interesting debate at the time as to whether that power could have been devolved or not, given the original wording of the LCO.

[177] **Leanne Wood:** What would have been the problem with that being devolved? It would suggest to me that there would be a political problem in that Wales could potentially ban the physical chastisement of children.

[178] **The First Minister:** We had not asked for the power, basically.

[179] **Leanne Wood:** So, it would have been given accidentally.

[180] **The First Minister:** It was not our intention to seek power to deal with that issue and so, as a result, we did not push for it because that was not our original intention.

[181] **Leanne Wood:** However, it was then discovered that we might get that power

accidentally, is that how it worked?

[182] **The First Minister:** Yes, there was a question mark over that. It is sometimes forgotten that, while it is right to say that the criminal justice system is not devolved, which is fairly clear, criminal law is not the same thing. We have the power to create criminal offences and that means particular attention has to be given to whether particular powers would be devolved without us asking for or wanting them. That issue is unique, but we are in a position to create criminal offences. That was the issue around which the debate centred, but given that we had not asked for the power in the first place, we did not push for it.

[183] **Leanne Wood:** I will move on to ask about the process for agreeing the referendum, because the problems that we have seen evidence of through the LCO system can be done away with if we get a successful result in the referendum. Are we likely to get clearance from London on the referendum before the general election?

[184] **The First Minister:** I do not know what you mean by 'clearance'.

[185] **Leanne Wood:** The date when the wording has to be agreed between Cardiff and London.

[186] **The First Minister:** No, that will not happen before the general election. The Electoral Commission, for example, needs some 10 weeks to consult on what the question might look like, if I remember rightly. So, there will not be a date before the general election. Nevertheless, as I have said many times, our intention is to keep all options open. Realistically, that means any date from October onwards. We have to bear in mind that the general election creates uncertainty on timing that we cannot control, but the vote in February was designed to keep options open.

[187] **Leanne Wood:** Do you envisage any hitches, if there is a change of Government in London, in getting the referendum?

[188] **The First Minister:** I do not know whether the Chair is in a better position to answer that than I am. The simple answer is that I do not know. I do not know what view any new Government at Westminster would take.

[189] **Leanne Wood:** However, as far as you are aware, October is still an available date for that referendum.

[190] **The First Minister:** We have always looked to keep all options open about any date, which includes October onwards.

[191] **Darren Millar:** We are here to scrutinise the First Minister, not a possible future Conservative Government.

[192] **Kirsty Williams:** Perish the thought.

[193] **The First Minister:** I like the word 'possible', Chair.

[194] **Kirsty Williams:** There has been a great deal of attention given to LCOs this morning, which reflects what has happened since the Government of Wales Act 2006 came into force, but framework powers have also operated, largely unseen, and they have devolved a great deal of power to us without a great deal of attention being paid to that. That has also happened without the delays associated with the LCO process. Are you content that, in drafting UK legislation in London, proper account of framework powers and the ability to pass a power quickly to the Assembly has been taken into consideration?

[195] **The First Minister:** Yes. Whenever we become aware of a Bill that has the potential to devolve powers to us, we will always look to get those powers devolved. There are practical reasons for that. Simply, it is quicker to get powers devolved via what are called framework clauses in parliamentary Bills than through the LCO process. So, we will always look to get powers devolved that way rather than looking at LCOs as the main source of the devolution of power. The use of LCOs is to devolve power in areas where, for example, no parliamentary Bill is being presented and it would take some time for us to be able to get framework powers via a Bill. We are keen to ensure that, when we know of Bills and their content, we look to see as quickly as possible how further devolution of powers to the Assembly can occur via those Bills.

[196] **Kirsty Williams:** With regard to the culture LCO, for example, legislation was going through Parliament at that time that could potentially have devolved similar, if not greater, powers to us through the framework route, but the Government decided that it wanted to pursue the LCO route—I am not quite sure why, we never got to the bottom of that with the Minister. So, are you saying that, on all occasions, you have prioritised the framework route over the LCO route?

10.10 a.m.

[197] **The First Minister:** Sometimes, there will be problems with timing. When parliamentary Bills progress through Parliament, there will be occasions when clauses are added during that process, which may give rise to the devolution of power to Wales. Sometimes, it is not possible for us to jump on the Bill, as it were, at that time. The optimum time for us to seek framework powers is when a Bill is published, but sometimes there are timing problems that make it difficult to get those powers devolved, and that is when we have to look at an LCO. However, we certainly would not look at an LCO as an alternative to having powers devolved via a Bill, because devolving via a Bill involves a quicker process.

[198] **Darren Millar:** Is it fair to say that there is an element of opportunism when a Bill comes out and that we are opportunistically looking for opportunities to devolve powers rather than it being a planned process?

[199] **The First Minister:** We are not in control of parliamentary business. That is the issue. For example, there may be occasions when we have an LCO planned, and then a parliamentary Bill presents itself that, effectively, devolves the powers that the LCO would have devolved. It does not happen very often, but it is a possibility. You use the word ‘opportunistically’, but that is possibly the wrong word. I would simply say that, on those occasions when a chance appears that we were not expecting, we would take it. There will be areas where a Bill seeks to legislate for England, and we would want to make sure that the Welsh clauses are framework clauses and that they do not seek to legislate for Wales.

[200] **Darren Millar:** Many people have suggested that, if the National Assembly—as opposed to the Assembly Government—had the capacity to conduct greater scrutiny of UK Government Bills, there could be other opportunities to devolve powers on a framework basis. That is an issue for the National Assembly, however, rather than the Assembly Government.

[201] **The First Minister:** It is an issue for Parliament, ultimately, because it is the Parliament’s Bill.

[202] **Darren Millar:** Yes, but—

[203] **The First Minister:** I know this is a live issue because I have been questioned on it

in what was the Subordinate Legislation Committee but is now the Constitutional Affairs Committee, I believe.

[204] **Darren Millar:** That is right.

[205] **The First Minister:** I have been asked the question, but there are practical difficulties with it, and we have Members of Parliament representing Wales at Westminster who can provide that level of scrutiny.

[206] **Darren Millar:** I will now ask you about the future role of the Wales Office. It has been suggested by Sir Jon Shorridge, the former Permanent Secretary, that, in the event of a 'yes' vote in the referendum, resulting in full lawmaking powers for the National Assembly, there will be no need for a Wales Office. Much of your paper refers to the current role of the Wales Office in guiding LCOs through the parliamentary scrutiny process, and helping to broker discussions between the various Whitehall departments and the Assembly Government. What do you say to the suggestion that the Wales Office does not need to exist, post referendum?

[207] **The First Minister:** There is still a strong case for the Wales Office continuing to exist, even if primary powers are devolved, for a number of reasons. First, regarding future funding for Wales, it is essential that we have somebody putting Wales's case forward at Westminster. It is right to say that if there were to be a Secretary of State who represented all of the devolved administrations, there would be tensions in terms of what shape future funding might take. It is important that Wales has its own voice with regard to the future of Barnett and the future of funding. Secondly, we have to remember that large areas of policy would not be devolved even after a referendum; criminal justice is one of these and policing is another. These are areas that are, by and large, devolved in Scotland, so there is a far stronger case for Wales continuing to have a voice around the Cabinet table, putting Wales's voice forward on those issues. With regard to energy, for example, we know that anything over 50 MW is not devolved, so it is essential that a strong Welsh voice remains around the Cabinet table.

[208] **Darren Millar:** So you are satisfied that, post referendum, a Wales Office should continue to operate for those reasons. Why do you think that Sir Jon made those particular comments? He had the experience of working with the Wales Office on a regular basis in his previous role. Why would he suggest that it ought to wither away?

[209] **The First Minister:** You would have to ask him that. From my point of view, I am not going to argue that Wales should lose a discrete voice around the Cabinet table.

[210] **Darren Millar:** Absolutely. I accept that point, and it is interesting to get a different perspective on it. In terms of the opportunity for framework powers post referendum, First Minister, do you think that the Wales Office ought to develop a stronger link in parliamentary Bills that are going through the parliamentary process at Westminster and the opportunities that might arise to devolve further powers to the Assembly? What takes place at the moment in terms of that role? You went into the LCO process in some detail in your paper, but there was not too much on the framework powers. Is there effective communication on the part of the Wales Office when a parliamentary Bill is presented in Westminster, and does it look at the opportunities? How does that relationship work at the moment?

[211] **The First Minister:** It would be a matter for us to spot the opportunities to have powers devolved—

[212] **Darren Millar:** Is that always at this end of the M4, rather than—

[213] **The First Minister:** It would primarily be our task, yes, because we would have to make an assessment as a Government of what we want to see devolved. The Wales Office has always been co-operative in working with us and liaising with Whitehall departments to achieve the devolution of those powers.

[214] You mentioned framework powers post referendum, but I do not think that that would apply post referendum.

[215] **Darren Millar:** Would it not apply at all?

[216] **The First Minister:** No. The whole point of the referendum is to bring into place Part 4 of the Government of Wales Act and the Schedule to it, which would make it very clear what is and is not devolved, because we will have effectively moved into an area where there are delegated powers and reserved powers. There would still be a need to deal with what are called Sewel motions in the Scottish Parliament. Our equivalents are legislative consent motions. There would still be a need for the Wales Office to ensure that any parliamentary Bill would not impinge on the devolved powers that would have, and it would have to ensure agreement for a legislative consent motion for a particular power to be applied to Wales.

[217] **Darren Millar:** In terms of the other issue that you referred to in your paper, namely the Joint Ministerial Committee and the value that that can add to the process of getting things right in understanding the different devolved arrangements for the nations. Can you tell us a little about the re-establishment of that body and how you see it working going forward?

[218] **The First Minister:** We met last week in London. I was present, as were the First Minister of Scotland and the First and Deputy First Ministers of Northern Ireland. Peter Hain represents the UK Government as a whole—he does not attend in his role as Secretary of State for Wales. He chairs the JMC. Last week, we were able to agree a dispute resolution process. It still needs a little work to tighten up some parts of it, but it is nevertheless the first time such a clear process with a number of steps to it has been put in place.

[219] Dispute resolution tended to be taken forward on an ad hoc basis in years gone by, but the more formal the process can become, the clearer it will be and the better it will be for all involved.

[220] **Darren Millar:** How often will the Joint Ministerial Committee meet in future?

[221] **The First Minister:** It has different forms. There is a Joint Ministerial Committee (Domestic), a Joint Ministerial Committee (European), and a Joint Ministerial Committee (Plenary), which I think meets every year. The JMC meets roughly once a quarter.

[222] **Ms Cassidy:** There is a total of four meetings a year, one plenary and three domestic, with European meetings being held ahead of European Council meetings.

[223] **Darren Millar:** Thank you for that. Are there any other questions on this particular issue? I see that there are not. That brings our evidence session and our questioning to an end, First Minister. I thank you and your officials for your attendance this morning. We look forward to receiving in due course the further information on the contingency planning issues that we raised with you.

[224] **The First Minister:** I thank the committee for rearranging my evidence-giving session from last week.

[225] **Darren Millar:** No problem. Thank you.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 10.19 a.m.*  
*The meeting ended at 10.19 a.m.*