



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

**Y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus
The Public Accounts Committee**

**Dydd Iau, 22 Ebrill 2010
Thursday, 22 April 2010**

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

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

Jeff Cuthbert	Llafur Labour
Irene James	Llafur Labour
Bethan Jenkins	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Sandy Mewies	Llafur Labour
Jonathan Morgan	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Welsh Conservatives (Chair of the Committee)
Nick Ramsay	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Jenny Randerson	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Janet Ryder	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Gillian Body	Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru Auditor General for Wales
Paul Dimblebee	Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru Wales Audit Office
Stephen Lisle	Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru Wales Audit Office

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

Alun Davidson	Clerc Clerk
Andrew Minnis	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 8.59 a.m.

The meeting began at 8.59 a.m.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Jonathan Morgan:** I welcome everyone to the National Assembly's Public Accounts Committee. I will start with the usual housekeeping arrangements. I remind Members that we operate bilingually, so please feel free to speak in Welsh or English. There are headsets available for public translation and amplification. I remind everyone to switch off their mobile phones, BlackBerrys and pagers, as they interfere with the microphone system. If the fire alarm does sound, please follow the advice of the ushers. I have received two apologies for absence this morning, one from Alun Davies and the other from Lorraine Barrett. I have not been notified of any substitutions this morning.

9.00 a.m.

**Gwasanaethau i Blant a Phobl Ifanc ag Anghenion Emosiynol ac Iechyd
Meddwl: Cyngor gan Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru
Services for Children and Young People with Emotional and Mental Health
Needs: Advice from the Auditor General for Wales**

[2] **Jonathan Morgan:** We have received some advice from the Auditor General for Wales. The Welsh Assembly Government sent us a response to the evidence that we took and the letter that we sent to it about the evidence session that we have had with the Director General for Health and Social Services. The Government sent us a response on 5 March. As usual, we asked the auditor general to examine this response and provide us with her response. With that, I welcome the auditor general this morning. I would be grateful if you could brief the committee on the issues that we raised and the issues that you identified.

[3] **Ms Body:** I will be delighted to do so. Members may recall that, at the evidence session on 13 January on services for children and young people with emotional and mental health needs, they were concerned about the ability of witnesses to provide evidence on some of the issues that the committee was raising, particularly those outside the health portfolio. Subsequent to that, the Chair wrote to the Permanent Secretary to raise the concern of the committee with her. The Permanent Secretary has responded, suggesting a protocol that should, hopefully, ensure that the witnesses who attend committee meetings are the right ones to provide responses to the issues of concern to the committee. The Permanent Secretary also suggested that it might be helpful to have some indication of the committee's likely lines of questioning. My advice to this committee is that the protocol looks perfectly reasonable. I think that we could also play a part here. We know the issues that come up in our report and which directorates general and departments within the Assembly Government they are likely to concern and which witnesses should therefore attend. We can therefore provide advice to the clerk as to which witnesses you might invite. I would suggest that, by taking that line, there is no need to provide any indication of the likely lines of questioning. In this instance, it is not the case that the committee strayed away from the issues raised in our report and came out of left field. I think that it is perfectly reasonable to say that it was quite likely that those sorts of issues were going to be raised.

[4] **Janet Ryder:** I find it rather strange, Chair, that we have had a response saying that they will ensure that we have the appropriate persons to answer the questions. That begs a lot of questions about what the practice beforehand was and how seriously the work of this committee has been treated. I hope that we do not see a repetition of these events.

[5] **Jonathan Morgan:** I know that Members were concerned about the responses that we received from the Director General for Health and Social Services at the time, which is why I wrote to the Permanent Secretary raising the concern that those officials who come to the committee should be more than capable of answering questions about a report that they have signed off. The Permanent Secretary has said that directors general now work more closely together, so there should be a way of ensuring, through the new protocol, that the officials who come here can furnish the committee with the information that we require.

[6] I would suggest that we follow this matter up by inviting the director general of the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills to attend a meeting with the Director General for Health and Social Services in June. We understand that Paul Williams has indicated that he is able to come to the meeting on 24 June; we are seeking clarification as to whether the other director general is free to attend at the same time. This is an issue that we should explore further. It was an interesting report and I know that Members, particularly Bethan, had a number of education-based questions about the report that we were unable to explore at the time. We need to explore that further with officials. So, if you are

happy to do so, we will pursue a date—and 24 June looks likely—to ensure that they come back to answer those questions and allow the committee to explore these matters further. Are there any further points on this?

[7] **Bethan Jenkins:** I do not think that Government officials should be signing off documents if they are not happy that they can fully present the opinions of the Government when they come before the committee. We fully expect such people to be able to answer questions on cross-portfolio issues. So, I welcome a meeting with the education side, because we had some concerns in relation to initial teacher training, identifying mental health issues, and subsequent lessons in the schools. I welcome that as an action point.

[8] **Jonathan Morgan:** I would like your opinion—I know my view on this, and I suspect that you know what it is—about the Government having advanced notice of the proposed lines of questioning.

[9] **Jeff Cuthbert:** I agree with the general thrust of the argument. It is for Assembly Members as politicians to ask the questions that we believe to be pertinent, many of which might be generated from the discussion that takes place at the beginning. So, I do not think that giving advance notice is the right thing to do. It is for us to ensure that our questions are relevant.

[10] **Jonathan Morgan:** I also work on the basis that the evidence sessions, particularly with senior officials, are, from their perspective, a fairly straightforward exercise. They know the structure, because it reflects the structure of the auditor general's report. They know how the report is put together, and they know the issues that have come out of that report, so I do not see why we need to provide further advice to the officials who come before this committee. So, we will thank the Permanent Secretary for the suggestion, but I think that the committee wishes to proceed in the usual way.

[11] Are you happy with the two directors general coming back on 24 June? I see that you are. Thank you very much indeed.

9.06 a.m.

Gwasanaethau Ambiwylans yng Nghymru: Cyngor gan Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru

Ambulance Services in Wales: Advice from the Auditor General for Wales

[12] **Jonathan Morgan:** Members who are fairly new to this committee, and those of us who are not so new to it, will know that this is an issue that the Public Accounts Committee, and the Audit Committee before it, has taken a huge degree of interest in following the excellent reports published by the Auditor General for Wales.

[13] Last July, the committee published its second report on ambulance services, which included a recommendation that the Welsh Government should provide data on response times by the beginning of February this year. We received figures from Paul Williams in March. According to the usual procedure, we asked the view of the auditor general, and Gillian has provided us with a response. We are grateful to you, Gillian, for doing so. Could you please brief the committee?

[14] **Ms Body:** This report on ambulance response times is in response to the committee's report. It provides a fair degree of interesting information about the achievements of the ambulance trust as a whole, the three regions within that and then areas within each region, and their delivery against two of the key targets that they are working to. It has not met the

targets in full; it has met them for a number of months. The report shows that there is quite a bit of variability in performance between the three regions and between the areas within each region, to the extent that two areas have not met the targets at all.

[15] There are clear signs of improvement in 2009 over the previous year, but as my letter points out, if you make a longer-term analysis, it is clear that 2008 was a dip from 2007. So, 2009 shows only a marginal improvement over 2007. Nonetheless, the direction of travel is very welcome. However, the bullet points that I make on the second page of my letter are just to say that it is probably worth treating this report with a degree of caution, because it only tells you so much. It only focuses on two key targets; it does not focus on any of the other targets that the ambulance service is working towards, and the committee has expressed concerns about some of the perverse incentives of other targets that were being used. In terms of providing robust evidence of sustainable improvement, there are other factors such as the management within the ambulance trust and aspects that are completely outside the control of the ambulance trust, such as the unscheduled care system. The committee has now received a response from the Assembly Government on how it is responding to the recommendations in our report on unscheduled care, to which the committee might wish to return and take evidence on from the new chief executive of the ambulance trust as part of that review.

[16] **Jonathan Morgan:** Are there any particular views or questions?

[17] **Sandy Mewies:** Do you know when we will be going back to this, and do we have any idea when the new chief executive will be appointed?

[18] **Jonathan Morgan:** I am afraid that I do not, and I am not entirely sure how long this process will take. It can take many months before an appointment is made.

[19] **Sandy Mewies:** We ought to have some idea, because this is not the first time that it has happened. For north Wales, the ambulance service is not doing too badly, but it is inconsistent and it is something that we need to return to quite quickly, but we need all the evidence.

[20] **Jenny Randerson:** The report makes great play of the problems of staff sickness and the bad weather, and one understands that. However, in her response, Gillian points out that only 47 per cent of cases involve the recording of a valid handover time, and when they are recorded, only 62 per cent of handovers took place in the allocated time of 15 minutes. That seems to be a significant gap in the report, and it is something that should be a genuine issue of concern, because, as we well know, in most months, the success of the ambulance service in meeting its targets is predicated to a considerable extent on meeting that handover time. Why was that not included within the report?

[21] **Jonathan Morgan:** Can you shed any light on that, auditor general?

[22] **Ms Body:** I cannot, other than to say that I think that they have just focused on two of the key indicators. As I said earlier, even within the committee's report, the committee expressed concern about some of the other targets, which this report does not address at all.

[23] **Jonathan Morgan:** What we need to do is to examine the response of the Assembly Government and decide how to take the matter further. It would be wise to ask the Director General for Health and Social Services to come to the committee. Likewise, I would like to see the new chief executive of the ambulance trust here as well. The only difficulty with that is that it could take many months. If the Government is going out to recruit, whoever it appoints could have to give three months notice for their current post, so we could be talking about towards the autumn term and beyond before we get to look at this. In the meantime, it might be worth asking the Director General for Health and Social Services to come in anyway

as we examine that response and pursue those matters with him in the meantime.

9.10 a.m.

[24] **Janet Ryder:** The letter that we have before us says that the performance report does not include any data regarding the time taken to follow an initial response with a fully equipped ambulance. The importance of that was highlighted in our committee's report. I would like further information on that, because I would like to know how many times the first responders are being used. I believe that, in north Wales, a number of these targets are being met by using first responders. They are excellent; they do a fantastic job. I would like to know how many times the initial response, to meet the target, is undertaken by a first responder, and how many of those calls then require a follow up by a fully equipped ambulance.

[25] **Jeff Cuthbert:** My question follows on from that, and I agree with the point that Janet has just made. It is important that we have the director general before us at the earliest opportunity. Of all the health-related concerns that my constituents bring to my attention, the largest number by far are to do with ambulance services. For them, the fact that it is a different trust is neither here nor there—it is all the NHS, as far as they are concerned. We need to have a joined-up picture and for people to understand that issues such as the handover times are very important to patients. If they are required—and I assume that they are—to register the amount of time that it takes, why are only 62 per cent of the 47 per cent doing it? That is a question that needs to be asked. Either they are meant to do it or they are not.

[26] **Jonathan Morgan:** Obviously, much of the evidence that we have taken, in more than one evidence session, has focused on how the NHS can help the ambulance service to meet its targets, because much of the ability of the ambulance service to meet those targets will depend on the rest of the system. A benefit of having the Director General for Health and Social Services come to the committee is that he is responsible for the whole system, so he can answer questions about how the rest of the system is working and whether it is working as effectively as it should be.

[27] At some point in the future, I imagine that we will want to return to the issue with the new chief executive of the ambulance trust. In the meantime, I do not think that we would want to wait for many months until we reach that point. Once we have gone through that response and taken advice from the auditor general, it may well be necessary for us to ask the director general to come back. An ongoing concern has been expressed by the committee, based on the work that has been done by the Wales Audit Office, and it would be right for us to invite those officials back here to answer further questions. Are you happy with that course of action? I see that you are. Are there any further points on this? I see that there are not.

9.13 a.m.

Cynnig Trefniadol Procedural Motion

[28] **Jonathan Morgan:** I would like the committee's permission to move into private session to allow us to consider a number of items, one of which is the auditor general's report into the Plas Madoc Communities First programme. It is also to allow the committee to consider one of its draft reports and its forward work programme.

[29] I move that

the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order No. 10.37.

[30] I see that the meeting is in agreement.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 9.13 a.m.
The public part of the meeting ended at 9.13 a.m.*