



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

**Y Pwyllgor Cymunedau a Diwylliant
The Communities and Culture Committee**

**Dydd Mercher, 5 Tachwedd 2008
Wednesday, 5 November 2008**

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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

Peter Black	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Paul Davies	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Nerys Evans	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Janice Gregory	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Mark Isherwood	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Ann Jones	Llafur (yn dirprwyo ar ran Lesley Griffiths) Labour (substitute for Lesley Griffiths)
David Lloyd	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Brian Gibbons	Aelod Cynulliad, Llafur (Y Gweinidog dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol a Llywodraeth Leol) Assembly Member, Labour (The Minister for Social Justice and Local Government)
Joanna Jordan	Pennaeth, Yr Is-adran Diogelwch Cymunedol, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Head, Community Safety Division, Welsh Assembly Government
Dr Emyr Roberts	Pennaeth, Yr Adran Cyfiawnder Cymdeithasol a Llywodraeth Leol, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Head, Department for Social Justice and Local Government, Welsh Assembly Government
Caroline Turner	Pennaeth, Y Gyfarwyddiaeth Gymunedau, Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru Head, Communities Directorate, Welsh Assembly Government

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

Lara Date	Clerc Clerk
Annette Millett	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Stefan Sanchez	Clerc, Yr Is-bwyllgor Darlledu Clerk, Broadcasting Sub-committee

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] **Janice Gregory:** Good morning and welcome to the Communities and Culture Committee on this day, 5 November. I cannot let the opportunity go by without making a passing reference to what a historic day it is for the American people and for the world at large, with the election of Barack Obama as the President-elect in the USA. I certainly send my congratulations and I hope that Members will join me in doing so.

[2] I welcome Dr Brian Gibbons AM, who is here this morning for scrutiny of his ministerial portfolio, and Emyr Roberts, Joanna Jordan and Caroline Turner. I welcome you all to committee this morning.

[3] I will just go through the usual housekeeping announcements. I ask that if you have any electronic devices about your person that you switch them off—that includes BlackBerrys, pagers and mobile phones. In the event of an emergency, an alarm will sound. We are not due to have a fire drill this morning, so you will be asked to leave the building in a safe and orderly fashion if we hear the alarm.

[4] We have received apologies from Lynne Neagle and Lesley Griffiths and we have been notified that Mark Isherwood will be leaving us early this morning. I am delighted to welcome Ann Jones who is here as a substitute for Lesley Griffiths.

9.01 a.m.

Craffu ar waith Gweinidog, y Gweinidog dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol a Llywodraeth Leol Ministerial Scrutiny, Minister for Social Justice and Local Government

[5] **Janice Gregory:** Good morning, Minister.

[6] **The Minister for Social Justice and Local Government (Brian Gibbons):** Good morning. It is nice to be here.

[7] **Janice Gregory:** It is lovely to see you and your officials again this morning. Thank you very much for the paper that you have provided for committee members. It is the usual thing, Minister: can you speak briefly to your paper?

[8] **Brian Gibbons:** I am happy to go straight to questions.

[9] **Janice Gregory:** That is great. Thank you. No-one has indicated that they wish to speak first, so if you can hang on for a second—I think that we have all been up all night watching the election coverage. Ann is first, then Nerys.

[10] **Ann Jones:** Thank you for allowing me to be a substitute on this committee. I see this as an opportunity to broaden our work. Minister, I wanted to ask you about child poverty. I read your paper. On what has been announced in terms of moneys for local authorities to assist them in working with children, how confident are you that local authorities have got the message that the index of multiple deprivation should be used to formulate their priorities when setting budgets? How do you think that that will help with the child poverty agenda? Although we have a child poverty index now, the indicators from the index of multiple deprivation often set the priorities for those children. How confident are you that local authorities are up to that challenge?

[11] **Brian Gibbons:** We realise that the index of multiple deprivation indicates where the concentrations of probably about 50 per cent of the children in poverty are. So, 12 or 15 per cent of the population of Wales lives in the areas covered by the top 10 per cent of the index of multiple deprivation and something like 50 per cent of child poverty is concentrated in those areas. So, clearly, being able to identify the localities that are affected by child poverty in a spatial sense is very important. I think that that is also recognised by the next phase of Communities First, for example, where one of the new priorities included under the vision statement for Communities First is child poverty. So, we would expect that if Communities First partnerships wanted to address the issue of child poverty, for example, that would be one of the priority areas under Communities First, but the partnership would have to demonstrate joint working with local authorities to be able to access the outcome fund. I think that there are real opportunities there for the statutory organisations to have complementary work going on to deal with child poverty in their areas. We need to realise that 50 per cent of the children in poverty live outside Communities First areas, and it is important that we do not lose sight of that, but the biggest concentration is obviously in the Communities First areas. As you said, the child index of multiple deprivation was published a few months ago and I hope that that will provide an even more focused approach in spatial terms.

[12] People will also remember that, about two months ago—I think that I mentioned it at the budget meeting—there was the publication of the Child Poverty Solutions Wales toolkit, which was developed by local authorities in conjunction with Save the Children. It is an important document, because, sometimes, when people are trying to address child poverty they may feel that the problem is too big or that they do not know where to start. The toolkit is a real and practical tool of information, assessment, guidance and best practice. It has been developed with the Welsh Local Government Association, so there is good sign-up in that regard. There is no excuse for individual local authorities not to get on with this work.

[13] **Nerys Evans:** Mae gennyf sawl cwestiwn ond dechreuaf gyda thri pwnc. Bu ichi sôn bythefnos yn ôl am strategaeth codi ymwybyddiaeth o drais yn y cartref dros y Nadolig. A oes gennych newyddion ynglŷn ag unrhyw gynllun penodol?

Nerys Evans: I have a number of questions but I will begin with three topics. You mentioned a fortnight ago the strategy to raise awareness of domestic abuse over Christmas. Can you give an update on any specific plan?

[14] O ran y strategaeth camddefnyddio sylweddu, a chyffuriau yn benodol, yr ydych yn sôn yn y papur eich bod yn edrych ar gynllun peilot yn Lloegr i roi pigiadau heroin mewn fferyllfaoedd. A oes unrhyw newyddion neu ganlyniadau yn sgîl hynny, gan fy mod yn gwybod fod y cynllun peilot yn dod i ben y flwyddyn nesaf?

Specifically on the substance misuse strategy—particularly drugs—you mention in your paper that you are looking at a pilot scheme in England to provide heroin injections in pharmacies. Can you give an update on that, because I know that the pilot scheme comes to an end next year?

[15] A gawsoch unrhyw drafodaethau gyda Llywodraeth San Steffan am swyddfeydd post? Mae'r cyfrif cerdyn swyddfa post yn mynd allan i dendr, ac mae sôn y bydd PayPal yn gwneud *loss leader* ar gyfer y tendr. Bydd hynny'n golygu y bydd miloedd mwy o swyddfeydd post yn cau yn ein cymunedau. A gawsoch drafodaethau gyda Llywodraeth San Steffan ynglŷn â hynny, a rôl y Llywodraeth y Cynulliad o ran atal hynny?

Have you had any discussions with the Westminster Government about post offices? The post office card account is going out to tender, and there is talk that PayPal will make a loss leader for the tender. It would mean that many more thousands of post offices would close in our communities. Have you had any discussions with the Westminster Government about that, and the role of the Assembly Government in preventing it?

[16] **Brian Gibbons:** Jo might come in later on domestic abuse, but we are hoping to have at least two events—one in north Wales and one in south Wales—around the beginning of December. They will provide an opportunity for the media to attend so that we can highlight the problems and risks arising from domestic abuse, particularly around Christmas time. There will be literature and so forth linked to that, and an attempt will be made to make the main public agencies aware of the fact that Christmas is a time of increased risk.

[17] In relation to substance misuse, there are two parallel streams. Instead of using methadone substitution, which is the main treatment for people on opiates for harm minimisation, the pilot schemes in England will provide intravenous prescribed heroin in a controlled environment to the person with the problem. It is one model that is being looked at in England. Heroin substitution is not widely used in the United Kingdom, if at all, so it is not a common way of treating patients. However, some people are interested in another model, in which people are provided with proper facilities to inject illegally obtained heroin—in other words, heroin that they buy on the street. That option is problematic, because, apart from the costs and the quality assurance for the service user in those circumstances, there is also a legal question as to whether or not such facilities could be deemed to be complicit with an illegal activity. So, there are a number of difficult issues to be resolved in the legal framework, but we are proposing that the national public health service in Wales looks at the evidence that is available and presents it to the advisory committee on substance misuse in the light of the latest evidence. I do not know what the timescale is—Jo may know—but in six, nine, 12, 15 or 18 months' time the advisory group's advice may be available to me. I do not know whether those timescales are correct?

9.10 a.m.

[18] **Ms Jordan:** The work has started; the national public health service has already had a meeting with our advisory panel on substance misuse and has begun the scoping and the initial trawl of literature on this. We are hoping that the bulk of the work will be completed during 2009, but it is one of those things that, until you start to get into the evidence, you cannot be absolutely certain how long it will take. We are giving it priority and the work has started.

[19] **Brian Gibbons:** On the post office account, the Assembly Government—not just now, but also going back over previous administrations—has a healthy scepticism about over-tendering and so on. However, this is a fairly major contract and, under competition rules and so on, the UK Government has much discretion in deciding whether the tender for this is arguable. We have made our reservations known, because it must be a legitimate tendering exercise. If there was a perception that the tendering exercise was subject to a political fix, the various contracting agencies could ask for a judicial review and go to court. You cannot have a tendering exercise and then solve the problem with a political fix. There are clear rules in terms of how the tendering process operates. We are as concerned as anyone else in relation to the outcome of the tendering process. We have no evidence to suggest otherwise. Potentially, it would be serious to the post office network if the card account was not secured. It would not mean that every post office would close down or anything like that, but there is no doubt that a substantial proportion would become vulnerable if they did not have the footfall from the post office card account.

[20] **Peter Black:** I want to follow up on Ann Jones's line of questioning on child poverty and on Communities First general regeneration initiatives. By far, the biggest amount of money available in any local area is in terms of regeneration and influencing the child poverty agenda, which lies with local authorities; they use a large amount of that money. In addition, there is also expenditure from your department for Communities First regeneration initiatives and child poverty and there is expenditure from Jane Davidson's department for the home energy efficiency scheme, housing and so on. How do you bring all of those elements

together to ensure that you are all singing from the same hymn sheet and aiming to deliver the same objectives and that you are not contradicting each other in terms of how that money is spent?

[21] **Brian Gibbons:** The main way that that is achieved is through the single children's plan. All local authorities have a statutory duty to prepare a children's plan, which has seven themes, one of which is child poverty. Every local authority works with partners—it is a multidisciplinary and multi-agency strategy—to incorporate the view of all of the various partners in a particular area working with the local authority. We get sight of all of those plans and we give advice on them. Now that the toolkit is available we would also expect that to further inform the development of the single children's plan.

[22] The framework for delivering a good children's plan and a good strategy at local level to tackle child poverty exists. It will ensure the joint working that you are talking about. However, that is not a guarantee that every single plan will be totally fit for purpose. Clearly, if the plan were seriously deficient, we would have a dialogue with local authorities in relation to the quality of the plan. However, there is a sense of focus. When the proposed Measure is passed, the fact that other agencies do not have a statutory duty in relation to the children's plan will be addressed so that every public agency in Wales will be signed up to the same priority of tackling child poverty. Emyr might want to say a word on this.

[23] **Dr Roberts:** With regard to physical regeneration, the Deputy Minister recently announced some strategic regeneration areas. This approach is seen as a vehicle through which local authority departments and Assembly Government departments can contribute to the same physical regeneration objectives for those areas. That obviously includes housing and educational facilities, as you suggest, as well as traditional, property-based physical regeneration.

[24] **Peter Black:** With regard to Communities First and regeneration, research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found a general failure of partnerships to exert influence over statutory and voluntary agencies. For example, it said that there was no evidence of significant mainstream programme bending. I know that that is all jargon, but ensuring that everybody is spending money in the same way towards the same objectives is very important if the amount of money that you are putting into Communities First is to have the maximum impact. My concern is that, effectively, local authorities are pursuing one course of action, and elsewhere Ministers are saying what their priorities are with regard to Communities First and regeneration areas, so you are not necessarily working that closely together. I am interested in how you are overcoming that, because there is a feeling among local authorities that they are being bypassed by some of these ministerial decisions.

[25] **Brian Gibbons:** I do not know; that may be the case in Swansea.

[26] **Peter Black:** No. I am talking about outside of Swansea—in north Wales too.

[27] **Brian Gibbons:** I would hope that that would not be the case, because, as an Assembly Government, we recognise the point that you made at the beginning, which is that local authorities are key delivery agencies for many of the initiatives necessary to tackle child poverty. If what you say is the case, I would be quite interested in getting the details so that we can address that, because it is in no-one's interest, and least of all in the interests of the children who are living in poverty, that that should be the case.

[28] **Peter Black:** How influential are local authorities in determining the direction of Communities First in their areas?

[29] **Brian Gibbons:** Clearly, local authorities must prepare their overarching community

strategy, and they must take the lead in developing the children's plan. Therefore, they are fundamental to the work in any particular area. The challenge for Communities First organisations will be to be aware of the policies that have been developed, and they should have been part of the development of those policies in the first place. The development of these policies and strategies, the children's plan and the overarching community strategy should not have been done in a darkened room by senior local authority officers without engaging with the public. Communities First organisations should be part of the process of reaching those plans, but if they want to draw down money from the outcome fund, one of the requirements is that they must have sign-up from statutory organisations.

9.20 a.m.

[30] The precise nature of that sign-up will depend on the nature of the project and the nature of the activity. However, if a Communities First organisation makes an application for the outcome fund and has no evidence of statutory sign-up, then that project will not be approved from the outcome fund. There is an incentive for local authorities because if the Communities First partnerships are sufficiently imaginative and creative, their outcome fund projects will complement the statutory duties of the local authorities, health bodies and all the others contributing to this. So, there is a real opportunity for mutuality and mutual support to emerge in this area of work, which was not there before, in fairness. There were no previous children's plans—they might have been in draft form, but they were not an official document.

[31] The outcome fund did not exist in the past and the shift in emphasis in the Communities First programme from capacity building to an outcome-based approach, including child poverty as one of the six strands of Communities First, means that things are coming together to place a real sense of purpose behind this. As I have said, that will be underpinned by a legislative framework in Wales. Interestingly, the Prime Minister seems to be taking a similar approach. It was our proposal in the Labour manifesto and in the 'One Wales' agreement to place a statutory duty on public authorities to take into account child poverty. It is a good idea; it has created that sense of national purpose and it is encouraging that the Westminster Government has taken a similar view.

[32] I do not know whether Members will have seen the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's report on poverty, which was published within the last three or four weeks. That report pointed out that, in the most developed capitalist countries, child poverty and inequalities in society were increasing, but the UK and Greece or Portugal, I think, were among the few countries to buck the trend of greater inequality. Between 2000 and 2005, the years covered by the survey, the UK began to reverse the previous two or three decades of emerging inequalities in the UK. The OECD agreed that that increasing trend towards inequality was being reversed. That is encouraging and the broad thrust at Westminster and behind our work in Wales will tackle the inequalities that we have faced for the best part of two decades.

[33] **Joyce Watson:** Following on from that, I am pleased with that OECD report. We give money to agencies, whether local government or other organisations, and I am concerned about how we can ensure that that money is being spent on the purpose for which it is intended, in this case, child poverty. You mentioned community strategy and children's plans, which are all very welcome, but is there a system to allow us to consider those plans and to track what the money that we give to whatever agency delivers?

[34] **Brian Gibbons:** The children's plans and community strategies are in the public domain and the Proposed Local Government Measure will lead to greater transparency and accountability in local government delivery. That is one of the main rationales for the proposed Measure that the Assembly Government is bringing forward: to bring accountability and transparency into the performance of local authorities.

[35] Dealing with the issue more immediately, there are several opportunities. Clearly, the development of the Ffynnon performance tool for local authorities will provide greater transparency in that people can track what is going on. We are hoping that representatives from Ffynnon will put on a demonstration next month upstairs in the Senedd so that Assembly Members and others can see its potential and get a feel for why it is an important tool for performance and accountability. The Child Poverty Solutions Wales software will provide similar opportunities, and one of the challenges in developing that is to ensure that it will interface with Ffynnon and result in a well-substantiated, empirical database.

[36] The Cymorth fund of over £50 million is still ring-fenced. The money spent through Cymorth is in relation to specific, named projects that we in the Assembly Government track. Cymorth money will go into the revenue support grant, but one of the legislative proposals from the Assembly Government is to place clear statutory duties on local authorities to carry out the type of functions that Cymorth money is currently available for, so that, even though the money may go into the RSG, the services provided under Cymorth will have to be provided on a statutory basis. A lot of things are going on. Perhaps Caroline can elaborate.

[37] **Ms Turner:** On the Communities First fund, we are bringing in more tracking of the outcomes. Until now, over the past few years, the emphasis has been very much on capacity building, and that is a very soft activity that is difficult to capture and measure, especially when you have 150 partnerships engaged in different activities. However, with the Communities First outcomes fund, we are providing a framework that will enable all partnerships to capture progress and report to us under a consistent framework. We are working with the local government data unit to provide a database, and we have annual monitoring reports, so we will have much better data in future about what Communities First is achieving.

[38] **Brian Gibbons:** The most important thing, which I forgot to mention, is the child wellbeing monitor, which will be unique to Wales. I do not think that any other Government, certainly in the United Kingdom, and maybe even further afield, will actually publish anything like it. Hopefully, by the end of this month, we will have published the child wellbeing monitor, and that will provide us with a benchmark for performance in relation to child poverty and overall child wellbeing.

[39] We are keen for the monitor to be a rigorous, robust and validated tool and, to ensure that, we have asked the child poverty expert group to peer review the monitor, just to make sure that it is totally fit for purpose. We have had some positive feedback from the group. Jane Hutt will be launching the monitor within the next two to three weeks. That will give us the benchmark to measure where we currently are. Then, in about two years' time, the monitor will be updated, and will then be updated regularly so that we can try to capture all of the relevant and key elements for child wellbeing.

[40] As Caroline said, on the Statistics for Wales website, a whole series of data will be made available to allow people to see what is going on with regard to child wellbeing. A lot of information will be available.

9.30 a.m.

[41] **Joyce Watson:** Keeping to a similar theme, but moving to the issue of fuel poverty, in your paper, you make a welcome commitment in terms of supporting projects on access to affordable money and educating people on how to manage their money or how to save and borrow safely. I am very keen for credit unions to be promoted and that we do our very best, especially in the rural area that I cover. There is a project in Newtown, called the Monergy project, which combines both. It has been running for some time and it is very successful. It

does two things: it shows people how to get the very best value when they are using and buying energy, but at the same time, running alongside that, it shows adults and children in the area how to save. It has a system that runs through the schools in the area, which have bought into it. Would you come to look at the Monergy project, because it is an example of best practice? Also, because the two things cannot be separated, particularly with increased fuel prices, would you consider looking at more combined thinking in the way that is demonstrated through that project, where people are clearly educated on how to save fuel, how to buy the cheapest fuel and, at the same time, how to manage their money?

[42] **Brian Gibbons:** I cannot say that I know about that particular project but I know that we are working very closely with the Robert Owen Credit Union in Newtown. As well as supporting the mainstream activity of the Robert Owen Credit Union, we are also working with it to develop a number of pilot schemes for new innovative financial products. I am unable to give you the precise details but part of the rationale behind it is to allow the credit union to interface with a number of the mainstream banks, so that the credit union is more closely integrated with high-street banking activity. If you want, Chair, we could give you some details of the project.

[43] I think that my colleague, Leighton Andrews, has been to Newtown and may be going back there in the near future, because it is Robert Owen's centenary year. He was a great champion of mutual support organisations and we want to celebrate the significant contribution that he made to Welsh, British, Scottish and international society—he did some of his work abroad. There is a lot of exciting work taking place in Newtown with the Robert Owen Credit Union, and we will try to get you some details, Chair.

[44] **Ann Jones:** I will change tack and refer to the fire and rescue service. First, I thank the Welsh Assembly Government for the part that it played in the development of Wales's first community fire station, which was opened in Rhyl by the First Minister; I know that you have also had a tour of the station. I hope that you think that the money that the Assembly has invested in it is well worth it. I know that the benefits to the community are already showing.

[45] I want to ask you about flooding. When I worked in the control room—and I might slip into some jargon here—we used to have special service calls, and they were either chargeable or non-chargeable. Flooding was never chargeable, because it was an emergency special service call. However, it was never accounted for in any funding—funding was always for fires and fire safety, but never for flooding.

[46] Given that flooding is becoming a major risk in most of our communities, the Pitt review is crucial. In the fire service rescue framework you say that you will be having talks with colleagues at a UK level to find a way forward on flooding. Could we do anything in Wales to look at the formula for fire service funding? Is it possible to set aside a specific amount of money to cope with flooding calls, and calls of a non-fire nature, so that we could be sure that the service is able to adequately tackle flooding? I pay tribute to those who helped in Yorkshire and Gloucestershire over the summer. There were quite a few from the Welsh fire brigade who went to help out, and I thank them. The fire service will always respond to such emergencies. However, I feel that there may be an opportunity for us in Wales to lead the way, and look at whether we could address some of the funding issues around the nature of these calls.

[47] **Brian Gibbons:** You are right about Rhyl: it is an excellent facility, and I was amazed that the community fire station, which has only been open for a short time, is already working beyond capacity. It has been a tremendously successful innovation. Equally, I saw a similar development in Morrision six or nine months ago, with community facilities being provided through the fire station. That has also been very successful.

[48] A few points come together in relation to flooding, and I will let Jo give you the detail. The Pitt report has changed the thinking around where responsibility should lie for responding to floods. There has not been a definitive response, as yet, from the UK Government, but if new duties were placed on the fire service, there might be consequential for us, too. You mentioned the Welsh fire service going to England, and the equipment that they used was mainly the new dimensions equipment—the high-volume pumps and so on. Did all the fire services from Wales go to England?

[49] **Ms Jordan:** No—all the pumps went to England.

[50] **Brian Gibbons:** So, the fire service in Wales was able to deploy the new dimensions equipment to good effect in England, and we have had much positive feedback and grateful reports on that—both to ourselves and to the fire service here in Wales—for the support given during the flooding. Jo would probably be able to give you more detail.

[51] **Ms Jordan:** Jane Davidson has established a working group to look at the issues coming out of the Pitt review, and to consider where the statutory duties on flooding should sit. No firm conclusions have been reached on that. If an additional statutory duty was placed on the fire and rescue service, we would have to consider additional funding on the back of that. As the Minister has said, the three fire and rescue services in Wales have access to the new dimensions equipment, which includes the high-volume pumps that are so important in flooding. That is being directly funded by the Assembly Government—it has not been taken out of the main funding for fire and rescue services. We will continue to put in place a plan to maintain and upgrade that equipment as necessary. I think that those are the key points.

9.40 a.m.

[52] **Ann Jones:** Could I explore the fact that the fire service is funded purely for fire? The funding formula does not address non-fire calls for issues such as flooding. Those emergency calls are not funded under the formula. The formula is based upon fire, and the prevention of fire. For as many years as I care to remember, and certainly when I worked there, the fire service always responds to an emergency call even if it is not to do with fire, and that has always been managed well within its budget. Could we start to fund the fire service for the special service calls that it responds to?

[53] **Brian Gibbons:** Jo will pick this up, but my understanding is that there is a funding stream for the new dimensions programme. I take your point about less severe flooding. I do not know whether Jo can throw any light on that.

[54] **Ms Jordan:** The funding that goes to the fire and rescue service is to fund it as an emergency service, which will include calls on issues around flooding. I am not sure that it would be possible or sensible to have a separate funding stream for responding to particular types of calls. If there is a crew in a fire station that is ready to respond to an emergency call, it is there, in a sense, to respond to any appropriate emergency call, whether it is flooding or fire.

[55] **Ann Jones:** In your performance indicators and your framework, there is no indication of the other calls that the service receives and responds to. All the performance indicators are around fire or fire prevention, and nothing is said about special service calls. Until we start to collect that information, the funding for fire services will never be sorted out. I will write to you on this, Minister, if I may, because I am getting technical.

[56] **Brian Gibbons:** I take the point that Ann has made. She is right in terms of how she has framed the question. I do not think that there is a specific point in the framework to capture that, but the Pitt review will substantially address a number of these issues; at least,

that is what we are anticipating.

[57] **Janice Gregory:** If Ann writes to you, it would be helpful if we received a copy of the reply, which we could circulate to Members.

[58] **Nerys Evans:** Mae gennyf ddau bwynt yn dilyn y cwestiwn ynglŷn â swyddfeydd post. Yr wyf yn deall yn iawn ynglŷn â'r broses tendro yn San Steffan. Bu ichi ddatblygu'r gronfa ddatblygu swyddfeydd post yn ôl ym mis Ionawr. Mae Swyddfa'r Post Cyf yn amlwg wedi gwneud gwaith i gyfrif sawl swyddfa fydd yn gorfod cau os nad yw'n ennill contract y cerdyn. Faint o waith mae eich adran wedi ei wneud gyda Swyddfa'r Post i edrych ar y ffigurau hynny? I ba raddau fydd y gronfa newydd yn gallu helpu swyddfeydd post a fydd dan fygythiad os nad yw Swyddfa'r Post yn ennill y tendr? A oes unrhyw waith wedi'i wneud o ran isafswm yr arian sydd ei angen ar y swyddfeydd post hynny?

Nerys Evans: I have two points following on from the question on post offices. I fully understand the situation regarding the tendering process in Westminster. You developed the post office development fund in January. Post Office Ltd has obviously calculated how many post offices will have to close if it does not win the contract for the card account. How much work has your department done with the Post Office to look at those figures? To what extent will the new fund be able to help offices that will be under threat if the Post Office does not win the tender? Has any work been done in terms of the minimum funding levels required by those post offices?

[59] Mae sawl maes yn eich adroddiad—trais yn y cartref, rhaglenni dimensiwn newydd, materion yn ymwneud â chyffuriau ac alcohol—yn rhedeg ar draws adrannau sydd wedi'u datganoli a rhai nad ydynt wedi'u datganoli. Pa rwystredigaethau sy'n eich wynebu wrth ddatblygu strategaethau cynhwysfawr yn y meysydd hyn? Fel pwyllgor, yr ydym yn cynnal adolygiad o drais yn y cartref; mae sawl elfen o hynny heb ei ddatganoli ond nid ydym wedi derbyn unrhyw dystiolaeth oddi wrth adrannau San Steffan i sicrhau bod ein hadolygiad yn fwy cynhwysfawr. Pa rwystredigaethau sydd gan eich adran wrth i chi geisio datblygu strategaethau cynhwysfawr mewn meysydd sydd wedi cael eu datganoli'n rhannol?

A number of the areas mentioned in your report—domestic abuse, new dimension programmes, issues around drugs and alcohol—cut across devolved departments and non-devolved departments. What frustrations do you face in the development of comprehensive strategies in those areas? As a committee, we are conducting a review into domestic abuse, many elements of which are non-devolved, but we have received no evidence from Westminster departments to make our review more comprehensive. What frustrations does your department face as you try to develop comprehensive strategies in partly devolved areas?

[60] **Brian Gibbons:** There is a narrative that Westminster is nothing but trouble, and if we had no Westminster, we would be living in paradise. I do not sign up to that. It is a consistent theme from some quarters, which I do not think bears scrutiny. The work that has been done on tackling inequality, for example, provides internationally vindicated evidence that that is not true. Generally, like any organisation, we are working fairly well and we have as many problems or difficulties with organisations within Wales as we have with organisations outside Wales, therefore I would not make a career of blaming Westminster for our problems. The whole point of devolution is for us to take responsibility and to be mature about it.

[61] Generally, we find the Westminster Government fairly supportive of this agenda. For example, in the area of responding to sexual assault and sexual abuse, the Westminster Government is fairly supportive in developing the sexual assault referral centres and the specialist domestic violence courts and has also put in independent domestic violence

advisers. We are working to supplement what is being done and we have given some additional support for a number of projects, for example those in Merthyr Tydfil and Swansea. Jo may be able to think of others. I think that we are working fairly well.

[62] Similarly, responsibility for the police is not devolved, and we have an excellent relationship with the police. Also, the National Offender Management Service, which again is not devolved, is very much signed up to the devolution agenda and we work very well with it. This does not mean any more than if we were to have a disagreement with a political party in Wales or a local government in Wales. Not everything in the garden is rosy and we recognise that. However, in general, the relationship is fairly constructive.

[63] **Nerys Evans:** I just thought that I would ask.

[64] **Janice Gregory:** For the inquiry on domestic abuse, we did not ask for any evidence to come down the M4. It is not the case that we were refused evidence; we did not ask for it.

[65] **Ms Jordan:** On the issue around domestic abuse and working with Whitehall, we are just beginning to prepare a new sort of strategic delivery plan for our domestic abuse strategy, and that delivery plan is being prepared jointly with the Home Office crime team that is based in Wales and alongside my team in Merthyr Tydfil. Therefore, that would be very much a case of us trying to draw together the agendas of the two Governments and the priorities within that delivery plan. Perhaps that demonstrates that we work quite closely.

[66] **Brian Gibbons:** To deal with the Post Office, we had a good meeting with Alan Cook from Post Office Limited within the last month. The Post Office Ltd shares our concern. I do not think that it could quantify precisely the scale of the implications were it to lose the post office account card, but that would affect the viability of a substantial minority of the network. At that meeting, it was interesting and encouraging to hear, in terms of the development of the post office development fund, that the Post Office Ltd seemed to have evidence to show that, if you can get people into the post offices for one reason, they will use the post office for other services. It seemed to have some empirical evidence on that. Therefore, the approach that we are taking in relation to the post office development fund, trying to look for ways of getting people into the post office to use services that are perhaps not even directly post-office related, can improve the financial viability of that particular business. As I say, we cannot really fully quantify it except that it will undoubtedly be a substantial risk to a significant minority of the post office network.

[67] **Paul Davies:** I want to bring you back to your policies to tackle child poverty. The children's commissioner, Keith Towler, has already said that, in his view, the UK and Assembly Governments' 2010 and 2020 child poverty targets will not be met. What are your views on his comments?

9.50 a.m.

[68] **Brian Gibbons:** I think that it is too early to talk about 2020. However, I think that it is fair to say that there is certain vulnerability with regard to the 2010 target. I suppose that the present economic climate will not contribute because we know that one of the most productive ways of getting people and children out of poverty is through work. If there is a significant economic downturn, there will be fewer opportunities for people to get into work, which will have negative implications for child poverty in Wales. In the last round of budgets—I am not sure whether I mentioned this in the paper—the UK Government put in just over £900 million into the budget, targeted at a number of child poverty measures, such as increasing child benefit and increasing the disregard in relation to certain benefits and so forth. A big vulnerability mentioned in the OECD report in relation to poverty generally, and child poverty in particular, is the disadvantage that single-parent households face in

maximising their income. That is why the Genesis programme, for example, which we, as an Assembly Government, are supporting, will have £70 million or £80 million—I cannot remember exactly how much—over the time of the convergence programme. That is particularly targeted at lone parents. Working with the UK Government, we have New Deal Plus for Lone Parents, which is a new, flexible way to allow lone parents to get into work. There will be, if you like, an in-work premium available for those parents. So, there is a lot going on and a lot of new work has been undertaken. Clearly, the overall economic climate that we face now, which did not exist when some of these targets were announced, brings some new vulnerabilities. We cannot dodge that. That is not an excuse or a reason to give up; giving up is not the answer. However, we have to recognise the reality, and it probably means that there is a requirement for us to try to do a bit more.

[69] **Paul Davies:** So, you accept, then, that Keith Towler is right in relation to the 2010 target, but not in relation to the 2020 target?

[70] **Brian Gibbons:** I think that 2020 is too far away. The UK Government has made substantial progress in tackling child poverty, which got worse throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as you know, and we are only beginning to claw that back now. It is only in the last two or three years that we have been able to get child poverty below the level that we inherited at the end of the 1990s. We have gone below that threshold and we have made good progress towards eliminating it, but, without doubt, the 2010 target is at risk. If we do not recognise the reality in trying to address it, we will not do anyone any favours.

[71] **Mark Isherwood:** I would like to go back to Communities First briefly. We have touched on this before. On the refocus of funding on population, I have a recent letter from you stating that those who feel disadvantaged, perhaps because there are several different centres in their Communities First area, can always apply to the outcomes fund. Can you recognise that that gap in core funding can compromise—and these people say that it will compromise—the progress that they have made in community decision making, which is key to community engagement and which, as you rightly said, is central to delivery, particularly in working with local authorities? How will you work with the affected Communities First communities to mitigate the possible damages that they have flagged up?

[72] A lot has been said about child poverty, and I will try not to repeat what has been said. As you say, the percentage of children in poverty fell after 1999. It bottomed out in about 2004, and it has slightly increased again since. We are going into recession with just over 100,000 children in workless households, and, as you rightly say, worklessness, or work, is possibly the most important factor in child poverty.

[73] You mentioned improving life opportunities for disadvantaged children. Many of the most successful schemes—and I am not being party political here, but this is something that the Mayor of London highlighted this week—are existing schemes that are often, although not always, run by the voluntary sector. To what extent are you seeking to identify good practice and support it, and possibly develop it elsewhere across the sectors, rather than reinventing the wheel?

[74] You have listed a number of financial inclusion initiatives. Two weeks ago, I went with Sandy Mewies to an event organised by Barnardo's on a family inclusion strategy, which is being delivered by Citizens Advice for young carers and funded by Barclays. Again, to what extent are you looking across the sectors to partnership there? It was a classic example of successful multi-sector working.

[75] In terms of encouraging the greater uptake of UK tax and benefit support, in the last fortnight alone, I have been to events organised by Citizens Advice, intermediate labour schemes, Supporting People schemes, women's refuges and benefits-to-work schemes, all of

whom are saying—notwithstanding the economic downturn—that the biggest problem that they are facing is the benefit precipice, particularly housing benefit withdrawal. Citizens Advice in north Wales has just launched a campaign calling, for example, for a three-year amnesty for people with mental health problems accessing work. I know that you do not control tax and benefits, but to what extent are you helping to drive this agenda with your colleagues where it is so critical to overall delivery?

[76] I would like to raise two small points on post offices. We are told that the problem with the post office card account is European tendering. European rules require the UK Government to tender. However, the National Federation of SubPostmasters told me that Ireland had applied to the commission for an opt-out, which was granted, and it was therefore allowed to grant its equivalent to its post office network. Could we not suggest that we do the same, or have we missed the boat on this?

[77] I asked you last time about post offices that are being closed under the closure programme applying to the post office development fund with community support. You said that you would consider any innovative schemes. Can you confirm that you would consider proposals from communities and/or local authorities to reopen those post offices that have been closed under the programme under that grant scheme, and that it is not just for those that have survived?

[78] I have a brief question on substance misuse. I have mentioned residential detox rehabilitation. With a colleague of mine, a Denbighshire county councillor, who has, sadly, since died, I visited Ireland to look at its residential detox rehabilitation a couple of years ago. He came back and did a presentation to his local community safety partnership and Substance Misuse Action Team and found that he was treated as an unwelcome guest because he was bringing new ideas from the outside into what was quite a cosy public sector club. How will we cross that barrier? All that he was trying to do was to share the practice that he had experienced not very far away, across the water in Ireland. Also, what consideration are you giving to the abstinence-based element of this? Alongside maintenance, many people need abstinence service provision, and there is also the issue of dual diagnosis. I have an extreme case at the moment of someone who was referred to the Priory for detox because there was nowhere else for that person to go. The Priory said that the best and cheapest place for rehabilitation to tackle that person's mental health and substance misuse problems was Stepping Stones in South Africa. There is a huge gap in provision. How are you addressing that?

[79] On community fire safety, you have recently written to me about DangerPoint, which has given evidence to this committee and its predecessor in the past stating that it is facing funding problems that could threaten its future existence. You have spoken in favour of it in the past, as have others across the parties. However, you say once again that it is down to the community safety partnership to provide funding. DangerPoint highlights the problem that, particularly in a stricter budgetary environment, without a sustainable funding commitment from the Welsh Assembly Government and the community safety partnerships, it may not survive. How will you address that?

[80] Finally, where are you on co-responding in Wales in relation to the fire and rescue service?

[81] **Janice Gregory:** Minister, there were far too many questions there for you to answer in the time available, so please just pick out some of them.

[82] **Brian Gibbons:** There were eight questions there.

[83] **Janice Gregory:** Eight? I think there were nine.

[84] **Brian Gibbons:** In relation to Communities First, I think that the population-based settlement is fair.

10.00 a.m.

[85] We are offering that communities of fewer than 4,000 people will have three full-time workers and that a community of more than 4,000 people will have an additional development worker. I think that that is a fair allocation of development workers and community support. The challenge will then be for Communities First partnerships to analyse what their local needs are and to draw down resources from the outcomes fund to address additional needs in their area and, clearly, the appointment of extra staff will be one of the options open to them.

[86] The outcomes fund is £25 million, targeted at front-line services, which was not previously the case. So, front-line services in Communities First have a level of support that did not exist when we were at the capacity-building stage. We are looking to see whether there are opportunities in Europe to increase the £25 million outcomes fund. If that extra funding emerges, the outcomes fund will be even greater, so there will be more opportunity for more people to be working on the front line, which is the way to go.

[87] We are working with a wide range of third sector organisations on tackling child poverty. In the benefits uptake programme, we expect, for example, that third sector organisations are actively involved, at the council tax level and, it is to be hoped, with the children's benefit uptake scheme when it develops. We are working with a wide range of third sector, statutory and private organisations on improving financial inclusion. For example, we are working with the Westminster Government and the Bank of Ireland, and the roll out of ATMs across certain parts of Wales will be part of this public-private-third sector partnership, which is the right way to go.

[88] On the housing benefit precipice, another example of where there is good working between us in Wales and Westminster is the good work that is being done in Merthyr as a leading agency in what I think is called the In-Out project, through which people are leaving benefit and going into work. You are right that people who are on housing benefit and council tax benefit are vulnerable because of these changes, particularly if people are moving back and forth with relatively short-term employment contracts. So, for example, if you are working for Amazon over the Christmas period and you come off the dole for a period of three or four months, you will need to have your housing benefit and council tax benefit quickly adjusted for that, and then after the Christmas rush is over, you will be back in unemployment again. The benefits system needs to be able to reflect that quickly, because people will not get their entitlements or they will get overpayments, and when they become unemployed they will end up having to pay back the overpayments, which leaves some people even worse off. One of the best schemes in addressing that issue has been developed in Merthyr, in collaboration between Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and Jobcentre Plus. It has now been rolled out across all of the United Kingdom as an example of best practice.

[89] I have discussed with Jocelyn Davies the need to standardise the housing benefit and council tax benefit forms, because if Jobcentre Plus and the Department for Work and Pensions are collecting most of the relevant information for their purposes, that information will very often be sufficient to allow housing benefit and council tax benefit to be claimed and adjusted. The good work that has been done in Merthyr is to be able to allow a single collection of that information, which can be transferred to the housing department. It is hoped that that will be an effective mechanism, which we have pioneered in Wales, for addressing this housing benefit and council tax benefit precipice that you rightly raise as an issue.

[90] We are open to all sorts of ideas on the post office development fund. I do not know whether that fund can subsidise post office services per se.

[91] **Ms Turner:** We have just closed the consultation on the post office development fund, so we are looking at those responses at the moment. However, the current thinking is that it will be limited to those post offices that remain open at the end of the closure programme. However, we have to be careful with state aid rules, in terms of what we will be able to fund. Therefore, it will be funding the non-post-office elements of their work.

[92] **Brian Gibbons:** Again, state aid rules may make it problematic as to whether you can directly subsidise the 'pure' post office functions. Therefore, we need to keep an eye on that in terms of what we can do there.

[93] On residential provision, it is not a cosy public sector club—that just is not true. A large number of providers in this area are third sector organisations, and one or two private for-profit companies may even be involved again. However, many of the main providers are not members of the cosy public sector, but third sector organisations.

[94] On DangerPoint and the main source of funding for such projects, as an Assembly Government, we send more or less 99 per cent of the money that we get out to delivery agencies in the community; we keep very little money centrally. As you know, our reserves are something of the order of £200 million—all the rest of the money is out in the service, because we believe in devolving responsibility for delivery to the front line. Therefore, community safety partnerships and educational establishments must have the primary responsibility for supporting DangerPoint. DangerPoint is a good public-private partnership, and the private sector is involved with it.

[95] If people want us to deliver services centrally, that means that we keep more of the money centrally. However, the message that we get from all delivery agencies is that they do not want the money kept centrally—they want to have the money out there. If they want to have the money out there, they must take responsibility for delivery; we cannot have it both ways in this instance.

[96] Co-responders are a good idea. Jo might be able to confirm how many fire appliances carry defibrillators, but a fair number do. However, it has been recognised that the co-responder role is not part of the core specification of firefighters. That is a particular issue in relation to the further roll-out of the co-responder programme; if co-responding is not part of core firefighter duties, the opportunities there will have to be negotiated. Having said that, a great deal of good work is going on in terms of shared sites between ambulances and fire services, and equally good work is going on in control centres, with joint working taking place there. Therefore, there is increasing co-ordination and collaboration taking place in general around the blue-light services in Wales.

[97] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you very much, Minister, and thank you to your officials for coming to committee this morning for the scrutiny of the social justice element of your portfolio.

10.08 a.m.

**Yr Is-bwyllgor Darlledu
Broadcasting Sub-committee**

[98] **Janice Gregory:** I do not think that we need to run through the history of this, do we? However, I will say that it has been a fairly tortuous route to where we are now. You will

recall that, on 22 October, I invited Members to decide whether they wanted to establish a Broadcasting Sub-committee. I understand that the Business Committee refused the establishment of a standalone Broadcasting Committee again yesterday, so we are where we are with this. We have provided outline terms of reference, and the purpose of the sub-committee, which you will all have had sight of.

[99] You are now invited to agree its terms of reference and the membership of the committee.

10.10 a.m.

[100] I have received nominations for membership of the Broadcasting Sub-committee for Peter Black, Paul Davies, Nerys Evans and Joyce Watson. Are Members happy to continue with the terms of reference and agree with the appointment of those Members who have been nominated? I do not see any dissent, but I will read out the terms of reference so that they are clearly and properly on the record.

[101] I propose that

the committee resolves to establish a Broadcasting Sub-committee. The remit of the sub-committee is to report by 4 December 2008 on the proposals in phase 2 of Ofcom's public service broadcasting review and to report on Ofcom's final report on the future of public service broadcasting within two months of it being published. The sub-committee will cease to exist upon final report.

[102] **Janice Gregory:** I see that we are in agreement.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig
Motion carried.*

[103] As I have your agreement for the sub-committee to be established, it will now meet in public immediately after this committee meeting. I envisage that that will probably take place at about 11.30 a.m. or 11.40 a.m., but it could be even earlier, if we all behave. Does anybody have any comments to make on the Broadcasting Sub-committee? If they do, now is the time to make them. I see that no-one wishes to add anything.

[104] Thank you, Ann, for your attendance today.

10.11 a.m.

**Y Prif Faterion sydd i'w Cynnwys yn yr Adroddiad ar yr
Ymchwiliad i Gam-drin Domestig
Key Issues for Domestic Abuse Inquiry Report**

[105] **Janice Gregory:** We are going to discuss the key issues for the domestic abuse inquiry report. I need to seek your agreement on the timetable for completing the inquiry. We will meet in private on Wednesday, 19 November to agree the report recommendations and then we will launch the report on Wednesday, 3 December. I see that we are all in agreement.

10.12 a.m.

**Cynnig Trefniadol
Procedural Motion**

[106] **Janice Gregory:** I propose that

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

[107] Does everyone agree? I have this feeling that no-one is listening to me.

[108] **Paul Davies:** We are spellbound.

[109] **Janice Gregory:** I see that I have your agreement that we will now move into private session. Thank you very much indeed. I will ask now for the public gallery to be cleared and for the broadcasting equipment to be switched off.

Derbyniwyd y cynnig.

Motion carried.

Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 10.12 p.m.

The public part of the meeting ended at 10.12 p.m.