



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

**Y Pwyllgor Plant a Phobl Ifanc
The Children and Young People Committee**

**Dydd Mawrth, 8 Rhagfyr 2009
Tuesday, 8 December 2009**

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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

Eleanor Burnham	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Angela Burns	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Christine Chapman	Llafur Labour
Helen Mary Jones	Plaid Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) The Party of Wales (Committee Chair)

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Nicole Davies	Unigolyn Individual
Sean Edmunds	Gweithiwr Cymdeithasol Social Worker
David Hawker	Cyfarwyddwr, Adran Plant, Addysg, Dysgu Gydol Oes a Sgiliau Director, Department of Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills
Annie Hunt	Unigolyn Individual
Sophie Hunt	Unigolyn Individual
Jane Hutt	Aelod Cynulliad, Llafur (y Gweinidog dros Blant, Addysg, Dysgu Gydol Oes a Sgiliau) Assembly Member, Labour (the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills)
Alanna Jones	Unigolyn Individual
Lauren Jones	Unigolyn Individual
Karen Williams	Sons and Daughters of Foster Care Group—Fostering Network Wales Meibion a Merched Grwpiau Gofal Maeth—Rhwydwaith Maethu, Cymru

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

Steve Boyce	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil yr Aelodau Members' Research Service
Linda Heard	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Abi Phillips	Clerc Clerk
Helen Roberts	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.19 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.19 a.m.*

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Helen Mary Jones:** Bore da a chroeso i bawb i gyfarfod olaf y tymor hwn o Bwyllgor Plant a Phobl Ifanc y Cynulliad. Yn ôl yr arfer, mae croeso i bawb ddefnyddio'r Gymraeg neu'r Saesneg, ac mae offer cyfieithu a sain ar gael i hwyluso hynny. Gofynnaf i bawb sydd yn yr ystafell ac yn yr oriel gyhoeddus ddiffodd ffonau symudol, 'mwyar duon' ac unrhyw ddyfais electronig eraill. Nid yw'n ddigon da i'w tawelu, gan eu bod yn gallu amharu ar yr offer darlledu a'r offer sain.

Helen Mary Jones: Good morning and welcome to everyone to the final meeting this term of the Assembly's Children and Young People Committee. As usual, everyone is welcome to use English or Welsh, and translation and audio equipment are available to facilitate that. I ask everyone in the room and the public gallery to switch off mobile phones, BlackBerrys or any other electronic devices. It is not enough to silence them, because they can interfere with the broadcasting and audio equipment.

9.20 a.m.

[2] Nid ydym yn disgwyl ymarfer tân, felly os bydd y larwm yn canu, bydd hynny'n golygu bod rhywbeth o'i le, a dylem ddilyn y tywyswyr. Byddant yn dweud wrthym pa allanfeydd i'w defnyddio.

We do not expect a fire drill, so if the alarm sounds, that will mean that something is wrong, and we should follow the ushers. They will tell us which exits to use.

[3] A oes gan Aelodau unrhyw ddatganiadau o fuddiant o dan Reol Sefydlog Rhif 31? Gwelaf nad oes.

Do Members have any declarations of interest under Standing Order No. 31? I see that there are none.

[4] Yr ydym wedi derbyn ymddiheuriadau gan Lynne Neagle; nid oes dirprwyon.

We have received apologies from Lynne Neagle; there are no substitutions.

9.20 a.m.

Craffu ar y Gweinidog dros Blant, Addysg, Dysgu Gydol Oes a Sgiliau ar Weithredu Argymhellion y Pwyllgor yn ei Adroddiad 'Tlodi Plant yng Nghymru: Ai Addysg yw'r Ateb?'

Scrutiny of the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills on the Implementation of the Recommendations in the Committee's Report 'Child Poverty in Wales: Eradication through Education?'

[5] **Helen Mary Jones:** Croesawaf y Gweinidog dros Blant, Addysg, Dysgu Gydol Oes a Sgiliau, a David Hawker, i'r cyfarfod. Diolch i ti, Jane, am roi o'th amser i fod yma gyda ni heddiw. Mae'n ddiwrnod prysur oherwydd y trafodaethau ynghylch y gyllideb ac yn y blaen, a gwerthfawrogwn eich bod wedi rhoi o'ch amser i fod yma. Croeso cynnes hefyd i David Hawker.

Helen Mary Jones: I welcome the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, and David Hawker, to the meeting. Thank you, Jane, for making the time to be with us today. It is an important day because of the discussions on the budget and so on, and we appreciate that you have made time to be here. A warm welcome to David Hawker as well.

[6] The Minister is here to follow up on actions arising from our report, 'Child Poverty in

Wales: Eradication through Education?'. We have some questions for you, Jane, and we will go straight into those if we may. I will start. On the issue of the child poverty strategies and the expectation on local authorities that will come out of the legislation, how will you ensure that the aims and actions set out in the 22 individual local authority strategies that will be required under the proposed Measure will be aligned with the Welsh Government's new child poverty strategy? How will you ensure that there is a coherent approach to address the educational inequalities for poor children?

[7] **Y Gweinidog dros Blant, Addysg, The Minister for Children, Education, Dysgu Gydol Oes a Sgiliau (Jane Hutt): Lifelong Learning and Skills (Jane Hutt):** Diolch yn fawr, Gadeirydd. Thank you, Chair.

[8] The Proposed Children and Families (Wales) Measure will require Welsh Ministers and local authorities to choose objectives relating to each of the 13 broad aims for contributing to the eradication of child poverty in Wales. The extent of the broad aims reflects the Welsh Assembly Government's view that the determinants of child poverty are highly complex. As we know, it is not simply about income, as we need to address this across a range of activities and policies. The broad aims are deliberately general, and Welsh authorities will have the discretion to choose the detailed objective or objectives. As you say, alignment with the Welsh Government's child poverty strategy is critical. There will be consultation on the first child poverty strategy for Wales in the spring of next year. That will set up the priorities, which will be based on the evidence and the work that has been undertaken to date.

[9] On making sure that all the local authorities are aligned and clear about their objectives in relation to the child poverty strategy, there will be a national direction, but it will allow local authorities and their partners to choose policy objectives to respond to particular local needs. The guidance that I as the Minister for children and education give to the children and young people's partnerships will be critical to this. It is being updated and will be reissued in 2010, and will reflect the priority areas that have been identified for the new national child poverty strategy.

[10] **Helen Mary Jones:** In your evidence, you have outlined the work that is being undertaken by your officials to evaluate existing Welsh Government child poverty programmes, and you state that a report will be published in late 2009. Are you able to share any initial findings with us with respect to the effectiveness of existing programmes?

[11] **Jane Hutt:** We are still awaiting the report, but what is important—and this comes through in the proposed Measure—is that one specific aim is to reduce inequalities in educational attainment between children, which means that we have to get this right, and we have to ensure that the evaluation and the methodologies that we are using are right. So, the child poverty strategy and the local-authority-led strategies must include measures to achieve that. There is a real opportunity to get it right. It is important to say that attainment levels for all pupils in Wales, including disadvantaged pupils, are improving. Clearly, we take heart from that. What is emerging from the work that has been done—and the report will be available shortly—is that we have to base the structure of the evaluation of programmes on how we assess the impact on child poverty specifically. That is something that has to be built in from the start. So, as soon as we have a clearer picture from the work that is being done, we will share it with the committee. The specific focus from the start is on the impact on child poverty. We need to ensure that the methodologies are clear in relation to that.

[12] **Eleanor Burnham:** Mae gennyf **Eleanor Burnham:** I have a question on gwestiwn ar adnoddau mewmol a chydlynid internal resources and policy co-ordination. polisi. A fedrwech ddweud wrthym sawl aelod Can you tell us how many members of staff o staff sydd yn yr uned tloidi plant yn are based in the Welsh Government's child

Llywodraeth Cymru? Yn yr hinsawdd economaidd bresennol a chan ystyried y cynnydd mewn tlodi plant ar draws Cymru, a ydych yn fodlon bod yr adnoddau sydd ar gael ar gyfer y maes polisi hwn yn adlewyrchu'r pwyslais mae'r Llywodraeth wedi ei rhoi ar ddileu tlodi ymysg plant? Mae hwn yn bwysig o ystyried bod tlodi plant wedi gwaethgu dros y 10 mlynedd diwethaf. poverty unit? Given the current economic climate and bearing in mind the increase in child poverty across Wales, are you content that the internal resources available for this policy area reflect the emphasis that the Government has placed on eradicating poverty among children? This is important in light of the fact that child poverty has worsened over the past 10 years.

[13] **Jane Hutt:** You hit the nail on the head in your opening comments, before you asked the question. This has to be cross cutting. It is not just about one unit; it has to be mainstreamed across the whole of the Welsh Assembly Government. Brian Gibbons, as Minister for Social Justice and Local Government, is the lead Minister responsible for developing the child poverty strategy. However, the children and young people's Cabinet committee, which I chair, has the lead role for Ministers to direct, monitor and develop the drive against child poverty in Wales.

[14] I cannot give you the exact figures about the size of the child poverty unit. The fact that it is not the only resource is important. The unit also secures a considerable amount of additional analytical and policy resources from external partners and from across the Assembly Government. I understand that an additional post has been created within the child poverty unit to support the delivery of the work as a result of the Proposed Children and Families (Wales) Measure, particularly in the development and the review of the new statutory child poverty strategy. So, that is an additional post. The future staffing is under review in the light of extra responsibility.

[15] Sara Reid from my department is here today, and we have appointed a secondee from the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales. Sara is acting as the lead for our department on child poverty and on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The key objective is to ensure that action to tackle child poverty and promote and safeguard children's rights is embedded in the development of the policy.

[16] So, we have a group of officials working on this from across WAG. Huw Brodie leads that group. It is critical that this crosses Government at a senior level and is co-ordinated in terms of the delivery of the aims of the child poverty group of senior officials. Perhaps David would like to comment on this, as he is still relatively new to the post of director general. Child poverty is at the forefront of his senior director-general objectives.

[17] **Mr Hawker:** That is absolutely right. It is so cross cutting that there are people in every department who are working with the unit that Tracey Breheny leads within public service delivery and with Huw Brodie, who has a roving brief to deal with major cross-cutting issues across the Welsh Assembly Government. Child poverty is one of the big themes that we know we need to tackle. So, there is quite a lot of resource going into co-ordinating the contributions from people across departments. In fact, that is increasingly the way we work as an organisation, not necessarily to set up large units in silos, but to set up small units that work across departments and create more power and traction for the policy environment as a whole.

9.30 a.m.

[18] **Helen Mary Jones:** Angela, you have some questions about targeting.

[19] **Angela Burns:** I just wanted some clarification on child poverty targets, Minister. In the 'Eradicating Child Poverty: Milestones and Targets' documents, the indicators chosen by

the Welsh Assembly Government to measure child poverty relate to all children in education. I was wondering why those indicators were used rather than academic achievement and entitlement to free school meals—data that specifically relate to children who live in low income households. I also wondered whether, by collecting so many data to measure child poverty, we might lose focus on the essence of the child poverty statistics that we need to move forward.

[20] **Jane Hutt:** The way that we are driving this commitment to improving attainment for all our young people has to focus on those who are disadvantaged. It is a key factor in the approach of the Proposed Children and Families (Wales) Measure to tackling child poverty. It is about narrowing the gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged, raising the bar and being able to identify ways of improving attainment for young people who have experienced child poverty.

[21] The education targets in the document on measuring success in eradicating child poverty came out of ‘The Learning Country 2’, the strategic document for education, and ‘The Learning Country: Vision into Action’, published in October 2006. We have moved from that to the proposed Measure, and the development of the new statutory strategy, but we have to be careful about how we use targets. We know that the inappropriate use of targets, when they are set at a national level, can focus attention too narrowly on one specific group—for example, you mentioned free school meals, and we have to be careful not to focus too much on one target group to the detriment of another. This is something that I am sure this committee and others have debated widely—the issue of targeting, and using free school meals as an indicator, which is a powerful tool. However, many other children in poverty would not necessarily be identified through the free school meals route.

[22] One of the things that I wanted to get across in this meeting is the priority that we are giving to our school effectiveness framework. We are trying to underpin our drive to improve attainment and tackle inequalities in education through that school effectiveness framework. Our all-Wales core data sets form part of that and focus on the use of data where schools and heads can have a robust self-evaluation framework to assess progress. It will underline our commitment to raising achievement across the board, but also to identifying individuals and groups who need support for continuous improvement. We also monitor progress through the annual publications of analyses of the relationship between free school meals and performance, but we have to be careful how we focus on these targets in terms of milestones. The all-Wales core data sets are being warmly welcomed by schools and headteachers because they enable them to benchmark themselves in comparison with other schools in similar positions. Then they can see where they may be falling behind when their peers are moving ahead, particularly around specific priorities such as tackling disadvantage and child poverty.

[23] **Angela Burns:** I can understand from what you said that an individual headteacher or individual schools can monitor their progress within the school, but how do you as the Government, because of what you do—you are far removed from an individual school—measure progress to combat child poverty? I am still not clear how you would do that. I understand that people get hooked on targets, but what we want to see is an upward trend on progress.

[24] **Jane Hutt:** I will bring David in on this in a moment, but the school effectiveness framework is a national one based on a national purpose for schools. We are working to develop it through the Welsh Assembly Government by working with local authorities and school leaders and headteachers. So, it is a comprehensive national scheme and framework to enable us to assess progress and identify gaps. Perhaps David would like to say something about the data set.

[25] **Mr Hawker:** We have data for every child in Wales on their achievement as derived from the schools' own assessment. That is correlated with all of the other factors, including free school meal uptake and so on. That means that we have a powerful national data set at individual pupil level, which is then analysed. We get the big national analyses from that. However, the most important thing is what the Minister has just said, which is that we are now giving the data to individual schools, but as part of a family of schools, so that they can compare how they are doing with schools in similar circumstances. So, typically, a family of schools would be 10 schools with similar socioeconomic characteristics. They will be given analyses that will enable them to compare their performance with other schools in that family so that they can tackle the issues on the ground. The idea behind that is that they are benchmarking against the data, and then looking at where the good practice is. So, if one school in the family has performed better in terms of children who have free school meals, or of boys or underachieving groups in various ways, all the other schools in that family will then ask, 'What is your secret? How are we going to do that?'. That is the process of the school effectiveness framework.

[26] The first data set went out a couple of months ago to schools across Wales and it went down extremely well—they welcomed it warmly. The evidence is that schools are starting to use those data in that analytical and self-critical way. That is what will make an impact in terms of children's attainment. Our strategy for ameliorating the impact of poverty is to help children to succeed in school.

[27] **Helen Mary Jones:** I will bring Eleanor Burnham in briefly to ask a supplementary, but I point out to Members that we are on the fourth question of 15 and we only have 20 minutes left.

[28] **Eleanor Burnham:** I will be very brief. Are families of schools within a local authority's area or within a region?

[29] **Mr Hawker:** It varies. Some are local and others are more regional. It depends on which schools share the similar characteristics.

[30] **Angela Burns:** The Government target for 2010 is for only 7 per cent of young people to not be in education, employment or training. Can you assure us that we will be able to hit that target given that the figure for young people not in education, employment or training—I am sorry, but I cannot bear the acronym 'NEETS', so I will say it in full every time because I think that the acronym is disparaging—increased to 12 per cent in 2007? We are going backwards. Can we meet the 7 per cent target by 2010?

[31] **Jane Hutt:** You will be aware of the impact of the recession on young people, and that is why we have taken certain initiatives. When you think in terms of the budget today, we have levered in an extra £20.5 million to tackle youth unemployment. That was important in order to ensure that we tried to bear down on those young people who may not be in education, employment or training. We needed to provide them with new opportunities. So, of course, we seek to meet that target, but it will be difficult because of the recession, and you will not be surprised about that.

9.40 a.m.

[32] On the range of additional support for young people, the young people's guarantee is important, as is the Future Jobs fund. I remind you that the young people's guarantee is for all young people aged 18 to 24 who have been unemployed for almost 12 months. They will have a guarantee of an offer of a job, training or a work experience placement. We have other programmes, of course, such as Reach the Heights, SkillBuild, and up to 1,800 new pathways to apprenticeship places. Young people who perhaps cannot find an employer could, if they

start college training as a pathway to apprenticeship, be placed with an employer as we move out of the recession. Of course, we have also increased the funding for SkillBuild. We could go back over the whole plan for young people who are not in education, employment or training, and that includes a whole range of measures, including Keep in Touch, the range of agencies that are working to address this problem at the local level.

[33] With graduate opportunities, we have to remember that we now have to support graduates who are leaving higher education. We have put funding into GO Wales, the skills for the economy project, and ProAct. In fact, a lot of the ProAct funding underpins apprenticeships with employers. Where an employer that has taken on apprentices is suffering from the downturn, we have come in with ProAct to ensure that we keep funding apprentices in that company, and that applies across Wales.

[34] In our policies and the initiatives in the past year, coming out of the summits and in the initiatives to lead Wales out of the recession, young people have been at the forefront, as they have been in my priorities for setting budgets and in ensuring that I have support from across the Cabinet. It is vital that we seek to bear down on the danger of young people becoming unemployed, because we know from previous recessions that it is difficult for young people, if they leave education, to get back into the pathways and be in a position to take opportunities. We must remember that the 14-19 learning pathways is one of the most important programmes and initiatives to keep young people in education. More young people have decided this year to stay in education post 16—it is not compulsory—and our Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 will give them an entitlement to employment in education from the start of the coming academic year. More young people are going into further and higher education, so they are heeding the message to stay in education, but we have clearly to tailor provision to their aptitudes and to support those who have additional learning needs through learning coaches, and so on. I believe that we are going in the right direction to tackle that.

[35] **Eleanor Burnham:** Mae'r pwyllgor wedi argymhellu y dylai Llywodraeth Cymru gyflwyno dull mwy effeithiol o fonitro a gwerthuso polisiau. Mae hefyd yn ymwybodol y dylai'r monitro gynnwys dadansoddiad ansoddol o newidiadau positif, yn hytrach na chanolbwyntio ar gymwysterau addysgiadol yn unig. A allwch chi roi'r wybodaeth ddiweddaraf i ni am y cynnydd wrth roi'r argymhellad ar waith, yn enwedig am y modd y byddwch yn monitro ffactorau y tu hwnt i gyrhaeddiad addysgiadol?

Eleanor Burnham: The committee has recommended that the Government of Wales should introduce more effective monitoring and evaluation of policies. We are also conscious that monitoring should not focus purely on educational qualifications, but should include qualitative analysis of positive changes. Can you update us on progress made in implementing this recommendation, and in particular on how you will be monitoring factors other than educational attainment?

[36] **Jane Hutt:** That goes back to the earlier question about the work that we are doing to ensure that we get our methodologies for evaluation right, such as, for example, in relation to the considerable investment in Cymorth, Flying Start and the range of programmes that we have implemented in which we are targeting disadvantage and going beyond that to ensure that we improve attainment and educational opportunities for all. It is crucial that we do that because we are responsible for guidance and the children and young people's planning, so that we can take this forward and ensure that it is more focused.

[37] **Eleanor Burnham:** But, Minister, we have had very strong evidence from language and speech therapists—I do not remember whether that was at this committee or at another committee—

[38] **Helen Mary Jones:** The other one, Eleanor.

[39] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes. The evidence was about the fact that many of the youngsters who are fragile and vulnerable in the kind of situations that you describe as part of Communities First, Sure Start and Flying Start, are not being helped. If they were there, among the partnership, they could make a huge impact. That evidence was heard by the Communities and Culture Committee. When you consider how many youngsters are vulnerable and fragile, you will see that around 70 per cent of them, for instance, who are in custodial estates outside Wales but who belong to us in Wales, have a basic problem with communication. The point that was very forcibly made was that if there was some extra support from them, many of the issues that we are discussing—

[40] I cannot say that we are having an impact, and we are not developing as you think we are. Surely, even some money for that kind of support would be very helpful.

[41] **Jane Hutt:** We did accept the recommendation in principle, and we have to evaluate existing anti-poverty strategies in particular and monitor the way in which we can ensure that every child has an opportunity to progress and the way in which we identify issues and needs, which is a key point, as you know, Eleanor.

[42] **Eleanor Burnham:** Absolutely.

[43] **Jane Hutt:** I hope to have the opportunity at some stage this morning to say that one of the developments that we have been taking forward is looking at the eight-to-14 age range. We have invested powerfully in the early years to great effect and acclaim. Already, we have the 14-19 learning pathways, but the eight-to-14 age range is a critical phase of transition and a phase that we need to look at in terms of identifying where we can ensure that, going from primary to secondary education, every child's specific needs are recognised. We do not want to be in a position where young people are disaffected or disengaged at any stage of their education. Therefore, I will be issuing a statement about this later today.

[44] **Helen Mary Jones:** I think that the committee will be very pleased to hear that, Minister. One of the big things in this report was the issue about transition from primary to secondary education, because it shows that children who were quite happy and succeeding in primary schools then started to fail again. We look forward to seeing that statement.

[45] **Christine Chapman:** I wish to ask you questions, Minister, about sharing good practice. In your evidence, you state that

[46] 'The Assembly Government is committed to ensuring that tackling child poverty is at the forefront of the work of schools and other education settings.'

[47] Are you confident that the examples that you have referred to, such as Child Poverty Solutions—Wales and RAISE, provide sufficient evidence that this is the case?

[48] **Jane Hutt:** This is something that is very cross-cutting in terms of the responsibilities. You mentioned Child Poverty Solutions, which I launched alongside the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government. It is important to engage the Welsh Local Government Association in this mission to tackle child poverty, and it was very engaged in developing the improvement tool of Child Poverty Solutions—Wales. That website, which engages with elected members at local authority level, is very important. In 'One Wales', we discuss committing ourselves to developing Wales-specific solutions to integrating strategies and sharing best practice. I am pleased that Brian Gibbons announced that he would continue to fund Child Poverty Solutions—Wales.

[49] Also, in terms of RAISE, we have now moved forward to ensure that we share good

practice. Again, you will be aware of the RAISE website and the fact that there is funding available at a regional level to ensure that the best practice emerging out of RAISE is shared. In fact, we have the RAISE national and regional co-ordination grant to ensure that we co-ordinate that development and sharing of good practice. The website is a dissemination vehicle, and we are generating high-quality case studies and materials to ensure that the sharing across Wales is taken on board. This all links back to our school effectiveness framework and to ensuring that the lessons learned from initiatives and programmes like RAISE and Child Poverty Solutions—Wales is shared and embedded.

9.50 a.m.

[50] **Christine Chapman:** Turning to free school meals, in your evidence, you state that initial desk-research undertaken in Wales on the take-up of free school meals indicated that limited information is available. Are you, therefore, confident that the current ‘Appetite for Life’ action research project is sufficiently aligned with child poverty issues, such as stigma and bullying, to enable it to inform your approach to piloting universal free school meals in the future?

[51] **Jane Hutt:** If we look at the latest figures on the take-up of all school meals, not just free school meals, we see that there is a 77 per cent take-up. That is an important figure for us to recognise. ‘Appetite for Life’ is all about finding the best ways to encourage, enable and enthuse young people about school meals generally, let alone free school meals. We must ensure that young people want to take up school meals and free school meals without any stigma. So, through ‘Appetite for Life’, we are looking at how we can encourage and enthuse young people to take up school meals. Some of the project schools have already managed to improve the food that is on offer and increase the take up. That is because they have adopted a whole-school approach. So, we need to get the provision right.

[52] On the importance of tackling stigma and enabling young people who will benefit from eating free school meals to take them up, we have looked to the School Food Trust, which has done some work across the UK—it is important to learn from England and Scotland—and has finalised its work on free school meals initiatives in the UK. We are looking at the results of that and the lessons from free school meal initiatives. I do not know whether the committee has seen that report; it is called, ‘Please Sir? Can we have some more?—lessons from Free School Meal initiatives’. We are considering that report to see whether more lessons can be learned to influence ‘Appetite for Life’. However, you will know that pioneering work has gone on in terms of electronic access, which is destigmatising, across Wales. The bottom line still has to be that, whatever any country or Government does about school meals, children must want to eat them or they will vote with their feet, as we know. That is why, as we have had these discussions and through Jenny Randerson’s successful Healthy Eating in Schools (Wales) Measure 2009, there has been consensus that we must go with our children and get it right for them in order to ensure that they benefit from school meals.

[53] **Angela Burns:** The committee recommended that the Welsh Government should ensure greater support and training for school governors, so that they are more aware of the issue of child poverty, which you accepted in principle. Can you explain to us briefly how the Proposed Children and Families (Wales) Measure will increase governors’ awareness of child poverty and its effects on children?

[54] **Jane Hutt:** That will have to come through guidance. We already have Welsh Assembly Government guidance for governors on preparation in key stage 2 for key stage 3 in terms of transition, which we have identified is key. That is governors’ most important responsibility as part of their pastoral role in terms of pupils’ personal and social needs. We are working closely with Governors Wales to drive this agenda forward. The raising attainment and individual standards in education in Wales programme identified eight key

themes for addressing the link between socioeconomic disadvantage and low educational attainment. It particularly focused on transition, which I would hope school governors and school leaders would take on board as part of their responsibilities. The work that we are doing with governors on taking this forward through guidance from the proposed Measure will be important.

[55] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yr wyf am ofyn cwestiwn 11, gan fod y Gweinidog eisoes wedi sôn am gynlluniau pontio. Yr wyf yn meddwl eich bod wedi ateb y cwestiwn yr wyf yn mynd i'w ofyn. Yr ydych wedi sôn am y dirywiad posibl yng nghyrrhaeddiad disgyblion yn ystod eu blynyddoedd cynnar yn yr ysgol uwchradd. Yr ydych wedi amlinellu'r cynlluniau pontio y disgwylir i ysgolion cynradd ac uwchradd gydweithio arnynt. A allwch ddweud rhagor ynglŷn â sut mae'r cynlluniau pontio hyn yn ystyried anghenion arbennig disgyblion o gefndiroedd economaidd gymdeithasol tlotach? Mae hyn yn gofyn am ychydig bach yn ychwanegol at yr hyn yr ydych wedi ei ddweud.

Eleanor Burnham: I will ask question 11 as the Minister has already talked about transition plans. I think that you have answered the question that I am going to ask. You have mentioned the possible deterioration in pupil attainment during their early years in secondary school. You have outlined the transition plans on which you expect primary and secondary schools to co-operate. Can you say more about how these transition plans take account of the special needs of pupils from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds? This is asking for a little more in addition to what you have already said.

[56] **Jane Hutt:** I think that I have probably answered that partially in my response on the role of governors.

[57] **Eleanor Burnham:** Okay.

[58] **Jane Hutt:** We are looking at the transition process. That is something that has come out of the Estyn review as well. My statement on the review of education for eight to 14-year-olds in Wales will encourage this committee in terms of its recognition of those factors.

[59] **Eleanor Burnham:** There was a fascinating programme on Radio 4 about school meals the other day—

[60] **Helen Mary Jones:** Eleanor, I am sorry, but we need to—

[61] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes, I am just saying. All that he was doing was local stuff—

[62] **Helen Mary Jones:** Eleanor, please; I have been—

[63] **Eleanor Burnham:** O ran arweinyddiaeth mewn ysgolion, yr ydych yn datgan eich bod wrthi'n adolygu'r rhaglen arweinyddiaeth sy'n bodoli ar gyfer arweinwyr ysgol ac y byddwch yn ystyried ffyrdd o gynnwys rhagor o ymwybyddiaeth o effaith tlodi ymysg plant yn y rhaglen hon. A allwch ddweud rhagor ynglŷn â'ch meddylfryd presennol ynglŷn â chyrraedd y nod hwnnw?

Eleanor Burnham: In terms of school leadership, you have stated that you are reviewing the current leadership programme for school leaders and that you will be considering ways of including greater awareness of the effect of child poverty in that programme. Can you say more about your current thinking on achieving that aim?

[64] **Jane Hutt:** I know that we are very short of time, and I do not know whether David will want to come in. You will be aware that we are undertaking a comprehensive review of continuous professional development and school leadership opportunities in relation to not

just continuous professional development, but the suite of leadership qualifications and training that we have. The focus on child poverty and tackling disadvantage goes back to the report on narrowing the gap and raising the bar. Do you remember it? I think that you were an Assembly Member when it was published. It is the David Egan child poverty drive—everything that we do, and everything in the school effectiveness framework, must be underpinned by that focus. David, be very brief.

[65] **Mr Hawker:** That is the point about giving the data sets, training headteachers and school leadership teams to use the data, and about comparing, benchmarking and sharing good practice. All of that will be built into the new requirements for headteacher qualifications and continuous professional development.

[66] **Helen Mary Jones:** Minister, are you able to stay with us for another five minutes? We are due to finish at 10 a.m. but there are a couple of questions about the cost of education that I would like us to get to, if we can. Is that alright with you?

[67] **Jane Hutt:** Yes, that is fine.

[68] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you. Angela?

[69] **Angela Burns:** The Government has undertaken to provide guidance about school charging and to research issues relating to school uniforms, for example. In your evidence, you said that the Proposed Children and Families (Wales) Measure will increase the importance and profile of the costs of education throughout schools and local authorities and even it out. Can you outline how you expect schools to be able to deliver that? I heard earlier about the schools framework, so this question is basically about stuff that is outside that.

[70] **Jane Hutt:** This is going to be a very important change, because there is disparity across Wales in terms of charging—there is no question about that. Through the proposed Measure, we anticipate that we will be able to address that indirectly, because there it will place a duty on local authorities and other bodies to publish child poverty strategies. Those strategies will have to include the effect of costs associated with attendance at school. At the moment, we are producing new guidance for schools and local authorities on charging for school activities. That is the key point. It will explain the law and what schools can and cannot charge for. We hope that that will enable them to have a more consistent approach to charging and how they handle it. That is very much a part of the child poverty strategy for the local authority.

[71] **Angela Burns:** Do you also see this spinning out into colleges?

10.00 a.m.

[72] **Jane Hutt:** Yes. The guidance that we are currently producing is just for schools and local authorities, but we will be providing guidance for colleges as well.

[73] **Mr Hawker:** We are working on a fees strategy for the FE sector at the moment.

[74] **Angela Burns:** Is this guidance with a light hand, or is it strong guidance that says ‘Please do not break these fees schedules’?

[75] **Jane Hutt:** The great thing is that local authorities now have a statutory duty for their child poverty strategies. That statutory duty will be underpinned by a lot of guidance as to how they deliver it. We will be giving model school charges policies, which will be important, and which will be issued to all schools and local authorities early next year.

[76] **Christine Chapman:** In your evidence you say that the Welsh Government is commissioning research to gather the views of parents and carers on school uniforms and associated costs. Will this project also consider the views of children and young people? A report was also published by the Bevan Foundation in November that talked about the feasibility of reducing the costs of school uniform, including exploring the possibility of an all-Wales school uniform. What are your views on that?

[77] **Jane Hutt:** Work is being undertaken on our behalf by researchers from BMG Research, which will engage with children and young people. An event has already been organised for early next year to talk about school uniform issues with children and young people. I do not yet have a view on the concept of an all-Wales school uniform—it was put to me on the day that the Bevan Foundation report was published. It is something that children and young people will have a view on. It is important that we look at the evidence from the Bevan Foundation, as it is well-researched, but your point about the participation of children and young people is crucial—it is a bit like the school meals issue.

[78] **Helen Mary Jones:** The final question is from me about the community focused schools, about which the committee made a strong recommendation. In your evidence, you state that some local authorities are more advanced than others in developing the community focused schools agenda. What more can be done to ensure that the funding for community focused schools is being used effectively and, where relevant, is contributing to addressing child poverty and social exclusion?

[79] **Jane Hutt:** We have set up a small working group of Continyou Cymru, which helps us with community focused schools, and local authorities. We have a new monitoring and evaluation form for the use of the community focused schools grant. The funding has been drawn up to respond to the recommendations from the Estyn report, which recognised that there was good practice, but that we needed to tackle poorer practice. The monitoring and evaluation form will be issued in the new year, and we will ensure that we address the shortcomings of the delivery of community focused schools. As you said, it is important to the wider remit of tackling poverty, not just child poverty. We have seen in some of the best Communities First examples how a school can be at the heart of a Communities First project, and engaged with the community. It can also engage the overlap between after-school childcare and use the school buildings to link to other community activities.

[80] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you, Minister and Mr Hawker, for being here today. I am sure that the committee would like me to take the opportunity to thank you for your co-operation throughout the year. As individual Assembly Members, we will see you between now and Christmas, but this is a chance for us to say Nadolig llawen.

10.04 a.m.

**Ymchwiliad i'r Trefniadau ar gyfer Gosod Plant mewn Gofal—Casglu
Tystiolaeth
Inquiry into Arrangements for Placement of Children into Care—Evidence
Gathering**

[81] **Helen Mary Jones:** We will now be taking what I think will be very interesting evidence from the sons and daughters of foster carers, who have been brought together by the Fostering Network and who will give evidence to our inquiry for the placement of children in care. We have not prepared questions for this, because we felt that it would be good to do it in a more informal way. So, there will be a short presentation, hopefully using PowerPoint, although you have paper copies of the PowerPoint presentation if need be. We will have a very short comfort break while the young people come in.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10.05 a.m. a 10.07 a.m.
The meeting adjourned between 10.05 a.m. and 10.07 a.m.*

[82] **Helen Mary Jones:** Welcome Sean, Karen, Alanna, Sophie, Annie, Nicole and Lauren. We will start with your presentation, and I hope that everything works well. Members may then have some questions to ask you on it. I know that this all feels official and posh, but we have asked you here because we want to hear what things are really like. I know, from having met one or two of you before, and from knowing Karen and Sean, that your presentation will be straight and to the point. If there are things that you want to say when we ask questions, just go ahead and say them, even if some of them are hard to say. If anyone asks you anything that you do not want to answer, you do not have to do so. I will be keeping an eye out for that, so if anyone feels uncomfortable with anything, you do not have to answer. It is up to you, really; be as open and as straight-talking as you want to be, but do not feel that you have to answer anything that makes you feel uncomfortable. Is everyone okay with that? I see that you are; that is brilliant.

[83] Members, are we ready for the PowerPoint presentation?

[84] **Ms Williams:** Just before we start, the presentation that we sent was not what the young people have been working to. We have just been talking, and, as you have copies of the presentation before you and the girls know the content, they would feel more comfortable doing the presentation without making sure that the PowerPoint slide corresponded.

[85] **Helen Mary Jones:** They can do whatever they want to.

[86] **Ms Williams:** See? I told you, girls, that it would be okay. [*Laughter.*]

[87] **Helen Mary Jones:** This is your session; use it in any way that works for you. Take it away.

[88] **Ms Hunt:** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, Assembly Members and young people. We would like to thank you for taking the time out to listen to our group presentation. Our group has been running for seven years, and it will hopefully run for many more. Our group helps us to socialise and to meet new people who are in the same situation as us. We cannot speak to our friends about our foster brothers or sisters because they do not know how it feels having to share our homes, parents and families. We foster because we like to help, so what we are asking for is to be acknowledged. Hopefully, our views will get across and you will see how strongly we feel about fostering. Before the committee today are Alanna, Nicole, Lauren, Annie and me, Sophie. Thank you.

10.10 a.m.

<p>[89] Ms A. Hunt: Bore da, foneddigion a boneddigesau, a gweithwyr y gwasanaeth. Yr wyf am ddiolch yn fawr i chi am roi'ch amser i wrando arnom. Gobeithiaf y bydd ein barn yn dod drosodd ac y byddwch yn gallu gweld sut yr ydym yn teimlo am faethu. Gyda ni heddiw y mae Alanna, Nicole, Lauren, Sophie a minnau, Annie.</p>	<p>Ms A. Hunt: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen and service workers. I would like to thank you all very much for finding the time to listen to us. I hope that our opinions will come over clearly to you and that you will be able to see how we feel about fostering. With us today are Alanna, Nicole, Sophie, and me, Annie.</p>
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[90] **Ms Davies:** Here are some top tips for parents and guardians: time on our own with parents; take us on special days out; we would like equal pocket money; please remember that we have feelings as well as the foster children; listen to us; make us feel important

sometimes; give us some personal space; do not always put us last; please consider our needs; talk to us; think about our time.

[91] **Ms A. Hunt:** We would like social workers to include us in home visits, because we would like to be included in discussions about the placements. So, include us in arranging home visits. We would like to be included on outings, because we feel that it is unfair that foster children get to go on outings while we do not—treat us, too. If you do not deal with the problem, it will only get worse. You will not know if there is a problem unless you listen to us and ask for our opinions.

[92] If you do not arrive on time, it ruins our day, because we have to wait for the children to come back from contact times. Please arrive on time. Social workers should think of the effects on children and families during contact times. Contact affects us, too. Please think about what time the visits take place. We are not invisible; we are a part of the family.

[93] We want to be in charge of our own groups, and we would like social workers to know this, otherwise they will organise things that we do not want to do. We would like what is said in the sons and daughters meetings to stay there—confidentiality.

[94] Remember: include us in home visits; treat us, too; listen to us; ask for our opinions; arrive on time; we are not invisible; contact affects us, too; we are a part of the family; we want to be in charge of our own groups; and confidentiality.

[95] **Ms S. Hunt:** Having fun days out will help those in a group to socialise and get to know each other, help you to act as a team and become one.

[96] **Ms A. Jones:** Mae diwrnodau hwyl allan yn helpu grŵp i fod yn ffrindiau, a gallant fod yn gymdeithasgar. Drwy weithgareddau grŵp, byddwch yn dod i adnabod eich gilydd a gweithio fel un. **Ms A. Jones:** Fun days out help a group to become friends, and they can be sociable. Through group activities, you get to know one another and you work as one.

[97] **Ms S. Hunt:** Children should be in charge—with a bit of help from their parents and link workers. This is because children sometimes want a break from being bossed about by adults.

[98] **Ms A. Jones:** Dylai plant fod yn defnyddio eu syniadau eu hunain, ac nid rhai'r oedolion. Ond mae dal eisiau tamaid o help oddi wrth rieni neu weithwyr cymdeithasol. **Ms A. Jones:** Children should be using their own ideas, and not those of adults. But a little help is still needed from parents and social workers.

[99] **Ms S. Hunt:** With funding, can the local authority help us? Can any other associations help us with funding? There are many questions that we would like asked, but are we going to be heard? If groups come together to arrange a fundraising event, would the local authority back us and help us to succeed?

[100] **Ms A. Jones:** A all unrhyw awdurdod neu gymdeithas ein helpu gydag ariannu? **Ms A. Jones:** Can any authority or association help with funding?

[101] **Ms S. Hunt:** Groups should have an agenda. Plan what is going to happen at the meetings, and mix fun things with learning, support and advice. Set goals for the group, such as charity work or annual get-togethers.

[102] **Ms A. Jones:** Byddai cael agenda'n helpu. **Ms A. Jones:** Having an agenda would help

helpu grŵp i ddod ynghyd a gwneud a group to come together and take part in
gweithgareddau cymdeithasol. social activities.

[103] **Ms S. Hunt:** Think about the location.

[104] **Ms A. Jones:** Meddylwch am y lleoliad. **Ms A. Jones:** Think about the location

[105] **Ms S. Hunt:** Where? At what time?

[106] **Ms A. Jones:** Ble? Pryd? **Ms A. Jones:** Where? When?

[107] **Ms S. Hunt:** You need a place to meet.

[108] **Ms A. Jones:** Mae angen lle i gwrdd. **Ms A. Jones:** You need a place to meet.

[109] **Ms S. Hunt:** What about transport?

[110] **Ms A. Jones:** A all pawb gyrraedd? **Ms A. Jones:** Is everybody able to get there?

[111] **Ms. S. Hunt:** What are the costs?

[112] **Ms A. Jones:** Beth fydd y costau? **Ms A. Jones:** What are the costs?

[113] **Ms S. Hunt:** Do you need helpers?

[114] **Ms A. Jones:** A oes angen pobl i helpu? **Ms A. Jones:** Do you need people to help?

[115] **Ms S. Hunt:** What are the dates?

[116] **Ms A. Jones:** Beth yw'r dyddiadau? **Ms A. Jones:** What are the dates?

[117] **Ms S. Hunt:** We want enough warning of the dates of meetings so that as many people as possible can attend. If possible, a newsletter, a phone call or an e-mail would be a good idea to let people know when meetings are on.

[118] **Ms A. Jones:** Dylai fod digon o rybudd am y dyddiadau, ac wedyn bydd cynifer â phosibl o bobl yn gallu mynd. Os yn bosibl, anfonwch lythyr neu e-bost, neu gwnewch alwad ffôn ymlaen llaw. **Ms A. Jones:** There should be enough warning about the dates, and then as many people as possible would be able to go. If possible, send a letter or an e-mail, or make a phone call in advance.

[119] **Ms S. Hunt:** We want respect and to be valued.

[120] **Ms A. Jones:** Yr ydym am gael ein parchu a'n gwerthfawrogi. **Ms A. Jones:** We want respect and to be valued.

[121] **Ms S. Hunt:** Our own feelings and wishes are important, and should be taken into account.

[122] **Ms A. Jones:** Mae ein teimladau ni'n bwysig, a dylent gael eu hystyried yn y cyfarfod. **Ms A. Jones:** Our feelings are important, and they should be considered in the meeting.

[123] **Ms S. Hunt:** Please, do not put us on hold.

[124] **Ms A. Jones:** Peidiwch â'n gorfodi i **Ms A. Jones:** Do not put us on hold.
aros.

[125] **Ms S. Hunt:** Groups should be on time, as set out in the newsletters, e-mails or phone calls. Also, we do not want long breaks over the school holidays.

[126] **Ms A. Jones:** Dylai grwpiau gyfarfod **Ms A. Jones:** Groups should meet at the
ar yr amser sydd wedi'i nodi yn y llythyr same time as set out in the letter, the e-mail
neu'r e-bost, neu yn ôl yr alwad ffôn. or the phone call.

[127] **Ms S. Hunt:** Time should be made to see other groups.

[128] **Ms A. Jones:** Mae angen amser i weld **Ms A. Jones:** We need to make time to see
grwpiau eraill. other groups.

[129] **Ms S. Hunt:** It is important that we meet other groups to keep up to date on new developments and to share new ideas.

[130] **Ms A. Jones:** Mae'n bwysig ein bod **Ms A. Jones:** It is important that we meet
yn cwrdd â grwpiau eraill er mwyn cadw lan other groups in order to keep up with the
gyda'r digwyddiadau diweddaraf ac i rannu latest developments and to share information.
gwybodaeth.

[131] **Ms S. Hunt:** We should be included in training.

[132] **Ms A. Jones:** Dylem gael ein cynnwys **Ms A. Jones:** We should be included in
mewn hyfforddiant. training.

[133] **Ms S. Hunt:** We would like groups to have the opportunity to be involved in foster training. Please consider this, as they will have some experience to share with new members joining their group.

[134] **Ms A. Jones:** Byddem yn hapus i gael **Ms A. Jones:** We would be happy to have
cyfle i fod yn rhan o hyfforddiant gofal the opportunity to be involved in foster care
maethu. Gall pobl sydd wedi bod yn rhan o'r training. Those who have been a part of the
grŵp am amser hir addysgu pethau gwahanol group for a long time could teach different
i'r plant newydd. things to the new children.

[135] **Ms S. Hunt:** Groups are a great idea, but we need some training so that we do things properly.

[136] **Ms A. Jones:** Mae angen ychydig o **Ms A. Jones:** We need a little training so that
hyfforddiant arnom fel y gallwn wneud we can do things correctly.
pethau'n iawn.

[137] **Ms S. Hunt:** We welcome your input.

[138] **Ms A. Jones:** Byddem yn **Ms A. Jones:** We would welcome your
gwerthfawrogi eich cyfraniad. input.

[139] **Ms S. Hunt:** Remember that we, the members of the groups, are also important.

[140] **Ms A. Jones:** Fel grŵp, yr ydym yn **Ms A. Jones:** As a group, we think that our

meddwl y dylai ein barn cael ei hystyried. views should be considered. We would like Hoffem i'r gweithwyr cymdeithasol adael social workers to include us in home visits, inni fynychu cyfarfodydd yn y cartref, gan because we are important. ein bod yn bwysig.

[141] **Ms S. Hunt:** As a group, we think that our views should be taken into account. We would like social workers to include us in home visits, because we are important.

[142] We think that there should be funding; children in charge and we should have an agenda. We should have fun days out, be respected and be valued, and meet up with sons and daughters in other groups.

[143] **Ms A. Jones:** Dylai fod cronfa; dylai plant ofalu am y grŵp; a dylai fod agenda. **Ms A. Jones:** There should be a fund; children should run the group; and there Dylem gael hwyl ar ddiwrnodau allan, cael should be an agenda. We should have fun ein parchu a'n gwerthfawrogi, a chwrrdd â days out, be respected and valued, and meet other groups. grwpiau eraill.

[144] **Ms S. Hunt:** You should think about the location; include us in training; and please, think big for us.

[145] **Ms A. Jones:** Yr ydym yn gofyn ichi feddwl am y lleoliad, ein cynnwys ni yn yr **Ms A. Jones:** We ask you to think about the location, include us in the training, and to hyfforddiant, a meddwl mewn ffordd fawr er think big for us. ein mwyn.

[146] **Ms L. Jones:** If your family cannot help you, who can? Who will take the time to listen to you? In Carmarthenshire fostering group, we take the time to listen to everyone. We run our group, not the adults.

[147] **Ms S. Hunt:** We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for listening to our voices. We hope that our message has been heard. Once again, thank you for listening.

[148] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you very much. Well done; that took a bit of doing. Do Members have any questions?

[149] **Christine Chapman:** That was an interesting presentation, and thank you for coming today. What are the nice things about having foster brothers and sisters?

[150] **Ms A. Hunt:** It is very rewarding. They may arrive in a state, but you can see how well they have done when they move on and how much better off they are.

[151] **Christine Chapman:** Would anyone else like to comment? I see that no-one else wants to comment on that point.

[152] **Eleanor Burnham:** It has been very interesting; thank you very much indeed. In your families, did you discuss all of this before your family embarked on fostering? Having done it, and if you had the choice, would you do anything differently?

[153] **Ms A. Hunt:** My parents spoke to us quite a bit about it before doing it. Now that we are fostering, I would not change anything. I really enjoy it and I would like to be a social worker. It has given me a lot of experience.

[154] **Eleanor Burnham:** Did your parents ask you?

[155] **Helen Mary Jones:** Eleanor, I said at the beginning that if people do not want to answer, they do not have to.

[156] **Eleanor Burnham:** That is fine.

[157] **Angela Burns:** I would like to understand one thing. My question is very similar to Eleanor's question. I should first say 'well done', because it is very daunting being here. When your parents began to foster and were interviewed to be foster carers by the foster caring agency, did anyone ever come to chat to you to find out if you were okay with it? I see not. So, it was left up to your parents to do the chatting with you.

[158] Do you know anyone at all, possibly from your group, who is the son or daughter of foster carers who says that they wish it had not happened and that they are not happy with it?

[159] **Ms A. Hunt:** No.

[160] **Ms S. Hunt:** It is rewarding and the outcomes are fantastic. You can help children who come from a broken home, bring them into your family and give them the love and care they need. To see them move on is very rewarding. I would not change a thing.

[161] **Angela Burns:** You are very generous-hearted people and I stand humbled.

[162] **Helen Mary Jones:** You have made some important points that we will want to think about. We are looking particularly at how children are placed in foster care. However, you have told us some other important things, such as needing time on your own with your mums and dads, and so on. So, the committee will have to think about how to progress with those areas that are not a part of our inquiry. Chris has a question, and then I have some questions that I would like to ask.

[163] **Christine Chapman:** Do you think that your parents should treat your foster brothers and sisters the same way that they treat you, or should it be different?

10.20 a.m.

[164] **Ms S. Hunt:** At the start, when they come into our home, because they have come from a broken home, you feel as though they need that little bit extra to come into our family, for us to say, 'We accept you'. They need more love and support from our parents at the start, but once they get more confident in our family and start to speak to everyone, things get back to normal.

[165] **Christine Chapman:** It should not be less than—

[166] **Ms S. Hunt:** No.

[167] **Helen Mary Jones:** It was interesting to hear your points about wanting to ensure that children who are fostered do not get treats or pocket money that you do not get. That is an important message.

[168] In your presentation, you talked about contact affecting you, too. I will ask you a little more so that I am sure that I understood what you meant by that. Do you mean when the child who is fostered by your family goes to see their own mum and dad or others from their family? Can you tell us a bit about how contact affects you and what you meant by that—if you want to and feel that you can?

[169] **Ms A. Hunt:** Our current foster children do not have contact, so it has been okay, but

the children we had before had contact twice a week from 5.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m., I think. That meant that the night had gone. If we had homework to do for school and we needed our parents to help us with it, they could not really do that because they would be taking the children to have that contact and they would not be back until late.

[170] **Helen Mary Jones:** So, that is what you meant when you mentioned thinking about the timing of when contact takes place and the knock-on effects of that on the rest of the family's life. That is really helpful.

[171] My other question was about training. You said that you thought that it would be useful for you to be included in training. Could you tell us a bit more about that? Who should have that training? How should that happen? We can then make suggestions about that.

[172] **Ms S. Hunt:** It is important because, if we go to the training, we will get life skills from it. So, when someone comes up to us to ask us how we feel about it and what we can share with them, we will have more knowledge to tell them what fostering is about.

[173] **Helen Mary Jones:** So, when your parents get the training, you want the training, too.

[174] **Ms S. Hunt:** Yes.

[175] **Helen Mary Jones:** Annie, did you want to add something to that?

[176] **Ms A. Hunt:** Yes. I was just about to say that when parents get letters through the post about all the training that is available, it would be nice if we could go, either with them or separately with our group, and do things like that together.

[177] **Helen Mary Jones:** That sounds really sensible.

[178] **Angela Burns:** You mentioned that you would like to be included when the foster children go away for the day on an outing or excursion. Under what circumstances would that happen? Are they going away to be with members of their birth family, or are they just being given the chance to go away because of something else? I do not quite understand why they might go on an outing that you might not get to go on.

[179] **Ms A. Hunt:** They get letters to say that they need to go to a play centre, a zoo or wherever, and I think that it would be good if we could go with them.

[180] **Helen Mary Jones:** Would their social worker organise that?

[181] **Angela Burns:** I do not quite understand why, if a child is in foster care, someone external would arrange something away from the foster family.

[182] **Helen Mary Jones:** Sean, are you able to help us with that?

[183] **Mr Edmunds:** There are a number of reasons why that could happen. It could be surrounding contact with the family, or it could relate to something like the looked-after children forum that we have in Carmarthenshire, through which a number of activities, meetings and groups are organised around the county. Often, the sons and daughters of foster carers and the foster carers have to reorganise their schedules to make these activities happen for the particular child, but then perhaps the outcome is that the son or daughter of the foster carer is not included in that activity or is doing something different. So, I think that this is about balance, particularly with older placements. It is important that we do that, but I think that the group is saying that they also want to have those opportunities, as a group and individually. That is an important point, but it is more for us, really.

[184] **Angela Burns:** I understand that. As you are aware, Chair, I have to leave to attend another engagement, but I thank the witnesses for their evidence. I have enjoyed meeting them, and I wish that I could stay longer to hear more of what they have to say.

[185] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you, Angela. Eleanor is next.

[186] **Eleanor Burnham:** Our witnesses have a lot of contact with social workers. Is the improvement that you have asked for anything to do with how social workers are as people or to do with their training, or is it a combination of both? I believe that Annie and Sophie both said that they wanted to be social workers, so if they were to become social workers, how could they improve on the social workers whom they have dealt with so far?

[187] **Helen Mary Jones:** It might be best to say that we are talking in general, rather than about specific people.

[188] **Eleanor Burnham:** Absolutely, but based on the experience that you have had, and the social workers you know. You have given us some wonderful tips in your top 10, which I have read carefully, and they are common sense. Some of us have had experience of social work in other careers.

[189] **Ms S. Hunt:** If you are a social worker, and you arrange contact between a foster brother or foster sister and their parents, you should try not to arrange the meeting too locally. Once, we took our foster brothers to meet their parents, but then we came across their parents in the supermarket straight after their contact. I was on my own with them, and I felt rather uncomfortable. I did not think that it was appropriate.

[190] **Eleanor Burnham:** That is interesting.

[191] **Helen Mary Jones:** That goes back to what you were saying in your presentation about social workers needing to think about you, the sons and daughters of foster carers, as well as about your mums and dads and the foster child.

[192] **Eleanor Burnham:** Is it that they have not been given the training, or is it down to other factors? You are clearly very mature, and you know all these things because you have the experience of going through them.

[193] **Ms S. Hunt:** I am not sure, but I would say that these kinds of meetings should not take place so close to our home town, although they should not be too far out to travel either. There needs to be a balance.

[194] **Helen Mary Jones:** When people are learning to be social workers, do you think that it would be a good thing if groups like yours could talk to them so that, right from the beginning, they would remember to think about you as well as about your mums and dads and the foster children?

[195] **Ms S. Hunt:** Yes.

[196] **Ms A. Hunt:** Definitely.

[197] **Helen Mary Jones:** Does anyone else have anything to ask? If not, could I ask a really difficult question?

[198] **Eleanor Burnham:** I thought that we had all asked difficult questions. [*Laughter.*]

[199] **Helen Mary Jones:** From what you have told us, we will make suggestions to the Welsh Ministers, and they can then tell the county councils, the social workers, and so on what they need to do. We can put some of the things about placements, and the need for you be included in discussions before a child is placed with your family in our recommendations from this inquiry, but we can also take up some of the other ideas, perhaps by writing to the Minister and asking her to come to talk to us about them. So, if you could pick one thing that we should tell the Government that ought to happen, what would it be? What is the most important of all the things that you have told us today? What would be at the top of your list? It is a big question.

[200] **Eleanor Burnham:** Perhaps one of your wonderful top tips.

[201] **Ms S. Hunt:** Perhaps just to take us into consideration when they do a placement.

[202] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is a really good point, because everything else would fall out of that. If people could remember that these are your families, too, and put you in the middle, some of the other things that go wrong would not go wrong, would they? They would realise. Is there anything else that you would like to get across to us today that you have not had a chance to say yet?

[203] **Eleanor Burnham:** Have you enjoyed being here?

[204] **Ms A. Hunt:** Yes, we have really enjoyed it. Thank you very much.

[205] **Eleanor Burnham:** It has been wonderful having you. We are quite well co-ordinated, because quite a few of us are wearing red today. Is it to do with Christmas, perhaps?

[206] **Helen Mary Jones:** I think that the girls may have had their red shirts made especially for this presentation. Before you go, would you like to turn around and show us the messages on the back of your shirts?

[207] **Eleanor Burnham:** That is brilliant. I cannot see the one on the end because of your gorgeous hair. Oh, it says 'Listen'. There is also 'We are the Future', 'Make a Difference', 'Respect', and 'Our Views Count'. Fantastic.

10.30 a.m.

[208] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you all very much. Your views certainly do count. [Applause.] Well done. It is quite nerve-racking to come to give evidence to a committee like this, and many adults and professionals who come are more nervous than you are. You got your message across on your own behalf, but also for the other sons and daughters of foster carers. I think that you did a brilliant job, and I am very grateful, as is everyone else on the committee.

[209] **Eleanor Burnham:** I am pleased that you did not use the PowerPoint presentation, because when they go wrong, it gets boring. [Laughter.] It is much better to do what you did.

[210] **Helen Mary Jones:** I thank Sean and Karen, too. Diolch yn fawr.

[211] **Eleanor Burnham:** Nadolig llawen a
blwyddyn newydd dda. **Eleanor Burnham:** Merry Christmas and a
happy new year.

[212] I hope you get lots of pressies.

[213] **Helen Mary Jones:** We now move on to the next bit of our meeting.

10.31 a.m.

**Cynnig Trefniadol
Procedural Motion**

[214] **Helen Mary Jones:** Cynigiaf fod **Helen Mary Jones:** I move that
y pwyllgor yn penderfynu gwahardd y cyhoedd o weddill y cyfarfod yn unol â Rheol Sefydlog Rhif 10.37(iv). *the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order No. 10.37(iv).*

[215] Gwelaf fod y pwyllgor yn gytûn. I see that the committee is in agreement.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 10.31 a.m.
The public part of the meeting ended at 10.31 a.m.*