



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

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

**Dydd Mawrth, 19 Ionawr 2010
Tuesday, 19 January 2010**

Cynnwys
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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg. Mae hon yn fersiwn ddrafft o'r cofnod. Cyhoeddir fersiwn derfynol ymhen pum diwrnod gwaith.

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. This is a draft version of the record. The final version will be published within five working days.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

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

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Tanis Cunnick	Pennaeth y Gangen Strategaeth Gwaith Ieuenctid, Llywodraeth Cymru Head of Youth Work Strategy Branch, Welsh Government
Mike Greenaway	Cyfarwyddwr, Chwarae Cymru Director, Play Wales
Huw Lewis	Aelod Cynulliad, Llafur (y Dirprwy Weinidog dros Blant) Assembly Member, Labour (the Deputy Minister for Children)
Marianne Mannello	Cyfarwyddwr Cynorthwyol, Chwarae Cymru Assistant Director, Play Wales
Martin Swain	Pennaeth y Gangen Rhaglenni Plant a Theuluoedd, Llywodraeth Cymru Head of Children & Families Programmes Branch, Welsh Government
Chris Tweedale	Cyfarwyddwr, Grŵp Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Effeithiolrwydd Ysgolion (PPIEY) Director, Children, Young People and School Effectiveness Group (CYPSE)
Keith Towler	Comisiynydd Plant Cymru Children's Commissioner for Wales

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

Sarah Bartlett	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Abi Phillips	Clerc Clerk
Helen Roberts	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser
Sian Thomas	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil yr Aelodau Members' Research Service

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.30 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.30 a.m.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Helen Mary Jones:** Bore da, gyfeillion. Croeso i bawb i gyfarfod cyntaf y pwyllgor hwn am y flwyddyn hon. Hoffwn groesawu Sandy Mewies fel aelod newydd y pwyllgor, a disgwylir i Joyce Watson ymuno â ni yn y cyfarfod nesaf. Manteisiaf ar y cyfle hwn hefyd i ddiolch yn fawr iawn i Christine Chapman a Lynne Neagle am eu cyfraniad gwych. Mae'n siŵr y gwelwn eisiau y ddwy ohonynt, ond mae gennym bobl sydd â diddordeb mawr, sef Sandy a Joyce, yn cymryd eu lle. Croesawaf Ann Jones eto.

Helen Mary Jones: Good morning, friends. Welcome, everyone, to this committee's first meeting of the year. I welcome Sandy Mewies as a new member of the committee, and we expect Joyce Watson to join us at our next meeting. I will use this opportunity to thank Christine Chapman and Lynne Neagle very much for their excellent contribution. I am sure that we will miss them both, but we have people who have a great interest, namely Sandy and Joyce, filling their shoes. I welcome Ann Jones once again.

[2] Ann is almost a permanent substitute by now.

[3] Mae Ann yma yn lle Joyce gan ei bod mewn cyfarfod arall, sy'n cael ei gynnal ar yr un pryd.

Ann is here instead of Joyce as she is attending another meeting, taking place at the same time.

[4] Hoffwn atgoffa pawb bod croeso ichi ddefnyddio'r Gymraeg neu'r Saesneg, bod offer cyfieithu ar gael, ac y gellir defnyddio'r offer i glywed y trafodion yn well. Gofynnaf i bawb yn yr ystafell ac yn yr oriel i ddiffodd unrhyw ffonau symudol, 'mwyar duon' ac ati. Nid yw'n ddigon i ddiffodd y sain yn unig gan y gall hynny amharu ar yr offer darlledu a sain. Nid ydym yn disgwyl ymarfer tân, felly os bydd y larwm tân yn seinio, rhaid inni ymadael gan ddilyn y tywyswyr.

I remind everyone that you are welcome to speak in Welsh or English, that there is translation equipment available, and that it can also be used to amplify the audio. I ask everyone in this room and in the public gallery to switch off any mobile phones, BlackBerrys and so forth. It is not sufficient to put them on 'silent' because they can still interfere with the broadcasting and sound equipment. We are not expecting a fire drill, so if the alarm sounds, we must leave the room following the ushers' direction.

[5] Gofynnaf i'r Aelodau ddatgan unrhyw fuddiant. Gwelaf nad oes dim, yn ôl y disgwyl. Mae ymddiheuriadau am absenoldeb wedi dod i law oddi wrth Joyce Watson, fel y dywedais eisoes, a chroesawn Ann, sy'n dirprwyo ar ei rhan.

I invite Members to make any declarations of interest. I see that there are none, as expected. We have received apologies for absence from Joyce Watson, as I said earlier, and we welcome Ann, who is substituting for her.

9.32 a.m.

Ymchwiliad i Fannau Diogel i Chwarae a Chymdeithasu—Casglu Tystiolaeth Inquiry into Safe Places to Hang Out—Evidence Gathering

[6] **Helen Mary Jones:** Estynnaf groeso i'r Dirprwy Weinidog dros Blant newydd, sef Huw Lewis. Diolch yn fawr ichi, Huw, am ddod yma. Credaf mai dyma'ch ymddangosiad cyntaf gerbron pwyllgor yn eich rôl newydd. Estynnaf groeso hefyd i Chris Tweedale, Martin Swain a Tanis

Helen Mary Jones: I welcome the new Deputy Minister for Children, Huw Lewis. Thank you, Huw, for joining us. I believe that this is your first appearance before a committee in your new role. I also welcome Chris Tweedale, Martin Swain and Tanis Cunnick.

Cunnick.

[7] Thank you all for coming. I welcome Huw Lewis to his new role, as well as to this committee meeting. I think that fellow Members will agree that we had a very good and positive relationship with Huw's predecessor, the former Minister for children, Jane Hutt, and we look forward very much to having the same kind of challenging but positive working relationship with you as we had with her.

[8] Thank you for your written evidence. If you are happy, we will move straight to questions. I will ask the first question. You state in your evidence that the Welsh Government has made significant progress in enhancing play and leisure provision for children and young people. Could you provide us with some more information to support that statement?

[9] **The Deputy Minister for Children (Huw Lewis):** Thank you for your kind remarks at the beginning of the meeting, Chair. I, too, look forward to having a good creative working relationship with you. I welcome the fact that play is one of the first issues that you will be looking into, and I look forward to reading your report.

[10] I do not think that anyone would doubt that the Welsh Assembly Government has a track record of commitment to the issues surrounding play and the development of children. We were the first legislature in the United Kingdom, and probably in the world, to have a proper joined-up play policy. We are now moving into a new era of development with the Proposed Children and Families (Wales) Measure that is soon to be enacted, which specifically legislates for play. The development of that legislation, how it rolls out, the guidance that emerges as a result of it, and how we work with our partners, particularly in the statutory and voluntary sectors, will be crucial to how the agenda develops. So, the commitment is there and it is now a matter for us to grasp the legislative framework that will be available to us to pursue the agenda.

[11] **Helen Mary Jones:** The Wales non-governmental organisation report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, when referring to the 2006 play policy implementation plan, stated that the Government must

[12] 'Commit itself to maintaining a momentum to deliver to its strategy targets and in due course commission a five-year review of the national play strategy'.

[13] Can you give us your response to that, Deputy Minister, update us on the progress made with the implementation plan, and advise whether you have plans to commission a review?

[14] **Huw Lewis:** I will probably turn to my officials for some of the detail on this.

[15] The convention and the comments that we are receiving from the UN on the play agenda will be central to our concerns, and we will take a great deal of notice of what is said here. We have echoed the convention's priorities in our seven core aims—and I am referring particularly to that on play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities. I will turn to Chris on the timings of the review, as I am not quite familiar with the state of play on that.

[16] **Mr Tweedale:** And I will turn to Martin. [*Laughter.*]

[17] **Mr Swain:** The implementation plan still stands, but the development of the proposed Measure and the powers in it in relation to play take it to a new dimension. Some reviews are under way that I can talk about. One is on playwork training. I do not know whether the committee is aware of this, but the Assembly Government funds the National Centre for Playwork Education and Training Wales, which is hosted by Play Wales. We are

aware that the developments in the national minimum standards for playwork mean that there is a need to review the level and content of playworkers' qualifications. That is one review that we are undertaking.

[18] The other review is of the standards and guidance for play. That is a piece of work that, despite being taken forward in the implementation plan, did not get completed. We are looking at that in the context of the new powers in the proposed Measure. So, in essence, it will create a new framework for assessing the sufficiency of play. To assess sufficiency, we need to look at what 'play' means and what constitutes 'play', thereby gaining an understanding of how sufficient it is to meet the needs of children and young people. Set alongside that will be new statutory guidance, linked to regulations flowing from the Measure.

[19] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you. That is helpful.

[20] **Sandy Mewies:** I understand what you are saying, namely that the proposed Measure will have an impact on what is going on, and that the two reviews, and others, will also have an impact. Does that mean that the Government intends to commission the review in 2011, or not?

[21] **Mr Swain:** To my mind, the appropriate time to conduct the review would be when the first sufficiency audits have been undertaken by local authorities, as that would give us a picture of the provision of play across Wales, which we have never had. Some audits have been undertaken, linked to the Big Lottery Fund's Child's Play programme, but we have never really undertaken a national audit. So, the timing of the review would link quite well to that, as well as with the implementation plan.

[22] It is worth bearing in mind that the implementation plan was a three-year plan. While the recommendation was to have a five-year review, the three years came to an end last year. With the progress of the proposed Measure, we are now into the next phase of developing play policy and thinking about where we take it.

[23] **Eleanor Burnham:** Bore da, a diolch am y papur diddorol. Mae'n braf eich gweld chi yn Ddirprwy Weinidog dros Blant. **Eleanor Burnham:** Good morning, and thank you for the interesting paper. It is nice to see you as Deputy Minister for Children.

[24] Mae gennyf gwestiynau am faterion sy'n effeithio ar brofiadau chwarae grwpiau penodol o bobl ifanc, yn enwedig yn yr ardaloedd gwledig. Beth y mae'ch Llywodraeth wedi'i wneud i ganfod ac ymateb i anghenion penodol plant a phobl ifanc sy'n byw mewn ardaloedd gwledig o ran polisiau sy'n ymwneud â datblygu darpariaethau gwledig i bobl ifanc a materion megis costau teithio er mwyn iddynt gyrraedd y cyfleusterau hamdden agosaf? Bùm yn holi am y gwersi nofio am ddim, sy'n ffantastig, ond yn ddi-werth os nad oes modd cyrraedd y pwll. Dyna'r cyd-destun. I have some questions about the issues that affect specific groups of young people's experience of play, particularly in rural areas. What has your Government done to identify and respond to the particular needs of children and young people who live in rural areas, as regards policies on developing rural provision for young people and issues such as travel costs so that they can get to their nearest leisure facilities? I have been asking about the free swimming lessons, which are fantastic, but they are of no use if you cannot get to a pool. That is the context.

[25] **Huw Lewis:** Thanks, Eleanor. That is a pertinent question, and I will be taking a personal interest in this issue. The sufficiency review that we talked about will give us a helpful snapshot of how things are being rolled out on the ground and of the level of provision. I am interested in the quality of provision, too.

9.40 a.m.

[26] On youth work, I can tell you that, thusfar, one specific thing that is worth drawing to your attention is that a great deal of investment has gone into mobile youth work in rural areas over the last few years. I believe that we are talking about £5.5 million in terms of revenue and £9 million in terms of capital, thus far. As I develop the work in my portfolio, I would be interested in taking a look at how that is delivering on the ground, particularly at what young people are saying about it, and at how we can develop and build on the idea of mobile provision, working with our partners in local government and the voluntary sector, if it is decided that this would be a good way of going forward. It is an attractive option. I have not yet spoken to anyone on the receiving end of this provision and I think that it would be presumptuous of me to make decisions about that before taking a good hard look at it.

[27] **Eleanor Burnham:** Mae hwn yn ddiddorol iawn. Yn ddiweddar, ar raglen Radio Cymru, *Taro'r Post*, yr oedd trafodaeth ar y mater hwn. Rhan o'r ymateb oedd bod y ddarpariaeth yn iawn, ond nad oedd ar gael yn aml. **Eleanor Burnham:** This is very interesting. Recently, on Radio Cymru's *Taro'r Post*, there was a discussion on this matter. Some of the responses said that the provision was fine, but that it was not available often.

[28] **Huw Lewis:** As I said, we will have our sufficiency review; however, I am not going to hang around waiting for that, because it will take time. I intend to get out there to take a look, for myself, at what this is delivering. We are all aware that Wales is a complicated collection of communities: we have deep rural communities, areas like the northern Valleys, which have elements that are structured in similar ways to rural areas, and more urban contexts. The issue of accessibility matters in all of those. There are different barriers to be overcome for each group of children. I am not necessarily accepting that mobile provision is the touchstone solution to everything, but I want to take a look at it. Is it right that you heard criticism of its availability?

[29] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes.

[30] **Huw Lewis:** That is interesting and is something that I would like to take a look at.

[31] **Eleanor Burnham:** Fel rhan o'r ymchwiliad hwn, mae'r pwyllgor yn adolygu a oes ffactorau ychwanegol sy'n rhwystro plant o gartrefi incwm isel rhag arfer eu hawliau i chwarae a chymdeithasu'n ddiogel. Yr ydym wedi derbyn tystiolaeth am rwystrau fel costau teithio uchel, pa mor fforddiadwy yw darpariaeth hamdden ac ansawdd gwael cyfleusterau chwarae ac ieuencid mewn rhai ardaloedd difreintiedig. Sut mae Llywodraeth Cymru yn mynd i'r afael â materion o'r fath fel rhan o'r strategaeth tlodi plant? **Eleanor Burnham:** As a part of this inquiry, the committee is reviewing whether there are additional factors that prevent children from low-income homes from exercising their rights to play and socialise safely. We have received evidence about barriers such as the high cost of travel, how affordable leisure provision is and the poor quality of youth and play facilities in some areas of deprivation. How is the Welsh Government going to deal with such issues as part of the child poverty strategy?

[32] **Huw Lewis:** You will know, Eleanor, that this is an area of personal political passion as far as I am concerned. The barriers thrown up by issues surrounding deprivation, the challenges faced by families that are caught up in the child poverty statistics and their ability to access the normal, decent standard of provision that other families take for granted are

things that I think about a great deal. The interesting part of my new portfolio is that I will be able to take a cross-cutting look, working with all Ministers, at how we can break down some of those barriers.

[33] Although transport costs, which you mentioned, are not my direct responsibility or the responsibility of my department, that does not mean that the conversation will stop there. I will be having these conversations with my colleagues in Government in connection with play, but also access to leisure and the sporting and cultural engagements that all children deserve and should have access to. I think that the legislative framework that we will be gifting ourselves shortly—it is imminent—will give me the ability to take a wide-ranging look at how all these issues impact on individual children and their families. It will also give me a great deal of leverage in terms of what is challenging people, both within the Welsh Assembly Government and in local government, in what is expected of them. We should also not forget the crucial engagement with the voluntary sector in this field.

[34] I want to get stuck into this matter, and it will be much easier to do so now given that we will soon have a pretty good impression of what works, as our audits come through. We also have a legislative framework with which to batter people about the head—in a nice way—in terms of what provision is accessible, its quality and what its quantity means for kids, particularly in rural areas. Issues surrounding child poverty and deprivation will be absolutely central to my thinking as we roll out developments on this.

[35] **Helen Mary Jones:** We are all very pleased to hear that, Deputy Minister, particularly the reference to battering if necessary. [*Laughter*]

[36] **Huw Lewis:** I have messed up already, have I not?

[37] **Helen Mary Jones:** No, but let us call it rigorous implementation. We all know what is meant by that.

[38] **Huw Lewis:** Yes, that is what I said.

[39] **Helen Mary Jones:** Welcome, Angela, and a happy new year to you. I believe that the next question is yours.

[40] **Angela Burns:** Thank you, Chair. My apologies for being delayed this morning; I do hope that the Deputy Minister will forgive me if I ask a question that has already been covered. As for your earlier comment, Deputy Minister, plain speaking is welcome, trust me.

[41] **Huw Lewis:** It is not always welcomed everywhere. [*Laughter.*]

[42] **Angela Burns:** I am particularly keen to understand what the Welsh Assembly Government is doing to ensure that disabled children and young people have safe places to play and hang out. The need for such places comes across when one visits a school anywhere in Wales: young people are always saying so, and I wondered whether you might be able to shed more light on the issue.

[43] **Huw Lewis:** There are big issues for us here, in terms of the multiple commitments that we have made on equality of opportunity, access and so on. To give you a picture about what is happening now, we would be talking about the Cymorth scheme and how it operates. There is a ring-fenced £0.25 million for disabled children's play facilities, which local authorities are expected to match. That brings the total to £0.5 million. I believe that we are now at the stage where the plans—the pro-forma and outline are the jargon terms used—regarding how local authorities would use that funding are back with us. Am I right in saying that that is the case?

[44] **Mr Greenaway:** We have agreed plans for this year. It is a three-year funding package, so it is effectively £0.5 million this year and for another two years, targeted specifically at disabled play.

[45] **Huw Lewis:** I am, however, interested—these are currently only initial thoughts—in taking a look at how we can enhance, in these very difficult times, the type of investment that goes into this kind of provision. I am not in a position to give much detail, because these thoughts are at an early stage of development, but there are options, possibly post-2011 or post-2012, for how we can use funding in an imaginative way to build on what works. I accept that there is an issue here that needs to be looked at.

[46] **Angela Burns:** I accept what you say, but I will make a quiet and quick plea, as somebody who's children have only recently come out of the pushchair—you will be familiar with that scenario. Quite often, when we go to play areas or on child-friendly walks, I have to lift pushchairs and prams over obstacles. How would this impact on a child in a wheelchair, the parent of a child in a wheelchair, or a child with real mobility problems? I can immediately think of a few places where there are great facilities that one cannot reach unless one is totally able-bodied and unencumbered.

9.50 a.m.

[47] **Huw Lewis:** We are not where we should be on this issue, and I look forward to hearing your views as a committee on ways forward on this issue. Good work is being done, and we will see a roll-out of that £0.5 million and the enhancement that it will bring about. There are issues surrounding how community focused schools might be able to assist us here, and how our joint working with special schools, in particular, might be of assistance. Play is much wider than that. The access to decent provision for disabled children and young people is about a lot more than just fixed play opportunity. I also want to talk to organisations as diverse as the Forestry Commission, the Sports Council for Wales and so on, in terms of access to open space. If we look beyond our borders and across the world, there is tremendous good practice in terms of what is possible. We have to be imaginative about how we resource such things. That is where it gets tough, and that is where we will have to think imaginatively about how things might develop. The post-Olympics period, in particular, might be an interesting time to focus our minds on what might be happening with funding that should be coming to Wales but is not necessarily part of the Assembly Government's budget.

[48] **Helen Mary Jones:** That was diplomatically put, Deputy Minister—roll on post-2012.

[49] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you for your paper, it was very interesting. I now turn to the Proposed Children and Families (Wales) Measure, which places a duty on local authorities to provide play opportunities that can be assessed. My first question is on process. Can you give us further information about the implementation plan and the timescale for regulations and guidance arising from Part 4, which relates particularly to play? Going on to the second question, Play Wales has given evidence that the duty has the potential to significantly increase the opportunities for children to play and to hang out. It depends on what the Welsh Assembly Government considers to be the definition of 'sufficient' play opportunities. How will that sort of concern be taken into account as the new powers under the proposed Measure are taken forward?

[50] **Huw Lewis:** On timescales, I will turn to Chris; I am not au fait with this.

[51] **Mr Tweedale:** And I will turn to Martin.

[52] **Huw Lewis:** That is Government in action. [*Laughter.*]

[53] **Mr Swain:** We have not yet developed an implementation timescale, predominantly because we have to do a fair bit of work on defining what constitutes the broad range of play, as you have just described. The Assembly Government's play policy is just one definition of play. If I had a lawyer sitting next to me, he would tell me that it is difficult to legislate just for that element of play. We need to define what play means, working with organisations such as Play Wales. We want to put in place a fairly quick timescale to get the powers in place. It is linked to Cymorth funding, and a key theme in that scheme is play and leisure. We need to be aware of how Cymorth funding is used and what we want to achieve in the future for play, as the Deputy Minister has said. Do you want me to cover the definition of sufficiency?

[54] **Huw Lewis:** I would like to surmise a little, and then you can continue. I am always wary, as a politician, of getting involved in too many conversations about definitions. I find that it can often lead to a circularity of debate, which does not deliver. Martin can give us a proper definition of what we will mean by this, but in terms of my broad outlook, I am much more concerned about what children and young people and their parents think of as sufficient, rather than hard and fast definitions.

[55] As I say, the nature of communities in Wales is varied, and the places where children live their lives means that what might be considered sufficient in one area might have different aspects in another. For instance, if you live in a built-up urban area, you would perhaps be facing insufficiencies in terms of outdoor play and open space. On the other hand, if you lived in a deeply rural area, you might face insufficiencies in relation to fixed and structured play provision, and if you lived in a deprived family, you might face insufficiencies in relation to how your parents are able to introduce play opportunities. So, this is complicated stuff and if any Government Minister sat here and said, 'My definition of sufficiency is . . .', then you would automatically exclude many children from many aspects of life experiences and so on.

[56] So, I will be looking at a broad human aspect of all this. I am interested in what Play Wales has said, for instance on the necessity of some degree of risk within experimentation and pushing the boundaries in how play develops children. Perhaps the word 'experimentation' rather than 'risk' is a better word to use there, because, as a father of two small children, I do not like to think of putting the word 'kids' in the same sentence as the word 'risk'. I know what Play Wales is saying, and it is important. So, on sufficiency, we must ensure that, using the legislative platform that we have as a framework for concentrating people's minds to address these issues, we level the playing field, as far as possible, with regard to access to sufficient experiences, which perhaps better-off families might take for granted in terms of their range, quality, quantity, and so on.

[57] **Helen Mary Jones:** I can see that Members want to ask you about this, but we only have 15 more minutes of this session and we have six more questions that we want to ask. So, to reassure Members, the Deputy Minister has kindly indicated that further on in our inquiry, when we have taken evidence from others, he will be happy to come back to give further evidence and respond to the evidence that we have received. So, hopefully, you will have a chance to pick things up then. We have a very full agenda today—we have two sets of witnesses after this session—so we will move on to question 8 from Ann Jones.

[58] **Ann Jones:** I will turn to the existing youth and leisure services. In your paper, you state that there is to be a review to identify the outcomes and impacts of the policy documents, and it is envisaged that the information gathered will identify the priorities and drive future policy in this service. How are young people being consulted on this review and how you intend to ensure that it is the young people who put their views forward so that we do not have a situation where adults tell children what is the best way for them to play?

[59] **Huw Lewis:** I will turn to Tanis for detailed back-up on this, Ann. I will be getting out and about, and I am interested in how the youth service in general can assist in a much wider agenda surrounding child poverty and so on. I want to see how things are operating on the ground. I cannot pretend to you this early on in my work in this portfolio that I have a proper picture of how this is operating. My gut feeling is that we have something of a curate's egg situation in terms of how this provision is rolling out across Wales. There has been good investment and progress, but I do not know whether we have a proper comprehensive grasp of what is being delivered on the ground in each community. I will now turn to Tanis for some more detail on this.

[60] **Ms Cunnick:** As you know, the national youth service strategy comes to an end in March of this year. The review is integral to enabling us to have a vision for the future.

10.00 a.m.

[61] When we look at a vision for the youth service, we need to ensure that we have a youth work methodology to meet the needs of all young people. So, that looks at universal provision, extending entitlement and targeted and specific projects, which include information services, youth centres, mobile youth-work provision to respond to rural areas, and outreach and detached youth workers, working on the streets where young people congregate to combat anti-social behaviour. However, underpinning all of that is participation. We believe that the philosophy of youth work is about empowering young people to shape youth services of the future. It is about young people, not only being consulted on how the national youth services strategy should be developed, but being part of that process. We are honour-bound and committed to achieve that. So, participation is about having young people at the heart of shaping that in the future. The mechanisms for achieving that would be our youth centres, mobile provision and information shops. Young people will be shaping the development of that on the ground. That will first inform local strategy and then national strategy. So, it is very much a 'young-people-ownership' process.

[62] **Ann Jones:** I want to ask you about the youth centres. The only way in which they will succeed is if young people run them themselves. As soon as I said that, I knew that it could become the \$64,000 question because local authorities will not allow youngsters to run those centres themselves. Are you going to deliver this plan outwith the local authorities so that the young people can deliver it?

[63] **Ms Cunnick:** The Welsh Assembly Government commits a significant amount of investment to local authorities currently. I think that that is in excess of £27 million. This is well-established provision—I think that we were established in 1939 originally. We need to look at the current needs of young people and shape that. The future will be about young people being involved and then potentially doing a senior member training programme. You may have heard of those programmes. We can accredit programmes where young people become qualified youth workers. That can be on a local basis and a national basis because they can then go on to do an apprenticeship in youth and community work. That becomes a career for them. Something else that is part of the youth-work methodology—and I will circulate this to colleagues on the committee for their information—is a 14-19 learning pathway in youth work. That has not been done before; it is very new. It can be funded through the 14-19 learning pathway process and young people will be able, not only to have a voice, but also to become instrumental in shaping the future of youth-work delivery.

[64] **Helen Mary Jones:** Do you want to come in on that, Deputy Minister?

[65] **Huw Lewis:** No. The point that I wanted to make has been covered.

[66] **Angela Burns:** I am interested in your comments about participation because we have Play Wales, the Children's Commissioner for Wales and local authority evidence that shows that planning policy and its implementation is not working in favour of children and young people. In fact, the number and quality of open spaces where children feel that they can play have been severely curtailed in recent times. How does the Welsh Assembly Government ensure that planning policy enhances children's and young people's opportunities for safe play and to hang out? Again, I would like you to pick up on the participation point.

[67] **Huw Lewis:** The opportunity here lies in the emergence of two new regimes, if you like. One is that legislative framework for play, which we have talked about several times, and the other relates to the Planning Policy Wales elements—I am thinking particularly of TAN 16, which relates to sport, recreation and open space. Individually, they are both good things, but in bringing together those sets of guidance and the legislative framework lies the opportunity for us to make some progress in this regard.

[68] This is where a cross-cutting portfolio such as mine would, hopefully, come into its own by taking a long, hard look at what kind of provision is out there. My understanding is that TAN 16 says that authorities should consider undertaking an open-space assessment, for instance, but I would be interested to know how many local authorities are doing that. I would have thought that the new legislative provisions that we will be making in respect of play in the Proposed Children and Families (Wales) Measure would make it difficult for a local authority not to do this kind of work. I want to make that point as I travel around Wales to look at how this is all developing. It is a complicated area, but we now have the possibility, through working in a positive way, to enter a new era in respect of how planning policy and legislative requirements for the quality of provision for children come together. We should see them as part of a whole.

[69] **Ann Jones:** I would like to turn to Communities First partnerships. In your evidence you say that the large majority of Communities First partnerships have historically prioritised work with children and young people and that some good stuff has gone on. We all know that Communities First provision is patchy. There are two Communities First areas in my constituency; one has worked and is okay but the other has never got further than the drawing board, as it were. What role do you see Communities First partnerships and co-ordinators having in securing safe places for play and for children to hang out? Is there any evidence that they are fulfilling that role?

[70] **Huw Lewis:** In my experience, one of the first priorities of almost every Communities First partnership that managed to get beyond first base, as it were, has been to ask what they can do for the young people in their area. Some of them are marvellous exemplars of best practice; some stunning achievements have been pushed through by community activism—essentially through partnerships—relating to play and sport and leisure provision. People's commitment to young people in their communities is quite humbling.

[71] What we have not done well over a period of time is allowing Communities First partnerships to learn from each other. That is something that I, in relation to my work on children and young people, would encourage as much as possible. It is quite remarkable that sometimes partnerships that are a few minutes' drive from each other know next to nothing about what the other partnership is up to. That is a great failing in how we have delivered for young people in particular. Someone, somewhere has invented the wheel, and it is always a good idea to make sure that you know who it is and that you have their phone number.

[72] **Ann Jones:** Absolutely.

[73] **Eleanor Burnham:** Hoffwn ofyn **Eleanor Burnham:** I would like to ask about

cwestiwn am rôl ysgolion. Yn ei dystiolaeth ysgrifenedig, mae Chwarae Cymru yn datgan mai caeau chwarae'r ysgol leol yw'r unig dir sylweddol mewn rhai cymunedau lle mae plant a phobl ifanc yn teimlo'n ddiogel i chwarae a chymdeithasu. Mae'n awgrymu oherwydd bod y caeau chwarae'n cau ar yr un pryd â'r ysgol, eu bod ar gau am fwy o amser nag y maent ar agor. Pa gyfraniad yr hoffech weld pob ysgol yn ei wneud er mwyn sicrhau bod mannau diogel ar gael i blant a phobl ifanc sy'n chwarae y tu allan i oriau agor arferol yr ysgol? Un ysgol sydd yn werth sôn amdani yw'r ysgol gynradd ym Mhlas Madoc yn Wrecsam, sydd wedi ei lleoli gyferbyn â chanolfan Cymunedau yn Gyntaf, a lle y datblygodd y brifathrawes gyfleusterau gwych flynyddoedd yn ôl, sydd mor solet fel na ellir eu dinistrio—mae wedi mynd i drafferth i sicrhau hynny. Maent hefyd ar agor ar gyfer y gymuned leol.

the role of schools. In its written evidence, Play Wales says that school playing fields are the only significant space in some communities where children and young people feel that it is safe to play and to hang out. It suggests that, as the playing fields close at the same time as the school closes, they are therefore closed for longer than they are open. What contribution would you like to see all schools making in ensuring that safe places are available to children and young people outside normal school hours? One school that is worth mentioning is the primary school in Plas Madoc in Wrexham, which is opposite a Communities First centre, and where the headmistress developed wonderful facilities years ago, which are so sturdy that they cannot be destroyed—she has made efforts to ensure that that is the case. They are also open to the local community.

10.10 a.m.

[74] **Huw Lewis:** Again, there is some tremendous best practice out there. The Assembly Government has put £25 million over the last four years, I think, into community focused schools. That effort to turn the face of schools towards the community is something that is ongoing and needs to be relentlessly pursued. I would like to think that we are at the start of a kind of thawing in terms of attitudes to how schools relate to their communities. This is not just schools that are labelled community focused schools, but all schools, including special schools, incidentally, and independent schools. This is something that I will be looking at, too, in terms of the use of facilities outside normal school hours. I think that we are at the beginning of what could be quite an exciting journey here. Those people who have managed to crack various problems—I am not familiar with Plas Madoc; that is, perhaps, something that we could chat about—

[75] **Eleanor Burnham:** I think that there would be an issue that you would be looking at, Minister, to do with health and safety, which obviously has been looked at with great care.

[76] **Huw Lewis:** Of course, yes.

[77] **Helen Mary Jones:** Eleanor, I will let the Minister finish his answer, because we have two more questions and two minutes left.

[78] **Huw Lewis:** This is something that I would want to develop in its widest sense, really. Very good stuff has been done in terms of community focused schools and how they relate to children and young people, but there is an issue here for the whole educational system. We talk about schools; we should equally talk about universities and colleges, perhaps. Anyone who has provision that is standing unused, just because it has always stood unused at certain times of the day or times of the year, should be challenged in terms of how that provision serves the community that pays for it.

[79] **Angela Burns:** Written evidence from both Play Wales and the children's commissioner says that people's negative and stereotypical views of young children are quite often barriers for providing them with safe places to play. I also want to add that, on a number

of school trips that I have made, one thing that comes from children is that it is their parents who are saying, ‘You cannot go down to that play park because there are lots of 18-year-olds colonising the swings’. So, there is a bad attitude that the big kids are too bad, but kids are just noisy. What can the Welsh Assembly Government realistically do to counteract that effect?

[80] **Huw Lewis:** I will be meeting the children’s commissioner very soon. I know that he has thought long and hard and done some good work in this regard. One of the items on the agenda for us to discuss is how we combat those negative stereotypes of children and young people.

[81] I know that he has had discussions with Welsh-based media outlets, for instance. As we are all aware, the media and some of the rest of us are guilty, from time to time, of falling into clichéd, knee-jerk thinking—I am putting as many clichés as I can into this sentence—but it is far too easy to fall into a way of thinking that accepts that young people are associated with trouble and troublemaking.

[82] I am also interested in conversations that are not simply about celebrating the positive aspects of what young people contribute to society—although that is absolutely essential and we need to do an awful lot more of it. We need more of a two-way dialogue on what expectations there might be from the community as to what they might expect from young people in terms of positive contribution, and vice versa. So, in other words, a conversation that is about rights and responsibilities—to use another cliché.

[83] I do not think that adults can dispel negative stereotypes attached to young people simply as a bunch of adults going about doing things on their own. I think that that is rather silly. We might be, by a degree, the guiltier party, but without a dialogue between adults and young people about how we get through this, we are on to a loser from the beginning, in my opinion.

[84] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you, Deputy Minister. I have a final question that relates to this and is, perhaps, a bit more controversial. Play Wales’s written evidence tells us that we have tended to respond to what it describes as the noise and mess that children and young people make when they are playing, hanging out and growing up with measures like anti-social behaviour orders and Mosquito devices. Play Wales put it to us that those responses are often inappropriate and disproportionate. What would be the Assembly Government’s view of that?

[85] Of course, some of these issues are non-devolved, but the Assembly Government has a strong commitment to the community safety agenda. I think that the question is about how we balance that and make sure that any response to genuine community safety concerns is not over-infected with the kind of prejudice and discrimination about children and young people that Angela Burns was referring to in her question.

[86] **Huw Lewis:** It is about this inter-generational dialogue that I am talking here. I take on board what Play Wales is saying; it has a powerful point. However, as politicians, we are also all aware of having people from older generations in our constituency surgeries who have genuine fear. It may be associated with misapprehension or a misunderstanding of what is going on out there in the community, but the fear is genuine.

[87] It would be interesting to talk to Communities First partnerships out there about whether they might be interested in taking a look at this aspect of how their community operates, in terms of setting up some constructive dialogue between generations. I think that it was Byron who said—forgive me, it is sexist because it was Byron, obviously, it is not me being sexist—that a man is much more of his generation than he will ever be of his country.

Our mindset is fixed within our generation much more, perhaps, than anything else. Our world view is part of our generational world view, and to break that down you must have some kind of dialogue. Someone will tell me this was not Byron now, will they not?

[88] **Helen Mary Jones:** It was Byron.

[89] **Huw Lewis:** It was Byron, yes. [*Laughter.*]

[90] **Helen Mary Jones:** At least I think that it was Byron, Deputy Minister. We could both be wrong.

[91] **Huw Lewis:** If we say that it is Byron, Chair, then it is.

[92] **Helen Mary Jones:** Yes. [*Laughter.*] Thank you, Deputy Minister, and your three officials for the evidence. We are grateful to you, Deputy Minister, for having indicated that you will be prepared to come back later in the process of our inquiry. We will, as a committee, take a very keen interest in the development of the regulations and the work that will go towards giving you, as a Government, the tools that you need to insist on some things if they are not forthcoming voluntarily.

[93] Thank you all. We look forward, deputy Minister, to working with you in the future.

[94] **Huw Lewis:** As do I. Thank you.

[95] **Helen Mary Jones:** Symudwn ymlaen yn awr at dystiolaeth gan Chwarae Cymru. Gwahoddaf Mike Greenaway a Marianne Mannello at y bwrdd.

Helen Mary Jones: We will move on now to evidence from Play Wales. I invite to the table Mike Greenaway and Marianne Mannello.

[96] Diolch i chi am eich tystiolaeth ysgrifenedig; yr oedd yn ddefnyddiol iawn. Gan ein bod wedi derbyn y dystiolaeth honno, yr ydym am symud yn syth at gwestiynau. Atgoffaf Aelodau a thystion ein bod yn rhedeg ychydig yn hwyr, ac mae'n rhaid inni orffen erbyn 11.30 a.m. gan fod cyfarfodydd eraill yn dechrau bryd hynny. Felly gofynnaf i bobl, cyn belled â bod hynny'n bosibl, fod yn gryno yn eu cwestiynau a'u hatebion.

Thank you for your written evidence; it was very useful. As we have received that evidence, we are going to move straight to questions. I remind Members and witnesses that we are running slightly late at the moment, and we need to finish by 11.30 a.m. as other meetings will be starting at that time. I ask people to be as concise as possible in their questions and responses.

[97] This is such a big agenda and I know, both of you, how close this is to your heart, so I hope that you will not be offended if there are times when I just have to cut you off. We have another set of evidence after this and we must finish at 11.30 a.m.. The same goes for Members. We may not be able to get in as many supplementary questions as we would like, but I am sure that, further on in the inquiry, if we want to ask Play Wales to come back to us again they would be happy to do that, once we have taken some more evidence that we might want to bounce off them.

[98] With that, we will go straight into the questions. I will start with my first question to you. In his written evidence to us, the Children's Commissioner for Wales states that, although there are many excellent facilities for the under-12s, this is not always the case for older children. Can you give us your views on the issues affecting older children and young people in accessing their right to play and to hang out safely?

10.20 a.m.

[99] **Mr Greenaway:** Yes. I guess that the starting point has to be the play policy. That is a clear statement by the Government that play has validity for children and young people of all ages. We feel that quite strongly. Right from the start, we need to revisit what we mean by ‘facilities’. I used to work as a youth officer, and all the people who visited me asking for ‘youth’ provision were actually talking about provision for under-12s: children’s play provision.

[100] There is a theme threaded through our evidence, which focuses on how we can embrace children and young people in our society and community, rather than making particular places available to them, which run the risk of becoming ghettos. Several countries have begun to do that, and there is a real opportunity for Wales to do that now. That is about changing attitudes and, with that, the environment.

[101] **Ms Mannello:** One thing that has changed for children and young people over the ages is this segregation by age. I will not ask anybody what they did when they were younger, but there were definitely more opportunities to play across the age ranges. I know that, where I lived, there were groups of children and young people together. Our education system segregates children by age group. Structured after-school activities further that. There has always been a tradition of that, but that has increased incredibly, and that is one thing that we need to look at. How do we develop provision to encourage interaction between children of different ages? If younger children had more interaction with older children, it would go some way towards addressing what children mean when they talk about feeling safe. For younger children, when they have identified being fearful of older children, it is simply because they have not had the same opportunities to interact.

[102] **Eleanor Burnham:** Mae hwn yn gwestiwn am blant a phobl ifanc sy’n byw mewn ardaloedd gwledig. Yn eich tystiolaeth, yr ydych yn cyfeirio at y ffaith bod plant yn byw yn bell i ffwrdd o’u ffrindiau, er enghraifft, ac nid oes modd iddynt deithio’n annibynnol o le i le. A oes unrhyw ffactorau sylweddol eraill sy’n effeithio ar y cyfleoedd sydd ar gael i blant a phobl ifanc mewn ardaloedd gwledig chwarae a chymdeithasu’n ddiogel, yn eich barn chi?

Eleanor Burnham: This is a question about children and young people who live in rural areas. In your evidence, you refer to the fact that children live a great distance away from their friends, for example, and that they are not able to travel independently from place to place. Are there any other significant factors that have an impact on the opportunities that children and young people in rural areas have to play and to hang out safely, in your opinion?

[103] **Mr Greenaway:** In a way, the issues affecting children playing and hanging out are common. While there is an issue with mobility in rural settings, when we are talking about children—and adults—feeling safe in the community, we need to look at what is regarded as acceptable behaviour these days. I will not talk about when I was a child—no, I will. When I was a child, you saw children outside and it was legitimate for children to be playing outside, but that legitimacy has now been lost, regardless of whether you live in a rural area or an urban area. I speak to many parents who say that they would like to let their children out, but they feel as though they would be regarded as bad parents because their children would not be engaged in some gainful activity that could lead to a qualification or that their play is not purposeful enough. We have to address that. As a result of that, there is alienation developing: because we do not see children playing outside, we become fearful of them. As parents, we become fearful of what will happen to our children when they are outside. So, we actually have a cycle of deprivation.

[104] As for children living in rural settings, there are issues, particularly with the

depopulation of rural areas, with second home ownership and what have you. However, to be frank, I do not know how we can overcome those issues. Children in rural areas have always not lived close enough to their peers to be able to play with them. For those children who catch the bus to school, there is a clear role there for the school, because many children tell us that the only opportunity that they have to play with their peers is at school, so we should be facilitating that.

[105] **Ms Mannello:** Further, on the quantity of provision, particularly in rural areas, I mentioned in our paper that we are currently undertaking, or completing, a review of safe play. I do not want to repeat any evidence given by local authorities—and I am sure this will come through from local authorities—but we are told by the authorities in rural areas that the allocation of funding, particularly under Cymorth, has restricted the quantity of provision that they have been able to develop, because they have fewer resources but must provide opportunities across a larger area. So, that is what the reviews and certainly the people in the field are telling us. I am sure that that will come across in the evidence that you receive.

[106] **Eleanor Burnham:** Could you tell us why, please?

[107] **Ms Mannello:** The Cymorth allocation is paid per head of population and is also based on other factors related to social deprivation. So, although rural areas are large and sparse, geographically, their populations tend to be smaller. Areas such as Monmouthshire, the Vale of Glamorgan, Powys, Ceredigion, and some of the more rural counties of north Wales receive a lesser amount of that allocation. Cymorth has been the main opportunity to fund children's play. Everything else that has come through for that has been tagged onto other agendas—and we have covered that a little in our paper. That is a real issue and needs to be noted.

[108] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes, we will be noting it.

[109] **Helen Mary Jones:** Yes, we will, although there is also an issue concerning how local authorities in areas as prosperous as Monmouthshire decide to invest their own resources.

[110] **Mr Greenaway:** Absolutely.

[111] **Helen Mary Jones:** So, it is not only a question of the Assembly Government having the responsibility to fund it, as we also need to make sure that local priorities are looked at.

[112] **Ms Mannello:** Scrutinising how funding is allocated is crucial.

[113] **Helen Mary Jones:** Yes. That brings us back to some of our children's budgeting work, does it not? It is sometimes very difficult to know what is being spent on children and young people.

[114] **Eleanor Burnham:** It depends on the demographics of the local authority, which puts pressure on councillors to determine how their budget is spent.

[115] **Helen Mary Jones:** Indeed, and it remains the case that old people vote but young people do not, which is one of our problems.

[116] **Ann Jones:** In your written evidence to the committee on the barriers to safe play experienced by some minority groups, you state that children and young people in some marginalised groups are likely to feel that they want the structured staff play provision within their minority community rather than within mainstream provision. If that is the case, what are the implications for the Government's policy and for local government's implementation

of it?

[117] **Mr Greenaway:** I will refer to what is happening with the Big Lottery Fund's Child's Play programme. All the bids that have been put forward for the second round of that programme focus on staff. The bids are predicated on basic audits that have taken place within the areas, where they have attempted to discern the greatest priority—so you may be looking at a play bus, staff provision or fixed equipment—and compare something that is not like something else, but they have found that it is hard to prioritise in that way. What has come through quite clearly as a very solid message is that the most effective way of using resources at the moment is by employing staff. There are a couple of reasons for that.

[118] One is that parents feel far freer to let their children out if they know that there are staff supervising them. In a way, it legitimises the fact that their children are going outside. They do not necessarily need to go to a bespoke play setting; it can be staff working in a peripatetic fashion on the street with children, but there is an aspect of permission to it.

[119] The other aspect is that we always expect the staff to reflect the culture of the community in which they are based, so we see that as quite positive. If we are talking about marginalised groups, we are talking about black and minority ethnic groups and disabled children. When we carry out research looking at their access to play opportunities, I believe that we fail to do that effectively, because we do not set a baseline of what is available for children without disabilities who are from the main stream.

10.30 a.m.

[120] It never comes as a surprise that children from the breadth of marginalised groups say there are not enough play opportunities, because all children say there are not enough play opportunities. The evidence is that where, for example, disabled children are supported, the proportion of disabled children playing in a staffed play setting can be greater than the proportion of other children within that setting. In other words, there are some significant positives already, but it is not surprising that when we ask children in marginalised groups, 'Are there enough play opportunities?' they say 'no', because all children say 'no'.

[121] **Angela Burns:** First of all, thank you for your paper. It was extremely well constructed and very in-depth. I have a lot of questions to ask on it, none of which I will have time to ask today. So, I would just like to follow up on Ann's point and talk about children with disabilities. The Deputy Minister refers to the Welsh Government's national service framework as stating that children and young people with disabilities have equity of access to all sorts of play, including after-school clubs and so on. What are the key actions that you believe could ensure that equity of access and would address some of these issues raised in your written evidence?

[122] **Ms Mannello:** When the children and young people's plans were being consulted on a few years ago, we were able to make comments on all of those plans. In terms of linking children's play into the national service framework, the guidance for the development of the children and young people's plans indicated that the national service framework should be considered. We highlighted that in our response to each of the 22 plans.

[123] I will précis this very quickly, because the national service framework is huge. In particular, 2.43 was about links to active play, and 2.44 was about social inclusion and play sites. Point 5.2 was about inclusion. It did not mention children's play specifically, but we made a comment that when new play provision is developed, it should be inclusive from the outset. It should not be seen as an add-on. There was also point 2.38, on accessible play areas.

[124] We also recommended that referencing those points, going back to the national

service framework and checking the progress on those actions, would be useful and would support partnerships perhaps with a more meaningful allocation of the Cymorth funding, specifically that extra funding to support disabled children.

[125] From our work in local authorities, the national service framework is a huge agenda. I am not aware of any local authorities that have seen those particular actions as flagged, because it is such an overarching agenda. Eight of the 15 responses to the state of play review that we are doing indicate that the play strategy and play provision link to the national service framework. The fact that people are looking into other plans as well is encouraging to me.

[126] **Angela Burns:** That is very interesting. If we take this one step further now and include all children, in his written evidence the Deputy Minister said that the Welsh Government had made significant progress in enhancing play and leisure provision. Would you agree with that statement, and is there evidence to back it up?

[127] **Mr Greenaway:** Shall I start?

[128] **Ms Mannello:** Yes.

[129] **Mr Greenaway:** I think that there has been progress. It is a challenge. As far as the play policy is concerned, there is no question that it was groundbreaking. It was radical. It still has the currency today that it had when it was adopted. We do a fair bit of international work and we have international links; it is recognised internationally as a groundbreaking policy. That had to be the starting point for changing attitudes, but in terms of the implementation of the policy on the ground, I would say that it has been patchy. There has been some movement on a number of the actions that have been identified.

[130] The most significant thing, I think, in the long term, must be the duty that will be placed on local authorities in respect of the Proposed Children and Families (Wales) Measure. It is patchy, but I think that this committee meeting now, and the opportunity that is provided to really look at what constitutes sufficient play opportunities for children, will begin to help us make the changes that are needed. They are radical. They are really simple, but they are radical. They will go in the face of some people who have financial interests.

[131] **Helen Mary Jones:** I will bring Angela back in briefly, and then you can add something, Marianne, if you wish.

[132] **Angela Burns:** I agree that the strategy does appear to be groundbreaking and I totally agree that its implementation is very patchy. We tend to single out local authorities because they are the people on the ground.

[133] I will also make a comment on other issues. For example, in my constituency I have play parks that are closed because health and safety people say that there are problems, or because the transport people will not allow a crossing on the road so that people can get to the play park, which is on the opposite side to all the houses, or people are scared about the insurance implications of somebody falling off the equipment. It goes on and on. It is just staggering the barriers that come up.

[134] **Mr Greenaway:** I would suggest, and we are quite clear about this, that many of the barriers that people think exist do not in fact exist. Local authorities hold insurance so that they are insured in the event that there is an accident. That is what it is for. The reality of the perception of parents and children that it is dangerous on the roads is absolutely clear. There is no question about that; nobody would argue with that. The UK Government commissioned the Play Safety Forum to draft 'Managing Risk in Play Provision', which is a groundbreaking document as far as the Health and Safety Executive is concerned. It has endorsed this. We no

longer talk about risk assessment; we talk about risk/benefit assessment, where the benefits of a child playing and taking risks may be balanced against the risk. It will take a generation to change. It is about attitudes.

[135] One of the problems that we have with play parks is that we could call them ‘play ghettos’. We put a play area in a park and we put a fence round it and it has special surfacing. We know that we have wasted £0.5 billion on the special surfacing. We know that the fences are unnecessary, and I could tell you about the history of why we have fences and the rest of mainland Europe does not. So, there is money that is being wasted.

[136] The other thing is that if you put a fence around a play area in a park, the message to children is, ‘That is where you should play. The rest of the park is not for you to play in’. We would say that, in terms of where it would be reasonable to play, it is the whole park—although perhaps not the rose beds. What we are talking about is what has been done in Rotterdam. We will use this as the example, and we will revisit this. The Rotterdam norm has been established, and it is a statute that stipulates that all public open space is designated as children’s play space unless a good reason can be given for children not playing there. Now, were we to do that in Wales, can you imagine how that would turn the perception of people on its head in terms of legitimising children’s presence outside? So, they might not need to be going to the play park because they could be playing more locally.

[137] **Helen Mary Jones:** I know that Marianne wants to come in, but I think that we are going to have to move on. Hopefully, you will have a chance to come back.

[138] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you again for your evidence. I am going to refer now to your evidence in respect of the Proposed Children and Families (Wales) Measure, and section 4 particularly, which is applicable to play, and to the duty on local authorities, which you say has the potential to contribute to a significant increase in play opportunities for children.

[139] However, you make play of the word ‘sufficient’ and the interpretation of it by the Welsh Assembly Government. Would you like to expand your views on that?

[140] **Mr Greenaway:** On sufficiency?

[141] **Sandy Mewies:** Yes.

[142] **Mr Greenaway:** Yes. Everybody we speak to says, ‘This is going to be a really hairy one’. How do you define what is sufficient? I think that ‘sufficient’ is what is good enough, and really it is for children to say what is good enough. What I would say is that what I would expect to see if we provide sufficiency is that we change the environment and attitudes sufficiently for children to become visible again. We will talk more and more about the need for children to be visible within our communities, within our towns and within the rural areas.

10.40 a.m.

[143] Part of the problem that we are dealing with now in terms of attitudes is that there is a degree of alienation. Children do not go outside, sometimes for good reasons, but sometimes because of perceptions that are not necessarily correct. The reality is that there is alienation. I live in a village. I have been involved in running a play scheme for 20 years now and I know all the children. I cannot remember them all, but they can all remember me. If I meet them as a group of 17 or 18-year-olds, I have to say that, from time to time, even though I know pretty much all of the children in the village, I will feel intimidated. It is quite natural for people to feel slightly intimidated when they are meeting a group of people that they do not know.

[144] It is about how we begin to redress the balance so that children feel that they can go

outside. I am not talking about gangs of children who are sociopathic. I am talking about your average child whose behaviour is going to be the sort of behaviour that you would expect of a child, who will not necessarily always do what they are told.

[145] **Ms Mannello:** I have little bit more to add on sufficiency. Rather than spend a lot of time defining what sufficiency is—I know that the Deputy Minister made reference to definitions in his evidence as well—we would like to see the regulations and guidance capture what it will look like if we get it right. So, going back to Angela’s question about the route to provision and how children get somewhere, for children a play opportunity in their community is the journey. It is what happens when they go out through their side door, to their back lane or through their front door. Their destination is teatime or bedtime or an hour—whatever they have been told. From the time they open the door, that should be a playable and playful opportunity. It is not about the destination or about where they are going. If you ask them where they are going, they may say, ‘To the park’, but it is about what happens along the way. There are tools already in place that could help us to begin to make some of those changes that Mike refers to as radical. When you talked about highways and parks, within technical advice note 16, which the Deputy Minister referenced within his evidence, there is already a reference there to the term ‘playable space’. I know because we provided that information as part of the technical advice group that informed TAN 16.

[146] There are actions within the existing implementation plan that talk about safer routes. There are initiatives within the Welsh Assembly Government. The safe routes to schools scheme was widened to safe routes within communities. That sort of funding stream could be looked at creatively. If a route is safe from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m., then presumably it is safe from 3 p.m. until 9 p.m. as well.

[147] **Helen Mary Jones:** May I stop you there? Please do not take it the wrong way. I know how passionate you both are about the agenda. I think that members are rapidly starting to feel the same way, so we could be here all day if we were able to. I will bring in Sandy to ask the next question.

[148] **Sandy Mewies:** I will be brief. In his written evidence the children’s commissioner has stated that the planning policies at national and local level in recent years have reduced the number and quality of open spaces where children feel that they can play. Do you agree with that?

[149] **Mr Greenaway:** Yes. The answer is ‘yes’, but as to the solution, what we are talking about will mitigate the impact of that. The other point is that, given the economic environment that we are operating in, it does not necessarily cost a pile of money. It is about doing what we are doing already but doing it differently.

[150] **Helen Mary Jones:** Since Ann has had to leave us, I will ask Eleanor to take question 21.

[151] **Eleanor Burnham:** There is anecdotal evidence that Communities First programmes contribute to the development of new play opportunities for children in many areas. What role do they have in securing safe places to hang out? What evidence is there that they are effective in fulfilling such roles bearing in mind that there is a huge difference between so many of these Communities First programmes?

[152] **Ms Mannello:** I briefly heard the Deputy Minister’s response to this question when we were coming in. In most communities in Wales, when you ask both adults and children they will highlight the need for places to play as an issue. So, we know that Communities First funding has been used to fund and develop new play provision. When an existing play association or a local play specialist or a local authority play officer was involved in that

decision on how that money was spent, the evidence suggests that it was a more meaningful provision that met the needs of a wider age range. There are examples of provision through the Communities First initiatives that looked at staff provision right across the age ranges of five to 15, and spaces where children had the opportunity to change their environment and to participate in decision making. In all of the instances that I am aware of, the decisions went right down to where the space was going to be. We know that there are one or two areas where people thought the space should be in one place and children and young people got together and started talking about territorial issues. So, we know that when there was expertise locally in terms of play behaviour and play types the provision better met children's needs.

[153] There is no doubt that the Communities First programme has been used and we would be keen to see that any future funding towards that was engaged. The sector has grown significantly in Wales and the support available for Communities First partnerships has grown since the programme was launched. I would be keen to see a better working partnership to better meet the needs of all of the children and young people in a community.

[154] **Eleanor Burnham:** You mentioned managing risk earlier and I presume that you were referring to educating children to develop coping strategies and whatever. You were not talking about particular areas; you were talking about attitude.

[155] **Mr Greenaway:** We have a better understanding of how children deal with risk. The evidence shows that children do not go out and seek risks; they go out to create opportunities to take risks. It is about taking risks in an environment of security—that is how children stretch themselves. So, while it is a risk, it is an incremental risk.

[156] If you watch children moving into a new setting where they can extend themselves, for example, by climbing trees, you will see that the first time a child climbs a tree they will be very slow, gentle and wary. They are aware of their limitations. As time goes by and they become more familiar with that tree, they will be like monkeys—there is no question about it. The risk that we run as a society is that we do not provide children with sufficient space to stretch themselves to, from time to time, break an arm or a leg, because that is what comes with it. For every child that I know that has hurt themselves, broken a leg or broken an arm, you ask them whether they are going to do that again and the answer is always, 'Absolutely. I am just going to be a little bit more careful about that bit there because I do not want to break my arm again'. That is the way that we grow as humans. The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 was introduced to make factories safer, but the unintended impact it has had on the rest of society is disproportionate. It is one of unintended consequences, and we live with that.

[157] **Eleanor Burnham:** That is important because last night's news was about snow. They showed some kids cycling in snow in Norway. I will leave that with you.

Yn eich tystiolaeth ysgrifenedig, yr ydych yn amlinellu'r modd y mae ysgolion a chaeau chwarae ysgolion yn cynnig mannau diogel i blant a phobl ifanc chwarae a chymdeithasu. Soniwyd am hynny'n gynharach. Yr ydych yn awgrymu, oherwydd bod y caeau chwarae'n cau yr un pryd â'r ysgol, bod caeau chwarae ysgolion ar gau am fwy o amser nag y maent yr agor. Fel y gofynnais i'r Dirprwy Weinidog yn gynharach, a allwch ddweud rhagor wrthym am y cyfraniad y credwch y gall ysgolion ei wneud y tu allan i oriau ysgol a sut y gallai unrhyw

In your written evidence, you outline the roles of schools and school playing fields in providing children and young people with safe places to play and to hang out. This was mentioned earlier. You suggest that, as the playing fields close at the same time as the school closes, they are therefore closed for longer than they are open. As I asked of the Deputy Minister earlier, can you tell us more about the contribution that schools can make outside of school hours and how any suggestions could work in practice?

awgrymiadau weithio'n ymarferol?

10.50 a.m.

[158] **Mr Greenaway:** Many children tell us that school is the only opportunity they have to play. It is sometimes the only open green space within their community. I used to chair the governing body of a primary school and I can remember the debates that went on. There was a big debate about whether or not the school was insured. Of course the school was insured. It is a local authority premise; it has to carry insurance. So, anyone that uses insurance and the possibility of accidents as a reason is being lazy.

[159] The schools have a significant role to play. We were commissioned by the Assembly in 2007 to write a section on the guidance for community focused schools on introducing play. To our knowledge, that has still yet to be published, and we are unclear as to why that is. There is a real opportunity being missed at the moment. We come back again to attitudes. It is depressing that many of the adults involved with schools for some reason do not want to see children playing on the school site. I run a village play scheme in a school in the summer each year, and I know that while some people really appreciate it and think it is fantastic, there is resistance from a number of adults who do not feel that children should be playing in school settings. I think that something needs to be done to address that. The difficulty—

[160] **Helen Mary Jones:** I am sorry to cut across you, but I think that Angela's next question may help you develop some of what may be behind that reluctance.

[161] **Angela Burns:** I just wanted to talk to you about the stereotyping of children—that they are all bad or all rude, or this, that and the other. One of the problems with play, if you can have a problem, is the fact that it is very often confrontational. It is rough. You look at wild animals, such as young cubs; kids are rough and tough and they push each other around. They shout, scream and all the rest of it. Adults listening will just say, 'They are being bad'. We seem to have lost the ability to be in touch with the exuberance of life. I want to take that forward, because I think that you are right—I know schools that will not let people on the premises outside school hours and they are, therefore, locked up. What do you think we can do to combat this stereotyping of children that suggests that those couple of kids casually leaning by the post office are up to no good, when, in fact, all they are doing is chatting and chilling out? You would not say the same thing about two mums having a little chat.

[162] **Mr Greenaway:** Absolutely not, and neither would you say it about a couple of dads. One of the things we have not talked about before in terms of employing staff to work with children as play workers is that one of the roles of the play worker is to be an advocate for children's play. We have watched the benefits of good training and qualifications for staff and the impact it has had on children and children's play, and on the parents.

[163] Again, I will draw on my personal experience of working in a school. Play Wales has developed some training, which was undertaken a few years ago by all the staff in our local village play scheme. The parents came in to see what was happening. It is not unusual to see the parents of a disabled child moved to tears on seeing their child playing in an inclusive environment when they had been told that that would never happen. It is unusual to see parents of children who do not have disabilities bursting into tears when they see their own children playing in a way that they would never have anticipated. This has to be a consequence of today's environment of good training of play workers. The feedback we get says that something different has happened—the children are playing more freely.

[164] The difficulty we have is that many of today's parents never played out themselves, so they did not have that experience. We have talked about the fact that, 10 years ago, we were worried that we were going to be bringing up a generation of children that had never

played with fire. We were wrong. The generation that never played with fire is already there. We are talking about parents who never played with fire now finding their children being provided with settings where they can play with fire. We do not have to teach the children and provide them with the opportunities; we actually have to provide the parents with those opportunities. I think that that is an indicator of the wider play environment and the work that will need to be done to educate parents that it is okay for children to fight and to make noise.

[165] **Angela Burns:** Along with other adults; it is not just parents.

[166] **Mr Greenaway:** Absolutely.

[167] **Angela Burns:** It relates to grandparents and people without children, and just the system, the state—

[168] **Mr Greenaway:** Yes, and that is where Government needs to take the lead.

[169] **Angela Burns:** That is interesting.

[170] **Helen Mary Jones:** I have a few questions on some of your detailed evidence, but, if we may, we will write to you about some of that.

[171] I want to ask a final question. I said that we would pick up on the health and safety issue. As someone who studied history and knows what factories were like before the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, I am afraid that I cannot regret the fact that it exists. You say in your evidence—and I think that this is something that others have touched on—that health and safety is routinely used as an excuse and as a threat that depletes children and young people of their right to play and hang out. You have made it clear that you think that that issue is significant. Do you have any further thoughts—because you have already touched on it—about how we can address that? It is a cultural misapprehension, really, is it not?

[172] **Mr Greenaway:** Absolutely. There is direct action that the Assembly could take. The Northern Ireland Executive has endorsed ‘Managing Risk in Play Provision’, produced by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Were the Assembly to do that, I think that it would begin to go that way.

[173] It is going to be a hell of a challenge, because the messages that are coming out of the Health and Safety Executive are mixed. The Play Safety Forum is working on this now. To be frank, I think that the way forward is to have alternative legislation that applies to children’s play, adventurous activities, sport and what have you, so that it is in statute. The title will come back to me, but there was legislation recently—I think that it was the Compensation Act. No, it was not the Compensation Act.

[174] **Helen Mary Jones:** Perhaps you can get back to us on that one.

[175] **Mr Greenaway:** Okay. However, that legislation has not had the effect that was hoped for. I think that there is something that the Assembly can do in terms of supporting a UK-wide initiative.

[176] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you both very much for your evidence. I am sorry that we have had to squash the dialogue down a little bit, but I am sure that we will want to come back to you. As we take further evidence, we may very well ask you to come back to respond to some of the issues that others raise with us. Diolch yn fawr.

[177] Trown yn awr at dystiolaeth gan We will now turn to the evidence of the

Gomisiynydd Plant Cymru, Keith Towler. Children's Commissioner for Wales, Keith Croeso cynnes ichi, Keith. Towler. A warm welcome to you, Keith.

[178] It is good to see you again. Our space and time with you might end up being a bit squeezed, so we may want to come back to you. Thank you very much for your paper, which, of course, highlights some issues that you have raised with us before in other contexts relating to your annual report, for example.

[179] We will go straight into the questioning. In your written evidence to the committee, you outline the costs and inconvenience of public transport for those living in rural areas, in particular citing the experience of a group of young people from Anglesey in attending the nearest cinema. Can you tell us a bit more about the main differences and issues affecting children and young people in the different geographical areas of Wales in terms of access to play and leisure opportunities?

[180] **Mr Towler:** Yes, of course. However, before I do that, I would like to congratulate you as a committee. I am very struck by the fact that you are doing a piece of work that is directly informed by children and young people. I think that it is a really fantastic thing that you are doing and I would like other committees to take a leaf out of your book. I think that this is brilliant.

[181] To answer the question, children and young people in rural areas talk to me about transport almost all the time in relation to play and access to opportunities. The example in the paper from the children from Anglesey is a really good piece of work, where they have taken the trouble just to demonstrate how much it costs and how long it takes just to get to the cinema.

[182] I heard Mike Greenaway talk earlier about schools being important places for children in rural areas because that is where they get the opportunity to play with their friends. They view the six or seven weeks of summer holidays as an absolute wasteland of a time when they are not in connection with many of their friends. They do not get opportunities to play in the way that they would like. So, it is a real issue; it is a significant issue. It is an issue in terms of their socialisation, which they feel very strongly about.

[183] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you, Keith. Sandy, are you happy to turn to question 28?

[184] **Sandy Mewies:** Yes. Welcome, Keith, and thank you for your paper. As part of this inquiry, the committee is reviewing whether there are additional barriers experienced by children in low-income households in playing and in hanging out safely. Do you think that the Welsh Government is addressing these issues as part of its child poverty strategy?

11.00 a.m.

[185] **Mr Towler:** I think that, in part, the answer to that is 'yes'. I have heard other people this morning refer to 'patchy in parts' and I think that that is very much my experience. It seems to me, to put it bluntly, that parents who have some money in their pockets are able to buy various bits of play activity and other activities for their children outside school—they will get the swimming lessons; they will go on the skiing holiday; they will be playing football; they will be taken to the rugby match. All of those things will happen because mum and dad will make it so.

[186] There are a whole load of other children, however, for whom those opportunities just do not exist, where their play experience is curtailed to the environment in which they live. If that environment actually has a rather negative attitude towards children and young people, those opportunities do not happen at all.

[187] Having said that, I have visited schools and seen fantastic practice in place. I must tell you about Tonypanyd Community College, a community focused school that really understands the relationship between the school and the community, opening facilities and providing as much opportunity to all children regardless of their circumstances. So, there are nuggets out there where you can see this working incredibly well.

[188] For universal provision right across the whole of Wales, I think that what we need to recognise is that there is a whole load of children and young people who do not get access to very basic things like the opportunity and the freedom to play. Going back to the first question about rurality and living in a beautiful location, I think that there is a very common perception that it must be a wonderful place for children to grow up, but if you view those fields as owned by people who will not let you go into them and you are contained to the road, your house and the garden, actually that is a pretty limiting experience unless you have money to access opportunities elsewhere.

[189] **Sandy Mewies:** I have just one comment, Chair, if you do not mind. Thank you for broadening that out slightly. I must say that I do sometimes look at the schedules of some children—dancing lessons at 6 p.m. and so on—and I am not quite sure how enjoyable that is no matter how much money you have.

[190] **Helen Mary Jones:** You have highlighted this as well in other contexts, have you not, Keith?

[191] **Mr Towler:** Yes.

[192] **Sandy Mewies:** Yes, as I say, I am glad you broadened it out slightly.

[193] **Helen Mary Jones:** Children actually need time to be by themselves and together and not necessarily organised the whole time, which is the other side of perhaps prosperous parents feeling that they have to fill the children's time every second of every day.

[194] **Mr Towler:** Absolutely. I think that that is why the phrase 'freedom to play' is the one that is critical. How much spare time do those children from more affluent families actually have to play?

[195] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is a good point.

[196] **Angela Burns:** You talked about some children having their ability to play curtailed. Of course, children and young people with disabilities are one of those groups that sometimes have their play activities curtailed. What do you think that the Government should do in order to ensure that children and young people with disabilities have the opportunity to have safe places to play and hang out?

[197] **Mr Towler:** What we found when we did the work on 'Happy Talent—Disabled children and young people's access to play in Wales 2007: a review of local authority strategies', to which I referred in the paper, was that lots of the play strategies at the time—I think that things have moved on a bit—did not have the words 'disabled children' in their horizon or had not lifted their eyes at all to the fact that disabled children, like other children, might want to play.

[198] I think that, to a large extent, although there is a greater level of recognition of disabled children's play and thinking about what that means in terms of access and opportunity, we still have a long way to go. I heard the committee's conversation about the Health and Safety Executive. I have spoken with children in wheelchairs who really would

like the ability to fall out of the wheelchair and crawl over to the slide. Now, there is absolutely nothing wrong in that desire. Our innate sense, as adults, is almost immediately to pick that child up and put them back in the wheelchair. I have heard children saying, 'I wish that they would stop doing that'. They mean well, but they are cutting this opportunity away. We are just not listening well enough to children and young people. We are just not hearing what they say about their play opportunities. Mike referred to risk benefit assessments, and the Deputy Minister referred to experimentation, not risk. However, we are consumed by the concept of risk and it seems to me that, with disabled children's play, with the best intention in the world, our ability to define risk and, 'Oh my goodness, they might hurt themselves if they fall out of there' is confining that child's ability to play. Those children are not having the freedom to play, and that, for me, is the crucial issue.

[199] **Eleanor Burnham:** As I said earlier, Chair, on *Y Byd ar Bedwar* last night they showed some kids cycling in the snow in Norway and the whole issue and the whole thrust of the programme was about how far we have gone the other way in terms of 'elf' and safety, if you pardon my saying.

[200] **Sandy Mewies:** I have two questions about written evidence. The Deputy Minister stated that the Welsh Government has made significant progress in enhancing play and leisure provision for children and young people; do you think there is evidence to support that view? Play Wales, in its written evidence, said that current funding available for play provision across Wales is limited and, because of the current economic climate, budgets could be squeezed. What sort of impact do you think that would have? What implications would that have for children and young people?

[201] **Mr Towler:** I think that there has been progress. I think that the Deputy Minister is right to refer to progress and more opportunity. It is not all doom and gloom by any stretch of the imagination. I have spoken here before about attitudes towards children and young people and how we respond to them. I do not get—maybe because I am the children's commissioner, I do not know—a tremendous amount of people saying, 'No, you are wrong; actually children need to be sitting in that chair and they need to be quiet'. I do not get a lot of that. I get a lot of people recognising that of course children should have a view and should be able to express that view.

[202] I think that the Deputy Minister is right. I think that we are making progress, and I think that we could probably evidence how we are making some of that progress. I would say that I am beginning to see the change in attitude that members of this committee have called for and that I have called for. If we are careful we could actually crack this. We could actually get to a point where children and young people are respected members of our society. I am beginning to think that there is a real opportunity to make this happen. The key thing now is that you, me, the Deputy Minister and everybody else with some leadership responsibility in this really drive that home. I think that that is crucial.

[203] Play Wales is right to raise the issue about funding, decision making and things that are going on. My office is continuing to receive letters from voluntary sector organisations and others concerned about the funding of their own project or initiative. Very often that will be less about people wanting to protect their own jobs and more about wanting to protect a service or an opportunity. That comes over quite strongly to me. I think that they are quite strong arguments.

[204] Of course, there are some big decisions that local authorities need to make. I heard the Deputy Minister earlier talking about the proposed Measure and the opportunities within it. Real consultation with children and young people and hearing their voice should determine some of the priorities on which local authorities and others choose to spend their money. The key issue for me, as you said, Chair, earlier on, is who gets the vote. Children under 18 do not

get the vote, but that is what is really important and significant about the proposed Measure. If you are prioritising funding decisions and genuinely listening to children and young people, then you should make some priorities in spending decisions in line with some of the things coming through.

[205] Play Wales is right to raise it. I do not envy people in local authorities having to make those choices. There are some big calls that they have to make but, nevertheless, my expectation, and I guess yours too, is that they should do what they can to hold on to as many services and opportunities for children and young people as possible, but it is not going to be easy.

[206] **Eleanor Burnham:** Mae hwn yn gwestiwn ynglŷn â'r Mesur Arfaethedig ynghylch Plant a Theuluoedd (Cymru). Yn eich tystiolaeth, yr ydych wedi datgan pryderon. Beth sydd angen ei wneud er mwyn sicrhau bod y pwerau newydd yn y Mesur arfaethedig sy'n gofyn i awdurdodau lleol ddarparu digon o gyfleoedd chwarae i blant yn cyflawni'r canlyniadau disgwylidig i blant a phobl ifanc?

Eleanor Burnham: This is a question about the Proposed Children and Families (Wales) Measure. In your evidence, you mention some concerns. What needs to be done to ensure that the new powers within this proposed Measure, which require local authorities to secure sufficient play opportunities for children, deliver the intended outcomes for children and young people in Wales?

11.10 a.m.

[207] **Mr Towler:** The word 'sufficiency' is now becoming a real pain in the neck. If we are not careful we will have papers written about what is sufficient and what is meant by the term 'sufficient'. It seems to me that, at the risk of repeating myself, the key issue is not consulting with children and young people, it is listening to their experience. I have said at this committee before that what we ought to be concerned about is having conversations with children and young people where they can articulate their views, as they do, when they can see, feel and understand the difference about something.

[208] I am not sure whether I have said this at this committee before, but I might have done. If I have done so, I apologise. I was at a play conference where a local play strategy had been produced—it was a great document and was held up in the air—and a very brave little girl asked the guy who was waving the document about 'Is my slide in that strategy?'. All she wants is a slide in the park. You could look at the strategy as much as you want, and it could be 'sufficient', but the slide in the park will not be there—and it was not there. I am not digging at that particular example but sufficiency has to be defined by children and young people's experience.

[209] Part of that is about the freedom to play in your local community, which can be anywhere at any time. It is also about the opportunity to get into parks, go to other play activities, get involved in all kinds of things at your youth club, but 'sufficiency' has to be defined by children.

[210] **Eleanor Burnham:** Pa mor effeithiol yw'r strategaeth genedlaethol ar gyfer gwasanaeth ieuenctid yng Nghymru o ran cynnig cyfleoedd i bobl ifanc chwarae a chymdeithasu'n ddiogel yn eich barn chi?

Eleanor Burnham: How effective is the national youth service strategy in Wales in offering opportunities for young people to play and to hang out safely, in your opinion?

[211] **Mr Towler:** I still hear from lots of young people that there is still nothing for them to do and nowhere for them to go—it is a bit of a stock phrase, but you pick it up all over the place—and children talking about places in which they would like to meet and congregate.

The reason that they choose to do that outside the local Spar or at the bus stop, or outside the park when the park gates are closed, is because they do not recognise that there are other spaces that they could inhabit to do that. So in terms of sufficient youth service provision, I have to say that young people tell me that we are a long way from seeing that universal service being delivered in the way in which we would all want it to be delivered.

[212] On extending entitlement, we need to go back to thinking about what extending entitlement was all about. It was about providing children and young people with opportunities and access to services with a principle that it did not matter who delivered that service as long as those children and young people received it in a safe way and as long as the opportunities were always offered—that you are constantly offering opportunities for children and young people. I come across young people who do not get those offers. It is not about the service provision; they are not getting the offer.

[213] **Eleanor Burnham:** I was thinking about the cinema, which we talked about earlier. Going to the cinema is a costly affair, yet it is obviously a very popular amenity.

[214] **Mr Towler:** Yes, absolutely.

[215] **Angela Burns:** I am going to be sneaky and get in three very quick questions.

[216] **Helen Mary Jones:** It would not be the first time or the last. [*Laughter.*]

[217] **Angela Burns:** You have already touched on places to play. Do you think that there has been a significant reduction in the number of places where children can play?

[218] **Mr Towler:** Yes, I do. The snow was brilliant because it just opened everything up and places became an absolute playground. I delighted in going out for a walk locally on a Sunday afternoon and watching children haring down a hillside in a canoe and on a car bonnet, heading towards white oblivion and having a brilliant time. At the same time on the radio, though, a debate was going on about closing schools for fear that children might throw a snowball at each other in the grounds outside.

[219] On one hand, if parents are quite happy for this activity to happen on a Sunday afternoon without any health and safety concerns, the fact that we close schools in case somebody has a snowball fight really rankles with me.

[220] **Angela Burns:** There is a true story of the woman who, on seeing young boy walking past her house on a Sunday afternoon, reported him to the police. In fact he was on his way to football practice and his mother had finally given him—he was only about seven or eight years old—permission to do that. That same boy walks that route every single Monday and Friday to school and back, but the police were there picking him up because he was out on his own. We are daft about this.

[221] You said one thing that totally surprised me and cheered me up, although I struggled to believe it, which is that you feel that the stereotyping of children and young people is getting better—that we are less pejorative. Maybe I am just too close to the coalface in that people only come to me when they have a problem. I go out to schools, I talk to kids, particularly the nine, 10, 11 age bracket, and they all say that they have nowhere to go and that people do not trust them. In Pembroke the council took all the play equipment out of the park because it was being vandalised and then they said that it was also because the kids there made too much noise and the residents complained. I can think of other areas where children are being corralled into small groups, where people are complaining and saying that they do not want them there because they are too noisy or because they feel threatened, so I want to challenge that.

[222] My sneaky extra question relates to Play Wales's comment about the children themselves being frightened of older children because the generations do not get the chance to mix. I have heard children saying, 'We do not want to go there because the big kids always hang out on the swing'. Play Wales said that if children had more opportunity to mix with the older children, they would not be so frightened of them. I challenge that a little because I wonder about the attitudes of the big kids. There is prejudice even from an 18, 16 or 15-year-old down to a seven or a six-year-old. I would like you to expand on that because I think it is vitally important.

[223] **Mr Towler:** I am trying to say that there is a bit of an opportunity here. We are increasingly having a debate about children and young people's place in society. I am doing what I can to try to provoke some of that debate but I have heard others do likewise. The opportunity that I see is that people are up for listening to what we are saying about the experience of children and young people, about what children and young people can contribute to that debate and what we want a good childhood to look like.

[224] With some decent leadership from government, from the children's commissioner and from others who proactively talk about children and young people's contribution, there is a chink of opportunity. I have done some work in talking to people in the media, for example, about how children and young people are portrayed in England and Wales, all of whom are saying, 'We hear what you are saying and we would really like to work alongside you on some of this'. They want to think about how children and young people can not only contribute to involvement in the media and getting their voices heard, but how they are portrayed. So, they take that on board.

[225] I think that that is an opportunity but I would not disagree with anything that you have just said about the scale of what we need to achieve, because that is still there. However, the opportunity to do that exists, and it is not a huge spend. We do not want to spend lots of money on this but we can find a way to start thinking about how attitudes towards children and young people can be improved.

[226] **Angela Burns:** Very quickly, could you tell me whether, in your opinion, the United Kingdom is the most hostile country towards children in Europe?

[227] **Mr Towler:** Without any question in my mind. That was the evidence that I gave, and the other children's commissioners gave, to the UN Committee when we were giving evidence on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. If you look at our rate of locking up children and young people if they commit a criminal offence, it is higher than anywhere else in Europe. If you look at anti-social behaviour and attitudes towards that, we are very heavy on children and young people's behaviour.

[228] Our attitudes towards children and young people are probably more negative too. That was definitely picked up by the UN Committee, which made some clear recommendations or concluding observations about how it felt that, as a society, we view our children and young people, and what the responsibilities and attitudes of government were towards children and young people.

11.20 a.m.

[229] **Angela Burns:** If you have any evidence, would you write to the Chair with what you think the tipping point was? That may inform our understanding of how we can tip it back.

[230] **Mr Towler:** Absolutely.

[231] **Helen Mary Jones:** That would be useful, because it would be good to learn when it got to be like that. Are there cultural factors at play? Any information that you can give us on that would be useful, Keith. It is a bit intangible, but it underpins so many things, does it not?

[232] **Eleanor Burnham:** It would also be useful to learn how we could achieve a return. I keep going back to this Norwegian thing last night about the kids going to school in the snow. The head was a Welsh guy, which is why he was on the programme. He was saying that he has never had to close the school—and I know that we have issues because certain schools here had their boilers break down and they had no electricity and so on, but snow thing has really focused our minds on people's attitudes to risk and managing it, as you say.

[233] **Helen Mary Jones:** That would be really useful, Keith. There are a couple of final questions from me, if Angela is finished with her sneakiness—but all very relevant sneakiness, if I may say so. [*Laughter.*]

[234] These questions follow the theme of who to prioritise. In its written evidence to us, Play Wales referred to streets congested with parked cars, and went on to state that adults' needs for protection and space for their cars are routinely and unquestioningly prioritised over children and young people's needs to play and hang out. Do you agree with that as a typical example of the use of space?

[235] **Mr Towler:** Yes, I do. Of those of us who travel around Wales, going to various communities, not many of us see children and young people playing in the street, not anymore. I am old enough to remember playing football in the street. I am also old enough to remember the windows that I broke and the things that I did—and perhaps that is one of those tipping points. However, the attitude of the people where I lived towards my smashing windows was that I had to repair the window and I had to apologise, but I was still out playing football the following day. So, there was something more accepting about children being in the street.

[236] Towards the end of last year, I visited one of our brilliant ambassador schools in Colwyn Bay, where the school council had taken it upon itself to leaflet-drop the cars that were dropping the children off outside the school to make parents aware of the fact that dropping their children off at the school was making the school environment unsafe. I asked the children what impact that had had, and they said that the parents had obviously never thought about it before. You know what they do: they rush up to the school gate, they open the car door, the children get out, and the parents speed off again—all while the pupils are trying to cross the road. Look at that experience from a child's eye view. In our hectic, hurly-burly lives, there are cars parked up outside but also cars moving too fast, and children and young people really cannot understand why no-one is paying any attention to the fact that they are road users, too.

[237] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is a very telling example. This is my final question, and it follows on from that, really. Play Wales, again in its written evidence, talked about the role that adults play as parents and carers. It stated that there is a view that playing outside is not desirable, particularly when combined with the perception that it is unsafe. Play Wales sees that as one of the biggest barriers to children and young people being able to play and hang out safely and with confidence. Do you share that perception? Do you have any thoughts about how we can begin to address the quite real fears of adults about children's safety when they are outside?

[238] **Mr Towler:** I share those sentiments. I have spoken with parents, particularly young parents, who want to be good parents and they strive to do good things for their children, but they are worried that they will be labelled bad parents if they let their children play outside.

This is an interesting time of year, because if children are playing outside at this time of year, when it gets dark really quite early, at around 5 p.m. or 6 p.m., it has all kinds of implications. A child of 10 or 11 might be outside at 6.30 p.m. when it is dark outside, but one perception of that is that the parents do not care about the child. Another is the perceived danger of cars or the threat of paedophiles. I know that that sounds quite exaggerated, but that is where people's thinking leads them. They think that there is a threat around every single corner. We have lost the ability to be reasonable in making assumptions about how we keep our children safe. So, it is a complex issue.

[239] For me, addressing it is about people's attitudes and how we view children and young people. It is also about our responsibilities as adults—and not just as parents and relatives but as members of society. Do we say hello to children when we pass them on the street? That picks up the point about 18-year-olds' attitudes towards younger children. I mentioned Tonypandy earlier, and, on community focused schools, I have seen older young people there actively engaged in activities with smaller children, showing them how to paint a picture, coaching them in football, or whatever—in other words, just being a part of the local community and creating opportunities to do that intergenerational stuff. That is the kind of thing that we may have taken for granted years ago. Somehow, we have lost the tipping point that you referred to, Chair. In our society, we have definitely lost something, and it is to do with finding joy in watching children and young people enjoying themselves and having fun. We have lost that ability.

[240] **Angela Burns:** This is a subject dear to my heart, and I have held a number of short debates on it. One issue is the culture of fear. To expand on that slightly, all of society is now far more fearful, because the media brings terrible scenes of devastation and desolation into our sitting rooms. I can remember clearly the first child to go missing whose case was really heavily publicised, and that was a young cyclist in Dorset, I think, called Jeanette. Ever since, we have been surrounded by stories of people abducting children left, right and centre and of terrible things happening to them. People say that it always went on and that it has not got any worse, but that is cold comfort to parents such as me. I talk to my friends and constituents who come to see me about this. When you have small children, you are bombarded by fear. Even though I live in a rural area, when it gets to twilight, I am like a mother hen, bringing her chicks in. You are taught from birth that the world is a dangerous, scary and evil place. That goes hand in hand with the negative stereotyping of children—it spreads and becomes pervasive. It will be exceptionally difficult, and will take a conscious mental effort on the part of parents to make that jump. That is why a paper on the tipping point would very interesting, if you have anything on it.

[241] **Eleanor Burnham:** Your role is very important, but are you going to be able to help us in Wales? Can you help parents to be better parents—and I am certainly an imperfect parent, but it is far more difficult to be a better parent these days with all the issues that we have discussed, including Angela's last one? In addition, what about the demographic changes that we are seeing, and the fact that we now have so many older people? Allow me to give you a quick scenario, which is very sad.

[242] A male adult was explaining to me how he was fearful because a young lad wanted to talk to him while he was having a shower in the changing room of a swimming pool. He eventually discovered the mother, who had gone to the gym while the child was swimming, and explained to her what he had been doing, because he did not want anyone to think that he was a paedophile. I was thinking, 'Oh, my God', but this male adult, who is terribly intelligent and is a very nice, upstanding citizen, was shaking at the thought. There is lots to do, and your role is crucial if we are to change the attitude of the media and help with older people. The alienation between the generations is growing.

[243] **Mr Towler:** I agree with both of the points that you are making. I also think that you

are right about the role of the children's commissioner. It has to be about speaking up, speaking out and engaging with people in the discussion. Partly, it is about my trying to soak up what children and young people are talking about, and partly it is about trying to help individual children and young people with particular issues, but it is also about inspiring people to think about what it is that we are all trying to do for our children. The bottom line is that we all want our children to be happy. That is it.

11.30 a.m.

[244] On the issue of what makes a good parent, or are you a better parent than somebody else, the art of parenting is a very personal thing and we must allow people that opportunity to parent well. People have to make judgments about risk and about whether they should bring their chicks home because it is getting late, and I would not criticise people for doing that, but there is something about our attitudes towards children and young people for which the commissioner, the Welsh Government, you and others can take some responsibility. It is about trying to create a culture in this society that values children as right holders, respects them as human beings and wants to see them having a damn good time. Every one of us has had a childhood and we are still defined by the experiences of our childhood.

[245] **Helen Mary Jones:** I think that that is an appropriate point to bring that evidence session to an end.

[246] I remind Members that there are some papers to note; I ask you to take a look at those at your leisure. I thank Members for being here and remind you that the next meeting is on 2 February. We will have a lot to do at that meeting. We have Barnardo's coming to give us evidence for this inquiry but Members will remember that we also wanted to see the representatives of local health boards who lead on child and adolescent mental health issues, to find out what these new vice chairs intend to do and how they see their roles. The clerk will circulate a message to Members to determine what suits you best in terms of start and finish times for these meetings, because we are stuck with the Tuesday morning slot. I am not happy about that, and I will discuss it with the Business Committee, as it means that we get squeezed at the beginning and by the need to move to group meetings. We will have a think about the most appropriate time slots, and there may be times—I will be in your hands on this—when we decide that we do without the pre-meeting, if the questions are already allocated and if we have no particular issues that we need to discuss in private.

[247] Diolch i bawb, i'r staff, i'r Cofnod ac I thank you all, the staff, the Record and all
i bawb sy'n ein helpu gyda'r ymchwiliad those who are helping us with this inquiry.
hwn. Diolch eto i Keith am ei bresenoldeb. Thanks again, Keith, for your attendance.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 11.32 a.m.
The meeting ended at 11.32 a.m.*