



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

Y Pwyllgor Cymunedau, Cydraddoldeb a **Llywodraeth Leol** **The Communities, Equality and Local Government** **Committee**

Dydd Mercher, 14 Ionawr 2015
Wednesday, 14 January 2015

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Cofnodir y trafodion yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynnddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd.

The proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee. In addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Peter Black	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Christine Chapman	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Alun Davies	Llafur Labour
Jocelyn Davies	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Janet Finch-Saunders	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Mike Hedges	Llafur Labour
Mark Isherwood	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Gwyn R. Price	Llafur Labour
Rhodri Glyn Thomas	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Lesley Griffiths	Aelod Cynulliad, Llafur (y Gweinidog Cymunedau a Threchu Tlodi) Assembly Member, Labour (the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty)
Maureen Howell	Dirprwy Gyfarwyddwr, Trechu Tlodi, Llywodraeth Cymru Deputy Director, Tackling Poverty, Welsh Government
Eleanor Marks	Dirprwy Gyfarwyddwr yr Is-adran Gymunedau, Llywodraeth Cymru Deputy Director of Communities Division, Welsh Government

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

Sarah Beasley	Clerc Clerk
Chloe Davies	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Hannah Johnson	Y Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Research Service

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:14.
The meeting began at 09:14.

**Cyflwyniadau, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introductions, Apologies and Substitutions**

[1] **Christine Chapman:** Okay, good morning, everyone, and welcome to the Assembly's Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee. Can I welcome you all to the first meeting of 2015? We haven't received any apologies this morning.

09:15

**Ymchwiliad i Dlodi yng Nghymru (Elfen 1)—Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 10: Y
Gweinidog Cymunedau a Threchu Tlodi
Inquiry into Poverty in Wales (Strand 1)—Evidence Session 10: Minister for
Communities and Tackling Poverty**

[2] **Christine Chapman:** The first item today is the final evidence session to inform strand 1—poverty and inequality—of our inquiry into poverty in Wales. So, I would like to give a warm welcome to, first of all, Lesley Griffiths AM, Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty, and also your officials, Maureen Howell, deputy director, tackling poverty, Welsh Government, and Eleanor Marks, deputy director of communities division, Welsh Government. So, again, welcome to you all. Minister, you have provided us with a paper, which Members will have read, so we will go straight into questions. I just want to start off with a very broad question. I mean, as you know, we have taken quite a lot of evidence on this from stakeholders. You know, it is a very broad inquiry, and there have been concerns raised by certain aspects of it, so could you just give me what evidence you have that the Welsh Government's approach is the right one to tackling poverty?

[3] **The Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty (Lesley Griffiths):** Thank you. Well, I do consider that our approach is the right one. I think we focus on areas where we've got the powers to make a difference. Obviously, we don't have all the levers, so I think it's absolutely right that we do take that approach. We can't do it on our own. Again, I think our approach to it being a shared approach is very important. Whilst I am Minister for tackling poverty, every Minister, right across Government, has responsibility within their own portfolio also to address poverty. I know the UK Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission agreed that we had the right approach. I firmly believe—. I've been in post now for four months but, obviously, prior to that in my own constituency I'd had dealings with the programmes and policies that we have, and certainly when you go out there and you talk to people and you speak to people on an individual basis and hear about how their lives have been transformed by our policies, you know it's the right approach.

[4] It's very challenging. It's a very complex area. We need different policies to address different aspects of poverty. We need different policies for different groups of people. I think my officials—. I've been reading in your evidence—. You'll be aware that, at the moment, we're going through consultation for our revised child poverty strategy, and certainly people seem to have an excellent relationship with my officials. They believe that Welsh Government is easy to deal with—much better than other Governments in the UK. I think it's really important that people hold me, obviously, accountable but that I also hold my other ministerial colleagues accountable. I chair the tackling poverty implementation board, where senior officials from all departments attend. Since I came into post, I have changed it slightly. At each board meeting I will focus on one topic, and the Minister will come as well, which is something that hadn't happened before. The next one, I think later this month—maybe next month—is focusing on education, when Huw Lewis will come along with all the officials from right across Government.

[5] **Christine Chapman:** Okay. Well, I've got Jocelyn first and then Alun.

[6] **Jocelyn Davies:** Minister, what's your evidence that your approach is the right one?

[7] **Lesley Griffiths:** Well, we do evaluation, obviously, of our policies. It's absolutely fundamental that we do evaluation of those policies to make sure that they are reaching the correct people. We evaluate all the major policies—Flying Start, Families First, Communities First. The evaluation coming back in—that's what it's telling me: that it's the correct approach.

[8] **Jocelyn Davies:** And those evaluations are published.

[9] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, they will be. Certainly, the Communities First one, I've asked officials to publish the first six-month report coming up. You'll be aware we're doing a new evaluation of Communities First. I aim to publish the whole summary of that evaluation at the end of February. I may do an interim one at the beginning of February.

[10] **Jocelyn Davies:** So, when you have meetings with the other Ministers and their officials, do you focus on the evaluation and the evidence that what they're doing is working?

[11] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes. I mean, I've only had one and, as I say, I am going to change the way that we do it. But certainly, yes, a senior official from every department comes to that board meeting and they have to prove to me that the policies that they have within their department are meeting what we—

[12] **Jocelyn Davies:** So, you expect evidence from them?

[13] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes.

[14] **Jocelyn Davies:** Okay. I know you mentioned that you've been following our deliberations here and obviously reading the evidence from outside, and I'm sure you would agree that poverty isn't just about income.

[15] **Lesley Griffiths:** No.

[16] **Jocelyn Davies:** So how do you respond to the calls for the Welsh Government to fully articulate its definition of poverty beyond that standard income measurement?

[17] **Lesley Griffiths:** I think income is probably the most important constituent of poverty, but obviously it's not the only one. But that is based on very robust evidence. I think that most Governments use that as a measure, but of course it isn't solely about household income. Poverty is very multifaceted; that's why we have to have the range of targets, that's why we have to have the range of policies. I think that looking at indicators other than income is important, and it's generally in those other areas where we do have the levers to make a difference. As I mentioned before, we haven't got all the levers. We've got the Welsh index of multiple deprivation, and that focuses on many areas, not just income.

[18] **Jocelyn Davies:** You probably noticed that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's definition is when a person's resources are not sufficient to meet their minimum needs, including social participation. Of course, we've heard from witnesses that the public don't like this term 'poverty' and don't respond very sympathetically to it, but they do respond more sympathetically to this idea that somebody doesn't have enough to meet their minimum needs. So, would you consider changing or articulating a fuller definition—obviously, income is easy to measure; those are data that are available to you—broadening it to include these other things about, sort of, not having enough resources, which isn't just about income, to meet their minimum needs?

[19] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, I can certainly see what you're saying. When WIMD was published in November and a different ward was the top one, the people living in that ward were very upset. Some of them were very upset and articulated that—that they didn't want to be living in the ward. They didn't feel they lived in the most deprived ward in Wales. So, I absolutely agree with what you're saying. Interestingly, we're out to consultation now for the revised child poverty strategy, and that's something that I think has come through. Maureen and I were discussing before that, if you've got two people earning the same money, the same income, but one person can't cook, they could then be in food poverty, if the other person could cook. They could be earning exactly the same money. So, you're absolutely right; it's not about that. So, I think we need to look at all those indicators, and certainly in relation to food poverty, which is much more acute than it was. Again, when we had the first child poverty strategy in 2011, it wasn't even referred to, whereas now we're out to consultation and we've put that in. So, I think we do need to look at the indicators around that.

[20] **Jocelyn Davies:** Would you be able to tell us something about your approach to tackling poverty and how that's adapting to this shift towards in-work poverty?

[21] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, in-work poverty. We now have more people in in-work poverty than in work poverty in Wales. I still believe that work remains the most sustainable route out of poverty. However, we have to recognise that it is now a significant issue—in-work poverty. We know it's more prevalent amongst part-time workers, so, therefore, we know more women are part-time workers. Looking at the child poverty strategy consultation we've got at the moment, again, I mentioned that food poverty now is being looked at; we're also looking at in-work poverty in relation to that. One of the main areas, I think, where we can help is childcare. I mean, childcare is obviously a barrier, and that's one message that I get a lot. We've done a lot of work around childcare. If you look at Flying Start, that's two and a half hours a day childcare, where children are eligible. So, again, we know that a lack of childcare impacts mainly on lone parents a lot of the time, so we're doing some work around that.

[22] I'm also looking at using European funds. We're working up something called PaCE—parents, childcare and employment—bids, which again will support parents getting into work but also if they need employment and training opportunities and upskilling and childcare is a barrier there. So, we are seeking to use European funding around that area.

[23] **Jocelyn Davies:** The other thing, of course, that we've heard is this idea of targeting anti-poverty initiatives towards those most at risk rather than in geographic areas. So, have you been considering that?

[24] **Lesley Griffiths:** Not all our programmes are geographical. Obviously, Flying Start is, Communities First is, but I think we do need to look—. The new evaluation that's coming from Communities First, I think, will help me in that area. Again, WIMD—the Welsh index of multiple deprivation—looks at the sort of areas, the very intense deprived areas; it doesn't look at the individual. So, I think it's something that we have to be looking at, is at the individual, more than perhaps we have been doing.

[25] **Jocelyn Davies:** Well, we look forward to seeing that. Thank you.

[26] **Christine Chapman:** Okay, I've got Alun, then Mike, then Gwyn; so, Alun.

[27] **Alun Davies:** Thank you very much. You were very robust in answering the Chair's opening question on tackling poverty, and the Government's approach is right, so I was wondering if you could outline to the committee what your understanding is of the term 'tackling poverty'.

[28] **Lesley Griffiths:** I think it goes back to Jocelyn's questions about, you know, has somebody got what they need—enough resources of what they need. That's why I said it's not just about income, it's about other issues as well, although I do think income is one of the best ways of measuring, and I know you mentioned the Joseph Rowntree trust. I think what's important is that we help people get out of poverty, and we do that by our policies right across Government. As I said, I can't do it on my own; we have to look at all ministerial colleagues. So, on fuel poverty, for instance, it's really important that the Minister for Natural Resources has policies to address that, and we do with Arbed and Nest. Educational attainment is vitally important in helping people come out of poverty. As I said, going around Wales and visiting settings, speaking to people and hearing the way that our policies are transforming their lives, is why I said in answer to my question to the Chair that I think our approach is correct.

[29] **Alun Davies:** Thank you for that. So, I understand from that reply that the purpose and objective of the Government's approach isn't simply to ameliorate the symptoms of poverty, but to attack the root causes of poverty; is that correct?

[30] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, that's correct. We have to try to prevent people going into poverty in the first place. It's very difficult, particularly with—. One of the main difficulties for people at the moment is the welfare reform, and certainly organisations such as the Trussell Trust say that the main reason people are going to them for help is because of welfare reform. We don't have the levers around that, so I think it's about being pragmatic. I think it's about recognising the levers that we do have and, again, that's why I think our approach is correct.

[31] **Alun Davies:** I appreciate that, and I also appreciate the damage the welfare reform programme is doing to people and communities across Wales, but I'm interested in your reply because you base it on anecdotal evidence—people you speak to. I'm not sure that I've seen any number that indicates to me that poverty is being reduced at the moment.

[32] **Lesley Griffiths:** It's not just anecdotal evidence; it's evaluations as well. You know, that's a fundamental principle on which you base your policies and you take your policies forward, and they may need to be adapted, and they may need to be tweaked or whatever going forward. Certainly, the child poverty strategy is a classic example, it's only—. The child poverty strategy was 2011 to 2014—three years. My very first day in post in September was signing off the, you know, going out to consultation for the new one. We had to put two different types of poverty in straight away: food and in-work poverty. I came across funeral poverty and then you start to think that you can probably put any word in front of poverty.

[33] **Alun Davies:** Yes.

[34] **Lesley Griffiths:** So, we are now meeting different forms of poverty, which makes it even more complex, I think, to, you know—. Our ambition is to eradicate child poverty by 2020. I've questioned that; I think it's completely correct to say that it's our ambition to eradicate child poverty by 2020. The consultation is saying to me that we need to be very honest about this and we need to be very pragmatic about this. It's sort of 50/50 at the moment that we should carry on—I think it's important that people don't detract from what work they're doing—to say that we have this ambition, but it is very complex and it is becoming increasingly complex, I think. But, I do think that we are making a difference out there.

[35] **Alun Davies:** I accept that and I certainly think that it's right and proper to both have a more profound understanding of poverty, and also to have a very real ambition to eradicate that, but my question was: on what basis? What is the statistical basis upon which you argue that the current Government's approach is actually working to eradicate poverty in Wales?

09:30

[36] **Lesley Griffiths:** We have the tackling poverty action plan, which again is not a static document—every year we produce an annual report that shows us that our targets and our milestones are decreasing poverty. It is very hard to articulate that, and I understand that, and that's why it's so important that we do have a sort of living document, and it's not a static document, and we can show year on year that we are making a difference, and I do think that the plan does—not just on anecdotal evidence, but on robust evaluation.

[37] **Alun Davies:** The evidence the committee's received, I think, most directly from the Joseph Rowntree trust was that poverty in Wales is increasing. I've seen no statistical evidence that demonstrates to me that poverty is decreasing.

[38] **Lesley Griffiths:** Have you got any data?

[39] **Ms Marks:** Will you do data?

[40] **Ms Howell:** I think, in terms of if we look at the stark income figures—you know, we were saying, 'Is poverty based around income?'—then there has been very little change; it's been fairly static over the last several years. I think, in terms of what the Minister was saying, within the tackling poverty action plan, we've highlighted areas of action where we think we can make a difference, around education, around early years, around NEETs, around housing and regeneration. What we are doing is that we are very closely monitoring the results of that work and what impact we're making there. If you look back to last July, in our annual report, what it says basically is that, in some areas, we are making a difference and, in some other areas, we need to do more.

[41] **Alun Davies:** Could you name them?

[42] **Ms Howell:** Pardon?

[43] **Alun Davies:** Could you name one of those areas? Give us the statistical evidence to sustain your argument.

[44] **Ms Howell:** Yes, in terms of if we just look at NEETs, there's been quite a significant drop in the number of NEETs aged 16-18, whereas there's more work needed to be done in terms of 18 to 24-year-olds. Although there has been a drop, there has been, over a period of years, a fluctuation in those numbers, so we need to maintain that work. A lot of our local authority anti-poverty champions are actually taking that on as their big agenda to drive through in local authorities. So, that's one area that we're making some achievement in, which is making a real difference to those individual young people's lives.

[45] **Alun Davies:** So, you can demonstrate that those young people are no longer living in poverty—

[46] **Ms Howell:** Yes.

[47] **Alun Davies:** Because the question wasn't, 'Are they in education?'—they're possibly in education and poor—but, 'Are they actually being taken out of poverty?' That was the question.

[48] **Ms Howell:** I think, if you look also at the results of the child poverty strategy evaluation, which again was published last July, what it says was that our focus, you know, sort of, in the long term, on prevention and early intervention is going to make a difference,

but it is going to make a difference in the long term. Therefore, we also need to do something in the here and now, and that's what the revised child poverty strategy consultation document is about: that we maintain that focus on early intervention and prevention, because all the evidence—and I think the Joseph Rowntree Foundation would support this—demonstrates that that's how we're going to make the biggest difference in terms of, you know, the poverty agenda. We need to pick up things in the here and now, and the Minister's indicated some of those around in-work poverty and food poverty that we need to focus on—you know, what people's power in their pocket basically is, in terms of the funding that they've got available.

[49] **Christine Chapman:** I've got a number of Members and I want to include everyone, but I just want to jump in here. Just following on from Alun Davies's question, Minister, do you think that there could be some confusion out there about whether poverty is going down, or is getting better, or what have you? You mentioned about articulating what it means to tackle poverty, and you said that, you know, I think it was that different people have got different views. Do you think there's a potential for confusion out there? And, if there is a potential for confusion, are we then able to do something to address it properly?

[50] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, that's not something I've come across. It was a question I actually asked. I have a tackling poverty expert advisory group, who I've met only once up to now. I met them last month and it was a question I actually asked: 'Out there, what is the perception of poverty?' They didn't seem to think there was confusion out there. Certainly, talking to stakeholders, that hasn't come across to me. As I say, it has mostly been articulated to me by the people who lived in Caerphilly—in the ward in Caerphilly that came top—who were very indignant about it. I was certainly told in no uncertain terms, you know, that they didn't feel they lived—. So, people's perception of poverty, obviously, is different. Poverty is such a complex issue that people have different views and opinions about it.

[51] **Christine Chapman:** Okay. Now, I want to bring other Members in: Mike, Gwyn, Mark and Rhodri. So, Mike first, then Gwyn.

[52] **Mike Hedges:** I've got two questions: one on NEETs. I don't know if you are familiar with the recent pamphlet published by the Fabian Society regarding NEETs in Leicester, where they identified that the number of people who actually were NEET was something like three times the number that they had on the books, as it were, as NEETs. Are you confident that, in Wales, we haven't got the same problem?

[53] **Ms Howell:** I think we have some data issues around the older age group of NEETs. In terms of 16 to 18-year-olds, we're pretty certain that we've got the right numbers there, because they're easier to track through the education system. What we are doing is working with DWP to facilitate the sharing of those data at a local level. I know that some local authorities have been more successful in terms of setting up local data-sharing protocols than others, so it's an issue that we have raised with DWP nationally, to see if we can get some sort of agreed sharing of data, so that we can identify. But, obviously, that will only be those people that register with DWP in terms of benefit collection. So, I wouldn't indicate that there is a significant difference in Wales in terms of those older NEETs, but that is an issue that we are looking at, and colleagues who lead on that youth progression framework are actually looking quite closely at it.

[54] **Mike Hedges:** Fifteen to 18-year-olds, of course, are picked up by education maintenance allowance. They get EMA if they go to college, so there is a financial incentive for them to do so, whereas at the age of 19 they stop getting it and there is a financial—. One thing that they found in that English investigation was that it was the post-19s, the 19-to-25s, that were running at something like three times the number that were there. I have seen nothing in your answer to indicate that Wales should be significantly different to the Leicester study.

[55] Anyway, moving on to my next question, I am a big fan of Communities First and Flying Start, and I've spoken very favourably about them on a number of occasions. Can I say about the great progress you've made in moving to lower super-output areas rather than wards, because the averaging effect in wards meant a number of people in relatively poor areas were being left out? Can I just say that one problem I find with the lower super-output areas is that they come to an end somewhere? In Edwina Hart's constituency, they come between two houses on a council estate—one lot are in, and one lot are out. The people are exactly the same—it is the same estate—and that happens quite often. You also get the problem we get in Swansea, where the relatively affluent people living on one road are looking out over a block of council flats in a ward that Peter represents, which, if they were anywhere else, would be in, but they're out. The man in his BMW looking out on the council flats is in Communities First and the people living in these low-rise council flats aren't. Can something be done to bring some sense to some of these boundaries? There are some very affluent areas that are in Communities First because of the averaging of the lower super-output areas, and there are some very poor areas, sometimes just next door, that are out. I could take you to mansions in Swansea East, and there are not many of them, that are in Communities First, and I could take you to some of the poorest areas, like the terraces of Plasmarl, which are mainly single parents living in very low-cost rented accommodation, that are out. I'm just saying: can something be done to actually apply some sense to the data? As you know, all the super-output area data are giving you is averages and that does not necessarily pick up the problem. Can some sort of common sense be applied to some of this? Some of the people in certainly shouldn't be, and some of the people out certainly should.

[56] **Lesley Griffiths:** Okay.

[57] **Christine Chapman:** Minister.

[58] **Lesley Griffiths:** It is obviously a geographical based programme. Certainly in my own constituency, and that was my experience of Communities First, I don't have that issue. However, since coming into this portfolio, I think two people have raised that issue with me, and I have asked officials to look at it. Obviously, it's been a policy for a long time. It's been our flagship policy for probably 15 years and I have asked officials to have a look at it. There are a few things that I need to have reassurance about; geographical areas is one of them. So, it is a piece of work that is going to be done. We want to make sure it's reaching the right people and, I think, you know, going back to anecdotal evidence, when you speak to individuals, you know, some of the figures that have come up about Communities First, particularly around healthy eating—. We've got 7,000 people now eating a healthier diet due to Communities First. We've got, I think, 2,300 people eating fruit and veg every day because of Communities First—you know, massive impact. If I said to any of you here, 'I'm going to take Communities First out of your constituency or out of your region', you'd soon see a difference about that. So, I think, you know, it's a fantastic programme. There are issues around it; you've just raised one, which, you know, we can look at, going forward. I'm going to ask Eleanor to come in as well, because, obviously, there's a lot of history to Communities First, before my time. So, perhaps Eleanor can add to that.

[59] **Ms Marks:** And before my time too. The—

[60] **Christine Chapman:** We don't need the history of—

[61] **Lesley Griffiths:** No, no, but I just mean about the geographical issue.

[62] **Christine Chapman:** Okay, fine.

[63] **Ms Marks:** On the flexibility around the boundaries, we are very conscious that we

don't want things to end on a deadline. Now, in terms of the lower super-output areas and the super-output areas, clearly, there is a marker on a map where those end, but if somebody is living next door to that or on the other side of the road to that, we wouldn't not help them because of that. Communities First is based in a particular community because it is one of the 10% most deprived, but we are very well recognising that, sometimes, the school that needs to be helped is just outside those boundaries, to make a difference to the pupils there, or more work needs to be done around those boundaries. We are very conscious of that and we do try to make sure that Communities First areas work in a way that help on—that awful term—'the fuzzy boundaries' around there, because, clearly, if somebody's on one side of the road or the other, they're living in exactly the same place.

[64] What we also recognise is that not all the people in poverty live in Communities First and not all of the people in Communities First are living in poverty. That's why the Welsh Government has a mix of geographically targeted programmes and universal programmes, so we can pick up on both sides. Communities First, like many of our geographically targeted programmes, is a limited resource and we have to have a method of allocating it to those areas, and the Welsh index of multiple deprivation is one of those, albeit it slightly crude, ways of doing it, but we do use the top 10% of deprived communities as the best way to, at least, focus and target that amount of money. It does cover about 24% of the population of Wales.

[65] **Mike Hedges:** I mean, as I say, I'm a great fan of Communities First and Flying Start and I've spoken and written quite extensively on my support for these. I think you were right that they can move outside the area. The only problem is that when they put their statistical returns in, you don't accept work that's being done for people who live outside the area; you're looking for the number of people they're helping living in the area. So, the person living next door, or opposite, although they're being helped—and Communities First in Swansea East do an incredibly good job in most of the clusters; three of the four clusters, I'm very, very happy with what's being done there—they do work, say, from the Plasmarl terraces, but those people who are probably amongst the most deprived living in the whole of Swansea East won't count against your statistical return, will they?

[66] **Ms Marks:** Not entirely. Some will, some won't, but they're still getting the help would be my point.

[67] **Mike Hedges:** Yes.

[68] **Christine Chapman:** We need to move on, but I just want—. Minister, you mentioned this report, because I know this has come up forever, this issue. You mentioned that you would be asking your officials to look into this. Any timescale? What is the timescale on this?

[69] **Lesley Griffiths:** No. Well, it'll have to be obviously before the end of the Assembly term, but I think we do need to—. As I say, it's been a policy for a long time and I think any policy—. And, we're having this evaluation now—I'm expecting the evaluation next month; I'm going to publish it by the end of the month—and I think that will help me. You know, as a new Minister coming into this portfolio, I think the evaluation coming out next month will really help me focus that, but, obviously, it will be a piece of work that will take place over the next 18 months.

[70] **Christine Chapman:** Okay, thanks. Right, I've got Gwyn, Mark, Rhodri then Peter. So, Gwyn first.

[71] **Gwyn R. Price:** Yes, good morning, Minister. You touched on some of the points here, but does the Welsh Government have any plans to conduct democratic research,

targeting resources where they are most needed, because the committee have heard evidence that there's a lack of data about who is living in poverty in Wales, particularly around demographics? Some witnesses said they're working in the dark to some extent, which makes their lives less effective—their work less effective. Is there a need now for a mapping exercise of existing services for people in poverty in Wales?

09:45

[72] **Lesley Griffiths:** I don't consider there's a need for, you know, a really big, extensive mapping exercise. I think that would be a huge undertaking. I think it would take a huge amount of resources. But, I think it is really important that we don't have duplication of services. So, that is something that we would want to avoid. I am having a mapping exercise around food poverty at the moment, because it is a relatively new poverty that has become much more acute over the last couple of years. I am having a piece of work done around that, and officials are working with the local authority anti-poverty champions around this area as well, aren't you?

[73] **Ms Howell:** And Public Health Wales.

[74] **Lesley Griffiths:** And Public Health Wales. We've also got a combined outworks framework for Communities First, Flying Start and Families First. So, these are our three big preventative programmes. Again, I've been picking up anecdotal evidence that a lot, no, not a lot, but maybe a number of the same people are being helped and dealt with by these three programmes. So, again, I want to avoid duplication, so we are having a combined outworks framework for that, which will seek to avoid any duplication on that. I think Welsh Government has really provided leadership on sharing of data. There are difficulties around sharing of data, but I think it is important that, where we can, we do. I think collection of data as well is something that we need to look at. I think that there are, of course, opportunities to share data more effectively. I know the UK Government are thinking of different ways of collecting data around poverty, and it is certainly something—. I don't think they have published anything as yet. No, they haven't, have they? But, when they do, it is something that I'm going to look at to see if it can help us in any way. But, I think, where there is a stronger use and need for data, we do seek to collect that data and use it in the most appropriate way.

[75] **Gwyn R. Price:** Yes, just to touch on what Mike just said, there are people who are just falling out of it and in it, and the people out there who we represent just can't make any sense of it. So, they are trusting us and these committees to address the situation, and that's where we are coming from, I think. As long as you take that on board, it is much appreciated.

[76] **Lesley Griffiths:** Thank you.

[77] **Christine Chapman:** Okay. I've got Mark, Rhodri, Peter then Jocelyn. So, Mark first—you have been waiting a while.

[78] **Mark Isherwood:** Thank you. You've claimed improved performance in tackling child poverty and poverty generally, and, clearly, if that's validated, that's good news. You also referred to the need to be tackling causes, not simply treating the symptoms, if we're going to tackle need, which you defined as the priority, not simply income. How, therefore, do you respond to the findings, for example, of the Alan Milburn state of the nation report on social mobility and child poverty, which compares all England regions and UK nations, and which found that Wales had the second highest child poverty amongst the 14 nations and regions, the second highest levels of working-age worklessness, the poorest performance of children on free school meals at GCSE level, and so on? To what extent, therefore, are you, or could you be, looking at the areas that are achieving better and looking at the schemes and

programmes they run, to see whether our schemes could learn from those?

[79] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, I am always very happy to look at other people's schemes. I think it's important that we do what we can with our levers. One of the programmes that we now have is the Lift programme, which colleagues will probably be aware of, where we provide training for people from workless households for 12 weeks and then we very much encourage organisations to provide full-time jobs. We've just had our thousandth person having the Lift programme. Some of these people are so far away from the job market to start with that an incredible amount of support and work has to be given to these people to get them even to come to the training. I've probably met about a dozen of these people now, and I think the work that we're doing around there is excellent. If poverty is a relative measure, somebody is always going to have to be worse off, but, of course, I'm very happy to have a look at best practice. But, I do think that some of our own programmes are best practice of course, and I would hope that others will be looking at them too.

[80] **Christine Chapman:** Rhodri.

[81] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Diolch, Gadeirydd. Mewn ymateb i gwestiynau gan Jocelyn Davies ac Alun Davies, fe roeddech chi, Weinidog, yn hyderus fod y modd y mae Llywodraeth Cymru yn mynd i'r afael â thlodi yn gywir ac yn effeithiol. Ar yr yn pryd, rydych yn dweud wrthym ni nad yw'r ystadegau o ran tlodi sy'n gysylltiedig ag incwm wedi newid rhyw lawer a bod mathau newydd o dlodi wedi datblygu—tlodi mewn gwaith a thlodi bwyd. Rwyf fi wedi bod yma am dros 15 mlynedd, yn gwranddo ar Lywodraeth Cymru yn dweud bod mynd i'r afael â thlodi yn flaenoriaeth. Onid y gwir yw'r hyn yr ydych yn dweud wrthym y bore yma, sef bod Llywodraeth Cymru wedi methu â gwneud hynny dros y 15 mlynedd a mwy diwethaf yma?

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Thank you, Chair. In response to questions from Jocelyn Davies and Alun Davies, you, Minister, were confident that the way in which the Welsh Government is getting to grips with poverty is correct and effective. At the same time, you say to us that the statistics in terms of poverty relating to income haven't changed a great deal and that new types of poverty have developed—in-work poverty and food poverty. I have been here for over 15 years, listening to the Welsh Government saying that tackling poverty is a priority. Isn't what you are telling us this morning the truth, which is that the Welsh Government has failed to do that over the past 15 years or more?

[82] **Lesley Griffiths:** No, I really don't agree with that. I think that we have to be very honest about what we can achieve. I think that we have to recognise that there are a lot of factors that are outside our control. I mentioned before that welfare reform will increase the level of poverty—that is outside our control. I do believe that our policies and programmes are making a difference, for the reasons I've outlined. I know that people are often experiencing different and multiple issues, and I don't think that you can lift a person out of poverty with just one intervention, so it is really important that all of our interventions assist in helping people in poverty. It is challenging; it is complex. We don't have all the answers and we can't do it on our own. I think that it's really important that we carry on with our shared approach and I think, certainly with the consultation that is out now—which is open until the end of this month, but I've just been picking this up, as we've gone through the consultation process in relation to child poverty specifically—that our approach is right. I'm not picking up that we should be doing different things. It's very long-term—a lot of our policies are very long term. But, I do think that, on the evaluation that I've seen since being in portfolio, it is the correct approach.

[83] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Yes, but some people would argue that 15 years is long term and that something should have happened over those 15 years.

[84] **Lesley Griffiths:** And I do think that something has happened over those 15 years, and, certainly, Communities First policy has been going for those 15 years and I do think that the outcomes from Communities First do show that it is working.

[85] **Christine Chapman:** Peter, and Jocelyn, I know, doesn't want to come in now.

[86] **Peter Black:** Yes. It's interesting that, in your response to Rhodri then, you talked about the programme that is helping people in poverty as opposed to cutting down the number of people in poverty. Is it right therefore that your programme characterises more the relief of poverty as opposed to reducing poverty?

[87] **Lesley Griffiths:** I think that, probably, they've changed; maybe, in the beginning, but I think that we are doing far more preventative work now. The Lift programme is one where, if people have been in workless households for a significant period of time, we are helping them to get into training, and, as I say, several of the people who I have met have gone on to full-time employment. I met one person who had been workless for five years and went on the Lift training programme for, I think, 25 hours a week, and it has transformed his life. He said to me—and he actually used the word—'it has stopped me going into poverty'. So, I think that you are right: we need to do more preventative work and I think that policies going forward, as they evolve, will probably focus more on prevention than perhaps we have done.

[88] **Peter Black:** You also referred to Communities First as being a success in terms of tackling poverty, yet the indicators that you gave to us earlier related more to, again, the relief of poverty as opposed to actually reducing poverty. What indicators have you got that actually show that Communities First is reducing poverty in communities—actually taking people out of poverty altogether and putting them back into work and lifting them out of that?

[89] **Lesley Griffiths:** I suppose that the example that I gave you was health inequalities really. The Lift programme is run via Communities First cluster areas. We have got pilots at the moment, but I think that that is one area where we are—perhaps Eleanor can add to that.

[90] **Ms Marks:** Thank you. The Lift programme has, so far, provided 1,000 opportunities of the 5,000 commitment for people, of which 180 have gone on into work. It sits on top of the Communities First programme, but the Communities First programme itself has got, in the first six months of this year, over 1,000 people back into employment, and the Minister has asked for us, as officials, to make sure that those first six months' data are published in the next few weeks, so we will do that. But it has indicators in that prosperity strand, which is about helping people back towards work and actually recording those who it does help into work as well.

[91] **Peter Black:** Okay, but going back to my question in terms of the indicators or the impact of Communities First on the communities they are seeking to help, you will be aware of the work that Marmot has done in this respect in terms of how they measure poverty, and various indicators that can be used there. Are there specific indicators attached to Communities First that show that the communities that we have been investing in for the last 15 years are less poor, have higher levels of employment, and are healthier?

[92] **Ms Marks:** There are indicators around the overall levels of poverty in those communities. Some have got better, some haven't, but it is a relative measure is the point we come back to. Even with WIMD, it is a similar number of places and similar places that remain in that relative poverty as at the start of the programme, but there is evidence about the difference that it has made to the lives of peoples living in those communities.

[93] **Peter Black:** We have anecdotal evidence, yes, but I'm talking about statistical

evidence that actually demonstrates that the tens of millions of pounds going into Communities First actually made a difference to communities in terms of making them healthier and better, and employed and wealthier.

[94] **Lesley Griffiths:** I think the evaluation that I'm going to publish next month will show that—show some evidence of that.

[95] **Peter Black:** Okay. Maybe we should have the Minister back to look at that evaluation.

[96] **Christine Chapman:** We'll have a look at the evaluation anyway.

[97] **Peter Black:** Okay.

[98] **Lesley Griffiths:** I'm going to publish it, so—.

[99] **Christine Chapman:** Okay.

[100] **Peter Black:** Moving on to the questions I've got—*[Interruption.]*

[101] **Christine Chapman:** No, I've got a few other people, because we've sort of merged some of these questions. I've got you down, Mike. So, yes, Peter.

[102] **Peter Black:** The questions I've been allocated now: is there merit in the poverty truth commissions conducted in Leeds and Scotland, where people on low incomes testified to help policy makers make more effective decisions that are based on people's lived experience of poverty? Can that actually help in terms of the formation of Welsh Government policy?

[103] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, I've looked at these poverty truth commissions, and I think, obviously, they provide a valuable service to those areas. But I think we've got, in Wales, a variety of mechanisms to ensure that people are engaged with policy makers. We collected case studies for our tackling poverty action plan annual report from right across Wales, and that demonstrated lived experiences of poverty and how that was being tackled through employment, through education, through training, and through a change of lifestyle. Communities First also collects case studies.

[104] Interestingly, yesterday, I chaired the Wales Race Forum, which is not, obviously, a tackling poverty forum. But it was interesting to talk to the representatives there about—. Because the women represent the BME community, and, obviously, protected characteristics are very important in looking at poverty, and she was coming forward with some suggestions around policy in relation to that. So, I think, you know—. We've given funding to Children in Wales to do a piece of work similar to the poverty commission, and also the work, I think, we do with the children's commissioner around poverty is probably a very similar sort of engagement.

[105] **Peter Black:** So, how does that gathering of experiences influence Government programmes?

[106] **Lesley Griffiths:** Well, it is really important that you hear about how your policies are working out there, both anecdotally and evaluation as well. So, we use those case studies to help us form policies going forward. So, I don't see the need for a—. I don't know if that was the question you were asking, but I don't really see the need for a poverty truth commission in Wales, because I do think that we have that level of engagement out there already, from a variety of stakeholders, and not just the stakeholders where you would think

the organisations would sort of be looking at tackling poverty. But, you know, I mentioned the race forum yesterday, and, in fact, we had a presentation—not from Maureen, but from one of Maureen’s officials team—about the child poverty strategy, and it was really good to hear their views about, you know, the strategy, and where we should go with it.

[107] **Peter Black:** Okay, thanks.

[108] **Christine Chapman:** Okay. Just to remind Members, we’ve got about just half an hour left, and I want to make sure every Member has the opportunity to ask all their questions. Jocelyn does want to come in now, then Alun, and then I’ve got Mike.

[109] **Jocelyn Davies:** Thank you. It was just a point of clarification, really, because I noticed in your response to, I think, Mark Isherwood, that you were saying about people and any individual who had complex needs and might need a number of approaches. But earlier on—I think it was in response, perhaps, to Mike Hedges—you were talking about trying to stop duplication, because different programmes are delivering services to the same individual, and there just seemed to me to be a conflict between the two answers that you’ve given, that some individuals have got complex needs and they need several approaches, but you’re trying to stop duplication. So, I think we ought to put a clarification on there.

[110] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, I don’t think it was contradictory. I don’t want the same services provided by three different people.

10:00

[111] **Jocelyn Davies:** The same services. Right. Okay.

[112] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes. I’ll try to give you an example—

[113] **Jocelyn Davies:** So, it is the duplication of services rather than—. You would still want to see people receiving several services, as long as they are different.

[114] **Lesley Griffiths:** Absolutely. Yes. So, the example I gave before about income: so somebody’s not in income poverty, but are in food poverty because they don’t know how to cook.

[115] **Jocelyn Davies:** Yes, yes.

[116] **Lesley Griffiths:** So, I hope I’ve clarified that. Sorry, Jocelyn.

[117] **Christine Chapman:** Okay. Alun, then Mike.

[118] **Alun Davies:** Thank you. Taking you to the evidence paper that was provided to the committee, reading the evidence paper, I’m struck that there’s virtually no discussion or debate or points made about economic policy. You start the paper by outlining that all Ministers across Government work together, joined up, and you give some examples, I think, in paragraphs 20 to 23, or 21 to 23, of what different portfolios or Ministers are doing—the Ministers for health, education and communities—but there is no description here of how economic policy is being used to tackle poverty.

[119] **Lesley Griffiths:** No, I did pick that up in your evidence that I think they thought there should be better alignment between our tackling poverty action plan and economic policy. There are close links between our economic policies and efforts to tackle poverty. I’ll repeat: whilst I accept in-work poverty has grown, I still think work is the most sustainable route out of poverty, and I think that’s why—. You know, jobs and growth is absolutely at the

heart of the programme for government. I mentioned the Lift programme before. Every department has to provide opportunities for Lift. So, the Department for Economy, Science and Transport has to provide a certain number, and, from the top of my head, I think it's 1,000 places that the Minister is providing within her portfolio towards the Lift programme.

[120] Within the tackling poverty action plan, we committed to introducing positive weightings to allow for the impact of bringing harder-to-reach groups into work as part of our appraisal process for grant support business. That is another way the department does that. We're going to review the model for supporting social enterprise. We're going to consider how that sector can provide more opportunities to build capacity and skills and boost the economy through improving employment prospects of the economically inactive and workless. I know the Minister expects any business that seeks support to sign up to corporate social responsibility. That gives a commitment to good employment practices. To me, that means flexible working hours, which, again, will help people who have barriers to work to enable them to work. So, I think that shows there is economic alignment, but I did pick that up in the evidence that you've had.

[121] **Alun Davies:** Thank you for that. You answered a question to a colleague in terms of that you were mapping the incidences of different areas of poverty and how poverty exists in different communities. Has any work been done within Government to map the input of the Welsh Government's economic policy on poverty?

[122] **Lesley Griffiths:** Just to clarify, I said I was mapping on food poverty specifically. Has the work been done on economy impact?

[123] **Ms Howell:** I'm not aware of any work.

[124] **Lesley Griffiths:** I'm not aware of any since I came into portfolio.

[125] **Ms Howell:** But maybe we can get back to the committee on that.

[126] **Lesley Griffiths:** Could I send a note on that, because—.

[127] **Christine Chapman:** Yes.

[128] **Alun Davies:** Okay. Thank you. It's quite striking that it appears from reading your paper that the tackling poverty work of Government seems to be about the public sector and not about what the Government can do to actually stimulate sustainable growth within different communities. We met, in my role as a constituency Member, before Christmas, to discuss the deep place study in Tredegar in my constituency, and I'm grateful to you for the time for that. Could you perhaps—and I don't know if you've had time since that conversation to give greater thought to the deep place study—say if that influences your thinking at all in terms of how we take a more holistic approach to addressing issues of poverty within different communities?

[129] **Lesley Griffiths:** You'll be reassured it was on my reading pile over Christmas. It was a very interesting report and study, and certainly it was obviously a new methodology and the kind of theme that came through was that you need this holistic approach to tackling poverty. Certainly, I've given it to officials to read as well, and I think there is an element of—. What's the word? It was different. It was very different, so I think we certainly need to look at it very deeply, not to do a pun, because it was a very new way of doing something. It was very resource intensive, as you know. It was just done for—. I don't know if colleagues know about this—it's a study of Tredegar. So, it's just one place and they did this very targeted study of how all the policies holistically fit into one area. So, I don't think you could do it for the whole of Wales, but I certainly think it would be worth colleagues reading it. It's

certainly very interesting and, as I say, it's a new methodology.

[130] **Christine Chapman:** Do you think that's something that the local authorities have done, I mean a similar—. I know there are aspects that they would be involved with. I mean, isn't that—

[131] **Alun Davies:** I'll provide a copy to the committee.

[132] **Christine Chapman:** Right.

[133] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes. David Adamson, who actually sits on my tackling poverty expert advisory group, was the author of it. It is certainly worth thinking about. But, certainly, yes, the short answer to your question is that we are going to look at it in great detail and see what we can take forward. It was certainly, to me, an example of best practice, on first reading it.

[134] **Alun Davies:** I'm grateful to you for that, Minister. I think that's very reassuring. I would hope that your officials will have read it already, I have to say—

[135] **Lesley Griffiths:** I'm sure they have—. Yes, they have.

[136] **Alun Davies:** But, anyway, in terms of taking that forward, the Bevan Foundation, when they were giving evidence, suggested that the tackling poverty action plan needs to be rethought and targeted at three areas, in terms of raising household incomes, meeting minimum needs and improving essential skills. Do you consider that to be a useful framework for future strategies, and to what extent, given the conversation we just had on economic policy, do you believe that the tackling poverty action plan is driving activity within Government? I actually believe that there is a real commitment in the political leadership of Government to addressing this. I don't believe for a moment that that political commitment is shared by the civil service. So, I'm concerned to understand how, as a Minister, you believe that you can drive the civil service machine to actually change.

[137] **Lesley Griffiths:** Okay—

[138] **Alun Davies:** Perhaps not just you on that, Minister. [*Laughter.*]

[139] **Lesley Griffiths:** It is a question I've already been asked by somebody else, so don't worry about that. I think the tackling poverty action plan is built on three principles. It's built on preventing poverty, helping people into work and mitigating the impacts of poverty. I think that broadly reflects the recommendations coming from the Bevan Foundation. I think the key difference in our approach is that we do have a strong focus on early intervention and prevention. I think that is coming through now in a way that perhaps it wasn't before. I think the evidence demonstrates that that is where we can make the biggest difference, and that's why I think we're taking that approach.

[140] To go back to your question about the civil service, I think you're absolutely right. I think, across Government, at a ministerial level, there is, you know, a very strong commitment to tackling poverty. I chaired my first tackling poverty implementation board and it was just with, as I say, senior officials. And whilst it was very positive to hear of the policies that were coming from the different departments, I did have concerns about some departments' policies not meeting the targets that I think they should be meeting to tackle poverty. And that is one of the reasons why, as I mentioned before, I've changed that, and, from now on, each board will focus on one topic. I have invited the Minister, and I will invite, you know, subsequent Ministers, to come to that meeting. So, the next one is on education, because that's where I was more concerned—the Minister has agreed to come along, and we

can drill down a bit deeper—and to make sure that, at an official level, there is the same commitment as at ministerial level.

[141] **Christine Chapman:** Right. Okay. We've got 20 minutes. Can I ask Members to be very concise with their questions? I've got Mike, Rhodri, then Janet. So, Mike first.

[142] **Mike Hedges:** Two questions. The first one goes back to Peter Black's question. Isn't one of the problems, which you saw from the Manchester study in the 1980s, that when you take people out of poverty, living in an area, they quite often move out of the area as well? So, although you move an individual out of poverty, you don't necessarily reduce the poverty in that area, because the person who was poor now is slightly better off? I think, in the Manchester study, 80% of those who moved out of poverty to employment actually moved out of the large estate in Manchester at the same time. Do you get that sort of information in Wales?

[143] **Lesley Griffiths:** No, that hasn't been raised with me at all, actually. I don't know whether, previous to my coming into the portfolio, that was an issue.

[144] **Ms Marks:** It's been raised in discussions in formulating policy and looking at the deprivation of a particular area. There is a pattern of it. I haven't seen the Manchester study, but a number of people who raise their income levels have been known to move out, and others move in, and it doesn't impact on communities. The flipside of that problem is also areas where there is a large transient population, for example in Rhyl, where the levels of poverty are not diminishing as quickly as we would like to see, because there are examples of pupils starting in school in September, but they are not there by the end of September. So, it is a combination of people aspiring to move on because they are better off, and other areas where there is a transient population.

[145] **Lesley Griffiths:** I suppose one of the things about having geographical programmes is to kind of address that issue that you've just raised.

[146] **Mike Hedges:** Leading on from the answer that Eleanor just gave, what are the advantages of having housing and tackling poverty as part of the same portfolio?

[147] **Lesley Griffiths:** I think it's hugely advantageous. I think there were strong links, but with the two coming together—and certainly at an official level, with the two departments coming together—we are doing a piece of work now to make sure that everybody is sort of coming together holistically, and I certainly see evidence of that. One of the most surprising things I've come across in this portfolio is the amount of work that housing associations do in relation to tackling poverty. They don't just provide roofs over people's heads; they do the most amazing work, in relation to training, job opportunities, and encouraging people to volunteer, for instance. So, I came across one—I can't remember, but I think it was Taff Housing Association—where they had a time bank for volunteers, and if you went along and volunteered, you got a voucher to go to the cinema, for instance. I was talking to a single parent who had volunteered on the food co-operative that the housing association ran, and then she built up her vouchers and was able to take her daughter to the cinema, which, you know, is a very expensive outing for a lot of people. So, I think that the two coming together is hugely advantageous. I think there were strong links, but I think there will be even stronger links now.

[148] **Christine Chapman:** Okay. Rhodri.

[149] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Diolch, **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Thank you, Chair. I will be concise, because the question on the Gadeirydd. Fe fyddaf yn gryno, oherwydd economy has already been asked by Alun mae'r cwestiwn ar yr economi eisoes wedi

cael ei ofyn gan Alun Davies. Mae gen i ddi-ddordeb yn yr ateb a roddoch chi i gwestiwn Alun ynglŷn ag ymrwymiad y gwasanaeth sifil i agenda'r Llywodraeth. Dywedoch chi eich bod wedi cwrdd ag uwchswyddogion ond nad oeddech yn argyhoeddedig eu bod yn rhannu'r argyhoeddiad a'r weledigaeth yma. Onid ydych yn meddwl ei bod braidd yn rhyfeddol, ar ôl 15 mlynedd o Lywodraeth Lafur, nad ydych chi wedi llwyddo i berswadio'r gwasanaeth sifil i weithredu polisiau'r Llywodraeth? Onid yw hynny yn gondemniad llwyr o Weinidogion: eu bod yn methu â chael y gwasanaeth sifil i wneud yr hyn y maen nhw i fod i'w wneud, sef gweithredu polisiau'r Llywodraeth?

Davies. I was interested in the response that you gave to Alun's question in relation to the civil service's commitment to the Government agenda. You said that you had met senior officials but that you weren't convinced that they shared the vision in this regard. Don't you think that it's quite surprising, after 15 years of a Labour Government, that you haven't succeeded to persuade the civil service to implement the Government's policies? Isn't that an indictment of the Ministers: that they haven't been able to get the civil service to do what they are supposed to do, which is to implement Government policy?

[150] **Lesley Griffiths:** No, I didn't say that they didn't share the vision; I said that there was an area. What we want—well, what I want from the tackling poverty implementation board is for officials to show, from each department, how their policies and their programmes are helping towards tackling poverty. That is the whole purpose of the implementation board. Whilst it is really important that, of course, officials are signed up to that agenda and deliver, ultimately, you know, the buck stops with the Minister. I think it is really important that the Minister also comes along to the board, but, as I said, I am going to have a focus on one topic.

[151] It could be that the policies that a specific department has are not to tackle poverty directly, but to do something else, and that's quite right. However, they must have another policy that will tackle poverty. So, I don't say that they don't share the vision—I don't say that at all. It is up to Ministers to ensure that officials are delivering in the way that they want them to.

10.15

[152] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Felly, pan fydd tystion yn dod i'r pwyllgor yma a dweud wrthym ni yn gwbl bendant mai'r peth pwysig ydy fod y rhaglen waith ar gyfer taclo tlodi yn cael ei chysylltu yn uniongyrchol â pholisi economaidd, mae hynny yn dangos bod Llywodraeth Cymru wedi methu dros y 15 mlynedd diwethaf â gwneud hynny.

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: So, when witnesses come before this committee and say to us that the important thing is that the work programme for tackling poverty is connected directly with economic policy, that shows that the Welsh Government has failed over the last 15 years in doing that.

[153] **Lesley Griffiths:** I'm sorry, could you repeat the question?

[154] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Wel, mae tystion wedi dod yn gyson—ystod o dystion—yn dweud mai'r peth pwysig ydy bod yn rhaid i ni gysylltu'n uniongyrchol y rhaglen waith i daclo tlodi â'r polisi economaidd. Onid ydy hynny yn dweud wrthym ni fod Llywodraeth Cymru wedi methu â gwneud hynny? Os nad ydy Llywodraeth Cymru wedi gwneud hynny, sut mewn gwirionedd—achos rydych chi wedi

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Well, witnesses have come regularly—a range of witnesses—and have said that the important thing is that we have to establish a direct link between the work programme to tackle poverty with economic policy. Doesn't that tell us that the Welsh Government has failed to do that, and if the Welsh Government hasn't done that, how will that happen, because you've told us more than once this morning that the

dweud wrthym ni fwy nag unwaith y bore yma mai'r peth pwysig o ran tlodi, a'r peth pwysicaf yn eich barn ni, ydy gwaith, o hyd. Er bod yna enghreifftiau o dlodi mewn gwaith, dyna ydy'r peth pwysicaf. Onid ydy'r dystiolaeth yr ydym ni wedi ei derbyn yn dangos yn glir iawn bod Llywodraeth Cymru wedi methu â gwneud yr union beth fyddai'n gwneud hynny, sef cysylltu y cynllun gweithredol â'r polisi economaidd?

important thing in terms of poverty—the most important thing in your opinion—is still employment, even though there are examples of in-work poverty, but that is the most important thing. Doesn't the evidence that we've received show very clearly that the Welsh Government has failed to do exactly that, which is to establish the link between the tackling poverty action plan and economic policy?

[155] **Lesley Griffiths:** No, no, I don't think it does, and having seen the evidence that you have, I know there have been calls to have the Work Programme devolved, for instance. So, I think the linkages with the benefits system, including the penalties for non-compliance, do form part of the UK Government's welfare reform programme. I think that does create a number of complexities, so I think it's something that we're going to have to look at in detail. I know we are exploring options at the moment. We've got the access to employment working group, and that's where we work with the Department for Work and Pensions to respond to the recommendations regarding the Work Programme's performance in Wales, but, no, I don't think it's a failure.

[156] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Wel, gan eich bod chi wedi cyfeirio at yr awgrym y dylid datganoli y Rhaglen Waith, ai dyna'ch barn chi? Ydy hynny'n rhywbeth yr ydych chi'n mynd i'w gyflawni o fewn y 15 mis nesaf, sef dadlau'r achos dros ddatganoli'r Rhaglen Waith o San Steffan i'r Senedd yng Nghymru?

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Well, as you've referred to the suggestion that the Work Programme should be devolved, is that your opinion? Is that something that you're going to achieve within the next 15 months, which is to argue the case for devolution of the Work Programme from Westminster to the Senedd in Wales?

[157] **Lesley Griffiths:** I think it's something that we are currently exploring.

[158] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Cwestiwn olaf: a ydych chi'n cytuno ag e ai peidio?

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Last question: do you agree with that or not?

[159] **Lesley Griffiths:** It's something we're exploring.

[160] **Christine Chapman:** Okay. Janet?

[161] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Thank you. Before I come in on the tabled question, just following on from Rhodri, I've had concerns raised about how in Wales—and it is really down to the Welsh Government—the Work Programme and Jobs Growth Wales, there is no synergy like there is in England. So, how are you—*[Interruption.]* You know, if you're on one, you can't go on the other at all. Now, in England, that actually works well because it's a continuation, and one helps the other. This is from the providers and from people themselves who have presented to me, and the blame does lie, from what I've been, sort of, advised and from some of the stuff I've seen, and it's been raised—Guto Bebb, our MP, has raised this as well. Surely, if you're thinking of looking into the Work Programme, it must be a good scheme, but you've still got this obstacle of why you won't allow—not you personally, but the Welsh Government—why there is this anomaly that, in Wales, it's holding people back, it's affecting poverty, and it's affecting the economy. There almost seems a stubbornness for the Welsh Government to accept that the Work Programme is succeeding, but if you're on one, you can't be on the other. There's no correlation. It's seen almost as double funding, but in England it's not, and it actually is a real enabler. I just wondered what your views are on that.

[162] **Lesley Griffiths:** I am very perplexed at the question, sorry, because there is no Jobs Growth Wales in England. So, I can't see—

[163] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** No, no, sorry. I don't mean there's Jobs Growth Wales in England, but there are other schemes that work well with the Work Programme that you can transfer. Jobs Growth Wales—the name of it—applies to just Wales, but nonetheless you can sort of go on whatever scheme suits that individual in Wales. If you've been on the Work Programme, it's almost like, 'Whoa, you can't', you know, and that is a real barrier.

[164] **Lesley Griffiths:** No; I mentioned that the education Minister is coming to the next tackling poverty implementation board, and that is something that I can raise with him.

[165] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Right, okay. Now, talking about Age Cymru, they highlighted the issue of under-claimed benefits in Wales, such as pension credit, and what you're doing. Now, I raised this during a recent debate on poverty to be told, 'Oh, it's DWP; it's not devolved', but my question is: as a Government, you have a Government responsibility, a corporate responsibility, to ensure that whatever benefits are entitled to be claimed by people living in Wales, you help in whatever way to facilitate them, so what are you doing to address Age Cymru? There are people out there who don't even know that there are these benefits they are entitled to. What are you doing to help to facilitate them?

[166] **Lesley Griffiths:** I think we're doing a huge amount of work as a Welsh Government. We have put extra funding into our advice services. Just before I came into this portfolio, my predecessor announced an extra £2 million. We've set up a national advice service. Just this week, I announced the independent chair of that and met with him. We talked about what I want to see coming out of that advice service. I have to say, you know, it is the responsibility of the DWP in certain parts, but we cannot keep plugging gaps. The UK Government have cut legal aid, for instance. We're having to pick up a lot of people who would have gone for legal aid who now can't access that funding and are coming to us for advice services. We fund the Citizens Advice bureau. I think it's well over £2 million for their Better Advice Better Lives service. They tell me that they are dealing with people who they don't think they should be dealing with, because of the reduction, particularly in legal aid. So, whilst we can't plug all the gaps, I do think we're doing an incredible amount of work in relation to advice services. I think it's really important that people do claim absolutely everything that they can do. I do see that we do have a role, of course; however, we cannot plug all the gaps.

[167] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Okay. Well, during the recent sort of workshop exercise that took place in my constituency, as a member of this committee, facilitators with the RNIB met lots of stakeholders and also lots of service users. They felt, even that day that we spoke, you know, there was dialogue taking place. One thing, the message that came out loud and clear was that people—and, as a politician, I do—find it difficult to navigate around all the support services that are there, unless you actually are advised an individual who to apply for. That individual could be one social worker working in a local authority who performs the role of helping people to navigate their way around what is a very complicated system. Most of the support services are wanting people to engage with them more, but there doesn't seem to be this correlation. There doesn't seem to be a joined-up approach. I've noticed this on evidence that we've taken: it's all down to evidence taking and data collection, and it seems that a lot of our support services are collecting data. Some are a little bit precious about sharing it, but it's not actually helping the individual who may walk out of hospital this afternoon, who may have been to their eye clinic, to be told, 'You're actually going blind now, so you're going to find it harder to access services'. What we're finding is that people are not being signposted to the areas that they should. I just wondered how you are working with local authorities, social services and various other organisations to ensure that. You know, as people described

to us that day, their world fell apart when they were told that they were going blind, and yet people sitting around the table said, ‘Well, we were signposted here’, and then other people said, ‘Well, we weren’t told anything’. There is no consistency. What are you doing? Again, it harks back to my first question. What are you doing to really make sure that agencies that are charged with delivering these services are actually doing that, especially the ones in receipt of Welsh Government funding?

[168] **Lesley Griffiths:** Well, I think the national advice network will help in that way. However, I don’t see it’s all just down to Welsh Government to ensure that these people are being signposted. I mean, you’re talking about somebody being told they’re going blind. Well, frankly, you know, that’s a health issue and they should be being told within the health service. If that is what you are saying—that someone in the health service has told them that they are going blind—what is really important from my perspective is that those services are there. I think that we need some specialist services as well and, certainly, some people with protected characteristics, I can see they need a different type of advice service than somebody who hasn’t got a protected characteristic. I think that that has been addressed; it is continuing to be addressed. I think that there had been a review of all the services being provided right across Wales before I came into portfolio and, on the back of that, we’ve set up the national advice network. I think that that will, hopefully, simplify—for want of a better word—where people can go if they want a specialist service, if they want a generic service or if they want, you know, advice about housing and about debt, so that people do know where they can go.

[169] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** What I’m trying to get at—the nub of this—is the fact that, clearly, when you’ve got protected characteristics, you are then entitled to benefits that help you to live a more, you know, fulfilled life. There is an awful lot of confusion, because this is a good-sized group—people from all different backgrounds—but one thing was quite clear: they actually believed that this lack of joined-up thinking, this inability to be able to navigate what is a complex system, was actually causing them to be in poverty now where they hadn’t been in previous times.

[170] **Lesley Griffiths:** I can see that a change in lifestyle could, obviously, create an issue such as that. But, as I say, I think that the services are out there. Maybe it is something that we need to look at, but I would hope that the national advice network will address that. But, certainly, next time we meet—as I say, we are just setting it up now; we’ve just appointed the chair this week, we are just looking at membership—then it is something that we can look at.

[171] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** It is just about making people aware that they are entitled to these things and helping them—a straight, clear and easy route to being able to claim what they are entitled to.

[172] **Christine Chapman:** Okay. We’ve only got a few minutes left. Jocelyn has a very small question and then Mark.

[173] **Jocelyn Davies:** It was just following on from that, really, because it sounds like a really good idea—the national advice service—but will colleagues in health and education be able to signpost people to that advice service? I think that that’s the point being made here: will somebody in the hospital, who is going to tell somebody that they might be losing their sight, be able to signpost them to that service?

[174] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, but I would hope that that would be being done already.

[175] **Jocelyn Davies:** But if you could give us a commitment that this is something that you’ll strengthen, so that people will have access to the advice service that will then be able to help them—

[176] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, I am sure that this is one of the things that the network will be looking at. So I am sure that, going forward, it could be strengthened.

[177] **Jocelyn Davies:** Thank you.

[178] **Christine Chapman:** Mark, did you have some last final questions?

[179] **Mark Isherwood:** Yes, thank you. I regret that you dismissed the poverty truth commissions. I think that the evidence that we have taken directly from service users—RNIB in Wrexham, for example, from BAWSO, from Remploy—has been compelling and has helped inform all of us in the way that we intend to take this inquiry forward. You also referred to factors outside Welsh Government control, but of course, those factors apply to all parts of the UK, and yet on relative measures, Wales is still, 16 years into devolution, the poorest, or near the bottom, in all of the key—or most of the key—poverty indicators. We have heard evidence from people like the Trussell Trust about the glaring omission of food poverty from the tackling poverty action plan, and from people like the Bevan Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation about the omission of fuel poverty from the tackling poverty action plan, which, they believe, should be central to it. Therefore, why aren't these still included within the tackling poverty action plan? Are you proposing to listen to the evidence that we've received from the external stakeholder experts and address that?

[180] **Lesley Griffiths:** Well, firstly, I don't agree that fuel poverty isn't in the tackling poverty action plan. It includes targets around additional housing, bringing empty homes back into use and the number of homes improved under Arbed and Nest, so I don't agree with that.

[181] Food poverty: probably the reason food poverty wasn't in there is because it wasn't as stark as it is now. But I mentioned before that we produce an annual report every year on the tackling poverty action plan, so we can, you know, add to it—it is not a static document. I also mentioned that, in the child poverty strategy, which is out to consultation now, on the revised one, we have put in food poverty and in-work poverty, even though they weren't in three years ago. But, obviously, the tackling poverty action plan, you know, is not a static document; we do add to it. So, certainly, the food poverty, yes, but the fuel poverty, I don't agree with.

10:30

[182] **Mark Isherwood:** Of course, food poverty is—. Churches have been feeding the poor for ever; what is new is the arrival of food banks in Wales in large numbers. But fuel poverty—. Arbed and Nest, good schemes as they are, only reach less than 2% of people living in fuel poverty in Wales. That is not a fuel poverty strategy. Those are welcome programmes that can be part of—

[183] **Lesley Griffiths:** They are very, very relevant to the fuel poverty agenda.

[184] **Mark Isherwood:** And they miss over 98% of people living in fuel poverty. There is great work going on out there; we need it joined up at the centre of the tackling poverty action plan, as the evidence to this committee heard. Please, therefore, listen to that, recognise that this is coming from impartial expert bodies and, hopefully, give consideration to their recommendations.

[185] **Lesley Griffiths:** As I say, the annual report is published, obviously, every year. It will be July this year and we will take stock and we will look at these issues, but I do not agree that fuel poverty is not addressed in the action plan.

[186] **Mark Isherwood:** It is addressed for 2%. Finally from me, the committee heard

evidence that the Welsh Government's discretionary assistance fund was underspent this year—

[187] **Peter Black:** Last year.

[188] **Lesley Griffiths:** Last year.

[189] **Mark Isherwood:** Last year, sorry, not because of a lack of need but because of its administration and restrictive criteria by the Welsh Government. What, therefore, are you doing to learn from these lessons and improve future access so that the underspends in the budgets don't repeat themselves?

[190] **Lesley Griffiths:** It is a demand-led scheme, obviously, and it does support some very vulnerable people. I think we'd be criticised if we didn't have strong criteria. I think, you know, it's absolutely important that we have done that. I think we need to keep looking at it; I did pick that up in your evidence. We've just, for instance, raised the threshold, or the maximum that somebody can apply for, from £30 to £50, so I think we are, sort of, listening to what people are saying to us. We've also got the discretionary assistance fund manager out there, working with stakeholder organisations to make more people aware of the fund. But as I say, it is demand-led, but we are doing some work around it and certainly looking at what we can do to promote it more.

[191] **Mark Isherwood:** And make it work better for the user, so that the people who are in need can better navigate the system.

[192] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes.

[193] **Mark Isherwood:** Okay.

[194] **Christine Chapman:** Peter.

[195] **Peter Black:** I find it difficult to imagine there isn't demand for the money in that fund. Are you confident that you're actually going to spend it all this year?

[196] **Lesley Griffiths:** Well, it's demand-led, so I don't think I can really answer that completely, but—

[197] **Peter Black:** Well, have you got expenditure profiles? You know, I mean, we're coming to the end of the financial year. Is it possible you could let us have an expenditure profile, so we can see how the fund has been performing this year?

[198] **Lesley Griffiths:** Up to now, 17,000 people have been awarded nearly £4.9 million.

[199] **Peter Black:** And how much is in the fund?

[200] **Lesley Griffiths:** The fund is £7 million—

[201] **Ms Marks:** Yes.

[202] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, £7 million. We've still got a quarter to go, so—. But, as I say, we are actively—. I think it is since I came into portfolio in September—I think it was the following month—that the manager started going out there, you know, talking to stakeholders.

[203] **Peter Black:** So, £4.9 million. Right, we'll see how it works out at the end of year

then.

[204] **Mike Hedges:** Are they the December figures or the November figures?

[205] **Ms Marks:** They're the November figures, I believe, but we can clarify to the—

[206] **Lesley Griffiths:** It was November.

[207] **Christine Chapman:** Could you send us a note on that?

[208] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes.

[209] **Christine Chapman:** Okay. We need to finish now, but I just want to ask a specific question. The Red Cross told us about their £25,000-a-year destitution fund for asylum seekers in extreme poverty who can't access public funding. In fact, a number of us did go to one of the centres recently. The Northern Ireland Executive fund a similar scheme. Would you consider providing funding for such a fund in Wales, given that it's helping to meet minimum needs for a marginalised group of people? As I say, a number of us did go and talk to some the other day and it was pretty awful, really, the experiences there.

[210] **Lesley Griffiths:** I don't plan to set up a specific fund like that. We do give, I think it's just under—well perhaps not just under—it is £900,000 plus from the equality and inclusion grant to organisations such as the Welsh Refugee Council and also the Trinity project and the south east Wales refugee women's support group; I think the Red Cross is part of that. So, we do give funding for those specific groups, but I don't think I would set up a £25,000 fund, no.

[211] **Christine Chapman:** Okay. Well, can I thank the Minister and your officials for attending today? We will send you a transcript of the meeting so that you can check for factual accuracy. But thank you very much, Minister.

[212] **Lesley Griffiths:** Thank you, Chair.

10:35

Papurau i'w Nodi Papers to Note

[213] **Christine Chapman:** There are a couple of papers to note.

Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42 (vi) i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd Motion under Standing Order 17.42 (vi) to Resolve to Exclude the Public

[214] **Christine Chapman:** Could I invite the committee, under Standing Order 17.42 to resolve to go into private for the remainder of this meeting to discuss the evidence and for item 1 of the meeting on 22 January? Okay. So, 22 January, this is to consider the committee's approach to scrutiny of the Local Government (Wales) Bill, so—

[215] **Peter Black:** That's item 1, then.

[216] **Christine Chapman:** That's item 1. Sorry.

Cynnig:

Motion:

*y pwyllgor yn penderfynu gwahardd y the committee resolves to exclude the public
cyhoedd o weddill y cyfarfod yn unol â Rheol from the remainder of the meeting in
Sefydlog 17.42(vi). accordance with Standing Order 17.42(vi).*

*Cynigiwyd y cynnig.
Motion moved.*

[217] **Christine Chapman:** Okay.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 10:35.
The public part of the meeting ended at 10:35.*