



Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
The National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Plant a Phobl Ifanc
The Children and Young People Committee

Dydd Iau, 1 Mawrth 2012
Thursday, 1 March 2012

Cynnwys
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Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog Rhif 17.42(vi) i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r Cyfarfod
Motion under Standing Order No. 17.42(vi) to Resolve to Exclude the Public from the Meeting

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

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee. In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Angela Burns	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Christine Chapman	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Keith Davies	Llafur Labour
Jocelyn Davies	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

Suzy Davies	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Julie Morgan	Llafur Labour
Lynne Neagle	Llafur Labour
Jenny Rathbone	Llafur Labour
Aled Roberts	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Simon Thomas	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

**Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance**

Brigitte Gater	Gweithredu dros Blant Action for Children
Des Mannion	Pennaeth Gwasanaethau yng Nghymru, NSPCC Cymru/Wales Head of Services in Wales, NSPCC Cymru/Wales
James Pritchard	Pennaeth Achub y Plant yng Nghymru Head of Save the Children in Wales
Yvonne Rodgers	Cyfarwyddwr, Barnardo's Cymru Director, Barnardo's Cymru
Catriona Williams	Prif Weithredwr, Plant yng Nghymru Chief Executive, Children in Wales

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

Helen Finlayson	Clerc Clerk
Claire Griffiths	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Siân Thomas	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Research Service

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.13 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.13 a.m.*

**Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions**

[1] **Christine Chapman:** Bore da and welcome to the Children and Young People Committee. I remind everyone that mobile phones, BlackBerrys and pagers should be switched off. We have not received any apologies this morning.

9.14 a.m.

**Trafod Blaenoriaethau gydag Elusennau Plant yng Nghymru
Discussion of Priorities with Children's Charities in Wales**

[2] **Christine Chapman:** I welcome the representatives from each charity and I thank you all for providing a paper in advance. Please introduce yourselves for the record.

[3] **Mr Pritchard:** Good morning. I am the head of Save the Children in Wales, and my

name is James Pritchard.

[4] **Mr Mannion:** Good morning. My name is Desmond Mannion and I am the head of the NSPCC in Wales.

[5] **Ms Williams:** Hello. I am Catriona Williams. I am the chief executive of Children in Wales.

[6] **Ms Rodgers:** I am Yvonne Rodgers, the director of Barnardo's Cymru.

[7] **Ms Gater:** Hello. My name is Brigitte Gater. I am the operational director for Action for Children in Wales.

9.15 a.m.

[8] **Christine Chapman:** We welcome you all. I know that we are all looking forward to this morning's session. All Members will have read the paper that you have provided, so, if you are happy, we will start with questions. We are going to split the session in two, so we will look at the issues that you have raised, particularly on poverty and neglect, but feel free to raise any other things that you feel are important for us. I will start on the poverty side; this is something that was looked at in detail by the previous Children and Young People Committee, and I suppose that this is a way of picking up where that committee left off, although there are new Members on this committee. I will start by asking what role, if any, this committee could have in taking forward the concerns that you have raised about child poverty. I preface that by saying that we are all aware that there are huge issues around child poverty and it is something that all of us in the Assembly feel very deeply about. I will just ask you that as a starting point.

[9] **Mr Pritchard:** It falls on me to go first. There is obviously a debate in Wales generally about the role of the Assembly in tackling child poverty. At Save the Children, we do a lot of campaigning on this issue, as you know, and it is an issue that is very close to our heart. The question that is often asked of us is that, given that so many of the economic levers for the eradication of child poverty exist in Westminster and Whitehall, what can the Assembly do, and, by extension, what can the Children and Young People Committee do. It strikes me that one of the most powerful things that this committee can do, and, therefore, that the Assembly can do, is in the area of advocacy and focus. For us, our constant work is to ensure that people do not forget the plight of children growing up in poverty and the importance of it as an issue. It can never be overstated how important it is that bodies such as this take up the issue and argue about it, and consider the various elements of child poverty; child poverty is not just about growing up in an income-poor household—it is about growing up in a household that is cold, it is about growing up with poorer health outcomes and it is about growing up in a situation where, statistically, you are far more likely to do badly at school. All those elements can be forgotten in public discourse.

[10] In terms of what this committee can do, raising that issue, continuing to badger about it and ensuring that it has a profile is very important. I guess that there is an element of the structures that the Assembly has in place to tackle child poverty that which is important, given those comments. If you look at the work being done at the moment on the poverty strategy, our view at Save the Children—and I am sure it is exactly the same with my colleagues here—is that child poverty needs to be through that at every level, and there needs to be a recognition that it is a different issue, that poverty affects children differently, and that there is a need to have that focus on it. In initial terms, it is about raising awareness, raising the issue and ensuring that it does not drop off the political agenda. It is also about getting to grips with the different elements of it and the fact that there is more to it than just household incomes; it is about the impact that it has on children. Children do not have a choice about where they live and how they grow up; they are not in the position, as adults are, to be able to take action to change the circumstances of their lives, to move to get another job and to get to grips with their own lives. They are recipients of the world

that they live in. Making that case strongly, and keeping it at the very heart of the Assembly's approach to poverty, is, from our perspective, absolutely the most important thing that this committee can do.

[11] **Mr Mannion:** Just to echo James's point, some of the significance of child poverty will probably come out in discussions later on about neglect, so I do not want to prefigure that, but the fundamental point is ensuring that, in any anti-poverty strategy, a focus is retained on the child throughout and within that at all levels.

[12] **Ms Williams:** I fully agree. The communication issue to the field is very important, as is how this committee can support the implementation. What we have noticed across Wales is that when terminology changes—we had a child poverty strategy, now we have 'Tackling Poverty'—it might be interpreted at local level that child poverty is no longer a priority. That is part of the importance of keeping the focus on the child.

[13] There are two other bits of work that the committee could keep an eye on. One focuses on the Welsh Government's analysis of the impact of the welfare reforms. Some reports have just been published and you might like to keep a close eye on those in order to child proof what is happening. The third sector partnership council's work stream is developing a paper from the wider third sector, but we are the children's third sector and we feel that we need a lot of support to keep the children's third sector focused on the huge implications of welfare reform.

[14] **Ms Rodgers:** Picking up on that, we need to focus on children and young people regarding what this committee can do in terms of scrutiny and the fact that the lens that you look through is that of children and young people. Although we support wholeheartedly changes in how we have moved forward, particularly through the Families First programme—thinking about families and how they can support their children—the danger in the catch-all Families First agenda is that we forget those children who do not sit within families. From a children and young people's perspective, we must remember those children who are not in families because they are in the looked-after system, for instance; they are not in their own families.

[15] We need to focus on those children who are in transition from being in a family to living independently. Some of those children, because they have been in the looked-after system, are doing that at a much younger age, so we have a particular issue of poverty among 16 to 17-year-olds because they fall outside the work programme. If they are not in a family, they fall between two stools, but they are still children—even though they would not like to think of themselves as children. They are hit by a number of issues related to welfare reform and everything else, which means that they are in a much more severe situation. For example, if they do not hold on to a job, they have already lost benefits and they spiral downwards into homelessness very quickly. We are particularly concerned that this committee should think about those children who do not have what would normally be thought of as traditional family settings. Young carers are another group; in those families, children are taking on the roles of adults.

[16] **Ms Gater:** We know that many families with which we currently work are experiencing poverty. Action for Children is interested in the concept of neglect and the interface between neglect and poverty. We know that poverty does not cause neglect, but we know that it increases the risk factors. We would want the committee to look at that sort of relationship.

[17] **Christine Chapman:** I have a specific question, given that you work closely with local authorities. In 2010, the Welsh Government placed a duty on local authorities to tackle child poverty. How do you feel that is going? What evidence is there that progress is being made on the ground to deliver on that duty to tackle child poverty?

[18] **Ms Gater:** I think that people are trying to work together to consider how they can support families experiencing poverty. However, we must be realistic in that some of the

improvements that we are making will take generations to come through in terms of outcome. This is a long-term plan.

[19] **Christine Chapman:** Does it have to be long term? In a child's life, that will take forever.

[20] **Ms Rodgers:** That is why, in some ways, you have that transition to the debate that we have on neglect. Early intervention is key, but when talking about the longer term, as James mentioned earlier, this is about poverty of experience and opportunity. There are quick wins to be made, because if you decided that transport was to suddenly be greatly improved so that children could access what was available free of charge—I know that, in a previous administration, we looked at leisure centres that had free entry, which is wonderful—you need to be able to get to that leisure centre. If you cannot afford the bus to take you there, you are not going to get there. If after-school clubs do not link in with free transport, those children are not going to be in after-school clubs. You want to know what the issues are for the directors of these charities—we have brought these five issues to you—but if children and young people were sitting here, would they be telling you different things? How does poverty impact on them? They do not talk very much about lack of money; they talk about feeling different and not being able to do things that their peers do. So, there may be some quick wins there when you look at what children and young people would tell you are the gaps for them.

[21] **Ms Williams:** This committee can use some of these opportunities to ask questions about what is working out there and what authorities are doing to ensure that the duty is implemented, linking it through to the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011. Yvonne has been talking about the individual child's rights today, not in the future. There could be a connection there. For me, the terminology is important, because if we have a tackling poverty programme as opposed to a child poverty strategy, at local level, with regard to where local policy makers who might not be children-focused put their priority, it is important to get this centre stage and into the plan. It is crucial, because otherwise it will not happen, despite the good work. I suppose that we are in a transition period; we have had the child poverty strategy focus and we are moving, as Yvonne said, through to the family agenda very carefully. So, everyone is moving and what we are keen on is making all those connections back to children's rights.

[22] **Mr Pritchard:** On the specific question about how local government is doing—as you know, we run the Child Poverty Solutions programme, which is designed to help public authorities write their child poverty strategies, implement best practice and try as best as possible to bend what they are doing in the right direction to help children—I think that it is probably fair to say that our experience is that the performance is fairly mixed. There are some examples of very good performance and there are some examples of councils—it is probably going too far to say having paid lip service—having put together a strategy and not necessarily always understanding it and not necessarily always getting to grips with what it meant for every level of their operation. Let me give you an example from this place. I was talking to quite a senior female Assembly Member the other day, who was talking to me about a school in her constituency that has been closed. She was saying that it was in a very poor area with very high levels of child deprivation and the feeling that she had from talking to the council was that there was not that much understanding of, or consideration being given to, the fact that there was a child poverty element to the decision that was being made. She felt very frustrated by that. We can have these conversations, but practice on the ground is very important.

[23] So, from our perspective at Save the Children, and in the work that we do at Child Poverty Solutions, our whole thrust is to try to get elements about tackling child poverty into council officers' work plans. It is about trying to make the case to council leaders and to politicians at a local level that it does not have to cost the earth, but that it is about incremental progress and doing things at every level of your operation. It is about looking at housing, education, health, transport, and looking at what you can do to help solve the problem—using

1,000 hands to address the issue. That is what needs to be done. Again, it comes back to the question about the role of the committee. To a certain extent, the committee is a bit of a cheerleader on this; it is arguing for it and is making the case that it does not have to cost the earth, but that it is very important for local authorities, public authorities or health boards, whatever it happens to be. We know that budgets are tight and we know that there are difficult decisions to be made out there, but there is potential to make a difference in children's lives.

[24] **Christine Chapman:** I like the phrase '1,000 hands'.

[25] **Mr Pritchard:** You are free to use it. I have no copyright on it. [*Laughter.*]

9.30 a.m.

[26] **Aled Roberts:** May I challenge you? James, you have answered one of my questions. It is all very well saying that it is for us to find out what is happening on the ground, but we want your perception of what is happening at local authority level. However, I was a council lead for seven years, and the only time that I received representations regarding any issues on child poverty was when the council was taking decisions on grants. Very few representations were made to me regarding how the council was performing or criticisms of the way in which the council was approaching the subject. So there is a need for two-way communication. Following on from your point regarding the long-term, generational aspect of some of these changes, in reality, because of the way politics works and the need for quick wins—you have already mentioned the move from a child poverty strategy to a family approach—are we, as politicians, giving enough time for different initiatives to settle down?

[27] **Ms Rodgers:** That takes us on to the issue of integrated working. It is about the next new idea, the wonderful idea, which may be Families First, for instance. The old guard has gone, but a great deal of good work has been done through Cymorth and partnerships, particularly to do with tackling poverty and a lack of experiences for children and young people. Decisions on Families First and the transition to Families First mean that that has gone. Cymorth has gone and Families First has come in, and the decommissioning of Cymorth services is happening out there before Families First services are in place. There is no embedding of Families First before the other service is lost and, possibly, it is not just the service to the young people that is lost but the people undertaking the work who are lost to the system, because they have to find new jobs somewhere. All that experience has gone. All the knowledge of that area and the needs of that community go with those people. I agree with you in that respect. It is great to swing from this rung of the trapeze of Cymorth onto the next rung, which is Families First, but we are actually in the air at the moment, and some of the people in the air are children and families who are going to fall.

[28] **Ms Williams:** To go back to your first point about direct representation to you, that is very worrying in a way. This is partly to do with the integrated working and the structures at local level for representations to be made. Work on child poverty is of a cross-cutting nature, but each authority is very different these days. The structures have that focus on child poverty, so that officers of the authorities as well as people making representations have a clear route to communicate. That communication is crucial, as is communication from the Welsh Government to local authorities and health boards that this is important. It is also about getting it into all the service and financial framework targets for health and so on, so that everyone is working towards it. The implementation side is our biggest concern.

[29] **Christine Chapman:** Before I bring other Members in, we obviously want to talk about local government, but what involvement did you have in the development of the Welsh Government's anti-poverty action plan, which is due to be published this month?

[30] **Ms Rodgers:** From the Barnardo's perspective, we are members of the end child poverty network and we have been involved in a number of sub-groups. There was a lot of work involved

in that. We are very supportive of that. When you come to a committee like this, it is difficult because we know how hard people are working on this. It is almost as though every time you think you are nearly there with your new strategy, we come along and say, 'That is all very well, but what about these young people?' We need to temper some of our comments today by acknowledging the work that is being done.

[31] **Ms Gater:** Action for Children is involved in the same sorts of things.

[32] **Ms Rodgers:** We are supportive of that. It is just that, for us, the other thing about being a voluntary organisation is that we have that privilege to sit outside and say, 'There's a bit there that you haven't seen', and we also have the privilege to come here to tell you about it. You asked about real examples—and, Mr Roberts, I believe that you are in Wrexham—so, from a Barnardo's perspective, on how we are working on poverty, through lottery funding, we currently have the Options project.

[33] **Aled Roberts:** I have visited that project.

[34] **Ms Rodgers:** You have been there. That project helps 16 to 24-year-olds to get into education, employment or training opportunities, and we do that by working with other agencies. So, there is collaboration and 1,000 hands; you cannot do this work on your own. As any of our agencies would testify, we need to work together with the experts, whoever they are. So, in that service, we rely on CAIS, a mental health charity, to work with some of those young people. We also rely on local colleges, and we are working with the local authority and Careers Wales. All of that needs to come together to make it work for the child or young person, so that they have a streamlined and easily accessible service.

[35] You talk about generational poverty, and there is a huge mountain to climb in terms of getting into a job when no-one who you know has ever had one. So, it is for us and 1,000 hands to work on that to make it simpler for young people. We are having some striking successes in projects, and, for the committee's benefit, I could send you further information on those.

[36] **Christine Chapman:** It is obviously also about money, but if it is about communication, as you said, why is it not happening? What are the real issues behind why that is not happening?

[37] **Ms Rodgers:** You talked about not having evidence brought to you in terms of poverty, and perhaps what we are not doing enough is highlighting the pockets of good work that are out there. It is about how you replicate that work to turn a good project or initiative into a strategy that could be rolled out.

[38] **Christine Chapman:** Who should be highlighting that work? Should it be you as charities or should it be us in the Assembly or those in local government?

[39] **Mr Pritchard:** As is the answer to most good questions, the answer is 'all of the above'. From our perspective at Save the Children, we spend an awful lot of our time trying to keep child poverty on the agenda, as you know. Probably one of the first things that I did, about four or five months ago, when I started in this role was to ask Gwenda Thomas whether she would stick to the 2020 target of eradicating child poverty. She said 'yes', and Carwyn, a few days later, said that he would also stick to that target. That is symbolically important, as well as practically important, because it provides senior leadership for the agenda at the heart of Government and it also communicates to every council leader in Wales, every head of a police force and every person working in the NHS that child poverty remains at the heart of the Welsh Government's agenda. That is important.

[40] We can and will do our bit in terms of keeping it on the agenda. However, let us be clear, when we talk about communication, it is not just about putting out press releases and talking to

the *Western Mail* and doing the odd interview on the BBC's *Good Morning Wales*; it is about looking at things like children's budgeting, which I know the committee has talked about in the past, and it is an issue that the Assembly has looked at. It is about looking at whether we can describe more effectively the way that we spend money on children, so that, every year, when the budget is published, or maybe a little bit after when we have the supplementary documents, we start to get a picture of how much of that money is being spent directly on children. That might help communicate the importance of the agenda to the wider political community. It is also about the language used in our strategies. We should make it clear that child poverty is different—it has different impacts and potentially more far-reaching impacts than the poverty that affects adults.

[41] So, it is about those sorts of things. It is not just about thinking about what you might call the soft communications, it is also about the hard political messages that are sent about the importance of this as an agenda, and the importance that the Assembly gives to it, not just in terms of the odd interview, but also in cold hard cash when budget time comes around.

[42] **Christine Chapman:** I know that Catriona is waiting, but I need to bring in Julie and Simon. Perhaps you could then respond, Catriona, if you are happy with that.

[43] **Julie Morgan:** My question is to do with something a bit further back, but I will ask it.

[44] I was very struck by what Yvonne was saying about what the children would say if they were sitting there. I think that we somehow have to put ourselves in that mindset when we decide what we are going to do. I know that there are surveys, and we have heard what children have said about what they want most—to go on holiday, or to bring other children home to tea and all those sorts of things. It seems that with these sorts of things, unless we capture them quickly, the time for them will have gone, as we have already said. Do you feel that we are doing enough as an Assembly in terms of looking at those things that we can try to influence quickly? The same goes for the local authorities: are they doing enough to go out to listen to what children are saying, to get at the small, tangible things that are difficult to deal with through strategies and those sorts of things?

[45] **Christine Chapman:** Catriona, I will bring you in now, if you are happy with that.

[46] **Ms Williams:** Yes. I will kick off, if I may. I was initially going to respond on what we can do and to your question about how we can work with the Welsh Government. In fact, we in Children in Wales chair the end child poverty network Cymru. We have a dual role, but we are still seeking assurances to this day—we want children to be included in the tackling poverty action plan. We want them to take centre stage.

[47] To answer your question, Julie, the interesting piece of work that we did—which I am enthusiastic about—on the things that are important to children was about how schools can make children feel less stigmatised. There was a whole range of things, such as not having to stand in the dinner queue with a special token, having a uniform that is just a colour so that they do not have to go to an expensive shop—there are a lot of those of issues that we could do more work on. For children, the priority issues include being bullied for not having the right shoes or trainers, for example. We could reduce much of the impact on children by having more of their views. There is quite a lot—I know that Save the Children and all the other organisations hear a lot from children directly, but I do not know exactly what local authorities are doing to get children's views.

[48] **Christine Chapman:** Jocelyn wants to come in on this point.

[49] **Jocelyn Davies:** Yes, I want to come in on this point about talking to children, because I thought that the free swimming was absolutely fantastic. Both of my daughters are lifeguards, and they give swimming lessons, but the only people who go for a free swim are those who can swim. So, it is not just about the transport, you see; it is about whether you can swim. If you have not

learnt to swim by the time you are nine, 10 or 11, then, sorry, but you are not likely to go to the free swimming session, because you will be too embarrassed. Who has swimming lessons? They are very expensive. Anybody who has paid for swimming lessons for their children will know that they are very expensive. So, the free swimming initiative was not the answer. Free transport would not be the answer, either—not on its own. I think that talking to young children about poverty of experience is something that we need to look at.

[50] **Christine Chapman:** I am conscious of the fact that we need to move on to the next area of neglect—I think that there is going to be quite a bit of overlap—but before that, I want to bring Simon in.

[51] **Simon Thomas:** I wanted to react to something that James Pritchard said.

[52] **Jocelyn Davies:** What, about you being a cheerleader?

[53] **Simon Thomas:** Exactly. I wanted to disagree: I am not a cheerleader for anyone. I am as a politician, but not as a member of this committee. I think that the committee is here to scrutinise the Government's actions and the Government's programmes. If you use the game analogy, you are the cheerleaders and we are the referee. Our job is to blow the whistle when things are going wrong, and not necessarily to cheerlead for any particular group. We do that as individual politicians, of course, but that is a different issue.

[54] What strikes me from the conversation that we have had is that a great deal of scrutiny is lacking at a more local level. That has come through in the conversations that we have had with Aled Roberts and in other things that you have said about local authorities. We may be able to say it on occasions where the national programmes are going wrong or where we are missing a target, but who is doing that locally? Who is able to scrutinise the local implementation? There are some clear gaps there or, at least, that is how it appears to me.

9.45 a.m.

[55] One thing that we cannot do as a committee is to scrutinise local authorities. If we were to start doing that, we would be here until judgment day. So, I put the question back to you: can you see scrutiny happening at a local level, whether it is by local authority scrutiny committees, or by local voluntary organisations? Is there any evidence that that is happening? It is there that we can tell what the reality is. We get people like you in here—we also listen to children, but, on the whole, we listen to organisations. How can we really tell that that is happening locally?

[56] **Christine Chapman:** Perhaps James would like to respond and then one other member of the panel, because we have a limited amount of time left. James, would you like to start and perhaps one other person could also respond?

[57] **Mr Pritchard:** I will respond very quickly, as disagreement is breaking out. We cannot have that in the new Wales.

[58] **Simon Thomas:** We need a little more of it.

[59] **Mr Pritchard:** Perhaps you are right.

[60] I think that it is a very fair challenge. As I have said, we work with local authorities, so we have that interface with them. As I said initially, the performance is mixed. I wonder whether the issue is that there are not as many votes in poor children as there might be in other issues. There may be something there. That is why I make the plea for political leadership at this committee, to a certain extent, because that is important. We are very interested in anything that we can do to get us into council officers' work plans and to have an influence in that practical

sense. We will continue to do that. The plea is not necessarily for this committee to spend all of its time trying to scrutinise what local authorities are doing, but to provide that sense of leadership and ownership of the issue and to carry on talking about it, as we are doing today. So, I do not think that there is too much between us. Perhaps it is about the emphasis more than anything else.

[61] **Christine Chapman:** Would anyone like to offer one response on behalf of the panel?

[62] **Ms Williams:** I will give just a very quick response. There is work that can be done by this committee to scrutinise the Government by asking it what it is doing to scrutinise local authorities. A letter from a Minister on a certain point can be effective. There was an example recently relating to health, which reminded local health boards that they should involve the third sector. That was very effective. That sort of encouragement, if things are not working as they should, could lead to scrutiny being improved.

[63] **Christine Chapman:** I am now going to move on to the issue of neglect. I think that Jenny wants to start.

[64] **Jenny Rathbone:** You say in the paper that you submitted in advance that safeguarding and child protection systems are struggling to provide an effective and swift response to neglected children. Certainly, from my experience and observation, I would not disagree with that. I am sure that most people around this table would have similar concerns. What can we do about that in the context of having less resource at all levels of government? What would be the one thing that you would want to do to, somehow, change things?

[65] **Mr Mannion:** We are on record as an organisation—going back to our election campaign, which was supported by a number of AMs—asking for there to be an inquiry into child neglect in Wales, with a view to scoping out the extent of neglect and to understand why we have significant levels of children who are subject to child protection plans for neglect in Wales, and also to think about some solutions. Broadly speaking, there are issues in terms of how professionals understand neglect, how they respond to it, and the solutions that they can bring to bear to address neglect. Public awareness and understanding of neglect is something that is sometimes confused. We have touched on the issues regarding poverty, the relationship between neglect and poverty, and the need to distinguish between these two things, but also not to deny the relationship between poverty and neglect. So, we think that there should be some work to scope the extent of neglect and to understand what is happening in Wales—and, also, across the UK, I guess.

[66] The issues that we think are of interest are those that relate to definitional questions. There is a definition in ‘Safeguarding Children: Working Together Under the Children Act 2004’ that places an emphasis on ‘persistent’, that is, the persistent failure on the part of parents to ensure that a child’s wellbeing is addressed. So, there is something about the test being a cumulative test, which puts professionals in a difficult place. How persistent is ‘persistent’? Once again, there is also the question of what ‘significant harm’ constitutes in relation to that. So, there are some interesting questions on definition, but also in terms of how that rolls out into consequences for practitioners.

[67] The criminal law in relation to neglect also feels a bit outdated to us as an organisation. We have gone on record as asking for that to be looked at as well. It seems to us that definitions of neglect should run in parallel. So, we think that it is time for a public debate about that to try to get some serious thought about what constitutes neglect. Borrowing from some of the points that we have heard recently, the views of children and young people about what constitutes neglect are quite interesting. As an organisation, we have done some work around that in other parts of the UK. Interestingly, the answers that we get back are not solely about the lack of material things; they are more about the lack of empathy and the emotional unavailability of their parent or carer. So, these are big questions. The point that I would make about neglect is that it accounts for

nearly 50% of all child protection plans in Wales. That is replicated across the UK. It has been running at that level for a long time, so it is clearly a problem that we all—the Government, local safeguarding boards, statutory agencies and professionals—find quite hard to crack. Broadly speaking, those would be the areas that we would like you, with respect, to undertake an inquiry into.

[68] **Jenny Rathbone:** However, you would agree that it is difficult to define what is neglect and what is appropriate chastisement. There are the rights of the parents. Schools face this problem every single day when they see what they do not think are appropriate responses.

[69] **Mr Mannion:** I would love to be able to say, ‘I have a solution to that problem’. I am unable to do that, but I do think, therefore, that we need a broader debate about the definitions of neglect and how we all understand neglect. As we get into more difficult economic times, that will become more rather than less important.

[70] **Christine Chapman:** I will bring Brigitte in first and then Julie wanted to come in on this point. I have a couple of other Members who want to come in after that.

[71] **Ms Gater:** There is nothing that Action for Children would disagree with in the presentation from the NSPCC. That is what we are supporting. We have recently undertaken a piece of research with the University of Stirling in this area. It is a UK-wide piece of research, and Gwenda Thomas is supporting a briefing on 21 March. So, hopefully, we can use that as a platform to get moving the sort of debate that Des talked about. In our research, we found that some of the child protection professionals whom we talked to were confirming that the safeguarding systems were not helping children who were faced with and living with neglect. Often, those children had to endure chronic and long-term neglect before they reached the threshold, because the safeguarding system is geared towards addressing a critical position in a child’s life. The solutions that Action for Children would propose are that we invest significantly in early intervention services, and that we look at the status that early intervention services have in relation to child protection services and address the potential imbalance there. If we can support families before they get to a critical position, children will not endure the difficulties that they currently endure.

[72] The other interesting thing that we found from our research was that practitioners who are providing universal services were often reluctant to refer children on because they knew that they would not reach the threshold. If you can imagine that cycle happening over and again in a child’s life, a childhood is not long enough to repair that sort of damage, because it has become iterative in terms of how the system responds.

[73] **Julie Morgan:** Des, do you think that physical punishment in the home is part of neglect?

[74] **Mr Mannion:** What we need to think about is, if we think about neglect and other forms of abuse in terms of child protection plans, then the numbers of children who are subject to neglect plus physical abuse is certainly a huge proportion of the children who are subject to child protection plans. The issue about physical punishment is something that I would like us to talk about at some point today, if that is all right. The issue around equal protection for children is one that we as an organisation have been on record, along with our colleagues here, as campaigning for. It is not referenced in our briefing document for you here today, which is a pity, but it seems to me to be a quite important issue. The Assembly has voted on equal protection on a number of occasions, and we have talked about the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2012, and the need to install equal protection as part of being consistent with that. On a number of occasions we have answered questions around whether there would be some flurry in prosecutions of parents for this, and we have campaigned on that, so, yes, I do think that it is part of that overall sense of child neglect. I suppose that the point that I am trying to make is that, when you encounter neglect, and identify neglect, it will be very likely that other forms of abuse will also be

present.

[75] **Suzy Davies:** We started this part of the session by mentioning that the views of the third sector should be heard, and its influence should be much greater, and in fact there is a change of direction towards that. At the end of the last session, I think that it was you, James, who said that children are different, and when we try to keep their needs high on the political agenda, we need to recognise that, particularly in the area of neglect, where the needs of children who are being neglected are quite different from those of vulnerable adults who are being neglected. On that, you will be aware that the Deputy Minister has a plan to merge the safeguarding boards. Bearing in mind the influence that the third sector should have, and how great it should be, can you give us some indication of how much input you had into informing that decision?

[76] **Christine Chapman:** I must just suggest, because otherwise we could be here all day, as it is such a huge area, that rather than everybody answering, perhaps just one of you could. We can move on to other things then.

[77] **Ms Williams:** I do not think that the children's sector has agreed that it is a good move at all. We were involved in the safeguarding forum, and certainly we gave evidence, probably with colleagues here, to committees previously. I represented the children's sector on the safeguarding forum and was a minority voice. That is quite often the issue—the children's sector is not heard as much as the wider sector. There is a huge need for adult safeguarding to be improved in lots of ways. Children's safeguarding is there, but the idea of merging the two—to me, it will just end up with there being sub-committees, one for children and one for adults, because there are totally different sets of people, and the focus on the child would be lost. We have said that publicly all along.

[78] **Suzy Davies:** Without asking you all to develop that, is that opinion more or less shared among the five of you? I see that it is; thank you.

[79] **Aled Roberts:** You are all representatives of UK charities—

[80] **Ms Williams:** I am not.

[81] **Aled Roberts:** Okay, you are not. Children in England and Children in Scotland are separate organisations.

[82] **Ms Williams:** They are partners.

[83] **Aled Roberts:** I wanted to ask the four representatives of the UK charities about the issue of a Welsh inquiry into neglect. Given the impact of the criminal law on the whole issue, can you tell us whether there are any moves at an English or Scottish level to look at that? It seems a bit strange that we would conduct our own inquiry when, in reality, it is the UK law, or the England-and-Wales law, that would need to be changed.

[84] **Mr Mannion:** I know that we as an organisation have given evidence to the education sub-committee at Westminster, so we have lobbied there in relation to the issues around the Criminal Justice Act. I fully understand that the criminal justice aspect of this is not a devolved matter, so it would be odd for us to go down the road of undertaking an inquiry into that in terms of Wales on its own.

10.00 a.m.

[85] However, any inquiry that we want to undertake in Wales into neglect is going to come up against this issue of the fact that there are differing definitions both in terms of law and working together on the guidance and definitions that it gives to neglect there. It is a problem and we are

going to have to think about how we answer that, otherwise we will just end up in a situation where we are undertaking a piece of work that solely focuses on civil law matters rather than the criminal law ones. It is important that, even if we cannot do something about it directly within Wales, we acknowledge that it is a major issue that needs to be tackled on a UK basis with all the other devolved nations.

[86] **Christine Chapman:** Quite a few Members want to come in. Angela is first.

[87] **Angela Burns:** Thank you very much indeed, and thank you for your evidence on this subject. I am quite puzzled by some of it, because I have had the opportunity to sit in on training sessions conducted by Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire fostering and adoption services and they are very clear as to what neglect is. They are very clear that, in fact, it is the worst thing that can happen to a child in their childhood. They asked me what I thought and I trotted out, 'Oh, it must be sexual abuse' and they said 'no'. It is not even being smacked, because that shows that someone has an interest in you, even if a malignant interest; it was neglect. Surely, the real crux of the issue is less about the definition of neglect, and more about the fact that we do not have the resources in place to be able to deal with the situations of neglect that we come across in our everyday lives. That is certainly what the social services and adoption and fostering teams of those three counties have told me over a number of years now.

[88] **Mr Mannion:** In response to that, I certainly agree with the issue around resources and the need to resource local government so that it can adequately address the needs of children; I do not think anyone would disagree with that. However, listening to some of the points that have been made earlier, there is also an argument about the need to refocus some of our resources into early intervention, so that we are preventing children needing statutory intervention. I would agree with you there. However, I do think that the issue around definition does matter and it is important to try to think about that. The point has been made that we see children that have repeat interventions around neglect. One child is subject to a child protection plan for a period and then they come off that plan, but then they, or a sibling in the same family, go back on a plan again. So, repeat registration, or repeat child protection plans for children, is an issue. The definitional questions do matter. People feel reluctant about it. There is the question about what 'persistent' is in this context, whether it is bad enough and what the threshold is. The resource issue plays into that, and what Brigitte was describing very well was this whole issue of the rationing of services and how professionals stop making referrals because they are aware that the services they are going to get are not going to address the needs of the people whom they are seeking to serve.

[89] **Christine Chapman:** I am conscious of time. We will be breaking soon for a short time, and we can continue some of the discussions then, but a number of Members want to come in.

[90] **Jocelyn Davies:** On the issue of neglect, I suppose that it is about where a child's physical and emotional needs are not being met. They might not be subject to violence, but they might be seeing it on a regular basis. You mentioned that neglect was a factor in about half the protection cases. Do you have figures on where it is the sole factor? I guess it can be a factor, but what about where it is the factor? What about criminal prosecutions? Do you have any statistics on prosecutions for neglect of children in Wales?

[91] **Mr Mannion:** In terms of children who are subject to a child protection plan, it stands at around 46% of all children for neglect on its own.

[92] **Jocelyn Davies:** What do you mean by 'on its own'?

[93] **Mr Mannion:** On its own as a single category. That is a matter of public record. Interestingly, it has run at that sort of level for that last 10 years. In terms of information about criminal prosecutions for neglect, I do not have any statistics to hand that I can provide to you today, and I am sorry about that.

[94] **Ms Gater:** I was just looking at this document here, which contains some outcomes of research by University of Stirling. In Wales, neglect on its own was 43% in terms of a category of abuse. However, neglect and physical abuse were pulled together, and the figure was 5%, and neglect and sexual abuse were pulled together, and the figure was 2%. So, the statistics are sometimes combined and the information is getting conflated.

[95] **Jocelyn Davies:** Perhaps we could have a note on the number of prosecutions.

[96] **Christine Chapman:** That would be good.

[97] **Keith Davies:** Mae gennyf ddau gwestiwn. Yn gyntaf i gyd, pa rôl mae ysgolion yn gallu ei chwarae? Os yw plant yn cael eu hesgeuluso, mae'n bwysig cymryd camau cynnar iawn i'w diogelu. Mae ysgolion yn gallu gweld a yw plant yn cael eu taro gartref, neu os nad yw plant yn cael unrhyw sylw gartref, yn enwedig lle mae rhieni wedi gwahanu ac nid yw'r plant o un tad neu un fam yn cael y sylw y dylent. A ydych yn credu y dylai ysgolion gymryd mwy o ran o ran rhoi'r neges i bobl fel chi neu i'r awdurdodau? Mae plant yn yr ysgol am 11 mlynedd ac rydych yn gallu gweld pethau'n gwaethygu pan fo plant yn cael eu camdrin yn seicolegol neu'n gorfforol.

Keith Davies: I have two questions. First of all, what role can schools play? If children are neglected it is important to take very early action to protect them. Schools can see if children are being smacked at home, or if children are not given any attention at home, especially where parents have separated and the children from one father or one mother are not given the attention that they should be given. Do you believe that schools should play more of a role in conveying the message to people like you or to the authorities? Children are in school for 11 years and you can see things getting worse when children are psychologically or physically abused.

[98] **Angela Burns:** I think that Keith has raised a really important point. I do not want to prejudice your reply, but of all the evidence that I have ever heard in a Children and Young People Committee—I also sat on the previous one—nothing has been seared in my soul as much as a representative of a major teachers union telling the committee that it was not the job of teachers to look after children's pastoral needs whatsoever; they were merely there to educate. I have never forgotten that statement, and at the heart of that lies a lot of our problems.

[99] **Ms Rodgers:** O ran esgeulustod, roeddwn yn meddwl bod hwnnw'n gwestiwn da iawn. Dechreuais fy ngyrfa fel athrawes, a thrwy gydol fy ngyrfa gwaith cymdeithasol, rwyf wedi ceisio esbonio i bawb fod athrawes neu athro gyda'r plant y rhan fwyaf o'r amser drwy'r wythnos.

Ms Rodgers: In terms of negligence, I thought that that was a very good question. I began my career as a teacher, and throughout my social work career I have tried to explain to everyone that a teacher is with the children most of the time throughout the week.

[100] Teachers are with children far more than any other professional. Apart from their parents—and if we are talking about neglect, perhaps more than their parents—teachers will know about the minute changes in children and what constitutes neglect. I have spent a great part of my career involved in training for teachers and other professionals on this particular issue. My concern remains that, although we work collaboratively, we are very precious about our own professions. I have a dual qualification that has been useful to me in social work or in teaching work. I have been there as a teacher and said something rude about social services, and I have worked in social services and said 'What on earth is this teacher on about?' [*Laughter.*] We have to bring this together, because both professions are concerned about the welfare of the children. As we know from numerous inquiries, many opportunities have been missed to pick up issues about children, because, as Brigitte says, people have given up and cannot see the point because the authorities are not going to do anything, or, if they do, they feel as if they are seen as the

troublemaker by the family as well. They are very nervous about a family turning up at the school because they have been reported to social services but social services have not done anything about the situation. So, they feel as if they are the troublemaker and have reported something that should not have been reported.

[101] In terms of what we could do, as a quick win we need to be able to work with teachers and children's social services, particularly, on respect between those two professions. With early intervention, we could address far more. We need much more than one designated teacher for child protection within the school, because that is tokenistic in some ways—you have one person with that tag. It has to be embedded in both of those professions. I know that it is also a resource issue, but is it a resource issue in the long term if we could intervene earlier? We would be in a situation to deal with these neglect issues much sooner.

[102] **Ms Gater:** We absolutely must work together on this to create a multi-agency solution. We have to be motivated by the end game, as opposed to by our professional homes, which I think we sometimes get trapped into. For example, we think only in terms of 'I am a teacher', 'I am a social worker' or 'I am a nurse'. I would broaden this out, too, because I think that health also needs to be involved.

[103] **Aled Roberts:** What astounded me, when we created a children's service in Wrexham, was that teaching and social services professionals who had worked for the same authority for years were only meeting each other very occasionally. We created a team-around-the-child system. However, the problem—to answer your question on resources—came when there was an explosion in child protection referrals. There is always a real danger that that early intervention work is the first sacrifice, because the resource has to be switched to firefighting. That is the real challenge for the Assembly and local government. Probably as a result of the baby P case, there is a greater tendency for people to report cases.

[104] **Ms Rodgers:** That is where the children's third sector can come into its own. Barnardo's has 88 services across Wales; many of them include supporting families and many deliver services on behalf of the local authority in the area of early intervention. I know that that is true for Action for Children. It is about how you allocate those resources in a way that is targeted and effective. However, we could do much more to enable teachers to feel that they are part of the child protection system by assuring them that what they say is taken seriously and is responded to. There is something that worries me a great deal about professionals carrying around in their heads concerns about children on a daily basis and feeling that they have nowhere to turn with those concerns.

[105] **Ms Gater:** I have one point on the education issue. We cannot forget pre-school children, because there is not one solution to be had; this is a very complex issue.

[106] **Christine Chapman:** We need to complete this section, but Jenny and Lynne have been waiting to come in.

[107] **Jenny Rathbone:** I want to take us back to Suzy Davies's question on the Government's proposal to merge safeguarding boards. Using the example that Des Mannion spoke about earlier of the child who goes on to the register for neglect and then comes off it and then the second sibling goes on it, is that not part of the problem? We have these different silos, so people whose concerns centre around children are not systematically thinking about what to do with the adults who are responsible for these children and how they can work with them to resolve the issues. Similarly, adult services that deal with drug addiction or mental health, or whatever it might be, are not systematically thinking about the impact of that illness on the child in that family. Is that not one of the problems? I agree that having two sub-committees would be hopeless—let us not even go there—but surely what we need to do, and what many have written about, is to ensure that everyone has a child-focused approach. That will not be achieved if we have separate adult

and children's social services. I just want to challenge you on that.

[108] **Ms Rodgers:** In some ways, the Welsh Government has provided some advantages in addressing that concern in terms of adult and children's services through integrated family support services. You now have a system in place particularly to address issues of crisis around substance misuse. It will also pick up on domestic violence and mental health issues as we get into phase two of that programme, where the team works with everyone so that you have a key worker, but back at base there is the mental health specialist in the adult system, the substance misuse specialist and so on, working on that.

10.15 a.m.

[109] On Catriona's point about the merged safeguarding board, we see that what will come to the adult safeguarding board are the issues of vulnerable older people and elder abuse. You know that we talk about children as being vulnerable, which is why there is a safeguarding board for children. Then, we will be talking about vulnerable adults. I think that the adults under consideration by those boards, in the main, will be those vulnerable older people, not the parents of the children who are now being considered by children's safeguarding boards. Those parents are considered as parents rather than as adults. So, they are considered as part of the family and part of the problem.

[110] **Lynne Neagle:** The issue of neglect is very important, but you have highlighted today some of the complexities and challenges with looking at the whole issue. You have also highlighted in your evidence that there is a lot of missing information on this in terms of children who are being neglected and who may not have made it on to the child protection register. Could you say a bit more about how you would see this committee taking that forward in a meaningful way, given those challenges? You have also said that you think that the Government should review the guidance on this as a matter of urgency. When do you see that happening—before a committee review or afterwards? Have you been making any representations to the Minister on that? What has the attitude of Government been?

[111] **Mr Mannion:** Some of the points that we have made have been about the role of this committee in sponsoring an inquiry that takes on a number of separate tasks, one of which is about how we enable professionals from all disciplines to think about the identification of neglect at an early stage and how we equip those staff on a multi-agency basis to address it and deal with it. So, there is something about identification, the tools that we need to do that and the methods and approaches that we might want to use to address it, because it seems to go on as a problem. That is one issue.

[112] There is also something—I touched on this—around the definitional issues. I take the point about the criminal justice system; we will certainly make further representations in relation to the need to think about how we define neglect in working together. The bit that is really important in all of this is that our discussions have been, for understandable reasons, focused on the numbers of children subject to a child protection plan. Of course, the evidence that we are trying to give to you suggests that those children are the absolute tip of the iceberg and that there is a huge population of children we describe as children in need. There is a grey area and there are probably many more children living in situations that should be classified as neglect who will never be subject to a child protection plan. So, there is something about scoping the extent of neglect within Wales. It seems to me that that is a legitimate task for this group and for the Assembly. I think that it is the single biggest problem that our safeguarding agencies are all facing together, and are struggling to address because of the volume.

[113] **Ms Gater:** I agree. We are saying that early intervention has to be part of the solution and has to be built into the system.

[114] **Ms Williams:** I just have a quick point about the emotional side of all this, which would be useful to this committee. There have been some very positive results from counselling work in schools in Wales, and there are a lot of good concrete examples of where things could be built upon for that cohort of children who have not quite reached that peak.

[115] **Lynne Neagle:** I have not had an answer to my question about discussions with the Minister on this.

[116] **Mr Mannion:** We have not had any full discussions yet, but I am sure that we could take that forward with Children in Wales.

[117] **Keith Davies:** When I spoke earlier, I mentioned smacking. You are breaking the law at an adult level if you hit somebody, but at a child level, there is no law to ban parents from corporal punishment. Should that be part of the new social services Bill?

[118] **Mr Mannion:** What I would suggest to you is that it is certainly an opportunity. The Senedd has voted on the matter and has stated on a number of occasions that it thinks that equal protection for children should be taken forward. I urge you to think about the opportunities that may be available to you, and to take them.

[119] **Christine Chapman:** On that note, I thank all of you for the first session. I apologise for rushing through things, but it is a big area to cover. We will have a break now and I invite our witnesses to have coffee or tea with us; we can continue with this for a few minutes and then we will come back to the formal session.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10.21 a.m. a 10.36 a.m.
The meeting adjourned between 10.21 a.m. and 10.36 a.m.*

Trafod Blaenoriaethau gydag Elusennau Plant yng Nghymru Discussion of Priorities with Children's Charities in Wales

[120] **Christine Chapman:** We now continue with our session. I now hand over to Aled, who wants to ask some questions.

[121] **Aled Roberts:** Rydym wedi edrych trwy eich tystiolaeth ar weithio'n integredig, ac mae'n eithaf amlwg eich bod yn dweud bod angen cau'r bwll rhwng polisiau'r Llywodraeth a'r gweithrediad ar lawr gwlad. Wrth feddwl am y polisiau plant a phobl ifanc, pa feysydd sydd fwyaf amlwg o ran y bwll rhwng polisi a gweithredu, yn arbennig ar lefel awdurdodau lleol?

Aled Roberts: We have looked through your evidence on integrated working, and it is quite clear that you say that there is a need to close the gap between the Government's policies and implementation at the grass-roots level. In terms of the children and young people policies, what fields are the most obvious with regard to that gap between policy and implementation, particularly at a local authority level?

[122] **Ms Rodgers:** Yr hyn sydd wedi digwydd yw bod pethau newydd wedi dod ymlaen fel polisiau o ran gweithio gyda phlant a phobl ifanc. Felly, er enghraifft, mae gennych Dechrau'n Deg, Teuluoedd yn Gyntaf, gwasanaethau cefnogi teuluoedd integredig, ac yn y blaen. Fodd

Ms Rodgers: What has happened is that new policies in relation to working with children and young people have been brought forward. So, for example, you have Flying Start, Families First, integrated family support services, and so on. However, in the meantime, as I said earlier, you are cutting back on things now that used to be available under the old Cymorth scheme. That is exactly what we were doing before. So, the policy is very

bynag, yn y cyfamser, fel y dywedais yn gynharach, rydych yn torri'n ôl ar bethau a oedd ar gael o dan yr hen gynllun Cymorth. Dyna'n union beth roeddem yn ei wneud o'r blaen. Felly, mae'r polisi yn dda iawn—mae'n bwysig ein bod yn gweithio mewn modd mwy integredig—ond, eto i gyd, nid oes digon o amser ar yr ochr weithredu, oherwydd nid yw wedi digwydd eto. Felly, golyga hynny fod bwlch rhwng beth sy'n digwydd ar lawr gwlad a beth sydd yn eich meddyliau chi yn y fan hon. Bydd pobl wedyn yn dweud:

good—it is important that we work in a way that is more integrated—but, then again, there is not enough time on the implementation side, because it has not yet happened. So, that means that there is a gap between what is happening at a grass-roots level and what is in your minds here. People would then say:

[123] 'We've signed that one off now, and that is Families First done. Look at this, a streamlined process for the integrated family support service.'

[124] Mae rhai pethau o'r fath yn digwydd. Er enghraifft, mae cam 1 Teuluoedd yn Gyntaf yn gweithio'n dda. Rydym yn gweithio gyda phobl yng Nghasnewydd, Wrecsam, Merthyr a Rhondda Cynon Taf ar Teuluoedd yn Gyntaf, ac mae'r gwasanaethau hynny'n dda iawn. Fodd bynnag, ar yr un pryd, mae cynllun Cymorth wedi'i ddatgomiynu, ac mewn rhai ardaloedd nid oes gwasanaethau'n cael eu cynnig. Felly, bydd rhai aelodau o staff yn gadael y swyddi yna ar ddiwedd mis Mawrth, ac ni fydd unrhyw beth yn dod i mewn i lenwi'r bwlch.

Some of those things are happening. For example, phase 1 of Families First is working well. We are working with people in Newport, Wrexham, Merthyr and Rhondda Cynon Taf on Families First, and those services are very good. However, at the same time, the Cymorth scheme has been decommissioned, and in some places there are no services being offered. So, some of the staff will leave those positions at the end of March, and nothing will come in to fill that gap.

[125] **Aled Roberts:** A ydych chi wedi cwyno am hyn i'r Llywodraeth? Os ydych, beth oedd ei hymateb?

Aled Roberts: Have you complained about this to the Government? If so, what was its response?

[126] **Ms Rodgers:** Mewn un o'r cyfarfodydd gyda'r Dirprwy Weinidog, Gwenda Thomas, bu inni siarad yn blaen ynghylch Teuluoedd yn Gyntaf. Mewn ffordd mae tri phapur gennym yma, ond gallech chi eu rhoi at ei gilydd: mae gennych *integrated working*, *commissioning a coterminosity*, a gall y pynciau hynny ddod at ei gilydd i drafod hyn. Beth ddigwyddodd oedd ein bod wedi siarad am gomisiynu Teuluoedd yn Gyntaf a wedi dweud bod enghraifft gennym—ar y pryd, roedd rhai awdurdodau yn dod i pethau allan

Ms Rodgers: In one of the meetings with the Deputy Minister, Gwenda Thomas, we spoke frankly about Families First. We have three papers before us that you could combine. You have integrated working, commissioning and coterminosity, and those subjects can be brought together in this discussion. What happened was that we had spoken about the commissioning of Families First and said that we had an example—at the time, some authorities were issuing things about that scheme.

ynglŷn â'r cynllun hwnnw.

[127] The local authority—I will not name it here—said, ‘We will decommission this group of services under Cymorth, we will then put out all our Families First tenders, and we expect you to collaborate in tendering for those services’. In principle, that looks amazing: there are going to be new family support services that will be much more tightly specified, and which will deliver more for less. That is everything you want to see in terms of efficiency, streamlined processes and collaboration.

[128] However, no-one has told us about that. It takes a long time to grow an old friend, so there is an expectation somehow that we, as disparate bodies, will work together. We are friends, but when thinking about the wider children’s sector, we are talking about, I do not know how many, but hundreds of agencies. What is happening to us, as large agencies, is that we are getting cold called by small agencies, saying, ‘We want to apply for the Families First tender because it is our work and it is what we do, and we would like to collaborate with you on approaching the local authority with a tender’. However, you have perhaps a month at most to turn that around into a tender to be sent in to the local authority. There is a lack of awareness that we are not an amorphous mass and that we all have separate constitutions, trustee boards and different ways of working. For those reasons, I cannot autonomously say that I will work with this or that organisation, and we have to submit a tender that the local authority would consider to be of a sufficient standard to go through even the first stage.

[129] **Christine Chapman:** We are going to come to commissioning, but are there any other areas to do with the gap between policy and implementation?

[130] **Ms Rodgers:** For us, it was the policies that had been introduced. The policy on integrated working in terms of more multi-agency working is something we support. The policies that have come out as a result of Families First, Flying Start, the integrated family support service and the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 are all moving provision in Wales in the right direction. Our concerns are more about how you implement that in a way that makes sense. So, when you ask what it means for children and families, it means that they will lose their service and have nothing to replace it. That is what is actually happening on the ground. You could say to Action for Children and Barnardo’s, as direct deliverers, ‘You would say that, wouldn’t you, if you are having funding cuts?’ However, the funding has been cut, not because what we deliver is not good enough—because that would be fine—but because we are moving to another policy, that is, Families First and re-commissioning. It is about the link between those policies and that situation.

[131] **Aled Roberts:** So, the main point you are making is not about the gap between policy and the effect on the ground, but the fact that it appears that the main problem is the lack of notice regarding implementation. When we were looking at Flying Start, for example, we were concerned that there had not been a proper evaluation of the success on the ground before the roll-out.

[132] **Ms Rodgers:** Yes.

[133] **Aled Roberts:** May I ask what the response of the Deputy Minister was? Why was the transition year for Cymorth not used to ensure this greater degree of integration? Was it because, during the roll-out, they were late in saying what Families First was?

[134] **Ms Rodgers:** Yes. I think that you would probably agree with me on this, Catriona. There was a delay in the guidance, which meant that local authority partners were telling us that this was going to happen, but that they did not know when, because it was delayed. When, eventually, it came out, it was rolled out very quickly, so there was delay along the line.

[135] With regard to what the Deputy Minister said previously, when we met her, she helpfully re-emphasised in the transition year that it was a transitional year. She sent out letters to all local authorities. The positive impact of that was that some local authorities, if not most, responded by being more careful in their decommissioning of Cymorth, ensuring that they were properly ready with Families First before they put out those tenders. However, in some ways, the letter came too late for some local authorities. They had already sent letters out to us to tell us that they were decommissioning from 31 March.

10.45 a.m.

[136] **Aled Roberts:** What was the Deputy Minister's response to the delay in guidance, which appears to be the big issue?

[137] **Ms Rodgers:** I do not suppose that we have had a robust response to that. As I said, it is about the wheels and machinery of Government going on apace without recognising that the receivers of that guidance, the local authorities, were trying to get their heads around how it would look for them on the ground and what the best specification would be. Our concern is that, in that gap, you end up with a service that is perhaps not as well formed and planned as it would have been if you had another transitional year—and I know that it is a bit of a joke, really—because it has taken that long. Look at the management of change in any organisation and then think through how you could do this through the lens of 22 local authorities, all of them operating slightly differently, who are being told that they need to work more collaboratively across borders, which we would support. As I told you, it takes a long time to grow an old friendship, but local authorities are expected to suddenly learn to work with each other, all in this very short timescale.

[138] **Christine Chapman:** Catriona wants to come in, and then I am going to move on, because there are quite definite views on this. Catriona, do you want to come in?

[139] **Ms Williams:** Yes, quickly, just to reinforce the fact that the impact on our wide network of small organisations has been huge. There has been a mixed response, and the picture is that some authorities have created what are almost dating agency events where you come together to meet and find a partner to deliver a service. I am being a bit facetious, but that has happened. There is also the question of where all the money for the whole of the 12 months has actually gone, because some authorities, as Yvonne said, decommissioned before they knew exactly what they were going to commission. So, we have been chasing that and asking whether they are going to get the money back.

[140] The concepts are not in question; it is probably the understanding. There has been a big change within the Welsh Government in staffing, and there are a whole range of issues that have impacted on that. However, the reality on the ground is that it has been quite turbulent for the workforce, as it has not known where exactly it is going to be or what sort of jobs there will be. For management, it has been particularly difficult.

[141] **Ms Gater:** To a service provider, it feels as though local authorities have used the transitional year to think about how they are going to decommission and what systems and processes they need in place, as opposed to looking at what services are being delivered and how they can transform them to meet the new Families First agenda, because, actually, the people doing the delivery are the ones that we have made a massive investment in, and they have great relationships with them. Yes, stop things that are not working by all means, but why stop things that are working? I think that they have been focused on creating what I would call 'a very fair commissioning system', which feels to me very long winded, cumbersome and hugely expensive, not just for the people who have to pitch in as providers, but also for people in local authorities who are having to create panels and engage in huge processes of marking and assessment, along with the legal implications. All of this is sometimes for very small amounts of money and very short contracts, for example, £57,000 for a year. It seems a little heavy-handed.

[142] **Lynne Neagle:** How widespread is it for local authorities to take that stance of decommissioning first and then putting the new services in place? Is it a minority of local authorities that have taken that stance?

[143] **Ms Gater:** Certainly, for Action for Children, a number of authorities seem to have got out of the stalls very quickly and said, ‘Right, we’re decommissioning’, and then they got the guidance and backtracked. What that has meant is that a huge workforce is on temporary contracts and the like, because there is the sense that the service is going to be decommissioned. So, the minute you start that process—whether you still have the funding or not—it is damaging direct service delivery. That is our experience. On the whole, we have maintained much of our income through Cymorth, but we are at different stages of tendering. However, I know that there have been some casualties, which are the smaller organisations, because, very quickly, we have had to develop sub-contracting relationships with smaller organisations. Action for Children and Barnardo’s are bearing the brunt of the legal costs of creating sub-contracts, because we are being held to account for very small organisations. We have never done this before, so we are entering new territory, which is very resource thirsty.

[144] **Christine Chapman:** Thank you. We will move on to Jenny’s question.

[145] **Jenny Rathbone:** I would like to bring us back to the subject of integrated working. Could you tell us how the single integrated plan can be given a strong enough focus on the specific needs of children and young people?

[146] **Christine Chapman:** Who would like to answer that question? Catriona?

[147] **Ms Williams:** It is early days in terms of consultations on this. We ran an event for the third sector a few months ago to begin to pull out views on the single plan. It is all part of this huge change for identifying the needs of children’s services at a local level. The partnerships are being dismantled, and the whole fabric of the way in which we have worked together in the past to try to get an analysis of need and a service to fit that need is changing. I will hand over to colleagues to discuss how that is playing out at a local level. A lot of the smaller third sector organisations are finding how they will get their voices heard in the new process to be a major challenge.

[148] There are obviously some positives with a single plan. There is a link in to adult services, such as those on domestic violence, substance misuse, community safety, and all of that is important. However, it is very similar to the point that we made at the beginning about how we keep the focus on the needs of children and their families within this plan. That is our challenge.

[149] **Mr Pritchard:** In very broad terms, it seems that the whole of this conversation has been about coherence, integration, and how we get the pieces of the jigsaw to fit together and join up the dots. In terms of the integrated plan and the way that we see it, listening to the views of the third sector is obviously important, but we would certainly make a plea for the importance from a moral perspective of listening to children’s voices. It is also important to ensure that services are provided properly in terms of listening to children’s voices. It never fails to surprise me in the work that we do at Save the Children with our young leaders and ambassadors—indeed, we have brought them to this committee previously to give evidence—how shrewd, insightful and how useful the voices of young people are on these matters. So, when we are planning services and when we have these conversations, it pays to spend some time listening to the views of young people. It should not be done as a gesture or because it ticks a couple of boxes, but because, ultimately, you will get a better plan as a result.

[150] **Ms Gater:** There is a question regarding whether we could integrate some of the neglect issues into a new integrated plan that would span the whole of the adult and child sphere.

[151] **Jenny Rathbone:** Good leadership would determine that you would both be listening to children and young people, but also to the front-line workers who are often the advocates for those people. So, you are painting a rather depressing picture of poor leadership. That should be second nature: you should know your community, know your services, know where good local organisations are doing a good job, and be building around that. It is not rocket science.

[152] **Ms Rodgers:** The challenge is the extremely pressurised timescale; that is what is at the bottom of this. There is pressure; there is an external driver on local authorities to transfer from one form of delivering services to the new form of delivering services and they are pressured to do that within an exceedingly tight timescale. It is those pressures that are impacting negatively on the ground—at this stage, on the service providers, but our concern would be where it leaves gaps in service provision for children and families. We are having discussions with people who have put out a tender and we talked about speed-dating earlier, but there is one example where—I will not name the local authority—we were asked to deliver one aspect of a service and another early years provider was asked to deliver another aspect of it. It then occurred to everybody that there was no-one covering the five to 10 age group in that service and they wanted a streamlined service. So, the local authority wanted to talk to both of us about who would be able to fill the gap for that age group. That is an example of rushed timescales, with them thinking, ‘There’s the early years; there’s the older children’, but then realising, ‘Oh, no-one’s thought about the five to 10 year-olds’, which is a crucial part of the population, as you know, in terms of need. We could provide you with examples in writing, if that would be helpful.

[153] **Christine Chapman:** That would be good.

[154] **Suzy Davies:** On that issue of gaps in provision, is the problem more acute in sparsely populated areas than in urban areas?

[155] **Ms Rodgers:** What we find across Wales is that it is the challenges that we talked about earlier and the need to think about a different way to deliver the services. Where we deliver services in Powys for example, we have to ensure that we have bases and people spread across the authority, because the cost of transport and delivery of the service is impossible otherwise, which makes it inaccessible for children, young people and families. We have had to be creative in how we deliver services to ensure that the stress is on our end rather than on the children and families. However, the economic challenges for those local authorities are far greater because they have to factor those costs into the delivery of services.

[156] **Suzy Davies:** Would you all say more or less the same on that? I see that you would.

[157] **Christine Chapman:** Okay. We have some final questions on commissioning. I know that we have touched on this. Lynne, do you have a question?

[158] **Lynne Neagle:** Yes. You have touched on some of the difficulties in the paper you submitted, which provides a long list of the problems that have been encountered with commissioning. What action do you think the Welsh Government should take to try to iron out these problems?

[159] **Ms Williams:** I will leave answering the question to my colleagues. I just have one point to make with regard to the health sector. We have always been great fans of partnership working and, for example, ‘A Co-Designed Future: The Third Sector Role in Health and Social Care in Hywel Dda’, got all the different partners working together to design how the third sector can input into the health service. It is that sort of thing that we would aspire to across all services. In terms of the practicalities of commissioning and how the committee might address it, perhaps Yvonne and Brigitte can answer that.

[160] **Ms Rodgers:** I was conscious when I re-read this paper what a long list of whinges it appeared to be, I am afraid. That takes me back to my initial comment this morning, because children and young people would not tell you that this was the problem here; it was for us as directors to outline that. What is written here says it all in terms of experience. These are process issues, rather than anything else. In terms of what you could usefully do about it, there are some things on that list in terms of portals and technical issues that could be addressed. There are other issues there about the lack of acknowledgement of the cost of time and the legal framework required, which Brigitte talked about earlier. Our concern is that in a time of stretched resources for local authorities, there is an imposition on them to spend a great deal of money in terms of commissioning. I am concerned that those scarce resources are not being used for the direct delivery of services to children and families, but for the construction of those services.

11.00 a.m.

[161] **Ms Gater:** I think that, in a way, this is about having that mutual understanding. When you enter the commissioning environment, you get into a position of the commissioner and the provider, and the relationship that you have on the ground, which are about coming up with sensible solutions, seem to go out of the window. It is almost as if common sense stays in the corridor, because we are making decisions based on a finite process, often led by contracting and procurement. Those things are difficult for us. As Yvonne has pointed out, it feels as if that has become an industry in itself.

[162] I can only speak for Action for Children, but we go through periods of feeling under siege. We do not have the capacity and the resources to do the detailed level of work that is needed for a tender, and sometimes that is about retaining work. If organisations like Barnardo's and Action for Children feel that way, you can make an assumption that smaller, community groups would probably be exiting at that point, because they do not have the time or the resources to fill in the forms.

[163] For me, it is about mutual understanding, because I do not think that any commissioner goes into this in order to exclude people—I want to be clear that I do not think that they intend to exclude people. However, it is an unintended consequence. It often relates to the fact that local authorities do not understand, for example, the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations and the liabilities that they pass on to the provider; they are unwilling to negotiate on contract clauses. Those issues can be difficult, and we sometimes take quite risky decisions about providing services. For example, if we are going to include in TUPE someone who has been working in health or social services for 30 years in a service that we have just won, the pension liabilities far outstrip the others that we have, but we have to pay them. If we then make them redundant, we have the redundancy package to pay for. I know that this is quite detailed, but if we win, the risks of inheriting that staff team are too high. Having such a conversation with commissioners is quite limited, because they are in a process and that is when the process takes over.

[164] **Christine Chapman:** As Simon Thomas said, talking about TUPE, this committee cannot necessarily scrutinise local authorities. We can make recommendations, but are there any specific actions for the Welsh Government?

[165] **Ms Gater:** Yes, we need simpler processes based on the achievement of outcomes. Those would be my key recommendations.

[166] **Ms Williams:** Just to inform the committee, some work has been going on around commissioning and procurement from the wider third sector. In terms of consistency, grants can still be given and Jane Hutt, the Minister for Finance, has said that. Interpretation at local level needs to be monitored, but across Welsh Government, we need consistency between commissioning in social services and health. There should be recognition of the role of the third

sector in designing services as a partner as well as it just being brought in to work on the design of what a local authority thinks it needs. Sometimes, large organisations may have much more in terms of feasibility studies and outcome reports from other parts of the UK, which might be helpful. So, we want a focus on co-designing.

[167] **Jocelyn Davies:** This is not the first time that someone has commissioned something, so I do not know why we cannot get this right.

[168] Your paper is strongly worded on the issue of commissioning. What caught my eye was that it says that the commissioning environment, which you describe as immature, is leading to 'unsafe and immensely time consuming' processes. What do you mean by 'unsafe'?

[169] **Ms Rodgers:** When I re-read it, I wondered whether, in the cold light of day, I would have said some of the things that are in this paper. For me, 'unsafe' was about the loss of service, in that there would be a gap. In the example that I gave, there was suddenly a loss of service to five to 10-year-olds that no-one thought about until they looked at it again. It was not unsafe in child protection terms. However, even within that, if we are asked to partner with other organisations that we know very little about, I am left standing in front of a tendering committee that will ask me about safeguarding. I can tell them about Barnardo's safeguarding policies and procedures, but working alongside an organisation that I may have known for a few weeks, can I say, hand on heart, that I am sure that all their safeguarding procedures are as tight as ours? That is the sort of unintended consequence that Brigitte says we are involved with.

[170] **Jocelyn Davies:** It would not come across very well to that panel.

[171] **Ms Rodgers:** Exactly. As an organisation, we have to do a lot of work in a very short time to cover those things.

[172] **Mr Pritchard:** Obviously, we are not as directly involved as colleagues in being commissioned to provide services, but we do some of that and I have quite a lot of exposure on a number of our projects. What strikes me as the problem is that you are sometimes dealing with Welsh Government civil servants who feel tied up by the process and feel that the burden of bureaucracy is very heavy on their shoulders. There is something around trying to empower the commissioner, giving them an opportunity to develop much more of a business-partner or relationship-manager relationship with those they are working with. I find sometimes, in the conversations that we have with Welsh Government civil servants, that Save the Children could just have arrived from Mars in terms of the knowledge that they have of how our structures work, the kinds of approaches that we have, our philosophy towards our approach to change and so on. It is not that they are not good people or that they do not get it; it is that they are not empowered to do that and to develop those sorts of relationships in the same way. So, I think that there is something in there around trying to see it as a creative two-way process rather than as one that is directed from the centre—that is, saying, 'Here is some money, bid for it, these are the forms you have to fill in and off you go, we will monitor it after that stage'. It is about being much more intelligent about how the whole process develops as you are going along.

[173] **Christine Chapman:** So there is an issue about consistency of staffing—

[174] **Mr Pritchard:** Yes, but also about culture. I have had conversation after conversation with Welsh Government civil servants. I am relatively new to this job, so I pick up the phone and ask them to explain to me what the thinking is on an issue, but they say, 'No, I cannot have that conversation with you'. I am baffled and say, 'Sorry, but we are spending your money'. I appreciate that there are processes and that you are spending public money, but working on that relationship and on that dynamic is very important.

[175] **Lynne Neagle:** On Catriona's point about how the Minister for Finance has said that you

can receive grants, there was an implied criticism there of local authorities maybe not listening to that. Could you say a bit more about what you think the advantages are of more of them doing this on a grant-funding basis? It is all very different to when I worked in the voluntary sector; it sounds rather horrific, actually.

[176] **Ms Rodgers:** The issue is about people having procurement rules, as James said, and trying, as Bridget said earlier, to keep to the rules. They are nervous about what they might view as stepping outside of those rules in any way. In terms of sums of money, I think that we could be much more sensible. If it is a small amount of money and it is only going to run for 12 months or 2 years, surely a grant is better than a commissioning process, because of the duplication of effort and all the money involved in that.

[177] So, in terms of what people could do from a Welsh Government perspective, I think that more needs to be done in terms of guidelines. That would be helpful. From a third sector perspective, in terms of taking responsibility ourselves, because we are in this process, we are trying to have those conversations, and not always successfully, as James says. However, Action for Children and Barnardo's are working on procurement and tendering as part of a child and families organisation grant scheme. We want to provide a platform for other voluntary organisations that may be smaller, so that there is guidance about this process that gives us the tools and the format of what a tender would look like to reduce that level of work for small organisations. We are taking responsibility for this as well, because we need to be better at doing this if it is the portal that we need to go through.

[178] **Aled Roberts:** Can you give us specific examples, because I have to say that I do not recognise most of this? Each local authority has a procurement strategy and it is up to the local authority to decide whether it wants to go through a simple grant structure for smaller amounts and a more complex tendering process for large amounts. Also, do you not concede that, under the old Cymorth rules, the reality was that there were service level agreements, for example, that were not monitored to a great extent and that were not very outcome-focused, and that, to be perfectly blunt, there were some organisations that got into the mindset of expecting the money to come around, regardless of whether it was having any impact on the ground? Do you concede that there was a need for the Government to take action to make it more outcome-focused?

[179] **Ms Rodgers:** I think that we said in our paper that we welcome the focus on outcomes. All our work is linked to outcomes and we have to prove the difference that we can make in the lives of the children and families we work with. Therefore, I would agree with anything that is outcome-focused. The challenge for the Cymorth work has been that it was not set up in a way that allowed the measuring of those outcomes. That is the problem here. We have something that is from a previous time, which is now being criticised for something that was never set out at the beginning. Hopefully, you will not have that with Families First and the other things that now exist. However, I also have to say that some local authorities measured outcomes and monitored money spends in Cymorth very tightly. One of our discussions with one local authority was about how many measuring tools it needed us to use for one grant fund, because there were so many. So, it depends on what you have on the ground in terms of monitoring.

[180] However, I understand that there were examples of some organisations feeling that all they had to do was exist and keep delivering without looking at their impact and without considering how to challenge things if they were not making a difference. With regard to our organisations, I would say that, where we feel we are not making a difference, we bring that to the attention of the purchaser.

[181] **Aled Roberts:** However, you are making the point that the procurement strategies are a bit of a postcode lottery.

[182] **Ms Rodgers:** I think that what has happened with the procurement strategies is that, in all

the guidance given on procurement and commissioning, local authorities feel that it is all about commissioning and procurement now—that grants are the old way and that this is the new way. In the telling of that message, some of the other possibilities got lost. Possibly, that needs to be revisited.

[183] **Angela Burns:** I wanted to ask you about the comments in your paper on coterminous boundaries, but, to be truthful, it will probably just require one very quick answer from one of you. Having listened to your issues about integration and commissioning, multiple boundaries, whether they are for health boards, police authorities, strategic transport areas or whatever, cannot possibly help.

[184] **Ms Williams:** Absolutely not. We have made representations on this. A letter went out from Carl Sargeant as a result of our representation to encourage using the health board footprint for boundaries. It is essential for us. It is essential for small organisations that they do not have to relate to one grouping in one service and another grouping in another service. It is just a waste of money.

11.15 a.m.

[185] The issue coming through from the police and the health sector is the capacity of individuals to be involved in many different meetings. That is a fair point. I am not sure, so I would not want to be quoted absolutely on this, but I think that there is only one part of an authority, education wise, that is facing the wrong direction at the moment from our point of view. I hope that we will get there.

[186] **Simon Thomas:** Gan edrych ymlaen at beth sy'n mynd i ddigwydd o safbwynt ffiniau a'r newid i gonsortia, a oes gennych unrhyw brofiad ar hyn o bryd o orfod bidio neu gomisiynu ar lefel ranbarthol neu lefel gonsortia, nteu a yw'r hyn yr ydych yn ei wneud ar hyn o bryd yn deillio yn uniongyrchol o awdurdodau lleol? Beth ydych yn rhagweld fydd yn digwydd wrth i'r consortia ddod i rym? Efallai bydd gwahaniaethau yn rhai o ffiniau'r consortia. Gall ffiniau'r consortia addysg fod yn wahanol i ffiniau'r gwasanaethau cymdeithasol a fydd yn wahanol i ieuchyd, ac a fydd yn wahanol i rywbeth sy'n ymwneud ag atal trosedd, er enghraifft. Rydym yn ymwybodol o'r pethau hyn. Beth yw eich profiad hyd yma? A oes unrhyw weithredu rhanbarthol ar sail consortia yn digwydd yn y trydydd sector ar hyn o bryd? Pa ragolygon a ydych wedi eu cael ar hyn o bryd gan y gwahanol gyrff ynglŷn â sut byddent yn disgwyl i chi weithio yn y dyfodol?

Simon Thomas: Looking forward to what will happen in terms of boundaries and the change to consortia, have you had any experience as yet of bidding or commissioning at a regional level or a consortia level, or is what you are doing at present emanating directly from local authorities? What do you foresee will happen when the consortia come into force? There may be differences in some of the boundaries of the consortia. The boundaries of the education consortia may be different to those of social services, which will be different to health, and will be different to something relating to crime prevention, for example. We are aware of these things. What is your experience so far? Is any regional work based on the consortia taking place in the third sector at the moment? What are the various bodies predicting at the moment about how they will expect you to work in the future?

[187] **Ms Rodgers:** Mae gan Barnardo's brofiad o weithio mewn consortiwm. Er enghraifft, gwasanaeth Taith ar gyfer ymddygiad rhywiol niweidiol. Rydym yn gweithio ar draws saith awdurdod yn y de. Mae gennym brofiad o weithio yn y ffordd

Ms Rodgers: Barnardo's has experience of working in a consortium. For example, the Taith service for sexually harmful behaviour. We work across seven authorities in south Wales. We have experience of working in that way. We have heard that some places in north Wales are going

honno. Rydym wedi clywed bod rhai lleoedd yn y gogledd yn mynd i drin gofalwyr ifanc mewn un pecyn. Ar hyn o bryd, rydym yn cadw at beth sydd gennym nawr, ond, fel y dywedodd Brigitte yn gynharach, dim ond am y flwyddyn. Erbyn diwedd y flwyddyn bydd rhaid i ni gyflwyno pecyn neu dendr. Os byddwch am gyflwyno bid ar gyfer gofalwyr ifanc, efallai bydd yn rhaid cyflwyno bid ar gyfer y gogledd i gyd.

[188] **Simon Thomas:** Pan fydd hynny'n digwydd, a ydych yn disgwyl y byddwch yn delio ag un awdurdod a fydd ar y blaen, ynteu a ydych yn disgwyl y bydd problemau caffael yn amlygu eu hunain ac yn dyblu neu'n treblu?

[189] **Ms Rodgers:** Mae ein profiad gyda Taith wedi bod yn anodd oherwydd mae'n rhaid cael cyfarfod gyda'r holl bartneriaid bob chwarter ac weithiau nid ydynt yn cytuno eu bod am wneud yr un peth. Os byddwn yn gwneud pethau tebyg, bydd rhaid i ni gysylltu â phobl mewn ffordd fel eu bod yn deall bod angen prif lefarydd i gario pethau trwyddo. Oherwydd ein bod yn gweithio dros Gymru, mewn 20 allan o 22 awdurdod, mae gennym ddigon o brofiad o weithio dros ffiniau.

[190] **Ms Gater:** In relation to Action for Children, typically, we are still commissioning per local authority area. With the Taith service example that Yvonne gave, that is historical and has been going on for a long time. New arrangements have come into place for fostering and residential placements and there seems to be more collective working. It is less to do with the provider, or the potential provider, negotiating with a number of authorities. For example, with fostering, Rhondda Cynon Taf authority has taken the lead for the procurement. There is one route in, which is more sensible. That indicates that things are getting better with regional commissioning. However, on the whole, our experience is with single-area commissioning.

[191] **Christine Chapman:** We have 10 minutes left, so I want to move on to another area and give each of you the opportunity to respond. You were asked to choose five issues affecting children and young people in Wales today. Are you confident that the issues that you have chosen are having more of an impact than other issues, such as child and adolescent mental health provision, educational attainment or issues affecting looked-after children? Are you confident that the issues that you have chosen are having more of an impact than those sorts of issues? In addition, is there a priority issue that you want to highlight individually to the committee today? Who would like to answer the first question? Is there anything else?

[192] **Mr Pritchard:** Poverty, poverty, poverty. As far as the issues that we have discussed today are concerned, for us and possibly my colleagues as well, some technical things have been raised that we are concerned about, and getting the processes right is important, but in terms of children's lives, the blight of poverty and the effect that growing up in poverty can have dwarfs all the other issues that we might look at. Indeed, it draws in many of the things that you have mentioned, such as childhood mental health, general health outcomes, educational outcomes and others. So, from our perspective, the focus needs to remain on that.

to treat young carers in one package. Currently, we are sticking to what we have now, but, as Brigitte said earlier, only for this year. By the end of the year, we will have to submit a package or a tender. If you want to submit a bid for young carers, it may have to be for the whole of north Wales.

Simon Thomas: When that happens, do you expect to be dealing with one lead authority, or do you expect the procurement problems to become magnified and to double or treble in size?

Ms Rodgers: Our experience with Taith has been difficult because we must have a quarterly meeting with all partners and sometimes they do not agree that they want to do the same thing. If we are to do similar things, we will have to connect with people in a way so that they understand the need for a main spokesperson to carry things through. Given that we work across Wales, in 20 out of 22 authorities, we have plenty of experience of working across boundaries.

[193] There are elements to it that, perhaps, we have not drawn out today, which it is worth mentioning. We have campaigned on childcare, and it is becoming increasingly clear that the welfare reforms in Westminster—which went through without a vote, I understand, yesterday—will hit single mothers and parents who are trying to work. We have done some research that we will publish in a number of weeks that looks at the impact of the universal credit and some of the other welfare reforms specifically on working mothers and families. It finds that, because of the way that the taper works, they will be absolutely clobbered by it; they will see less money in their pockets and work will be a less attractive option.

[194] The National Assembly and the Welsh Government should look at what you can do on childcare, strategies for food poverty, the way that health and transport interact with child poverty, leisure and play and all these things that are part of the agenda around tackling child poverty. That brings me back to the point that I made at the start of this morning, which is that the role for this committee can be one of leadership and of ensuring that that agenda simply does not go away. So, my answer to your question, Chair, is poverty. That is the issue that will make the biggest difference to children's lives in Wales today and if we can get that issue right, that will make the biggest difference to the lives of young people growing up in Wales today.

[195] **Mr Mannion:** I would choose to answer your question by saying that a theme has run through quite a lot of the discussions that we have had today. We might want to summarise that as the churn of change, in terms of organisations, structures, processes, collaboration and integration. All of that is happening at a great pace right now, and it will carry on at a time of recession that will only worsen, I guess, at this moment in time. So, for me, throughout all that we have talked about, the role of this committee is to try to ensure that we keep an eye on outcomes for children and ask how a change will impact, positively or negatively—bearing in mind some of the comments that we have heard in terms of how processes have unintended consequences—on children and families in Wales. It is important that we maintain a rights-based approach in Wales and hold to that and all of the implications of that in terms of some of the issues that I have identified. I still think that neglect remains an issue that is worthy of your collective attention, however you choose to do that, and I would be happy to discuss that further, if that would be helpful. That would be my pitch.

[196] **Ms Williams:** When we chose the topics, we were trying to get the ones that had the biggest impact on the ground at the moment. We have covered the churn of change; it really is affecting how many services we have, not just what they do, but whether they are there at all. That is why that was a top priority. For Children in Wales, other priorities are looked-after children, their health and education and all the different issues; disabled children; early years—Flying Start is there, but we know that investing in early years is important across the board; and emotional wellbeing and the CAMHS agenda. They are all big issues for us.

[197] We could bring only five issues to you today, but the one that I think the committee could probably do most with, in terms of giving it a real profile within Wales, the UK and Europe, is to carry on with the good work that came out of the debate on abolishing the physical chastisement of children in Wales. I and others have been involved with this agenda for 20 years or so, and Wales is at the forefront of children's rights, and is highly respected in other countries for having incorporated the UNCRC into our policies and philosophy, but it seems strange that we have not got that basic right in our Welsh agenda for children. Given the change in this committee, so that, as I understand it, you are not just a lobbying committee but a real committee with teeth that is able to take that forward, I think that you would have a lot of support if you gave leadership on that.

[198] **Ms Rodgers:** I agree with my colleagues and the comments that they have made. In terms of the issues that we have brought today, the list could have been very long, and I would refer the committee to the joint manifesto that the organisations prepared on particular issues that we

remain concerned about. Children and young people's mental health is clearly still there; we are still not happy at all with the provision of mental health services to children and adolescents, and we remain concerned about that, so anything that could bring improvements in that area would be most welcome.

[199] In terms of Barnardo's, we are particularly concerned about hidden populations of children. We have done a great deal of work around sexual exploitation in recent years, and we are very pleased with the progress in terms of guidance and protocol. As a UK organisation, it was pleasing to me that, when the Scottish and Westminster Governments were addressing this issue, I could tell our chief executive at UK level that she did not need to do this in Wales, because we had raised the issue and we already had a protocol and guidance. It is still an inadequately met need, but it is on the agenda. I think that, because of that, we have other hidden populations now; by working on sexual exploitation, you have raised issues about the trafficking of children, whether that is into the country or within the country, and then of course there is trafficking for purposes other than sexual exploitation, which I think will be coming to the fore in terms of missing children.

[200] Other hidden populations include young carers—we discussed them earlier—and there are children within the system that, because their numbers are small, we perhaps do not address as much as we should. Traveller children are within that category. There is also a very unseen population that we are working with more, namely, the children of prisoners. Children of offenders is a huge area of unmet need and is one, in terms of poverty, where perhaps we will have people who are not in work situations going down a route of criminality; what will the impact be on their children? I think that it would be valuable for the committee to look at that whole issue of children of offenders and the impact on them.

[201] **Ms Gater:** The benefit of going last is that I can agree with all my colleagues. The thing that I have talked a lot about is neglect and it is one of Action for Children's biggest concerns. For me, it is about how we can collectively find some solutions around it. What is it? Let us bring it to the surface. How can we support local initiatives to improve? How can we integrate into localities early intervention services that are targeted at neglect without people feeling worried? This refers back to the conversation that we had, Jocelyn, about upsetting people. We have to remember that this is about outcomes for children.

[202] **Christine Chapman:** I thank all of you on behalf of the committee. We have heard some powerful evidence today, and I know that we will continue this good dialogue and partnership that we have with you as children's charities. Thank you for attending. You will be sent a transcript of the meeting in due course so that you can check it for factual accuracy.

11.30 a.m.

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog Rhif 17.42(vi) i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r
Cyfarfod
Motion under Standing Order No. 17.42(vi) to Resolve to Exclude the Public from
the Meeting**

[203] **Christine Chapman:** I move that

the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order No. 17.42(vi).

[204] I see that the committee is in agreement.

Derbyniwyd y cynnig.

Motion agreed.

Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 11.30 a.m.
The public part of the meeting ended at 11.30 a.m.