



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

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

Dydd Iau, 4 Hydref 2012
Thursday, 4 October 2012

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Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public for the Remainder of
the Meeting

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

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

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol **Committee members in attendance**

Angela Burns

Ceidwadwyr Cymreig
Welsh Conservatives

Christine Chapman	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Suzy Davies	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Rebecca Evans	Llafur Labour
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**

Eleri Thomas	Prif Weithredwr Chief Executive
Keith Towler	Comisiynydd Plant Cymru Children's Commissioner for Wales

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

Kayleigh Driscoll	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Sian Thomas	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Research Service
Claire Morris	Clerc Clerk

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.17 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.17 a.m.*

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

[1] **Christine Chapman:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the Children and Young People Committee. I remind people to switch off any mobile phones or pagers. We have an apology today from Jocelyn Davies; there are no substitutions.

9.17 a.m.

**Adroddiad Blynyddol Comisiynydd Plant Cymru
Children's Commissioner's Annual Report**

[2] **Christine Chapman:** The first item is the Children's Commissioner for Wales's annual report, which we are going to look at, as the committee normally does. I welcome our witnesses, Keith Towler, Children's Commissioner for Wales, and Eleri Thomas, chief executive. Thank you both for attending this morning and for providing copies of your report

in advance of the meeting. Would you be happy for us to go straight into questions? I am sure that there will be a good dialogue then. I see that you are happy.

[3] I will start. My question is in relation to the role of the Children's Commissioner for Wales. How do you divide your time and resources between the different functions encompassed within your role? Could you say something about casework, policy reviews and making representations on broader issues affecting children's rights?

[4] **Mr Towler:** Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as we launch the annual report. I always enjoy the dialogue that we have. I am very happy to talk to you about this. The remit of the Children's Commissioner for Wales, as you will be aware, is broad and large and is to promote and safeguard the rights and welfare of all children and young people in Wales. Eleri is the chief executive and runs the organisation for me. So, in terms of the way in which that relationship works, I set the vision for the way in which we work and provide the strategic leadership. We developed a corporate plan, which you will remember that we discussed, that set the goals for a five-year period. Eleri's responsibility with the staff team is to work through the work plan each year.

[5] So, in terms of the way in which we divide resources, we have a number of functions within the office. We have 22 full-time equivalent posts, which are shared between 26 members of staff. We have two offices: one in Swansea and one in Colwyn Bay. We have four officers who are our policy team; four who do the casework, the investigation and advice work; and a further four who do our participation work, so they work directly with young people and children, supporting me in getting children's voices heard. We also have a corporate services function, meaning that we have HR, finance and governance staff. We therefore have a very small team of people—22 full-time equivalents. The majority of our budget, which is just over £1.7 million, goes on staff costs. Eleri could talk a bit about project costs, and how we divide those things up. We can also explore the casework stuff in a bit more detail, if the committee would like that. Maybe Eleri would like to add something here.

[6] **Ms Thomas:** I can certainly do that. The key way of working is that all functions are integral to us delivering our overall corporate objectives, and supporting the commissioner in achieving his aims and goals, in terms of the strategic corporate plan and our annual work plans. Each element of our work is vital and is interlinked in terms of how we deliver for children and young people. The key issue is around achieving systemic change for children. We try to achieve a balance between working on an individual basis and making sure that our casework is absolutely fundamental to everything that we do as a team. Listening to children and young people, and supporting their carers and parents and the people who work with children and young people on an individual basis, is core to everything that we do. However, that must drive the systemic change in our policy work. Whether we are dealing with a wheelchair issue, a child and adolescent mental health service issue or a child poverty issue, it is about the link between the individual circumstances of children and taking that on in respect of policy influence.

[7] **Christine Chapman:** I know that some Members will want to look at specific issues later on. I will now bring in Rebecca Evans to start us off.

[8] **Rebecca Evans:** You referred to your five-year plan, Mr Towler. Who reviews the progress that you are making in terms of delivering on those goals, and what is the process of that review? Some of the goals are quite hard to measure: how do you measure success in terms of improving attitudes, and so on? Who reviews your progress and how?

[9] **Mr Towler:** You will be aware of course that I, as the children's commissioner, am an independent human rights institution for children. Therefore, in governance terms, I have corporate sole status and so I do not report to an authority. In a sense, I hold the team to

account for delivery against the corporate plan and work plan objectives. I also have an audit committee that looks specifically at my functions in relation to the accounting officer role that I hold. A very traditional understanding of the accounting officer role applies to me as it applies to anyone else. We have tried to turn the audit committee into an audit-plus model, so that, in relation to good, effective challenge against our work plan and corporate plan targets, we have a healthy debate with the audit committee about how we are delivering against our objectives. When we put the corporate plan together, we did so at a point where we did not previously have within the office a corporate plan that would set the vision for how the commissioner's office needed to work. I wanted the corporate plan to feed the work plan for the office on an annual basis, and people's individual plans within that. Therefore, picking up on Eleri's point about all functions working together, every one of the 22 full-time equivalents can see how they are delivering against their individual plans and what that means in relation to the work plan and the corporate plan.

[10] We therefore have staff performance and appraisal systems in relation to individual work, thereby ensuring that people are working and achieving objectives against the work plan that feed into the corporate plan. Within the corporate plan, we set some really ambitious targets. However, we were also setting pretty ambitious targets, particularly around levels of awareness of the role of commissioner, at a time when we did not have any baseline information about what the baseline was. We had to do a bit of work ourselves on that. We could talk to you about where we believe those baselines exist. In terms of monitoring progress, we have monthly supervision processes with management and staff. They feed through to our management team, chaired by Eleri. There is a quarterly review of progress in relation to the work plan where I, in a sense, ask the management team to account for progress against the work plan. We review with the audit committee where that is taking us in relation to the corporate plan.

[11] So, in terms of reviewing progress, you could argue that it is very much an internal process. That is just the way it is in relation to the corporate sole function and the independent human rights institutions in terms of accountability, which is why I always find it really helpful to come here to this committee, and to have a discussion with you about how we are doing and the issues that we are raising on behalf of children and young people, because there is no other avenue for doing that.

[12] **Angela Burns:** I understand, totally, the review process, which is as one would expect in any public body. I want to pick up on that one point, which I think you started off by saying, which was that because you are an independent human rights organisation you are not accountable to anyone. There must be someone who can scrutinize you, because you are funded by taxpayers' money. We are accountable to the electorate, who can just say, 'I do not like you, off you go'. There must be someone who, surely, looks at, not your organisation, because you look at your organisation, but at the children's commissioner to ensure that policies are in tune with what we want to achieve.

[13] **Mr Towler:** The individual who has that responsibility is the First Minister. The First Minister can remove me from office if he takes the view that I am not performing as I should, but I do not have a direct reporting relationship with him.

[14] **Angela Burns:** So, there is no guidance on policy or your direction of travel. Does no-one come along and say 'For Wales, we would like to achieve this', which might be slightly different from what you are trying to achieve, and is there no negotiation then about how the two might fit together?

[15] **Mr Towler:** No. I remember when Rhodri Morgan was the First Minister, and I think that it is the same with Carwyn Jones, but I am using Rhodri Morgan's words. I remember, distinctly, upon appointment that he said how pleased he was to have made the appointment

for the Children's Commissioner for Wales, and that that was what his responsibility was, but now I am accountable to him, in terms of how we do in response to our work with children and young people. So, it is a difficult one, and I do not know whether this will come out later in the conversation about the remit and function in terms of how the commissioner works and where that accountability relationship should be. I would feel more comfortable if I had a relationship with the National Assembly for Wales and the Senedd. I think that the position that we currently have with the First Minister is a difficult one for both of us. I would recognise that the Welsh Government would not want to interfere with the work of the independent human rights institutions for children. A lot of us would tell you, 'Absolutely, you must not interfere'. So, it is not easy; it is complicated.

[16] **Angela Burns:** It just needs a line somewhere, does it not?

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

[18] **Angela Burns:** We have lines with the Wales Audit Office and the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales, and it is public money.

[19] **Ms Thomas:** I will reiterate what Keith has said. It is certainly one of the areas of work that we want to try to address. Certainly, from an organisation's perspective, that accountability function is one of the things that we want to see changed. Some of the work that we are doing on the legislative remit for the commissioner would involve the idea that the commissioner is answerable to the National Assembly, in the way that, as you described, the Wales Audit Office and the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales are. Those are certainly discussions that we are having on an ongoing basis with the Welsh Government and would very much welcome your input and support in terms of taking those discussions forward.

[20] **Mr Towler:** I do not know whether it will come up in the conversation, but there are a number of hooks, which are not just contained within what the Welsh Government might want to do, but in relation to Westminster, in terms of the role of the England commissioner, which could have an impact on Wales.

[21] **Rebecca Evans:** There was a decrease in your funding for the year 2011-12, as compared to the previous year. I wonder what sort of operational changes you needed to make to take that decrease of funding into account?

[22] **Ms Thomas:** We have, year on year, made significant efficiency savings, so we understand, as all public services across Wales that are facing tough financial times, that we have to find and strive as a staff team, and as an organisation, to be the most effective organisation, using our resources and making sure that we strive to deliver value for money. So, internally, year on year, we have made efficiencies, which has enabled us to live within those budgets. There are real issues for us in terms of some of the areas that you may want to talk to us about around increasing awareness of the children's commissioner's office, and looking at how we engage effectively with children and young people across Wales that require resource elements. Certainly, some of the discussions we have with the Welsh Government are about how to maximise that resource and delivery within financial constraints. It is a very difficult balance for us to achieve. In effect, it is a mix of efficiency savings and rejigging project costs that enables us to live within the financial settlement.

9.30 a.m.

[23] **Mr Towler:** Eleri is right. We can supply you with a paper on the efficiency savings if you would like to see where we have tried to make the savings. Like every other public body, we have been doing what we can to ensure that we offer good value, that we are working in best-value terms. It involves simple things such as renegotiating contracts for

things such as photocopiers through to the way in which staff work. We made an investment a couple of years ago in video-conferencing, which is really paying off for us now. When I became the commissioner, I think we had 30 to 34 full-time equivalent members of staff. Now, as I said earlier, we have 22, so we have done what we can to bring that function down. The challenge for the management team with diminished or reduced budgets, as everywhere else, is that the majority of our budget goes on people: our staff, and our offices. So our project costs are the things that actually get pared down. As Eleri said, when we are talking about raising awareness levels, we do not have a massive marketing budget, for example. Therefore, we have to box cleverer in relation to our project costs; that is where the pinch is.

[24] **Christine Chapman:** Do Members want a note from Keith on that? Yes, we will do that then. Thanks. We will move on now; I think that Angela has a question.

[25] **Angela Burns:** I want to talk a bit about casework. We have talked about this in the past. I am interested because I know that you are very keen to raise awareness particularly among the most vulnerable groups, and yet your casework has dropped. Do you have an explanation for that?

[26] **Mr Towler:** Yes. We have talked about this over previous years. In our annual report, we reported dealing with 427 cases this year, throwing up 564 different issues. We are pleased that we have a really good completion rate on those of around 97%, but you are right that there has been a slight drop and a continued slight drop in the number of cases. There are two external things that have happened to us that will have had a bearing, although we really do not understand that effect yet. One is the Meic helpline for children and young people. That will have had an impact. The other is the success of school-based counselling services. We have had this debate before. Yes, we have to ensure that all children and young people, professionals and those who care for children and young people understand that the commissioner is there if they need to get hold of him. However, with regard to awareness levels and take-up, it is not about the number of calls that come in, but what those lead us to do. I do not know how we monitor this, but it is the awareness level bit that I am more concerned about.

[27] Eleri referred to systemic change. It is the casework that drives a great deal of the work we do. The fact that we carried out the review of advocacy came about as a direct result of some of the themes that we were picking up from our casework. So, you are able to help individual children and families in certain circumstances. Sometimes, that will be a quick piece of work; sometimes it will be a long piece of work for the caseworker. However, picking that up, running with it and dealing with it in a more systemic way is one of the challenges for us. The other benefit of the casework is that it keeps my ears and the ears of the staff to the ground so that we have a real feel for the issues going on. The targeted work is really quite difficult actually.

[28] A good example of this is Pembrokeshire. When there were concerns about safeguarding and education in Pembrokeshire, we wrote to all schools, we did work on the media and tried to do everything we could to ensure that people understood that, if they felt that they could not speak to someone locally and independently for support and advice, they could get in touch with the office of the children's commissioner. We had some contact but not huge amounts of stuff. That does not raise particular alarms for me if people feel confident that they are getting the service locally. The important thing is that we are not a front-line service provider; we are the safety net for children and young people. So, it is pleasing to see that Meic is having good numbers of children and young people going to it directly and it is also great to see that children and young people are taking things directly to school-based counselling services. That might be having some knock-on effect on us—I am not sure—but the key issue is about the awareness of the role of the commissioner, as opposed to the number of calls that we receive.

[29] **Angela Burns:** I agree with you on that. I am very pleased to hear what you have been saying, because, a few years ago, there was a slight change of emphasis and it was about the big picture and developing policy, and casework got put slightly on the backburner. So, I am pleased that it is part of your work, because it keeps you grounded in relation to what the issues are.

[30] I get your analogy that you are not a front-line service, but the safety net; I totally buy that. However, one of my concerns—and I speak from experience of people who have been to see me in relation to the situation in one of the counties that I help to represent—is that people do not get down to the safety net because they have to fight through such appalling levels of bureaucracy, disinterest, aggression and people who just do not give a damn about the individual child or the situation. That is my real worry. I have constituents who are snagged in the drop-through and they just give up. They think, ‘Social services aren’t going to help me, the council isn’t going to help me and the AM can’t do anything because she doesn’t have any statutory powers, so we’ll just carry on and have a completely rubbish life’. That just gets me. So I do not know how we can achieve that. What I am really trying to say is that I am really pleased that you are making more of the casework element, and I will try to bring more to you. This must reflect the situation everywhere over the country, because people are not using you and it is absolutely not changing out there on the streets, Keith. It is absolutely is not.

[31] **Mr Towler:** I know that Eleri is bursting to get in here, but I just want to say that I agree with everything that you have just said. One of the challenges for me as the commissioner is getting out and about all of the time and making my face visible. I take the point about people getting to their wits end, and, if they find a route to the commissioner, it is sometimes by luck not by judgment or advice from anyone else. They have somehow twigged that the commissioner is there and they get in touch, at a point when they are very desperate because they feel that nobody is listening to what they have to say. That could be parents, carers and it can be professionals. We can be talking about teachers, social workers and youth workers getting in touch with the office.

[32] I went on a tour of Communities First areas over the summer and saw some fantastic pieces of work going on. This tour was in south Wales; we are going to do other parts of Wales later on. I was talking with people who had some vague idea about the role of the commissioner, but would not have thought it appropriate for them to get in touch. So, in their own minds, they perceived the importance and significance of the commissioner, but they would never dream that they could make that approach. That is a huge issue for us and we are looking at our current marketing materials—our posters and all the rest of it—and we are seeing, although it is not reflected in this reporting period, a difference in the way in which people are contacting us, for example through social media. So, there is more contact through Twitter, for example. It is almost easier to send a direct message via Twitter to ask, ‘Is it okay...?’ than it is to pick up the telephone to speak to us.

[33] So, we are going to try to find as many different ways as we can to make ourselves as accessible as possible. The key point for me, as the children’s commissioner, in the four years that I have been in post, is that it is the casework that drives everything that we do. When we talk about legislation and the role and remit of the commissioner in the future, I would fight with every breath to hold on to casework as a function for a commissioner, because it is that work that drives so much of our response.

[34] **Jenny Rathbone:** I absolutely agree with what you say. Could I ask you about specific casework that you feature on page 27 of your report? You talk about a letter that you received from a child in foster care who came from another local authority and there was obviously to-ing and fro-ing between these two local authorities. This is of great interest to this committee, and I wonder whether you can tell us what the outcome was as a result of

your intervention and how long it took you to knock their heads together to get a result for this young person. My question, really, is how long did it take for this child to get into the 14-19 pathway scheme? How long were they sitting at home?

[35] **Mr Towler:** The issue about two local authorities or two public bodies squabbling about who picks up the resource for a child—I know that we are talking about this particular instance now—is quite a common occurrence in our casework.

[36] **Jenny Rathbone:** You can talk about them; you do not have to name names.

[37] **Mr Towler:** Yes, we will talk about them, but that is not unusual, that is what I am trying to say. In this case, two local authorities were squabbling over the resource at a time when they were not focusing on the needs, wishes and feelings of that child. What tends to happen is an issue about protecting the local authority's response rather than thinking about the views of that child and what needs to happen for that child. In that particular case, the investigation and advice team went straight in to both those local authorities to seek a resolution and to remind them of the needs of the child. There is no doubt in my mind that that kind of work is mediating between two bodies by focusing on the child, and it unlocks some common sense. That is what tends to happen.

[38] **Jenny Rathbone:** So, what happened? You intervened and you told them that they had to focus on the child. How long did it take for them to do that?

[39] **Ms Thomas:** We can go back to look at the case and give you that answer, but, in our experience, usually, a quick call, a quick letter or a quick intervention from the children's commissioner's office helps move things on quite quickly. I wanted to come back to some of the points that Angela was making; when our office gets involved, it helps to unlock things quite quickly. The way that Keith wants us to work in relation to the casework service is by finding quick and local resolutions for families, so either unlocking it quickly ourselves or finding somebody locally who can, and is in the best place to, intervene and make things happen for children.

[40] **Christine Chapman:** Obviously, we have that experience as AMs sometimes, but I am curious as to why it took so long and what made the difference, because they were not looking at your powers or anything.

[41] **Mr Towler:** I worked really hard, when I was appointed commissioner, thinking through the relationship between the commissioner and local authorities, health boards and others who have responsibility for direct services to children. I did not want for us to pick up the phone to a local authority and for the person at the other end of the phone to be scared stiff of engagement: 'Oh my God, the children's commissioner's just given us a call'. So, we did a lot of work on building relationships with people. On where we are now, we have worked productively with the heads of children's services in local authorities saying 'We want you to respect the role of the children's commissioner, and we want you to respond when we pick up the phone. We don't want you to give us platitudes. We want to really get to the bottom of what the problem is so that we can work together on resolving this. This is not about the commissioner hitting you with a stick and punishing you for failure. What we want to do is seek resolution at the earliest point'.

[42] I think that we have quite a sophisticated relationship with most local authorities. So, in this case, when a call is made to both local authorities, we have pretty open dialogue with those local authorities about the nature of the problem. We do not get resistance or people playing games with us, but what tends to happen is that, if the commissioner's office takes an interest in something, there is no doubt that that escalates its resolution in the minds of those people who have responsibility for doing it. So, if the investigation and advice officer made a

call, let us say, to a social worker, and felt that they were not getting anywhere, Eleri or I would call the head of children's services and say 'Will you sort this out?' and they would say 'Yes, we will'. There is no doubt that the relationship is an effective one.

[43] On the point that you were making, Jenny, about the time taken in this particular case, we will get back to you and give you the timescale, because the timescale is really important, not just to you as committee but to the child. So, in terms of this particular case, we will give you that case note.

9.45 a.m.

[44] **Christine Chapman:** I want to move on to Aled's questions, and then we can move on to another area.

[45] **Aled Roberts:** Mae hynny wedi gweithio yn yr achos unigol rydych yn ymwybodol ohono, ond beth am yr achosion hynny lle mae cynghorau yn gwrthod setlo unrhyw anghydfod ond nad yw'r rhiant neu'r plentyn yn gwybod bod y comisiynydd plant yn gallu ymdrin â'r sefyllfa? Beth sy'n digwydd yn yr achosion hynny? A ydych wedi gwneud unrhyw waith ynglŷn â newid polisi rhwng cynghorau, ynglŷn â chael rhyw fath o brotocol ar anghydfod rhwng cynghorau er mwyn sicrhau bod diogelwch y plentyn yn cael ei ystyried mewn achosion unigol lle nad yw'r rhieni yn ymwybodol o'ch swydd chi?

Aled Roberts: That worked in that specific case that you know about, but what about those cases where councils refuse to settle a dispute but where parents and children do not know that the children's commissioner can deal with the situation? What happens in those cases? Have you done any work on changing the policy between councils, on having some sort of protocol on dispute resolution between councils in order to ensure that the child's safety is considered in individual cases where parents are not aware of your role?

[46] **Mr Towler:** On the particular question of whether we have done some work on developing protocols, no we have not, but that is a really good suggestion and we can certainly take that back and give it some thought. It is one of those systemic issues that we have identified, particularly in relation to, for example, boundary disputes, where the child falls between the two and is sometimes lost. It is helpful to have your perspective on giving that a bit of focus in terms of protocol. It is not an approach that we have thought about or developed, but we can certainly give that some thought.

[47] **Ms Thomas:** Where it becomes even more relevant is not necessarily between councils, but between different public bodies. So, the circumstances that Jenny highlighted in relation to the case that crossed local authority boundaries is one circumstance, but the other very common circumstance, which I am sure comes through in your constituency postbags as well, is the interaction between health and social services, and between social services and education. That is probably an area that we should take a look at, in terms of looking at protocols and how people work in order to resolve issues for children.

[48] **Aled Roberts:** A yw'n bosibl inni gael y ffigurau ynglŷn â nifer y plant sydd wedi mynd yn uniongyrchol drwy Meic, oherwydd y gostyngiad yn y nifer sy'n dod atoch chi?

Aled Roberts: Could we also have the figures on the number of children who have gone directly to Meic, given the reduction in the numbers that have come to you?

[49] **Christine Chapman:** Would you send that to us?

[50] **Ms Thomas:** Yes, we will get back to you on that.

[51] **Lynne Neagle:** Further to that, it would be really useful to see the Meic figures, but could we have them broken down by local authority, so that we can see where the children are making use of Meic?

[52] **Christine Chapman:** Yes, that would be useful. Would that be possible?

[53] **Mr Towler:** That is not within our gift, because we do not manage or control Meic. However, I am sure that Welsh Government colleagues and Meic would be more than happy to provide that.

[54] **Christine Chapman:** We can get that from the Welsh Government. We will write a letter. Jenny, would you like to ask anything else?

[55] **Jenny Rathbone:** Yes, very briefly. You have already mentioned that you are now using new media and that it is proving effective. We do not have time to talk about that again, but I want to know how much of the 149% increase in your media coverage for the financial year that you are reporting on is because people contact you for a quote and how much is due to your office promoting itself. How do you evaluate whether the time spent by those working in your office promoting the office was more effective than doing something else?

[56] **Mr Towler:** Eleri mentioned that every function in the office is tasked with raising awareness. You are right that there are two aspects to the media work. The first is the way in which we respond to the BBC, ITV and other major outlets coming to the commissioner's office looking for quotes on stuff. That is virtually a daily occurrence. Secondly, there are the planned things that we do as an office. So, for the Communities First tour that I mentioned earlier, we targeted local media in order to ensure that people were aware that the commissioner was coming, and were keen for any report that we produce to target the trade press or the national press. So, it is about having a balance between both of those.

[57] In relation to how the media work, they feed on each other. We use an outsourced press-cuttings service. We constantly get information in that shows where we feature in the media. In terms of evaluating awareness, that is something that we evaluate internally. So, the way in which this works in relation to placing a cost value on it is a standard professional way of looking at what the advertising value would be for that amount of coverage. It might be a bit crude, but it gives you an indication of the value of the media work.

[58] We tried to set a baseline around awareness levels, so we got Beaufort Research to look at 1,000 adults and 1,000 children and young people to see whether or not all this media work was making an impact, and to set a baseline. The work by Beaufort showed us that 29% of adults said that they knew about the Children's Commissioner for Wales. Of that 29%, 48% described the work as 'advice and support', 26% said that they thought that the role of the commissioner was to tell people who can make a difference for children, and 36% felt that the commissioner's role was to meet and listen to children and young people.

[59] The baseline figure for children and young people was 14%. Of those, 23% described it as an 'advice and support service', 29% felt that my job was about telling people who can make a difference for them, and 36% of children—as with adults—felt that it was about the commissioner listening to them.

[60] Those are the types of baselines that we are using, so by the time that my term comes to an end, we will get Beaufort to do a similar piece of work to see whether any of this media work is making a difference.

[61] **Ms Thomas:** It is a joint responsibility, and we are very clear that we need to be

working with all organisations to find opportunities to make sure that people know about the children's commissioner and to promote children's rights. That links very clearly with the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011, and the obligations to raise awareness of the convention. Within that context, and it goes back to the discussion on casework, there is a very clear message that if children are not receiving their rights and not getting their entitlement, the place that they can go is the children's commissioner. So, it is very much about driving that as a team. I want to reassure you that we are not being complacent. We have an annual target for raising awareness for the commissioner and for the casework role. There is a target for the team this year to review materials and focus on ensuring that vulnerable children and young people know about the commissioner and how to get in touch with him, which is absolutely core to our work.

[62] The media strategy is very clear that we want the office of the children's commissioner and the children's commissioner himself to be the one place that media outlets want to come to directly to get an authoritative view and version of events for children and young people.

[63] **Jenny Rathbone:** I am sure that we can get the details of the Beaufort Research work for ourselves.

[64] **Mr Towler:** If you would like to see more detail on that, we can send you something. It is useful baseline material.

[65] **Christine Chapman:** We will note that. Julie is next, and then I want to move on.

[66] **Julie Morgan:** I have a question about the media, and it does not directly follow on from what Jenny said. There is a proposal to exempt TV and film from the smoke-free legislation. Do you feel that this has a children's angle and do you have any views on it?

[67] **Mr Towler:** I am a bit concerned about the impacts on health in work settings. My feeling is that exposing children and young people to smoke on a TV set or anywhere else is unacceptable. That is my clear view on it. I cannot believe that it is not possible for TV producers to simulate smoke if they need to; I do not see why they would need to expose children and young people to real cigarette smoke. I would not be terribly happy about the exemption.

[68] **Julie Morgan:** I am not sure that it would be allowed if children and young people were on the set, but in terms of the message that it gives—

[69] **Mr Towler:** Yes, I think that the message is fundamentally wrong. I do not think that there should be an exemption.

[70] **Simon Thomas:** Cyn imi symud at yr hyn roeddwn am ei godi, rwyf am orffen y drafodaeth rydym newydd ei chael. O ran hyrwyddo'r gwaith, pa rôl rydych yn ei gweld i Lywodraeth Cymru wneud hynny hefyd, ac a ydych yn hapus gyda'ch perthynas chi â'r Llywodraeth? Roeddech yn sôn am bartneriaethau ar lefel ranbarthol a lleol, ond beth am y bartneriaeth genedlaethol?

Simon Thomas: Before I move on to what I was going to raise, I want to finish the discussion that we have just had. In terms of promoting the work, what role do you see for the Welsh Government to also do that, and are you content with your relationship with the Government? You mentioned partnerships on a regional and local level, but what about the national partnership?

[71] **Mr Towler:** In relation to the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011, the Welsh Government has an absolute responsibility to raise awareness of the

role of the Children's Commissioner for Wales, and that runs alongside its work on raising the profile of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The mechanism for doing that in relation to the children's perception of the plan is to ensure that raising awareness of the UNCRC runs parallel with saying, in the same breath, 'And the role of the children's commissioner is such and such, this is how you can contact him, and this is what his office does'. So, our working relationship with Welsh Government is quite good, and we have been quite pleased with how Welsh Government has approached the task. We have been talking to it about materials for personal and social education through to broad promotional materials. We need that extra leverage because our budget does not allow us to do fantastic marketing things. The responsibility, from a UN committee perspective, rests firmly with Government.

[72] **Simon Thomas:** Diolch am hynny. Hoffwn droi at faterion rhyngwladol yn awr, neu o leiaf at Loegr. Bu ichi gyfeirio ynghynt at newidiadau posibl i waith y comisiynydd plant yn Lloegr ac rwy'n siŵr eich bod wedi bod yn trafod rhai o'r materion hyn gyda'r adran yn Lloegr. Sylwais fod y Gweinidog a oedd yn gyfrifol, Sarah Teather, wedi gadael y Llywodraeth yn yr ad-drefnu diweddaraf. Mae hwn yn faes dyrys. Mae cymhlethdod ynghylch pa faterion sydd wedi ac sydd heb eu datganoli ac ynghylch pwy sy'n gyfrifol am beth a phwy sydd i fod i arwain. Er enghraifft, a yw'r hawl yn cael ei throsglwyddo i chi i weithredu ar faterion sydd heb eu datganoli i Gymru ac ati? Rydym i gyd yn ymwybodol o'r materion hynny, ond beth yw'r sefyllfa erbyn hyn? Pa drafodaethau sydd wedi bod a beth yw'r goblygiadau posibl i'ch gwaith chi?

Simon Thomas: Thank you for that. I would like to turn to international issues now, or at least to England. You referred earlier to the possible changes to the role of the children's commissioner in England, and I am sure that you will have been discussing some of these issues with the department in England. I noticed that the Minister responsible for this, Sarah Teather, had left the Government in the latest reshuffle. This is a complex area. There is some confusion about which matters are and are not devolved, about who is responsible for what and who should take the lead. For example, is the right transferred to you to act on issues that are not devolved to Wales and so on? We are all aware of those issues, but what is the state of play by now? What discussions have taken place, and what are the possible implications for your work?

[73] **Mr Towler:** Thank you for the question. It is complex. I will first deal with Wales before we get to the international matter of England. [*Laughter.*] You will be aware that, in the First Minister's legislative statement, the children and young people's Bill was omitted. That Bill had within it the Welsh Government's commitment to expand the role of the Children's Commissioner for Wales. Officials tell me that that is a postponement and not a doing away with it, but the timing of that is not helpful in relation to what is happening in England. Now we have a new Minister in England who is taking forward the reform of the Children's Commissioner for England. There has been a concern for a while that the powers and remit of the Children's Commissioner for England were not sufficient to meet the obligations towards children in England. Fellow commissioners in the UK and I would welcome a strengthened Children's Commissioner for England. That would be excellent.

[74] Within the proposals that were raised was the issue of delegated authority as a mechanism, to try to do what Dunford recommended when he reviewed the function of the England commissioner's office and looked at its relationship with those of us in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. The delegated authority adds a level of complexity to the issue of devolved and non-devolved matters, which in my own mind would set a new England commissioner as the UK commissioner who would delegate responsibility. So, to give you a practical example, youth justice is a non-devolved matter, so if I wanted to conduct a review of youth justice, I would have to seek permission from the England commissioner to conduct that review. He or she would delegate authority to me and I would conduct the review and give him or her the report with the recommendations that I had drafted, and then he or she would decide whether it saw the light of day. If it did see the light of day, it would not be

counted as my report, but as the England commissioner's report, and he would hold Welsh Government to account for those elements within it. So, suddenly, we have a hierarchy of commissioners, which threatens the independence of the Children's Commissioner for Wales. Although the delegated authority mechanism came from the right place, that of trying to think through how to do something practical to resolve this issue so that all children and young people normally resident in Wales could find a route to the commissioner, it has actually added a layer of complexity.

[75] **Simon Thomas:** The delegated idea seems to have originated from the idea of dealing with casework rather than dealing with policy work. Would your view still be that you need to separate the two and that the policy work needs very much to lie with yourself?

10.00 a.m.

[76] **Mr Towler:** Absolutely, yes, we would need to separate them. To be honest, on the casework, again using the youth justice example because it is a useful one, my own investigation and advice team already runs surgeries in young offender institutions, so we go into YOIs and pick up casework. However, the casework we pick up is about education and being homeless upon release, and I interpret those as matters that are within the competence of Welsh Government and therefore within my remit, so we will deal with those issues. The distinction between the two is important. If I wanted to review how youth justice was working, or the status of my advocacy review with Welsh Government, I would not be able to do that and I would have to seek authority from an England commissioner. That is what I am talking about.

[77] There are three things that I think we need out of this. First, the current legislation for the Children's Commissioner for Wales is confused and needs simplifying. There is the issue of independence and accountability structures, and we talked a bit about that earlier, namely to whom I am responsible? If it were the Welsh Government, that relationship would be strange, and so it would be better if it were the National Assembly for Wales. There are also the implications of the reform of the commissioner's office for England, both for me and for children and young people in Wales. To answer your question about what the state of play is now, the four UK commissioners and officials from each Government in the UK met two weeks ago to talk about where we are at and the implications for all of us. It was pretty clear that the Children's Commissioner for Wales and officials from Welsh Government were of one mind about the implications of what was coming forward in England. I think that we put a pretty robust case together although, to be fair to officials at that point, we had absolute clarity from the Deputy Minister in Wales. I had not had an opportunity to do so, but subsequently I have met with Gwenda Thomas, and we are absolutely aligned on what it is that we need to do, so that is good.

[78] The Northern Ireland perspective on delegated authority was also interesting, because at that point officials there had looked at it and had started to talk about the funding and resource issue in relation to delegated authority. Taking the example that authority had been delegated to a Wales and a Northern Ireland commissioner, they asked whether it would come with budget and resource, and they made it absolutely clear that, if not, there was no way that they would expect the Northern Ireland commissioner to spend money on a review for the England commissioner. So, the resource issue was equally complex.

[79] Therefore, we had a frank, open and, I think, quite creative discussion. Officials from Westminster came away from that meeting to go to talk to their new Minister for children, Edward Timpson, about how he wanted to take that forward. Westminster officials took pretty robust evidence from all three other nations and got a clear message that the current proposal would not work for us.

[80] **Simon Thomas:** To be clear, you are able to discuss these matters directly with Westminster officials, and you do not have to go around, through Government talking to Government. You can do this directly.

[81] **Mr Towler:** Yes. I had met with Sarah Teather, the former Minister for Children and Families, when this was a twinkle in her eye, and I said, ‘Please do not forget that a Children’s Commissioner for Wales exists and that I will want to have dialogue with you, as a Westminster Minister’.

[82] **Lynne Neagle:** On the issue of the powers that you have in Wales, you mentioned that the Welsh Government is looking at that area, and your report raises a lot of important issues in which you are ‘requesting’, ‘calling on’ and ‘asking for’. I wish that I was completely confident that, next year, you will have had all the answers, but I am afraid that I am not. I want to ask whether you think that your role should be changed so that it is more like that of the Commissioner for Older People in Wales, given that she has legal powers of review. I was certainly very impressed by the way in which she took the dignity in care work forward, as she was really able to drill down into the issues by not letting people off the hook.

[83] **Mr Towler:** Yes, absolutely. I know that Sarah Rochira has picked up the mantle and run with it, but Ruth Marks started that work, and the level of accountability and the messaging around that is really important. I have legal powers in relation to review, of course. In the review that we did of independent professional advocacy—and maybe we will come on to that later—of the status of those recommendations from the Children’s Commissioner for Wales, it absolutely required a response from Welsh Government and local authorities, which are the two duty bearers identified in that review.

[84] As a point of interest, I was not entirely happy with the response that I got from Welsh Government. I have sought further discussions with Gwenda Thomas, so we will get to that point, and it is exactly the same with local authorities. Half the local authorities gave me a response that I was not happy with, and I will require them to respond appropriately to me. So, I have those powers, which are virtually the same. The issue is around how we present that. I do have legal powers of review, and people have to respond if I identify them as they duty bearer. In the case of the advocacy review, it was Welsh Government and local government.

[85] **Lynne Neagle:** With the dignity in care review, though, when Ruth Marks went back to local government and the Welsh Government, that was all published on the website. She just kept going back until she got a satisfactory response. Are you able to do that? Are you also able to publish that information?

[86] **Mr Towler:** The answer to both those questions is ‘yes’. At the moment, we are in the middle of going back to 11 local authorities and to the Welsh Government. So, at the point at which those responses come in and we are satisfied, we will publish where we are at. We are right in the middle of the process at the moment and I am just taking the view that it would be unfair to publish that right now. Rest assured that nobody is left off the hook in making sure that we get advocacy back on track.

[87] **Ms Thomas:** We have given a commitment that, on the anniversary, a bit like the dignity in care example, we will be expecting a progress report from Welsh Government and local authorities in relation to those recommendations. It is absolutely the same process and we use those powers in a very similar and complementary way.

[88] **Aled Roberts:** Rwyf am fynd yn ôl at yr adroddiad ei hun. Mae’r adroddiad blynyddol yn datgan eich bod yn croesawu’r **Aled Roberts:** I want to return to the report itself. The annual report states that you welcome the rationalisation agenda in this

agenda resymoli yn y maes. Fodd bynnag, ar hyn o bryd, mae'r partneriaethau plant a phobl ifanc a'r cynlluniau penodol lleol yn dod i ben. A ydych wedi ymgymryd ag unrhyw waith i weld beth fydd effaith hyn ar lawr gwlad?

area. However, at present, the children and young people's partnerships and the local specific plans are coming to an end. Have you undertaken any work to see what the impact of that is at grass-roots level?

[89] **Mr Towler:** We certainly did welcome the idea of bringing all the partnership activity that was happening at local authority level into a simplified single integrated process. Our concern is about making sure that the focus on children and young people is maintained. The point that you make, particularly on children and young people's partnerships, is an important one. We have looked at issues in relation to the participation of children and young people, and the implication for youth fora. The other element of this is the way in which Ministers sign off the single integrated plans. My interpretation of this, going back to the rights Measure, is that the Minister would have to have due regard to how those single integrated plans have taken on board the rights of the child. So, the ultimate benchmark for this is making sure that the focus and the progress that children and young people's partnerships have made, which has been excellent in some areas, is not lost as a result of bringing them into a single plan. We are working carefully and clearly, keeping a close eye on things. I think that there is a huge job for the leadership on this, and I want to see demonstrable commitment to children and young people's issues from chief executives and others, including those on local service boards. I do not want that focus to be diluted.

[90] **Julie Morgan:** On the policy issues, you say that the Welsh Government should deliver to end the smacking of children. What specifically do you think that it should do?

[91] **Mr Towler:** Welsh Government's position has been clear for some time, and I think that some consistency is required from it on the issue of smacking. Introducing legislation that would provide equal protection for children and adults is probably the clearest demonstration that Welsh Government could make of its commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. There are no other members of our community who can be hit without recourse to any action. From my point of view, that is really important. On consistency in the Welsh Government, it is inherent and explicit in the national service framework—perhaps we can come back to the NSF and where that is—and there is the parenting action plan of 2005 and the 'Tackling Domestic Abuse' strategy from 2005. So what I am calling for is some consistency from the Welsh Government and some strength on and commitment to the issue. Clearly, I welcome the debate that you had in the National Assembly and the outcome of that debate, which clearly indicated all-party support for this. There is a legislative programme in place and the opportunities exist, so I would like to see the Welsh Government use them.

[92] **Jenny Rathbone:** I want to move on now to your idea of local authorities providing universal parenting support services. Given the financial pressures on national and local authorities, this is the age-old debate about universal versus targeted services. Obviously, there are quite a lot of concerns about parenting, but can you say why you think that providing a universal parenting support service would reach the people who really need those services?

[93] **Mr Towler:** Parenting is one of the hardest jobs I have ever done in my life. It is a job I continue to do even though my youngest is now 18—

[94] **Simon Thomas:** Oh, yes. [*Laughter.*]

[95] **Mr Towler:** There is no release from it. [*Laughter.*] My view on parents being able to access universal support when they need it is that it should not be based on a geographical determination or, indeed, an issue to do with poverty levels, because we all reach our wits'

end as parents at some point. It is about how you access the services. This is linked to the previous question about smacking. If we had legislation in relation to equal protection, that ought to set the commitment about how parents can get support to positively parent their children. I accept completely the issue about universal and targeted services. Clearly, there are areas of greatest need where we probably need to target resource. However, we surely do not want to be in a position where parents at their wits' end do not know where they can go to get some decent advice or even some peer support from other parents on what it is like to be a parent and to cope with these issues, perhaps for the first time, or perhaps because you are at your wits' end or perhaps, to pick up the point Angela made about getting in touch, because banging your head against a brick wall because you cannot cope is better than banging your child's head—but you have to get a response. Therefore, we must not lose sight of the universal issue for all parents, because it is a tough job.

[96] However, with regard to targeted support, Flying Start, Families First and integrated family support teams, as I have seen first-hand, are doing some fantastic work in relation to parenting. However, I have also seen—and this could pick up on some of the issues about universal services—some brilliant work in primary schools, taking a holistic approach to creating a school environment that is safe, healthy and happy in relation to increasing educational attainment. They take a family focus, so they invite mums and dads to come into schools and seek support from each other, and the schools are signposting people to where they can get other support. There is more than one way to make universal support available, and it is about agencies working together to make it happen. We need a clear parenting support programme. I know that the Deputy Minister is as keen as anyone in supporting this. The social services Bill might help us with some aspects of that, but I do not think that it is impossible to ensure that parents get the message that they are not alone.

[97] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay, but in relation to raising the standards of parenting, a simple example is having a suitable bedtime for a very young child. Some of the problems that teachers cope with in primary school—and not only in primary school—arise from children simply not going to bed at the right time.

[98] **Mr Towler:** Yes, they can arise from not going to bed at the right time or not having a meal at the right time. Parents need to understand that they need to say 'no' and set a boundary and they need to know how to deal with it when their child kicks off. Those are very clear parenting responsibilities. The parenting responsibility in itself is a really interesting one. This issue arises not just through casework but through my discussions with people.

10.15 a.m.

[99] Parents cannot expect the state to carry the parenting responsibility for them; they have to step up to the mark. It is difficult, and there are times when the difficulties seem to outweigh the joys. I am sure that that is not the case, but you have to accept your responsibility, and boundary-setting is really important. Young people who are parents, some of whom have come through our care system, have said to me that they do not know how to parent because they were never parented themselves. So, they do not have role models that they remember. In those situations, we are under an obligation to give them the basics. These include what bedtime looks like, how to see through a tantrum, and the fact that children respond to routine, meaning that very clear routines are needed during the course of the day, and that they need to be maintained until they eventually get there. We cannot take it for granted that every parent will know those kinds of things. Some will be patronised by this, but there will be a lot who will not be.

[100] **Jenny Rathbone:** Do you see this universal parenting service being delivered in our schools or in some other environment?

[101] **Mr Towler:** Schools, including nurseries, represent a really good opportunity. There are two points in a community that everyone knows about: the GP surgery and the school.

[102] **Christine Chapman:** We will have a quick question from Angela now before we move on.

[103] **Angela Burns:** This is a slight diversion, and parenting might be a good place for it. As parents, you are always on the other end of information from the school—it is a case of ‘do this, do that, and then do the other’. However, speaking for a number of parents who have raised this issue, I am slightly concerned about a pilot project that is asking some primary school children to take part in a psychological assessment that is being run on a computer. For example, I have had a letter seeking my permission for my child to be assessed by a computer programme that will ask them how they feel about themselves, their home and all these kinds of things. I have tried exceptionally hard, on behalf of a number of parents on the parent teacher association, to find out what the name of this programme is and who is running it. It seems to be coming from Government, but I cannot find anything out from the Government. You made a comment earlier that the state should not get involved in parenting. Could you give me your view on whether it is appropriate to conduct such intrusive questioning of young children through a computer programme? It has basically been indicated to the parents who have raised concerns about this programme, which I believe is running in about 20 schools, that they have something to hide if they are not keen on their children taking part. This is odd, but I sat here listening to Jenny talk about parenting, parental responsibility and taking charge, and I thought that, when you try to take charge and tell the state that you are not comfortable with something—

[104] **Mr Towler:** The rules change.

[105] **Angela Burns:** Yes, the rules change. Do you know about this programme? I would like to know about it, but I cannot find out about it anywhere.

[106] **Mr Towler:** I do not know about it, and neither does my team. Could you send us what information you have? We will certainly take a look at it.

[107] **Angela Burns:** Yes. Could you give us your general view about the line between the state and the parent?

[108] **Mr Towler:** Yes. The City and County of Swansea is doing a lot of work on restorative practice in schools. I was recently at Townhill Community Primary School, which, along with Blaenymaes Primary School, is doing some brilliant work on this. At the beginning of every single day, they have a circle group where children talk about whether they are feeling happy or sad and about what is going on. The conversation is moderated by a teacher, and the parents all know that it is happening. Everyone is very comfortable, and this is all dealt with—in a really professional, secure and trusted way—between a trusted professional, a child and the family. In my view, you do not get trusted relationships like that by going through an online system. So, I would be quite keen to take a look at what you have described.

[109] **Christine Chapman:** Maybe we could find out about that and share the information with the committee.

[110] **Mr Towler:** Please do. Maybe we could also take a look at it—pick it up as a piece of casework. [*Laughter.*] It would be the first time that we have had a direct referral from the Children and Young People Committee. That would be excellent.

[111] **Simon Thomas:** Hoffwn barhau â'r drafodaeth am ysgolion, ac yn benodol am faterion sy'n ymwneud â chyrhaeddiad plant. Mae'n rhaid eich bod yn pryderu bod y bwlch rhwng cyrhaeddiad plant mwyaf difreintiedig Cymru a chyrhaeddiad y plant mwyaf breintiedig yr un mor fawr ag erioed ac, os rhywbeth, yn tyfu. Yn yr adroddiad blynyddol y llynedd, cyfeiriasoch at y cynllun gweithredu 20 pwynt a oedd gan y Gweinidog, sy'n gynllun sy'n dal yn weithredol, hyd y gwn i. Cyfeiriasoch yn yr adroddiad eleni at ganlyniadau PISA a'r ffaith ein bod yn dal i lusgo'n traed ar y mater hwnnw. O edrych ar y gwaith mae'r Llywodraeth wedi ei wneud, gan gynnwys y cynllun ymateb i PISA, hyfforddiant i athrawon ac ati, a ydych yn hyderus bod y Gweinidog yn delifro ar y mater hwn? Pa gamau sydd eu hangen yn y dyfodol agos i wneud yn siŵr bod ein plant mwyaf amddifad yn cael cyfle teg i wella eu haddysg?

Simon Thomas: I would like to continue with the discussion on schools, and issues relating to children's attainment in particular. You must be concerned that the gap between the attainment of the most underprivileged children in Wales and the attainment of the most privileged children is as large as ever and, if anything, is growing. In last year's annual report, you made reference to the Minister's 20 point action plan, which is still in force, as far as I know. You refer in this year's report to the PISA results and the fact that we are still dragging our feet on that issue. Looking at the work that the Government has done, the response scheme for PISA, teacher training and so on, are you confident that the Minister is delivering on this matter? What steps do you think are needed in the near future to ensure that the most deprived children have a fair chance to improve their education?

[112] **Mr Towler:** I welcome the Minister's focus. He has given some rigour. We certainly know that he is there. We hear about him every day. We know his commitment. I am also pleased in relation to the issue around PISA generating a response in terms of attainment levels, that he has not lost focus on how you create good learning environments in school. That is really important. We do not see pupil voice, for example, as an add on, but as something that is intrinsic to creating an environment in school within which attainment and attendance levels can be improved—you cannot improve attainment unless you get children into school in the first place—so I am pleased that the Minister has done that.

[113] I mentioned some of the restorative work that I have seen in some parts of Wales, and I think that that creates that kind of positive learning environment. I have heard from teachers directly about how that created an environment in which children feel safe; when you are safe, everything is possible.

[114] One area that I think is worth looking at is the new standards for teachers. I met the General Teaching Council for Wales yesterday, which is meeting the Minister in the next week or two to talk about how teachers are supported and trained, and to start thinking through what that teaching module needs to look like, not just in terms of the qualification, but ongoing professional development. I welcome that focus. So, in terms of where we are going, and how we are getting there, I am pleased with the Welsh Minister's commitment.

[115] We have taken a particular line within the commissioner's office about our relationship with schools, and we have talked before about our ambassador school model. We will try to massively increase up-take this year, with some new materials, a new website and new staff, which will try to create that link between rights-based practice within school and how that can drive improved attainment and attendance levels. So, I welcome the thrust. I am glad that the Minister is giving this the effort that he has. I am really pleased to see that he is not rejecting that nurturing part of school as a route to getting the attainment levels that we would like to see.

[116] **Simon Thomas:** Would it be fair to say that it is all a work in progress?

[117] **Mr Towler:** It is very much a work in progress. It is a case of 10 out of 10 for effort at the beginning. We have to keep it going.

[118] **Simon Thomas:** What about the accountability of all of this, as developments are happening now with new regional consortia being set up? They are looking at plans around dependence, relating to bands 4 and 5 schools—we certainly want to see schools move out of those bands; whether you want banding or not, you want to see them move out of those bands. We want to see attendance picked up and the behaviour of pupils improve. The support is increasingly coming from more nebulous parts of the education system; it is not so directly to the local authority. It is a little early, possibly, but have you picked up any sense of how this might play out in terms of focusing on attainment in the most deprived communities.

[119] **Mr Towler:** I have picked up on the impact of banding on children and young people.

[120] **Simon Thomas:** They know about it.

[121] **Mr Towler:** Yes, they certainly know about it. One of the team was saying yesterday that, when we were on the maes at the Eisteddfod, a young person came up and asked why their school was in band 5, when it was a brilliant school—‘I love it to bits. It is the best place I have ever been to, and I am so proud of it.’ So, there is an issue around children and young people’s understanding of the banding system and what it means. I have certainly had conversations where I would not want children and young people to think that they come from a poor area with a bad school, when that is not true. It almost knocks their self-esteem if people are not working with children and young people to understand the banding system. They are drawing their own conclusions. They are saying, ‘That’s the best school over there but I happen to be in this school over here, so I can’t be as good as them.’ It is a very simplistic thing, but children and young people are picking that up. So, we need to think through our message and how we address that issue. We certainly would not want any child to have their self-esteem dented because they feel that they come from a dysfunctional area.

[122] **Simon Thomas:** To give you an example, a leaflet was produced by the Welsh Government explaining what banding was. That leaflet was designed for parents more than for children. Did you have any input into how that might be pitched at children?

[123] **Mr Towler:** No. We had no—

[124] **Simon Thomas:** Would you be prepared to do something like that?

[125] **Mr Towler:** Yes, of course. We spend quite a lot of time—

[126] **Simon Thomas:** That is not saying that you have to support banding.

[127] **Mr Towler:** We spend a lot of time advising or helping Government departments to think through how they can make information available to children and young people, by including, for example, different formats and bringing groups of children and young people together to discuss certain areas with them. To be fair to officials and civil servants in the Welsh Government, that is pretty new territory for them. So, thinking that through and working out what it is they can do, and what is realistic to achieve, is a huge learning curve. However, the commissioner’s office is more than happy to provide advice and assistance.

[128] **Simon Thomas:** Hoffwn droi at **Simon Thomas:** I want to turn to ddiogelu plant. Fy mhryder penodol i yw’r safeguarding children. My specific concern is ffaith nad yw materion diogelu plant wedi’u that safeguarding children issues have still

datrys o hyd mewn sawl man yng Nghymru. Er enghraifft, os edrychwn ni ar sir Benfro, fe welwn fod Gweinidogion yn parhau i ddweud eu bod yn anfodlon gyda'r cynnydd a wnaed. Rydym hefyd newydd glywed yr wythnos hon fod rhywun yn ymddiswyddo ac efallai fod diffyg arweiniad. Beth yw eich prif bryderon ynglŷn â diogelu plant ar hyn o bryd, yn arbennig ynglŷn â'r diffyg gwybodaeth i rieni, disgyblion a phobl ifanc ynghylch lle mae'r cyfrifoldeb yn gorwedd a'r diffyg gwybodaeth ynglŷn â sut i wella'r drefn?

not been solved in many places in Wales. for example, if we look at Pembrokeshire, we will see that Ministers are still saying that they are not content with the progress that has been made. We have also just heard this week that someone has resigned and that there is perhaps a lack of leadership. What are your main concerns in respect of safeguarding children at the moment, especially in respect of the lack of information for parents, pupils and young people about where the responsibility lies and the lack of information about how to improve the situation?

[129] **Mr Towler:** In terms of the Pembrokeshire example and also in relation to safeguarding children in education more broadly, the absolute point that has to be made is that safeguarding in education is everyone's task. So, you would not want a position where schools or local authorities lose sight of their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding children; it is a primary part of their functions. I am always pleased when I hear a director of education saying that the most important thing is keeping children safe and that they will make sure that that happens. That is absolutely the right approach.

[130] There are two things at play here. One is about professional misconduct and allegations of that and how we deal with it, and the other is about guidance in relation to pupil complaints. This week we have seen the publishing of the long overdue guidance on pupil complaints, which is great. There was a bit of pressure from me and my team about making sure that that came out. That guidance is significant and important in that it picks up your point about information and knowledge. It is understandable why some teachers do not know what some procedures are. So, very often, our casework on safeguarding in education is something like, 'This is the set procedure that you must work to. We expect you to make a referral to an independent investigator for this issue. You should not be keeping this issue to yourself as a headteacher or a governing body.' So, we tell them that that is what they should do and they say, 'That's great, thanks for that; we'll do that.' So, if that is the set procedure, why are they not doing that?

[131] **Simon Thomas:** Why is it not automatic?

[132] **Mr Towler:** Why is it not just happening? Why is the safety net being used for something like that? That should not be the position. So, the issue is about how they do that.

[133] What the Pembrokeshire case and the leadership issue there illustrate to me is that the leadership and the responsibility in relation to safeguarding in education rest with the director of education and certainly with the chief executive and the leader of the council. That is where the lines of accountability are and we need to be absolutely clear about that.

[134] **Simon Thomas:** Are councillors generally up to speed with these issues?

[135] **Mr Towler:** The Deputy Minister said clearly last year or the year before that they need to understand their corporate parenting responsibilities. We have a whole raft of new councillors now, and I know from discussions I have had with chief executives that they have heard that point and they are making that clear, but there will be some new councillors who will be learning and getting their heads around that. That is fine; as long as it is on their agenda, then it is good.

10.30 a.m.

[136] **Christine Chapman:** What about governors? I do not know how many of them would be councillors, but there is a huge responsibility there and they are quite often at the sharp end with regard to seeing this practice.

[137] **Mr Towler:** Yes, it is massive. You are right to raise the issue about governors, but it is also about the leadership demonstrated by headteachers. Very often, governing bodies will look to the headteacher for advice. They might not always think about going to the local authority. The headteacher, unsurprisingly, is powerful within the school environment. So, there is something about the role and the leadership demonstrated by the headteacher. I am sure that you will have met governors—as I have—in your constituencies who might have some understanding of the responsibility but would expect some leadership to be demonstrated elsewhere. I suppose that it is like parenting responsibility; governors have a responsibility towards their children. As to whether they would all understand that, one hopes that that would be the case, but my direct experience suggests that some do not. They will be coming in for other reasons, such as to help with the finance of the school or for another reason. However, that level of awareness is probably not as satisfactory as it needs to be.

[138] **Ms Thomas:** Some of the concerns that come through in casework relate to governors who may have volunteered to be a school governor for very genuine reasons who then find themselves in very complex situations—where we are talking about professional misconduct—in terms of possibly close relationships that they have with teachers or headteachers. Over the last year, that has certainly been an area in which we have had to intervene. The training and the support needs for governors in relation to safeguarding are an area that we need to focus on.

[139] **Mr Towler:** It goes back to Lynne's point about the legal powers of the children's commissioner. Peter Clarke's Clywch inquiry used those legal powers. Some of the things that have been happening in relation to the joint inspection reports, pupil referral units, and the things that have been going on in Pembrokeshire make you wonder whether all of the recommendations in the Clywch inquiry have been implemented.

[140] **Simon Thomas:** I have one final question. We have talked about the school setting and safeguarding children, but what about children who are educated at home? As you know, a consultation is being conducted by the Welsh Government. This has been put in the context of standards and safeguarding children. I think that it goes to the heart of an earlier discussion about parenting responsibilities and Government responsibilities, where the two meet and where the two sometimes conflict. At this stage, do you have any involvement in this consultation? Can you give a first take on it? As it is a consultation and, therefore, we assume that action will follow, is this an issue that you will look at in the next year of your work?

[141] **Mr Towler:** We will certainly engage, as you would expect us to do, in relation to home-educated children. It is an issue that I have been quite interested in. My first exposure to this issue as the children's commissioner came when I visited a youth forum and talked to the young people on that forum who were educated at home. They described the route by which they got there, which was the most circuitous thing ever. We picked up a piece of casework, which is in the report, regarding a school that does not have school-based counselling services because it is a privately funded school. That raised issues for us in terms of home-educated children. For example, how would those children access the counselling service that children in schools can access confidentially and in a supportive environment? So, there are a number of issues relating to home-educated children in terms of the support framework, the socialising opportunities and all of the other things that we are concerned about.

[142] **Ms Thomas:** It is certainly an area that the team has looked at over the last year, and we will be drawing on that work in terms of having met groups of home-educated pupils and their parents, but also in terms of looking at it from the safeguarding and regulation angles. So, we have done some work over the last year, and that will inform our response, which we would be happy to share with you.

[143] **Aled Roberts:** To go back to the safeguarding and child protection issue, have you undertaken any assessments of how many of the senior councillors in local authorities have an interest in either the corporate parenting panels or child protection? One of the issues may be that there is an assumption that as soon as you become a senior councillor within an authority that is not something that should— That was my experience when I became leader of a local authority in 2004. I had been on the corporate parenting panel, and there was an assumption that I was much too busy once I became leader to remain involved with that.

[144] **Mr Towler:** How did you feel about that?

[145] **Aled Roberts:** I stayed on.

[146] **Ms Thomas:** We have not particularly looked at it in relation to safeguarding, but I take the point, and I think that it is something that we should follow through. We looked at it in the review of advocacy services. So, although we did not necessarily look at child protection and safeguarding, we took evidence from all 22 local authorities in undertaking the review. We went into eight authorities so that we could have more in-depth opportunities for fieldwork, which included conversations with the lead councillor or the lead member. Their level of knowledge or awareness of advocacy services, which we would see as one of the components of child protection and safeguarding, was very varied. There are recommendations in the 'Missing Voices' report on the need for awareness raising and regular opportunities to inform corporate parents and councillors about advocacy services.

[147] **Christine Chapman:** We have just over 20 minutes left, and we still have quite a lot of ground to cover, so I ask Members and witnesses to be as concise as possible so that we can cover some of these really important areas.

[148] **Lynne Neagle:** I wish to raise four issues, so, if it is okay, I will raise them all in one go because of the time. You raised some serious issues in the report about child and adolescent mental health services. You said that you were going to robustly scrutinise the progress of CAMHS in light of the new legislation in the coming year. Can you say a little more about how you intend to proactively do that?

[149] You raised major concerns about the new arrangements for safeguarding and child protection with regard to the merging of the adults and children panels. I raised this in a technical briefing on the Bill with officials in the Health and Social Care Committee, and the official said that this was not an issue that emerged as a concern any more through the consultation. Therefore, why are you specifically worried that this change will be bad for children?

[150] On healthcare, you expressed further concerns about the national service framework. It would be useful if you could share the update from the Welsh Government on the current status with the committee. You also said that you do not think that the new continuing healthcare guidance, which we discussed last year, will meet expectations. I would be interested to know why that is the case.

[151] Finally, on the radio this morning you raised the very important issue of youth work, which I am sure we would all agree is important. However, I know from my constituency that one of the threats to youth work is changes to the Communities First programme. To what

extent are you monitoring the impact of those changes on the employment of local youth workers?

[152] **Mr Towler:** Those were really concise questions, so I will have a go at giving concise answers. On CAMHS, I have raised concerns in my annual report every year about CAMHS, as did Peter Clarke. We have debated it almost ad nauseum among ourselves. I welcome the Government's focus. I think that there is a clear view about needing a rights-based approach to this. It is age-blind, so we had concerns that not having a focus on children and young people might not effectively address the barriers to accessing services that we have debated here and elsewhere.

[153] I submitted a pretty strong response to the Government consultation. At that point, officials in the Welsh Government worked incredibly hard to understand what our concerns were. We continue to have discussions with officials about making sure that the barriers for children and young people to accessing services can be overcome as they move things forward within the delivery action group, or the DAG, as they call it; it took me a while to get that one, but I have got it now. So, we are getting some good messages.

[154] In addition to the annual report content, there was no change to the Mental Health (Secondary Mental Health Services) (Wales) Order 2012, which means that only children and young people in receipt of secondary mental health services will be eligible for a care and treatment plan. That adds weight to my concern about children and young people facing the barriers. So, we are working it through with officials and we are pleased with the discussions that have taken place, but we are not going to let our foot off the gas when it comes to ensuring that children and young people can access these services, because we pick up too many examples where children and young people are not accessing the service appropriately. Sorry, that was only one example.

[155] On safeguarding, I have had a number of conversations with Gwenda Thomas and her officials on the social services Bill and the proposal to establish a safeguarding board for adults and children. I very much welcome the idea of an independent board, because of the accountability issues in relation to safeguarding and child protection. It is always telling for me that, when a serious case review is published, we say that we will learn the lessons; sometimes, I wonder whether we do. However, a board that had some accountability could force those lessons to be heard and understood across the whole of Wales, so I am pleased about that.

[156] You are right to pick up that I raised, along with others, at the beginning of the consultation the issue about a people-led board rather than something that focused on the progress that we have made on child protection. I have been interested to note that people in the adult world view progress on child protection as a threat to the adult agenda and those of us in the child's world tend to see it the other way around. So, we both have a level of anxiety. There is no doubt that there will be challenges for a national board and the new local safeguarding children's board arrangements. I am still concerned to ensure that progress on safeguarding children and young people in child protection is not in any way diminished by a structure that has responsibilities for children and adults. We have debated that, and we have had that discussion with Ministers and officials, who feel very strongly that they have heard what we have said, but say clearly that they will not lose focus on how these bodies are structured. I have to take their word that they mean that. However, we will continue to monitor and scrutinise.

[157] When the national safeguarding children fora stood down—and they did a lot of development thinking on the consultation, of which I was part—and in the interregnum between their work and the work of the new national board, the Deputy Minister made a point of saying that there would be an interim arrangement on a national level. There is no sign of

that and I am slightly concerned that we do not lose momentum on a national level in Wales, while LSCBs in local authorities are picking up the rationalisation agenda and rightly talking to each other about how they can work on a regional basis. It seems to me that LSCBs are doing their bit, but that we have a bit of an impasse in terms of the national level while we wait for the Bill to progress.

[158] I would be delighted to share an answer on where the NSF is, if we get one. I have said before in this committee that, if we had managed to implement the NSF, we would not be discussing half the things that we discuss. This is not a flippant comment, but I no longer understand what the status of the NSF is and I am absolutely convinced that practitioners out there have no idea—when we talk about the NSF, I do not know whether it means anything to them anymore. So it is a serious question: what is its status and will it be implemented? I would certainly share any response that we get from Welsh Government with you as a committee and anything that we can do to get good answers about the NSF and its status. The other week, I talked to Sir Al Aynsley-Green, who used to be the children’s commissioner in England. He was giving a big speech in Glasgow on children’s healthcare. He asked me where the NSF was in Wales because he could not find it. That just about sums it up. We need those answers.

10.45 a.m.

[159] On youth work, I was pleased this morning that the BBC—and hopefully ITV will pick this up too—gave air time, given what is going on with the April Jones case, to my call on youth work and youth services. It is interesting that you should pick up the Communities First point, because on the tour I went on around Communities First areas, the value that young people placed on youth work was astronomical. They see it as being life-saving. So we need to protect what resource we have on youth service and youth work. This is not some kind of nice add-on; this provides incredible value and return for young people. My concern is that youth work and youth services are seen pretty much as a soft target in budget decisions that are going on at the moment. When I start to think through why that is happening, I think that it is because, at a national level, we do not have an up-to-date, coherent youth service strategy that is rights based and complementary to all of the other things that the Welsh Government are taking forward. We had ‘Extending Entitlement’, a youth service strategy and the four or five pillars of youth work, but we do not have anything that sets out a strategy and a vision for youth work and youth services that is clear about what the statutory responsibilities of local authorities are—I do not just mean this in terms of clubs and all the rest of it, but youth fora and a statutory responsibility in relation to young people’s voices. I am hearing from young people who are saying, ‘Our youth forum doesn’t exist anymore’, and I am hearing from people that youth clubs are closing down. This is unacceptable from my perspective. Clearly, people will have to take budget cuts, but we cannot see youth services and youth work as a budget that can be plundered because we do not value it. The fact that we do not have a national youth service strategy that is driving this work makes it a soft target. However, this is a statutory responsibility.

[160] **Julie Morgan:** What about ‘Lost in Care’ and the recommendations from your reports on issues about education and others? What progress is being made?

[161] **Ms Thomas:** ‘Lost after Care’ was our report into the circumstances for young people as they transition from care to independence. One of the team’s reasons and rationales for doing the report was very much going back to last year being the tenth anniversary of the children’s commissioner’s office and wanting to put a strong focus on looked-after children and the experiences of children and young people. Some of the key things that emerged out of ‘Lost after Care’ were inconsistencies in services, the fact that children and young people who are in our care system are safer than they ever have been but that some of the outcomes in relation to looked-after children are still varied. Some key messages from young people as

they were looking to transition into independence went back to the comments that have been made already around the need for a long-standing corporate parenting role by the authorities that provide care that does not finish at the age of 16, and that looks at extending that. We have all joked about parenting never stopping, but that was a strong message from young people: the fear that they felt when we collectively started talking about leaving care rather than transitioning into independence. They were saying clearly, 'That corporate parenting role doesn't cease once we move in to our flat. We need to be able to know who to go to and how to take forward any concerns that we've got when we might be on our own'.

[162] 'Lost after Care' led to the next piece of work that we did, and resulted in the publication of 'Missing Voices', which focused on advocacy for looked-after children, children in need and disabled children. The overwhelming evidence that young people gave us in both of those reports was that young people and people working with children and young people did not know what advocacy was or how to access it, but, when they did have access to it, the results were phenomenal, in terms of the outcomes, decisions or being able to have discussions in which perhaps they disagreed with their parent or their social worker about the outcome, but, at least, through the process, they felt listened to and understood why decisions were being made about them.

[163] **Aled Roberts:** Rydych wedi crybwyll yr adroddiad 'Lleisiau Coll' ac mae rhyw chwe mis ers iddo gael ei gyhoeddi. Pa fath o gynnydd sydd wedi bod wrth weithredu'r argymhellion yn yr adroddiad? **Aled Roberts:** You have talked about the 'Missing Voices' report, which was published some six months ago. What progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of that report?

[164] **Ms Thomas:** As Keith said earlier, we have asked for a response from the Welsh Government and the local authorities. We are following up on those responses currently. We have had strong, confident responses from 11 local authorities that really illustrate their commitment to taking forward those recommendations. In particular, some of the recommendations for local authorities are very practical. So, it is very much about raising awareness among professionals about advocacy and a real commitment by authorities to do so. We are certainly having discussions with the Welsh Government. We did so last week with the Deputy Minister around how the Welsh Government is taking forward the recommendations in relation to inspection, regulation and ensuring the consistency of advocacy services and access to advocacy for children and young people.

[165] If I could make one final point, one of the strongest messages that we were not anticipating that came out of 'Missing Voices' is that our advocacy services, in the main, are aimed and targeted at young people and not necessarily focused on children. So, for me, in taking forward the recommendations, there is a real commitment by our office to say, 'Let us really ensure that advocacy services include children and think about how children can access those advocacy services'.

[166] **Aled Roberts:** Faint o amser y byddwch yn ei roi i'r 11 o gynghorau nad ydych yn fodlon â'u hymateb? **Aled Roberts:** How much time will you give to the 11 councils with whose responses you are not satisfied?

[167] **Ms Thomas:** The deadline to have the remaining 11 results back in was Friday. I understand from the office that we have had seven. As we speak, the team are on the phone to those authorities, expecting those three final responses. We will then be scrutinising those 11 to ensure that they are to the standard that we would expect. If they are not to that standard, that is when the commissioner will be having direct dialogues with those authorities. So, we have given the 22 authorities the chance to respond and we felt that 11 had acceptable responses. We have told those 11 that, in a year's time, we will expect a progress report against the recommendations that they have told us they will be responding to. We are

currently analysing the second group of 11 that just came in towards the end of last week, with a follow-up on three.

[168] **Mr Towler:** This picks up what Lynne was saying earlier in relation to the powers used to conduct the ‘Missing Voices’ review. If, for instance, those three authorities blanked us, I can require them to come to meet me. So, in terms of using the powers, that is what we will do. I would hope that it would never get to that point. The other point that is worth raising is that I met the Deputy Minister last week to discuss the recommendations that I have made for the Welsh Government and the fact that the whole thrust of the review was that this has gone off track, that we have lost our way, and commissioning guidance. What we have agreed with the Deputy Minister, who has decided to host a conference on advocacy in February, which is a good thing, to bring all the stakeholders together, is that we will work with her and her officials to help them to develop an action plan that will set out the accountabilities, who will do what and within what time frame. That is what I wanted to see from the Welsh Government’s initial response to me. I have a series of responses in relation to the recommendations, but I was not satisfied that the Government was going to inject any momentum into doing something. The Deputy Minister has accepted that point and we will work with the Government to get to the point where we have that. Clearly, from an advocacy provider’s point of view, the commissioning guidance is critical, because lots of advocacy providers are still finding themselves anxious about the new financial year and what the commissioning arrangements will look like. Also, there is still the absence of up-to-date guidance. So, there are some key things to see through, but I am content that the Deputy Minister has understood my concern from the Welsh Government’s initial response.

[169] **Christine Chapman:** I know that the committee will be very interested to hear about that conference next year. Thank you for that. We only have a few minutes, but this is a really important area. Suzy Davies has some questions.

[170] **Suzy Davies:** Child poverty in four minutes; I do not think that we are going to be able to do it justice properly. Obviously, over the last 10 years, very little has changed. I note from your report that you say that things had started to improve, but then went back five years. I was going to ask you why you think that has happened, but I do not think that you can do that in this time.

[171] You say in your report that you are going to be producing a child poverty strategy. We have the Government’s plan that came in 2012; how will those two pieces of work fit together? I have two subsequent questions. First, in your report, will you be addressing the Estyn report on the more able and talented children who are not getting support in the most deprived parts of Wales? Secondly, do you have a view on how we measure child poverty? Is the current way of doing it hiding successes, but also hiding failures?

[172] **Mr Towler:** Okay, here we go: three minutes on child poverty. As with the CAMHS debate, I am always concerned, as the children’s commissioner, about levels of child poverty in Wales. The situation is getting worse. The welfare reform agenda certainly does not help us in any of this. A huge concern that I have, and that others have expressed, is about families who have disabled children, and related changes arising from welfare reform. We met, as four children’s commissioners, with Lord Freud in Westminster to outline our initial concerns. He gave us an opportunity to remain in open dialogue and to feed back our concerns. That invitation is fantastic and we will work that through. He clearly had a robust difference of view about some of the issues that we were raising, but we nevertheless felt that he heard us out. So, the welfare reform agenda is a key issue for me, as the commissioner, as it is for the other children’s commissioners.

[173] The Welsh Government is not off the hook. We have talked before about its responsibilities and what it can do to alleviate poverty. Regarding the children’s

commissioner—me—developing my own child poverty strategy, I am under no obligation to do so and am not identified as a body that needs to do so. However, my team and I took the view that it would be really important for us to ensure that we publish a child poverty strategy. We will be publishing that later this month. Some of the work that we did on Communities First will feed into some of that. Regarding the school ambassador model that we have working in schools, we are looking at whether we could develop an ambassador model linking those communities and the children's commissioner. We tested that out with young people and children in some Communities First areas, and they thought that it was a brilliant idea. There is loads of enthusiasm about doing it, which is great. All that we have to do now is control the enthusiasm and make something realistic happen. That is a really important area for me, as the children's commissioner.

[174] At the beginning of the meeting, we talked about awareness levels for the investigation and advice service. My feeling was that the dialogue that you have with children and young people in settings outside schools, such as Communities First area youth work, is a bit more comfortable in terms of asking questions like 'Why do you not raise that with the commissioner?' For me, having that as part of a child poverty plan seemed like a really good way of doing that. It is also an opportunity for me, to answer the point about dovetailing with what the Welsh Government's plan is all about, in trying to demonstrate what rights-based practice is all about. This is about all Government departments, such as leisure and culture; for example, what will our museums be doing to ensure that opportunities are in place for children all over Wales? This is about helping those institutions to understand what child-rights practice is all about, and about how to make opportunity and accessing fantastic things a part of alleviating a child poverty experience. Bringing those things together is really important. I am sure that I have lost the thread on one of the questions that were asked.

[175] **Suzy Davies:** I asked about more able and talented children.

[176] **Mr Towler:** In terms of the targeted approach, there is something for me about ensuring that we encapsulate all children's experiences. That means that we need the broadest possible approach. What we probably need to do, in relation to all of the child poverty strategies that each part of the Welsh Government puts together, is to take a look at the whole picture of their contribution. That is what we need to take a look at. We need to ensure that there are no children and young people who are being left behind and who are not getting the opportunities that they need. We need to bring it all into one piece. The Welsh Government is serious in understanding what its obligations are in relation to child poverty. Tying things together and making it work coherently is the key issue.

[177] **Suzy Davies:** I am not sure if we have time for my other question.

[178] **Christine Chapman:** We are running short of time.

[179] **Suzy Davies:** I do not know if you can answer this in a short time, Mr Towler: how do we measure child poverty, and does that process hide successes and failures?

[180] **Mr Towler:** A piece of string? I do not know. That is just huge, is it not? First, there is people's understanding. The 60% median income fluctuates all of the time. People are coming in and out poverty. There is in-work poverty. We are not just talking about the benefits system; we are talking about people who are working three or four shifts a day, perhaps, and who are still in poverty. So, that is a financial issue. However, they also have a poor relationship with their children because they are not there to see them. Measuring all of those different things is an enormous task. How do you measure progress and success? I am not a statistician, and I have run out of time.

[181] **Ms Thomas:** Due to the time constraints, we could get a note to you on that point.

We could get back to you, as a team, on the measurement of child poverty.

[182] **Suzy Davies:** If you have a view on that, I would love to hear it.

[183] **Christine Chapman:** That was a really good point to finish on. Thank you both for attending this morning. I think that all of us would agree that it has been a very engaging discussion. Very important issues have been discussed. We are pleased to have the report. Thank you both for attending.

11.00 a.m

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o Weddill
y Cyfarfod
Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public for the
Remainder of the Meeting**

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

in accordance with Standing Order No. 17.42, the committee resolves to meet in private for the remainder of the meeting.

[185] Are all Members content? I see that you are. We will now move into private session.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 11.01 a.m.
The public part of the meeting ended at 11.01 a.m.*