



Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru The National Assembly for Wales

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

**Dydd Iau, 14 Gorffennaf 2011
Thursday, 14 July 2011**

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

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

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

Angela Burns	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Christine Chapman	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Jocelyn Davies	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Keith Davies	Llafur Labour
Suzu Davies	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Julie Morgan	Llafur Labour
Jenny Rathbone	Llafur Labour
Simon Thomas	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Aled Roberts	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru (yn dirprwyo ar ran Kirsty Williams) Welsh Liberal Democrats (substituting for Kirsty Williams)

Eraill yn bresennol**Others in attendance**

Leighton Andrews	Aelod Cynulliad, Llafur (Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau) Assembly Member, Labour (The Minister for Education and Skills)
Jeff Cuthbert	Aelod Cynulliad, Llafur (Y Dirprwy Weinidog dros Sgiliau) Assembly Member, Labour (The Deputy Minister for Skills)
Dr Emyr Roberts,	Cyfarwyddwr Cyffredinol, Adran Plant, Addysg, Dysgu Gydol Oes a Sgiliau Director General, Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills
Chris Tweedale,	Cyfarwyddwr, Grŵp Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Effeithiolrwydd Ysgolion Director, Children, Young People and Schools Effectiveness Group
Gwenda Thomas	Aelod Cynulliad, Llafur (Y Dirprwy Weinidog Plant a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol) Assembly Members, Labour (The Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services)
Rob Pickford,	Cyfarwyddwr Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol Cymru Director of Social Services Wales
Martin Swain,	Swyddog Arweiniol ar Weithio mewn Partneriaeth ym maes Plant a Theuluoedd Lead for Children and Families Partnership Working

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

Sarah Beasley	Clerc Clerk
Steve Davies	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Cyfreithiol Legal Research Service
Claire Morris	Clerc Clerk
Siân Lewis	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Research Service

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.01 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.01 a.m.*

Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Christine Chapman:** Good morning and welcome to you all to the Children and Young People Committee. I remind Members to switch off any mobile phones, BlackBerrys and pagers in case they interfere with the sound. We have received an apology from Kirsty Williams, and I welcome Aled Roberts who will substitute for Kirsty. I know that Aled will be taking over as a full member in September; therefore, welcome to your first meeting, Aled. I also know that Lynne Neagle will be arriving later.

9.02 a.m.

Craffu ar Waith y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau Scrutiny of the Minister for Education and Skills

[2] **Christine Chapman:** I welcome the Minister. I also welcome Jeff Cuthbert, the Deputy Minister for Skills; Emyr Roberts, director general at the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills; and Chris Tweedale, director of the Children, Young People and Schools Effectiveness Group. We have read the papers. I do not intend to ask you to make a presentation; if you are happy with that, we will move straight on to questions.

[3] Thank you for providing the paper, which has covered a broad range of aspects of your portfolio. I know that the Members want to question you on various parts of the portfolio. I will start with Suzy Davies who wishes to ask some questions on the programme for international student assessment.

[4] **Suzy Davies:** I must say how grateful I am to receive these papers. As a new Member, I found them very useful indeed. My question is in two parts and relates to the use of data and the creation of the family of schools idea that, from what I can tell, is relatively new. The first part concerns the schools themselves. How useful do you think the work of school improvement officers has been in helping schools to understand the whole principle of families of schools? Are you happy that the idea of a family of schools is working? It is inevitably a bit of a blunt instrument because schools are never the same as each other. Do you think that it is actually proving more useful for schools than the previous system?

[5] Secondly, are you confident that families that are looking at schools, particularly primary schools, understand what the principle of a family of schools is all about? Do they understand the data? I ask that in my capacity as a school governor, because I am not convinced that they do understand the data at the moment and we are struggling, slightly, to explain the whole system of quartiles and being compared with schools in other parts of Wales.

[6] **The Minister for Education and Skills (Leighton Andrews):** There were several questions, Chair, and I am happy to go through each of them. We need to understand how the family of schools data evolved. They evolved in the context of our school effectiveness framework, which is designed to empower teachers and other professionals to improve performance themselves within the education system, drawing on the best international research. We have ensured that they have access to data on schools representing similar communities and socioeconomic backgrounds in other parts of Wales, and that they are able to exchange good practice and discuss matters with other professionals across Wales. Those data have been rolled out through the school effectiveness programme across the 1,800-plus

schools that we have in Wales.

[7] When I came into this post I was slightly sceptical about the school effectiveness framework and the family of schools data, until it was explained to me by a headteacher on secondment to the department—that is, Andy Henderson of Ysgol Hen Felin in my constituency in the Rhondda—who saw it as embedding the best research in terms of professional practice and ensuring that it was rolled out across the whole of Wales. In terms of what is understood by school governors, no, I am not convinced that those data have been shared effectively or thoroughly with the governing bodies of schools, and that is why, in the statement that I issued on 2 February and in the speech that I made on 2 February, I made it clear that no school would in future pass an Estyn inspection unless the governing body could prove that it had discussed the family of schools data, seen where the school lay in terms of performance, and considered that in the context of an improvement plan for the school.

[8] **Christine Chapman:** Jocelyn, did you want to pick up on that? I am conscious that Jeff Cuthbert, the Deputy Minister, will have to leave at 9.30 a.m., so if there are questions that Members would like to put to him, perhaps we can bring those forward. Did any Members want to ask about qualifications, particularly?

[9] **Jocelyn Davies:** Deputy Minister, I wondered what kind of reaction you had had to the suggestion that qualifications be simplified, especially with the background of the controversy around the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009.

[10] **Leighton Andrews:** Before Jeff comes in, perhaps I could say a word about this, because I kicked off the debate in a second speech in February when I said that I thought we needed to look at the qualifications that we had on offer in Wales. We have continuing anecdotal evidence from employers that they are not always convinced about the quality of all of the vocational qualifications that are being pursued. We have, as a result of the learning and skills Measure, made significant progress over the last four or five years, because we have doubled the number of vocational qualifications on offer. Alongside the anecdotal evidence from employers, we also have evidence that certain higher education institutions operate an approach that values certain qualifications for entry rather more than others. Clearly, if we are putting public money into funding our qualifications system—which we are, through private qualifications bodies—we would want to ensure that we are supporting the system in a way that means that our learners are benefitting from qualifications that are seen to be meaningful, either for employment or for progression into further and higher education. That was the point of kicking off the debate. Jeff will now say a word about the qualifications review that he is going to convene.

[11] **Jocelyn Davies:** May I come back on that? You mentioned the array of available qualifications that have developed over the last four or five years as a result of the learning and skills Measure, but that was not passed until 2009, so it could not have affected the last four or five years. So, something else was going on before the learning and skills Measure was passed that has resulted in that increase.

[12] **Leighton Andrews:** The Measure may not have been passed until 2009, but the debate around the Measure had been going on for the lifetime of the One Wales Government. The steps that we have taken to try to change the culture in respect of the 14-19 learning pathways goes back to the second Assembly, as the Chair will recall, because she was the Deputy Minister. That started the process, and it was then formalised in the learning and skills Measure.

[13] **Jocelyn Davies:** Could the Deputy Minister answer on the simplification?

[14] **The Deputy Minister for Skills (Jeff Cuthbert):** I am grateful that you have

allowed questions relevant to my portfolio to be put to me early. The way that the committees are organised now means that most of my responsibilities will relate to the Business and Enterprise Committee, but nevertheless we thought it appropriate that I came here to deal with certain issues. As the Minister said, I will be leading a review of the qualifications system in Wales—not just with a view to simplify them but to ensure their relevance to the Welsh economy and that we are doing the very best that we can for young people in the 14 to 19 age group, who are at a very important stage in their lives and who are obviously looking for future employment, further or higher education or, indeed, self-employment. We want to ensure that the qualifications system that we have in Wales is relevant to their needs. Let me say straightaway that this is not about abolishing GCSEs or A-levels or anything like that. Nor is it about dragooning young people into particular occupational areas as a result of their education. However, it is certainly about giving them informed choice about the sort of qualifications and courses that are likely to be positive in terms of helping them in their future adult lives. That is what we want to focus on, and we will be working with employers, educationalists in further and higher education and the school sector and, of course, awarding bodies so that we have the best system that we can have in Wales and one that is right for young people in that age group.

[15] It will not be a question of denying young people the opportunity to study any particular courses that they wish to study, but we want to ensure that they are aware of what is more likely to lead to future employment or self-employment, as the case may be, encouraging entrepreneurship and building on the success of the Welsh baccalaureate. The review is at the earliest stages. The paper has just gone to the Cabinet, and I will be receiving reflections and comments back soon. Then, we will take it forward.

[16] **Jocelyn Davies:** That is good to hear, Deputy Minister. Just yesterday, I was talking to a major employer from my area that provides a very high-tech, highly paid employment offer in engineering, and the skill base was completely wrong for it. Therefore, it is having to recruit from elsewhere. Minister, I take on board your point that most of your portfolio falls within another committee's remit, but the Wales Employment and Skills Board tells us that employers are frustrated with the level of literacy and numeracy even among those who possess a qualification. So, you may have a GCSE, numeracy and literacy and yet still not be proficient enough to be employed.

[17] **Leighton Andrews:** I am frustrated with the level of literacy and numeracy. As I explained in what I said in February, the evidence we have is that many young people are leaving primary school without the right reading age. The evidence that we have from the heads of further education colleges is that, when they test young people on entry, somewhere between 40 per cent and 80 per cent of young people do not have the qualifications in terms of literacy and numeracy that they should have. The evidence we have from work-based learning organisations is that they have young people coming to them who may have been in the school system and taken the relevant tests but who do not come with the relevant certificates. So, a whole series of things seems to be going wrong in the schooling system.

[18] That is why we have put in place the national literacy and numeracy framework. That is why we have put in place catch-up measures for literacy between the ages of seven and 11. That is why we are moving to an annual reading test from years 2 to 5, to be carried out in the summer term on the basis of the research undertaken for us by Professor Rhona Stainthorp of Reading University, which I outlined at the end of June. I know that a couple of colleagues here were present when I outlined that research. So, we have a number of measures in place. We are seeking to learn from best practice across the UK. We have had an advisory group, including Professor Tommy MacKay, who has been involved in the West Dumbartonshire initiative, which has been one of the leading initiatives in the whole of the UK on addressing this issue of literacy. So, I endorse what you say, and it is probably the issue at the top of my agenda. Jeff, do you want to add anything?

[19] **Jeff Cuthbert:** Yes, it certainly is, and it is at the top of mine as well. Part of my portfolio is basic skills for all ages. That obviously includes literacy and numeracy. You are quite right about the views that have come out from the Wales Employment and Skills Board. You referred earlier to the PISA results, which are about the application of knowledge at age 15. We have got to do better in those. It is a huge wake-up call, and it has an impact on my portfolio as much as it does on anyone's. Yes, employers are complaining—they do, and they have done for some time—but what is crucial is that this is now an opportunity for them to step up to the mark and participate fully in the review that I will be conducting, so that, at the end of the day, we will have a system that, to the best of our ability, meets the needs of young people and the future economy.

9.15 a.m.

[20] **Simon Thomas:** Hoffwn ofyn cwestiwn penodol ar ganlyniadau'r Mesur Dysgu a Sgiliau (Cymru) 2009 a'r llwybrau dysgu ar gyfer rhai sy'n dewis dysgu drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg. Yr oedd pryderon cyn pasio'r Mesur na fyddai'r ystod yn Gymraeg yn ddigon deniadol i sicrhau bod plant a phobl ifanc yn aros mewn addysg cyfrwng Cymraeg ar ôl 14 oed. Yr wyf wedi derbyn tystiolaeth lafar gan rieni a phobl ifanc nad ydynt yn teimlo, mewn rhai sefyllfaoedd, fod y dewis ar gael. Yn wir, yr wyf wedi dod ar draws pobl ifanc sydd wedi dewis symud i chweched dosbarth Saesneg o ysgol Gymraeg. A oes gennych chi dystiolaeth bod hynny'n digwydd a pha fath o drafodaeth ydych chi'n ei chael gydag awdurdodau addysg a cholegau yn y cyd-destun hwn ynghylch sicrhau bod y dewis ar gael i gadw pobl mewn addysg cyfrwng Cymraeg? Sut gallwch chi sicrhau bod pobl yn cael eu hannog i weld addysg cyfrwng Cymraeg fel opsiwn positif go iawn, ac nad yw'r opsiwn Saesneg yn cael ei weld yn fwy deniadol oherwydd bod mwy o gyrsiau o bosibl ar gael yn yr ardal drwy gyfrwng y Saesneg?

Simon Thomas: I want to ask a specific question on the results of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 and learning pathways for those who choose education through the medium of Welsh. There were concerns before the Measure was passed that the range available through the medium of Welsh would not be sufficiently attractive to ensure that children and young people would stay in Welsh-medium education after the age of 14. I have received anecdotal evidence from parents and young people that they do not feel, in some situations, that the choice is available. Indeed, I have come across young people from a Welsh-medium school who have chosen to go to an English-medium sixth form. Do you have any evidence that that is happening, and what kind of discussion are you having with education authorities and colleges in this context with regard to ensuring that the choice is available to keep people in Welsh-medium education? How can you ensure that people are encouraged to see Welsh-medium education as a positive and real option, and that the English option is not seen as being more attractive because there are possibly more courses available in the area through the medium of English?

[21] **Leighton Andrews:** That is an important question. I want to pay tribute to the Welsh-medium education sector, which has done very well in expanding the range of courses that are on offer, often grouping together on a regional basis to ensure delivery. The further education sector has, in recent years, responded well on this, and I am pleased that ColegauCymru has now appointed its own bilingual officer as part of its own efforts to improve the development of Welsh-medium education across Wales.

[22] I have a meeting with officials later this morning to discuss the implementation of the local curriculum as a result of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009. I will be looking in detail at how that is being delivered across the whole of Wales, and that will be one of the questions that I will be asking. There is anecdotal evidence, but I am not certain

whether there is evidence that this is happening systematically.

[23] **Keith Davies:** Rai blynyddoedd yn ôl, yr oedd cynllun peilot fel rhan o'r llwybrau dysgu yn cynnig 50 diwrnod o brofiad gwaith y flwyddyn i blant. A oedd hynny'n llwyddiant, ac a yw ar gael o hyd i blant rhwng 14 ac 16 oed?

Keith Davies: Some years ago, there was a learning pathways pilot scheme that offered 50 days' work experience a year to children. Was that a success, and is it still available for pupils aged 14 to 16?

[24] **Jeff Cuthbert:** Thank you for that question. I am sure that it is still available, but I will have to turn to officials for the details of the history of that scheme.

[25] **Mr Tweedale:** It was before I arrived in the Assembly, but, to the best of my knowledge, it was a project that was run between some schools and some FE colleges and employers to ensure that young people got a full range of work experience during their qualification. It is still available informally, but it does not lead to a specific qualification. Certainly, as part of the qualifications review, we will be looking carefully at the quality and the quantity of work experience available to young people, and we feel that it is a very important part of the curriculum.

[26] **Keith Davies:** Yr hyn oedd yn bwysig am y cynllun hwnnw oedd ei fod yn cael ei noddi gan Fwrdd Hyfforddi'r Diwydiant Adeiladu. Yr oedd y bwrdd yn un o'r sefydliadau a oedd ynghlwm wrth y peth. Yr oedd y cynllun yn chwilio am bobl weddol abl mewn ysgolion a allai fod yn rheolwyr yn y diwydiant, nid dim ond y rheini a allai fod yn *brickies* neu'n seiri ac yn y blaen. Dyna bwrpas y peth, ac yr oeddwn yn meddwl ei fod yn werthfawr iawn i'r plant a oedd wedi penderfynu pa yrfa i'w dilyn.

Keith Davies: What was important about that scheme was that it was sponsored by the Construction Industry Training Board. The board was one of the organisations involved. The scheme was looking for people in school who were relatively able and who could become managers in the industry, not just those who could be brickies or carpenters and so on. That was the purpose of it, and I thought that it was very valuable for those children who had decided what career to follow.

[27] **Jeff Cuthbert:** We will certainly be looking for work experience placements and opportunities to be part of our system; there is no doubt about that. I have already had discussions with the Confederation of British Industry on the qualifications review, and it is positive about that approach, as is the Institute of Directors. So, I do not anticipate resistance; indeed, I expect full support for the role of work placements, which, as you say, is critical in equipping young people with a properly supervised and planned experience of the workplace. Certainly, in terms of developing leadership and management skills at that young age, that is very important. Those young people may want to become entrepreneurs, and clearly that experience and opportunity would be most valuable. So, I will certainly take account of those comments.

[28] **Christine Chapman:** Angela Burns wants to come in on this point.

[29] **Angela Burns:** Yes. I just wondered whether that was the same thing as project Dynamo, or whether it is slightly different. I was not quite clear as to whether that is funded by the Welsh Government or whether it is a voluntary scheme brought together by a number of charities and individual educational organisations.

[30] **Jeff Cuthbert:** I understand that that is a different project. There were questions in Plenary yesterday on that, and I am awaiting more information about it.

[31] **Leighton Andrews:** Project Dynamo has been quite successful across Wales, and we

have obviously been keen to support it within the context of several initiatives that we have been working with Careers Wales on developing.

[32] **Angela Burns:** So, it is a Careers-Wales-based—

[33] **Leighton Andrews:** That is one initiative; there are other, similar initiatives that are run by Careers Wales.

[34] **Aled Roberts:** Yr wyf yn siŵr ein bod ni i gyd yn cefnogi ymdrechion y Gweinidog i godi safonau. Fodd bynnag, a gaf fynd yn ôl at bwynt Jocelyn? Un peth sy'n fy mhoeni i yw, fel y dywedodd hi, ac i chithau gyfaddef hefyd, fod cyflogwyr a cholegau yn cwyno am safonau darllen ac yn y blaen. Pa mor hyderus y gallwn ni fod yngylch yr ystadegau sy'n dod allan o'r ysgolion os nad ydynt yn dweud wrthym fod problem? Mae fel eu bod yn dweud bod y sefyllfa'n gwella, ac eto mae cyflogwyr a cholegau yn dal i ddweud bod problemau syflaenol.

Aled Roberts: I am sure that we all support the Minister's efforts to improve standards. However, may I go back to Jocelyn's point? One thing that worries me is that, as she said, and you admitted it as well, employers and colleges are complaining about reading standards and so on. How confident can we be about the statistics that are coming from the schools if they are not telling us that there is a problem? It is as if they are saying that the situation is improving, yet employers and colleges are still saying that there are fundamental problems.

[35] **Leighton Andrews:** We are not confident; there is a difference between the qualifications that people get and their ability. Let us pay tribute to the school system. We have had improvements in GCSE and A-level performance throughout the lifetime of the Assembly and we have far fewer young people leaving schools without qualifications. However, the qualifications they gather do not necessarily measure their abilities in respect of literacy or numeracy, which are key skills that employers are looking for. The PISA results indicated to us that we have a real issue about the application of skills, which we have got to get to grips with, which is what we are doing.

[36] **Aled Roberts:** Mae'r ffigurau o'r ysgolion ynglŷn â'r safon mae plant yn ei chyrraedd yn yr ysgolion cynradd, er enghraifft, yn dangos bod y sefyllfa'n gwella, ac eto, pan fo plant yn cyrraedd 16 oed, nid yw'r dystiolaeth yn adlewyrchu hynny.

Aled Roberts: The figures from the schools on the standards that children achieve in primary schools, for example, show that the situation is improving, yet, when children reach the age of 16, the evidence does not reflect that.

[37] **Leighton Andrews:** I have said, Chair, on several occasions over the last 12 months that I am not confident of the assessments at key stage 2. We have said that, historically in Wales, we seem to be ahead of England at key stage 2 and that there is then a dip at key stage 3. I am not convinced that the evidence is there to prove that. I think that there are serious issues about the moderation of key stage 2 assessments, and I have referred to that in both of the speeches that I have delivered on the subject of school standards over the last six months.

[38] **Christine Chapman:** Keith Davies, do you want to come back in with your main question on Welsh-medium education, or has it been covered, do you think?

[39] **Keith Davies:** No, it has not.

[40] Un o'r problemau yr wyf wedi dod ar eu traws yn ystod y misoedd diwethaf—ac yr ydych wedi dweud eich bod yn mynd i roi sail statudol i gynlluniau llywodraeth leol cyn

One of the problems that I have encountered over the past few months—and you have said that you are to put on a statutory basis the plans of local authorities as far as the Welsh

belled ag y mae'r Gymraeg yn y cwestiwn—yw bod nifer o blant ag anghenion arbennig nad ydynt yn gallu cael eu hasesu drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg achos bod prinder o bobl broffesiynol sy'n gallu gwneud hynny. Mae'r rhieni wedyn yn cwyno ei bod yn anheg ar y plant ac, ar ôl iddynt gael eu hasesu, efallai drwy gyfrwng y Saesneg, mae'r ysgolion yn methu ymdopi â'r plant hyn. Mae'n broblem gynyddol wrth fod addysg Gymraeg yn

language is concerned—is that a number of children with special educational needs cannot be assessed through the medium of Welsh because there is a shortage of qualified professionals who can do that. Parents then complain that it is unfair on the children and, after they have been assessed, perhaps through the medium of English, the schools are unable to cope with these children. It is an increasing problem as Welsh-medium education increases.

[41] **Leighton Andrews:** I am grateful to you for bringing that problem to my attention—perhaps you might want to follow up with me specific cases that you have in mind and I will make further inquiries about that. The broad point that I would make is that we do want to put Welsh-in-education plans on a statutory basis; it was a manifesto commitment. There is now significant evidence, since I launched the Welsh-medium education strategy last year, that not all local authorities are making effective assessments of parental demand for Welsh-medium education. Consideration was given in the previous Assembly to making that statutory. I think the time is now right to make it statutory because we want to have effective forward planning. That would also include the field of additional learning needs. However, if you have specific evidence that you wish to bring to my attention, I would welcome that.

[42] **Christine Chapman:** Julie Morgan wants to ask something about the foundation phase.

[43] **Julie Morgan:** Thank you for your paper. You say that the foundation phase has been widely praised but that we need to ensure that it does not lead to a relaxation of literacy standards. Do you have any evidence that it does?

[44] **Leighton Andrews:** I have heard some anecdotal comments from different parts of Wales from some headteachers of primary schools who are concerned that, in the move to the foundation phase, some schools have been less structured in their approach to ensuring follow-through on literacy and numeracy. We do not have a scientific study that proves that one way or the other, but where the foundation phase is being implemented effectively and creatively, headteachers, teachers and learning assistants are ensuring that literacy is picked up through the overall approach of the foundation phase. If it can be done well in one school, it should be possible for it to be done well in every school. The issue is how to ensure that best practice is followed through. As you go around Wales, you see the fantastic investment that has been made in the foundation phase, particularly in creating outdoor learning centres and in the different approaches to learning through play and other initiatives that have gone on. However, this was never intended to result in a relaxation of basic skills standards. If people have thought that, they have got entirely the wrong message about the foundation phase.

[45] We will complete the roll-out of the foundation phase this year, and additional investment is going in. We have asked all local authorities and regional consortia to ensure that there is no slippage on standards.

[46] **Julie Morgan:** I have been stunned by the open-air classrooms in my area and by the way that the learning has gone on, which seems tremendously successful. You say that you will undertake a baseline assessment of children's levels when they go into the foundation phase. Can you expand a bit more on what you mean by that?

[47] **Leighton Andrews:** An assessment will take place in the first six weeks when

children join the foundation phase. This will give headteachers and teachers opportunities to understand the children who have come in so that they can measure what value they are adding through the foundation phase and beyond.

[48] **Julie Morgan:** As the roll-out is just finishing, we are not at a stage where we can assess how it will affect children later on in the educational system. Do you agree that there is still some way to go before we know how it is working?

[49] **Leighton Andrews:** Yes, indeed. We will ensure that we have an effective evaluation of what has taken place, and that is very important to us because this is a major initiative that has been widely welcomed in Wales and is also being watched quite intently beyond our borders. So, we want to be able to demonstrate the impact that it has had, and we will be undertaking evaluations as we move forward.

[50] **Jocelyn Davies:** I have a question on the involvement of families, because children learn to read not just in school but also at home; I think that I learned to read at home rather than in school. What help and advice are parents given in order to do that? You generally repeat what has happened to you in your past. Therefore, if you were not taught to read at home, you will not have the skills to teach your children to do so. Are advice and help given to families through the foundation phase so that they can supplement whatever is happening in school so that those children get the best start?

9.30 a.m.

[51] **Leighton Andrews:** Not just through the foundation phase, but through a number of the initiatives that we have. Our whole approach in terms of building community-focused schools is concerned with how we engage the wider community—parents, grandparents and others. Sadly, a large number of children are entering primary school without the necessary oracy skills, let alone literacy skills. Their parents may not have spent sufficient time talking to them, reading to them or engaging with them. That is becoming an increasing challenge for professionals in primary schools, whether they are teachers or learning assistants.

[52] The Flying Start initiative is no longer the responsibility of my department—it is now within Gwenda Thomas's remit—and we committed to double spending on it in our manifesto. The evidence that has come through from that initiative is that children who have been through the Flying Start programme are more attentive, better behaved and more focused, and there is proper parental engagement. It has been a highly effective scheme and is an important scheme for the future.

[53] **Christine Chapman:** On that point, before I bring in the Deputy Minister, I was in a school in my constituency this week, talking to a head teacher who said that there is an issue with very young children in that there are possibly things going on at home, such as television, DVDs and so on. This is not the first time that this comment has been made to me. I would like your comments on that, Minister, because headteachers are saying that children are different now when compared to children 10 or so years ago, and there is a real problem.

[54] **Leighton Andrews:** That is something that we are all experiencing. There are issues that go back over the last 20 to 30 years—such as the downgrading of the culture of work as a result of changes to our economy in the 1980s and 1990s; there are communities that have seen significant economic disruption; there is long-term unemployment running in families; and there is an absence of things such as time discipline and the sharing of cultural experiences in families. All those things that exist in a number of communities, particularly in the former industrial heartlands, have had an impact. We are all hearing that from headteachers in primary schools.

[55] **Jeff Cuthbert:** In my constituency, there are severe problems of worklessness. You are quite right, there has been a cultural shift over the last 10 to 15 years. We are now dealing with some families where there is a third generation that is not used to regular employment in any meaningful way, and those problems come through to the education system. I am hopeful, although it is not directly part of my brief, that changes that we are bringing in with the foundation phase and the 14-19 learning pathways provide different opportunities that will be linked in to the qualifications review, the assessment regimes, and how people learn. I hope that it will make a positive difference. Time will tell.

[56] **Christine Chapman:** I will now move on to another aspect of this. I am conscious that other Members want to ask questions.

[57] **Simon Thomas:** Mae'r dystiolaeth yr ydych wedi ei chyflwyno i'r pwyllgor, Weinidog, a'r dystiolaeth y mae'r pwyllgor wedi'i derbyn yn ei gwneud yn glir bod lleoedd gwag yn un o'r problemau yn isadeiledd ein hysgolion ar hyn o bryd. Yr ydych wedi dweud yn glir eich bod eisiau gweld y lleoedd gwag yn dod i lawr o tua 20 y cant, fel y gallant fod ar hyn o bryd, i 10 y cant, fel canllaw. Un ffordd o ddelio â hyn, yn enwedig yng nghefn gwlad, yw drwy syniadaeth newydd, cyffrous—nid dim ond ysgolion newydd—fel ysgolion gydol oes o 3 i 16. Gwnaethoch ddatganiad ddoe yn dweud y byddwch yn ailwampio'r cynllun ysgolion yr unfed ganrif ar hugain. Pa gynllun newydd sydd gennych mewn golwg? Mae'n amlwg bod diffyg arian cyfalaf ar gyfer y cynllun: ym mha ffordd y gallwch lenwi'r bwlc hwnnw? Hyd yn oed os bydd awdurdodau lleol yn rhoi mwy o arian i mewn i'r pot, rhaid i'r arian hwnnw ddod o arian cyfalaf Llywodraeth Cymru, gan mai'r un pot sy'n diwallu hwn—oni bai bod gennych ffordd fwy creadigol o greu arian newydd.

Simon Thomas: The evidence that you have submitted to the committee, Minister, and the evidence that the committee has received has made it clear that surplus places are one of the problems with school infrastructures at present. You have made it clear that you want surplus places to be reduced from around 20 to 10 per cent, as a guide figure. One way of dealing with that, particularly in rural areas, is through new, exciting concepts—not just new schools—such as lifelong learning schools from 3 to 16. Yesterday, you made a statement that you will reorganise the twenty-first century schools scheme. What new plans do you have in mind? There is obviously a shortage of capital funding for the scheme: how can you fill that gap? Even if local authorities put more money into the pot, that money has to come from the capital funding of the Welsh Government, because this is funded from the same pot—unless you have a more creative way of generating new funding.

[58] **Leighton Andrews:** I issued an extensive written statement on twenty-first century schools yesterday. I explained that we have asked local authorities to go back to look at their business cases, and we will reach further judgements on those towards the end of this year. We already have an extensive round of capital funding in place, with around £415 million going forward to 2014, so we are looking at the period after that.

[59] We have been running the twenty-first century schools programme in collaboration with the Welsh Local Government Association, which has said in writing to the Permanent Secretary that it is one of the best examples of collaboration between local government and the Welsh Government. Through that programme we have, in the past, seen a contribution from the Welsh Government of some 70 per cent, with 30 per cent coming from local government. We could keep to that, but it would mean fewer schools being funded. We are, therefore, discussing with local authorities whether we should move to a situation where we put in 50 per cent rather than 70 per cent. Of course, local authorities have the means to borrow, and some of them have been using prudential borrowing powers more effectively than others. There is a need for local authorities to look not only at the general capital funding that they receive from the Assembly Government, but also at what they can do with their own

borrowing. It seems that if you are going to commit to long-term borrowing, you do so when interest rates are at their lowest rather than waiting until they start to rise again. There are a whole series of judgements here, and it is difficult to speak about the whole of Wales as a generality, but there are options open to us.

[60] In the past, local authorities, such as Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council when it was under a Plaid Cymru administration, have made use of private finance, for example, for school building projects. We would be open—and have said so in the statement—to looking at what other initiatives can be afforded through alternative finance, and will provide relevant revenue streams to support that.

[61] **Simon Thomas:** Ymhellach i hynny, yr ydych yn dweud eich bod yn gobeithio dod i gytundeb erbyn diwedd y flwyddyn hon. Mae hyn yn peri problem; mae gennych gynllun da sydd wedi cael ei gytuno gan yr awdurdodau, ond fel yr ydych yn gwybod, mewn sawl rhan o Gymru, mae'r cynllun hwn yn ddadleuol iawn. Mae gwrthwynebiad gwleidyddol gan wahanol garfannau yn erbyn cau ysgolion cefn gwlad, er enghraifft. Mae posibilrwydd y bydd hyn i gyd yn cael ei atal gan yr etholiadau lleol y flwyddyn nesaf. Bydd newid yn rhai o'r cynghorau oherwydd y mater o ysgolion lleol. O bosibl, ni fydd rhai o'r cynlluniau hyn yn ennyn y gefnogaeth leol sydd ganddynt ar hyn o bryd. A yw'n gwneud rhywfaint o synnwyr i symud mor gyflym â phosibl i wneud yn siŵr bod y cynllun hwn yn gallu mynd yn ei flaen heb gael ei ddal yn ôl oherwydd problemau sydd weddol o leol ond sy'n effeithio ar y darlun cenedlaethol?

Simon Thomas: Following on from that, you say that you hope to come to an agreement by the end of this year. This is problematic; you have a good scheme that has been agreed by the authorities, but as you know, in several parts of Wales, this scheme is highly controversial. There is political opposition from different quarters to the closure of rural schools, for example. There is a possibility that all of this will be held up by the local government elections next year. There will be changes to some of the councils because of the issue of local schools. It is possible that some of these schemes will not enjoy the local support that they have at present. Does it make some sense to move as quickly as possible to ensure that this scheme can go ahead without being held back by problems that are relatively local in nature but ultimately affect the national picture?

[62] **Leighton Andrews:** We are talking about school capital investment from 2014, which is potentially halfway through the next local government cycle. In my experience, few local authorities bring forward school reorganisation proposals in the six to nine months before local authority elections.

[63] **Simon Thomas:** There are a few that will, however. [*Laughter.*]

[64] **Keith Davies:** Ymhellach i'r hyn a ddywedodd Simon, mae'r cynllun hwn wedi bod yn llwyddiant mawr, ac mae gennym ysgolion ac adeiladau newydd. Mae nifer o ysgolion cynradd newydd gennym yn Llanelli, a chredaf ein bod yn gweld twf yn nifer y plant sy'n mynd i'r ysgolion cynradd hynny. Y broblem wedyn yw bod y plant hynny'n troi'n 11 oed ac yn symud i'r ysgolion uwchradd. Yr wyf yn rhagweld y byddwn yn mynd yn ôl i'r sefyllfa a welwyd 20 mlynedd yn ôl, a byddwn yn codi cabanau eto ar safleoedd yr ysgolion uwchradd. Yr wyf yn gwybod bod hyn yn broblem, ond

Keith Davies: To follow on from Simon's comments, this scheme has been a great success, and we now have new schools and buildings. We have a number of new primary schools in Llanelli, and I believe that we are seeing an increase in the numbers of children attending those schools. However, the problem is that those children then turn 11 and move on to the secondary schools. I foresee that we will return to the situation of 20 years ago and will again be erecting cabins on secondary school grounds. I know that this is a problem, but because of the success and growth of the primary schools—

oherwydd y llwyddiant a'r twf yn yr ysgolion cynradd—yr adeiladau newydd i gyd—bydd y sefyllfa yn yr ysgolion uwchradd yn gwaethygu. with all of the new buildings—the situation in the secondary schools will deteriorate.

[65] **Leighton Andrews:** The problem is that we have significant numbers of surplus places in the secondary sector. We may be seeing growth in the numbers coming through to primary schools, but we are running at around 20 per cent surplus capacity in the secondary sector. Overall in Wales, what you describe is not the picture that emerges.

[66] **Jenny Rathbone:** I welcome the expectation that all students will make one year of educational progress in a calendar year, which ensures that gifted and talented students are making good progress in line with their attainment, as well as acknowledging the good work being done in a lot of schools in deprived areas where young people's educational attainment may not be in line with their chronological age. So, I very much welcome that. How will we close the gap in attainment that affects children in poverty? We know that that gap appears as early as 22 months and that it gets wider as children get older, particularly in the context that some parents will not even get out of bed on the day that their young people are sitting their maths and English GCSEs to ensure that they have breakfast before they go to the exam or even that they get to the exam on time. Those are some of the challenges that are faced in some of our schools.

[67] **Leighton Andrews:** I used the phrase 'time discipline' in an earlier answer, and that was what I meant. I have extensive experience of headteachers in my constituency reporting situations from primary school onwards in which some parents are simply not ensuring that their children are going to school on time. In schools, we have the whole system of education welfare officers. In some schools in Communities First areas, other measures have been undertaken to ensure that more family support is provided. We have the Flying Start programme, which is key to this. That is why we were committed to doubling the investments into Flying Start. If you look at the work that has been done there to support parents alongside pupils, you will see that that is delivering results. So, we are acutely aware of the issues that you raised and we are trying to put in place the programmes to support them, but those are not cheap programmes to run.

[68] **Jocelyn Davies:** May I just check, Chair, did the Minister say that there will be zero tolerance for truancy?

[69] **Leighton Andrews:** I am now separating truancy from the previous question, which was about late attendance.

[70] **Jocelyn Davies:** Yes, children not coming to school.

[71] **Leighton Andrews:** Indeed; we launched the all-Wales attendance framework before the election. We have had Professor Ken Reid look again at the recommendations of the national behaviour and attendance review report, and I met him two weeks ago to go through that. One of the things that concern me is that some local authorities in Wales appear to be reducing spending on education welfare services, which is a false economy.

[72] **Jenny Rathbone:** Following up on that, there is also an issue in that there is a tardy response from the LEAs in getting children who have been excluded from a school into other educational provision. So, they are not getting any education, which cannot be right.

[73] The second area that I wanted to pick up on is the important role of governors. There are several interesting areas. You state that:

[74] 'Local authorities will provide a clerking service'.

[75] I agree that that is an extremely important way for the LEA to know what is going on in a school, but what happens if the school opts out of the service level agreement for the clerking service?

[76] **Leighton Andrews:** Through legislation passed at the end of the last Assembly—in fact, the final Measure that went through the Assembly in the last session was the Education (Wales) Measure 2011—we have put in place arrangements for the training of governors and for the effective clerking of governing bodies. These are now obligations on local authorities. We would expect local authorities to ensure that effective clerking and training of governing bodies are going on at a local level. We have also expanded the powers of local authorities to federate governing bodies. So, they will have extensive powers if they feel that the situation locally is unsatisfactory.

[77] **Jenny Rathbone:** How much emphasis do you think should be put on the role of local authorities in appointing LEA governors, because they are often the only ones who are completely independent of the school? If you are a parent, teacher or other member of staff, it can be difficult to change.

[78] **Leighton Andrews:** That is essential, and I have said that before. Governors have a role in supporting the school, but they should not just be cheerleaders for what is going on. They must take on the responsibility of setting the future direction for the school, engaging properly in how the school develops going forward and what it is doing in terms of school improvement. Therefore, we have said, as a result of the education Measure that we passed in the last Assembly, that we are looking for effective induction training for all governors, proper training for the chairs of governing bodies, and for local authorities to take seriously their responsibilities in respect of their own governors.

9.45 a.m.

[79] **Jenny Rathbone:** Do you have in mind any sort of publicity programme to recruit new school governors, so that people are aware of what an important role this is? In other places, a lot of work has been done with companies to encourage them to put forward volunteers.

[80] **Leighton Andrews:** We obviously support Governors Wales, which undertakes a number of activities in this area. This is a responsibility for local authorities, to ensure that they engage properly with the recruitment of governors. We would certainly encourage them to work with the local business community and with other groups to ensure a wider range of governors are available.

[81] **Julie Morgan:** Following on from that, you say that you will have induction training for every governor. Does that happen at the moment?

[82] **Leighton Andrews:** Not universally, no.

[83] **Julie Morgan:** So, some governors have no training at all.

[84] **Leighton Andrews:** That is almost certainly the case.

[85] **Julie Morgan:** Could you say a bit more about the sort of training that you think it is essential that the governors have?

[86] **Leighton Andrews:** It is important that they are given a background in how the

school is performing, what the relationships should be between governors and the staff in the school, and the responsibilities of the local authority and themselves as governors, which is not always clear on the employment and performance management front. We would also want them to understand how to use data. There is a lot that we need to ensure that they have an initial understanding of.

[87] **Julie Morgan:** So, the governing bodies will have a much more structured role in future.

[88] **Leighton Andrews:** I would hope that that would be the case; yes.

[89] **Suzy Davies:** You have partly answered my question, Minister, which was going back to the role of the school improvement officer, who plays a crucial part in governing bodies' understanding of how the education system operates. Do you think that they could be used more to help governors translate the host of educational jargon to the parents that they present an annual general report to? There is quite a difficulty when data are presented in a format that is simply not comprehensible to the layman. That is something that could be explored in improving the role of governors.

[90] Just to follow on from that, I would like to ask briefly about your standards unit. We may talk a little more about that, but are you planning to include governor representatives in the standards unit at all? If you are asking governors to be proactive in improving the performance of schools, their input at that level would also be useful.

[91] **Leighton Andrews:** On your first point, the issue is not necessarily school improvement officers, but local authority support for governors. Some have governor support officers, for example, who will work with governing bodies, but clearly there is a role for the local authority to work with them as well, and this is where the effective clerking of governing bodies comes in. We want to see local authorities taking a leadership role in respect of governing bodies of schools, and ensuring that they understand the issues that they face.

[92] In respect of the school standards unit, that is an internal unit within my department, so it would not be appropriate to have external representation in that form. It is there to help local authorities and the regional consortia to benchmark their performance. It has already carried out a number of stocktakes with local authorities since it was established in May, under the leadership of Brett Pugh, who was the director of education in Newport and has joined us on secondment. I think that it will be one of the principal ways in which we drive up school performance.

[93] **Jenny Rathbone:** My last question is on teacher training colleges. I would like to hear how we know that we have a really good standard of pedagogy in all our teacher training institutions. I am dealing with a case that suggests that that might not be true of all such institutions, and clearly that is crucial to getting good teachers in all our schools.

[94] **Leighton Andrews:** I would welcome any evidence that you wish to bring to my attention in that respect. We have, in recent years, moved to a much tougher system in initial teacher training in the sense that we acknowledged that we were probably over-producing teachers in Wales, and therefore we had to look at the number of places available, which resulted in some difficult decisions affecting a number of higher education institutions, including in north-east Wales, in recent years. What I said in my statement and speech in February was that I wanted us to look at the quality of initial teacher training. It is apparent that teachers are not trained, for example, to teach young people how to read. That seems to me to be a key gap in initial teacher training and it needs to be rectified. There are other issues as well, such as behaviour management, additional learning needs and so on. We are going

through a process of reviewing the teacher training curriculum, looking to see whether we can introduce a Master's qualification. If there are issues that you want to raise, this is exactly the right time to bring them to my attention.

[95] **Keith Davies:** O ran hyfforddiant i brifathrawon, yr wyf i'n clywed wrth deithio o gwmpas mai delio â phapurau—symud papur o gwmpas—ac nid rheoli staff y mae'r cymhwyster proffesiynol cenedlaethol ar gyfer prifathrawiaeth. Beth yw'ch cynlluniau i gael hyfforddiant i brifathrawon? Yn y pen draw, hwy sydd â'r dylanwad mwyaf ar ysgolion.

Keith Davies: With regard to training for headteachers, I hear on my travels that the national professional qualification for headship is about how to deal with paperwork—that is, paper shuffling—rather than managing staff. What are your plans to secure training for headteachers? Ultimately, it is they who have the greatest influence on schools.

[96] **Christine Chapman:** Minister, before you answer, I will just bring Simon Thomas in. His question is on the same point, so you can answer both together.

[97] **Simon Thomas:** Mae'n gwestiwn penodol am athrawon. Pa gamau sy'n cael eu cymryd i ddenu pobl i ddysgu sydd â phrofiad o waith arall? Ymddengys i mi fod bwlch yn y fan hon. Mae rhai gwledydd yn arbrofi drwy ddenu pobl sydd â 10 mlynedd o brofiad ym myd busnes neu'n gwneud gwaith peirianeg, er enghraifft, i fod yn athrawon, lle bod gennym ni nid *outside half factory*, ond ffatri athrawon. Mae syniad y gall rhywun adael y brifysgol a mynd i ddysgu. Mae'n ymddangos nad oes llwybr hawdd yng Nghymru i bobl ddod i ddysgu ar ôl iddynt fod yn gwneud gwaith arall.

Simon Thomas: It is a specific question about teachers. What steps are being taken to attract people who have experience of other types of work into teaching? It seems to me that there is a gap there. Some countries are experimenting with attracting people into teaching who have 10 years' experience in business or in engineering, for example, whereas we have not an outside half factory, but a teacher factory. There is an idea that someone can leave university and go into teaching. There does not appear to be an easy route in Wales for people to enter teaching having followed another career path.

[98] **Leighton Andrews:** I will go through those questions in sequence. The question that Keith asked is very relevant as we regard leadership in schools as being paramount in terms of improving performance. That is why we have looked again at the NPQH, because we found that it was being used by teachers as they progressed through their careers, not necessarily to become heads, but simply to improve their overall leadership qualifications. Insufficient numbers were following the NPQH into headteacher jobs. We have therefore revised the NPQH, after discussions with the profession, and we have recently had further discussions and consultation on the performance management of headteachers. There has been an extensive range of developments in this field and we could give you further information on those developments in the form of a note because I am conscious of the time now.

[99] On Simon Thomas's point, we would expect to gain powers to promote teaching as a career as a result of the changes that are currently going through in the Education Bill at Westminster, if I remember rightly, as a consequence of the UK coalition Government's changes to the role of the General Teaching Council in England and so on. We are open to new initiatives to attract teachers. Indeed, later today, I have a meeting with Teach First, for example.

[100] **Christine Chapman:** I am going to draw this item to a close now. I thank you, Minister, and the Deputy Minister and your officials for attending today.

[101] I suggest that we take a short break of a few minutes before the Deputy Minister for

Children and Social Services attends.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 9.54 a.m. a 10 a.m.
The meeting adjourned between 9.54 a.m. and 10 a.m.*

**Craffu ar waith Dirprwy Weinidog Plant a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Scrutiny of the Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services**

[102] **Christine Chapman:** I welcome Gwenda Thomas, the Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services, along with Rob Pickford, director of Social Services Wales, and Martin Swain, the lead for children and families partnership working. I thank Gwenda Thomas for providing a paper in advance of the meeting. I understand, Gwenda, that you are happy to go straight into questions from Members, of which there are many. The first question is from Jocelyn Davies.

[103] **Jocelyn Davies:** Welcome, Deputy Minister. I will begin with an observation on child poverty. We were both at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Bevan Foundation event last week, and it appears to me that the gains made in this area are very fragile. An awful lot of effort and resources have been invested in this over a number of years, yet it seems from the statistics that they can be wiped out very quickly by events that are beyond your control. You will know from the event that we attended last week that for families to be lifted out of poverty—children, of course, are poor because their families are poor—it appears that at least two adults in a household need to be working. The challenges of that are enormous for you, with regard to affordable childcare and so on.

[104] The child poverty strategy has objectives, the first of which is to reduce the number of families living in workless households, and the second is for people to secure well-paid employment. However, in a time of recession such as this, with job losses occurring all the time, is this still a credible objective?

[105] **The Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services (Gwenda Thomas):** Some of the matters that you raise are non-devolved. I was at the launch of the Bevan Foundation poverty report, and the author of that report was clearly of the opinion that it was not. We can never disentangle child poverty from family poverty. The welfare reform programme is challenging. That is not to say that I support abuse of the welfare programme, but I think that the reform is fast and furious and we cannot underestimate the effects of those changes on the most complex families that we are dealing with.

[106] We have set a strategy on poverty and I will work closely with the Minister for Local Government and Communities. We will set up an anti-poverty programme board that will be chaired alternately by Carl Sargeant and me, and I am also keen to establish an external stakeholder group to look at the implementation of this strategy and the development of the plan.

[107] To return to your specific question, the 2020 target is not that far away, but I do not think that our sentiments can change. Within our devolved responsibilities, we still have to do as much as we possibly can, as a Government and with partners, to alleviate the effects of poverty. I want to move forward with that agenda as soon as possible.

[108] **Jocelyn Davies:** I just have one further question. You mentioned your action plan. When will we see that plan?

[109] **Gwenda Thomas:** The First Minister will announce the programme of Government early in the autumn. However, as I have already explained, the preparations for that are

progressing. It is wise to take advice from an external group of experts. A group has supported and advised the Welsh Government previously, but we need specific terms of reference for the group so that we can work with it on the preparation and implementation of that plan.

[110] **Simon Thomas:** Ddirprwy Weinidog, cawsoch ychydig o drafferth dros y penwythnos gyda'r *Wales on Sunday* am ddweud bod nifer y bobl a oedd yn derbyn budd-daliadau yn eich etholaeth yn arwydd o lwyddiant. Yr wyf yn gwybod beth yr oeddech yn ei feddwl—hynny yw, y dylai pobl gael yr hyn sy'n ddyledus iddynt ac mae ganddynt hawl iddo. Fodd bynnag, beth fyddai'r arwydd o lwyddiant i chi o dan y strategaeth atal tloidi hon, yn enwedig gan fod diwedd y tymor hwn yn hanner ffordd at darged 2020? Pa fath o bethau yr ydych yn gobeithio y bydd y Llywodraeth hon wedi'u cyflawni erbyn diwedd y Cynulliad hwn, sef 2015?

Simon Thomas: Deputy Minister, you got into a little difficulty with the *Wales on Sunday* over the weekend for saying that the number of people receiving benefits in your constituency was a sign of success. I know what you meant—that is, people should be given what they are due and what they have a right to. However, what would be a sign of success for you under this poverty eradication strategy, particularly given that the end of this term is half way towards the 2020 target? What kind of things do you hope the Government will have achieved by the end of this Assembly, that is, 2015?

[111] **Gwenda Thomas:** Byddwn yn gosod y cynllun allan yn glir ar gyfer y pum mlynedd nesaf, ond nid oedd y *Wales on Sunday* yn rhy gas ddydd Sul. Y pwynt yr oeddwn yn ei wneud oedd bod y *Wales on Sunday* yn edrych ar Gastell-nedd ac yn dweud bod diweithdra a budd-daliadau yn uwch yno. Serch hynny, degfed oedd Castell-nedd a phan edrychais yn fanwl ar y ffigurau gwelais, o ran budd-daliadau fel y lwfans gweini a'r lwfans byw i bobl anabl, bod Castell-nedd Port Talbot ar y brig. Mae hynny'n newyddion da, oherwydd o ran plant o fewn yr uned deuluol sy'n byw mewn tloidi, mae'n bwysig ein bod yn sicrhau bod pobl yn elwa ar y budd-daliadau y maent yn deilwng i'w cael. Dyna oedd y pwynt yr oeddwn yn ceisio ei wneud.

Gwenda Thomas: We will set out the scheme clearly for the next five years, but the *Wales on Sunday* was not too nasty on Sunday. The point that I was trying to make was that the *Wales on Sunday* was looking at Neath and saying that unemployment and benefits claims were higher there. However, Neath was in tenth place and when I looked at the figures in detail I saw that with regard to benefits such as attendance allowance and the disability living allowance, Neath Port Talbot was in first place. That is good news, because for children in the family unit living in poverty, it is important that we ensure that people benefit from the benefits for which they are eligible. That was the point that I was trying to make.

[112] **Suzy Davies:** I might be jumping the gun slightly, but you mentioned earlier that you will be taking evidence from or seeking assistance from external advisors. Are you talking about education specialists or locally based community organisations that already play a significant role in helping to reduce poverty in their particular areas? Do you know who will be on the external advisory panel?

[113] **Gwenda Thomas:** I am considering its terms of reference. We need experts in the field of poverty and, as far as my portfolio is concerned, in the field of child poverty. We receive reports regularly from external bodies and we would benefit from listening to such people. It is also very important that we listen to children and young people in any stakeholder group. I want to facilitate their voices. I will look to this external group being independently chaired and I think that that source of advice would be invaluable. I liken it to the development of the Carers Strategies (Wales) Measure 2010, for example, on which the Carers Alliance advised us and worked with us throughout. It is a good way of reaching a

consensus and thereby developing policies, measures and regulations that best fit their intended purpose.

[114] **Jocelyn Davies:** I will comment on Neath and the take-up of benefits, because we have worked hard to encourage people to take up the benefits to which they are entitled, and some local authorities have made great strides in that regard. The figures in Neath probably reflect some work that has been done in that regard. We want benefit take-up to be destigmatised, but there is a move towards calling these hand-outs and moving back to a time when people did not feel able to take up benefits because of the stigma. Therefore, I applaud you for saying that you were pleased that people in Neath were taking up the benefits to which they were perfectly entitled—that is why the state provides them.

[115] **Gwenda Thomas:** With regard to paying for care in the future, although the Dilnot commission looked at care for older people, the principle of what it says about the importance of these benefits and their preventive power is something I welcome. I do not think that that is excluded from other age groups. That is my belief.

[116] **Christine Chapman:** I am going to bring Jenny Rathbone in on this now with a new series of questions.

[117] **Jenny Rathbone:** I want to ask you about how you evaluate how well Flying Start programmes are working. I know that we know that the outcomes for children are very good in terms of their speech and language development and emotional development, and that is all excellent. However, I am particularly interested in how you know whether the Flying Start programmes are reaching the hard-to-reach families as opposed to the ones who are less deprived anyway. I am also interested in how well Flying Start programmes are engaging families in helping to reshape services to better meet people's needs.

[118] **Gwenda Thomas:** This is a new part of my portfolio. I have tried to focus and to develop my thinking about Flying Start. I have no doubt that it is an excellent programme and that it is benefiting families. We are in the process of evaluating the first phase and developing our thinking for the expansion of Flying Start. It is a manifesto commitment, and that will, of course, be uppermost in my mind. The issue is that Flying Start is based on geographical areas, and I think that the boundaries have been quite rigid. So, I think that it would be wise to look at the blurring of those boundaries and whether it makes sense to have one side of the street qualifying for Flying Start and the other side not. That is a priority for me. Keith would not forgive me if I did not say that I visited Llanelli very recently—

[119] **Simon Thomas:** He goes on about it.

[120] **Jocelyn Davies:** Yes, he has told us. [*Laughter.*]

[121] **Gwenda Thomas:** That was the first time that I had visited a Flying Start project. What was most valuable that day was being able to talk to families and to understand from them how it has helped them. Moving forward with Flying Start and realising our manifesto commitment is a very high priority for this portfolio.

[122] **Jenny Rathbone:** I want to come back on that because, although I absolutely applaud the idea of extending Flying Start, if we remove geographical boundaries, how are we going to prevent health professionals from targeting the low-hanging fruit? A great deal has been written about people avoiding dealing with the people who are most challenging. How are we going to ensure that Flying Start really does engage with the hardest-to-reach families, the families that schools find it most difficult to engage in their children's learning later in life?

[123] **Gwenda Thomas:** That is a challenge, and this is an issue that we want to consider as

we think about the best way to roll out Flying Start. We have to look at the wider picture and look at Flying Start as part of a wider programme. It is crucial that Flying Start complements Families First and that Families First looks at the extreme end through the integrated family support teams and the principles that surround Communities First. All of this is the big picture and, within that, we can learn a great deal from the way that Flying Start has developed. However, I take your point in that reaching very hard-to-reach families has got to come down to the local level. Then, I think that there might be a way of communicating or linking with local authorities' community plans, which permeate down to ward level. The best way to identify people at the sharp end and to bring them into the programme is by getting down to that level. With all the programmes that I have mentioned, that will be important.

10.15 a.m.

[124] **Jenny Rathbone:** Does the department currently monitor how many families in the target group in a Flying Start area it is working with?

[125] **Gwenda Thomas:** We saw that in Llanelli when we had a preliminary meeting there. The team there explained to me how it does that on the ground. Perhaps Martin would like to elaborate on that.

[126] **Mr Swain:** We collect a huge amount of monitoring data through Flying Start via the health visitors and the childcare settings. We know which families are engaging with us, where they are from, what their locality is, and what caseloads the health visitors have. We also have a fairly extensive evaluation process with Flying Start. It has been in place since the programme started three years ago. We have already had one interim evaluation report, which basically assessed how well the programme had been set up and its reach. We also have a longitudinal survey with the parents. We are expecting the first phase report very soon. The next wave of that survey will take place next year. That is very much about assessing the reach of the programme into families and the impact that it is making. So, we have one evaluation that says how well the programme has been established and the lessons that we need to learn, particularly in terms of future expansion. The survey tells us the impact that it is making with families. In respect of your question about reaching those who are hard to reach, the referral systems into Flying Start are important. If you talk to local Flying Start teams, you will find that they have connections into various referral systems. For example, social services will refer people to Flying Start. We then see fewer families going into more acute social services provision, because Flying Start is able to pick them up and work with them earlier in the system.

[127] In some areas, midwives are an integral part of a Flying Start team. So, although Flying Start, technically, is a programme from birth to the age of four, local authorities in some areas have worked with the local health board to include midwifery as part of the core Flying Start offer. In terms of expansion for the next phase of the programme, we will evaluate that, to see whether it is an effective way to work—getting to the families pre-birth.

[128] **Jenny Rathbone:** It also means that you are less likely to miss anyone, because nearly everyone has a midwife involved.

[129] **Mr Swain:** The advantage with Flying Start is that it is so closely locality based. In some areas, it is based on such small geographical areas we find that we miss very few. You will always get the exception where a family will just not engage. I am not naive enough to say that we capture every single family in a Flying Start area, because some families just will not engage with what they see as statutory services. I think that our reach in Flying Start areas is fairly expansive.

[130] **Jenny Rathbone:** So you are satisfied with the level of outreach.

[131] **Mr Swain:** I am fairly satisfied. We can always make improvements. The benefit of the evaluation is that the feedback that we get from parents is about how our health visitors interact with them, and whether it works better with them going into the home or into a clinic situation. I think that those are the lessons that we learn, and we build that into the future expansion.

[132] **Jenny Rathbone:** How well are Flying Start, Families First and integrated care—where it exists at present—collaborating? How good is the impact that they are having on re-shaping services to better meet people's needs?

[133] **Gwenda Thomas:** I do not think that we are there yet with 100 per cent interaction and collaboration, but we are on the way. That has to be a goal. As I have already said, one programme must complement the other. The preventative power of some of the programmes will be crucial. Last year, for example, we published, for the first time, the statistics in Wales of children in need, which made for very sober reading. Off the top of my head, that showed that there were around 26,000 children in need in Wales. I see a dam, if you like, between programmes like Flying Start, Families First, integrated family support services schemes and children in care. If we do not do our utmost to shore up that dam, we will be in big trouble. We also know that we have over 5,000 children in care in Wales. There is evidence to show that some children in need may be worse off than some children in care. I see those preventive policies as being crucial.

[134] Of course we need the sharp-end services such as IFSS, and that is where we have set a precedent in requiring health and social services to work together. We are no longer asking—we are saying that they must work together for the benefit of the children. That has been welcomed by front-line workers; they have welcomed the clarity of legislation. I believe that the integrated family support services are working as well, and evidence of that is emerging. I will, very soon, be able to announce a further two IFSS areas in Wales, bringing that budget up to £3.3 million. That is money well spent, in dealing with the sharp end and taking children the other way—bringing them out of care. That kind of action has to be taken, and I am pleased that figures are beginning to show success. I do not think that you will mind my repeating that ensuring that we do everything that we possibly can for children in need through programmes such as Families First, Flying Start and Communities First is the right way forward.

[135] **Christine Chapman:** Four other Members want to come in with brief supplementary questions on this point. We will start with Simon Thomas.

[136] **Simon Thomas:** Croesawaf yn fawr yr addewid yn y maniffesto i ehangu Dechrau'n Deg. Mae'n ymddangos bod dwy ffordd i'w ehangu: naill ai drwy fynd yn ddyfnach yn yr ardaloedd yr ydych eisoes yn gweithio ynddynt a cheisio cyrraedd plant a theuluoedd nad ydych wedi eu cyrraedd eto, neu drwy fynd yn ehangach ac edrych ar ardaloedd ychydig mwy, gan ddilyn y patrwm sydd wedi ei weld o ran Cymunedau yn Gyntaf, er enghraifft, a cheisio dylanwadu ar ddiwylliant lleol yn hytrach na gweithio mor agos â theuluoedd unigol. A fyddwch yn ceisio gwneud y ddau beth? Pa dystiolaeth sydd gennych i ddangos pa un yw'r ffordd fwyaf effeithlon o weithio? A ydych wedi

Simon Thomas: I welcome the commitment in the manifesto to expanding Flying Start. It appears that there are two ways of expanding it: either by going deeper into the areas in which you are currently working and trying to reach those children and families that you have not yet reached, or by widening things out and looking at larger areas, following the pattern seen in relation to Communities First, for example, and trying to influence local culture as opposed to working with individual families. Will you try to do both? What evidence do you have on the most efficient way of working? Have you decided yet how you will expand Flying Start?

penderfynu eto sut y byddwch yn ehangu Dechrau'n Deg?

[137] **Gwenda Thomas:** Yr ydym yn edrych ar sut y byddwn yn ei ehangu, ac yr ydym wedi ymrwymo i ddyblu nifer y plant sy'n elwa ohono. Credaf fod gennym y cyfle yn awr i ystyried yn fanwl y ffordd orau i fwrw ymlaen â'r cynllun. Credaf y byddai'r pwyllgor yn falch i fod yn rhan o'r ddadl honno; os yw am roi barn, byddwn yn hapus i'w ystyried. Byddwn hefyd yn hapus i wrando ar y bobl sy'n gweithio yn y maes, gan fod clywed am yr hyn sydd wedi digwydd yn barod yn bwysig iawn. Beth bynnag a wnawn, y peth pwysig yw cyrraedd cynifer o blant ag y bo modd—y plant sy'n fregus, plant mewn angen, fel y dywedais, a phlant sydd efallai ar fin mynd i ofal. Mae llawer o dystiolaeth y gallwn ddibynnu arni, ac yr ydym wrthi'n ei hystyried yn awr.

Gwenda Thomas: We have looked at how we will expand it, and we have committed to doubling the number of children who benefit from it. I believe that we now have the opportunity to consider in detail the best way to move forward with the scheme. I think that the committee would like to be part of that debate; if it wishes to express an opinion, I would be happy to consider it. I would also be happy to listen to people who work in the field, because hearing about what has already happened is very important. Whatever we do, the important thing is to reach as many children as possible—children who are vulnerable, children in need, as I said, and those children who are perhaps about to enter care. There is a lot of evidence on which we can rely, and we are in the process of considering it.

[138] **Aled Roberts:** Byddai'r pwyllgor yn croesawu'r drafodaeth honno. Mae gwahaniaeth barn—yn fy sir i, yn bendant. Ein profiad ni oedd nad oedd plant mewn angen y tu allan i'r ardaloedd yn cael y gwasanaeth. Yr wyf yn cydnabod yr hyn mae Jenny wedi ei ddweud, ond, mewn rhai ardaloedd, yr angen sy'n bwysig ac nid lle yr ydych yn byw. Cytunaf â chi: mae esiamplau o wasanaeth yn cael ei wrthod oherwydd eich bod yn byw ar ochr anghywir y stryd. Nid yw hynny'n iawn, yn fy marn i.

Aled Roberts: The committee would welcome that discussion. There is a difference of opinion—in my county, certainly. Our experience was that children in need outside those areas were not receiving the service. I accept what Jenny said, but, in some areas, it is the need that is important and not where you live. I agree with you: there are examples of a service being refused because someone lives on the wrong side of the street. In my opinion, that is not right.

[139] **Gwenda Thomas:** Ie. Mae Wrecsam yn ffrwd o dystiolaeth gadarn. Yn Wrecsam cafwyd un o'r timau cyntaf i integreiddio'r gwasanaethau hyn, ac yr wyf wedi cael cyfarfod fideo gyda'r tîm hwnnw yn y diwrnodau diwethaf. Mae'r bobl sy'n gweithio ar y ffas lo, fel petai, mewn sefyllfa yn awr i roi'r dystiolaeth inni, ac i gryfhau ein gwybodaeth o ran y ffordd ymlaen. Mae hwn yn fater i bob un ohonom—mae dod o hyd i'r plant hyn fel eu bod yn dod i sylw yn fater i gymdeithas.

Gwenda Thomas: Yes. A great deal of strong evidence has come from Wrexham. One of the first teams to integrate those services was based in Wrexham, and I have had a meeting with it via video link in the last few days. The people who are working at the coalface, as it were, are now in a position to provide us with evidence and to strengthen our information regarding the way forward. This is a matter for all of us—finding these children so that they come to our attention is a matter for society.

[140] **Julie Morgan:** Health visiting is key to all this, and to the increased provision that we want to see. Have we calculated whether there are enough health visitors in the system, or have we calculated for more to be recruited? Will they be available?

[141] **Gwenda Thomas:** This is the issue, Julie, and the strength of Flying Start is that the casework of health visitors does not extend beyond their ability to deal with it. We have capped the number at 110 cases. I will bring in Martin in a moment, but a programme that

operates in Colorado has come to my attention, where there are other ways of working that complement the role of health visitors. We need to consider all of this and look at evidence from other countries and other parts of the UK. However, the contribution of health visitors cannot be underestimated in the success of Flying Start. Does Martin want to say anything more on that?

[142] **Mr Swain:** We have calculated the number of additional health visitors that we would need, because we are very prescriptive in Flying Start that there can be no more than 110 families per health visitor. However, we have learned from the programme that they have built a multi-skilled team around the health visitor in some areas, so that the health visitor is not the core offer to the family. From the evaluation work that I have just described, we hope to find out what impact that skill mix has. We do not want to dilute the very intensive health visiting support that families get, but there may be a slightly different way of doing it in the future with an appropriate skills mix of people. However, we need to see the evidence, and we should have that evidence in the autumn. We do not want to dilute any aspect of the core offer of Flying Start, because they are important parts.

[143] **Julie Morgan:** So, you have calculated for that and you have the budget there to recruit.

[144] **Mr Swain:** We provide a budget for 18,000 children in the current scheme, but we deliver to over 19,000 children. That is because they do things slightly differently in some areas, and that is the learning process that we have to go through to understand Flying Start across 22 delivery models. Although it is very prescriptive, there are different ways of doing things. Whatever investment we put in, maximising the number of children and families that benefit has to be the overriding driver.

[145] **Keith Davies:** Yn dilyn o'r hyn a ddywedodd Simon ac Aled, yr ydych am ddyblu'r nifer a fydd yn rhan o raglen Dechrau'n Deg. Clywais y pwynt a wnaeth Aled sawl gwaith yn ystod yr ymgyrch etholiadol, sef nad oedd plant yn gallu ymuno â'r rhaglen oherwydd eu bod yn byw ar yr ochr arall i'r stryd. Y peth pwysig yn y cyfarfod a gawsom yn Llanelli oedd mai nid dim ond y gwasanaethau cymdeithasol a'r gwasanaeth iechyd oedd yno: yr oedd y gwasanaeth addysg yno hefyd. Yr oedd pennaeth yr ysgol leol yno yn sôn am ddenu teuluoedd a chael rhieni i ddarllen gyda'u plant. Yr oedd yr hyn yr oeddem yn sôn amdano yn gynharach gyda'r Gweinidog dros addysg yn bwysig, ond yr oedd y gwasanaethau hyn i gyd yn rhan o'r peth. Wrth edrych am ardaloedd newydd ar gyfer y rhaglen, mae'n bwysig bod yr asiantaethau iechyd, addysg a gwasanaethau cymdeithasol yn gweithio gyda'i gilydd cyn eich bod yn penderfynu. Mae dyblu nifer y rhai sy'n rhan o'r rhaglen yn golygu newid o 19,000 i 40,000 o blant dros Gymru, felly mae'n rhaid inni sicrhau bod y tîm sydd yno yn gallu cynnal y peth er budd y plant.

Keith Davies: Following on from what Simon and Aled said, your intention is to double the number participating in Flying Start. I heard the point that Aled made a number of times during the election campaign, namely that children could not join the programme because they lived on the other side of the street. The important thing about the meeting that we had in Llanelli was that it was not only social services and the health service that were in attendance: the education service was there too. The head of the local school was there, talking about attracting families and getting parents to read with their children. What we talked about earlier with the Minister for education was important, but these services were all a part of it. When you look for new areas for the programme, it is important that health, education and social services work together before you decide. Doubling the number of those participating in the programme means going from 19,000 to over 40,000 children across Wales, so we must ensure that the team that is in place can sustain the activities for the benefit of the children.

10.30 a.m.

[146] **Gwenda Thomas:** Yr ydym yn anelu at gynnwys chwarter plant Cymru, ac yr wyf yn cytuno'n llwyr bod angen i bob awdurdod weithio gyda'i gilydd. Gwelsom esiamplau yn Llanelli, ond yr wyf yn siŵr y byddai Abertawe yn maddau imi am ddweud eto'r bore yma bod Abertawe wedi dechrau edrych ymlaen yn bositif pan ddaeth y gwasanaethau cymdeithasol ac addysg at ei gilydd. Mae'r dystiolaeth yna i ddangos bod dod o hyd i blant drwy'r sector addysg yn bwysig iawn, gyda phlant meithrin hefyd. Dywedodd y prifathro yn eglur yn y cyfarfod yn Llanelli bod hynny'n hollbwysig, a bod y gwaith sy'n gallu cael ei wneud gyda'r oedran hwnnw yn bwysig pan ddaw'r plant hynny yn oedolion hefyd. Mae hynny'n hollbwysig. Yr ydym wedi ymrwymo fel Llywodraeth i weithio ar draws portffolios er mwyn inni gael y cydweithrediad hwn a'r ymrwymiad ar y cyd i yrru'r rhaglen ymlaen.

Gwenda Thomas: We are aiming to include a quarter of Welsh children, and I entirely agree that each authority must work together. We saw examples in Llanelli, but I am sure that Swansea would forgive me for saying once again this morning that Swansea started to look forward positively when social services and education came together. The evidence is in place to demonstrate that identifying children through the education system is very important, in terms of nursery children as well. The headteacher at the meeting in Llanelli stated clearly that he thought that that was crucial, and that the work that can be done with that age group is important when those children become adults as well. That is crucial. We are committed as a Government to working across portfolios so that we get this collaboration and joint commitment to drive this agenda forward.

[147] **Christine Chapman:** Before I move on to the next set of questions, do you want to make a final point, Jenny?

[148] **Jenny Rathbone:** An area that we are still not clear on is the engagement of parents in shaping Flying Start and whether that is an aspiration that you have.

[149] **Gwenda Thomas:** I am not saying that we have the monopoly on wisdom on this and we have to consider very carefully the best way forward. We can learn and depend on the evidence of the past, but to drive it forward, I am convinced that we have to link that to sustainable social services and to the evidence of the independent commission that looked at these very principles. Flying Start is an example of doing things differently; of working in different ways; of breaking down barriers and getting rid of complexities and bureaucracy. I believe that the firm foundation of sustainable social services, and moving that into legislation, will hold us in good stead and will answer some of the questions. However, we have to be open and receptive to the advice that experts in the field give us.

[150] **Christine Chapman:** Julie Morgan wants to come in now on adoption and fostering services.

[151] **Julie Morgan:** You are committed to having one adoption agency to cover Wales and the idea has been generally welcomed. Will you expand a little on how this would be set up? With all the local authorities involved in adoption, and with so many voluntary bodies involved in adoption, there is concern about how this will actually happen.

[152] **Gwenda Thomas:** We have clearly identified adoption as a service that would be best delivered nationally. As you know, I wrote to local authorities in March asking them how they are going to respond to the section of sustainable social services that impacts on them. This will be part of what I would expect to hear from them. We have had some interim responses. There are 23 adoption agencies in Wales and I am not convinced that that has led to permanency for children as well as it could. By developing this national resource, we would be able to better identify children who would be best served by adoption. We stick by

the principles that we think a child is best brought up within his or her own family or extended family, where it is safe for them, but we all know that there will be instances when that is not the answer. I believe that we must develop a more coherent approach to adoption, working with the British Association for Adoption and Fostering, which has done a lot of work for us with regard to adoption policy. This is not a cost-cutting measure. It will release resources, of course, for reinvestment in the service, but it is of paramount importance to me that we get the best answers for a child's needs. Moving toward a national agency is best.

[153] **Julie Morgan:** I entirely agree that this is the way forward. You say that you have written to the local authorities; have you written to voluntary bodies asking for their views about how we should go forward?

[154] **Gwenda Thomas:** Yes; I mentioned the British Association for Adoption and Fostering, and I met the voluntary sector this week to explore my enhanced portfolio. I will be listening to that sector knowing that we can benefit from its expertise and knowing that we will do so.

[155] **Julie Morgan:** One area that is patchy is post-adoption support. Do you have any plans to tackle that, as it is very much a postcode lottery?

[156] **Gwenda Thomas:** I would like to look at the national resource of excellence to support this. I am aware that post-adoption support is patchy, as is pre-adoption support sometimes. It is a whole process, and underlying it is our statutory responsibility for the welfare of children. We cannot divorce one from the other, so we will be considering the issue and how we can better develop post-adoption support.

[157] **Suzy Davies:** I welcome the idea of introducing common standards, but can you explain how that might work on a cross-border basis? There will be children somewhere like Powys who are placed across the border in England and vice versa. Are those standards going to be in line with any common standards in England?

[158] **Gwenda Thomas:** This is being considered. Since the referendum, we in Wales are masters of our own destiny. However, that does not mean that we will build brick walls around ourselves, and it is very important that we learn from other countries. I believe that we need common standards of service in Wales. We are looking at what is happening in the field of child welfare at the moment—the family justice review, for example—and how that impacts on all of these policies. We will need strong cross-border protocols on what is best for children. If a child is being cared for in Wales and there are suitable adoptive parents over the border, nobody is going to put anything before the welfare of that child. We will be looking to develop our work on that.

[159] **Lynne Neagle:** I apologise that, due to family commitments, I was late this morning. I want to ask about kin carers, which is an issue that I raised with you in correspondence because of cases that came up in my constituency. From the casework that I have done, it seems that kin carers are not getting a fair crack of the whip and are not getting the same financial support as other carers. This seems to me to be a disincentive for family members when everyone is finding it difficult to make ends meet. We would prefer children to be raised with their families. I know that the University of Bristol has recently published a big report on this, and I wonder whether you have any plans to change policies to ensure that support is on a par with that for non-kin carers.

[160] **Gwenda Thomas:** Yes; this has to be part of how we look after children in care. A legacy report from the previous committee made recommendations on this. We need to look at all options, and kin carers are often invaluable. Before you were able to join us, I said that we need to look at all options for the child. Of course we want to try to support the child to

live within the family or the extended family, and I think that local authorities have the authority under the Children Act to support kin carers, and a lot of them do. I know that you have come across some people who have not received this support, but one of the basic principles for integrated family support teams is to support kin carers. As I have said to committee, the first indications are that IFSTs are beginning to deliver for the benefit of children. The kin carers issue is fundamental to the success of that.

[161] **Christine Chapman:** On that point, I wonder if you have any comments on kin carers. I have dealt with some difficult cases—for example, with grandparents who are involved with their grandchildren, but then the children are adopted. I have seen quite a lot of that recently, and I wonder if you had any comments on that. Sometimes grandparents are not allowed to adopt or foster because of age and ill health.

[162] **Gwenda Thomas:** Yes, and because of family fallout, and so on. This is one issue that the family justice review has considered robustly. That review was jointly commissioned by me and the UK Government. There is an interim report, but the panel will report fully in the autumn, and I am sure that we will want to look at recommendations within that report that support our policies. I was delighted that Keith Towler accepted my request to be our representative on that panel, and I know that Keith has made clear our policies in Wales, and his expectation of the Welsh Government. I think that, when we see that final report, the committee would be interested in that, and in our responses to it.

[163] **Christine Chapman:** I am going to bring Jocelyn in because I know that she has a series of questions on this.

[164] **Jocelyn Davies:** Yes, the family justice review is something that I am interested in, and it links in with the safeguarding and child protection issues, because the courts are often part of that process. Bearing in mind your previous comments about children in need and looked-after children, the family justice review clearly shows that the system is not working. It says that there are huge delays, and anyone who has had constituency casework will know about that, and these delays really matter. The court process in itself can lead to children living with uncertainty for months and sometimes years. I can see from the report that the average case in 2010 took a staggering 53 weeks. In 1989, it was just 12 weeks. Those are average times, so you can imagine that there must be some cases that take much longer. Obviously, the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service comes into this, and it is at the point where it cannot work on all the cases. There are ever more expert assessments being ordered, and this becomes a long, adversarial process, and that process harms children—children whom you are trying to protect. The process of protection harms them. I would be pleased to hear your views on that.

[165] I know that you mentioned numbers earlier, but I would be interested to know how many children in need we have in Wales, and how many looked-after children, just for clarification. Going back to the law review, how long is the average case in Wales taking? I know that you have a commitment to review the law, and to set those national standards, but obviously the court process is out of your hands, Deputy Minister. We have had an inspection of CAF/CASS, which was found to be satisfactory in relation to overall effectiveness, but inadequate in relation to the capacity for improvement. Your comments on where we go with CAF/CASS would therefore be of interest.

10.45 a.m.

[166] **Gwenda Thomas:** I am glad to have the opportunity to do that. I have the utmost faith in the new chief executive of CAF/CASS, Gillian Baranski, who, I am sure, would be more than pleased to come to committee to explain her policies.

[167] I am pleased to say that CAFCASS has a history of reaching its targets. Nobody denies that more children are going through the court system, but I was pleased at the end of the last Assembly be able to write to CAFCASS to congratulate it on reducing the backlog of cases. They have now been reduced significantly. I cannot recall the exact figures, but—

[168] **Jocelyn Davies:** A note would be fine.

[169] **Gwenda Thomas:** I would be pleased to send a note to committee on the current figures.

[170] Linking that to the family justice review, my view has always been that the court procedure—my background was in county courts and dealing with adoption, so I can go back many years to find some similarities—is a process that happens when we retain our responsibility for the welfare of those children throughout. There have been issues in my mind about the continuity of the welfare process during that time, but Gillian Baranski is now reaching the end of a full structural review of the organisation. She has established a new senior management team, she has improved processes for managing and handling complaints from adult service users, she has developed effective feedback processes for children and young people who have been involved with the organisation—it is very important that that has happened—and she has developed an appropriate performance management system and performance indicators. Gillian is also keen to make a link between CAFCASS and the advocacy programme. That is also very important, because advocacy for children during that process is very important. Gillian has made that link.

[171] There is an advisory board that advises CAFCASS—I do not know whether you are familiar with it—and the voices of children and young people are being heard on that board as well. So I believe that there have been huge steps forward, and I would be more than pleased to set them out for committee. Alternatively, the committee might want to talk to Gillian.

[172] **Jocelyn Davies:** On the issue of changes to the legal aid system, if family law cases are to be excluded so that people are then litigants in person, we already have huge delays that harm children and so I wonder what the future will be, however hard CAFCASS works on its processes, because that other stuff is beyond our control. I would be grateful, Deputy Minister, if you would look at the effects that the changes to legal aid might have and give us a note on your views on that—I do not expect you to have that information with you today—in relation to child protection issues, delays, and the potential harm that that might cause to the most needy young people. The process might add to the harm that they experience.

[173] **Gwenda Thomas:** I would be pleased to do that. It is a non-devolved issue, but the child protection forum, which has been working for a while now under the chairmanship of Phil Hodgson, has looked at issues of this nature in order to advise me how we move forward to the national protection board. There is expertise on that forum and I am sure that the committee will be interested in the final report of the forum, which will soon be to hand.

[174] **Lynne Neagle:** I understand that the UK Government has persisted with the policy of increasing court charges in relation to child protection issues. I have tabled written questions on this topic before. It is a non-devolved issue, I know, but there was a lot of concern at the time that the increase in charges would lead to local authorities being deterred from pursuing cases that they should be pursuing. Have you had any feedback on that in Wales and on the impact that it has had?

[175] **Gwenda Thomas:** There was a u-turn on court fees. Janet brought up the £8 million that she thought had been taken out of the budget and I said that it was £8 million that was being transferred to the revenue support grant. Part of that was to reimburse local authorities for court fees as a result of the u-turn. There was a move to take the responsibility for the

payment of court fees away from local authorities, but I felt that that would impede local authorities from going to court when they needed to. However, there was a u-turn and local authorities are being reimbursed. I do not have up-to-date figures to hand regarding the position of all local authorities with regard to court cases, but I am happy to make that information available, because we keep statistics on those issues.

[176] **Julie Morgan:** I am concerned that young offenders are not within this committee's brief, because I understand that the Welsh Government has always said that they should be treated as children first, not offenders. Can that be remedied? What are your views on that?

[177] **Gwenda Thomas:** I cannot comment on the designation of ministerial portfolios, but there is the youth justice system and the welfare of the young people who go through that system. The youth justice system is not devolved, but the welfare of offenders is. Therefore, that is another issue on which we have to work with the UK Government. As part of the five-year legislative programme that the First Minister announced this week, we will consult on a prevention of youth offending Bill over the next two years. That would strengthen the delivery of services to children and young people who are entering and leaving the youth justice system, making clear the vulnerabilities of those in the system and establishing duties on local partnerships to address them. In other words, that will confer equivalent entitlement on those entering the juvenile custodial detention to the entitlement of looked-after children. So there is consideration of that. The Welsh Government is firmly committed to the youth justice agenda and continues to support and assist children and young people made vulnerable through offending, and upholds the principle that those young people are young people first—as you said, Julie—and offenders second.

[178] Following the Cabinet's endorsement of the paper on the devolution of youth justice, the Cabinet agreed that officials should carry out further work to examine and quantify the implications for local authorities and their partners. Following the publication of the Cabinet minutes on the devolution of youth justice, a paper was presented on that in March 2011 and there has been further engagement with the Wales Youth Justice Committee, which has membership from all the relevant sectors and partners, including the police, the Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru, the Welsh Local Government Association, the Association of Directors of Education in Wales and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers. A detailed implementation plan will be developed over the coming months with an update to Cabinet in the autumn. However, the implementation is likely to be achieved through a combination of primary legislation, changes to statutory guidance and financial levers through the safer communities fund. We will continue to explore the devolution of youth justice, and our commitment is that, over time, we will manage all youth justice services in Wales. So, we intend to bring in a Bill on the prevention of offending, but there is a wider issue—I would rather stick to the notes on that to get it right. I am sure that it would make sense to a lot of us.

[179] The other thing that I would like to mention in relation to this is the autism strategy and the way that that strategy clearly showed some difficulties for young people when they perhaps did not get a diagnosis of autism and ended up in the criminal justice system. Part of the implementation of the autism strategy looks at that.

[180] **Julie Morgan:** Thank you very much for that response, Deputy Minister, and I welcome the moves towards the possible devolution of youth justice in the long term. I know that you cannot comment on ministerial portfolios, but I reiterate that I had expected that youth offending would be addressed by this committee, in looking at young offenders as children first. I realise that you have said that you cannot comment on that, but I think that it is a mistake.

[181] **Simon Thomas:** Erbyn hyn, **Simon Thomas:** By now, Deputy Minister,

Ddirprwy Weinidog, nid yw'r hyn sydd gennyf i'w ddweud yn gwestiwn. Yn syml, yr wyf yn croesawu'r datganiad yr ydych newydd ei wneud ar ddatganioli'r gyfundrefn gyfiawnder ieuencid i Gymru. Yr wyf yn falch bod y Llywodraeth yn parhau gyda'r gwaith a wnaed gan y Llywodraeth flaenorol ac yr wyf yn gobeithio y byddwch yn gallu dod yn ôl i'r pwyllgor ryw dro i'n diweddarau ynglŷn â'r broses.

what I have to say is not a question. I simply want to welcome the statement that you have just made on devolving the youth criminal justice system to Wales. I am glad that the Government is continuing with the work done by the previous Government and I hope that you will be able to return to the committee at some point to give us an update on the process.

[182] **Gwenda Thomas:** Diolch, Simon.

Gwenda Thomas: Thank you, Simon.

[183] **Christine Chapman:** I have a final point on children's budgeting, because we discussed it a lot in the last Assembly. Can you give us an update on the priority given to children's budgeting?

[184] **Gwenda Thomas:** This is important to me and, straight away, I acknowledge that there has been a delay on this. My officials have developed a children and young people's budgeting action plan and have recently asked for an update on this from relevant policy leads. This is an issue that has been brought up by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and we will need to respond to the next UNCRC meeting on this matter. I do not know whether you remember the group that I chaired for the previous First Minister, Rhodri Morgan, looking at keeping children safe. This became an issue for the panel to consider. I do not think that anything has changed since then. We could revisit the report of that review and look at what young people told us at that time. It has to be a priority. The Welsh Government accepted the majority of the recommendations from the previous Children and Young People Committee, which made strong recommendations on this. We are committed to responding to those recommendations.

[185] The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 focuses the mind on raising awareness of the UNCRC and, within that, on this important issue of children's budgeting. Within children's budgeting, there is gender budgeting, at which we also need to look. So, it is a matter that is receiving serious consideration and I am happy to come back to the committee when I have had more time to get on top of this aspect.

[186] **Christine Chapman:** Thank you for that, Deputy Minister, and we look forward to that work. I thank you on behalf of all the Members. I know that there may be some areas that we did not have time to address this morning. Therefore, would you be happy for the committee to write to you following the meeting, if there are issues that require clarification?

[187] **Gwenda Thomas:** I would be more than happy with that and I think that effective dialogue between us will only help the agenda. I am grateful for the opportunity to come to the committee this morning. Diolch yn fawr.

11.00 a.m.

Cynnig Tefniadol Procedural Motion

[188] **Christine Chapman:** We shall now move to discuss matters relating to possible future inquiries. I move that

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

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

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.