



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

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

**Dydd Mercher, 3 Rhagfyr 2014
Wednesday, 3 December 2014**

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of the Meeting

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

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

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

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

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Sam Ali	Ymddiriedolwr Cyngor Hiliaeth Cymru Race Council Cymru Trustee
Jeff Collins	Cyfarwyddwr Cymru, Y Groes Goch Brydeinig Wales Director, British Red Cross
Rhian Davies	Prif Weithredwr, Anabledd Cymru Chief Executive, Disability Wales
Miranda French	Rheolwr Polisi a Materion Cyhoeddus, Anabledd Cymru Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Disability Wales
Victoria Goodban	Cydlynnydd y Prosiect Sanctuary in Wales, Oxfam Cymru Sanctuary in Wales Project Co-ordinator, Oxfam Cymru
Uzo Iwobi	Prif Weithredwr, Cyngor Hiliaeth Cymru Chief Executive, Race Council Cymru
Glyn Meredith	Cyfarwyddwr Gweithredu Cymru, Leonard Cheshire Disability Director of Operations Wales, Leonard Cheshire Disability
Yr Athro / Professor Jane Millar	Dirprwy Is-Ganghellor Ymchwil, Prifysgol Caerfaddon Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research, University of Bath
Betty Nyamwenge	Ceisydd Lloches o Gaerdydd, Prosiect Ffoaduriaid Oxfam An Asylum Seeker from Cardiff, Oxfam Refugee Project
Stanislava Sofrenic	Uwch Reolwr Gwasanaethau, Y Groes Goch Brydeinig Senior Services Manager, British Red Cross
Rhian Stangroom-Teel	Polisi a Materion Cyhoeddus Cymru, Leonard Cheshire Disability Policy and Public Affairs Wales, Leonard Cheshire Disability

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

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

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

Cyflwyniadau, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon Introductions, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Christine Chapman:** Good morning, and welcome to the National Assembly's Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee. I remind Members that, if they have any mobile phones, they should switch them to silent. We have not received any apologies this morning.

09:15

Ymchwiliad i Dlodi yng Nghymru (Elfen 1)—Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 7: Prifysgol Caerfaddon Inquiry into Poverty in Wales (Strand 1)—Evidence Session 7: University of Bath

[2] **Christine Chapman:** Our first main item today is our inquiry into poverty in Wales. This is actually evidence session 7. We are taking evidence from the University of Bath. This is on strand 1 of our inquiry into poverty in Wales, which focuses on poverty and inequality. I would like to give a warm welcome to Professor Jane Millar, pro-vice chancellor for research at the University of Bath. Welcome to you, Professor Millar.

[3] **Professor Millar:** Thank you very much.

[4] **Christine Chapman:** I would like to thank you for the paper that you sent in advance. We will go straight into questions if you are happy with that.

[5] **Professor Millar:** Yes, thank you very much, and thank you for the opportunity to come to talk to you.

[6] **Christine Chapman:** We look forward to that today. I just want to start off with a fairly general question really. Other Members will come in on other aspects. We have heard about the dynamic nature of poverty and how there is a lack of evidence to base policy upon. Could you outline what we know about poverty in Wales? Is it changing or is it the same?

[7] **Professor Millar:** Poverty in Wales in particular.

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

[9] **Professor Millar:** I am probably better on the UK as a whole, but I will try, where I can, to talk about Wales. I think, on the extent of poverty in the UK and in Wales, if we look at the data on income poverty, which are the best data we have that we can look at over time, they tend to show that the level of poverty has not changed that much. There was a dip—. There has been a change in the characteristics of the people who are most likely to be at risk of poverty. So, pensioner poverty has fallen, and what we have seen is an increase in poverty

among people of working age and families with children, so child poverty also. So, on the different characteristics of people who are poor, that has changed a bit. There was a fall—there was quite a significant fall in child poverty during the late 1990s going into the 2000s. So, we did see child poverty fall at that time. However, if you take quite a long-term view, looking at the past 30 years or so, what you see is similar levels of poverty—so not much of a fall overall in the level of poverty, although, as I say, there have been changes in the characteristics of those people who are most likely to be found in poverty.

[10] **Christine Chapman:** Jocelyn is next.

[11] **Jocelyn Davies:** I know that you mentioned that you know more about the UK than Wales specifically, but could you say anything about the Welsh Government's approach to tackling poverty in comparison to what is going on elsewhere?

[12] **Professor Millar:** Yes. First of all, I think that the thing to say about Wales is that I know you have more of a challenge here for various different reasons. You have got lower GDP per head, there are lower overall employment rates, there is higher unemployment and lower gross weekly earnings, more people leaving school and not going into employment, and so on. So, there is a set of challenges that is particularly high here. If you look at the Wales poverty rates, still focusing on income poverty, compared with the UK as a whole, you can see that it is a bit higher here, and that is true across everyone—children, working age people and pensioners, so that is true in general. It is particularly true for children, so I think there is a particular issue in relation to child poverty. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation recently put out a report on poverty in Wales—you will be familiar with it. It identified three main areas: inactivity—so people not in the labour market—disability and in-work poverty. Those were the particular areas of challenge. The recent commission—I always forget its name; it is the social inequality or social justice commission—state of the nation report also pointed to certain areas where Wales was not performing perhaps as well as other countries in the UK. So, I think that there are certain areas where the strategy, although I think it is focused on the right sort of areas—on jobs and training, on education and so on—does not seem to be delivering. May I give you a bit of wider context though?

[13] **Jocelyn Davies:** Yes, of course.

[14] **Professor Millar:** If you look across Europe as a whole or more widely, trends in poverty are also pretty flat. Poverty has not been falling generally in Europe. Of course, in some European countries recently, poverty has risen quite steeply. So, there is a broader issue about changes in the labour market and the opportunities for people to be able to sustain themselves through paid work, changes in family structure and the way that families are constituted and come into being and actually, I have to say, changes in what Governments are doing in relation to social protection, because we have generally seen a decline in the level of support for families, particularly those out of work. There has been a decline in the real level but also there are greater conditions attached to it, more time limits and so on. So, I think that the safety net has been taken away a little bit, and that has also contributed to the fact that poverty is not falling.

[15] **Jocelyn Davies:** You will know that we do not have control over benefits and that kind of thing, so what should the Welsh Government focus on?

[16] **Professor Millar:** Control over benefits does seem to me to be an extremely important part of it. That thing about ensuring an adequate level of benefits seems to me a very important first line of defence, but, as you say, that is not within its control. I think that the other way to look at it, therefore, is to think about what costs can be reduced. If you cannot raise incomes, can you take away some of the costs that people have to face? I am thinking of things like basic needs, which we know at the moment for many poor people are

quite challenging—the cost of housing, the cost of food, the cost of fuel and so on. I would have to add the cost of childcare to that, and indeed other forms of care in families. So, if we can think of ways of perhaps addressing the issue of costs rather than income, because you are saving on income if you do not have to spend on those things, that may be another way into the issue of what can be done.

[17] **Christine Chapman:** I have Gwyn and then Mike, so I will bring Gwyn in first and then Mike.

[18] **Gwyn R. Price:** Do you have an opinion on whether any further powers should be devolved to Wales, for example, powers over the Work Programme and tax-varying powers, that could help out in these situations?

[19] **Professor Millar:** In a way, it is hard for me to say about what powers might be devolved, but I suppose, if you look at it the other way, if you think about what works and what therefore what would be good for you to have control over, as I said, I certainly think that benefit levels are an important part of it. However, things like the Work Programme I would say are quite an important element, because that is about being able to support people to get into work. On the Work Programme, what we know about labour market programmes is that they do work best when they have a local understanding, if I can put it in those terms—when they are rooted in the local place and they understand the local labour market. So, it seems to me that something like the Work Programme would be a very effective element. The other side of things, as I said, that I do think are important are things like childcare support and so on—so, being able to provide that sort of care at subsidised levels and rates. So, it is about the props around that.

[20] **Christine Chapman:** Mike is next.

[21] **Mike Hedges:** I have two questions. The first one is that in your paper you talk about tax credits and income and even when income goes up all that happens is that tax credits come down, so the amount of money that you have stays stationary. I did not see you talking in your paper about people who work variable hours, because a lot of people I know are not on zero-hours contracts—they are guaranteed five or eight hours, but they can work 30 hours or they can work eight hours. Does that cause problems within the tax credit system?

[22] **Professor Millar:** Yes, absolutely. In the study that we did, where we were talking to a sample of lone mothers in particular about their experience in the labour market, we certainly found that their hours changed a lot. That was one of the issues that people found difficult to cope with. Hours of work were unpredictable and people did not necessarily therefore know what hours they were going to work, but also therefore what pay they would receive. That level of change in the pay is then reflected in the tax credit but not necessarily immediately. So, there was an issue about the unpredictability. What you had was a complex package of income, your wages were varying a lot, your tax credits would vary a lot for reasons you would not necessarily understand and the bits that were secure in your income were relatively small. So, what the research seemed to show was that the more you can secure some part of that income, the more important it is. That is why I believe, for example, that child benefit is extremely important anti-poverty income, although that is not what it only is but it certainly plays that role, because it provides something that is secure in people's incomes.

[23] The tax credit system is very important in supporting low wages, but because it is means-tested and tries to take account in a lot of detail of those sorts of changes, it causes problems. I think a better design would allow some variation in hours of work and income, so that you did not immediately lose your tax credits when your hours changed a bit, to give a bit more security. I worry, I have to say, about universal credit as it comes in, because I think that

that potentially has all the problems of tax credits and possibly a few more. So, I think that universal credit will not necessarily help to solve these problems.

[24] **Mike Hedges:** The other question here is that—everyone else in here is bored of me saying it, but you have not heard me say it, so it is the first time for you—it is very expensive to be poor in terms of the cost of a whole range of things. For example, it is much better to be on a dual fuel direct debit than it is to put tokens in a meter, but also, if you live in suburbia, you have these double-glazed houses, which are relatively energy efficient, but if you are privately renting, you can be in a house with single glazing, with windows not fitting perhaps as well as you would like, and you have a whole range of problems. So, yes, you want to cut down costs, but I would guess that some of my poorest constituents are paying more to heat their houses to not be cold than I am paying to keep mine warm.

[25] **Professor Millar:** You are absolutely right and that is true in all sorts of ways. The costs of being poor are very high. So, it raises issues then, in respect of my earlier point, about how we reduce those costs and how we ensure that things like energy efficiency programmes reach the poorest families.

[26] On things like credit unions, what we have seen is a big expansion, for example, in the pay-day loan sector, so that sector of the financial market has risen very substantially. A lot of people depend on it and they do that because they cannot get credit elsewhere. It is fulfilling a need, which is why it has grown and increased in size. Of course, it is a very, very expensive way to borrow. In my view, we need more regulation of that sector of the financial market, but we also need alternatives.

[27] So, we need alternative ways in which people can get access to credit to meet unexpected—. One of the aspects of being poor, of course, is that unexpected expense that comes along that you cannot possibly meet. So, ways of meeting that unexpected expense seem to be absolutely essential. I am also a great believer in one-off lump sums that people should be able to use as they want. That is the other side of benefits: people living on very low incomes are scratching along, if you like, and just managing, and the occasional injection of a lump sum of money would help people a lot, to meet some of their debts, which we know are very significant, and meet some of these extra costs that otherwise are very difficult to meet.

[28] **Mike Hedges:** On your last point, with some of my constituents whom I talk to, one of the big problems is a funeral, especially when it comes unexpectedly. They are very expensive and it is very difficult to meet those costs. Have you come across that?

[29] **Professor Millar:** Yes, absolutely. Some colleagues of mine at the University of Bath in fact worked very closely in this area and they worked very closely with the National Association of Funeral Directors, talking about these costs. It is absolutely true. We used to have part of the social security system where you could apply for help with that. This is exactly the sort of need that we have cut away from the system, but, as you say, it can be very distressing for people not being able to meet that. So, I would say that something like that would be an important element, and it goes back to the safety net that we need.

[30] **Christine Chapman:** I have Mark, then Janet.

[31] **Mark Isherwood:** There is a cross-party group on funerals and bereavement, which is engaging on that matter, and I would encourage Members to come to meetings and perhaps take part in the agenda. More broadly, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has previously indicated that growth in the barriers in the tax and benefit system during the so-called noughties was a critical contributor to poverty in Wales. You mentioned the Work Programme. It is designed to go in cold and develop according to the local market and local

circumstances, which you indicated was critical. Is it not the case that simply devolving would not change anything, it is the policies that might be applied to the betterment or detriment of what preceded, and put simply devolution is not a magic wand; it is how the powers are applied, at whichever level of government, and how they are then implemented on the ground?

[32] **Professor Millar:** I think that it is absolutely true that implementation on the ground is absolutely crucial—so, the way in which policies are put into practice. Well-designed policies that people cannot actually put into practice on the ground are not well-designed policies in effect, so I think that that is absolutely the case. It seems to me that the place is very important in poverty; your location, your local labour market and the opportunities that are available to you and so on are really important. So, if we are thinking of measures to tackle poverty, I think that they have to happen at a number of levels. There are macroeconomic policies that are absolutely crucial, which obviously need to happen at national or, indeed, supranational sorts of levels, but there are also regional and local policies that are also extremely important. So, I would say that there are a number of different levels that are all important in terms of tackling poverty. How we get them to work together, I guess that is part of your devolution question; that is, can you get them to work together to work effectively in a devolved structure, or can you get them to work together effectively in other sorts of structures? I am not an expert on that, but I would agree with you that the delivery on the ground is the bit that is really crucial to making them work.

09:30

[33] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Good morning. As regards poverty, sometimes, where there needs to be intervention to give support to families in how they spend their money and how they save, do you think that that could actually be addressed by earlier intervention, more financial literacy and education? You could theoretically give three people £100 per week and some may be able to have some left the following week; people would spend it on different things and people would prioritise different things. Do you think that we are getting to a stage now where financial knowledge and education, really, and financial literacy need to be brought in at an earlier age?

[34] You may be aware that Bethan Jenkins was attempting to get a Bill through last week, which was, unfortunately, not supported by the Welsh Government. However, I believe that there are some steps that are going to be taken. Do you believe that there needs to be earlier intervention? I raised this in Plenary, in the Siambur, that when I was little, we used to have National Savings stamps. That was in primary school. We could decide whether we spent our money on those stamps and saving up, and, as friends, we used to do different things. However, it was getting it into us early enough. There were the savings banks, piggy banks and things. There does not seem to be that kind of culture anymore and I think that we have ended up with a long-term problem where people, of all backgrounds, can end up now not really knowing how to manage their finances. I want your views on that, please.

[35] **Professor Millar:** Thank you very much.

[36] **Christine Chapman:** Just for the record, I think that Bethan's financial Bill was withdrawn. So, it was not—

[37] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Because it was not being supported.

[38] **Christine Chapman:** Well, it was withdrawn anyway.

[39] **Alun Davies:** Janet, you cannot assume that; the fact is that it was withdrawn.

[40] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** There was enough negativity—.

[41] **Christine Chapman:** Anyway, we will—

[42] **Professor Millar:** So, it did not go forward.

[43] **Christine Chapman:** Professor Millar, we will—.

[44] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** [*Inaudible.*]

[45] **Professor Millar:** Let me try to tackle the complicated issue that you have raised there. I think there are a number of things in that. First of all, I think it is definitely true that we live in a more complex financial world, and, in part, added to that is the online nature of some of this. So, it is the capacity to understand the online financial services and how best to use them. The capacity to access the benefits system and the tax credits system and to understand it does seem to be—. So, yes, we are aware that people do often need advisers and people to help them to find their way through it.

[46] I have to say, from our study of lone parents, one of the women—and we actually wrote this up as a single case study, which you would very rarely do, but we took this one case because I found it so interesting—worked as a financial accountant and was running the accounts for a company. She understood the financial world, but she could not understand the tax credits system. She could not get it to work for her. Despite her having a very high knowledge of these systems and really being savvy with it all, she just could not get it to work for her. So, even people who really understand it can struggle with what we have created in terms of a very difficult system, in both the state sector and, I would say, in the private sector. So, yes, I would agree.

[47] The other thing, though, I think the evidence about people living in poverty shows is that there is quite a lot on budgeting and how people spend their money, including some evidence from children and their understanding of their families. Many people living in poverty are pretty good managers, actually. They have to be. They are working really hard all the time to manage their money and they are pretty aware of everything that they have got, what is coming in and what is going out, because they need to be. People use different systems to do that. There are all sorts of different systems there, and I have to say that, sometimes, in single-parent families, it can be easier because there is only one of you to do that managing. So, people use all sorts of different systems. Now, at certain points, those systems fall down because there just is not enough money. It is nothing to do with what you are doing as a manager. It is the fact that you have not got enough, so you are never going to manage it well enough to make it succeed. So, to some extent, the people, and particularly women, I have to say, who are managing poverty every day are doing it very well and are succeeding, or are coping a lot in very difficult circumstances.

[48] We interviewed children as part of our study. They were children aged eight to 14. Actually, my colleague Tess Ridge at the University of Bath has done a number of studies where she has talked to children living in families on low incomes. Those children are perhaps more aware than we might expect them to be, and sometimes more aware than their parents think they are, of the financial circumstances of the family. So, they do understand it. One of the things they do is stop asking their parents for things, because they recognise that their parents probably cannot afford them; they withdraw a little bit from making demands and so on. So, children also have a pretty good understanding of their situation. That does not quite answer your question about whether we need more financial education for children, because I agree that we probably do. I think that, probably, the way in which we teach children to think about the world of adulthood—if I can put it in those terms, because I would take it more broadly than that; it is about civic responsibility and so on—is probably

something that we do not do enough of and could usefully do. However, I do not think that it is just about poor children, I would have to say; I would think that it would be a general sort of issue.

[49] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Oh, yes; I think it is across the board.

[50] **Professor Millar:** Yes. My overall point, however, would be that we live in a complex financial world in which poor people living in poverty have to work very hard to manage.

[51] **Christine Chapman:** Peter is next.

[52] **Peter Black:** When we had the Bevan Foundation giving evidence to us, it suggested to us that the Welsh Government could do more to develop low-skilled sections of the labour market, such as caring and retail. I was just wondering what your view of that was.

[53] **Professor Millar:** On this issue about the nature of the labour market, the skills required and areas like that, certainly the care sector is an extremely important sector of employment, for both the supply and the demand, if you like. We know that there is a need for more care services. We know that that is an important area where there is a need for more care services. So, I would say that that would be an important area to think about how we develop it. The question is what sort of jobs it is creating. So, if the focus is on creating low-paid jobs, then that sort of pushes the problem along a little bit, does it not? It bounces it along. So, I think that issue about the nature of the job creation and how far it is necessary to subsidise wages in certain sectors of employment is something that would need to be considered and addressed.

[54] **Peter Black:** Okay. Do you think that intervention by the Welsh Government could help people who are suffering in-work poverty, such as women in those particular sectors? Would you have to have a direct subsidy to do that, or are there other interventions that might help?

[55] **Professor Millar:** There could be. I mean, some of the evidence about what helps women in particular to be able to stay in work are things like wages—certainly, the pay is important—and flexibility in terms of hours, that is, the way in which flexibility operates in jobs. We know that there is a lot of flexibility that employers are using, in effect, to manage their workloads, but I think that looking at it from the other side, in terms of what flexibility would help people to manage their work and life, is very important. So, on one side, there is flexibility for the employers, and on the other side, back to the care side, are the issues of care that go around the normal working day, so that care services that focus on what you might call the 9-to-5 working day will not necessarily help a lot of people. So, the issue of how you maintain a level of services that can fit unsocial hours, or different hours, is something that is really important, I think.

[56] **Peter Black:** Okay. Your research found that securing stable employment was a particular issue for lone mothers, and you have touched on that already today. Do you find any examples of good practice in the private sector around job progression and security?

[57] **Professor Millar:** I think that we are bit lacking in research, actually, to be honest, in this area to really understand. We know a little bit about what works in terms of helping people to stay in work. In Bristol, there is an organisation called the Single Parent Action Network and, a couple of years ago, it did a project where it talked to lone parents about the factors that helped them to stay in work. It certainly was about employers being flexible and the provision of support, not necessarily from employers, but others who could provide payment for training and further training and so on. That is, subsidies to enable people to train

and improve their situation.

[58] Actually, one of the things that we found in our research that helped the women a lot to stay in work was not so much the formal rights that they had in work, but actually the informal relationships. It was about their line managers, their co-workers, their boss and so on being a bit sympathetic and understanding and willing to have a bit of give and take. I actually think that, probably, understanding that better and spreading that sort of good practice across employers would be a useful thing to do. So, I should think that we need some more—. Sorry to say this—academics always come in and say that we need more research—but I think that we need some more work with employers who are providing a good environment for their particularly low-paid women workers, to understand what it is that works better. I do not think that we have a good evidence base on that.

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

[60] **Jocelyn Davies:** Just out of curiosity, in terms of the women whom you did the study on, the lone parents, were the absent parents contributing financially?

[61] **Professor Millar:** Some were, and some were not.

[62] **Jocelyn Davies:** Did it make any difference if somebody was out of work, or in work, whether their partner was contributing?

[63] **Professor Millar:** It does not seem to make a difference whether they are in work, or out of work, whether their partners are contributing. There is quite a lot of research that is trying to look at what makes it more likely for partners to contribute, and so on. One thing that we found, though, which was quite interesting, was that the partners would not necessarily contribute with income—and, you know, your partner is probably low income as well, to be honest, so it can be quite difficult to do that—but they would contribute with time. Again, what they did not contribute was time while the mother was actually working. It was not substitute childcare. What they did was contribute time at other times, so, actually, they helped the mothers to manage their work a lot more by giving them respite, or time off, if you like. So, it was not a simple, ‘You’ll care for the kid while I go for work’; it was much more, ‘We’ll take the weekends, or the evenings, or something’, and that enabled the mothers to have some sort of recovery time.

[64] The other thing that we found, which I also thought was very interesting, was that, for the children, that often meant that their relationships with their absent fathers improved, because they were spending more time with them. So, actually, it was an unexpected positive effect of it, that they actually got to spend more time with their fathers—and not just their fathers, but grandparents as well. So, the family relationships for the children, because the mothers were in work, actually spread a little bit more, and often improved. So, it was a positive side of it.

[65] **Christine Chapman:** Gwyn Price wants to come in on this.

[66] **Gwyn R. Price:** Just touching on the lack of research, do you think that there is an issue with the data around poverty? Have we got enough evidence there, or are policy makers working in the dark a bit?

[67] **Professor Millar:** There are certainly some gaps. There is good evidence on income poverty, I would say, on the extent and depth—or the extent and risk—of income poverty. However, I know that, when we look at Wales, often, things like the official statistics have to put several years together to get a sample size, so there are issues about the sample size. That will be true in other surveys, so with the poverty and social exclusion survey, nationally, it is

hard to drill down into Wales, because the sample sizes are not big enough. So, the question is whether, there is a case, as I know Northern Ireland has sometimes done, to pay for those services, to boost the numbers. So, let us double the sample for Wales, or triple it, or whatever would be required, and make sure that we collect that extra information. That can be quite a good way to get the data, I think, so that, rather than doing a separate additional survey, we find the ones that already exist and try to boost up the numbers, to give you the sort of local information that you would want.

[68] You said right at the beginning, and I did not really answer you, about the dynamics. So, understanding poverty over time is still an area where I do not think we have enough information, for really understanding what helps people be protected from falling into poverty, and what helps them come out of poverty, although, we know that employment is very important in this. And, actually, I have to say that we know that it is both adults in a family's employment. I think that, sometimes, there is a bit of focus on saying, 'Let's get one person into work—that is really important'; actually, two is really much more effective. So, you know, it is about women's employment and men's employment, in terms of getting people into work.

[69] I think also that some of the studies that have looked at issues—and we started to talk a little bit about this—around budgeting, the experience of poverty, and so on, and probably there is a bit of a gap there in relation to up-to-date information. As I said, we have seen the growth of food banks, and so on, and I do not think that we have any decent research about what is going on there yet, in terms of understanding who is using them, and why. So, there are gaps, I think, that could—

[70] **Gwyn R. Price:** Perhaps we could help you out with research, because we were doing a programme on it last week, and it is ongoing.

[71] **Professor Millar:** Right, okay.

[72] **Gwyn R. Price:** Thank you very much.

[73] **Christine Chapman:** Mark, did you want to come in on this? I will bring Rhodri in then.

[74] **Mark Isherwood:** You indicated the need for statistically significant figures. How important are comparators? For instance, if we had the figures for Wales in isolation, on any measure, unless we can compare elsewhere to identify perhaps what is working better, and what is not, how can we consider best practice?

09:45

[75] **Professor Millar:** Yes, I think that that is absolutely right. I think then that the sort of comparisons that you want to make would take you outside of the UK, to some extent. I think that there is very—I mean, the countries within Europe that have always had the lowest levels of poverty are the Scandinavian countries. So, if you want to look at small countries with low poverty levels, then that is the area of the world to take a closer look at in terms of their policies. I know that they have higher GDP and so on, so they are rich countries, if you like, but, nevertheless, those sorts of comparisons would be extremely interesting and useful. The Scandinavian countries have, traditionally, been able to have such low poverty levels by a mixture of high employment for men and women—to repeat that point—and also a strong level of services to support people, so childcare, health services and other care services, alongside social security benefits at an adequate rate. So, it is that combination. However, yes, you can interpret the figures better if you have a context to put them into.

[76] **Mark Isherwood:** Does not devolution also allow us to make comparisons within the UK as well as beyond it?

[77] **Professor Millar:** Yes, and I think that comparisons with England, Scotland and Northern Ireland are very important, as well.

[78] **Christine Chapman:** Alun, did you want to come in?

[79] **Alun Davies:** Yes. Thank you for that. I am interested in understanding which administrations are actually achieving something, because we spend a lot of time discussing the nature of poverty and describing the difficulties, but we do not spend so much time looking for answers and trying to find them. I was interested, therefore, in what you said about the Scandinavian countries. You seemed to be saying that it is a combination of economic, social and welfare policies. I wonder whether you could develop that a little, thinking in terms of the devolved responsibilities in Wales and the sorts of actions that, potentially, learning from those countries, the Welsh Government could take in addressing poverty.

[80] **Professor Millar:** We have some understanding of the sorts of policy areas that work and make a difference in relation to poverty, and as you say, they are labour market support, services and social protection—a safety net. So, those are the areas. One example that I might draw your attention to comes from Ireland, actually, and it is the combat poverty agency. The combat poverty agency, which does not exist anymore, was set up within Government to focus on the issue of combating poverty or thinking about poverty, and I suppose that you might say that the social exclusion unit in the UK does something similar. I think that that approach—of a designated part of Government having the responsibility of understanding, learning from others and developing and disseminating best practice and so on—can be quite a powerful tool in the overall armoury, if you like. So, something that has a focal point—and that is why I think that having a child poverty or poverty strategy is important. It is a focal point, something that people can recognise, and it has the responsibility for driving things forward and the responsibility to work with other Government departments or areas of Government, to ask, ‘What are you doing to hit this target? How are you doing it and how do you know whether you are doing it or not? How do you know whether it is successful?’ So, I would say that that would be one area that could be very effective.

[81] I think that the other side of what works, and we talked about this, is the thinking about different groups and different issues. For example, we know that transition to work is a problem in terms of people being able to make that move, whether it is from school, from being a lone parent or a woman who has been out of work for a while bringing up children, or from unemployment into work. So, I think that measures that focus on that specific area of transitions to work would be another important bit where we say, ‘We know that’s important and we know it’s a barrier for people, so what can we do to make that more secure and easier for people to achieve?’

[82] The other one that I would point to, I think, is multiple needs. So, there are people in poverty who have very intense and multiple, complex needs, and that requires a much more tailored set of support systems, which we know work. So, the work programmes, the New Deal programmes and so on, were very good for people who are quite close to work and could access them and use them to get into work. For the people who have complex, multiple needs, I think that you need very targeted sorts of interventions. So, I think that a bit of segmentation, if I can put it in those terms, and thinking about different groups and what they need, but also thinking about having some sort of agency that has an eye on all of it are some of the things that seem to have worked in other places.

[83] **Alun Davies:** You have used that example from Ireland, and I am not convinced that

the Irish Government has been that effective in combating poverty in many parts of Ireland, I have to say. In terms of the Scandinavian examples, you seem to be saying that Governments there, in different ways, approach society in a different way than we do here, using examples of different sectors of policy, whether it is economic, social or whatever. That leads me to think that, while policies are quite important—and if policies eradicated poverty, we would have done so years ago—is it not as well a cultural approach to the nature of society that is fundamentally at the heart of addressing issues of poverty, self-esteem and the rest of it, which affect people?

[84] **Ms Millar:** Yes, I think that is absolutely right. So, it is those issues of concepts of social justice, of the extent to which we have views of society as being something in which we all share as a cohesive thing. You know, it is the sort of notion of contributing to society and receiving help when you need it, so the idea that it is not just about poverty. I think that the social security systems that have worked best in different countries are those that have that collective sense of what it is about. I use the words ‘social security’—sorry, I often rant about this—because people talk about ‘welfare’ all the time these days, and that is the phrasing, but I actually think that social security, which is what we used to talk about, is exactly the right language for thinking about these issues. It is about security, which is absolutely something that we all need. If we have that recognition of society that we can all face issues where we are going to need help and support—and we certainly all face things like old age—that is the concept of security and also the concept of social, namely that there is a collective engagement in this. So, I would love us to recapture that way of thinking about it. I think that we should have a department of social security again, and I would love us to put it, as you say, in this context of social justice. There is also, of course, good evidence that societies are happier and feel more connected to society when they feel that those societies are not full of unfairness and rampant inequality. So, there is definitely evidence that shows that there are greater levels of wellbeing in societies that are more equal.

[85] **Alun Davies:** It seems to be a Beveridge sort of approach to these issues. Can I just ask one final question on this issue? You talk about the economy, and of course, the economy is absolutely fundamental to the success, if you like, of any sort of society. Do you see a correlation between increases of GDP and decreases in poverty? Where there is more economic activity, does that lead directly to a reduction in poverty levels, or do you see that Governments need to be more proactive in focusing economic policy to eradicate or tackle poverty, rather than relying on some sort of neo-Thatcherite, trickle-down sort of approach?

[86] **Ms Millar:** I think that the evidence shows that the trickle-down does not really—. It does not seem to be the case that the rising tide lifts all boats, and there is evidence to show that. When overall incomes rise, it does not necessarily mean that—

[87] **Alun Davies:** Can you tell me what evidence that is, please?

[88] **Ms Millar:** There is certainly evidence from people like John Hills at the London School of Economics. He has done a lot of work on inequality over the years, and he has probably provided some of the most detailed analysis. I probably need to refer you to him rather than try and—. He has certainly, in his work on inequality, shown that there is not that sort of direct trickle-down effect. I cannot give you the—. Anyway, I refer you to him. He is a great expert in this.

[89] **Christine Chapman:** I think, as a committee, we will try and get hold of some of that work.

[90] **Ms Millar:** So, the trickle-down does not seem to be, and, therefore, yes, I do believe that there is a need to actively ensure that the fruits, if you like, of economic growth are shared more equally. One thing that is part of the work that John Hills has done is that you

look at the extent of inequality pre-tax and transfers and so on, and then you look at the extent after tax and transfers. What you are trying to do there is to see to what extent Governments can make a difference by moving some of that inequality around. Certainly, I think that that evidence shows that it is important that you are not going to hit the poorest people unless you have some sort of direct attempt to do that.

[91] **Christine Chapman:** Rhodri, did you want to come in on this?

[92] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Diolch yn fawr, Gadeirydd. Mae'n ddiddorol eich bod wedi bod yn sôn, yn eich tystiolaeth y bore yma, am bobl sydd ar gyflgoau isel, oherwydd pe baem—

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: Thank you very much, Chair. It is interesting that you have been talking, in your evidence this morning, about people who are on low incomes, because if we—

[93] **Jocelyn Davies:** I do not think that the translation is working. Is the translation working?

[94] **Professor Millar:** It is not loud enough yet, sorry.

[95] **Jocelyn Davies:** The volume is on the other side.

[96] **Professor Millar:** Thank you.

[97] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Rydych wedi bod yn sôn yn eich tystiolaeth y bore yma am bobl sydd ar gyflogau isel. Pe baem yn trafod tloidi 10 mlynedd yn ôl, byddem wedi dweud mai'r ateb yw sicrhau gwaith i bobl, ond nid yw hynny bob amser yn wir. Mae dadl bod rhai pobl ar gyflogau isel, efallai, yn wynebu cymaint, os nad mwy, o heriau na phobl sydd ar fudd-daliadau, erbyn hyn, yn y gymdeithas.

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: You have taken in your evidence this morning about people on low incomes. If we were discussing poverty 10 years ago, we would have said that the solution would be to secure work for people, but that is not always true. There is an argument that some people on low incomes are perhaps facing as many, if not more, challenges than people on benefits, these days, in our society.

[98] Roeddech yn sôn am oriau hyblyg, a'r angen i sicrhau bod y math o waith sydd ar gael yn addas ar gyfer pobl sydd â chyfrifoldebau eraill—plant ac yn y blaen. Beth yw eich barn chi am gytundebau dim oriau? Mae hynny, wrth gwrs, yn fanteisiol, i gyflogwyr, ond a yw'n cynnig unrhyw beth i bobl sy'n chwilio am oriau hyblyg o ran eu gwaith?

You mentioned flexible hours, and the need to ensure that the kind of work available is appropriate for people who have other responsibilities—children and so on. What is your opinion about zero-hours contracts? That is, of course, advantageous to employers, but does it offer anything to people looking for flexible working hours?

[99] **Professor Millar:** I think that zero-hours contracts are a problem where they tie people to one employer and do not allow them to take up other opportunities—I think that that is one of the key problems with them. So, being on a zero-hours contract where you cannot take another job, as it were, is a real problem. Zero-hours contracts are a problem for most people, I would say, but that is not to say that they are—. It is a bit like what we talked a little bit earlier about pay-day loans and so on. For some people, in quite small sets of circumstances, I think that zero-hours contracts can be quite useful, to be able to access some work, on an on/off basis, as it were, without committing yourself to the full employment.

[100] So, for some people, in limited circumstances, I think that there can be some usefulness in them, but it is about what goes alongside them, I suppose, you would say. Does

it give you rights to any other employment protection, or any other provisions that that employer is making, and so on? So, I guess that I am saying that there is a bit of a continuum in what zero-hours means, in terms of what you get, and what they are calling you to do. There is also a bit of a—not quite a continuum either—. For different people, in different circumstances, at certain times, zero-hours contracts can be something that can provide a bit of a useful boost to your income. So, it is not quite as simple as always being a bad thing, or being a good thing. I think that you have to look in a bit more detail.

[101] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** O ran Llywodraeth Cymru, nid oes gan Lywodraeth Cymru reolaeth dros y rhan fwyaf o'r elfennau sydd yn effeithio ar incwm pobl. A oes pethau ymarferol y gall Llywodraeth Cymru eu gwneud er mwyn gwella sefyllfa pobl sydd ar gyflogau isel? Rydym yn sôn lot fawr am gyflog byw. A oes pethau ymarferol y gallwn eu gwneud er mwyn creu sefyllfa lle mae pobl ar gyflog byw, ac y mae'r cyfle hwnnw ganddyn nhw?

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: In terms of the Welsh Government, the Welsh Government does not have any control over the majority of elements that affect people's income. Are there any practical steps that the Welsh Government can take in order to improve the lot of people on low incomes? We talk a lot about the living wage. Are there any practical steps that we can take to create a situation where people are on a living wage, and they have the opportunity?

[102] **Professor Millar:** The Welsh Government, I assume, does not have the capacity to set a living wage, or even to set a minimum wage, so that is not—. So, in a way, it is back to—. Well, there are two sides to things. It is back to what I was saying earlier, I think, about how far is there capacity to help people reduce some of the costs—some of those other costs of working, if you like, like childcare, and also some of the fundamental costs, like costs for housing, or food and fuel and so on. Is there anything in those areas, or providing things, as I said, like credit unions—alternative sources, and so on? Then there are employment conditions, rather than just wages, such as the opportunities and conditions that people have in relation to employment, and whether there is a way to work with employers—okay, you cannot compel people to pay the living wage, because the law is about the minimum wage—on the other aspects of work that would be possible to take forward.

10:00

[103] **Christine Chapman:** I am conscious that we have a maximum of about a quarter of an hour left and I have a number of people who want to come in. I know that Mike wants to come in. Could you just indicate and then I can then take you in the order that you indicate? Mike is first and then Janet.

[104] **Mike Hedges:** May I return to working lone mothers, which I think is a much neglected body of people who are living in poverty? What I find from talking to a number of them is that they hate the summer and the school holidays, because they lose the free breakfast, they lose the free dinners and then they have to try to find childcare. If you are working irregular hours, you have to find childcare at irregular hours. It is not, 'I have to find childcare for every morning from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.', but 'I have to find childcare from 9 a.m. till 4 p.m. on a Monday. I don't need it on a Tuesday, but I need it again from 9 a.m. till 12 p.m. on a Wednesday'. Is there anything the Welsh Government could be doing to take action there? One thing that I still believe, which may not necessarily help other people, is that free school dinners and free school breakfast should continue through the holidays.

[105] **Professor Millar:** Yes, I agree with that. I think that that is one of the things in which there have been some changes in relation to schools and the place of schools in communities, if you like. Part of what this is saying is that schools have, and always have had, a wider role than the education of children. They are also part of the support services in a local community, and things like the before-school clubs, the after-school clubs, the summer

holiday clubs and activities and so on are all an important part of that. Certainly, school breakfasts and meals are an important part of reducing costs. So, I absolutely agree with you. We cannot expect schools to solve everything and do everything, but recognition that schools have that sort of role to play is, I think, quite important. They are a community resource in relation to helping people to manage.

[106] **Christine Chapman:** Mark, did you want to come in?

[107] **Mark Isherwood:** Yes, if I may. Clearly, you cannot share the fruits without first growing the wealth, because I think that one precedes the other, however we slice it. You referred to the need to support people with complex barriers to the workplace. On Monday, as part of this inquiry, I visited Remploy in Wrexham, which has supported hundreds of people into workplaces and has then supported them in that work, partly in term of its own contracts and partly through contracts with the Work Programme and through delivering Work Choice. Scope, I know, also delivers Work Choice, as do some other charities. So, the complexity issue is critical. So, to what extent do you believe that the Welsh and UK Governments' understanding of poverty reflects the actual experiences of families living in poverty, including the stigma and public attitudes, which were raised with me on Monday by some of the customers at Remploy, when considering whether they wish to access some of the support that was available?

[108] **Professor Millar:** There is, to some extent, a discourse about poverty that does not recognise some of the complexities and the experiences of people and which can be quite negative about people living in poverty. You see it to some extent in attitude surveys as well—this sort of idea that poor people are not trying hard enough, in a sense, and that they are making bad choices. We have certainly heard from some senior politicians about 'lifestyle choices' and the use of that sort of language. I think that that is quite unhelpful in terms of really understanding the challenges that people face in trying to get into employment, sustain that employment, manage on very low incomes and so on. So, I think that the way in which we as a society—I am probably not answering your question about just the politicians side of it—tend to think about poverty, and I guess it goes back to some of the earlier questions, need to think about poverty in a social justice context rather than in a sort of individualistic context that focuses on poor people and bad choices. People are actually making choices in very difficult circumstances, where they do not often have a lot of choice about what they can do. I think that the way in which we think about the issue of poverty is fundamental to addressing it.

[109] **Mark Isherwood:** We have been talking a lot about poverty. How would you define poverty? Normally, as we heard in previous sessions, we work on the 60% median measure, but we have had previous witnesses suggesting that that is overly rigid and that we should be looking more at the needs and resources in households. How would you respond to that?

[110] **Professor Millar:** I think that both are true, actually. Income poverty is absolutely important and we need to not lose sight of that. However, when we are talking about poverty, we are talking about participation in society. We are talking about whether people can live in the sorts of ways that everyone in society might expect to be able to live. I think that that side of it is quite important.

[111] On some of the European measures, I was looking at some of the European studies on poverty and social exclusion from the European Union, and it uses a threefold sort of measure, which was quite good. One was the income poverty side of it, and whether you were below the threshold—the typical 60% of the median threshold. The second was material deprivation, which was one of those scales asking 'Are you missing at least four out of nine of the following?' They were things like not being able to pay for your housing, not being able to heat your home, not being able to meet an unexpected demand, so they were quite

substantial things. The third one was work intensity, and I think that that is something that we could get usefully into the definition. That was about whether the adults in a household were working below 20%—I think that it was something like that—of what they could work in the year. So, it captures unemployment and some of the issues around zero-hour contracts, the insecure, the very part time and so on. It is some notion of work intensity that is not just employment or unemployment, but about where you are in the labour market as well. It seems that those sorts of combinations are actually quite powerful in terms of thinking about poverty. Personally, I would not lose sight of the income one, because it is a strong measure of people's capacity to participate.

[112] **Christine Chapman:** I have a very quick supplementary question from Alun, and then I want to bring Janet in on this point.

[113] **Alun Davies:** I was taken by your earlier answer to Mark, and I was thinking about it in the context of something that you said earlier, that people who are experiencing and dealing with poverty tend to deal with it very well. That is not something that would you see in the mainstream media and it is not something that is part of the UK discourse, particularly. I was wondering whether you could, first of all, enlarge on that a little.

[114] **Professor Millar:** I will go back to our study. We followed these families for a period of about five years. They were women who had been living on benefits, they got jobs and they were trying to get into the labour market and stay in work. What we found over the period of five years was that they faced a lot of changes, such as with jobs. We talked about insecurity and jobs, finding jobs and their incomes going up and down. They were seeking to manage their situations—with a lot of help, I have to say, from family and so on—over time, so they were very well aware of the need to balance one thing against another, if I can put it in those terms. So, they were balancing different choices about their expenditure and what they would do over time periods. The juggling that people do is quite complex.

[115] The other side of it is that, although people in poverty generally manage very well and are living through difficult circumstances, there is quite a personal cost to that. Over the five years, we saw increasing levels—not reducing—of ill health and stress issues, because, as you can imagine, doing this for a long period of time is really hard work. So, for a long period of time, constantly having to be aware of the need to manage puts a real strain on people. So, there is a personal cost to that, which is very much hidden—you are right to say that. We would not necessarily see it, as it tends to be very much hidden within families. Of course, the other thing that comes out very strongly from a number of studies, not just ours, is the extent to which people do not want to define themselves in those terms—of course they do not. Being poor is not something that people want to talk about; you do not stand up and say, 'I am poor'. It is something that people manage personally and keep hidden and to themselves, to some extent.

[116] **Alun Davies:** Well, that is certainly true. I represent Blaenau Gwent and I have never come across anybody who has said to me, 'I am poor'. However, I am assuming that one of the impacts of what you have described in terms of stresses and difficulties, on which I absolutely agree with you, is an increase both in physical and mental ill health. I also presume that those sorts of cultural issues have a very negative effect on the children within those communities and families. You described earlier children who had far greater recognition than many adults would presume of the economic circumstances of their families. I presume that particularly those negative stereotypical images that we see from very well educated people in the British media and from the millionaires in the British Cabinet, will also have an extraordinarily negative impact on the ability of those children to come out of those sorts of circumstances.

[117] **Professor Millar:** Yes. I think that people recognise the discourse, of course they do.

They can see it around them. Our study found quite a variation. First, even being in work, typically—going back to some of the points that I mentioned earlier—these families had experienced living on income support and had had very low incomes, so just having some increase in their incomes did feel like an improvement. For those families who, even though they had not improved, were still pretty much on the same income level over time, and who had managed to stay in work and keep that income level, but not a high income level, that was generally where the children did value their mothers being in work. They saw it as being a better circumstance for them, in general. It was those families in which there was a lot of insecurity where the mothers were moving in and out of work a lot, were not increasing their incomes, were really struggling and were finding it difficult at work, where the children certainly found that to be a very negative experience. They worried a lot about their mothers, I have to say. They worried a lot about the impact on their mothers of such a tough life, as it were.

[118] Therefore, certainly for some of the children, that experience of seeing their mothers struggling to manage over long periods of time and the sorts of lessons that they were drawing from that were about the difficulties of doing it and the very low rewards. So, it is a mixed picture, I would say. For a lot of the children, actually, what they all wanted was for their mothers just to work school hours—they thought it was best for their mothers to be at work, but in school hours, please. So, that was the ideal circumstance that they would like to see and that is probably true of all children, actually.

[119] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** On data, clearly, a lot of the evidence that you are giving is based on data that you have collected, but how good are those data, generally, for other agencies and advocacy groups that work for people in poverty? I know that some organisations can be precious about their data and some just do not have the wherewithal or the resources to have a data collecting officer. So, I just wonder how you feel that agencies and support groups are able to—

[120] **Professor Millar:** It is an interesting question, because I think that there are a lot of data that are not used at the moment. If you think about service use and so on and housing associations and other such groups, they have some very good data in terms of understanding their customers or clients, or whichever term you want to use. So, I think that there is capacity for better use of some of the existing service-related data for us to understand, and that would be true of other things in all sorts of areas where we are delivering services. I think we could make better use of those sorts of data.

[121] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** My next point is on strategies. As a Government and local authorities—and fair play to some of the support groups; they all do their annual reports or their strategies and a lot has come out from here—in some aspects, we get evidence that some of those strategies are so cross-cutting that they become complex and there is a lot of duplication. What do you suggest there?

10:15

[122] **Professor Millar:** Well, I suppose that I might go back to what I was saying earlier about having some sort of agency that has responsibility for looking across the piece—something like the social exclusion unit in Westminster when it was in existence or the Combat Poverty Agency. Would there be a role for some sort of Government section or department that took on that issue—and actually, it could address the data issue much better probably as well—with some sort of oversight role? It may be that you do need a lot of strategies because you are dealing with different things in different areas. It may be that cross-cutting is not always a problem because there is so much to tackle. However, on the other hand, you do want to get rid of inefficiencies and duplication and so on—

[123] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** And wasted resource.

[124] **Professor Millar:** Yes, exactly. When you have limited resource, you want to make sure it is doing the right thing. So, some sort of oversight—

[125] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Just on that, we hear people in places like this saying, ‘Oh, let’s have a commissioner’. Is it more a department than a responsible figure with a department slightly outside of Government? Should it be here, within Government or would you see this agency or a commissioner being at arm’s length?

[126] **Professor Millar:** I suppose that there are pros and cons to both. Being an agency and within Government can give you probably more authority with the other Government departments. They are required to give you some answers, as it were. If you are independent, the positive side of that is that you have a more independent voice, as it were—you can say different things. On the other hand, you may not have as much access to leveraging change. I guess that you would have to be weighing up the pros and cons and what exactly the issue was that you were trying to address by it.

[127] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** So, is there more that the Welsh Government can do with its department or whoever now? Could it be doing more?

[128] **Professor Millar:** Yes, I would say so.

[129] **Christine Chapman:** We will have to draw this session to a close. Could I thank you, Professor Millar? It has been a fascinating session and it has given us some really good insights for our inquiry. We will send you a transcript of the meeting for you to check for factual accuracy. Thank you once again.

[130] **Professor Millar:** Thank you very much.

[131] **Christine Chapman:** We will have a short break now until 10.25 a.m.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10:17 a 10:30.
The meeting adjourned between 10:17 and 10:30.*

**Ymchwiliad i Dlodi yng Nghymru (Elfen 1)—Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 8: Anabledd
Cymru a Leonard Cheshire Disability
Inquiry into Poverty in Wales (Strand 1)—Evidence Session 8: Disability Wales
and Leonard Cheshire Disability**

[132] **Christine Chapman:** This is the eighth evidence session on strand 1 of our inquiry into poverty in Wales. I give a warm welcome to our panel of disability organisations. First, I welcome Rhian Davies, chief executive of Disability Wales; Miranda French, policy and public affairs manager for Disability Wales; Glyn Meredith, director of operations in Wales, Leonard Cheshire Disability; and Rhian Stangroom-Teel, policy and public affairs in Wales, Leonard Cheshire Disability. I welcome you all. The Members have a number of questions based on the evidence that you have sent, so, if you are happy, we will go straight into questions, and, because of the time factor, you do not all have to answer every single question—you decide, obviously. However, thank you for coming in this morning.

[133] I just want to start. Do you think that the Welsh Government’s approach to tackling poverty work is actually working for disabled people in Wales? Who would like to start?

[134] **Ms Davies:** Shall I start? First of all, greetings on the international day of disabled

people. I think that the Welsh Government approach probably runs through in different ways. I suppose that the main one is through the framework for action on independent living. Although that is not primarily about tackling poverty, it is about addressing the structural barriers that disabled people face, which can then result in poverty through lack of opportunity in terms of education, skills, employment, and the ability to participate in the community. So, obviously, there are a number of actions outlined in the framework addressed at those barriers. In terms of the tackling poverty action plan, I guess that we would feel, at Disability Wales, that perhaps there could be a much stronger emphasis on tackling poverty particularly among disabled people, given that a third of people living in poverty are disabled people. However, from reading the tackling poverty action plan, you would not necessarily get that impression. So, I think that we would like to see more read-across between the two—the framework for action on independent living and the tackling poverty action plan—and a stronger emphasis on tackling poverty particularly in the case of many people disabled people where work is not an option and how we ensure that people maintain an appropriate level of income.

[135] **Christine Chapman:** Does anyone else want to add anything, or shall I move on?

[136] **Ms Stangroom-Teel:** I think that we would agree with the points that have been raised. I think that one of the areas that we think that there could be—. Again, it is about identifiable actions for tackling poverty for disabled people. One of the flagship policies of the Welsh Government in its tackling poverty action plan is free bus passes. Free bus passes are only helpful if you have bus services going to and from places that you need to get to, and then, when a bus turns up, it actually has a wheelchair space or a ramp that a wheelchair person can get on to. We have a couple of residents in one of our care homes in Chirk who have the free bus pass but have never used it. They have never used it—they are a married couple and they are both wheelchair users. There are three buses that go to the bus stop very close to the home each day, but two of the buses that turn up tend to not have the ramp. When the bus that does have the ramp turns up, there is only one wheelchair space. So, who gets to go? Clearly, it is not very accessible at all. For them, therefore, to go into town to the dentist or whatever, the taxi cost was £85 for the round trip. Clearly, it is quite a financial burden to just do some quite simple, inclusive community-based stuff.

[137] **Christine Chapman:** Rhodri, did you want to come in?

[138] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Mae'r ateb a roddoch chi yn awr yn ddiddorol iawn oherwydd os oes gennych chi hawl i rywbeth, ond rydych chi'n methu manteisio ar hynny, mae bron yn waeth na pheidio â chael yr hawl yn y lle cyntaf. Mae'r syniad o gynnig teithio am ddim ar fysiau yn enghraifft o'r math o bolisiau mae Llywodraeth Cymru wedi eu creu er mwyn mynd i'r afael â thlodi. A oes problem yn y fan honno ei bod yn trin pobl sydd ar incwm isel i gyd fel un grŵp sydd â'r un problemau, yn hytrach na cheisio creu polisiau sy'n ateb gofynion grwpiau arbennig o bobl sy'n wynebu'r heriau hyn?

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: The answer that you just gave is very interesting because if you are entitled to something, but you cannot take advantage of that, it is almost worse than not having that entitlement in the first place. The idea of offering free bus travel is an example of the types of policies that the Welsh Government has created in order to tackle poverty. Is there a problem there that it is treating people on a low income as one homogenous group with the same problems, rather than trying to create policies that meet the needs of specific groups of people who are facing these challenges?

[139] **Ms Stangroom-Teel:** Yes, I think that there is absolutely that danger that it is a one-size-fits-all approach that seems to be going on. There do not appear to be identified individual actions for disabled people.

[140] **Christine Chapman:** I have Gwyn to speak first, and then I will bring Mark in.

Gwyn, you had a question, I think.

[141] **Gwyn R. Price:** Yes. Good morning to you all. Could further powers be devolved to Wales to tackle poverty among disabled people more effectively, for example, the Work Programme? Could that be brought in, or Access to Work funding or specific benefits? Do you think that it would help to have the Work Programme brought in?

[142] **Ms Davies:** We have been in meetings with the Department for Work and Pensions, because it has a new disability and health and employment strategy, and I think that it is looking at a more personalised approach to supporting disabled people into work. Certainly, with programmes like the Work Programme, again, we are into the one-size-fits-all approach. They are big, generic programmes that tend to work best with people who are relatively close to the workforce—perhaps they have only recently become unemployed—but for a lot of disabled people who have been out of work for many years, they do not really work. Whether it is the Work Programme or this new form of personalised programme, I know that the Welsh Government and DWP are in discussions about how such a programme would work in Wales, but I guess that if the Welsh Government had responsibility for it, it could make it more targeted. Similarly, with Access to Work, it is referred to as the best kept secret in Government, because it helps a huge number of disabled people to work and fully participate in the workplace, but many employers are not aware of it and many disabled people are not aware of it. I know that when we were developing a framework for action on independent living, we were thinking about things like whether we could have a campaign in Wales about take-up, but because it is a DWP responsibility that would not be appropriate. So, I can see the case for those kinds of initiatives being led in Wales, so that they can be better targeted.

[143] **Gwyn R. Price:** To follow up on that, how consistent is the provision of benefits services in Wales? Is it across the board or does it go up and down?

[144] **Mr Meredith:** Undoubtedly, for me, it varies from region to region, and depends on how proactive the people in the local authorities are about getting out there and being able to support people to know what is available to them. I am thinking of citizens' advice bureaux in particular, but also carer centres, which vary within different local authorities in Wales in how proactive they are in supporting people to know what benefits are available. I think that that is a big barrier for some people.

[145] **Gwyn R. Price:** It is not really consistent right across the board.

[146] **Mr Meredith:** 'No' is the short answer.

[147] **Christine Chapman:** Miranda, did you want to come in?

[148] **Ms French:** Just to support that, really, in saying that it is very inconsistent across the country. There are some really good examples. For example, there is Disability Can Do, which covers Caerphilly, provides information and advice about benefits and supports people to complete forms, which are hugely complex, as we know. However, again, they lack funding and are often faced by a restricted amount of time when they can offer that service, because perhaps their lottery grant or their Lloyds TSB grants are coming to an end. So, we really need additional support to increase these services and to build their capacity, because I think that an important part of those user-led initiatives is that it is disabled people supporting other disabled people—people who have that lived experience and knowledge and are able to pass that on to the people they serve. That is quite crucial.

[149] **Christine Chapman:** I have a supplementary question from Alun, and then I want to bring Mark in. Alun, you have a quick supplementary question.

[150] **Alun Davies:** Okay. It is a straight answer to the question I am going to ask. Inconsistent, patchy—fine. Where is good and where is bad? And why is ‘good’ good and why is ‘bad’ bad?

[151] **Christine Chapman:** Did you get that? [*Laughter.*]

[152] **Ms French:** Yes. I think that, in some of the points that I touched on, it is due to capacity and a lack of funding, really, and support for good examples and good initiatives and to be able to spread those good initiatives across the country. So, Disability Can Do is one of the initiatives that we need to learn from, and look at how we can develop similar approaches across different areas that perhaps do not have that available. For instance, in rural areas, how can we cover those areas realistically with the resources that we have available? Another good example is that Community Housing Cymru has developed the Your Benefits Are Changing campaign, which we have signed up to in support. We have produced a number of leaflets aimed at helping disabled people and their families to understand how benefits are changing. For instance, the disability living allowance is now personal independence payments, and there are changes to employment support allowance and the work capability process. So, things like that are really, really good and really beneficial, and they are informing people across the country, but we need more, and it is never ‘one size fits all’; we need multiple mechanisms, really.

[153] **Mr Meredith:** I think that a review of what works well and what does not would be useful, and then you could take the best practice and be strategic in how it is moved forward.

[154] **Christine Chapman:** Mark is next.

[155] **Mark Isherwood:** As you know, at cross-party group level, we consulted on the ‘Framework for Action on Independent Living’ in north and south Wales. We have engaged with the review of Access to Work. You are engaging with Capita over personal independence payments—they will be attending our next meeting, if you want to come and find out and ask questions or raise concerns. However, given that the ‘Framework for Action on Independent Living’ is focused on the social model of disability and on the right to independent living, to what extent is that reflected in Welsh Government policies and legislation, and to what extent is there still a need to recognise that the social model of disability is not just a strapline, but a whole new way of doing things?

[156] **Ms Davies:** Thank you for that, and thanks for the plug for the next cross-party disability group meeting on 27 January. The ‘Framework for Action on Independent Living’ was a huge step forward on the part of Welsh Government, and I know that our colleagues in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland look at it with a certain amount of envy, in that we have the framework. However, I think that it does still need to be taken forward across all departments and through legislation. I suppose that the obvious one at the moment is the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, because we were campaigning for a social model of disability definition to be in the Act and for inclusion of independent living in the definition of wellbeing, and also for the Act to reflect the UN convention on the rights of disabled people, none of which materialised. Of course, that is an Act that is most closely related to services and support for disabled people. Obviously, there are other pieces of legislation, such as the housing Bill and the future generations Bill. So, I think that there is still a huge amount of work to be done in adopting a social model approach and an independent living approach across Welsh Government. Definitely.

[157] **Ms Stangroom-Teel:** I think that independent living is also about having the right home to live in and accessible community services to go to. Leonard Cheshire has just launched a second strand of our report to the Home Truths campaign, which is on the hidden housing crisis facing disabled people. We are asking for lifetime homes to be built as

standard, for all new builds, whether they are social or private housing, and for 10% of all new-build homes to be built to wheelchair-accessible standards, because, just to take the example of a lady who lives in the Vale of Glamorgan—a lady called Ruby Nash—whose son Cody suffers from a degenerative muscle-wasting disease called Duchenne muscular dystrophy, her little boy is in and out of a wheelchair, and that is only going to get worse to the point where he is completely within his wheelchair. She lives in a house that is completely unsuitable for her and her little boy.

10:45

[158] She has nowhere to move to because there are no adaptable houses available on the social housing register. There are no available houses in the private market. If you were to walk into an estate agent and ask, ‘What do you have on your books for wheelchair-accessible housing?’, most estate agents would not be able to tell you. So, we think that independent living is more than that framework; it is about making sure that communities are being developed and built in a sustainable and inclusive way for everybody. So, I think that there are some opportunities in the future generations Bill. There is also the planning Bill, and perhaps looking at planning regulations and making it compulsory to build homes to lifetime home standards so that they can be easily adaptable.

[159] It is not just about homes; there is a school issue. She has to take her little boy out of the catchment area, at significant cost, because it is via taxi that is not funded by anyone else. It has to be funded by her because the local school is a Victorian building on three levels that cannot be adapted. So, there are much wider issues than just what this stuff is looking at the moment.

[160] **Christine Chapman:** Peter, did you want to come in?

[161] **Peter Black:** Yes, in terms of the tackling poverty action plan, what does the Welsh Government need to do to ensure that poverty among disabled people is better recognised and addressed in that plan?

[162] **Ms Davies:** The issue with the tackling poverty action plan is that it tends to focus on poverty of place rather than poverty of a particular community of interest or protected characteristics. Disabled people are barely mentioned at all, but, to be honest, I think that for other people with protected characteristics there is no emphasis on the distinctiveness of poverty in relation to being a disabled person, gender, ethnicity or whatever. I think that there needs to be more data—a presentation of evidence in terms of the data—but also that initiatives should not be aimed at geographical areas; they should recognise that, according to what your identity might be, you might experience poverty differently. I guess that Communities First, in particular, is the Welsh Government’s flagship initiative here. Our concern is that it is a kind of generic place-based programme. Without the resources, expertise and focus on, for example, disabled people who live in poverty in those areas, people are not going to be reached. I suppose that there are two ways: you either make Communities First reach out to people of different protected characteristics or you identify other programmes that would be better targeted, in this case, at disabled people.

[163] **Peter Black:** I accept what you are saying. What you are effectively saying is that the plan has not been equality-proofed. However, in terms of Communities First, given that it is geographically centred, are there any good examples around Wales where Communities First projects have actually done a great deal in terms of tackling poverty among people with disabilities?

[164] **Ms Davies:** We are not aware of any, to be honest. We are not aware of any of our members around Wales saying, ‘Yeah, we’ve got a good relationship with Communities

First?. Our experience is that it does not engage with disabled people.

[165] **Peter Black:** Are there any particularly poor examples?

[166] **Ms Davies:** How many schemes? [*Laughter.*]

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

[168] **Ms French:** We do not want to slate the programme completely because there is obviously some good work being undertaken by Communities First. Perhaps there are some examples where Communities First programmes are engaging with local disabled people that we are not aware of. However, the people that we have spoken to, and the groups that we have spoken to recently in the lead up to this inquiry, tell us that there has not been that engagement, which we are quite saddened by, really, because it seems that those organisations, for instance, one group, the Bridgend coalition of disabled people, are running in silo. The Communities First programme is trying to make attempts to engage, but there is a local group of disabled people in that area. That is just one area, for instance.

[169] **Christine Chapman:** Is it not being done on a sort of strategic level? It is almost like common sense, is it not? It should work, but I just wonder why it is not working.

[170] **Ms French:** That is right. There needs to be a lot more work done there.

[171] **Ms Davies:** I mentioned in the evidence and to the Member about the tackling poverty external advisory groups. Obviously, we spend quite a lot of time discussing this issue. My understanding is that the thinking behind Communities First was that it had a place-based focus and that there were other schemes that would tackle the issues of poverty among people with specific characteristics. However, I think that we struggled to think what those other schemes would be.

[172] **Peter Black:** So, when they re-launched Communities First and they set the objectives for that programme, were you consulted?

[173] **Ms Davies:** I do not think so, no.

[174] **Christine Chapman:** Mark, did you want to come in?

[175] **Mark Isherwood:** On that, I think that the WCVA called for the community-owned dimension. Outside Communities First, do you have any examples of projects led within the community, perhaps by disability groups, that are successful and that could be an embryo for development elsewhere?

[176] **Ms Davies:** Well, we have a particular interest in the development of centres for independent living, and I suppose that the strongest example in Wales is the Dewis Centre for Independent Living based in Trefforest in Rhondda Cynon Taf. It provides support around direct payments and befriending. It has quite a wide reach. Through Welsh Government funding, we have now got a project called 'Enabling Wales'. It is going to be about providing accredited training and development to disabled people around Wales to set up further centres for independent living and also a young disabled people's network. So, there is an opportunity there for disabled people based locally to identify what the priorities are in this area—whether it is around information and advice, direct payment support, or employment—and develop a centre for independent living and services that are peer-led, a peer support model, where disabled people support other disabled people in the area.

[177] **Mark Isherwood:** Thank you. I was hoping you would say that. [*Laughter.*]

[178] **Christine Chapman:** Mike, did you want to come in?

[179] **Mike Hedges:** I have two points. Has the loss of Remploy had any effect on getting disabled people into work? That is my first question.

[180] **Ms Davies:** I am not aware of that. I know that the Welsh Government scheme that provided support to people who lost their jobs when the Remploy factories closed has been very successful. I think that about two thirds of disabled people who lost jobs through the factory closures have found work. My understanding is that Welsh Government is doing a review of that scheme because I think that there are a lot of lessons that can be learnt in terms of the level of support that it was possible to provide to those individuals. I know that there was a kind of wage subsidy as well in terms of employers with a sort of taper. There was quite a lot of partnership working as well. It is that sort of initiative, that level of resource and expertise, that are really what is needed to support a lot of disabled people into work. It would be good to see more schemes flowing from that initiative.

[181] **Mike Hedges:** My second question was answered by the last bit of that.

[182] **Christine Chapman:** Mark, did you want to come in on that?

[183] **Mark Isherwood:** On Monday, we visited Remploy in Wrexham to take evidence for this inquiry. It told us that, of the redundant Remploy factory workers, twice made redundant because the Government intervention did not work, all but two had been found employment by Remploy. The two who had not had chosen not to.

[184] **Ms Davies:** I know another aspect with that was, again, peer support. Those ex-factory workers who had managed to get work in the first wave were then supportive to people coming on afterwards. I think that that was very powerful because I know that, for a lot of those workers who had worked in those factories for 20 or 30 years, it was difficult to see a future beyond the factories. It has been a powerful initiative really. We have seen how it can work but also the support that is needed to make it work.

[185] **Alun Davies:** In terms of the debate that we are having here, we are spending time discussing the impact of poverty and how we describe it, analyse it and understand it. I am interested in understanding what works, what succeeds in addressing issues of poverty, and I would be grateful if you could outline projects possibly that you believe have succeeded and why they have succeeded, and also the work of other administrations outside Wales, whether in the UK or elsewhere, that have actually succeeded in addressing issues of poverty among disabled people.

[186] **Christine Chapman:** I just wonder whether Glyn or Rhian want to start this time.

[187] **Mr Meredith:** Yes. In terms of employment, that is a big key to addressing the poverty issue. I have had experience of the Shaw Trust, for example, based in Llandarcy, which has good schemes where it will work with individuals to give them support to get into work. So, there are pockets of areas where there are good models, but it is inconsistent across the board in terms of the service that people with a disability can expect in terms of the support that they can get to get into work. For me, that would be a big issue in terms of employability and giving the additional support. It is an incredibly complex thing, with the spectrum of disabilities that you are trying to work with, to get people into work. A lot more investment and thought is needed about how services can focus on that area, really, particularly for school leavers, from 19 to 25 years of age, in terms of working with parents. For children of that age, the parents do not see that there are any job prospects for their children. They certainly do not know where to get the support in a number of areas, which is a

challenge and a worry to them. However, I think employability would be the biggest one for me.

[188] **Alun Davies:** Does anybody else want to come in?

[189] **Christine Chapman:** Miranda, do you want to come in?

[190] **Ms French:** Just to give a few good examples, Elite Supported Employment Agency based in Rhondda Cynon Taf, which I think covers the whole of the Valleys areas, supports disabled people and people with learning difficulties to gain work experience leading to paid employment, and there are many, many positive outcomes for lots of people. However, initiatives like that require capacity, funding and resources to enable people to provide that support. Many people need job trainers, job coaches, to enable them to become independent in their roles and take on the job themselves. Those job trainers can then move aside and let that person become quite independent in their job. That is a good example. It has lots of good case studies that it would be able to share, I am sure.

[191] Another example is Vision 21, which is based in Cardiff. It provides pre-vocational training in work areas such as horticulture, catering services and retail. There are lots of different areas and opportunities for people leaving education to gain workplace experience, often leading to paid employment in many cases. Those are good examples.

[192] **Alun Davies:** Do you have any knowledge of areas where Governments, wherever that Government may be, have adopted policies that have succeeded in addressing issues of poverty among disabled people?

[193] **Christine Chapman:** Do not worry; we are not testing you today.

[194] **Ms French:** May I come in on that point? We cannot flag up a particular policy that has definitely succeeded. There have been some good points and there have been some not so good points. However, what fails to happen for disabled people is that there is a huge lack of recognition of the higher cost of living faced by disabled people across the country. That is with regard to additional energy costs because of the additional heating that is required because of a particular impairment, or additional water costs because of the need to do lots of washing of clothes for personal hygiene. Assistive technology may also be required to enable them to become independent within their own homes, but also to get out of bed and get out within the community, whether that is for volunteering, going shopping or being a parent—it goes right across the board. There is a huge lack of understanding and recognition about those issues. We need to make sure that policies that are being developed take that on board, and it is not happening.

[195] **Alun Davies:** Is that true in Wales as well as other—

[196] **Ms French:** Yes.

[197] **Ms Stangroom-Teel:** We would absolutely second that point. People who are employed who are disabled also have substantially lower wages—I think it is 20% lower for men and 12% lower for women. So, there are disabled people who are in work who are still in poverty exactly because of all those extra costs that come along with living with a disability.

[198] **Mark Isherwood:** In terms of work, I think the official figures in 2012 showed 46% of disabled people in work and 76% of non-disabled people in work. However, at a recent cross-party group we heard that the disparity was far wider with regard to full-time work. Could you comment on that?

11:00

[199] **Ms Davies:** Yes. I think that the UK Government recognises that unemployment among disabled people is a tough nut to crack. Its latest initiative is the disability and health employment strategy, which is about taking a personalised approach to supporting disabled people to find work and to retain work. I think that it is looking at rolling out some pilots across the UK. Possibly, there will be one in Wales. The thing is, I think, that this goes back to where the framework for action came from. You are talking about centuries of barriers in the built environment, transport systems, housing, employment and education. It is like trying to turn around a tanker. It needs very focused, very targeted, and very expert support with a high level of resource put into it, and I think that most Governments have yet to really address it seriously.

[200] **Christine Chapman:** Janet, did you want to come in?

[201] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Just on data, really, because the collection of data seems to have risen its head while we have been taking evidence, and whether there are agencies out there that are unable to collect the data, whether there are conflicting data, whether some agencies are very precious about their data, and how that is actually influencing things, and whether the Welsh Government should be doing more to oversee the data. Then, on the other side of the coin, you have the strategies and things that we churn out here and local authorities and some agencies and so on, and whether all of that is muddying the waters.

[202] **Christine Chapman:** Who would like to start?

[203] **Ms Stangroom-Teel:** I think that we would quite like to see some sort of annual disability monitoring by the Welsh Government, where it sort of looks at the number of disabled people living in poverty, rather than actually do a specific audit on that, looks at comparative employment rates each year between disabled people in employment and non-disabled people in employment, looks at the homeownership and social housing figures for disabled people to see how many people with disabilities can own their own homes and those who are actually waiting on the housing lists, and looks at the level of unmet need for home adaptations. There is a whole raft of very targeted specific data that could be collected, which would give a much broader understanding of the actual need, and then probably a much more informed way of going forward in terms of tackling this and getting this category of people out of poverty.

[204] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I have to confess that, in the time that I have been an Assembly Member, I have been amazed, frankly, by the number of written Assembly questions that I have put in to the Welsh Government to which the response has been, 'Sorry, we do not hold that information'. When you do not, how on earth—? It is on all sorts: it is on health, education and employment in various questions that I have tabled. So, really, the Welsh Government should be getting more savvy in its own data collection.

[205] **Ms Stangroom-Teel:** Absolutely. We are individual organisations and we do pull research projects together. I do not think that any of us would be precious in sharing that information with the Government, but I think that there needs to be an onus on Government to actually do some real targeted data collection.

[206] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes, but the concern, of course, is that, if you have different agencies all going out collecting the same data, that is a waste of money.

[207] **Ms Stangroom-Teel:** Absolutely.

[208] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** You have agencies hanging onto it; so, that is not the best

use of that money or that information. I actually believe that a Government should actually really want that kind of thing, but be strategic in its own data collection and ensure also that bodies that it is giving money to are not duplicating. That money is better off on the front line than everyone running around in circles doing the same thing. It is the same with the strategies. The impression that I get—and it is not just taking information from you, but during our discussions on our Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill—is that it is the same message coming through, which is that we are almost churning out these strategies, making people sort of duck and dive because one strategy conflicts with another strategy, and in all of this you have a tremendous waste of resource that actually somehow needs to be sorted out. In business terms, you would do so. You would pull it all apart, make sure that it works, and you would ensure that the major resource was getting where it needs to get—to the point of delivery that can really make an improvement to people's lives. I do not know how we do that.

[209] **Christine Chapman:** Would you agree with that?

[210] **Mr Meredith:** Absolutely.

[211] **Christine Chapman:** I think Alun wants to come in, but, obviously, Janet and a number of us have asked about data. Do you feel that we probably know what the answer to this is, which is that we do know the data, but we just need to get on with the delivery? I do not know how you feel about that.

[212] **Mr Meredith:** I really do not think that we know the data.

[213] **Christine Chapman:** You do not know the data.

[214] **Ms Stangroom-Teel:** I think that that is the key point. It is specific targeted data.

[215] **Mr Meredith:** It is local authorities—

[216] **Christine Chapman:** You need more specific detail then obviously.

[217] **Mr Meredith:** Yes, and to look at how it is collected and who is responsible for that. In terms of just looking at Swansea as a local authority, you might have a number of children with a disability and so on. So, you might have social workers who would have their numbers, but not all people with a disability would have a social worker. You have schools with people who have special educational needs statements, but that might not pick up all children. There are health figures as well; midwives would have figures. It is about pulling it all together really and spending the resource to do that.

[218] **Christine Chapman:** I have Alun and then Mike; sorry, it is Mike first.

[219] **Mike Hedges:** On the answer that we have just had, you said that SEN would not pick up all disabled children. Why? How are they going to miss out on SEN?

[220] **Mr Meredith:** The threshold for children sometimes having that SEN statement might be that a child with a physical disability might not be eligible to have that support. So, for example, a child with autism might have the statement, but a child with a physical disability might not. That is my understanding. So, you might have a difference in figures. I do not think that the figures are public in terms of how many children would have the statements.

[221] **Mike Hedges:** They are globally—the local authority knows exactly how many people it has with an SEN. The information that you have just given is contrary to my

understanding that any child with a disability is picked up under SEN. I think that we may need to make enquiries on that.

[222] **Christine Chapman:** We will look into that. Alun is next.

[223] **Alun Davies:** I am fine.

[224] **Christine Chapman:** Right, okay. I just wanted to ask how you feel the Welsh socioeconomic duty could impact on tackling poverty.

[225] **Ms Davies:** I think that the public sector equality duty, particularly in Wales, where you have specific duties, have been very effective. In terms of collecting data, doing equality impact assessments and producing strategic equality objectives, they have all been very robust mechanisms. So, I think if a socioeconomic duty had a similar approach, then I think that we could be collecting some very powerful evidence data, and there would be a requirement on public bodies to have specific objectives, which they would have to report on in terms of how they were tackling poverty in their areas.

[226] **Christine Chapman:** Would you agree, Rhian?

[227] **Ms Stangroom-Teel:** We would agree with that.

[228] **Christine Chapman:** I do not think there are any other questions from Members, so I thank our panel for attending today. It has been a very interesting discussion and this will help us enormously in our inquiry into poverty. So, I thank you for attending. We will send you a transcript of the meeting so that you can check it for factual accuracy.

[229] We will just take a very short break of five minutes. I think that most of the witnesses are here, but that will just give them time to come in.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 11:09 a 11:17.
The meeting adjourned between 11:09 and 11:17.*

**Ymchwiliad i Dlodi yng Nghymru (Elfen 1)—Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 9: Cyngor Hiliaeth Cymru, y Groes Goch Brydeinig a Phrosiect Ffoaduriaid Oxfam
Inquiry into Poverty in Wales (Strand 1)—Evidence Session 9: Race Council Cymru, British Red Cross and Oxfam Refugee Project**

[230] **Christine Chapman:** Okay, we will start back. I give a warm welcome to our panel. Could you all introduce yourselves for the record? We will start with Victoria.

[231] **Ms Goodban:** Good afternoon. My name is Victoria Goodban. I work for Oxfam Cymru and I am the Sanctuary in Wales project co-ordinator.

[232] **Ms Nyamwenge:** Good afternoon. My name is Betty Nyamwenge and I am a volunteer asylum seeker at Oasis Cardiff.

[233] **Ms Sofrenic:** Good morning. My name is Stanislava Sofrenic and I am the senior services manager for the British Red Cross in south-east Wales.

[234] **Mr Collins:** Good morning. I am Jeff Collins and I am the director of the British Red Cross in Wales.

[235] **Ms Ali:** I am Samsunear Ali and I am on the board of trustees for Race Council

Cymru and my day job is deputy chief executive of BAWSO.

[236] **Ms Iwobi:** My name is Uzo Iwobi and I am the chief executive of Race Council Cymru.

[237] **Christine Chapman:** Thank you. It is really good to see all of you here today and I look forward to hearing your contributions to our inquiry. If you are happy, we will go straight into questions. Given the time factor, you do not all have to answer every single question. Obviously, you can decide which organisation or individual wants to answer the questions. I want to start off by asking whether the Welsh Government's approach to tackling poverty working for people of different ethnicities, refugees and asylum seekers, and what needs to change.

[238] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Do not all answer at once. *[Laughter.]*

[239] **Ms Iwobi:** Perhaps I could start. Within our paper, we looked specifically at the section within the strategic equality plan that the Welsh Government produced, which specifically mentions that it wants to strengthen and support the work of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and minority ethnic communities to improve their access to advocacy and advice services. So, that is a really strong statement, which we think is very positive.

[240] Within the tackling poverty action plan we have not seen mention of asylum seekers or refugees. This is one of the points that we raised with the Ministers at the joint ministerial forum when we looked at the actual tackling poverty action plan. We suggested, based on the actual publication of the poverty and ethnicity research undertaken by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, that they bring it together—to strengthen the tackling poverty action plan—with the strategic equality plan. However, the good thing is that the tackling poverty taskforce within WCVA, which Race Council Cymru sits on, among other groups, and the tackling poverty action initiatives that the Welsh Government has since introduced to ask BME groups to actually make a direct contribution are quite positive. However, I do think that it is a missed opportunity to include this specifically.

[241] **Christine Chapman:** Are there any other comments?

[242] **Ms Goodban:** I think that, in terms of Oxfam, we identified in our submission the lack of detail about the part-demographic factors, not just ethnicity but gender, culture, age, play and people's experiences of poverty, and how this might influence the solutions that are created. There is a risk of an assumption that everyone's experiences of poverty are the same, and that is clearly not the case. There are a lot of factors that play in.

[243] **Mr Collins:** I think that, from the Red Cross perspective, we are very much dealing at the front end. We are dealing with failed asylum seekers and refugees who are destitute, and we are giving them clothing, money and the rest of it. In terms of whether the Government policy is working, I think that, at one level, the fact that Wales sticks out alone in providing healthcare for these individuals, is a huge positive compared with our colleagues across the Severn bridge. On the other hand, when we come down to the nuts and bolts, I will be seeking some advice and some help in assisting us to make provision for destitution. At the moment, we use only charitable funding.

[244] **Christine Chapman:** Janet, do you wish to come in?

[245] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes, just on that. You mentioned a plan. I think that one of the concerns that I have raised along the way, based on evidence that has been coming forward, is that, for me, it is not the first time that we, as a Government, would expect those factors to be considered. The existing strategies, from what we understand, are so cross-

cutting that there is a bit of a fog out there with the number of strategies, plans and policies, and where this sometimes gets in the way of you being able to actually have a real, tangible, meaningful delivery of services on the ground, basically. That is what we want, really, is it not? It is a question of whether some of these plans and strategies, because they conflict and cross-cut, and different interpretations of them, are a problem. I would not mind asking you all to respond to that.

[246] My second question would be just about data collection, because I have a real bee in my bonnet about that and whether we have different agencies collecting loads of data, some sharing it, some not sharing it, and whether the Welsh Government should be the more strategic driver. It should dictate what it needs and not have people all running around collecting all of the same data. It is a question of whether we are all wasting massive resources that could actually be delivering for you people, and helping to deliver for you people on the ground.

[247] **Christine Chapman:** There are two questions there about whether there is—as Janet says—any confusion about the strategies, and then the data collection. Who would like to start?

[248] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I would really like a good grounded and all-round response to it, because this is something that I am picking up really strongly.

[249] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** No pressure, then.

[250] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** There is no pressure there, no.

[251] **Ms Iwobi:** Race Council Cymru works with 33 ethnic minority communities right across Wales; from north Wales to Newport in Gwent, to Cardiff, Swansea, Llanelli and Carmarthenshire. The feedback from the grass-roots BME groups is that poverty is absolutely impacting adversely on the lives of their communities, and that the funding, for whatever reason, is not actually trickling down to the actual grass-roots communities to be empowered to work with their communities to address the poverty issues. However, there are some real good pockets of excellent work that is going on, and I will mention Oxfam—and Victoria is here—which is really doing a lot of excellent projects that address poverty and tackle the lack of employment for people from marginalised areas. So, there are a number of great projects that are working. For example, the African Community Centre, which is in Swansea, is actually working with Oxfam on a project called Building Livelihoods and Strengthening Communities, which is a brilliant project. There were a number of other projects. One of them was called the Moving Up project, which was funded by Jobcentre Plus, and it was all about bringing local people and BME people through into the employment pool. I can say that over 50% of the participants in that project were from BME backgrounds. So, you do have good work.

[252] On your question about whether there are too many strategies and whether they are too cross-cutting and confusing, for BME grass-roots communities out there, they actually do not care about the action plans that we have got. They see them as glossy papers that are stuffing the shelves of very important people, and they have absolutely no relevance, in their minds, to what they are experiencing on a day-to-day basis. That is a sad situation, because, really, we should see how the tackling poverty initiatives translate from the frameworks and the plans to actual grass-roots livelihoods changing. You know, obviously the Government has done a lot to revise and review the Communities First initiatives. I know, for example, that in some of the areas where they are working, in Cardiff and in the Swansea area, they are doing a lot of work—for example, in the Hafod area and in some of the real low income areas. That is really positive, but I would say that, rather than worry about whether we are cross-cutting, we should adopt a joined-up approach, so that the left hand knows what the

right hand is doing, and we are not duplicating effort.

[253] I think that more support should be provided to the Red Cross, Oxfam and organisations like that that know and work closely with the grass roots. Also, perhaps Welsh Government should be innovative in actually looking to engage directly with grass-roots BME groups, because, sometimes, gateway organisations like ours can be quite a barrier to actually getting that better understanding of what grass-roots communities are feeling. Recently, a Welsh Government member of staff attended Race Council Cymru's primary stakeholder forum, which deals with poverty, and they had the opportunity to come face to face with the people affected, to hear how their lives had been impacted and how communities are struggling with the economic downturn.

[254] So, all together, more of a joined-up approach is needed, and more value put on having measurable outcomes, with performance indicators that show us that things are actually working, rather than big strategies that they do not think is achieving anything.

[255] **Christine Chapman:** Before I bring the others in, Gwyn Price has a supplementary question to this. The others who want to come in can then perhaps add to this, because it is part of the same question.

[256] **Gwyn R. Price:** Yes, this is part of the same question. Do you believe that the private sector has a role to play in tackling poverty in Wales?

[257] **Mr Collins:** In a word, 'yes'. As witnessed over the last few years, there has been a growth in food banks. Yes, I think there has been a general realisation by the private sector that it is their community just as much as it is anybody else's community, and they must make a contribution. To be fair, I see that happening. In dealing with destitute asylum seekers in particular, we give them food, but we do not buy that food—we get it from food banks. So, yes.

[258] Returning to your question, it is a complex subject, and it involves very nearly somebody from every single office inside the county hall, locally. It is housing, benefits—you name it, it is there. We do have the Welsh strategic migration partnership, which is a strong body that brings all of that expertise together.

11:30

[259] The problem that I foresee happening, however, is that they are predicated on the old distribution centres—Newport, Cardiff, Swansea and, to a degree, Wrexham—and under the new COMPASS legislation those asylum seekers and refugees in particular are going to find themselves in different parts of Wales where that expertise and knowledge do not exist. That is something to flag up for the future.

[260] With regard to data, I would support you entirely. The WSMP, the Wales strategic migration partnership attempted two or three years ago to put some studies in place, but again it is not joined up. You are absolutely right: how many asylum seekers are there today in Wales? We do not know.

[261] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Really? Does anybody else want to comment?

[262] **Ms Goodban:** May I just echo your points, Jeff? I think that we see a real problem with the absence of any mention of the refugee inclusion strategy in the tackling poverty action plan. There is a risk of the 'siloeing' of asylum issues, because it is Home Office-administered support. It provides challenges, obviously, for Welsh Government, but there is a whole host of devolved services that people are accessing, and the service providers often

have very limited and varying understanding about the needs, rights and entitlements of people. It is often left to projects like the one we partner with Oasis and the African Community Centre to provide service-provider training. We also provide engagement opportunities with the private sector because we see a lot of discrimination and lack of access to the labour market as well for people. So, that is another way that we try to—. However, really, there are laws in place on equality of access to services, and I think that, on the ground, we do not see the reality of that being—

[263] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I think that the key word here is ‘access’, is it not—access to those services? For me, it is a simple question really: is it a maze out there? Is it a maze for people themselves? Is it a maze out there for people to navigate their way around the system for those really trying to help?

[264] **Ms Goodban:** Yes, and I think that, since April, with the loss of in-person support with the Welsh Refugee Council, there has been a fragmenting of asylum and refugee support services to two entities. The in-person support is only provided at the initial accommodation centre when people first arrive in Cardiff, and then, once you are dispersed you are really left to check online or use the helpline, which have varying degrees of success for people. I am sure that Betty would back me up on that. Then, the lack of advocacy support from the service provider, Migrant Help—because they just do not have the local knowledge on the phone line—means that a lot of people with complex needs will be falling through the net. So, we have issues with health and with social services. Where language is a problem, of course people are going to have an immediate barrier. However, obviously there are confidence issues if people have suffered trauma, as they may have a fear of authority and be afraid to even—. That goes on into things like reporting issues with housing, hate crime and all the rest of it. You will see that these things will be hugely underreported, because implicitly they will be—. There needs to be an attempt to at least disaggregate those data as well, and to monitor whether things are being reported and issues being raised, because of the loss of advocacy support, which the Refugee Council did provide. I do not see how that is being raised. It is being left to third sector under-resourced partner organisations and the grass-roots organisations that we work with, and they just do not have the time or resources to monitor all this stuff.

[265] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** So, on that point alone, that is a job really that the Welsh Government should be picking up on. After all, it has ultimate responsibility—

[266] **Mr Goodban:** For people existing in Wales, yes, whether they are NRPF—no recourse to public funds—asylum seekers or refugees. Yes, I think so.

[267] **Ms Iwobi:** I think that a big gap has developed in some of the areas that were previously covered by the Welsh Refugee Council. Since the service has shrunk, what has happened is that a lot of the usual clients it had are now rushing to grass-roots BME groups. For example, in one day, I know that the African Community Centre in Swansea had an influx of about 70 women who had absolutely nowhere to go. They were from Afghanistan and Pakistan—you know, all the different groups that would usually have been finding a support network. Without any resources, it is very difficult to see how this will improve, but a point that I would like to make is the point that you raised about whether the private sector has any role to play. It absolutely does. I think that that is something that we are recognising more and more in our work, namely that just employment does not provide a route out of poverty. A lot of our BME people are employed in very low-paid jobs and in manual jobs, for example particularly Bangladeshi, Pakistani and migrant workers. It is really at minimum wage, and that has its own challenges for people. So, we believe that the private sector can get involved in recruiting people and developing them to move up the ranks to jobs that would mean that they step out of poverty.

[268] Another thing that is really important in this conversation is the understanding that poverty links to social exclusion, because if you are living in a particular type of area and you are classed as a poor person, the access to mainstream services is limited, and the confidence for BME people to speak up and even to ask about the childcare provisions that are available is almost non-existent. They sit within their small communities and try to self-help, which adds to the problem.

[269] **Christine Chapman:** Mike, you had a supplementary question.

[270] **Mike Hedges:** You talk about people coming in with different languages to English. Do the local authorities not still use LanguageLine?

[271] **Ms Goodban:** They are supposed to, but we have anecdotal evidence from women who respond to our project that they have difficulty with GPs, sometimes, when they do not have time to use LanguageLine, even when they have requested it in advance. They turn up for appointments, and then they are told, 'Oh no, we didn't know about that. That's impossible'. I am not sure, as well, about getting help in other areas of the health service, but I know of cases, personally. That was in the Gwent area, and I know that that has been followed up by the support worker, but it does go on.

[272] **Mike Hedges:** That is something that should not be happening, because people should be using the LanguageLine facility. Both the health service and local authorities are signed up to it, are they not?

[273] **Ms Goodban:** They should be, but it does not happen across the piece.

[274] **Ms Ali:** I can add from our experience as a support provider. Although LanguageLine is there, there are real challenges. One is the availability. Sometimes, the health providers or even the jobcentre, for example, are quite reluctant. Even now, they try to encourage us as support providers to bring our own interpreters. For us, time is of the essence when you want to get things off the ground for a client, so we, too often, have to take our own interpreters, and we have a very small pot of funding from the Welsh Government to provide the service, which was set for us over 10 years ago. Our demand for the services has increased fourfold, so it does not quite cover our costs at the moment.

[275] The majority of our interpreters are female, sensitive and trained to work with the specific client group as well, and having a conversation over the phone is not always ideal, as you need to see the body language—although you are interpreting directly, it does play a specific role. The client, we find, sometimes does not feel comfortable, because they do not know who they are speaking to the other end. The other danger with ethnic minority communities is that the communities are quite close-knit and small, and they always have this fear that the person on the other end of the phone might know them, and so to what extent should they disclose information? So, those are the barriers, I would say. However, I think that there is clearly more need for face-to-face language support and also for an acknowledgement of the length of time it takes for someone to be supported. When you are having a two-way conversation, it will take 10 minutes, but if you involve a third person, by the time you have relayed things back and forward, it can be 20 to 30 minutes. So, I think that we are in a difficult position.

[276] As mentioned earlier, there are strategies in place and we, as organisations, want to comply and support victims accordingly, but when we have funding cuts and we are constrained, and other service provision is being closed down, the impact on the remaining services is increasing and the ratios increase as well. Within already tight timescales, the language support need and the complexity of the matter all add up, so we are all under a huge amount of pressure at the moment.

[277] Talking about the data side of it as well, that inconsistency of various funders and different local authorities adds pressure on us, because, if there were a consistent format for collecting data, it would be easier for us to report to local authorities and to the Welsh Government, but that is a bit of a prolonged process for us at the moment in the backroom services.

[278] **Christine Chapman:** Rhodri, did you want to come in?

[279] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Ar y sylw diwethaf hwnnw ynglŷn â chasglu data a chael cronfa gyson o ddata ar draws Cymru, oni ddylai cynllun gweithredu ar gyfer trechu tloidi Llywodraeth Cymru, mewn gwirionedd, amlinellu yn benodol pwy sy'n byw mewn tloidi a beth yw eu hanghenion nhw?

Rhodri Glyn Thomas: On that last comment in terms of data gathering and having a consistent database across Wales, should not the Welsh Government's tackling poverty action plan, in truth, outline specifically who lives in poverty and what their needs are?

[280] **Christine Chapman:** Who would like to start?

[281] **Ms Ali:** I think that it depends on where the question is being asked. The strategy might say that, but it is at the point of implementation, so, we, as support providers, are dealing with different client groups, and is the information being asked of us as a reporting line or a strategic line? I think it really depends; otherwise, the information, as you said, is inconsistent and incomplete, and it is not collected over a prolonged period of time, so there will be data missing for you to analyse the trend as well.

[282] **Ms Iwobi:** From Race Council Cymru's perspective, there was a really brilliant initiative, which was introduced by the Welsh Government fairer futures division recently. It was to do with the newly established independent advisory group that provides advice and critique on the hate crime framework. It has asked that the grass roots and strategic bodies that are sitting around the table across the protected characteristics should be the group's eyes and ears and should be directly involved in collecting data from their wider networks, and also, linking that into the third sector partnership council, run by the WVCA with Welsh Government, that the groups there are providing a ready source of providing the data from their networks. So, that has actually been quite positive. As recently as last week, we had an e-mail out to everyone, giving us ideas on the questionnaires, asking us to propose ideas on what we need to enable us to assist Welsh Government to collect these data from a grass-roots perspective. So, it shows that some of the comments that we have been making are actually getting through and they are looking at how to collect data from the grass roots as well.

[283] **Mr Collins:** I would just like to highlight the degree of difficulty in collecting these data. In the timeline from when an asylum seeker may first arrive in Cardiff, through to when that asylum seeker has their very last appeal, we could be talking four or five years. Is that individual going to remain stationary, in Cardiff, for those four or five years? No, they are not. They have friends and family; they are going to move. It is an amazingly difficult task, and I think that it is for the Welsh Government, as Uzo said, to have a network for collecting local data from local groups and bringing them all together.

[284] **Ms Sofrenic:** Particularly in terms of the refugee population, the Wales strategic migration partnership brings together the Home Office, which deals with the issue of asylum, the third sector, the local authorities and a number of other partners and it collates the data on asylum. However, once people have been given refugee status and are allowed to remain in the country, either for a limited period of five years or indefinitely, they go out of this stream and are considered to have recourse to regular social services, emergency assistance funds, employment et cetera. So, they are not treated as a particularly vulnerable category by the system any longer. Therefore, there is nobody, as far as we in the British Red Cross are

aware, who has any data on the number of refugees. Various sources estimate the current number of refugees in Wales at 10,000, but actually no-one gathers that information and no-one can really tell for sure.

11:45

[285] **Ms Iwobi:** Also, there is a lot of value in looking at the extensive research undertaken by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. It has done a brilliant study on poverty and ethnicity, and it has had updates since then, which provide a lot of helpful data. It would be great if the Welsh Government collated them all alongside what is being collected at the grass-roots level. If the network feedback to the Welsh Government through the third sector partnership council and the hate crime independent forum is working, that would definitely be a new avenue to tap grass-roots feedback as well.

[286] **Ms Nyamwenge:** I was going to say, about poverty and refugees, that I think that the crucial thing is really the jobcentres. This is where people go to find resettlement advice and advice on their lives. You find that the majority cannot express themselves and therefore do not get the help straight away. So, it goes on for months before they can get employment and establish their lives. You find that, during that period of time, they are depending on others, they are borrowing from others, their lives are stuck when they should straight away be ready for work. You find that it is because of the language they are denied work; because they cannot speak English, they think that they cannot do certain jobs, but they are willing to work. However, because of the stigma that they are refugees, it is thought that they cannot know about certain jobs. It is all about giving people a chance to get out there and work. I think, on the data point, it should really start from the jobcentres, because that is where these people go at the first point.

[287] **Ms Goodban:** Just to echo what Betty has said, we had an example in Newport of a woman who had been given leave to remain, so she went to the jobcentre. Her English is not of an adequate level to be without an interpreter, but they went ahead without one anyway. She was told that her reporting requirement was fortnightly, but she did not understand that word. She was expecting to get the text message updates that she had had before, but she did not get them, she missed an appointment and was sanctioned. Already, in that move-on period, people often are at huge risk of destitution and a lack of funds for prolonged periods. When you add sanctions to that and the delays, and also the fact that the discretionary assistance fund does not cover people on JCP sanctions—

[288] **Christine Chapman:** May I ask you, Victoria and Betty, to say something about the sanctions? Mark, Sarah and I visited last week and we were interested in this particular point on the sanctions and how this is affecting people's quality of life at the moment.

[289] **Ms Nyamwenge:** From some stories I have heard, people misunderstand their appointments, they fail to turn up and they are sanctioned. They wait for eight or 10 weeks before they can get back in the system. Sometimes, the demand that is put on these people is that, as soon as they get their refugee status, they are expected to get work, but these are people who cannot speak English yet, who have no experience of how things are working, how they can get jobs and how they can apply for this and that. So, it is the pressure that is put on these people. If they fail to meet these demands, then they are sanctioned as time goes by and then they are stuck with life. They cannot afford to supply their needs, they do not have any cash support, they do not have a home to stay in, so it all evolves from the first period of their resettlement, really, and the way that things are handled. I think that it is due to the communication within the system, really. There is not enough help.

[290] **Mr Sofrenic:** There is one good thing that the Welsh Government is doing in tackling poverty—from our experience; I am sure that there are many good things that the

Welsh Government is doing, but what concerns us directly is that, through the equality and inclusion division, a number of grants are given to third sector organisations to tackle exactly problems like this. Giving someone refugee status in the country does not mean that they are immediately fit to work and are able to access employment benefits and health this and that in the same way as someone who is well established in the country. This is because of language problems and cultural lack of awareness et cetera. Through the equality and inclusion grant, the British Red Cross is funded by the Welsh Government to help the integration of people like that into Welsh society. The integration is based on improving people's language skills, improving their cultural awareness, awareness of things like local authorities, social services and what rights and benefits you can expect, but also what the authorities can expect of you, what being a good citizen means, how to access primary health, secondary health, how to deal with schools, the need for mandatory education et cetera. That is a very good and practical way in which the Welsh Government, perhaps indirectly, is helping to tackle poverty.

[291] **Ms Iwobi:** In looking at the needs of asylum seekers and refugees, it would be great also to mention other migrants who currently experience real issues around poverty, such as the Polish community and the Romanians who are coming in. There are a lot of clusters of migrants who are slipping through the system because they are not in work, but who is actually able to support some of their needs and what is happening within those communities? For example, a report was produced by Isaac Blake, director of the Romani Cultural and Arts Company on those not in education, employment or training among Roma and Gypsy people. The specific case studies they did in Shirenewton showed that a lot of Gypsy and Traveller children were living in poverty and destitution. So, there needs to be a really comprehensive look across the board at the whole issue of poverty across all minority ethnic communities, because the impact is different and very individual for people. There is also a need to have a broad view as to what we can do, because the tackling poverty action plan needs to be robust enough to stretch across the needs of all these communities.

[292] **Christine Chapman:** Rhodri, do you have any further questions? No. Peter, did you have a question?

[293] **Peter Black:** We are undergoing a process of looking at the powers that the National Assembly and the Welsh Government should have. Is there anything in particular that the Welsh Government needs, in terms of additional powers, which would enable it to tackle poverty more effectively?

[294] **Mr Collins:** I think that there is a very good example in Northern Ireland, where the Northern Ireland Government has a policy of putting not huge amounts, but quite small amounts, of money into recognising destitution and funding its eradication. There is a great partnership in Northern Ireland between the British Red Cross and the Northern Ireland Government. I really do believe that that would help hugely.

[295] **Peter Black:** I am not sure that we can do that with existing powers, but I think that that is worth looking at.

[296] **Ms Goodban:** On that point, the discretionary assistance fund was underspent by about £2.5 million last year, so we have an increasing need, as I am sure the British Red Cross would reflect, around the destitution of asylum seekers and people with no recourse to public funds. It should not be acceptable in a western country that we are forcing people to live literally in absolute destitution; it is an abuse of their human rights. The City and County of Swansea council passed a motion against destitution, and it would be really progressive if the Welsh Government would do similarly, echoing its support for the idea of a nation of sanctuary, so that no-one is left in that situation, whatever their status or background. In terms of additional powers and things that would be useful for the Welsh Government to maybe take over, I think that Oxfam sees the Work Programme as a real problem. It can be quite

problematic because it is centrally funded by the UK Government, so it does not reflect the resources and availability of work, training and opportunities in the local communities where people find themselves. So, we have this traffic-light system where people who may be further from the labour market and who may have a complexity of needs, such as mental health, alcohol or drug abuse problems, are effectively parked and given a red light, and then the people who are the easiest to work with are prioritised because obviously then they get payments by results for those people. We think that a mandatory system like that is problematic in itself, but we do believe that if that was something that the Welsh Government had, it could have a much more nuanced approach and make local solutions to local problems.

[297] **Peter Black:** Swansea is a city of sanctuary, absolutely. You referred to the discretionary assistance fund. Is that an example of additional power where devolution has actually made it worse?

[298] **Ms Goodban:** I could not comment; I do not know.

[299] **Peter Black:** There is an underspend, and people are still having problems accessing it. A number of people have said to us that they want the Work Programme devolved to Welsh Government. Is there evidence that, if that happened, it would do anything differently or would improve the situation, given its record, for example, on the discretionary assistance fund?

[300] **Ms Goodban:** Hopefully, it would avoid the complications that have happened with the Work Programme and the EU-funded provision as well, which have created some problems in the past. So, yes, that would be the idea; to make sure that it was cohesive with what else was going on, and also with job centres and provision at local level.

[301] **Mr Collins:** To give you some idea of the numbers, this year, from the recorded asylum seeker community, we will offer help to around about 50%. So, we are talking about a total population of about 2,000 and we will offer help to 1,000 of them. What with cash payments and clothing payments, my budget will not get any change out of £25,000 this year. So, it is not huge sums of money.

[302] **Ms Goodban:** However, that is emergency assistance; people can access that only three times in six months, is it?

[303] **Ms Sofrenic:** No, up to 12 weeks with Red Cross destitution payments.

[304] **Ms Goodban:** Okay, but it is very much a sticking plaster on a much bigger problem, is it not?

[305] **Ms Sofrenic:** It is.

[306] **Ms Ali:** I think the accessibility is a problem. As you have said, there is an underspend of that fund, yet, when you go to apply for that fund, it is quite difficult to obtain and you do not always get it. I think that, if it is there, there should be an easier process because the need is there. We are trying to justify it, but yet it is still so difficult to access it, so I think that there is something going wrong here.

[307] **Peter Black:** That is devolved to us, so we can actually make recommendations along those lines. I have one last question for Oxfam. You note in your paper that place-based programmes to tackle poverty have limited reach. Could you expand on that?

[308] **Ms Goodban:** My remit is more around refugee and asylum seeking work, so I will try to give you a response, but we can give you something a bit more detailed in due course. I

think what that was relating to was the limitations of programme-based approaches. So, the Communities First model has some great aspects to it, but, because of the geographical nature of the way that it is organised, it naturally will exclude people who require those services but accidentally fall outside of those areas. So, asylum seekers are a very good example, because they have no control over where they are housed, and, because that housing is privately provided and administered, local authorities or Welsh Government have no power really, I guess, over where people are placed. So, for instance, in Cardiff, someone could be placed in Ely, which is very far from English classes or other support available on the other side of the city, and, if you are on cashless support, for instance, with an Azure card, you literally do not have any money to catch a bus and you may not feel confident to do that and all the rest of it. So, I guess, it is about trying to ensure—. Place-based approaches have great impact. CREW Regeneration Wales has done a deep place study about Tredegar, and we definitely support the findings of that for more localised economic models that eradicate poverty and achieve sustainability in the wider sense, but it does not mean—. It is not one or the other, I think, is the thing, and, if there are demographic groups that require support, then that is probably a more progressive way of ensuring that you are meeting the needs of people who need it most.

12:00

[309] **Christine Chapman:** Mike wants to come in, but do you want to come in first, Rhodri?

[310] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** A allaf ofyn cwestiwn penodol i Oxfam? Rydych chi wedi gwneud awgrym ynglŷn â'r economi sylfaenol a sut mae hynny'n cysylltu â'r Bil Llesiant Cenedlaethau'r Dyfodol (Cymru). A allwch chi ehangu ychydig ar hynny? **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Could I ask a specific question to Oxfam? You have made a suggestion about the foundational economy and how that links to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill. Could you expand a little on that?

[311] **Ms Goodban:** I think what we are calling for is a bold long-term realignment of the economy in Wales that joins up all aspects of Welsh Government policy. We see the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill as a great opportunity to link the environmental, social and poverty aspects of this together, so that there is a cohesive approach. We need to find ways of building a vibrant foundational economy that reflects basic human need, such as food and energy. The legislation has the potential to make the crucial links, as I said, across the environmental, economic and social areas.

[312] We feel that there is a lack of any detailed analysis in the tackling poverty action plan on issues that will affect Welsh people in the future, both short and long-term, and the implications that this will have on poverty in Wales. This includes issues such as the impact of peak oil, climate change, food and energy security, and building a stronger foundational economy in Wales will help tackle poverty in the short term and increase resilience to longer term threats like these.

[313] The foundational economy that we are talking about is sectors of the economy that supply essential goods and services, such as infrastructure, utilities, education, welfare—things that everybody makes use of every day. I think that about 40% of the UK workforce is employed in it, so it is a significant percentage of the people who we are talking about as experiencing poverty as well. The Bevan Foundation report said that it is highly likely that semiskilled and unskilled occupations in the foundational economy account for a large proportion of the in-work poor—the in-work poor being a far larger group than the long-term unemployed as well. So, while resource does need to be spent on the long-term unemployed, it is actually a much smaller group than the increasing numbers who are experiencing in-work poverty. So, that says something about the quality of the work that is being provided for people and the need to address some of those problems and issues. That links then with

procurement policy as well and trying to ensure that public procurement policies try to maximise the employment and the use of local skills and people in business as well in the way that they are managed, to revitalise the local communities, as well as to keep indigenous businesses in business.

[314] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Diolch yn fawr.

[315] **Christine Chapman:** Mike, did you have some questions?

[316] **Mike Hedges:** You seem to have mentioned Swansea very often in lots of things. There are a lot of very good things going on in Swansea. You talked about Hafod and a FAST project that you ran in Hafod school among mainly the ethnic minority community. It was very successful, but my question is on the discretionary assistance fund. It has been operational since 2013. What changes need to be made to it for it to be more effective?

[317] **Ms Sofrenic:** It could be perhaps be a little bit more open in the sense of criteria for application. We have anecdotal evidence that people who—. Again, the Red Cross works with the asylum seeking and refugee population predominantly in terms of poverty. People who apply for assistance from the discretionary assistance fund are very often told that one of the conditions, whether it is written or just established practice, is that they need to have applied for a budgetary loan first. In order for them to apply for a budgetary loan, there is a condition that they have to be on benefits. Now, people who are not on benefits and do not have any income go to the discretionary assistance fund precisely because of that reason. So, if that fund takes them back, originally, to the benefits, they are just going to be in the same loop without having an option to get out of it and actually get assistance from the discretionary assistance fund.

[318] **Mike Hedges:** So, you are saying that, if anybody is sanctioned, they cannot access the discretionary assistance fund either.

[319] **Ms Sofrenic:** Quite frequently, yes.

[320] **Christine Chapman:** Are there any other questions? Sorry, Jeff, you—

[321] **Mr Collins:** I am putting it simply, but the bureaucracy surrounding it is mind-blowing.

[322] **Christine Chapman:** I do not think there are any other questions from Members. I am just checking now. No. In that case, may I thank all of you for contributing this morning and for answering Members' questions? It will give us an enormous head start on our inquiry. So, thank you for attending. We will send you a transcript of the meeting, so that you can check it for factual accuracy. Thank you very much to our panel this morning.

[323] **Mr Collins:** Thank you for listening.

12:05

Papurau i'w Nodi Papers to Note

[324] **Christine Chapman:** Before I close the meeting, there are some papers to note.

12:06

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

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

the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 17.42(vi).

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

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 12:06.
The public part of the meeting ended at 12:06.*