



Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru The National Assembly for Wales

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

**Dydd Iau, 21 Mehefin 2012
Thursday, 21 June 2012**

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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

Angela Burns	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Christine Chapman	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Jocelyn Davies	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Rebecca Evans	Llafur (yn dirprwyo ar ran Keith Davies) Labour (substitute for Keith Davies)
Julie Morgan	Llafur Labour
Lynne Neagle	Llafur Labour
Jenny Rathbone	Llafur Labour
Aled Roberts	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Erica Beddoe	Seicolegydd Addysg Educational Psychologist
Dr Sam Clutton	Swyddfa Comisiynydd Plant Cymru Children's Commissioner for Wales Office
Bev Jones	Cydgysylltydd Addysg Plant sy'n Derbyn Gofal, Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr / CCAC Looked After Children Education Co-ordinator, Bridgend County Borough Council / ADEW
Jean Letton	Aelod BASW Cymru a Gweithiwr Cymdeithasol Annibynnol BASW Cymru Member and Independent Social Worker
Nia Lloyd	Swyddfa Comisiynydd Plant Cymru Children's Commissioner for Wales Office
Penny Lloyd	Aelod BASW Cymru a Gweithiwr Cymdeithasol wedi Ymddeol BASW Cymru Member and Retired Social Worker
Karen Williams	Y Gyfarwyddiaeth Plant, Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr / CCAC Children's Directorate, Bridgend County Borough Council / ADEW

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

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

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.15 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.15 a.m.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon Introductions, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Christine Chapman:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the National Assembly's Children and Young People Committee. I remind Members and witnesses to switch off their mobile phones and BlackBerrys as they can affect the sound equipment. The Assembly operates through the media of Welsh and English, and headsets are available to hear simultaneous translation on channel 1 and to amplify the sound on channel 0. As this is a formal public meeting, Members and witnesses do not need to operate the microphones. We have received apologies this morning from Suzy Davies and Simon Thomas. There are no substitutes for this morning's session.

9.16 a.m.

Ymchwiliad i Fabwysiadu Inquiry into Adoption

[2] **Christine Chapman:** Today, we will receive evidence from the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales. Keith Towler, the Children's Commissioner for Wales, should have been here this morning, but he has had a minor accident. I do not think that it is anything too serious, but he is obviously unable to come here today. However, I welcome representatives from the commissioner's office. Would you introduce yourselves for the record, please?

[3] **Ms N. Lloyd:** My name is Nia Lloyd and I work as a policy officer.

[4] **Dr Clutton:** I am Sam Clutton. I am also a policy officer.

[5] **Christine Chapman:** Welcome to you both. Thank you for the paper that you have sent, which Members have read. If you are happy to do so, we will move straight into questions. I will start off by asking how we can monitor whether local authorities are successfully engaging with children and young people during decision making relating to their adoption. Before you start, because of the time constraints, could one person be the spokesperson on each question, please?

[6] **Ms N. Lloyd:** I will take that. I would just like to clarify that we will be representing the children's perspective today and their rights within the adoption process. The voice of the child is a hugely significant element in all decision-making processes that will impact on their lives. The commissioner is obviously keen to see article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the right of expression used freely in all matters affecting the child and that their views are sought and listened to. Part 2 of article 12 looks specifically at the voice of the child in legal proceedings. The commissioner remains concerned that the mainstreaming of participation is not necessarily happening and he is also concerned, through his involvement in the family justice review, that the voices of children and young people in public and private law proceedings remain quite low, and so they are not necessarily heard. That can have a negative impact on the child or young person throughout that process. He is also aware that the family justice review concluded that they are not necessarily receiving adequate or clear information to enable them to participate in the process.

[7] **Christine Chapman:** May I just stop you there, Nia, because we want to pick up those specific issues later? We can delve deeper into them. So, I will come back to the main issue that I wanted to know about. It seems that your office is not content with the way that things are at the moment. However, having said that, are there any ways that we can monitor

how local authorities are successfully engaging with children and young people? You have mentioned the convention, but how else can we monitor whether or not they are doing this?

[8] **Ms N. Lloyd:** That is a really important point and goes back to the concerns of the commissioner that I mentioned in terms of mainstreaming participation. In terms of local participation strategies, this should be embedded in the way that local authorities work. The importance of involving children and young people in this particular process is key. In terms of monitoring—

[9] **Dr Clutton:** One of the things in which the office has been interested in relation to the monitoring of participation within social services is the implementation of the national participation standards. If that was integrated into processes and was common practice, we could measure it within an outcomes-focused service, looking at adherence to the national participation standards. However, those who are working with children and young people need to know what they are and to be able to implement them.

[10] **Christine Chapman:** I need to bring in Aled Roberts, but I want to pick up another point. In your paper, you talk about a lack of age-appropriate information being available to children and young people going through the adoption process. What opportunities could the development of a national adoption service offer in this regard?

[11] **Ms N. Lloyd:** That was key in the paper. We definitely saw some elements of information for prospective parents, but there was very little for children and young people. In terms of what a national adoption service would provide, there should be availability of adequate, age-appropriate information for children and young people through a national service, and it could ensure the quality of that as well.

[12] **Aled Roberts:** Pa waith y mae swyddfa'r comisiynydd wedi ei wneud gyda chynghorau ar achosion o fabwysiadu i weld beth yw'r sefyllfa ynglŷn â faint o wrando sy'n digwydd ar lais y plentyn? Yr wyf wedi ymwneud ag achosion teuluol yn y llysoedd ac, i ddweud y gwir, yr wyf yn synnu braidd eich bod yn cymryd y safbwynt hwn, achos ym mhob achos yr wyf wedi ei weld mae safbwynt y plentyn yn eithaf clir. Mae cyfrifoldeb ar Wasanaeth Cynghori a Chynorthwyo Llys i Blant a Theuluoedd Cymru, ac ar y gweithiwr cymdeithasol, i ddweud yn union beth yw safbwynt y plentyn. Y broblem sy'n codi yw bod safbwynt y plentyn yn eithaf clir ond bod problemau ynglŷn â dylanwad riant sydd hwyrach wedi bod yn cam-drin y plentyn.

Aled Roberts: What work has the commissioner's office done with councils on adoption cases to see what the situation is regarding how much the voice of the child is listened to? I have been involved in family cases within courts and, to be honest, I am somewhat surprised that you take this position, because, in every case that I have seen, the view of the child is quite clear. The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service Cymru, and the social worker, have a responsibility to say exactly what the view of the child is. Problems arise where the view of the child is quite clear but where there have been issues to do with the influence of a parent who may have been abusing the child.

[13] **Ms N. Lloyd:** We are aware that practice across Wales is inconsistent. We are aware that there was a commitment in the CAF/CASS Cymru strategic plan to the UNCRC and to ensuring that the voice of the child is heard in the family justice system. However, the commissioner feels that this inquiry is an opportunity to see whether, in all cases, that is applied in practice. It might be there in principle, but not in all cases, and the view of the commissioner is that it is inconsistent.

[14] **Aled Roberts:** Faint o achosion yr ydych chi wedi dod ar eu traws yng Nghymru **Aled Roberts:** How many cases have you come across in Wales where the voice of the

Ile nad yw llais y plentyn wedi cael ei ystyried? child has not been taken into consideration?

[15] **Ms N. Lloyd:** Ni allaf roi manylion ar hynny, ond gallaf fynd yn ôl i'r swyddfa a dod yn ôl atoch. **Ms N. Lloyd:** I cannot give you details on that, but I can go back to the office and come back to you.

[16] **Christine Chapman:** That would be helpful.

[17] **Dr Clutton:** To add to that, one of the main recommendations of the family justice review was in relation to the fact that the voice of the child is lacking in proceedings currently. So, the evidence is there, as found by the family justice review.

[18] **Julie Morgan:** I know that you said that you will go back and get the numbers, but are we talking about the child's voice not coming through in the majority of the cases that are heard?

[19] **Dr Clutton:** A lot of the evidence that comes to the children's commissioner's office comes through our investigations and advice team, so we would not have the full picture. It would depend on which cases had come to our office. However, in terms of what the family justice review uncovered, it had real concerns and it forms one of its main recommendations. People may be focusing on acting in the best interests of the child, but that does not necessarily mean that they have sought the views of the child in a meaningful way or are able to represent them, or to explain to the child why those decisions are being made, which can be just as important. We sometimes have to make decisions about children in their best interests that they are not happy with. It is about a two-way process of having that explained to them as well.

[20] **Christine Chapman:** It would be helpful if you could supply us with written evidence on that. I am going to move on to look at issues around the workforce.

[21] **Rebecca Evans:** The commissioner in his written evidence is clear that there is a need for training on adoption, and for permanency for social workers and adoption panel members. How could this be achieved in a sustainable way?

[22] **Dr Clutton:** There could be a clear role for the national adoption service in terms of ensuring that we have a consistent model of practice within social work. Social workers need the capacity to gain those skills and experience to be given that capacity. There are examples of good practice. CSSIW in its reports of adoption agencies found good examples of permanency planning work, life story work, use of children's assessment reports for adoption and so on, but that is inconsistent at the moment. If the national adoption service could act as an agent for promoting quality across our adoption services in the best interests of the child, we could use those examples of good practice to make sure that there was a consistent service.

[23] **Rebecca Evans:** Is there a role for the national adoption service to deliver a more specialised workforce?

[24] **Dr Clutton:** There is expertise and evidence out there on what works in terms of permanency and preparing children for permanency. The national adoption service could lead the way in ensuring that we have some quality measure across Wales to make sure that that happens, and also in relation to social workers having the experience and training needed to act within the court arena. Those skills are needed throughout the adoption process.

[25] **Rebecca Evans:** Should we move away from a system with generic social workers

doing adoption work to a system with more specialist adoption teams, or designated specialist adoption social workers in smaller authorities?

[26] **Dr Clutton:** As an office, I do not know whether we have clear evidence on what would operate best. From a child and young person's point of view, it is about their relationship with a key professional. Children and young people, particularly older children, often tell the commissioner that they are unhappy that their social worker has changed because of process. If that led us to a position where a child was moving between social services teams, it might not be in their best interests because of issues of trust and relationships, and so on. A level of expertise needs to be built up within social services.

[27] **Christine Chapman:** We will move on to questions about the family justice reviews.

[28] **Aled Roberts:** Rydych wedi sôn yn barod am yr adolygiad cyfiawnder teuluol. A oes unrhyw beth perthnasol i'r ymchwiliad hwn yn yr adolygiad? **Aled Roberts:** You have already mentioned the family justice review. Is there anything of relevance to this inquiry in the review?

[29] **Ms N. Lloyd:** The children's commissioner was appointed to the panel of the family justice review to represent children's interests from a Welsh perspective. From the children's commissioner's point of view, to enable the implementation of the UNCRC he believes that two particular issues have emerged from the family justice review that could be thought about in this inquiry and in the process of adoption, one of which is the best interests of the child, which is mentioned in article 3. That should be central to the operation of the family justice system.

[30] In order to ensure that, he also believes that there needs to be a better response so that delays are reduced and that adequate support is provided to the child or the young person and the prospective family. There is also a need to look at adoption through the lens of children's rights, and to use the UNCRC as a framework that underpins all decision-making processes.

9.30 a.m.

[31] The other issue for the children's commissioner is the voice of the child. He feels that those two issues are pertinent to this process and that decisions in the adoption process should ensure that the wishes and feelings of the child are taken into consideration. That means improving the age-appropriate information that is available to them and ensuring that they are supported to raise their concerns and to share their views on the process.

[32] **Aled Roberts:** Sefydlwyd gweithgor arbenigol ar fabwysiadu gan Lywodraeth Cymru. A oes angen i'r gweithgor hwnnw weithio ar y cyd gyda'r adolygiad yng Nghymru i yrru'r pethau hyn ymlaen? **Aled Roberts:** The Welsh Government set up an expert working group on adoption. Does that working group need to work in conjunction with the review in Wales to drive these things forward?

[33] **Ms N. Lloyd:** Rwyf yn siŵr y byddai'r comisiynydd yn hapus i weld gwaith o'r fath ar y cyd. **Ms N. Lloyd:** I am sure that the commissioner would be happy to see such joint working.

[34] **Aled Roberts:** A oes unrhyw gysylltiad wedi bod hyd yn hyn gyda'r gweithgor arbenigol a'r comisiynydd? **Aled Roberts:** Has there been any contact between the expert working group and the commissioner thus far?

[35] **Ms N. Lloyd:** Nid wyf yn siŵr; bydd rhaid imi ddod yn ôl atoch gyda'r wybodaeth **Ms N. Lloyd:** I am not sure; I will have to come back to you with that information.

honno.

[36] **Jenny Rathbone:** We know that the courts are not a devolved matter, but that should not hinder the commissioner's role to safeguard and promote the interests of children. Does his presence on the family justice review enable him to raise concerns about how child-focused judges are when they make decisions on placements for children? Some of the evidence that we have heard indicates a wilful lack of understanding of the attachment process and of the need for continuity of care where possible.

[37] **Ms N. Lloyd:** Again, we would go back to it being about the best interests of the child and the voice of the child being heard. The commissioner, as a representative on the panel, ensured that those two issues were particularly driven forward by the review.

[38] **Jenny Rathbone:** So, he did pursue that point—about judges also, not just social workers?

[39] **Dr Clutton:** As a member of the family justice review, he expressed concerns about the process, in terms of it being given primacy and the adults being involved in the process and losing sight of the child. One of the main findings of the family justice review was the need to return to a child-focused decision-making process, which is what, I think, you are talking about. That has been lost and we need to return to it. He has spoken strongly about that and will continue to do so.

[40] **Christine Chapman:** I want to move on to issues relating to delays. Jocelyn Davies has questions on that.

[41] **Jocelyn Davies:** Yes. We have heard evidence that the views of adults seem to trump the best interests of the child. Have you had many complaints about delays in adoption that relate to local authority performance, rather than the courts?

[42] **Dr Clutton:** In relation to the cases coming to our investigation and advice team, which is the main way in which these issues would come to our attention, we have cases of prospective adoptive parents expressing concerns about the process. They are not doing so in large numbers, in terms of the cases coming to the office, but, often, those concerns will be about delays. I can think of one example of a family that had already adopted one sibling and was concerned about how long it was taking to adopt the other child; that does not appear to be in the best interests of either the child or of the family. In relation to where the ownership of those delays lies, it is with the courts, with the preparation of the child and with training and workforce issues in relation to social workers.

[43] **Jocelyn Davies:** Of course, you never hear about when things go well. That was the point that you were making earlier; you only hear about when things go wrong.

[44] **Dr Clutton:** Yes.

[45] **Jocelyn Davies:** We have also heard from specialists that long-term damage is done to children by delaying permanent placements. That is on top of the harm that has already been done to the child by the birth family—there has been neglect or abuse, otherwise they would not have been taken away. The voluntary sector told us that, typically, a child could spend three, four or five years in foster care, and not always with the same carer, forming strong attachments and then being moved on. We have been told that that is because of the structure of local authority funding arrangements, and that is why children are left adrift. So, have you had any evidence to that effect?

[46] **Dr Clutton:** Nothing specific has come into our office, as far as I am aware, in

relation to that issue.

[47] **Ms N. Lloyd:** No, it has not.

[48] **Dr Clutton:** We have been involved in cases with older looked-after children who have been through a number of placements, where permanency is not being secured, with constant changes in main carers and so on, but, in relation to that specific issue, I am not aware of any cases that we have had. We will go back and check our cases.

[49] **Jocelyn Davies:** I would perhaps guess that you would not have any cases in relation to that, but the children's commissioner might like to think about that gap when children, typically toddlers, are taken from their birth families, but then it might be several years before permanent homes are found for them, despite the fact that there are people looking to adopt.

[50] **Dr Clutton:** If we could achieve a system in which we know that we are going to remove children at birth and can place them with prospective adoptive parents in a foster care arrangement until such time as the adoption process can be completed, that is obviously in the best interests of the child, allowing them to form an attachment with that carer. In cases where children are looking for adoptive families, I know that there will often be a description of how they have formed a positive attachment with their foster carer. It does give you pause for thought about what is going to happen when that relationship ends and they move to their adoptive family. That moves us on to the question of post-adoption support and the preparation of children for permanency.

[51] **Jocelyn Davies:** The evidence that we have heard from experts says that that in itself can cause damage to children. I noticed that there was not anything in your paper about that, but perhaps the commissioner would like to consider that.

[52] **Dr Clutton:** We will take that back.

[53] **Christine Chapman:** As I said, if there is any other information, we would be grateful for it. Funnily enough, we were just going to move on to post-adoption support. I will bring in Angela.

[54] **Angela Burns:** Your comments are very interesting. We have heard an awful lot of evidence from parents about post-adoption support. I will read a little bit from Adoption UK's evidence, because I think that it sums it up.

[55] 'The calls we receive on our helpline and the responses we collect when we survey adoptive parents across Wales, tell us that many feel isolated, abandoned, under extreme pressure and some are close to giving up altogether.'

[56] Of course, that is about post-adoption support. So, imagine that you have adopted your longed-for child and yet you feel that you want to give up: people must be really driven to the edge to have those kinds of feelings. Have you dealt with many complaints about post-adoption support? Are you aware of contradictions in the consistency of provision of post-adoption support throughout Wales? For example, local authorities have a mandatory obligation to provide post-adoption support for three years, but we have had evidence from parents that they cannot access it. Some parents did not even know that there was the obligation to provide post-adoption support, so they have just ploughed their own furrows. The other thing that we have heard an awful lot about is that, if you adopt a child at, say, the age of two or three, things may go swimmingly well and it does not all start kicking off in such a way that you might need that bit of extra help until maybe the age of seven, eight or 12 or when they hit puberty. I would like to hear your general thoughts on that, please.

[57] **Ms N. Lloyd:** Some of the cases that have come into the office reflect the issues that you mentioned, in that some adoptive parents are struggling to find where to go and will come to the office in the hope that we will be able to signpost them onwards. We also need to think about post-adoption support for the children and young people in that circumstance as well. The concerns that the commissioner has around post-adoption support echo what you have already said in terms of the lack of multi-agency engagement in support services and the absence, perhaps, of a dedicated budget for that, despite the statutory duty on local authorities to provide that advisory role. The calls that have come into the office are around adoption breakdown as a consequence of a lack of support being provided to families and, in particular, a lack of access to support for emotional wellbeing. These packages of post-adoption support can be inadequate and, in many cases, too short in duration, and do not necessarily reflect the fact, as you pointed out, that, in later years, they might reach a situation in which they particularly need that support. If that does not fall within the three-year timeline, where do they go then? That is definitely a concern of the commissioner. He acknowledges that that support should be available when the child or young person needs it as well as when the adoptive parents need it.

[58] **Angela Burns:** I picked up on a point he made in his evidence, which I think Jenny will probably explore more anyway, with regard to the Bill, when it comes out, for the national adoption service. The difficulty will be in getting all the agencies together. We can talk rather glibly about post-adoption support, but unless we can get education people, mental health people and everyone else who needs to be involved—child psychologists and educational psychologists—to all work together in a multi-agency way it is going to be very difficult to implement this, is it not?

[59] **Ms N. Lloyd:** Absolutely, but all partners need to ensure that they know their responsibilities in this. That theory can be applied to different aspects of a child's life and not only in the adoption process. However, for a particularly vulnerable group, it is essential that those partners are working together.

[60] **Angela Burns:** I just want to drill down into that. You are absolutely right that, of course, they need to know their responsibilities, but is the issue actually that they know their responsibilities but do not feel empowered to deliver, that they know their responsibilities but do not have the funds to deliver, or that they just do not know what their responsibilities are?

[61] **Ms N. Lloyd:** I imagine that the commissioner would say that all three can arise.

[62] **Lynne Neagle:** With regard to the period after the three years have elapsed when local authorities still have a duty to assess but not to fund, has the commissioner's office dealt with any cases where assessments have taken place and, subsequently, a need was identified but local authorities were trying to wriggle out of their responsibility to fund services based on that assessment?

[63] **Dr Clutton:** I am not aware of any specific cases of those circumstances. However, in relation to wider issues of children with additional or complex needs, the office certainly commonly receives calls about situations where the right package of support is not provided because a number of agencies, such as health, education and social services, need to work together and that does not always happen. They can get caught up in a tug-of-war about whose responsibility it is and lose sight of the child in that.

[64] **Christine Chapman:** Time is nearly up, and we have other witnesses to see. There is one more question from Julie.

[65] **Julie Morgan:** In his written evidence, the children's commissioner said that the specific duties that apply to looked-after children should be extended to adopted children.

Obviously those are the specific duties of health and education services. Can you comment on how that would work in practice, and do you think that local authorities would be able to take this on?

[66] **Dr Clutton:** With regard to resource and capacity, there are some challenges, and in relation to the social services Bill. That does not mean that it should not happen. With regard to the wellbeing duty in relation to the social services Bill and the way in which it seeks to put duties on those other agencies to secure wellbeing, we need to think about how we apply that in relation to particular types of children and young people. Therefore, where we have an adopted child or young person with additional complex needs, we need to think about what extra resources we need to secure their wellbeing. There could be a role for the national adoption service in terms of acting as a clearing house in relation to such cases. However, you obviously need a local connection and a local relationship within those services in order to ensure that the support is delivered to the individual children and young people and their families.

[67] **Christine Chapman:** Because of time constraints, we have not managed to get through all the questions we wanted to ask. However, thank you both very much for attending. I know that it was quite short notice. We would be grateful if you could send us some of the written information we agreed on. Thank you for coming. We will send you a transcript of today's meeting for you to check for actual accuracy.

9.45 a.m.

Ymchwiliad i Fabwysiadu Inquiry into Adoption

[68] **Christine Chapman:** I now invite our next witness to the table. Good morning and welcome to our meeting today. Will you introduce yourself for the record, Erica?

[69] **Ms Beddoe:** I am Erica Beddoe. I work as an educational psychologist in Rhondda Cynon Taf and my role primarily involves working with looked-after children, but I have become increasingly involved in working with adopted children. I sit on the adoption panel and I follow through a lot of the children and am involved in meeting their needs.

[70] **Christine Chapman:** For your information, there are Members who will speak in Welsh, so if you need to use the translation facility, it is on channel 1 of the headset, and we will sort that out for you. You do not need to touch the microphones either, because they will come on automatically. We will start off with some questions, and I will bring in Rebecca Evans.

[71] **Rebecca Evans:** Good morning, Erica. Can you outline for us the main challenges that adopted children might face in school?

[72] **Ms Beddoe:** Do you mean in a school setting, once they have arrived? I did a presentation at an After Adoption conference and I thought that it might be useful to send a copy of that presentation to you, because it looks at some of these issues. I will go through it now and forward it to you via e-mail afterwards. On the main challenges, initially, one of the difficulties I see is that when you are going into school as an adopted child, you do not have a history of peer relationships, so you do not have the already existing social relationships that you take into the school setting, and you do not have anybody in the new scenario who knows you very well either, because your new adoptive parents do not know you to the extent that they would know their own child. The schoolteachers do not know you, and they have not got to know you through link-ups, playgroups or any previous knowledge. So, you are going into a completely new scenario and, from the outset, you are facing different challenges to any

other child going into school.

[73] If you look at the specific difficulties, they are the same issues that children who are looked after have, because they have been, and are during the time of their transition to school, a looked-after child. So, they are often going in with difficulties with concentration and attention and they often have difficulties with the ability to listen well. They have difficulties with what we call executive functioning, which is planning and organisation and, in a school setting, in order to be able to function effectively, you have to listen to instructions, you have to hold them, plan and carry them out. So, they have difficulties with that, which they are taking with them. They have difficulties with play skills. Many of the children whom we have worked with have had difficulties with playing. When you are in a class of 30 and in an unstructured yard setting, if you have difficulty with social relationships and play skills, it is a struggle for you to settle down, given that you have only just arrived, without those friendships being already developed.

[74] They often had difficulties with managing transitions. In a school day, there are a number of transitions: transitions into the classroom, from there to play, from play times back to class and from lunch times to play. When you struggle with managing those changes, throughout the school day you have a lot of anxiety over transitions. Many of our children also struggle with accepting failure and disappointments. They have a lack of self-worth and, in a school setting, they are often set tasks, because that is the nature of school. Therefore, there can be reluctance or a failure to do those tasks, and that can impact on their self-worth. I will not go into all of the specific issues, but that gives you a flavour of the fact that it is not just about the global issues. Adopted children will be going in with a lot of difficulties and a lack of the skills that other children will go to school with, which makes it quite difficult for them to manage in the classroom setting.

[75] **Christine Chapman:** We will delve into some of the specifics that you have already outlined. I will bring in Rebecca again on that.

[76] **Rebecca Evans:** What practical strategies can teachers and support workers employ to help children experiencing some of these issues?

[77] **Ms Beddoe:** I have detailed them in the information that I will send you, but I will go through some of them. Do you want me to talk now about transition into the school setting and the preparation or will we come back to that after?

[78] **Christine Chapman:** Can you outline some of the practical strategies—

[79] **Ms Beddoe:** Do you mean in the classroom?

[80] **Christine Chapman:** Yes, the ones that are being used at the moment.

[81] **Ms Beddoe:** For a start, it is about meeting and greeting the child at the beginning of the day, not just allowing them to come in among a whole group of children. That requires somebody to be allocated to do that. So, what I am suggesting to schools is that they have a key person—an attachment person, if you like—in the school setting whose role it is to ensure that they bring the child into the classroom, settle them down and sort them out, because the beginning of a school day is such a mêlée that the needs of the child can be forgotten.

[82] Then, keep the child near to you when you are sitting. If you are a child in a class of 30, you need to be attended to and given attention throughout the day, so that your needs are met immediately before you engage in behaviour that draws attention for the wrong reasons. If you meet the child's needs straight away—

[83] **Christine Chapman:** How satisfied are you that all teachers would know that the child is adopted?

[84] **Ms Beddoe:** I would say that a lot of teachers would not know that. If they do, they will not have had training on attachment issues or managing children with attachment difficulties. So, oftentimes, you have to do that as an individual by going to the school and providing the training for teachers and other school staff.

[85] **Christine Chapman:** I was at a school last week and I asked the headteacher this very question, and he said that he would not necessarily know. So, obviously, these things could be happening and the teacher would not be aware of them.

[86] **Ms Beddoe:** Absolutely, and I think that that is where the transition is so important, because they would often not know.

[87] **Aled Roberts:** Is there a professional view on the fact that, even if the headteacher knew, through involvement with social services or whatever, that information would not be passed on to class teachers?

[88] **Ms Beddoe:** I think that it would come down to whether the adopter would wish that information to be shared. Sometimes they do, and sometimes they would prefer not to. In all the situations I have been involved in, the adopter has wanted the school to know and has wanted the school to be prepared, but I probably see a small percentage because my job as a psychologist by its very nature means that I would have the children with difficulties.

[89] **Aled Roberts:** It has been suggested to us that there is no evidence that people are reluctant for that information to be given; it is just that the information does not appear to be shared.

[90] **Ms Beddoe:** It is not always shared; you are absolutely right. From my perspective, most of the people I work with will want that, because I will only be working with a number of children that have difficulties.

[91] **Christine Chapman:** I was pleased to hear your suggestion that you have a presentation. Perhaps you could send that to us, because I think it would be useful for us to have evidence of the strategies. However, I will move on now, because there are some other—

[92] **Ms Beddoe:** That is okay. As I say, there are so many that to go through them all would be unnecessary.

[93] **Christine Chapman:** If we can have that by e-mail, that would be good, Erica. I am going to bring Lynne in now, on another aspect.

[94] **Lynne Neagle:** Staying on the issue of teachers' approach to adopted children, we have also had evidence from parents telling us that even where teachers knew that a child was adopted, they did not have a good understanding of the child's particular needs in contrast to a child who is looked after. Could you comment on how common it is for teachers not to have an understanding of the different issues that affect adopted children, such as attachment problems?

[95] **Ms Beddoe:** I would suggest that unless somebody makes it their business to share that information with them and to train them, most teachers would not be aware of that. There is an attitude that is probably generally held that if a child is adopted, they are extremely fortunate—that they have a new family and their life is going to be lovely. They are forgetting

that those children have been looked after, and if they are looked after, in the world in which we live, they will have experienced a lot of trauma, neglect and other major issues. The teachers' attitudes will probably be that they are lucky children, as they have been adopted.

[96] It would have to be somebody's responsibility to make the teachers aware and to train them, because these children often come with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

[97] **Lynne Neagle:** Are you aware of any places where that happens?

[98] **Ms Beddoe:** Somerset has an additional specialist psychologist for adopted children. It also has a specialist looked-after children co-ordinator, which is something I feel would be extremely beneficial. A number of authorities now give documentation to schools when adopted children arrive on their needs and how to meet them. In fact, that is something that we are going to develop in Rhondda Cynon Taf. We will shortly have an additional member of staff in my department, so that is something that we are planning to do for Rhondda Cynon Taf.

[99] **Christine Chapman:** Before we move on, Jenny and Angela have questions.

[100] **Jenny Rathbone:** I just want to challenge the idea that schools do not have in place structures for settling new children. It is not just about adopted children; there are dysfunctional families who will move around the system to avoid meeting people like you.

[101] **Ms Beddoe:** Absolutely. I agree.

[102] **Jenny Rathbone:** There are all sorts of other reasons why people move school in-year. Where is the circle of friends method, the buddying system and the special educational needs co-ordinator who is assessing such children?

[103] **Ms Beddoe:** I suppose that that is what I am saying. It is not that they do not have the systems, as they often have the systems and the strategies; it is just about being made aware that a certain child will probably need those systems. So, the systems are in place and there is the circle of friends and you have mentioned many of the other strategies that I have written about in my notes, such as the buddy system, the social and emotional aspects of learning, that is, the SEAL curriculum, where children work in small groups to include the adopted child so that you are not separating them. Those all exist. It is a matter of imparting the information that these children will probably need access to those systems and will need to tap into them. Therefore, it is a matter of preparing an individual plan for adopted children, whatever one might like to call it, so that they have access to that immediately that they arrive in the school setting.

[104] One of the difficulties is that you are often moving children across counties, so who is responsible for that preparation, given that there is sometimes a delay between the child moving and going to school? It is necessary to ensure that someone is responsible for holding that meeting in the school and preparing the school. You are absolutely right to say that schools have all of that knowledge and information; they just need to tap into it and be aware that they need to do so.

[105] **Angela Burns:** Is any time given to this during the three years of the teacher training course?

[106] **Ms Beddoe:** I am sorry, but I do not have that knowledge. I am not sure, in all honesty.

[107] **Christine Chapman:** We are going to raise this point this afternoon with the

Association of Directors of Education in Wales, because there is an issue in relation to teacher training.

[108] **Angela Burns:** As you know, Chair, I cannot be here this afternoon, but I would be grateful if we could raise this and if we could hold the thought, because, when we come to our report—and given that the Minister for Education and Skills is reviewing the teaching curriculum—this might be something that we could add in.

[109] **Christine Chapman:** Okay, thank you. We will do that, Angela.

[110] **Lynne Neagle:** You have said that people know what to do—

[111] **Ms Beddoe:** Yes, they have the skills and the knowledge.

[112] **Lynne Neagle:** Yes, but perhaps they need a little more training.

[113] **Ms Beddoe:** Yes, definitely. However, I do not think that they always have knowledge regarding attachment.

[114] **Lynne Neagle:** However, in terms of the fact that this is clearly not being applied, when it comes to our report, do you think that it would be useful if we were to make a recommendation that calls for some sort of guidance to be issued so that this is applied throughout Wales?

[115] **Ms Beddoe:** Yes, I do. My view is that it needs to be extended to be someone's role specifically to do that. So, looked-after children co-ordinators need to extend their role to be party to that process for post-adoption work. Psychologists for looked-after children could extend that role into adoption. So, yes, I think that it needs to be identified as something that has to take place rather than just being good practice.

[116] **Christine Chapman:** Aled Roberts has a question.

[117] **Aled Roberts:** I just want to make the point that there is a danger that we will miss the boat, because the consultation on induction guidance for teachers ended at the end of May and that guidance is about to be issued. So, we may be able to convey some of these concerns to the Minister as I think that he intends to issue the new guidance before September.

[118] **Christine Chapman:** Okay. That is useful.

[119] **Ms Beddoe:** When I work with schools, I never come across any issues. Once you make them aware, they are extremely grateful for the support, guidance and help. I have not had a situation where they have not taken that guidance on board.

[120] **Christine Chapman:** Angela and I had a meeting on Saturday with some adopted children, and they gave us some very interesting responses. We want to look at this as well, Erica. Angela, I will bring you in at this point.

10.00 a.m.

[121] **Angela Burns:** Yes, we met an absolutely smashing group of children who had been adopted, who ranged from around 14 to 17-years-old. I was going to talk about classroom activities, such as when children are asked to bring in pictures of themselves as babies and so on. I do not think that I am misquoting; I think that one of the boys said that when he told his teacher that he did not have a picture—the class was talking about families and relationships—that the situation was making him feel very uncomfortable and he did not want

to take part in it, the teacher's response was, 'Get over it'. You may not come across it, but the overwhelming impression that we had when from our session with these young people was that the biggest problem in their lives was the education system and the way that they were treated.

[122] **Ms Beddoe:** That is interesting, because that is probably at secondary age.

[123] **Angela Burns:** It is, but they also remembered being bullied and being involved in inappropriate discussion of what adoption was all about, nosiness from teachers and other pupils about why they were adopted and what happened—you know, 'Scandal, scandal, scandal'. We also specifically asked them whether they remembered much of their primary school lives, and some of them remembered being asked to bring in their birth picture. The whole thing is a nonsense, because in this day and age, we have many different shapes of families, be it adopted families, stepchildren—

[124] **Ms Beddoe:** That is because it is on the national curriculum for one of the areas, such as 'All about me'. There is some aspect about it on the curriculum, because I see it very often regarding where we live, who we are and what our families are. It poses significant issues, as you say, because adopted children do not always have the history to take with them.

[125] **Angela Burns:** Do you have any examples of good practice to share about how schools have handled this in a better and more sensitive way?

[126] **Ms Beddoe:** I am thinking on my feet now. The difficulty with that is the sharing of information from previous periods. Good practice does not always stem from schools; it sometimes has to stem from the social workers who are providing all the information to the prospective adopters at the time that a child is placed. Sometimes, children do not go with all that information. It sometimes requires a lot of time and effort to gather the information for the child to take with them. So, the work of gathering those pictures, that life story and the history to take with you has to be undertaken at the time that a child moves in. That might help later on in the education system if you have it with you. I know that schools have issues with it, and their attitude towards it is one of the key issues. To go back to your question, if teachers are made aware of the impact that those issues have on children, one would hope that those attitudes would not arise. The information also needs to go with the child in the first instance, when they are placed for adoption.

[127] **Angela Burns:** A number of the parents who we have spoken to had children with no history with them, and you cannot manufacture it. This may be something that we ought to look at anyway, because a child may have lost their mother and a school might go mad celebrating mother's day. We just need to be more sensitive and have a little more compassion.

[128] **Ms Beddoe:** It is about being sensitive to the needs of the child. Due to the increasing inclusion agenda, teachers will have children with autistic spectrum disorder, dyslexia, ADHD and a whole host of issues in their classrooms. This is about extending their knowledge to appreciate that adopted children and children in the care system also have emotional wellbeing issues that need to be attended to and taken care of.

[129] **Christine Chapman:** I want to come on to special educational needs, but before we do that I want to finish this set of questions. Julie and Aled have questions on classroom activities.

[130] **Julie Morgan:** My question has been covered, but it seems extraordinary that teachers who you would have thought would be sensitive and understanding of children by nature would not immediately clock all of these issues. I am stunned by it; I do not know

whether that is an overreaction.

[131] **Christine Chapman:** Is that common? The question that you were asking, Julie, was about the fact that there are some very sensitive teachers out there, but we are concerned that the system is not addressing it.

[132] **Ms Beddoe:** I have also seen some extremely sensitive teachers who would be very caring and accommodating.

[133] **Christine Chapman:** It should not be just down to chance; this is what we are arguing as a committee.

[134] **Aled Roberts:** I wish to develop Angela's point, because Angela, Keith and I took evidence from parents in your area. I would like to ask you how common this is because it amazed us that some adoptive families were given little or no evidence about the child's background. In fact, in some cases, there had been very serious criminal behaviour by the birth parents and none of the information had been passed on by the social services department.

[135] **Ms Beddoe:** I guess that is what I was saying. In looking at the school, you almost have to take a step back and that relates to what I said initially, in response to the first question about the challenges that they face: the child is going into the school system without the parents knowing a great deal about that child. If a behavioural issue comes up with your own child, you have that history that you can take into the discussion with the school about the issues with the behaviour. I understand your point: sometimes the information is not available. However, sometimes information is held by people who are not directly involved with the adoption process. That requires a lot of effort—it might be held by the learning support assistant in the playgroup or the health visitor. Somebody would have known that child quite well before they moved on.

[136] **Aled Roberts:** This was a situation where the adoption service did know and did not pass the information on.

[137] **Christine Chapman:** I will just stop you there because we should not be straying into individual cases.

[138] **Ms Beddoe:** The point that I am making is that people do know the child and perhaps a lot more effort should be made to pass on a picture of a child, with all their strengths and needs. The sources that we seek that information from should be widened to make sure that it goes with the child.

[139] **Christine Chapman:** I want to talk a little bit now about special educational needs and support. Jocelyn is going to ask the first question.

[140] **Jocelyn Davies:** Do you have a feel for what percentage of adopted children is likely to have a statement or special needs identified?

[141] **Ms Beddoe:** There was a study in Sheffield in 2007—which was the only study that I could access when I was looking for information—that said that 39% of adopted children had special educational needs. I suspect that that has increased since 2007, given the nature of children—

[142] **Christine Chapman:** Was that a Welsh study?

[143] **Ms Beddoe:** No, it was from Sheffield. A total of 23% have had a statement of

special needs. More of the children who I am involved with, because of the nature of my work, have statements of special educational needs and additional needs.

[144] **Jocelyn Davies:** Earlier on, when you described the child who had been neglected and had gone to school, it sounded as though that was a child with special needs. Is it possible that there could be an adopted child who really has a special educational need, whose need is being masked by what a teacher would expect from a child who has been neglected and brought to school? Is there confusion where perhaps there is a mislabelling? You mentioned autism, attention deficit disorder and so on.

[145] **Ms Beddoe:** I think that you are absolutely right.

[146] **Jocelyn Davies:** Is there a possibility of that? The written evidence that we have had suggests that there are barriers to children who have been adopted accessing educational psychology services.

[147] **Ms Beddoe:** Barriers in what sense?

[148] **Jocelyn Davies:** We have been told in written evidence that they cannot access educational psychology services and learning support. I am wondering whether that is because there is confusion. I do not know what the explanation is. Based on your description of that child, if I were a teacher in that class, perhaps I would wonder whether that child had a special educational need.

[149] **Ms Beddoe:** You are right. That is true. There are issues that arise because of a child's adopted status and the looked-after issues that they have had, which are teased apart from their additional learning needs. For me, that is a matter of undertaking accurate and detailed psychological assessments at the time of placement, amid preparation for placement for adoption. With regard to barriers to access, if a looked-after child has an additional learning need, they should have priority of access to an educational psychologist within the system.

[150] **Jocelyn Davies:** If, for example, it was not teased apart by someone with your expertise and insight, what would be the consequences of labelling a child with adoption issues with another label?

[151] **Ms Beddoe:** It is more likely to be the other way around. If it is an additional learning need, it is likely to be the other way around. If it is an emotional and behavioural difficulty, going back to attitudes, the child is often perceived as having challenging or difficult behaviour, without appreciation of where that behaviour emanates from.

[152] **Jocelyn Davies:** If you do not know where it emanates from, what are the consequences in terms of the way in which that situation is dealt with?

[153] **Ms Beddoe:** I think that the strategies that you would use would often be very similar. However, in order to employ those strategies effectively, and with empathy and sensitivity, if you understand where the difficulties emanate from, you do far better. Also, we would not want those young children necessarily to be placed in units for those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, because one would hope that these are transient problems, whereas some of the other behavioural issues that we see are longer term ones. One would hope that, with many of the children, once they have settled, have become secure and are in settled home placements, those behavioural issues would dissipate to some extent.

[154] **Julie Morgan:** In its written evidence to us, Adoption UK Wales recommended that adopted children, as well as looked-after children, should be dealt with by looked-after-

children education co-ordinators and designated LAC teachers.

[155] **Ms Beddoe:** That is eminently sensible. However, given that the number of looked-after children is currently increasing on a monthly basis, the task would be enormous and they would not be able to do that with current resources. This would have resource implications. Responsibility would also need to be identified at the time of transition into the new placement. Would this involve the looked-after-children education co-ordinator from the sending authority or the co-ordinator in the receiving authority? We would have to be clear about who was responsible. There are very clear issues with the belonging regulations for looked-after children, and we would have to be clear about that responsibility on transition as well.

[156] **Christine Chapman:** Could you clarify whether you support this idea in principle?

[157] **Ms Beddoe:** In principle, it would be eminently sensible. Many of the issues would be similar, and you could enhance their knowledge and skills. I believe that, in many authorities, those people would probably be doing this anyway at the moment.

[158] **Julie Morgan:** So, you do not think that there should be an additional teacher to take on the adopted children issue.

[159] **Ms Beddoe:** If there were additional teachers, it would be exceptionally good. However, if you were going to add these responsibilities to existing workers, the looked-after-children education co-ordinator is the person that you would choose, as well as the looked-after children co-ordinator in the school setting. However, in terms of what you said about additional needs, there needs to be joint working with the special educational needs co-ordinator and the LAC co-ordinator. This is not an either/or situation. Perhaps that is what was being asked: do these children go to the special needs co-ordinator or do they go to the looked-after children's co-ordinator? Some of the issues are so intertwined that you cannot separate them at the time of placement. Ongoing assessment is needed to ensure that you can separate those issues.

[160] **Christine Chapman:** I see that Julie has finished her questions, so I will now bring in Aled Roberts.

[161] **Aled Roberts:** I wish to move on to local education authorities, and the oversubscription issue within schools. Our understanding, based on the evidence, is that, in England, adopted children—referred to previously as looked-after children—have the same priority as looked-after children, whereas in Wales, they do not. Do you have any observations on that?

[162] **Ms Beddoe:** They should have the same priority. At the time of placement, they are looked-after children. Often, the adoption order has not gone through, and they are looked-after children who should have priority. However, I think that this is more complex than that. In relation to the high percentage of children with additional learning needs, one of the issues that I face daily in my work is that we are placing children who receive specialist educational provision in the sending authority in authorities that cannot replicate that provision. To use a recent example, we could have a child in a learning support class that included eight children and two members of staff, going to a neighbouring authority that does not have the equivalent provision. We would therefore be placing that child, whose needs we recognise as those that require this provision, in an authority where they would be placed in a mainstream school. There needs to be a fast-tracking system to make sure that that child's educational needs are met on arrival. At the moment, one of the biggest challenges that I face is ensuring that a child that we have recognised as having quite significant needs has that provision replicated when they move.

10.15 a.m.

[163] **Aled Roberts:** You mentioned fast-tracking, but how much flexibility is there with regard to transition, either from one area to another or from one school to another? Does the local education authority take quite a robust view without taking into account all of these issues that we have referred to this morning?

[164] **Ms Beddoe:** I think that they take them into account, but there are systems in place such as panel meetings and timescales. If you think about the difference between the matching and the time that a child moves into a placement, it is quite a short period of time. Making arrangements for special educational needs to be met within that short timescale often does not meet local authority timescales. That is a huge problem for children who have been in specialist settings, particularly if they are in special schools with additional learning needs. That is a great issue for me—I think that they should have priority of placement.

[165] **Aled Roberts:** Why is there so much pressure on timescales between matching and placement when, according to all of the other evidence that we have heard, there does not seem to be a great deal of speed in the system on the local authority side.

[166] **Ms Beddoe:** In my experience, children in our authority seem to move on quite quickly once they are matched.

[167] **Aled Roberts:** Why is there so much pressure and short-circuiting in terms of ensuring that their needs are met in that window of time, compared with all of the other evidence that we have heard where there appears to be significant delay in—

[168] **Ms Beddoe:** Do you mean in the process of adoption?

[169] **Aled Roberts:** Yes.

[170] **Ms Beddoe:** In a sense, the delays may be preceding that. From the point of view of education, you cannot make plans until the matching has taken place. You can have some preliminary discussions and some investigations prior to it, but after it is agreed that the child is moving into this family and this authority, you have quite a small window of time in which to make those arrangements with the receiving school on a practical level.

[171] **Aled Roberts:** Is there a need for that deadline to be allowed to drift a bit more, if what we want is to place before ensuring that those children's needs are met?

[172] **Ms Beddoe:** Rather than doing it that way around, the receiving authorities should fast-track their systems in terms of education; otherwise you would be holding children's placements up. There should be an agreement at the receiving end that the children's educational needs be met within the adoption plan.

[173] **Aled Roberts:** At the moment, there is no requirement on the receiving authority to do that.

[174] **Ms Beddoe:** They are within the looked-after status, but the speed at which that happens can be quite slow.

[175] **Jenny Rathbone:** What is the impact on the child who, on Friday, is told that they are leaving that school and local authority and then, on Monday, turns up in a new school? Normally, ceremonies take place when a child leaves a school, for whatever reason; for example, 'We are all going to say "goodbye" to Fred, and—

[176] **Ms Beddoe:** Yes, and that happens. Mostly, schools have leaving parties and say 'goodbye'. There is then the difficulty in deciding about the time that you take to admit to a new school, because I often believe that children should settle in their new families before they are exposed to the anxiety of being in a new school setting too. I find that a difficulty, because there is no clear-cut guidance on when a child should be admitted. There seems to be anxiety that a child of statutory school age should be in school, because that is what happens—they have to attend school. However, if you considered the needs of the child, there should be flexibility about whether a child should be attending school full time, even if they are of statutory school age. Adopters and social workers for adopters become anxious about that, because legally they should be attending school, but their needs are not always met at that stage in their life by attending school. For me, there is a real conflict in terms of whether they should have more time at home to allow them to become part of their adopted family before they are faced with the additional stress and pressure of moving to a school. I advocate part-time placements at times, so that they can gradually move into a new school setting. However, they often have goodbye parties; schools are good at that.

[177] **Christine Chapman:** Do any other Members want to ask any specific questions? I see that you do not. Thank you, Erica, for attending today. It has been a very useful evidence session and it will help the committee to produce its report. We have taken a lot of evidence on different aspects, so it was very useful.

[178] **Ms Beddoe:** Shall I forward this document to you?

[179] **Christine Chapman:** Yes, that would be helpful. We will send you a transcript of the meeting so that you can check it for factual inaccuracies before it is published. Thank you, once again, for attending.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10.21 a.m. a 10.45 a.m.
The meeting adjourned between 10.21 a.m. and 10.45 a.m.*

Ymchwiliad i Fabwysiadu Inquiry into Adoption

[180] **Christine Chapman:** In this item, we will be taking evidence from the British Association of Social Workers. We have witnesses from the association. Please introduce yourselves for the record.

[181] **Ms Letton:** I am Jean Letton, a BASW committee member. I am also an independent social worker and, until about 18 months ago, I managed the adoption agency for the Vale of Glamorgan.

[182] **Ms P. Lloyd:** I am Penny Lloyd, a retired social worker, having spent most of my working life working with children and families and with adoption in particular. I have been responsible for helping to draw together the results of the consultation on the social services Bill. In a sense, I am here to support Jean in what she is doing and with any wider questions.

[183] **Ms Letton:** I wrote the part in respect of the national adoption service brought forward by the Welsh Government.

[184] **Christine Chapman:** Thank you for providing a paper in advance; Members will have read it, so, if you are happy, we will go straight to questions so that we can pick out some specific areas.

[185] **Aled Roberts:** Dylid nodi fy mod yn **Aled Roberts:** It should be noted that I am a noddwr i BASW Cymru. patron of BASW Cymru.

[186] **Christine Chapman:** Thank you, Aled. I will start with Jenny Rathbone.

[187] **Jenny Rathbone:** In your evidence, you say that social workers should be given the time, skills, training and resources to help those applying to adopt to explore their capacity and flexibility to do so. The man on the No. 58 bus would assume that that was part of the core job. Could you tell us what the time constraints are that mean that that does not appear always to happen?

[188] **Ms Letton:** I wrote that. That was in response to the recruitment needs for adopters. If we are talking about delays, then we are talking about why those delays are happening. The obvious ones are court delays, but part of the delay is caused by not having enough adopters to meet the needs of the children placed for adoption. If you are going to set up a national adoption service, I believe that social workers must have enough space to be able to explore with the average adopters what their flexibility is in terms of taking a child that is perhaps not your average child. The majority of adopters who come to local authority adoption agencies want a young, average child. There is no shortage at this time of adopters who want the average child. The shortage comes with people who are not willing to take an older child, sibling groups, or children who have obvious issues or difficulties.

[189] If you are going to set up a service to meet those needs, which are obviously the crucial needs, as part of the service, you must have social workers who can help people to explore their flexibility. That takes time and space.

[190] **Jenny Rathbone:** I understand what you are saying.

[191] **Ms Letton:** We do not get many people through the door who want to take children who have issues or difficulties. So, you can do your recruitment, but it does not happen. People are not prepared to do that. It has to be a very specific type of recruitment, and I think that a national adoption service potentially has an opportunity to do that.

[192] There are some projects in England that do that specifically—they target only those people who are prepared to take a difficult child or who are prepared to explore their flexibility. However, it takes time and space to do that, and if you have busy case studies and many children on your books, it is not that easy.

[193] **Jenny Rathbone:** That is true, but we have heard quite a lot of evidence from people saying that they have called up to enquire about possibly being adopters and been told, ‘Oh no, we’re full’. It is a journey, is it not, to explore whether you feel able to take siblings on and so on?

[194] **Ms Letton:** Absolutely, and if we are going back to look at a national adoption service, in that context, you can spend that time with someone who is saying to you categorically at the time of registering their interest that they only want a young child without any difficulties to meet their own needs, which come about because they cannot have their own children. Unfortunately, for small local authority adoption agencies it is not so simple, because we already have another five, six or 10 people who want that and who are not prepared to change their opinion on that at that time. I do not think that there are any local authorities in Wales that are not able to meet the needs of the average child.

[195] **Christine Chapman:** Before I come back to you, Jenny, Jocelyn has a quick question.

[196] **Jocelyn Davies:** On the delay in placing children, in your evidence you say that a great deal of the delay is because of the problems faced by the local authority in the courts. That is not what we heard from the voluntary sector representatives. They said that one of the reasons for the delay was the structure of local authority funding in that fostering budgets are big and adoption budgets are small and that children were, therefore, left adrift for far too long in foster care and often moved around rather than being placed for adoption. They said that that can happen for years, and they felt that the reason for that was not that there were not people prepared to take them—when the voluntary sector gets those children, it gets them adopted pretty quickly—but purely to do with the structure of funding in the local authority.

[197] **Ms Letton:** Funding is always an issue. To take it back a step, all children who come into the care system must, within the first four-month independent review, be identified as needing a permanent placement. Therefore, the child is in the system for up to four months. After those four months, the review has to identify whether they need a permanent placement. If the assessment is that they need a permanent placement, the referral should come to the adoption agency in the local authority on the basis of there being a child in need.

[198] The Welsh Government research note from May 2012 referred to 905 days from entry to care to final adoption order. That sounds like a phenomenal period of time, but, when you break it down, there are 353 days from entry to care to the ought-to-be-placed decision. Within that, the child first has to be in the care system for four months before the identification of need for permanency has been made. Then, there is the twin tracking process that goes on with regard to whether the child is going back home, because, obviously, children have a right to a home life. So, it is very much a local authority's responsibility to look at whether they can place the child back home. Any rehabilitation process will be taking place throughout that year as well. Then there are the assessment reports and the ought-to-be-placed decision panel. So, when you take out four months, 353 days is not a huge amount of time for dealing with the rehabilitation, assessing aunts, uncles and whoever.

[199] Then it refers to 244 days for matching a child to adopters. Once a child has gone to an ought-to-be-placed decision panel—which was previously known as 'best interest'—it goes before the court. This is where delays happen. What happens in the court system, and I appreciate that we cannot discuss this too much, is that, because the court is balancing the right of the child to a family life with protection, many more people are being allowed to come forward and request the leave of the court to be assessed for these children. It may well be that the local authority has already assessed these people at some stage or other but that they are able to place before the courts some changes or whatever, so the court will then make a decision on whether to give leave for them to be part of the system again. That means that no placement order is made and the local authority or independent experts have to assess these people for their suitability for this child. That takes time—

[200] **Christine Chapman:** May I come in on that? We have had information on what you suggest, namely that, between 2008 and 2011, 13 local authorities in Wales were failing to meet this requirement and that, in one local authority, more than 40% of children were without a permanency plan in place at four months. So, again, this is a contradiction to your information. Can you respond to that?

[201] **Ms Letton:** It is difficult. Each local authority will be coming from a different perspective. My understanding in terms of the process is based on where I came from in the Vale of Glamorgan and the timescales that are set out within the regulations.

[202] **Christine Chapman:** So, you are looking specifically at the Vale of Glamorgan and not the others—

[203] **Ms Letton:** I am looking at the regulations that tell local authorities at what stage

they should be doing what they are doing, basically.

[204] **Angela Burns:** There is something here that I fundamentally do not understand. After four months, the regulations say that you have to make a decision about whether a child should be permanently placed—

[205] **Ms Letton:** It is whether the child needs a permanent placement.

[206] **Angela Burns:** So, that is there. However, if the decision is ‘Yes, this child needs a permanent placement’, did I hear you say that, despite that decision being made, you still spend another x number days trying to decide whether that child can go back to their birth parents?

[207] **Ms Letton:** That is what happens, yes.

[208] **Angela Burns:** I am confused. Why bother to make that decision about whether a child needs a permanent placement—

[209] **Ms Letton:** A twin tracking process is that, on one side, you are tracking a child to a permanent placement and, on the other side, you are looking at rehabilitation or placement with other family members or interested parties.

[210] **Angela Burns:** But is that not incredibly time-consuming, resource-consuming and finance-consuming? It does not appear to shorten any processes, as far as I can tell.

[211] **Ms Letton:** The twin tracking process has been around for many years. It is part of regulations and—

[212] **Angela Burns:** I can still question it, surely.

[213] **Ms Letton:** Of course you can. [*Laughter.*] Most children who come into the care system go back home within three or four weeks. That is the average situation. However, for these children who are still in the care system at four months, and the immediate action was to look at whether the child could go home, the court would suggest that it is not enough time to make a final decision that a child’s right to family life should be taken away. The twin track process enables both of these things to happen. So, when a child is referred to a local authority adoption agency after four months, they are already starting the process of considering what that child’s needs are. However, alongside that, the childcare social worker is continuing to address the issue of whether they can find somebody for this child or whether they can work with these parents sufficiently for the child to return home.

[214] **Angela Burns:** I have one last quick question. After four months, does the adoption arm of the local authority start making direct contact with that child, to make all these assessments for twin tracking?

[215] **Ms Letton:** It probably would not at that immediate time, because the majority of children who come through a local authority referral process for adoption, in the twintracking process, will go home. So, that rehabilitation process has happened as part of the twin tracking and they will go home. You will find that with an awful lot of local authorities. If you look at the number of referrals of children for adoption they receive, you will find that an awful lot of them will have returned home and will not need adoptive placements in that process.

[216] **Angela Burns:** May I make one comment, Chair? I simply do not understand, given that adoption is such a major life-changing event for a child, how someone can say ‘We think

this child might need a placement' and then, four months later, say that everything is fine and that they are going back to their home. I would have thought that that would be something that would be thought about much later, after all of the other work has been done. There is an issue of commitment, is there not? If you know that you have many different choices, you are less committed.

11.00 a.m.

[217] **Christine Chapman:** Okay, we have noted that, Angela. I would like to move back to Jenny, because we will pick up on these issues later.

[218] **Jenny Rathbone:** These are very important issues. We have to recognise that the bar that enables children to come into the care system in the first place is already very high. They are not coming into the care system because they failed to turn up to school on one day. Therefore, I am concerned that there appears to be a four-month delay during which they are simply parked. The matters that bring them into the care system in the first place will already be quite serious, unless it is because mum is taken dangerously ill and is not in a position to look after the child, when there are very specific issues. I do not understand why, as soon as children come into the care system, we are not thinking about twin tracking. Obviously, some children will go back to their parents or family and others will already be in a very serious position and many methods will have been tried to rectify the situation. So, already, there is a four-month period where nothing happens with regard to making important decisions about the tracks and the possible options that could be pursued.

[219] **Ms Letton:** During those four months, people are changing and looking at what needs to happen for a child to go home and remain safe. That is an ongoing process. People do change. Given the right inputs, things do move on and change. Four months might not be a huge amount of time to give to parents who might have fairly serious problems, sufficient for a child to be removed.

[220] **Jenny Rathbone:** I am not at all arguing that we do not need to explore rigorously the possibilities for the child to go back to the birth family or into kinship care, among other options, but I feel that there is real concern about the impact on the child of chopping and changing. Why is there not much more championing of concurrent planning, which still enables the child to go back to the birth family?

[221] **Ms Letton:** I am an advocate of concurrent planning. For a child, certainly for the babies who have been removed from hospitals right at the beginning of their lives, concurrent planning is something that we really need to consider as it means that the emotional trauma lies with the adults as opposed to the child.

[222] **Jenny Rathbone:** So, in 12 years, at least, where this has been advocated? We do not have a single example in Wales.

[223] **Ms Letton:** No, we do not in Wales. They do in England.

[224] **Jenny Rathbone:** Why?

[225] **Jocelyn Davies:** Are there any statistics in relation to children repeatedly coming into care? Obviously, you cannot tell me those off the top of your head. We talk in terms of one child coming into care and it just happens once in their life. Is such information collected?

[226] **Christine Chapman:** Do you have that information to send to us?

[227] **Ms Letton:** No.

[228] **Christine Chapman:** Do not worry.

[229] **Ms P. Lloyd:** I think that it would be true to say that, if you looked at cases where children repeatedly come into care, you might begin to examine why that might be happening and the work that might be done to support a family to stop that from happening. Someone asked earlier about the training and support of social workers. We know that childcare social workers have been in hugely short supply over the last decade. If you have a shortage of social workers, you then get the newly qualified social workers who are now supposed to be protected for the first year, but we know that not every local authority manages that. I will not say why, but some think that it is a good idea and others do not. There is a cohort of staff who are learning on their feet. Many of the more experienced staff have given up because they cannot stand the strain—BASW certainly gets an awful lot of members saying that the situation has become intolerable and that they would rather do something else. Delays in the process—the court process, the regulations and the legislation—are for your side of the table to consider. I have been out of adoption practice for quite some years, and I am alarmed to hear how many more bureaucratic barriers have been introduced in order to seemingly improve things. In my view, they have not made any difference. I cannot tell you that in fact, but I have listened to the evidence.

[230] However, I know that childcare social workers are very thin on the ground. It is difficult to get people to go into childcare, it is difficult to get them to stay there and it is difficult to get them to have a sense that they are really making a difference to a child, because there is a managerial approach to it. The sort of work that I would have done in the past with a child involved direct work with that child, so you got to know them and you could write the form because you knew that child. There is not the space or the time to do that now. It has been suggested to me that local authorities are a bit nervous about whether their social workers are able to do this work anymore. The culture has shifted as it has become more court-based—decisions have been removed to the courts, and judges think that they should make these decisions, not social services. There is a culture of moving away from enabling social workers to do what they were originally intended to do.

[231] **Christine Chapman:** This is linked to Lynne Neagle's questions on the workforce. We will be taking up some of the issues that have been raised this morning with the Welsh Local Government Association and later with the Welsh Government, but it is interesting to have your perspective on this.

[232] **Lynne Neagle:** We have heard that children are sometimes placed inappropriately with adoptive parents, or are placed with adoptive parents without their knowing the full range of problems that the child faces. Witnesses have said that the reason for that is that social workers are not sufficiently aware of attachment disorder and are also not sufficiently assessing the needs of a child before making that placement. Is that a view that you recognise, and, if so, how common is it and what should happen to address it?

[233] **Ms Letton:** Penny mentioned that there was a shortage of childcare social workers, which has a huge impact on the direct work that you do with children. If you do not have enough social workers and you have huge caseloads, you will not have the space, time and skills to do that direct work with children. It is a problem and it will continue to be an ongoing problem.

[234] **Ms P. Lloyd:** It is also my experience that local authorities, for whatever reason—it may be finance, I do not know—in straitened times do not give enough money for a range of training or provide the time to do it and to put it into practice. Those are the things that are short-changed very quickly.

[235] **Ms Letton:** If you have a busy childcare team and there is training coming up, the chances are that not many people will be able to do that particular training because they are already up to their neck in all the other work that they have to do, and the training gets left.

[236] **Aled Roberts:** A oes gennych **Aled Roberts:** Do you have any specific unrhyw dystiolaeth benodol gan y cynghorau evidence from the councils that the money bod yr arian sy'n cael ei wario ar being spent on training has been cut back? hyfforddiant wedi cael ei gwtogi?

[237] **Ms Letton:** Sorry, do I have any information about money spent on training being cut back?

[238] **Aled Roberts:** You made a point on training budgets in straitened times, and I also accept your point regarding the demands placed on social workers and that they may not have the time to attend training events. You also made the point that budgets were also being cut.

[239] **Ms Letton:** All budgets in social services are being cut and things like training are not going to be left out of that. Training budgets are going to be cut.

[240] **Ms P. Lloyd:** I have to say that it is not just about the money or the training; it is about the time to do it as well. If you take out your childcare staff, who are the ones who are also doing child protection work, your teams are then denuded and you do not have the cover. When I have been running training, and when BASW has put on events, we find that it is the childcare workers who do not get the space to come.

[241] **Aled Roberts:** You mentioned changes in regulations. Do you have any views on the increase in bureaucracy, with regard to the volume of forms that have to be filled in, and so on, in the whole process?

[242] **Ms Letton:** That is one of the biggest issues that social workers are facing today: the bureaucracy, the level of form-filling that they have to complete, and the computer work that they have to do before they can even get out to see that child. You will see that the forms that are necessary for adoption are quite repetitive. They could be refined and pared down quite considerably. We also have to bear in mind that, in terms of adoption, it is also a matter of child protection, which is the No. 1 priority within adoption, as it is with any work that we do with children. We have to be very careful, when we do targets and timescales, that we do not miss the fact that a great deal of the work is done to ensure that a child is in a safe home.

[243] **Christine Chapman:** I will just remind Members and witnesses that we only have about a quarter of an hour left, so perhaps we could have some very specific questions. I now call on Lynne.

[244] **Lynne Neagle:** I just wanted to follow up my first question and your answer to that. You have highlighted the difficulties that, perhaps, are impeding this kind of work. Is that the case everywhere, in your experience, or are there local authorities where they are doing this comprehensive assessment and spending time with the kids?

[245] **Ms Letton:** It is difficult to answer that question. I would say that most local authorities are struggling with low numbers of staff within their childcare systems. It is very different to when Penny and I came into social work 30 years ago: being in childcare was considered the place to be, but now it certainly is not.

[246] If I may, I would like to bring in one issue, which is about the statistics. When I looked at the Welsh Government statistics, I saw that they showed that, throughout Wales, 252 children had been adopted, 183 children had been placed with adopters, but 498 children

had been placed with parents or others. That gives us a total of 933 children placed in one year throughout Wales within a permanent placement. I do not know, but for those 498 children I do not think that there is any clear idea of what that means. In my view, it means residence orders, guardianship orders, placement with parent regulations, or long-term fostering. If we are looking at a national adoption service, one of the major things that you have to do is to use it as a repository for good data collection and for getting accurate statistics to identify need. If you are talking about 933 children in one year being placed in permanent placements, that is not bad.

[247] **Christine Chapman:** We will clarify that for Members. We will get back to you, as Members. We will look into that. Thank you for raising that issue. Did you wish to come back in on anything, Lynne?

[248] **Lynne Neagle:** We have talked about the difficulties, but in looking to the future, you have raised concerns about the national adoption service. You have indicated that it could cause local authorities to lose trained social workers; therefore, effectively, you are saying that it would make the situation worse. Are you able to say why that is likely to happen?

[249] **Ms P. Lloyd:** On the face of it, I suppose that it looks as though you would be taking those social workers from a local authority, placing them in the national adoption service, putting them together, and then they could focus on the work. An essence of that is true. However, as my colleague says, there are these children who need residence orders, guardianship orders, and a whole host of other permanency options, which will still have to be done by the local authority. Therefore, from a small pool of highly trained people, you will then be spreading it. That is not to say that we do not think that the national adoption service is a good idea; we do think that it is a good idea, but we are just trying to raise some of the issues that will inevitably come from that.

[250] **Ms Letton:** The worry is that it will be seen as an elite place to work and, therefore, highly skilled people from the local authority will want to go there, which could leave the local authority without as many staff as it should have. I have included this in our report. There is still a huge amount of work to do in an adoption agency; it is not just about the placement of children and the recruitment of adopters.

11.15 a.m.

[251] **Christine Chapman:** This is uncertain at the moment, as the Bill goes through, but how do you think the perception of change is affecting current social workers? Is there an issue there?

[252] **Ms Letton:** People are fearful of what that will mean for them. That is why, when BASW put this together, we looked at certain areas where standardisation could occur because that would be great. A collection of statistics and a data repository would be an essential part of any national adoption service because without that, you will not identify the needs. You cannot identify needs unless you have accurate statistics. If I am right, of the children who are languishing—for want of a better word—within the care system, waiting for placements, the majority of them will be the harder-to-place children; that is without a shadow of a doubt. If you have accurate statistics, you target your adopters accordingly to meet your needs. If you are able to do that, you will reduce some of that delay.

[253] Many local authorities have thought that a Welsh adoption register would be helpful. What happens—to briefly explain the process to you—is that if we have a placement order for a child and cannot place that child in-house, with the adopters that we have, then in south Wales there is a consortium of local authorities that meet and share adopters and children in terms of matching. However, if there is not anywhere suitable at that point, that child will go

to the national adoption register. Therefore, a Welsh child could potentially be placed in Leicester, London or wherever. However, we have always felt that if there were a Welsh adoption register, then we would be covering the whole of Wales. That does not mean that the national register cannot take children from north or mid Wales, but that leads to a delay. If you had a Welsh register that you could go to automatically, it would make a big difference. If you had a national adoption service that met those needs and recruited people who could meet those children's needs, then that would also shorten the delay.

[254] **Jenny Rathbone:** I would like to follow that up because some of the evidence that we heard was not just about the constraints on social work time, because we understand that child social workers are asked to do an incredibly difficult job and there is often not enough of them. However, we have heard evidence of information about a child simply not being made available because of attitudes. All public services should be working together.

[255] **Ms P. Lloyd:** I think that BASW's view on that would be that that is untenable. We would not support that if a member came to us and said that that was what they were doing; we would take issue with them. That is not a position that we would take.

[256] **Jenny Rathbone:** You would agree then that it is not simply about the paucity of dedicated social workers on the ground in local authorities.

[257] **Ms P. Lloyd:** No problem has just one cause, has it?

[258] **Jenny Rathbone:** No, indeed. However, if the national adoption service were to be given to the voluntary sector to run, would there be specific challenges for local authorities? I am not saying that it will happen, but that is one option, given that the voluntary sector seems to have a much shorter timescales, for example, those that have dedicated services just dealing with adoption.

[259] **Ms Letton:** With all due respect to the voluntary agencies, all they do is recruit and assess adopters; they do not deal with the process prior to that, relating to the child, because that remains with the local authority and it always will, as current legislation stands.

[260] **Christine Chapman:** Going back to Jenny's point about sharing information, which you have agreed should be shared, is there an issue with local authorities and the voluntary sector sharing that information on the child?

[261] **Ms P. Lloyd:** Probably.

[262] **Ms Letton:** However, we do not know the answer to that.

[263] **Aled Roberts:** Do you have any observations on the evidence of the voluntary sector regarding the number of cases placement social workers were dealing with compared with local authority workers? They seem to be dealing with many more cases than local authority workers.

[264] **Ms Letton:** Understandably so, because that is all their job is. Local authority adoption social workers will be doing step-parent adoptions, home-finding, access to birth records, residence orders, guardianship orders, supporting their adopters—a whole raft of stuff—as well as work with the child. The work of the likes of Barnardo's and St David's Children Society is purely and simply to recruit adopters and be part of the assessment process.

[265] **Ms P. Lloyd:** And supporting the family.

[266] **Ms Letton:** Yes, they support the family after the child has been placed, but everything prior to that, plus all of the other things that go with adoption, they do not do.

[267] **Angela Burns:** I would like to pick up on two points. Jean, you commented that adoption is about child protection, and I understand that. However, you also said that, in your experience, barriers have appeared over the last few years that were not there when you were a social worker. What is your view of the process and adoption forms? It is about child protection, and I understand absolutely that you want to ensure that the person who is going to adopt is not a psycho who has somehow slipped through the net, but why do adoptive parents have to, for example, have their financial statements looked at? Does that not exclude poorer people?

[268] **Ms Letton:** No.

[269] **Angela Burns:** Sorry, may I just finish? A friend of mine, who has just adopted, said that her medical did not look at whether she was going to have cancer and therefore die in six years' time; it was about whether the reflexes in her knees worked. Why do they have to go through that kind of medical? Also, having gone through all that and adopted one child, less than a year later, they had to go through it all again to adopt a second child. There was evidence in the previous evidence session that you get these siblings who are loitering around—because everybody knows where they are going to end up—due to the forms and the process. I want to hear your views on that, because I do not understand what how well the reflexes work in your arm has to do with child protection.

[270] **Ms Letton:** I cannot answer the medical side of that.

[271] **Angela Burns:** But that is what they have to do.

[272] **Ms Letton:** A medical is a process that you go through, whether you are going for a job or trying to become an adopter, to check that you are well. Whether or not checking your reflexes is an important part of checking that you are well, I do not know.

[273] **Angela Burns:** The point that I am making is that the medical was a matter of going to the doctor, who did that kind of thing—checked eyes and teeth. If she had had a tail, she would have had her tail looked at. That was it, pretty much. It was not about whether she had diabetes or some kind of congenital illness and so—

[274] **Ms Letton:** That would surprise me. I would not agree with that. A medical will cover all of those things.

[275] **Angela Burns:** Are you saying that, if somebody had diabetes, they would not be able to adopt?

[276] **Ms Letton:** No. I did not say that.

[277] **Angela Burns:** I am just wondering.

[278] **Ms Letton:** No, it would be about how well-regulated the condition is and how well the person is with the condition. Certainly not.

[279] **Ms P. Lloyd:** The objective of the medical is to try to get some idea of what length of time you have left on the planet to care for the child—although it can never be accurate. As regards finances, when I first started, you never asked anybody how much money they earned. It was a taboo subject. Then one or two people went bankrupt or whatever, and the family was in disarray after that. What you are aiming for is for the child to have fewer

chances of things going drastically wrong in their life. They have had enough things go wrong already, so that is why the finances should be there. However, whether people interpret that well may depend on their skill as a social worker.

[280] **Ms Letton:** Also, identification of people's financial needs runs alongside adoption financial support.

[281] **Angela Burns:** Most of our people have said that they do not get that. I have to add that. I would like your view on having to go through the whole thing again for a second child. I understand that you want to check that things have gone well for the first child and whether that child is old enough—

[282] **Ms Letton:** Well, that is what you do. You do not look—

[283] **Angela Burns:** Sorry, but my friends who have just been through it—I cross-examined them on the whole process a few weekends ago—said that they had to go through absolutely everything again.

[284] **Ms Letton:** They would have had to have had their medicals again.

[285] **Angela Burns:** And checks on their finances and the whole—

[286] **Ms Letton:** Yes, because that situation might have changed.

[287] **Angela Burns:** We are also talking about their whole family support structure, their neighbour support structure, and why they could not have their own children. They had to go through that again, and their childhood experiences. It was the whole monty, and I thought that it was nuts. I wanted to ask you because you are the first real social worker that I have got hold of.

[288] **Ms Letton:** In my experience, the history bit is the history bit, and you already have that. The second time around, what you want to know is what has changed, what is different and how well they are caring for their child. You also want to know that they are still well and still financially okay.

[289] **Christine Chapman:** It may not be for the witnesses to answer these questions. This may be a Government thing, and we will need to look at that. We literally have three minutes left, and there are some other people who want to come in with a few other questions. Jocelyn, would you like to come in?

[290] **Jocelyn Davies:** Yes, I have a question on the issue of post-adoption support. Why does that appear to be the sole responsibility of social workers, rather than being shared with education and health departments, and so on?

[291] **Ms Letton:** The regulations talk about post-adoption support and a person called an adoption support services adviser, an approved person who looks at a child's needs and works with what the child needs to have for a placement to be successful. Alongside that, there has to be tripartite co-working with the health and education sectors, and most local authorities have struggled to find a balance there, whereby all aspects of a child's needs are considered successfully. More often than not, the child has been in place for some time prior to needs being identified and they come back to the local authority, because that is their starting point, to say that there are issues or concerns with the child. Very often, the health sector is unable to offer any therapeutic work, if that is what is needed, and the local authority has to buy it in and pay for it. The regulations as they stand say that local authorities have a duty to provide an assessment of a child's needs. They do not have a duty to provide the work to meet that

child's needs. Most local authorities try very hard to provide whatever they can, but it is extremely expensive. If you have to buy in independent, therapeutic work, such as play therapy, for a child, it is very expensive. Also, there is no time constraint, necessarily, on that type of work.

[292] **Ms P. Lloyd:** I suppose that you could say that, if the vision that is in the social services Bill were to come to fruition, a child would be, whatever their situation, eligible for an assessment of need, and the local authority would, hopefully, have a duty to cause to be provided services that might assist that child or individual. I do not know; we are down to the issue of money again—money and bureaucracy.

[293] **Ms Letton:** Yes, it is about finance and budgets.

[294] **Ms P. Lloyd:** We tend only to get bureaucracy because cash-strapped local authorities find it difficult to provide every service that should be provided. So, some choose this and others choose that, using their money in different ways. Then, you get a new regulation or law that says that they all have to provide something, but it does not help them to get there.

[295] **Jocelyn Davies:** If the adoption breaks down, though, there are considerable costs, are there not?

[296] **Ms P. Lloyd:** Yes, absolutely. However, you could make that argument for loads of things in life, could you not? People might not commit offences if certain things were available, and people might not go into long-term residential care if there was money to support them at home and so on.

[297] **Jocelyn Davies:** I think that, on this committee, we all take the view that if the state says that a child's parents are no good and that we are going to be the child's parents, we need to be the best parents that we can possibly be.

[298] **Ms P. Lloyd:** I would agree with that.

[299] **Christine Chapman:** On that note, I have to end this session. I thank you both very much for attending and for answering our questions. There may be some other questions that Members had but did not ask. If you are content, we will write to you, and perhaps you can send us a written response. We will be sending you a transcript of the meeting so that you can check for any factual inaccuracies. Thank you both for attending.

[300] **Ms P. Lloyd:** Thank you for inviting us.

[301] **Christine Chapman:** I will now invite our next panel of witnesses to the table.

11.30 a.m.

Ymchwiliad i Fabwysiadu Inquiry into Adoption

[302] **Christine Chapman:** Our next witnesses are from the Association of Directors of Education in Wales. Could you introduce yourselves for the record, please?

[303] **Ms Williams:** My name is Karen Williams, and I am the team manager for Bridgend adoption service. I am the adoption support services adviser for the local authority and corporate parenting officer.

[304] **Ms Jones:** I am Bev Jones, and I am the looked-after-children education co-ordinator for Bridgend, so I monitor and track all our looked-after children to ensure that they get the best benefits from their education.

[305] **Christine Chapman:** However, today, you are giving the wider perspective of the Association of Directors of Education in Wales. Thank you for attending this morning. We have taken quite a lot of evidence on the support that teachers and schools are giving to families and adopted children. We have heard evidence from many families across Wales and spoken to adopted children and parents. There is evidence that there is inadequate support for them from teachers, schools and wider education services. How do you respond to that?

[306] **Ms Williams:** I am probably best placed to answer that in the first instance. There is a challenge for education services to provide bespoke support to children placed for adoption and children who are adopted. There are relatively small numbers of children placed for adoption. Therefore, to provide training and advice across the board, which changes as our knowledge and experience grow, is quite a challenge for local authorities and nursery and education providers. However, we try very hard, as I know do a number of authorities that I work with, to look at individual needs and to adapt support to children's individual needs.

[307] **Christine Chapman:** Would schools necessarily know that children are adopted? Is there a system in place to check this?

[308] **Ms Williams:** Yes. Part of the requirements of the regulations is that the placing authority notifies the receiving authority that a child is moving into its area and that the child is being placed for adoption. That would go directly to the education authority. However, we would also write to the local school. Adopters have some autonomy in that they can select the school they wish the child to go to, and local authorities would then support the prospective adoptive parents at that time by providing the information needed. My experience has been that, when we place children, we encourage adopters to meet the school the child is currently in so that they can hear from the school what the child's experience has been in that school. The records transfer with the child to the new school.

[309] **Christine Chapman:** We want to pick up some of the specific issues later. You have talked about training. Are any other methods used to help teachers and classroom assistants better understand the complex needs of adopted children?

[310] **Ms Jones:** There is a designated teacher in every school with responsibility to ensure that the needs of looked-after children are being met fully and to support them throughout their education. That designated teacher would have that information; it is shared when the child is placed, and we ensure that that information is passed very quickly to the receiving authority and the receiving school, which would include any additional assessments, the personal education plan if the child was previously looked after, a statement of special needs, the individual education plan, the pastoral support programme and so on. All of that information would be transferred to the school.

[311] **Christine Chapman:** That is the case for looked-after children, but the evidence we are hearing is that there may be a great deal of support for looked-after children, which is appropriate, but that it is not necessarily there for adopted children.

[312] **Ms Williams:** We have a challenge, although less so in Wales than when we place children in England, in that there is a misunderstanding when children are placed for adoption that they are still looked-after children and should be subject to all of the support services that looked-after children have. We have identified that, occasionally, when children are placed outside Wales, the receiving authorities and schools struggle to understand that they are still looked-after children until the adoption order is granted, which could be four to eight months

along the line. There is that misunderstanding, so it has sometimes been our experience that receiving schools will not want to engage with local authorities, because they want to deal directly with the adoptive parents. We have a number of examples of where that has been the case. That is less of a problem in Wales, from our experience.

[313] **Christine Chapman:** Aled wants to come in, and I have another question.

[314] **Aled Roberts:** We heard that, in England, local education authorities have responsibility for previously looked-after children, certainly in respect of admission policies and so on, whereas that obligation does not arise in Wales, only in respect of children who are still looked after.

[315] **Ms Williams:** We can only speak from our experience, which has been that we have struggled more with placing children in English authorities, where the schools will not accept those children as LAC. We have not had that experience in Wales.

[316] **Ms Jones:** Given the numbers and the admission policies of schools, we have a situation at the moment where we are struggling to get a child into an English school, because the school is reluctant to go over its numbers, even though the child still has LAC status. So, that is a challenge for us at the moment.

[317] **Christine Chapman:** I want to ask a specific question about attachment disorder, on which we have had evidence. I take your point that, if it is a new child coming into the school, you may be alerted, but we have had evidence from professionals that suggests that there are a lot of issues around attachment disorders, which could even present later on in a child's life. How well-versed would teachers be in that?

[318] **Ms Jones:** Again, it is to do with schools ensuring that teachers have the right skills to carry out the job. Local authorities deliver training to designated teachers because, pre-adoption, the designated teacher has responsibility. However, on ensuring that all schools and teachers have the skills to deal with and an understanding of attachment disorders, it is difficult to answer.

[319] **Ms Williams:** Many children who are placed for adoption will have attachment difficulties, if not a diagnosis of an attachment disorder, and we have put on training for schools about adoption experiences and some of the issues that schools might need to consider. We have put that training on in our authority, which benefits children being placed within our authority from outside or the few children whom we can place locally. It is not always available across the board in England and Wales.

[320] **Ms Jones:** It is, as you said, about the point in the child's life when those behaviours begin to show, which will not always be when a child is placed for adoption. Sometimes, it is many years down the road.

[321] **Christine Chapman:** Before I move on, I want to make sure that I get this clear: a lot of work is going on with looked-after children, but not necessarily with adopted children, where it is more patchy. Do you agree with that?

[322] **Ms Williams:** I would say that it is more bespoke. You will have the team that supports the individual child who moves into a placement. It will work with the school that the child is leaving, which will do work to help the child and his or her peers to understand that they are moving. The classroom assistant and the teacher will then work with an adoption worker or a looked-after-child worker to look at the impact of that child moving. So, you would have bespoke approaches, but not necessarily a wider training programme.

[323] **Jenny Rathbone:** Can you explore how much flexibility education departments have to look at the child as an individual, in terms of the appropriate school placement for them? For starters, we have heard that, often, parents are approved as adopters on a Friday and on the Monday, they are allocated a child. We have had evidence that it happens that quickly. This morning, an educational psychologist has told us that, although it is a requirement for all children of the statutory age to be in school, it might be too much for a child to have to get used to a new family and a new school in the same week. What flexibility is there for a package of care that addresses the individual child?

[324] **Ms Williams:** I would be very surprised to find that adopters have children placed with them within such a short time of being approved because, after being approved, there is a period of getting used to the idea and finding out about the child and the child's education needs. Each child is matched with each set of adopters separately. So, we would look at the range of the child's needs, which would include their social needs, their emotional needs and their education needs. If a child has attachment difficulties and emotional difficulties, and the preparation for transition from their looked-after placement to an adoptive placement was taking a while and was very complex, because the child's needs were quite extensive, we would not advocate that the child be rushed straight into a school. The bonding process with adoptive parents is crucial, and those early few weeks are the bit that helps to stabilise the placement.

[325] My experience of the past six or seven years is that no school has insisted that a child attends immediately. School staff want to work out when the best time for the child would be. We have been able to explore the child going in gradually, by going to events in the school, buddying up with other children and so on. That is why we have challenges; we try to place children in a school in the community where they live, so that the friends and peers that they meet early on are also at the school, which helps the process.

[326] I have not experienced schools being forceful in having children join them. There is a need for children to have an education as soon as possible, and many of our children will have had an interrupted education, or perhaps other difficulties will have impacted on their learning, but the priority will be to get them into a stable placement and feeling secure. We have not really come across any difficulties.

[327] **Jenny Rathbone:** That is helpful; thank you. Is there any reason in your mind for not giving adopted children the same priority for a placement at school as looked-after children?

[328] **Ms Williams:** I think that they should be getting a higher priority, because while looked-after children have a range of difficulties and experiences, adopted children have a further difficulty, in that they have moved yet again. Children who move into adoptive placements lose contact with their birth family, their school friends, and the local community, as they may be moving to a different area with a different dialect or there may be subtle changes. If everything has changed, they need extra help in schools, where it is available.

[329] **Jenny Rathbone:** So, you would countenance having a thirty-first child in a class in what happens to be the local school for the family concerned.

[330] **Ms Williams:** If the school can accommodate it and the child needs it, yes. Obviously, I would not want to go against the needs of all the children in the class, but children who are placed for adoption have additional needs by the nature of their having been moved.

[331] **Jenny Rathbone:** I have another specific question. Is there any reason why we would not take up the recommendation from Adoption UK Wales for the looked-after-children coordinators in the education service to have their remit extended to cover adopted children, so

that there is that focus?

[332] **Ms Jones:** Clearly, that is my role. It is about capacity. The number of looked-after children is rising in local authorities. The demand on my role is enhanced through ‘Towards a Stable Life and a Brighter Future’. It is appropriate, but there is a capacity issue to do with managing children placed out of county, because a lot of our children are placed out of county, and it is often the case that adopted children are placed in English authorities. So, it is about the capacity within my role, or within a looked-after-children education co-ordinator’s role.

[333] **Jenny Rathbone:** Are you saying that it is really quite a different task?

11.45 a.m.

[334] **Ms Jones:** I would not say that it is a different task. I work with adopted children anyway, but if it is a statutory requirement to extend the role, it is down to capacity within the role of a looked-after-children education co-ordinator.

[335] **Jenny Rathbone:** In the school itself, where you have a designated teacher in charge of looked-after children, would you also find it helpful to have that person taking on the role of designated teacher for adopted children?

[336] **Ms Jones:** Yes, very much.

[337] **Christine Chapman:** We now move on to look at issues around special educational needs.

[338] **Aled Roberts:** Am ryw reswm, mae Llywodraeth Cymru a chynghorau yn casglu ystadegau am blant sy’n derbyn gofal a chanddynt anghenion addysgol arbennig, ond nid ydynt yn gwneud hynny ar gyfer plant sydd wedi cael eu mabwysiadu. A oes rheswm am hynny, yn eich tyb chi? **Aled Roberts:** For some reason, the Welsh Government and councils collect statistics on looked-after children with special educational needs, but do not collect statistics on adopted children. Is there a reason for that, in your opinion?

[339] **Ms Jones:** I do not think that there is a particular reason. We collect information for looked-after children prior to the adoption order going through, but once the adoption order has gone through, the data are not collected. However, information is collected for pre-adopted children who are placed in pre-adoptive placements for special educational needs.

[340] **Aled Roberts:** Felly, nid oes rheswm ymarferol, o ran y cynghorau, pam na all hynny ddigwydd. **Aled Roberts:** So there is no practical reason, on behalf of councils, why that cannot happen.

[341] **Ms Jones:** I missed that, sorry.

[342] **Aled Roberts:** There is no reason in practical terms, either in the school setting or in the councils, as to why that information could not be collected.

[343] **Ms Williams:** I see no reason why it cannot be collected, but there is an element of trying to normalise the children who are adopted. Once they are adopted, if they have no services and no involvement from social services—

[344] **Ms Jones:** It is the stigma, again—

[345] **Aled Roberts:** We have heard evidence that suggests that schools are perhaps not as aware as they should be that adopted children have additional learning needs.

[346] **Ms Jones:** In the planning of placing a child, that information is shared, whether the child has special needs or not. So, I am not quite sure how—

[347] **Christine Chapman:** Angela and I met with adopted children on Saturday morning and they gave us a very poor response regarding the attitudes of some teachers—I am not saying that this is widespread, but it did happen. It could be the case that, if teachers feel that this is not an issue for them, it is not looked at, it is not monitored and they do not take it seriously. So, we are concerned about whether it would be better for the data to be collected. Do you have a view on that? It may be for others to make a decision on that.

[348] **Ms Williams:** There are two or three issues there. For children who have a support plan, we should be looking at that information and schools should be part of the partner agency providing the wraparound service for that child or young person. However, where a child has no additional support needs or education needs, I am not sure of the merit of gathering data on whether they are an adopted child. I agree that schools would benefit from a wider understanding of adoption-related issues, including education issues and the interrupted education that a young person or child may have had before they end up in their permanent school.

[349] **Lynne Neagle:** Is it not the case that some adopted children could settle down very nicely and then, only later, go on to develop difficulties? Some of the evidence that we have heard is that those difficulties are not being picked up by teaching staff because they do not have sufficient understanding of the kind of development difficulties that can occur later on. I am not clear whose responsibility it is for seeing that those issues are picked up. I think that it is a pity that ADEW did not send someone at director level today, so that we could explore some of these strategic issues. Presumably, if there are big policy changes to be driven forward on this, it would be done at director level rather than by people who are delivering at the coalface, as it were.

[350] **Christine Chapman:** Obviously, we are very pleased that you are here today and we know that it was not your decision as to who would attend the meeting.

[351] **Lynne Neagle:** No, that was not a criticism of you; I just wish that a director had also been sent, as that would have been appropriate.

[352] **Christine Chapman:** Karen, do you want to respond?

[353] **Ms Williams:** On the first part of that point, children can develop difficulties whether they are adopted or not, and those difficulties can emerge once the child is very stable. So, schools might not have the knowledge that a child is adopted, but children may develop issues because of their developmental stage or because of external issues; it may not be related to their adoption. There is a fine line between normalising things for the adopted child and having a system that ensures that, when there are concerns, we explore whether or not the child is affected by adoption in any way and that schools know that they can approach the authority in which the child is placed to have an assessment or an exploration of their support needs. Certainly, when we receive inquiries from schools where children who have been adopted are experiencing difficulties, assessments are carried out that look at the whole child. It may well be that it is an education or behaviour issue that is not traced back to their adoption. So, there is a very fine line about capturing data on all children, which may not be needed and to which children and adoptive parents may object, for the children who emerge with difficulties at a later date.

[354] **Jocelyn Davies:** On that point, we have heard evidence that suggests that the difficulties that they are experiencing today may be traced back, not to their adoption, but way before that to the neglect that they experienced when they were very young. However, if there is not an acknowledgement that this might be because of that, then the parents who have adopted the child are left to believe that it is their fault and that it is the result of something that they have done since the adoption. So, an acknowledgement that this could well be due to something that happened a long time ago is important for those parents. After all, it is often the most inexperienced parents who adopt children. This is the weight of the evidence that we have received—that that aspect should be looked at.

[355] **Ms Williams:** I think that I may have misphrased my response. When I talk about it not being related to their adoption, I do not mean the adoption process of their being matched, placed, and adopted and going through that bonding process. When I referred to adoption, I was talking about their earlier experiences, because they are our primary concern in terms of support services. They are the cause of the majority of difficulties that we have to work with, and some of those may arise years down the line. For example, adolescents who have had a perfectly stable experience with their adoptive parents, when they are 12, 13 or 14 years of age, they are the ones who come forward for adoption support services and, very often, it is transferred. We explore with the families and the schools and it goes right back to the fact that they do not understand why they were placed for adoption and what their early information was. Adoption has moved on, somewhat, in terms of the information that is shared. There is a long way to go and all of the partner agencies need to work together to explore who needs what information and at what time in order to effect speedy and appropriate support services.

[356] **Jocelyn Davies:** To go back to the answer that you gave earlier about normalisation—that we do not want to stigmatise anyone and that we want this to be normalised—you have acknowledged that there could be problems years after an adoption that can be traced back to experiences before the adoption that people should be aware of. It is not because of the way that that parent has parented the child since adoption.

[357] **Ms Williams:** Yes, absolutely. Every case is different. It may well be down to the parenting, but, very often, it is down to the early experiences and a combination of factors.

[358] **Aled Roberts:** Hoffwn ofyn cwestiwn ar y dystiolaeth rydym wedi ei derbyn. Mae nifer o awgrymiadau wedi cael eu gwneud bod plant sydd wedi cael eu mabwysiadu yn wynebu rhwystrau i gael gafael ar wasanaethau seicoleg addysgol a chymorth i ddysgu. Ydy hynny'n wir yn eich profiad chi? Os ydy hynny'n wir, beth yw'r rhesymau dros hynny?

Aled Roberts: I would like to ask a question on the evidence that we have received. A number of suggestions have been made that children who have been adopted face difficulties in accessing educational psychology and learning support services. Is that true, in your experience? If it is true, what are the reasons for that?

[359] **Ms Jones:** When a child is placed for pre-adoption or a looked-after child goes into a school and they do not have a statement of special needs or have not required an assessment by an educational psychologist, there is often a difficulty as to whose responsibility it is: is it the responsibility of the placing authority or the receiving authority of a child? They get the service, but it is about the clarity regarding who is responsible for delivering that service or delivering that additional resource to the child.

[360] **Aled Roberts:** On changes to the statementing process in Wales, will those difficulties be exacerbated by the fact that the statementing arrangements are currently subject to change?

[361] **Ms Jones:** It is difficult to draw down the resources if a child who is without a

statement has additional learning needs. When we place children with additional learning needs without a statement in a school, it is very often difficult to find those resources within the school, and a specialist person is often needed, whether it is a designated educational psychologist or someone with responsibility for looked-after children only, to identify it. Not every authority has that resource, so it is down to funding really.

[362] **Aled Roberts:** How does that pan out when local authorities are under pressure to reduce the numbers of children who have been statemented, when you appear to suggest that without a statement, it is difficult to access certain resources? Are you suggesting that certain local authorities have a policy where you would not be able to access the service without a statement?

[363] **Ms Jones:** That appears to be the case in some cases.

[364] **Rebecca Evans:** I want to look at classroom activities and how they can impact on children who have been adopted. We have heard from professionals and from children and young people who have been adopted that activities such as writing a family tree, bringing in baby photos, celebrations of mothering Sunday and father's day and curriculum topics such as genetics and inheritance can be very upsetting for some children. How aware are schools of potential problems with these subjects for children who have been adopted, and how are schools being made aware of the problems?

[365] **Ms Jones:** As part of the planning process, schools would be aware of the difficulties that a child might experience in a class that is going through family history. It is about ensuring that all members of staff in the school have that information, because some of it is held centrally by heads, deputy heads or by people with designated roles. It is about ensuring that the staff that a child might come into contact with have that information so as not to upset or disrupt the child's education. It is difficult to manage to ensure that schools deliver that information in a very careful way to all staff.

[366] **Rebecca Evans:** Do you have any examples of good practice with regard to the strategies that teachers put in place to deal with these sensitive topics?

[367] **Ms Williams:** I have come across schools that have spoken to the adoption social worker to find out how much of the child's early life they know about and understand before the child goes into the book about 'my family', which they all write and for which they bring in their first baby photo. They have tailored their classroom activity to still cover the areas of the curriculum that they have to cover, but they have tailored it so that they can look at different types of families. My staff have gone into schools to give talks to primary school children about different types of families, including foster families, reconstituted families and adoptive families, to make it more of a general subject. Some schools will ask to see the child's life story book if the child and the adopters are willing for that to be shared, and they will use that in a class to show that some children have a book about their early life experience. That is not done as often as we would like, because they may not have the time and resources; if there are 30 children in a class, a tailored packaged for one child is probably quite difficult to achieve. Our experience is that schools have been very sensitive to the fact that information is very often missing for children placed for adoption. They try to make other children in the class aware of different types of families, provided the adopted child is aware of it and comfortable with it.

12.00 p.m.

[368] **Christine Chapman:** We are picking up that there is some really good practice, but do you have a feeling for how widespread the good practice is or would you say that, in the main, it is not as good across Wales? It may be difficult for you to answer that.

[369] **Ms Williams:** I would love to say that it was widespread, but I do not think I can comment—

[370] **Christine Chapman:** Do not worry if you cannot say because we will pursue this elsewhere. I just wondered whether you had a feel for that.

[371] **Jenny Rathbone:** I want to press you on this because surely all lesson planning has to be varied according to the different levels pupils are at. Therefore, I do not see how this sort of thing is not captured as part of that differentiation, because the planning will be different for a maths lesson and for exploring who we are and where we come from. There will be many complexities around this subject for the teacher who is going to deliver it, but surely that ought to be a core part of the planning of the lesson.

[372] **Ms Williams:** I think it is important for every child to understand where they have come from and to have that explored in a safe environment in school. However, I think it is also very important for all children to understand different types of families. Therefore, if you could look at multiple types of families and tailor the lesson plan to cover lots of areas while being sensitive to the child who has just had a bereavement or the child whose family is splitting up or where there is no father figure, that would be ideal. I could not comment on the ability of teachers to deliver that. I know of good examples—

[373] **Jenny Rathbone:** However, you are the LEA. All of your teachers ought to be doing this.

[374] **Ms Jones:** I agree that they should be doing it, but how to ensure that is a difficult issue.

[375] **Lynne Neagle:** Is anyone responsible for monitoring that at LEA level or does it just come down to individual headteachers?

[376] **Ms Jones:** I would say that it comes down to individual headteachers and primary advisory teachers.

[377] **Christine Chapman:** Jenny, I know that you raised your question earlier, so I will move on to Angela now.

[378] **Angela Burns:** Do you feel that inspection regimes, such as Estyn, ought also to evaluate schools on their provision for and delivery of specialised targeted care for adopted and looked-after children?

[379] **Ms Jones:** As far as looked-after children go, schools are inspected on that delivery. However, there is no process in place on the adoption side.

[380] **Angela Burns:** So, when Estyn inspectors go to a school, do they look at what procedures the focus teacher for the looked-after children have?

[381] **Ms Jones:** Absolutely. They check whether there is a personal education plan in place. They look at the role of the designated teacher and at whether the school is aware of what looked-after children are in the school.

[382] **Angela Burns:** Should we use that process to include adopted children as well?

[383] **Ms Jones:** Again, it comes back to what Karen said about normalising it. Looked-after children are under a care order or under section 20 placed with parents or cared for by

the local authority. When the adoption process goes through, children are placed with their new family.

[384] **Angela Burns:** I accept that totally, but we could say that it should be looked at where the school knows of adopted children with statement plans or—

[385] **Ms Williams:** Or a support package.

[386] **Angela Burns:** Yes.

[387] **Lynne Neagle:** On school counselling, Adoption UK Wales told us that it does not feel that school counselling arrangements are necessarily adequate for adopted children because they rely primarily on a model of cognitive behavioural therapy. Do you have any comment on the appropriateness of counselling services for adopted children in school?

[388] **Ms Williams:** Our experience has been that there is a mixed response. Some of it is actually very beneficial, but it depends on what the child needs. Counselling needs to be offered earlier, in primary school as well as in secondary school. The majority of children placed for adoption are much younger. Often, having the counselling service in a primary school is helpful. If you have a child who is adopted, who has no other support need, and who starts to have difficulties, then having a counsellor in the school is a very good resource to have. In terms of their ability to meet the specific needs of adopted children, it may well be that we need to explore, with counsellors in schools, training around the specific needs of looked-after children and, more specifically, adopted children. It needs to be widened, rather than changed dramatically.

[389] **Rebecca Evans:** I want to turn to a different topic. Do you have a view on the role of school governors in supporting adopted children in schools?

[390] **Ms Jones:** There are governors who are currently responsible for looked-after children within their schools. There is a role for governors, but that has not been expanded to adopted children. That could possibly be quite useful.

[391] **Ms Williams:** It is a similar theme. There is a designated governor responsible for child protection and for looked-after children, so their role could be expanded to cover children who are known to the schools to have adoption in their background. However, it is not just the children placed for adoption who we would need to consider, but the children left behind by adoption. For example, the siblings of children who have been adopted—the children who have been left behind—have equally as many difficulties, if not more sometimes. So, we must also think about those who have been left behind.

[392] **Christine Chapman:** Thank you. We need to close the session now. I thank you both for attending today and for giving us useful evidence. We will send you a transcript of the meeting so that you can check it for factual inaccuracies. Thank you for attending today and for giving us your perspective on how things are panning out, particularly in your own authority. Thank you very much.

[393] Before I close the meeting, I want to advise Members that the inquiry will continue this afternoon at 1.15 p.m. in committee room 1, which is where we are now, when we will be taking further evidence.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 12.07 p.m.
The meeting ended at 12.07 p.m.*