



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

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

**Dydd Iau, 15 Tachwedd 2007
Thursday, 15 November 2007**

Cynnwys
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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg. Mae hon yn fersiwn ddrafft o'r cofnod. Cyhoeddir fersiwn derfynol ymhen pum diwrnod gwaith.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee. In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included. This is a draft version of the record. The final version will be published within five working days.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Eleanor Burnham	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Angela Burns	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Christine Chapman	Llafur Labour
Helen Mary Jones	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Lynne Neagle	Llafur Labour

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Dr Mike Shooter	Cadeirydd, Bwrdd Ymddiriedolaeth, Plant yng Nghymru Chair, Trustee Board, Children in Wales
Catriona Williams	Prif Weithredwr, Plant yng Nghymru Chief Executive, Children in Wales

Swyddogion Gwasanaeth Seneddol y Cynulliad yn bresennol
Assembly Parliamentary Service officials in attendance

John Grimes	Clerc Clerk
Abigail Phillips	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 10.02 a.m.
The meeting began at 10.02 a.m.

Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Mr Grimes:** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I now call the meeting to order. This is the clerk's big moment, because, as this is a new committee, we have yet to elect a Chair. We have no apologies, because all members of the committee are here.

10.03 a.m.

Ethol Cadeirydd
Election of the Chair

[2] **Mr Grimes:** Do we have any nominations for Chair?

[3] **Eleanor Burnham:** I would like to propose Helen Mary as Chair.

[4] **Mr Grimes:** Do we have any other nominations? I see that there are no other nominations. Therefore, on that basis, I declare Helen Mary duly elected.

[5] **Helen Mary Jones:** Diolch yn fawr **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you to the clerk

i'r clerc ac i chi am fy enwebu i gadeirio Pwyllgor Plant a Phobl Ifanc y Cynulliad. Mae'n fraint ac yn anrhydedd i gael fy ethol.

and to you for electing me to chair the Assembly's Children and Young People Committee. It is a privilege and an honour to be elected.

[6] Dechreuaf gyda'r pwyntiau ymarferol. Gobeithio bod pawb yn gwybod sut mae'r clustffonau'n gweithio. Mae croeso i bawb ddefnyddio'r Gymraeg neu'r Saesneg. Atgoffaf bawb i droi unrhyw ffonau symudol, BlackBerrys, ac ati i ffwrdd—nid yw'n ddigon da eu rhoi i ganu'n dawel, gan eu bod yn amharu ar yr offer cyfieithu a recordio. Nid ydym yn disgwyl prawf larwm tân, felly, os yw'r larwm yn canu, mae hynny'n golygu bod argyfwng, a bydd rhaid inni adael o dan gyfarwyddyd y tywyswyr.

I will begin with practicalities. I hope that you all know how the headsets work. You are all welcome to use Welsh or English. I remind everyone to switch off any mobile phones, Blackberrys, and so on—it is not sufficient to put them on silent, as they interfere with the interpretation and recording equipment. We do not expect to a fire alarm test, so if the alarm rings, there is an emergency, and we will have to follow the ushers' directions to leave the building.

10.04 a.m.

Plant yng Nghymru Children in Wales

[7] **Helen Mary Jones:** Mae dau bapur o'n blaenau heddiw—papur Plant yng Nghymru a'r papur mae gwasanaeth ymchwil yr Aelodau wedi'i baratoi; diolchaf i Kathryn am yr holl waith y mae wedi'i wneud. Gobeithiaf y bydd gennym, yn dilyn y cyfarfod byr hwn, syniad clir ynglŷn a pha bynciau yr ydym am weithio arnynt yn ystod y misoedd nesaf, fel y gall y clercod baratoi rhaglen waith ddrafft y gallwn gytuno arni drwy e-bost.

Helen Mary Jones: We have two papers before us today—the Children in Wales paper and the paper that the Members' research service has prepared; I thank Kathryn for all of the work that she has done. I hope that we will have, following this short meeting, a clear idea of the subjects on which we want to work over the coming months, so that the clerks can prepare a draft work programme that we can agree through e-mail.

[8] Croesawaf Dr Mike Shooter, cadeirydd Plant yng Nghymru, a Catriona Williams, y prif weithredwr.

I welcome Dr Mike Shooter, chair of Children in Wales, and Catriona Williams, the chief executive.

[9] Would you please introduce yourselves and give us your names for the record?

[10] **Ms Williams:** I am Catriona Williams, chief executive of Children in Wales.

[11] **Dr Shooter:** I am Mike Shooter, chair of Children in Wales.

[12] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you both for your paper. For the record and for Members who perhaps do not have as much experience of children's issues as others, could you briefly describe what Children in Wales is and what you do? I will then invite Members to ask you questions on your paper. The idea behind inviting you here was to seek your advice, as a leading children's voluntary organisation, on some of the subjects that you think that this committee could usefully address.

[13] **Ms Williams:** Children in Wales is the national umbrella organisation with membership from the voluntary, statutory and independent sectors. Our strapline is 'siarad ag

un llais, speak with one voice', so we tend to be the funnel of campaigning on children's issues. Our main raison d'être is to promote the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Due to our history, we have a particular remit to look at the most vulnerable, marginalised and disadvantaged children. Our origins are in the child welfare sector; Mike will tell you more about that. We have close involvement with health, education and youth justice people. An advantage of our network is that we are not all managers; that is the strength of our structure. We have many practitioners, service users and peer-led organisations on our board. So, we have a spread across, and a remit from grass roots to national policy. We undertook campaigns to get the children's commissioner and to push the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as Funky Dragon; all of those milestones are Children-in-Wales-led.

[14] **Dr Shooter:** I think that that is a wonderful description of Children in Wales and that is exactly why I joined it.

[15] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is why, along with the research service and the clerks, I thought that it would be useful to invite Children in Wales along, because it represents a broad cross-section of the voluntary organisations that work with children and young people in a range of settings. Thank you for that, Catriona, and for your paper. Looking at that and the paper provided by the Members' research service, are there any questions or comments that Members would like to put to Catriona and Mike about their paper or any comments on issues that we might want to address in our forward work programme for the coming months?

[16] **Eleanor Burnham:** If you had a wish list, what would you suggest we should start with and how would you approach our work remit?

[17] **Ms Williams:** I would say that there are probably two key matters. It is important to avoid doing what other committees are doing, and to ensure that, in terms of the monitoring role, you focus on key events. I said to Helen Mary earlier that the Children's Commissioner for Wales's child and adolescent mental health strategy papers have just come out, so when recommendations come through, I think that there should be a monitoring role to ensure that committees are addressing those issues. There has been a history in Wales of many reports and recommendations being published amid a flurry of activity, leading to nothing. So, the implementation phase is important in terms of ensuring that there is proper consideration of whether strategies are funded and how they will be implemented and monitored; those sorts of things.

10.10 a.m.

[18] The Welsh Assembly Government does not have a structure for looking at the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child systematically, even for promoting it—I think that I have seen around three leaflets. So, as a broad-brush approach, it would be quite timely, given that the UN convention report is going back to Geneva at the moment, to say that there have been three lots of UK Government reports to the committee and, each time, the committee has said that there should be a Government means of promoting the UN convention and that there should be structures within Government to gather the data to see how you are doing. That is a broad-brush, cross-cutting issue that involves training for people within the Assembly. It is not just about issuing guidance, but also how to implement it.

[19] If you want my view on specific issues, the current difficult one is advocacy. It is a difficult topic to resolve and it has been rumbling on for a long time. Perhaps this committee could finalise a way forward.

[20] On children's budgeting, given that there is an ageing population, we are very worried at the moment about how children will be prioritised in many departments. Within the Assembly, we have seen capacity issues within the children's division. At local authority

level, there are not many people with a passion for children's issues in senior positions any more. So, I think that the way that local agencies spend money on children is important. That is my contribution.

[21] **Helen Mary Jones:** Do you want to add anything to the wish list, Mike?

[22] **Dr Shooter:** I seem to spend my life summarising what Catriona has already said much more eloquently.

[23] **Helen Mary Jones:** We will come to you first next time.

[24] **Dr Shooter:** I would agree with all of that, of course. To summarise Catriona's paper and add my feelings, I hope that the committee will take the lead in three areas. The first of those is the integration of services at any one point in a vulnerable child's life. As Catriona has said, one of the wonderful things about Wales is that everyone is interested in children; we have lots of policies for children, but we do not have an integrating body that brings those policies and, therefore, those services together around that particular problem in children's lives.

[25] **Eleanor Burnham:** So, do you think that that should be the central role of this newly formed committee?

[26] **Dr Shooter:** I think that it will be an absolutely crucial role. As a corollary to that, the second wish that I have is that this committee would also have the trajectory of children's lives in mind. One of the problems that I have seen, as a former consultant in child and adolescent psychiatry and as part of CAMHS teams, is that there is not a lack of services involved in children's lives—services are falling over themselves to be involved—but that they all have a narrow remit. They all get involved at flashpoints and crises and then they withdraw. No-one seems to have in their hands the whole trajectory of a deprived population and their needs from Fallopian tube through to early adulthood. I would hope that this committee could have that broad remit in mind and bring policies together around that.

[27] The third item on my wish list would be that this committee could get services, through its own lead, into the audit habit. In other words, that we take a problem, we look at the research into that problem, we devise policies that are based on that research, we look at what training is necessary for the implementation of those policies, and then we implement them and monitor the implementation and the effect that that has had on the problem. Again, I would hope that this committee is in a prime position to bring together the strands to do that.

[28] **Christine Chapman:** You mentioned the implementation of cross-cutting policies and the monitoring role with child poverty. Can you say more about your view on that, because it is a huge area? Other committees will be looking at this, but do you see a distinct role for us other than just monitoring? Are we here to plug any gaps, or would it just be scrutiny on these particular areas?

[29] **Ms Williams:** I think that we would be looking for proactivity in this field. I remember being the first to tell officials in the Assembly Government that they were not giving this issue enough priority. It is integral to health matters and it is an important topic for our members. We want the Assembly Government to look at it. Officials originally said, 'It is not our problem—it is non-devolved'. However, we pushed, and a political lead was very welcome.

[30] We have three levels of experience in Children in Wales. I am the president of Eurochild, which is funded by the European Union to combat child poverty and social exclusion at EU level. So, some Welsh people input into some of the stuff that comes out of

Brussels, so it is a circular thing. Because of that role—it is nothing to do with Wales—I have been invited onto the Department for Work and Pensions group that writes the report for the UK national action plan. Wales is not a part of that; we have very little capacity, civil service wise, in the Assembly on it, so there is no focus on that. It is about the ability to deal with all the fiscal matters from the DWP. We worked closely with the child poverty action group on detailed matters, but we do not have a connection across. I know from the focus in the Westminster all-party group for children that it would love to have more connection across, because it needs to know the detail of what needs to be pushed forward. That is the proactive side.

[31] The newness of child poverty proofing, which is interesting, will take a lot of detailed work, to look at what it is and how it will be done. This committee could be helpful in getting some consistency about how each department deals with it. That is my take on it, but how to sell it at the local level is also important. At an EU level, the very organisations working with children and young people do not regard themselves as being anything to do with child poverty, so no-one owns it at the local level.

[32] **Eleanor Burnham:** Do you believe that we will have the opportunity in this committee to push and inform and, dare I use the word, educate, at UK level? We have the discomfort of not having primary powers around issues such as benefits, and so on.

[33] **Helen Mary Jones:** We will come back to that in a minute. There is another interesting suggestion in the paper that I wanted to explore, namely the possibility of working jointly with the Welsh Affairs Committee. That committee has done some specific work on that, so we might be able to tie in with it on some devolved issues, and some non-devolved issues.

[34] **Dr Shooter:** May I add a rider to the poverty issue?

[35] **Helen Mary Jones:** Yes, of course.

[36] **Dr Shooter:** We are talking about material poverty, and if there has to be a priority list, that must be at the top of it. However, I have always had a bee in my bonnet that we should actually think about a wider definition of poverty. I would rather talk about deprivation, because that covers emotional poverty. Some of the most difficult and deprived families that I have had to work with—as have, no doubt, other people around the table—have been families who are not particularly materially badly off, but whose emotional poverty is extraordinary. Children in those circumstances suffer in ways that are just as damaging as children who suffer from material poverty.

[37] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is an interesting point.

[38] **Lynne Neagle:** I wanted to raise child poverty too. Are you content with the pace of progress in Wales? There is a well-developed child poverty action plan over the border, as there is, as I understand it, in Scotland; we still do not have something up and running in Wales, so I would be interested in your observations on that. You referred in your initial remarks to the fact that we have these reports in the Assembly that are launched with a flurry of paraphernalia, and goodness knows what, and then there is nothing. Do you have any specific examples of where you feel that that has been a particular problem, where expectations were raised, but where that has not been delivered?

[39] Finally, you refer to the NSF for children in your paper and you talk about whether or not this will be delivered. The expectation with an NSF should always be that it will be delivered. I would like your observations on that. Where are we falling short? On the issue of disabled children, I understand that the NSF has been shown not to be making that much of a

difference yet.

10.20 a.m.

[40] **Ms Williams:** For my sins, I am on the NSF implementation group, which has hardly met. So, the follow-through is what Children in Wales is concerned about. We have a document of our priorities, which are pretty much all about implementation—you can have a copy if you do not already have one. Many good policies have come out of the work that the Assembly and the network have done, but the follow-through is not there. I think that it is worth asking why it is not there. Is it because the internal capacity is not there within the Welsh Assembly Government to focus and prioritise? My perception in terms of tackling child poverty is that you need staff time to drive it forward and to monitor it. It is the same with the NSF—back-up is needed. Those are the sorts of questions that could be asked of Ministers. Where is the wherewithal to make this happen? We have the report on looked-after children and the Carlile review—I have been around so long that I have been involved in all of these. It is impossible to get a list of all the recommendations. The ‘Keeping Us Safe’ inquiry asked for a list of all the recommendations that had been made in relation to safeguarding children that had been agreed by Government as being priorities, but it could not get one. So, I think that this committee has a really important role to play.

[41] On child poverty, if the implementation plan were implemented, it would be great. In terms of the many children’s issues around how they feel, for example, if they are stigmatised in school because they do not have a school uniform, there is a lot of detailed stuff that would improve the lives of children in that regard.

[42] **Dr Shooter:** I have been around for a long time as well. Because I was president of the Royal College of Psychiatry for a while, I was in at the birth of many NSFs for various age groups in various countries. I can say, without a shadow of a doubt, that the children’s NSF in Wales was, and remains, on paper, by far the best of the children’s NSFs. However, it is lagging far behind in terms of its implementation.

[43] **Helen Mary Jones:** Can we explain for the record what an NSF is?

[44] **Dr Shooter:** It stands for national service framework, and not the National Schizophrenia Fellowship.

[45] **Helen Mary Jones:** It was a young person in a participation meeting who once taught me that abbreviations can mean different things to different people. Tammy, who was 14 years old, sat there and asked, ‘Am I the only one who thinks that you two are talking about something different?’, and she was right to ask.

[46] **Dr Shooter:** That is why they changed the name of the National Schizophrenia Fellowship to Rethink.

[47] Over the last year and a half or so, I have not turned down an invitation to go to facilitate awaydays for CAMHS around Great Britain because I want to see what is happening and how far ahead the services are in implementing the principles of their particular NSFs. I have been staggered by the creativity of some services, which have just got on with almost wholesale integration with local authorities and health services around children’s needs. So, we have local people sitting down together in their areas, irrespective of what hat they wear—be it a school hat, a social services hat or a health services hat—on a regular basis to consider the particular profile of problems in their area, and how, together, they are going to commission and develop services to solve those problems. It comes down to regularly sitting in groups of about this size to work out, around a particular child and his or her family, how the input will be managed over time. There are places in Wales where we could point out

such practice, but there are fewer places here now than there are in England and Scotland. We need to get to that level of implementation if the national service framework in Wales, as principles, is to be put properly into practice.

[48] **Helen Mary Jones:** To summarise, on child and adolescent mental health, we have the best policy on paper, but when it comes to delivery, your view is that that is not making the difference; and that is certainly the view of the children's commissioner—the really good policy is not being implemented.

[49] **Angela Burns:** I wish to ask a question from a completely different angle. There will always be children on the edge; the children you have been working with are on the edge and they need help through intervention, either because of their issues, or those of their families or the societies that they live in. What is your view of how what I would call 'mainstream' children are faring? My concern is that so much of our attention is on the marginal that we, as a society of adults, are totally disregarding our mainstream children—the ones whom we all individually love and cherish. When they are all together as a group society tends to be very pejorative about young people in particular, rather than children, because even our society occasionally has the love and respect for a child that you would expect and hope an adult would have. I am concerned that these marginalised young people—and they can be marginalised in a very small way by adults—are going to grow up and become slightly less engaged adults, and, in turn, their children will become slightly less engaged again, so that society, rather than being tight-knit, is becoming ever more stretched out. Do you think that that is a negligible risk and that we can carry on as we are, or do you believe that we should also look at—I cannot think of another word—'mainstream' kids?

[50] **Ms Williams:** On an international level, I have been involved with the work of UNICEF. The UNICEF report caused a major stir in the UK, because we have had a very arrogant view about how well all of our children are doing, with the exception of those who are regarded as either victims or villains; the feeling was that everybody else was fine. That report said that children in the Netherlands are much happier, they feel safer, and they like and trust their friends. It looked at what life is like for children in each of the EU developed countries, and UK children were next to the bottom in terms of being the most unhappy, feeling unsafe and not liking school. There was a whole set of issues to do with being in separated families, having the highest rate of teenage pregnancy, drugs, alcohol and so on. It was quite interesting, because there is the factual stuff and then there is the children's perception. The UNICEF researchers asked that question as an afterthought, but it provided one of their most interesting results, revealing how children felt about their lives. Mike has many examples relating to this subject.

10.30 a.m.

[51] Children in Wales's parenting and fatherhood forums try to look at the family life aspect; we have a parenting action plan that is supposed to help parents in Wales. That is another topic. Two or three years ago, we were told that there was no money in the Welsh Assembly Government and asked what our priority would be. I said that it would be a helpline for parents of teenagers who are perhaps having a problem in school, for example. It would be for the middle range of issues. If there was somebody that they could talk to on the end of a telephone, that would be helpful, but we still do not have anything, while England has loads. I have been on the Family and Parenting Institute trustee board, which was originally for England and Wales but is now just for England, so I am no longer on the board. It has had a lot of money and it has focused on promoting and supporting parents, and we have not really invested in that. I know that Mike has many examples of children who are in the mainstream but with whom something happens and they then disengage.

[52] **Dr Shooter:** I think that this is a really important question. We have a spectrum, if

you like, with so-called marginalised, problem, deprived, needy children at one end, and so-called healthy, normal—whatever that means—children at the other, and the bulk of children and families are somewhere in the middle. There can be a continual progress through that spectrum if we do not watch out. Of course we need to give a lot of attention to the most needy, deprived children who are currently causing—[*Inaudible.*]—problems. There is a lot of firefighting with them at that end. This feeds back to what I was talking about in terms of the trajectory of children's lives over time. If we do not put major work in, the outlook for them is calamitous. Those are the children who are going to become drug addicts and hooked on alcohol, who are going to be harming themselves, committing suicide in young adulthood, and who are going to produce a family in need, and so on. It will be calamitous for them and for the system as a whole.

[53] However, we cannot ignore the kids who you have called mainstream kids. There are not many—[*Inaudible.*]. They are under tremendous pressure too. They will all develop problems. There is no child—[*Inaudible.*]—who is going to escape problems in their lives. They will all get overtaken by events, by bereavements, illness and so on, and they will struggle with those events. They will also struggle with the expectations of them, in school for example, or, in very high-achieving families, being pushed and pushed. If those children who then develop problems are not tackled, they will become the marginalised children at the other end of the spectrum and they will fall off in turn, and so on around the circle. So, we cannot just ignore the bulk in the middle. In fact, from a statistical point of view—and I am not a great fan of statistics, except when they support what I believe is right [*Laughter.*]; I think that they are wonderful then—[*Inaudible.*] The most pressing problems are the kids in the smaller, deprived groups on the end, but the bulk of problems, in terms of number, are with the mainstream kids. That is vital.

[54] **Angela Burns:** That is very interesting. [*Inaudible.*]

[55] **Helen Mary Jones:** Before you respond to that, we need to adjourn the formal meeting—we can carry on chatting, but we need to adjourn the formal meeting as we have technical problems with the microphones—[*Inaudible.*] By all means carry on the conversation, but we are now technically adjourned.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10.35 a.m. a 10.56 a.m.
The meeting adjourned between 10.35 a.m. and 10.56 a.m.*

[56] **Helen Mary Jones:** I inform Members and witnesses that we are now formally back in session. For the record, we have been informally discussing the committee's forward work programme.

[57] We need to seek further clarification of that, but the Minister told me that she felt it would be helpful. If there is a need for her to seek some additional powers, there may be an opportunity to do that through the proposed legislative competence Order relating to vulnerable children, and she might look at taking a staged approach.

[58] **Christine Chapman:** May I just clarify that, if we did this, the terms of reference would be that we were scrutinising the Government's proposals? If you are talking about getting witnesses in a fortnight's time, which is not long, I suggest that we get the Deputy Minister in first, as a starting point; otherwise, I am a bit confused as to where we go from there.

[59] **Eleanor Burnham:** I am not clear on this. Forgive me, but are we talking about Jane Hutt now?

[60] **Helen Mary Jones:** Jane has the overall responsibility, but Gwenda is taking the lead

on this.

[61] **Eleanor Burnham:** Can you confirm then, Chair, that this piece of work has been undertaken and is at the point of being completed, but by which committee?

[62] **Helen Mary Jones:** Not by a committee, but by the Minister. There was a consultation, but there have been some differences of view, and the Minister, the chair of the cross-party group on looked-after children, and I feel that it would be helpful to air those differences and to clarify matters.

[63] **Eleanor Burnham:** So, if we were not here, who would be doing this? I am not sure whether it is good practice to review a piece of work recently produced by the Government. I am a little concerned that we are setting some sort of precedent.

[64] **Helen Mary Jones:** To put it in a broader context, since the Waterhouse report, recommendations have been made about independently provided advocacy services for children. It has taken a long time to get them delivered. We are at a point where the Government has consulted on a proposal, so it is in the public domain, and is about to come back on that, but there are some differences of view about the effectiveness of the public consultation and what is likely to come back. The reason for looking at it now—if we do decide to look at it now—is because it is urgent. The structures are about to be put in place, and if there are problems with those structures, it would be helpful to put them right now rather than further down the line.

[65] **Lynne Neagle:** At the moment, we are talking about scrutinising something that has not yet been published. However, on that basis, Gwenda would come to the committee to outline the proposals, which we would then scrutinise.

[66] **Helen Mary Jones:** Yes, to put it simply, we would be scrutinising the Government on what action it has taken in response to the various recommendations on advocacy. The Minister is in a position to come and say, ‘This is what we have done so far’. Following that meeting, we can seek some further evidence from the voluntary organisations that are concerned about the model, and from local government, which appears to be broadly content, and we can then give the Minister further advice about how we think the Government should proceed.

[67] **Lynne Neagle:** However, in the intervening period, proper terms of reference will be circulated to us and further advice will be sought on the legal situation.

11.00 a.m.

[68] **Helen Mary Jones:** Yes, and we can agree on that and seek further legal advice. It would be helpful to the first meeting if we asked the Assembly’s legal people to come along.

[69] **Eleanor Burnham:** Should we ask Catriona whether she thinks it sensible to go down this route, because we are a new committee?

[70] **Ms Williams:** As you were talking, I was thinking that we did not mention in the terms of reference the committee’s ability to scrutinise reports coming in, and, in fact, the Assembly Government has not produced anything on the report of the children’s commissioner, for instance. That went through my mind as one example of a report not already produced by Government.

[71] On advocacy, it would be helpful to focus the mind. We have a situation in which we have very few advocacy providers, and my own organisation brings them together. There are

vested interests from those who are commissioning people to come, effectively, to criticise their own organisations. So, there must be a strong voice for children and young people that this will work for them. In Children in Wales, we have received slightly different perspectives from different organisations. We have asked them and tried to get them to work together, and we are nearly at the point at which a solution can be found that would suit everyone, but it has taken a long time. The Waterhouse report was published years ago, and it was a main issue—

[72] **Helen Mary Jones:** So, you would feel that it would be appropriate?

[73] **Ms Williams:** Sorry, I will not go on. Yes, I do.

[74] **Helen Mary Jones:** On the way ahead, if we invite the Minister to update us on the Government's implementation of the various reports around advocacy, we will seek legal advice on the exact position. I do not think that the terms of reference need to be desperately detailed, but we need to be clear that what we are doing is scrutinising the Government's performance. We will draft a set of terms of reference based on the things that you have said, such as that we need to clear about what we are doing with this, and we will circulate it at the same time as the draft forward work programme. If we can agree by e-mail, we can proceed. We should invite the Minister as soon as possible, given the pressures on her time. If Members are content, the clerk will get a letter off today and we will agree the detailed terms of reference after that, because Ministers have an awful lot to do. I know that she is keen for us to do this, but my preference would be to have her here. I know that she has said that she would make officials available to us, but, to begin with, we need to have the Minister herself here, as we need to know what the direction is.

[75] So, we will start with a short, focused piece of work on advocacy. I am picking up this morning that we are also interested in looking at what has happened with the parenting action plan. What about child poverty?

[76] **Lynne Neagle:** I think that child poverty should be considered before the parenting action plan. I am not taking anything away from the importance of looking at parenting, but we have an implementation plan that is not being implemented, and that should be a high priority for us. The LCO committee will also be completing its work, and it is important that we do not miss the boat on that.

[77] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is helpful. So, if we begin with advocacy, we will then move on to child poverty. Could I have some thoughts about how we go about that, not necessarily today. We will begin by asking for a paper from the Government on implementation, but it is difficult to invite just one Minister on this issue, given that it cuts across many portfolios. So, we will start with Jane Hutt as Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, but we may want to bring in different Ministers across the portfolios. The policy is clear, but the implementation of it and the action plan are not.

[78] I do not know how people feel about this, but the former Committee on Equality of Opportunity did a detailed piece of work on disabled children and young people, and the Government agreed to all of its recommendations, but I am not in the least bit sure what is happening with that. Despite the fact that it was the work of a previous committee, it might just be a question of asking Ministers which recommendations they have agreed to, and which recommendation sit in whose portfolio. We can ask the Minister what they have done about it, and, if they have not done anything, what they intend to do, and where are the resources to back that up?

[79] **Eleanor Burnham:** What about the latest report of the children's commissioner, because that is really important?

[80] **Helen Mary Jones:** That is a key role for this committee. So far, we will look at advocacy, child poverty, the parenting action plan, disabled children, and the commissioner's report.

[81] **Lynne Neagle:** We were also keen to look at a children's budget. I am very happy to look at disabled children's issues.

[82] **Helen Mary Jones:** I think that we could do that in one meeting.

[83] **Lynne Neagle:** Perhaps we could also look at what has become of the £21 million that came as a consequential.

[84] **Helen Mary Jones:** We can certainly ask the Minister about that.

[85] So, have we got enough there to begin with? That should keep us busy at least until the summer recess, and possibly beyond. With the committee's permission, I will have further discussions with the clerks about how we might go about the different pieces of work, bearing in mind that we talked about the possibility of not just sitting here and bringing in witnesses, but of using individual Members as rapporteurs. Can I explore with the clerks what we might do with that, and come back to Members with some suggested ways ahead?

[86] **Eleanor Burnham:** Chair, are you proposing that we tackle one issue at a time?

[87] **Helen Mary Jones:** That would be my preference, given that we have such a huge agenda. If we were to jump about between one issue and another, my fear would be that we would try to do it all and end up doing none of it properly—which, one might say, is what has gone wrong with the Assembly Government's approach to children's issues over the years. Everybody wants to do everything at once, with the result that it is not very clear what is being prioritised or where the resources are. So, that approach seems to be sensible. There may be issues that crop up, and events that we want to respond to, and we will need the flexibility to do that. For example, if there were a particular crisis in children's social services, we might want to ask the Minister to come and give us a brief report about it.

[88] Is everybody broadly content with that until we see things on paper? I see that you are. I thank you all very much, particularly Catriona Williams and Mike Shooter, for being with us. It has been very helpful to have an external steer at this early stage, and we will get the paperwork to committee members as soon as we can. I think that there is an awful lot of commitment and enthusiasm on this committee, and that bodes well for our being able to look back in a year or in 18 months' time and say that this committee makes a difference.

[89] Finally, on the point of leadership, I think that the Assembly as a whole has shown leadership in setting this committee up, and we need to ensure that that leadership runs through Government and public services in Wales.

[90] Diolch yn fawr iawn i chi i gyd. Thank you all very much.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 11.07 a.m.
The meeting ended at 11.07 a.m.*