



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

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

**Dydd Mawrth, 15 Mawrth 2011
Tuesday, 15 March 2011**

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

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

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Eleanor Burnham	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Helen Mary Jones	Plaid Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) The Party of Wales (Committee Chair)
Lynne Neagle	Llafur Labour
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Helen Freese	Rheolwr, Hyrwyddo Mynediad at Hawliau, Llywodraeth Cymru Promoting Access to Rights and Entitlements Manager, Welsh Government
Marcus Hill	Rheolwr Polisi Arbenigol, Llywodraeth Cymru Specialist Policy Manager, Welsh Government
Huw Lewis	Aelod Cynulliad (Llafur), y Dirprwy Weinidog dros Blant Assembly Member (Labour), the Deputy Minister for Children

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

Sarah Bartlett	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Sarah Hatherley	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil yr Aelodau Members' Research Service
Abigail Phillips	Clerc Clerk
Helen Roberts	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser

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

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies, and Substitutions

[1] **Helen Mary Jones:** Bore da a chroeso i'r Aelodau, y Dirprwy Weinidog a'i swyddogion, Marcus Hill a Helen Freese. Dyma gyfarfod olaf y Pwyllgor Plant a Phobl Ifanc yn y trydydd Cynulliad, a dyma gyfle imi ddiolch yn ffurfiol i bob Aelod sydd wedi gwasanaethu ar y pwyllgor, a hefyd i'r staff sydd wedi gweithio i ni yn ystod y pedair blynedd diwethaf; yr ydym yn hynod ddiolchgar i bawb.

Helen Mary Jones: Good morning and welcome to Members, the Deputy Minister and his officials, Marcus Hill and Helen Freese. This is the final meeting of the Children and Young People Committee of the third Assembly, and this is an opportunity for me to thank formally all the Members who have served on the committee, and all of the members of staff who have worked for us over the last four years; we are very grateful to everyone.

[2] Atgoffaf bawb bod croeso ichi ddefnyddio'r Gymraeg neu'r Saesneg. Mae clustffonau ar gael i glywed cyfieithu ar y pryd ac i addasu lefel y sain. Mae cyfieithu ar y pryd ar gael ar sianel 1 a'r cyfraniadau yn yr iaith wreiddiol ar sianel 0. Atgoffaf bawb, gan gynnwys unrhyw un yn yr oriel gyhoeddus, i ddiffodd unrhyw ffonau symudol, mwyar duon ac yn y blaen. Nid yw'n ddigon da eu rhoi ar 'dawel' gan eu bod nhw'n dal i amharu ar yr offer sain a darlledu. Nid ydym yn disgwyl ymarfer tân, felly os clywch larwm tân, mae hynny'n golygu bod problem a dylech ddilyn y tywyswyr, fydd yn dangos y ffordd ddiogel ichi allan o'r adeilad. Yr ydym newydd dderbyn ymddiheuriad gan Jonathan Morgan; estynnaf groeso cynnes i'r Aelodau eraill.

I remind everyone that you are welcome to speak in English or Welsh. Headphones are available to hear simultaneous interpretation and to amplify the sound. Interpretation is available on channel 1 and contributions in the original language can be heard on channel 0. I remind everyone, including anyone in the public gallery, to switch off any mobile phones, BlackBerrys and so on. It is not good enough to put them on 'silent' because they still interfere with the broadcasting and sound equipment. We are not expecting a fire drill today, so if you hear an alarm, it means that there is a problem and you should follow the ushers, who will show you a safe way out of the building. We have just received apologies from Jonathan Morgan; I extend a warm welcome to the other Members.

9.18 a.m.

Adroddiad Blynyddol y Comisiynydd Plant The Children's Commissioner's Annual Report

[3] **Helen Mary Jones:** A warm welcome once again to the Deputy Minister for Children. As I have said before, he is practically an honorary member of this committee. We are very grateful to you, Deputy Minister, for making yourself available today. We are grateful to you and your officials for the written responses that we have received and we were able to raise some of the matters in Plenary last week. If you are content, we will go straight into questions.

[4] **The Deputy Minister for Children (Huw Lewis):** That is fine.

[5] **Helen Mary Jones:** I will begin. The children's commissioner states in his annual report that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child action plan is only as good as the actions that flow from it. He also references some delays in meeting the target dates set out in the plan. Will you outline the main reasons why progress is behind the anticipated timescales in some areas? How confident are you that those actions that are outstanding, or somewhat delayed, will be successfully completed?

[6] **Huw Lewis:** The children's commissioner is quite right; any action plan is only as good as the actions that flow from it. As far as I am aware, we are pretty much on target with more than nine out of 10 of the actions being on schedule. I am not clear as to exactly which actions he is pointing to when he says that there is a delay. Has he made that clear?

[7] **Mr Hill:** If you consider the action plan in its entirety, you will see that there are 16 priorities, and under those priorities there are 90 actions. The plan covers a range of cross-cutting issues, from things such as tackling child poverty to raising awareness of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Inevitably, timescales slip in some cases, but, from the information that has been received so far on monitoring the action, I believe that around 98 per cent of actions are on schedule or have been completed. So, we are aware of only a small number that have slipped at this stage.

[8] **Huw Lewis:** We have an implementation support network and, as the plan mentions, internal and external stakeholders are a part of that. It has been established to give us an

overview as regards progress. So, this will all be transparent, and I will be pushing for timely actions as they flow from the plan.

[9] **Helen Mary Jones:** Before I bring in Joyce Watson, I want to ask about some of the specifics that the commissioner mentions—and, because there has been quite a gap between the commissioner making his report and your response, it may be that things have caught up. He references the refugee inclusion strategy action plan, which was due by spring 2010, but that had not come through when the commissioner produced the report. He also mentions the regulations in relation to pupil participation and the national participation strategy, and pilot schemes for the Proposed Education (Wales) Measure. Do you believe, Deputy Minister, that we have now caught up with regard to some of those things that were delayed when the commissioner made his report?

[10] **Mr Hill:** In a number of cases, action is planned to catch up. I am not clear on the refugee inclusion action plan.

[11] **Huw Lewis:** Could I undertake to send you a note on that?

[12] **Helen Mary Jones:** Yes. Perhaps, Deputy Minister, we could write to you about the areas that the commissioner raised that we remain concerned about.

[13] **Huw Lewis:** Of course.

[14] **Helen Mary Jones:** You may need to seek information from your colleagues, because those areas do not fall into just your portfolio. That is the whole point.

[15] Thank you for that. Joyce has the next question.

[16] **Joyce Watson:** Good morning, Deputy Minister. One area that the commissioner outlined in his annual report was that of the urgency with which children's budgeting needed to be progressed. He said that it was imperative, particularly given the current financial situation, to move that forward. What steps have been taken to address the actions in the 'Getting it Right' action plan that might avoid further delays?

[17] **Huw Lewis:** I will be completely upfront and say that there has been a delay in taking that work forward. As we got stuck into the agenda, no-one anticipated the sheer complexity and difficulty surrounding the untangling of budget strands and how they impact on children. There is no manual for that. There is no manual that we can pick up from another legislature and just run with. At this late stage in this Assembly, I can say that, if I am lucky enough to be in this position after May, this matter must be a priority. We must not be put off by the complexity of it. We have been a little taken aback, as it were, by the tangled web Government weaves when it comes to finance—although I suppose that it should not have been a surprise. This matter needs a redoubled effort in the next Assembly; there is no doubt about it. If we are to maintain any kind of momentum on this agenda, it really does need a ministerial wallop over the next few months.

[18] **Joyce Watson:** Deputy Minister, in my life before politics, I was on the steering group of a gender budgeting working group, and work has been done on this area. There are very few people who have expertise in the gender budgeting area, because of the complexities that you have outlined. Deputy Minister, will you look at the pioneering work that was done through gender budgeting to see how that might aid you in moving forward the children's budgeting that you so clearly said that you want?

[19] **Huw Lewis:** If there is anything to learn from the gender budgeting agenda, I will ask officials to take a look at it. I will bring in Marcus, because some ground has been covered.

[20] **Mr Hill:** The point that I would make is that you will know that there are quite a few dimensions to children's budgeting and, in its recommendations, this committee raised a range of areas. Some of those relate to things such as participative budgeting, involving children and young people in budget decisions, through to a range of other methodological approaches in terms of budgeting. You will know that the Assembly Government published its second statistical bulletin in July last year, talking about an analysis of the budget. To a certain degree, that is retrospective. Work is being done to look at the development of things such as participative budgeting and looking at what we know, what our evidence base is, what is good out there and what is not good. At the same time, we are looking at other methodologies, such as children's budget statements and pro-poor budgeting, and trying to draw some of that information together. In terms of that review of literature and in bringing stuff together, we will also consider the work that you mentioned on gender budgeting.

[21] **Eleanor Burnham:** Mae Eleanor Burnham: The Children's Commissioner for Wales has expressed his concerns that services targeted at prevention and early intervention might be seen as easy targets for spending cuts. What assurances can you give to the committee in respect of such funding?

Mae Eleanor Burnham: The Children's Commissioner for Wales has expressed his concerns that services targeted at prevention and early intervention might be seen as easy targets for spending cuts. What assurances can you give to the committee in respect of such funding?

[22] **Huw Lewis:** The commissioner, as always, is quite right to raise this as an item of concern. In response, I would say that I want to try to give every reassurance about the Welsh Government's attitude towards preventative, early intervention. In fact, in terms of the direct children's agenda, we have new initiatives coming on stream that will reinforce and underline that commitment to early intervention, with Families First being the most important of all. We also have the protection, or even strengthening, of the budget strand in Flying Start, and, again, we have emerging evidence as to its effectiveness as a programme of early intervention. The foundation phase, more generally, is also a commitment in this regard. As budgetary pressures increase, and, in the coming financial year, in particular—we are all in some trepidation as to the fallout and about the budget that is coming up—there will be an increasing political gravitational pull towards trying to shift to remedial work dealing with the fallout of budgetary cuts and the effect and impact that they might have on vulnerable families, and vulnerable kids in particular. However, we have demonstrated, as best we can, that that preventative, early intervention agenda remains our policy commitment. There will also be developments in the theatre of youth justice, to be announced soon, that will further underline that commitment. It is, after all, what we know works. To abandon that agenda would be to retreat from the core issues that we are trying to solve.

[23] **Eleanor Burnham:** Mae'r Eleanor Burnham: The children's commissioner yet again highlights concerns in his annual report—this has happened every year for nearly a decade—about the state of school toilets. Can you provide a timescale for when we can expect the Welsh Government to publish its best practice guidance in relation to school toilets? How and when will these improvements really be rolled out?

Mae'r Eleanor Burnham: The children's commissioner yet again highlights concerns in his annual report—this has happened every year for nearly a decade—about the state of school toilets. Can you provide a timescale for when we can expect the Welsh Government to publish its best practice guidance in relation to school toilets? How and when will these improvements really be rolled out?

9.30 a.m.

[24] **Huw Lewis:** Since last week's Plenary debate, a clear timescale has been set for the publication of the guidance—it will be published in May. Sorry, what was the second half of your question, Eleanor?

[25] **Eleanor Burnham:** I asked when it would really be put into practice, because we have had 10 years of waiting. We are not blaming you, but you will know, as a parent, as we discussed in our Plenary debate, that this is probably one of the biggest issues.

[26] **Huw Lewis:** It is frustrating that the children's commissioner has once again felt the need to underscore this issue. We are aware that there has been quite impressive capital improvement spend on school buildings. However, there seems to remain an attitudinal problem, in my view, as regards the importance of the issue. It is not just something that is on the wish list of children, but it is also directly connected to hygiene, human dignity, at the end of the day, and the good running of a school estate. There is responsibility here on the part of local government and clear responsibilities lie with school governors, in terms of prioritisation. Everyone is under a budgetary cosh, but, at the same time, we cannot have the children's commissioner's report next year highlighting this issue yet again.

[27] It would be my intention to get to grips with this primarily with the Welsh Local Government Association, in order to clearly illustrate to it that this is not an added extra, and that we cannot go on like this. It would be my intention to have face to face contact with the WLGA on this issue.

[28] **Lynne Neagle:** I think that you have partially answered my question. As you said in your answer, hygiene issues are particularly important in this regard, given that Wales did see an E. coli outbreak. As you say, this is not a peripheral issue—it could potentially be an issue of life or death for children. The commissioner's report highlights a gap between policy intent and practice, which is something that we hear about quite regularly in this committee. Do you agree with that view, and will you take any particular measures to finally get over that hurdle?

[29] **Huw Lewis:** The commissioner's original report, 'Lifting the Lid', was published back in 2004. Since then, two substantial campaigns have been run by the Welsh Assembly Government—Mind the Germs and Teach Germs a Lesson. We have also had guidance and actions taken by the commissioner. The guidance for local government has been very clear. If that is not enough, and the commissioner continues to be concerned about these issues, it would be time to raise the volume in terms of the message that is coming out from the Assembly Government on this issue. It might be time very soon to start connecting this issue to budgetary priorities.

[30] As Members will be aware, I am not a school toilets tsar. This is not just a cross-portfolio issue within the Assembly Government, but also a question of our relationship with local government and with the governors of voluntary aided schools. Other options would include giving consideration to legislative or statutory means of doing this, but you have to ask yourself how that would be enforced and inspected, how you would prescribe standards and so on. However, it is getting to the point where this cannot continue. We have now had the ninth children's commissioner report underlining this. We cannot have a tenth and an eleventh doing the same; it really has to be sorted out. After all, if this was an issue that was having an impact on adults, in terms of workplace hygiene, it would probably have been resolved some time ago.

[31] **Helen Mary Jones:** I think that we are all very pleased to hear you say that, Deputy Minister. It is absolutely true that if many of the school lavatories that I have seen and the ones that the commissioner reports on were in an adult workplace, the Health and Safety Executive would shut the place down. It is not just a question of them not being very nice;

they are borderline dangerous, as Lynne has said. Eleanor, you may have a very brief supplementary question on this. We need to move on.

[32] **Eleanor Burnham:** How do we move the persons involved in budgeting to a mode where they realise that this is a priority for education? It is not only a health issue; it is a wellbeing issue, which affects children's ability or otherwise to be able to learn, as we discussed in Plenary. If children cannot go to the toilet, they cannot drink; if they cannot drink, they cannot function properly. The people advising local authorities on their budgetary requirements should be prioritising this. Some of the toilets probably only need refurbishment, if there are no doors or if the taps are not working. It does not always mean that there will be a whole host of things to be done.

[33] **Huw Lewis:** One could envisage linking certain strands of capital spend to a minimum standard. It would concentrate minds enormously. There would be questions about exactly what an inspection scheme would consist of, how much it would cost and how on earth such a thing could be set up. It is tragic. We talk a lot about the role of local government, but there is also a role for headteachers and boards of governors. If there is an attitudinal issue, which means that people accept low, unhygienic standards that adults would not tolerate as being an okay offer to children, there are people in front-line positions who need to ask themselves some serious questions. I know that there are many very committed headteachers and governors out there, and perhaps we are dealing with something that has just historically been accepted, but it cannot be accepted any more.

[34] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you, Deputy Minister. I think that we are all pleased to hear what you have said about that, and I am personally very pleased to hear that you are not ruling out legislation. I take on board what you say about enforcement, but, of course, we have the schools inspection regime, which is changing to be more flexible. That may be something that a future Government could consider, if all other measures fail, because this seems to be a particularly intractable issue. Joyce, I think that we are moving on to questions on safeguarding.

[35] **Joyce Watson:** Yes, we are moving on to questions on safeguarding and child protection, Deputy Minister. We are talking about the gap between policy and its intent and practice. In evidence to us, the children's commissioner has said that we have an all-Wales child protection procedure for people to adhere to, and a policy commitment that clearly says that safeguarding and child protection are critical issues. However, at the same time, we have a frustrated workforce that is asking why it cannot do the job it is employed to do.

[36] We would all agree that one of the issues that everybody in the country and in this committee gets distressed and exercised about is the safeguarding of children and their protection. We have seen reported evidence of widespread and tragic failures. Against that backdrop, what are you, as Deputy Minister, and the Assembly Government more broadly going to do to address the implementation gap between policy and practice in Wales?

[37] **Huw Lewis:** This is a huge issue, Joyce, and I do not know whether I can do it sufficient justice here this morning because we are dealing with something that is a classic shared responsibility. You will be aware that Gwenda Thomas recently published a framework for action on the future of social services, particularly in relation to child protection and safeguarding. We have also established a national safeguarding board, so the Deputy Minister for Social Services has a very active agenda in terms of ensuring that this absolutely crucial area of work receives the proper kind of attention that it needs. Marcus or Helen might like to add something.

[38] **Mr Hill:** The approach that is being taken here is based on the view that a framework for action will help to ensure a more coherent approach to safeguarding across Wales for

adults and children. This includes establishing a national safeguarding board for adults and children, which will help us build on robust safeguarding arrangements, particularly those that have been developed in Wales. The Deputy Minister for Social Services has published guidance on the safeguarding of children and young people from sexual exploitation. This will help practitioners rise to the challenge of identifying children at risk of sexual exploitation and take steps to protect them from perpetrators. I believe that Barnardo's Cymru has also developed training for practitioners that is being rolled out at the moment, which is helping. As you would appreciate, in many cases where there is a gap between policy and practical delivery, training is the usual approach pursued to help bridge that gap and to ensure that policy intentions are turned into actions on the ground. I believe that a review of this approach will be undertaken in six months' time to see what progress has been made.

[39] **Helen Mary Jones:** Eleanor, do you have anything further on safeguarding boards?

[40] **Eleanor Burnham:** I believe that my question on that subject has been answered, has it not?

[41] **Helen Mary Jones:** Yes.

[42] **Eleanor Burnham:** I will therefore ask a supplementary question.

[43] A allwch roi unrhyw enghraifft ymarferol arall o'r ffordd y bydd y fforwm diogelu cenedlaethol yn mynd i'r afael â phryderon ynghylch y system sydd ar waith i amddiffyn plant? Can you provide any other practical example of the way in which the national safeguarding forum will address concerns about the system in place to protect children?

[44] **Huw Lewis:** It is worth bearing in mind that the children's commissioner is intimately involved in this. I believe that I am right in saying that he is a member of the forum. Gwenda Thomas set out for us, during a recent Plenary meeting, a new national programme for serious case reviews. I am reluctant to tangle with the expertise of Gwenda Thomas, who really is the person who should be drawing out these lessons, illustrating them and laying out before you what the Assembly Government is doing in this regard. I know that the forum is active and that it includes the children's commissioner as an active member, and I know that the Deputy Minister is extremely energetic in trying to push the agenda forward.

[45] **Helen Mary Jones:** Deputy Minister, given what you have just said about not wanting to tangle with the expertise of one of the other Deputy Ministers—it would be a very brave person who did any such thing in relation to child protection and Gwenda Thomas—I will therefore skip my question, which would have been next, because it might be more appropriate for a successor committee to put that question to whoever is in charge of children and social services after the election, and call on Lynne Neagle to ask her next question instead.

[46] **Lynne Neagle:** I believe that Eleanor wants to ask it, if that is okay, Chair.

[47] **Helen Mary Jones:** If Eleanor would like to ask the question, that is fine.

[48] **Eleanor Burnham:** Diolch yn fawr iawn. Mae'r comisiynydd plant wedi dweud ei fod wedi ei siomi gan y cynnydd araf wrth weithredu argymhellion yr adolygiad cenedlaethol o ymddygiad a phresenoldeb. Beth yw'r sefyllfa ddiweddaraf o ran bwrw ymlaen â'r argymhellion? A oes gan y **Eleanor Burnham:** Thank you very much. The children's commissioner has stated that he is disappointed at the slow rate of implementation of the recommendations of the national attendance and behaviour review. What is the latest position on progressing the recommendations? Is the commissioner right

comisiynydd reswm i deimlo'n siomedig to be disappointed with progress to date?
ynghylch y cynnydd a wnaed hyd yma?

9.45 a.m.

[49] **Huw Lewis:** As a result of the commissioner's comments, Assembly Government officials and the commissioner's office have come together to talk through his concerns. There has been action on the national behaviour and attendance review. My understanding of the situation is that timescales for action have largely been okay, but that there has been disappointing progress with the attendance issue in particular. It is not acceptable that in Wales we have had some of the poorest school-attendance figures of the UK. We are going to have to revitalise our approach and, thanks to the children's commissioner, who is maintaining his focus on this area, we are going to respond to his prioritisation of the issue. There will now be a new phase that will concentrate on outcomes, for example, improving behaviour by asking all newly qualified teachers to undertake behaviour-management training as part of their induction process. We are talking about a shift in our approach on that. The attendance framework, which will be used by the education welfare service, was launched last week. We have the tools in place and, as you said, Eleanor, it is now a question of implementation and ensuring that we improve standards and performance. However, it is a little disappointing that the children's commissioner feels the need to return to this issue and that attendance rates need particular attention in Wales.

[50] **Eleanor Burnham:** Do you feel that we have not learnt lessons in the 10 years that have gone by? After all, from the issues that some of us used to deal with before we came here, it was evident that much of the stigma that developed in relation to these children did so when they were very young. Do you feel that the foundation phase should identify and help the next generation? It is a very urgent issue for the current generation because these young people only get one chance and if they are out of the system, it is really bad for them.

[51] **Huw Lewis:** When you are dealing with any kind of children's service, you are always operating a two-tier approach. One tier is the urgency of the situation that faces young people now, as this is their chance to make progress, and the time that young people are exposed to things like early years intervention is very short. You are simultaneously talking about a reform that needs time to work its way through the system, so that the end results of the foundation phase, for instance, might be 10 years away. The only answer is to do both things at the same time; that is why we have the new framework and the changes for newly qualified teachers and what is expected of them. Politically speaking, I am also taking away the message that the commissioner is prioritising attendance in particular. The rest of the agenda has moved forward reasonably well, and we can all be pleased with the progress that has been made; however, the commissioner is right about attendance figures, and that issue needs to be prioritised politically.

[52] **Lynne Neagle:** In relation to child poverty, the children's commissioner challenges the Government to build a bridge between the objectives of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 and the real lived experiences of children and young people in Wales. How confident are you that the child poverty strategy will deliver on such a challenge?

[53] **Huw Lewis:** This is what I spend most of my waking hours concerned with since the First Minister asked me to lead on child poverty as an issue. There are three elements to the bridge between policy implementation and reality. The first is a legal framework that is unique in the UK because the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 is not a law that only applies to Government or Ministers; it applies to the entire devolved Welsh public sector. Therefore, all local authorities, health boards and semi-independent organisations, like the Arts Council of Wales, are part of this and are expected to come up with their own strategies to contribute, so we have the legal aspect. We have, I hope, a workable child

poverty strategy. A decade of experience has gone into that to ensure that it is robust, workable and deliverable. It was launched by the First Minister and me last month. A means of delivery is also critical: a programme on the ground that is budgeted and staffed, with real people doing real things in relation to early intervention, particularly as regards the most vulnerable kids. The centrepiece of that will be the Families First programme as it evolves. I will be announcing another set of Families First pioneer local authorities this month. By that time, around 12 to 15 local authorities in Wales will be involved in developing the Families First strategy alongside us. That is not cast in stone; it is a developing agenda. By April 2012, all 22 local authorities will be drawn in and will be a part of this.

[54] Simultaneously, as regards the wider public sector, I began by sorting through these things in a bilateral, ministerial context with colleagues. The strategies of organisations like health boards will be coming across my desk and we will be taking a long, hard look at how robust those strategies are at the local level and what we think is being fulfilled as regards the legal duties of those organisations. Essentially, I will be looking at what has changed about the operational, day-to-day work that is done in relation to these children. I will be asking what the organisation will be doing for the Evans family in Coronation Street over the next six to 12 months. I will be asking what is being done in that organisation's area of the public service to improve that family's life and to increase downward pressure on child poverty statistics. The key question will be: how will the organisation's strategy do that? If it is a box-ticking exercise, it is not going to that. I will be looking for changes in the distribution of effort and resources.

[55] **Joyce Watson:** I am pleased to hear about what you are doing. I do not doubt your commitment to this, and I do not think that anybody in the Assembly or beyond it doubts that commitment either. However, it does not make it any easier: the latest published figures show that child poverty in Wales is at 32 per cent, and it is the worst rate in the UK. You have demonstrated your intention to move forward on this agenda fairly well. Do you think that the Welsh Assembly Government has done enough, and will do enough in the future, to alleviate child poverty?

[56] **Huw Lewis:** We will not have done enough until we get these figures down to the internationally agreed eradication level of around 5 per cent. That is a figure that has been achieved in a few countries across the globe and represents the minimum churn. For instance, Sweden's levels have been around 5 per cent, but there is a Tory Government in Sweden now and the figures are going back up. That was just a throwaway line. That level represents the level of immigration, in the main, where immigrant children are technically in the poverty bracket for a while, as they are being integrated into Swedish society and while the welfare systems kick in and so on. Sorry, I ran away with myself there, Joyce.

[57] **Joyce Watson:** Have we done enough and are we going to do more?

[58] **Huw Lewis:** First, on the levels, let us not get too carried away. The epicentre of child poverty in the UK, with by far the highest levels—pretty much double the average level of severe child poverty, for instance—is London. London stands out way above every other part of the UK. It is only if you aggregate the whole of England that this figure for Wales, within a margin of error, is pretty much the same as an English average. However, nine out of the 10 worst council areas for child poverty figures are in London, and the other is in Manchester. So, we are not at the bottom of the heap.

[59] Having said that, it is unacceptable to have these levels of child poverty. Only through a co-ordinated national effort, which is in the gift of the Welsh Government, do we stand any chance of pushing these figures backwards, as we have successfully done over several of the last 10 years. However, I fear that, while we are busy pulling children out of these statistics, central Government policy might be doing its best to push them back in. It is

early days yet, and we do not know exactly what the welfare reform pressures will mean when translated into reality in a Welsh community, but I fear that families with children will be expected to pay disproportionately for central Government policy as regards deficit reduction.

[60] **Joyce Watson:** Our theme this morning addresses the implementation gap between policy intent and practice. We are looking at how successful the Welsh Government has been in raising awareness of children's rights and in helping to improve rights-based approaches with service providers, as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child action plan. We have signed the UNCRC, which is a good thing, but how successful have we been in raising awareness of children's rights?

[61] **Huw Lewis:** I believe that future historians of Welsh politics will look back on our commitment on the UNCRC as a distinctive and unique contribution to children's rights; it is a governmental commitment that is without parallel. However, as you say, there is a difference between a political commitment and roll-out on the ground. Across Wales, I have seen a remarkable spectrum of awareness when it comes to young people, particularly at the top end. A school in Anglesey, for example, has grasped this as a central part of its personal and social education agenda. It sees it as part of ensuring that kids become aware, as citizens, of how society works around them, which is marvellous. That has fed through into things such as that school's involvement with Funky Dragon. Therefore, there are young people who are without parallel when it comes to articulating their priorities, right through to complete unawareness in some communities—whether they are school communities or geographical communities—across the country.

[62] It is the age-old story—how do you translate that best practice into normal practice across the country? We are working on PSE materials. This will not be completed by schools alone, but, at the same time, we cannot do it without them. Schools will have to be supported in terms of a new PSE framework and materials, and that step is under way. We also work hard with organisations such as Clic and Funky Dragon. In conjunction with me and my officials, Funky Dragon is undertaking a review of how its future will look, particularly as regards that awareness of citizenship.

[63] I would like to bring Marcus in to add some more detail on that.

10.00 a.m.

[64] **Mr Hill:** Thank you, Deputy Minister. I will talk you through some of what we know. As you will be aware, Funky Dragon's own research said that around 8 per cent of children that it had asked in its two reports, 'Why do people's ages go up not down?', and 'Our Rights, Our Story', had said that they were taught about the UNCRC in schools. The children's commissioner's research estimated that figure at around 13 per cent, but said that 30 per cent had heard of the UNCRC. Similarly, we have recently had the national survey in Wales, which dealt with the adult population, because those surveyed were 16-plus; it said that 30 per cent had heard of the UNCRC. It shows that there is still quite a lot of work to do around this.

[65] When the concluding observations came back from the UN committee's last examination of the UK, this was one of the issues that came forward, and this is why it has been identified as a priority within our 'Getting it Right' UNCRC action plan for Wales. We have had some mapping work undertaken by Save the Children in Wales, and it found that there were not many resources available for children or young people or professionals. We have spent a bit of time starting to develop those resources for use with children and young people in schools, outside schools, and also with different professional groups. Those resources should become available around May or June for wider use, and the resources for

training professionals, in particular, are going to be ones that you can pick up, and will include case studies that make them more multi-professional. At the same time, the UNCRC monitoring group has set up a sub-group called the article 42 group; article 42 of the convention is about raising awareness. It has been talking to different professional groups and producing reports about what they see as the key issues. That is important in helping to guide our future action as we renew the action plan itself. The last point that I would like to make on this is that the Royal Approval for the proposed Measure is anticipated later this week, which would mean that section 5 of that proposed Measure would come into force in May of this year. That would place a duty on Welsh Ministers not just to raise awareness of the convention but to promote knowledge and understanding of it. That will certainly help to spur on activity in this area and start pushing forward, right the way across the spectrum, children and young people, professionals and the adult community alike.

[66] **Helen Mary Jones:** The final question, Deputy Minister, is from me, and it is quite a big one. The children's commissioner highlights in this report, as he has done previously, the policy implementation gap—the gap between very high quality national policy for children and young people in Wales on a range of issues and making a difference on the ground. We have touched on this already, and Lynne Neagle has mentioned it this morning. How do you believe the next Welsh Government can ensure that this strategic vision—which I hope the next Government will share, and which I am confident that it will, because there is such agreement across this Assembly on the way that we want to work for our children and young people—is effectively translated into improvements in the experience of children and young people and real outcomes for them? I know that this is an area where you have had some frustrations yourself.

[67] **Huw Lewis:** Yes. It is a messy business, democracy, and even in a small country like Wales, where we have responsibilities that can be split; quite often, if you are talking about a children's agenda, it means something slightly different to a health board, to a local authority and to a school. Everyone contributes in part to the picture. We have made great strides forward in trying to bring coherence to the way that we take the priorities of children and young people to the top of the queue. We have not been shy in terms of legislative change. That children's rights agenda will be on the statute book very soon, and the child poverty issue is on the statute book as well. A lot of people are under the impression that there is a UK child poverty law, but it is very different in nature to our legislative commitment on that. There is also a clear strategy that has been agreed in high-level consultation across the country. What really matters, though, is the vigilance with which we—I was going to say 'police', but perhaps that is too harsh a word—

[68] **Helen Mary Jones:** I am happy with that word—let us leave it on the record.

[69] **Huw Lewis:** Maybe 'orchestrate' is a better word. What really matters is the vigilance with which we orchestrate change across the country. The central role lies with the Welsh Government; no-one will do this for the Welsh Government, and that is why I particularly welcome the First Minister's commitment. He was at the launch of the child poverty strategy, for instance, as you were as well, Chair. There is also good cross-party consensus within this institution on this agenda, which is welcome and which makes all the heavy lifting a little easier. However, when it comes to working through the complexities of how, for instance, you might deliver this through the NHS, as one institution, you hit multiple layers of complexity, and the only way through it all is to maintain a clear vision of the targets and milestones that we have set ourselves and be extremely demanding from the top-down with regard to professionals taking this agenda seriously. It is a daily issue; it is not something that you can write on a piece of paper, hand to someone else and assume that it is completed. It is a question of political and institutional vigilance, right across Welsh civil society. It is, in my view, the biggest thing that we have taken on as a devolved Government; there has been nothing bigger.

[70] **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you, Deputy Minister. That brings our questioning session to an end. I am particularly struck, as I am sure are fellow committee members, about what you say about political and institutional vigilance. I think that I can safely speak for other committee members in saying that we hope that, in future, whoever undertakes the role that you have been fulfilling is as rigorous and vigilant as you have been as Deputy Minister. We are grateful to you for being so open with the committee on a whole range of issues; we very much appreciate it. We also obviously hope that there will be an equivalent committee to this to hold your successor to account. It is only right to express the committee's gratitude to you and your officials, because you have been ready to be very open on a range of issues, and to take our recommendations on board whenever you could. We appreciate that.

[71] **Huw Lewis:** That has been my pleasure, Chair. I wish to mention my appreciation of the committee's work. It is an extraordinary amount of ground that you have covered, all of it valuable.

[72] **Helen Mary Jones:** Diolch yn fawr **Helen Mary Jones:** Thank you, Deputy Minister, and officials.

10.07 a.m.

Cynnig Trefniadol Procedural Motion

[73] **Helen Mary Jones:** Symudwn yn awr i ystyried ein hadroddiad ewyllys drafft. **Helen Mary Jones:** We now move to consider our draft legacy report. I move that Cynigiad fod

y pwyllgor yn penderfynu gwahardd y cyhoedd o weddill y cyfarfod yn unol â Rheol Sefydlog Rhif 10.37(vi). *the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order No. 10.37(vi).*

[74] Gwelaf fod y pwyllgor yn gytûn. I see that the committee is in agreement.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 10.08 a.m.
The public part of the meeting ended at 10.08 a.m.*