



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Cyfiawnder Cymdeithasol ac Adfwyio**

**The National Assembly for Wales
The Social Justice and Regeneration Committee**

Wednesday, 8 Tachwedd 2006

Dydd Mercher, 8 November 2006

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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynnddi 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 o'r Cynulliad yn bresennol: Janice Gregory (Cadeirydd), Mick Bates, Mark Isherwood, Laura Anne Jones, Trish Law, Huw Lewis, Leanne Wood.

Eraill yn bresennol: Sam Austin, Llamau; Carl Chapple, Swyddog Digartrefedd ac Ymgyrchoedd, Cymorth Cymru; Carol Crowther, Rheolwr, Cymdeithas Gofal Sir Benfro; Steve Gamgee, Prif Weithredwr, Wallich Clifford; John Puzey, Cyfarwyddwr, Shelter Cymru; Dr Kay Saunders, Meddyg Teulu; Babs Walsh, Rheolwr Rhanbarthol, Dwyrain Caerdydd, Wallich Clifford.

Gwasanaeth Pwyllgor: Dr Virginia Hawkins, Clerc; Claire Griffiths, Dirprwy Glerc.

Assembly Members in attendance: Janice Gregory (Chair), Mick Bates, Mark Isherwood, Laura Anne Jones, Trish Law, Huw Lewis, Leanne Wood.

Others in attendance: Sam Austin, Llamau; Carl Chapple, Homeless Policy and Campaigns Officer, Cymorth Cymru; Carol Crowther, Manager, Pembrokeshire Care Society; Steve Gamgee, Chief Executive, Wallich Clifford; John Puzey, Director, Shelter Cymru; Dr Kay Saunders, General Practitioner; Babs Walsh, Regional Manager, East Cardiff, Wallich Clifford.

Committee Service: Dr Virginia Hawkins, Clerc; Claire Griffiths, Deputy Clerk.

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.35 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.35 a.m.*

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau, Dirprwyon a Datgan Buddiannau Introduction, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

[1] **Janice Gregory:** Welcome to the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee meeting. I am sorry that we are starting a tad late this morning. Several Members have apologised that they will be late because of the awful traffic problems on the M4 and surrounding roads. We are all looking forward to listening to our presenters later in the meeting. I also welcome those members of the public who have taken the time to come this morning.

[2] Before we commence, I need to inform you that, if anyone has a mobile phone, a BlackBerry or pager, please make sure that it is switched off, as they interfere with our sensitive broadcasting equipment—and that from the Chair who is almost positive that she has switched hers off; I apologise if it goes off. There is no fire drill today so, if the fire alarm sounds, please follow the instructions of the ushers, who will guide you safely from the building. For those who have not attended before, I am sure that you are aware that the National Assembly operates in Welsh and English. Headsets have been provided for simultaneous translation from Welsh to English on channel 1. If you have difficulties hearing, you can also use these headsets on channel 0 to amplify the sound. Tea and coffee will be available during the break. For members of the public, that is available in the Oriel upstairs, but refreshments will be provided outside this room for Members and presenters.

[3] I ask contributors not to touch the microphones; they will come on automatically. Now that we are getting used to this equipment, we have found that, if we press the buttons on the microphones, we are actually switching ourselves off rather than switching ourselves on.

[4] As you know, this morning is important for the Social Justice and Regeneration

Committee in that we start our in-depth review of youth homelessness. This meeting is devoted to that review. I am therefore delighted that John Puzey from Shelter Cymru is here to make a presentation, after which Members will be invited to ask questions.

[5] Before we move on, does anybody have any declarations of interest to make? I see that there are none.

9.37 a.m.

Cofnodion y Cyfarfod Blaenorol Minutes of the Previous Meeting

[6] **Janice Gregory:** Does anyone have any comments on the short minutes of the meeting on 19 October? Laura Anne's name has been spelt wrongly again, has it? I am attuned this morning, Laura. Is your name wrong again?

[7] **Laura Anne Jones:** Yes. It is fine. It is a silly mistake. An 'e' is needed at the end of 'Ann', that is all.

[8] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you; I am sure that the clerk heard that—Laura needs an 'e'. Is everybody agreed on the minutes? I see that you are.

*Cadarnhawyd cofnodion y cyfarfod blaenorol.
The minutes of the previous meeting were ratified.*

9.38 a.m.

Adolygiad Polisi: Digartrefedd ymhlith Pobl Ifanc Policy Review: Youth Homelessness

[9] **Janice Gregory:** I am delighted to invite John Puzey, the chief executive of Shelter Cymru, to make his presentation.

[10] **Mr Puzey:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, committee, for inviting Shelter Cymru to give evidence. I congratulate you on undertaking a review of this extremely important issue. I have a slight apology to make, because the paper that we gave you was constructed in quite a hurry. The invitation came when neither I nor my policy worker was around, so we have done it quite quickly. There is more information and evidence that we can provide to committee while you are undertaking this review, and we would be pleased to do so. I just wanted to make that clear.

[11] Homelessness among 16 to 25-year-olds is significant in Wales. Your own official figures, collected from local authorities, show hundreds of people in that age range being accepted as homeless. You will see in our paper that, over just one year, almost 900 people in that age range were assisted by Shelter Cymru, and we have laid out for you some of the issues, causes and problems that we have dealt with. However, we have to say that the official figures, our figures and, indeed, even the figures of my colleagues in other agencies do not tell the whole story by any means; we are pretty sure that there are many other people in that age range who, for all sorts of reasons, do not appear in figures and are not going to agencies. There is concern about new practices undertaken by local authorities now—the options prevention approach, as it is called.

9.40 a.m.

[12] In many ways, it is a very useful approach to tackling homelessness, but one of the

problems with it at the moment is that people are being dealt with outside the official structures, which means that they are not being counted in those formal figures. So, we need to be clear that the recorded figures almost certainly underestimate the number of people going to local authorities and presenting themselves as homeless. Among those will be a large number of people in this particular age range. So, it is something that we need to look at, and one recommendation in the paper that we quickly put together is that we must start monitoring that work as quickly as possible, so that we know who is coming to local authorities, and, more importantly, what is actually happening to them. Local authorities are telling us that they are undertaking prevention work, and we know that they are in many cases, but we need to know that that is sustainable and is actually happening.

[13] One issue that we have tried to raise in the paper is the importance of not stereotyping young people in that age range. When we look at young people between the ages of 16 and 25, it is clear that there is a whole range of different reasons why they might be facing acute housing need or homelessness. Some of those people need quite intensive support and assistance for all kinds of reasons, but, equally, there will be people who simply need affordable, decent housing. So, there is a wide range there, and one of the issues that I wish to underline is that, in some ways, people in that age group have almost more varied and difficult reasons for homelessness, and therefore it is even more difficult to resolve the problem.

[14] There are three key reasons for that. The first reason is that the age of those people disadvantages them. For example, there are particular vulnerabilities around their lack of life skills and inexperience that can make them vulnerable to exploitation and perhaps not necessarily make the right choices in some circumstances. Some people in that age range will have left care, and there are key issues about leaving care and finding sustainable support and accommodation afterwards. There will be family issues that particularly impact on them, and there may be issues of abuse. People in that particular age range may get into desperate circumstances and therefore turn to drug and alcohol abuse. There may be educational underachievement and a lack of training opportunities, which lead people in that age range into cycles of poverty and homelessness, which, if they are not careful, can blight the rest of their lives. So, there are particular issues about being young and facing those difficulties.

[15] Secondly, there is what I would describe as structural and market factors that work against people in that age range. People in that age range have lower incomes than the rest of the population, are more likely to be unemployed, and also have lower levels of benefit. There is a particular issue here about the single-room rent, which the Assembly and this committee have concerned themselves with before. In terms of the configuration of housing stock, there is not the right type of housing for people in that age group. So, it is harder for people in that age range to buy if they wish to buy—it is almost impossible for most young people, even those receiving the average income for people aged between 16 and 25, to even think about getting on the first rung of the lowest-cost housing. It is difficult for those people to get into social housing because of the configuration of the housing, but also because of other issues that I will come to in a moment.

[16] Therefore, we find that many young people in those circumstances end up in the private rental sector, which, in many cases, is not necessarily a good sector to end up in. I am not saying that all private landlords are problematic, but it is clear that the conditions in the private rental sector are poorer than in other tenures. Security is very short with six month tenancies, but there is a particular issue about the affordability of that sector. As I mentioned, the single-room rent is causing serious problems for single people under the age of 25. The Archbishop of Wales is currently leading an inquiry into poor housing and homelessness, and the evidence of the inquiry has been quite horrific in some cases. We have received evidence from young people who are living in very overcrowded conditions in order to be able to afford to pay a rent, and landlords are allowing that. We have received evidence from young

people who have been asked to do menial work by landlords, and we have heard of examples of people going into prostitution in order to make up the difference in the rent so that they can keep a roof over their heads.

[17] So, there are key issues about the shortfall between what young people have in terms of housing benefit and what landlords are asking for. Almost all people under the age of 25 find it almost impossible to rent in the private rental sector because of that, and they must do these things in order to get a roof over their heads. There is an issue in any case about housing benefit. We have just completed a piece of research funded by the Assembly into the private rental sector, which shows that over 80 per cent of claimants from all age groups are suffering shortfalls in local authority areas across Wales in terms of housing benefit. That is a key issue that needs to be considered.

[18] So, we have the age problem, we have the problem of the structural and benefit issues, and if that were not bad enough, there is the third factor. We have examples of what I can only describe as poorer services and practices overlaying all that, which certainly do not help. There are examples of this in what we describe as gate-keeping services, and I want to keep calm about this, because we are not saying that there is a systematic approach to this, but simply perhaps because of a lack of training, pressure and resource issues, we find, in some cases, that local authorities are providing poorer gate-keeping services and this seems to be a particular issue directed at younger people. I have already described the processes whereby younger people are assisted almost outside the system, so there is a concern about what exactly is happening to those people. We also have examples—and I think that we have given a couple in our paper—of harsh intentional homelessness decisions. Decisions have been made, for example, when a young person has been thrown out of their home because their parents told them to get back at a certain time and they did not do so, and instead of trying to work with that person and accept its duty, the local authority has said, ‘You’re intentionally homeless, because you didn’t get back at 11.00 p.m.’, or something. That does not help anyone, in our view, and it seems as if the local authorities are simply wiping their hands of the problem.

[19] There are also issues about allocation systems. Some of the allocation systems in Wales do not assist or recognise the problems of younger people. The Assembly’s code of guidance, which is helpful in terms of providing certain types of tenancies for those under the age of 18, is often ignored. So, there are some issues in that group that can be tackled more easily through training, guidance and perhaps even legislation or regulation.

[20] However, if you pull all those three elements together, you clearly have a problem, and we propose a few ways in which that might be tackled. There is always a resource issue—you would expect this from Shelter Cymru, and I am sure that my colleagues would say the same thing—in terms of providing appropriate accommodation and, vitally, appropriate support. The Supporting People fund is a key issue in terms of ensuring that young people who are vulnerable and need support are assisted. One of the key problems in terms of young people is ensuring education, training and employment opportunities. We suggest that there may be some scope for developing a kind of network around those issues, linked into homelessness services. Local authorities might also want to look at assessing training and education needs as part of their assessment. I think that they would say, ‘We need resource to do that’, but, in terms of ending repeating cycles of homelessness, that might be a long-term approach.

[21] On other areas, the structural stuff is obviously much more difficult for us to tackle. Manipulating benefits is outside the Assembly’s control—at present, anyway. There are issues around providing more low-cost home-ownership initiatives, and I know that the Assembly is concerned about that. That is important for young people, particularly those in couples, in that age range, who simply need somewhere to live. I know that issues such as

using community land trusts to provide that kind of accommodation are being considered, and we urge you to consider those—I am sorry; I took the fiver earlier.

[22] Housing benefit shortfalls are a key issue and I know that you have a unique opportunity with the Government of Wales Act 2006 to look at ways in which we may be able to intervene on that. We certainly urge that, if there are ways in which housing benefit single-room rent can be adjusted to stop the terrible hardship that we are seeing in Wales, you should look at them. There may be things that the Assembly can do, in terms of looking at the rent officer service in Wales and the way in which it determines local rents. It is a difficult area, but it is under the Assembly's control and it might be a way of trying to make local reference rents a bit more in line with the reality of people's lives.

[23] Finally, there is a group of areas that we suggest that you may also want to look at. The intentional homelessness issue is one. We are seeing poor decisions on intentional homelessness, and they seem to be particularly directed at younger people. We ask whether you might consider making recommendations on changing what is currently a duty for local authorities to address intentional homelessness into a power, and also requiring them to have greater responsibility for people found to be intentionally homeless, rather than having the current situation whereby, if you are found to be intentionally homeless, you are given 28 days in temporary accommodation and that is it—goodbye. I know that, in Scotland, they are already looking at this issue. They believe that that does not help anybody. It certainly does not help people who are found to be intentionally homeless, and perhaps we should consider it in Wales as an important, progressive step in addressing homelessness.

9.50 a.m.

[24] I have also mentioned some other areas. Health and homelessness is a key issue that affects younger people. There is also an issue about investment and priorities, and we would call for greater investment in affordable housing, low-cost alternatives and an increase in the Supporting People budget if we are really going to tackle the problem of youth homelessness in the long term.

[25] I know that I was only supposed to speak for five minutes; I might have gone over, but those are my key points.

[26] **Janice Gregory:** That is great. Any supplemental information that you could provide would be gratefully received.

[27] **Laura Anne Jones:** On page 4 of your report, you talk about the hurdles that people are faced with when making a homelessness application. That concerns me, particularly when you say that there were two instances in Wales of where homelessness decisions regarding 17-year-olds were delayed until the applicants were 18 years old, when they were informed that they were no longer in priority need. That is a very concerning paragraph in your report.

[28] I agree with what you said about how people's educational needs should be assessed once they have made that contact with a local authority and that they should be given job opportunities and that there should be a link with the jobcentre and that sort of thing. It is important that those go hand in hand.

[29] I am only a couple of years over this age bracket and, when I left university, I was in a lot of debt, and I am sure that a lot of people are in more debt than I was. People are faced with trying to buy somewhere to live and, particularly in my area of Monmouthshire, it is just not an option for many 16 to 25-year-olds. Affordable housing is just a no-no—there is none. House prices are way beyond the reach of many young people.

[30] Perhaps we should be more proactive than reactive when we are dealing with homelessness, especially youth homelessness. As we said when we were discussing debt in this committee, perhaps we should go into schools and teach them how to get onto the housing ladder and about the options that are available to them, and tell them that renting is probably not the best option. I do not know what you think of that. Perhaps we could link in with schools.

[31] **Mr Puzey:** The Assembly funds Shelter Cymru to provide teachers with an educational resource, looking at issues of housing and homelessness. That does two things: it clearly raises awareness of the issue but it is also an important piece of what we describe as early housing advice. As you say, it is not easy to leave home and find somewhere, and it is about taking young people through—we are talking about 14, 15, 16-year-olds—how they would apply for housing but also, importantly, taking them through issues such as financial literacy and those kinds of matters and saying, ‘It is not easy to buy a house, but if you are going to do that, this is how you should do it’. So, that is an important area of work that we are doing. However, it is not only Shelter Cymru that is doing that; other agencies in Wales are also doing this work.

[32] **Laura Anne Jones:** Do you think that there is a link between the amount of debt that young people are getting into, particularly as there are so many credit cards around now for them, and being able to get accommodation?

[33] **Mr Puzey:** Perhaps that is the case at the higher end of that age range. I am not aware of 16, 17, 18-year-olds being able to get into credit debt, even if they wanted to. One of the key areas is that you will find that young people who are suffering from housing and homelessness problems will tend to come from poorer families, who may have experienced similar problems themselves. There are often generational issues here that we need to crack. It is about how we intervene in that. It is an issue. How do we break those cycles of social exclusion and poverty in the end and give people a chance to develop, learn, and get jobs and education? An essential part of that is decent accommodation and support.

[34] **Mick Bates:** Thank you for your verbal and written reports and for the work that your organisation undertakes. I want to refer to two areas. One is service delivery, and I would like to hear your comments about the impact, or lack of it, in terms of the co-ordination of services so that, when a young person presents himself or herself to the council or is referred by whatever process, through education or social services, there is sufficient co-ordination between all the relevant people, including the rent office and all the way through, to ensure that they receive a first-class service.

[35] The second issue is one of low-cost home-ownership or rent, because the rent issue that you referred to is equally crucial. Could you give some indication, if possible, of how many homes we would need? There has been a question about the reliability of data and how many people are homeless. In rural Wales, I know from experience that a great many young people are forced to stay with their parents, so while I accept that it is difficult to get to the real data, surely people like you could give me some indication of how many single-bedroom apartments we would need to alleviate that type of problem? There are now construction techniques and the development of community land trusts that enable people to take opportunities to build affordable rental property and affordable homes for purchase. We need some indication of how many we need to build.

[36] **Mr Puzey:** On your first point, on whether services are effectively co-ordinated, you must remember that we, as a housing advice service, assisted 17,000 people last year, so we tend to see the worst of everything—we sometimes have a jaundiced view of these things. However, from our perspective, on the whole, services are not terribly well co-ordinated. There is a particular issue for younger people in terms of the ability of social services and

housing departments to work effectively together. Even now, years later and after this issue has been raised over and over again, young people are still being ping-ponged between housing departments and social services, and both claim that these young people are the responsibility of the other. So, they end up nowhere—caught between two stools. That is still a major problem, despite the existence of written protocols drafted at the corporate level. Those do not seem to filter down to the service on the ground, so there are some key issues there.

[37] You are also right to look at the other areas, such as the rent office service and housing benefit, and how they work with social services and housing. Is that all joined up? Again, I would have to say ‘no’. Interestingly, we undertook some work recently on the private rental sector, where we talked to housing benefit departments, housing departments and environmental health departments—those three key elements—and it was surprising how little they worked together, and yet they were all concerned about issues in the private rental sector. It was difficult to see how those three departments linked up in some local authorities—not all local authorities, but many that we looked at. ‘Hostility’ is the wrong word, but it is almost as though there are three different cultures there and never the twain shall meet, which I find quite extraordinary. So, there could be a much better corporate approach to these issues. The fact that those services are not effectively linked causes problems for the person who is making an application and who is facing a real housing need.

[38] **Mick Bates:** So, where would you take us to see good practice?

[39] **Mr Puzey:** There are examples of good practice in Wales; I would not need to take you outside of Wales. I do not want to paint a picture that it is all dreadful. There are some very effective and well co-ordinated services in Wales and I would be happy to share those with the committee.

[40] **Mick Bates:** Go ahead.

[41] **Mr Puzey:** I would not name them here, mainly because I have forgotten which ones they are, but they are out there; I would not want to start shouting out various names, in case I get them wrong.

[42] **Janice Gregory:** We would be grateful if you could pass that information on to us.

[43] **Mick Bates:** Yes, could we have that information, because it is important in terms of this review that good practice is recommended by us, so we need to know where it happens? Often, it is just a case of putting all these people in the same room so that services and councils can sit together and communicate.

[44] **Mr Puzey:** The other issue that you raised related to numbers. It is difficult to arrive at data on those for precisely the reasons that you outlined, Mick, namely that there is much of what you described as ‘hidden homelessness’—people who are often forced to stay in overcrowded conditions. Overcrowding is a major issue for young people in Wales. They are forced to stay in such conditions, simply because there is no available, affordable accommodation locally. Some of those people will leave their areas and will go elsewhere and end up as a statistic somewhere else. That kind of depopulation occurs particularly in rural areas. Having said that, it is still quite shocking, when you look at the official figures in rural areas, that they continue to grow quicker than in urban areas. So, the fact that the homelessness figures have grown rapidly in rural areas in Wales, given that we also know that people move out of those areas when they cannot find somewhere to live, is a real worry.

10.00 a.m.

[45] **Mick Bates:** I have a short final point. Returning to the issue of data collection, which is the responsibility of local authorities and so forth, you say that it is very difficult to get data. Do we have a figure—a source—or could you tell us where to go to look to find a figure, so that, when we recommend that we need more low-cost homes for rental and to buy, we have a figure to quote? Where can we find it?

[46] **Mr Puzey:** You have the official figures.

[47] **Mick Bates:** Yes.

[48] **Mr Puzey:** That is a starting point, I suppose. You have waiting lists, although, to some extent, waiting lists have been somewhat discredited over recent years in terms of really reflecting housing need in an area. As I mentioned at the beginning, you have a problem now of local authorities dealing with people outside the system, in a sense. I am not entirely sure why they need to do that, but they do it, nevertheless. We have talked to local authority officers, saying, 'Your homelessness figures dropped last year compared with the year before', and they say, 'Yes, but actually, we are still getting the same number coming to us, if not more'. We then ask why the figures have dropped, and they say that they are no longer including them in the figures because they are dealing with them outside the system. When we ask why, they say, 'Well, it is the options approach, is it not? We will count them eventually'. Let us start capturing that data now.

[49] Interestingly, the performance indicators work that has been taking place in Wales is also attempting, when it is finally agreed, to capture that grouping. Therefore, we might have a better idea of the kind of demand on local authorities, although it is not just about local authorities—there is clearly a demand on the agencies that are here today. I know that most of them will probably say that they are having difficulty responding to that demand. To give you an indication of what might be happening in Wales, out of every three people who come to my organisation facing homelessness, only one has actually been to the local authority before. We do not claim that we, by any means, work with all people facing homelessness in Wales, so, if that figure is reflected across Wales, a lot of people are, even by the statutory definition, facing homelessness and yet not seeking help—as you said, they stay at home or whatever.

[50] **Mick Bates:** Therefore, you could treble the official figure.

[51] **Mr Puzey:** You could do, but I would not stand by that entirely. What I am suggesting to you is that the real level of housing need is much greater than is reflected in the formal figures that are available. How we grasp and capture that information is the difficulty.

[52] **Mark Isherwood:** You mentioned the problem of six-month tenures. I know that the housing associations have proposed that we should introduce, for registered social landlords and housing associations, the same tenure arrangements as for council providers of social housing. What impact do you think that that might have, if any, on this agenda? Equally, were the assured shorthold tenancies to be amended and replaced by something better, what impact might that have on the supply of private rental housing, if any? What might your contacts with landlords have indicated in that area?

[53] On rooflessness, as we now call it, or rough sleepers, there are often, as you rightly emphasised, associated drug and alcohol or abuse problems and so forth. In Wrexham, for example, there is a push now for some sort of overnight shelter for the roofless. It has been strongly emphasised by Cymorth—I am sure that we will hear from Carl and others later—that, unlike most housing provision for this group, we need to allow people to come in with their behaviour and drug and alcohol issues and have appropriate people on site to build relationships and trust. Hopefully, that will give them a bridge to service provision that can help them to rebuild their lives. It is not enough to simply talk about the provision of hostels

or shelters; we need to take that more holistic approach. I wonder whether you could comment on that.

[54] Most of the discussion, rightly, has been on youth homelessness where the young person is homeless alone. There are some instances where the young person is homeless because the whole family has become homeless, for various reasons. I wonder whether you could comment on provision for that sector of people. I am aware of some very good practice models but also a huge paucity of provision. Young people often becomes homeless because families were unable to stay together.

[55] In terms of gate keeping, what you say fully endorses my own experience. In another example, last week, I was contacted by someone in a Women's Aid refuge who had filled in the appropriate form and stated where she wanted to go and where she did not want to go, but the council offered her a house in the area where her former partner resided and suggested, via Women's Aid, that she would be marked as intentionally homeless if she did not accept it. We are dealing with that at the moment. That is just another example of how that can work.

[56] On housing benefit, you talked about various linkages. I want to concentrate on the links with education and on young people, particularly between the ages of 19 and 25. Those people who are seeking to go to college and live in a hostel or some sort of supported housing can find that they are unable to pay their rent if they go into full-time education. Do you have any figures on or awareness of the current situation with void properties, particularly in the social sector? Is there a solution there, and, if so, how could we deliver it?

[57] To develop the issue of the option prevention approach, which we have discussed before, you told me that, officially, homelessness figures are going down, but that you did not know where those people were going. Registered social landlords have told me that that does not match their experience. When did this regime that you describe come into force? Will you confirm whether, from your experience of the current situation, homelessness is rising, falling or remaining static, to give us a clearer picture?

[58] You have mentioned many linkages between housing and other factors. Is it your view—and I know that Housing Forum Cymru has stressed this point—that housing must be central to wider community regeneration and economic and social regeneration issues, because, otherwise we will be tackling symptoms rather than causes?

[59] In your experience, how receptive do you find private landlord associations to be to addressing the issues with you? Publicly, collectively, they state that they wish to tackle the Rachmans and co-operate, but what is your experience in practice?

[60] **Janice Gregory:** There are quite a few points there, John.

[61] **Mr Puzey:** I shall dash through them as best I can. On the issue of the length of tenure, I was referring to shorthold leases in the private rental sector. One thing that you can tell by looking at the official statistics is that the main cause of homelessness in Wales, certainly last year and the year before, was people losing their tenancies in the private rental sector. They then went to local authorities for assistance. These people did not lose their tenancies for rent arrears but because, for whatever reason, the landlords decided to end the tenancies at the end of six months. There could be a variety of reasons for that happening. The official figures do not show it, but our research suggests that it happens for a range of reasons, one of which is landlords removing tenants because they think that they can get other tenants at higher rents, and another is landlords removing tenants because the market is favourable to sell property. Sometimes there are anti-social behaviour issues; those are mixed up in there too.

[62] Short tenancy is a problem for us in Wales—as it is in the United Kingdom—because it recycles homelessness. Often, people, particularly younger people, who might have experienced homelessness, go back into the private rental sector and six months later, for whatever reason, they are homeless again and back they come again. Therefore, there is a problem with repeat homelessness, and the issue is how to tackle that. There are proposals for tenure reform. The Law Commission has put some proposals together, and I understand that there has even been talk that the Assembly Government might wish to take on some of those proposals and fast-track them through the Government of Wales Act 2006. Oddly enough, the tenure reform proposals are to take away the six-month lease and therefore, effectively, there will not be any short-term leases. I am not sure whether that will work.

[63] If that law comes into place, it will mean that, when someone goes into the private rental sector, they could be removed with only two months' notice, at any time. You might want to consider—and I am told by the Law Commission that this is possible—setting a different amount of time, such as a year, instead of six months. So, as far as I understand, you could introduce a Welsh shorthold lease that actually increases security in the private rental sector. You might want to look into that. However, it is not just about security; it is about management, conditions and affordability, so there is also the question of how to tackle those issues.

[64] There is now a move towards equalising the tenancies between housing associations and local authorities, which makes sense. We are looking at the social sector now, and if stock transfer gathers momentum over the next few years, a great deal of social housing will effectively be under the ownership of housing associations or new companies. It makes sense to have some sort of equalised social housing tenancy in Wales.

10.10 a.m.

[65] You asked me about responding to the diverse needs of young homeless people. It would be better to listen to Carl and his colleagues about that issue, because they are closer to those matters. As we said in the paper, young people often—although not always—come in with a multitude of different needs and issues and it is important to respond in a holistic way and address all of those needs. It is not simply a matter of saying, 'Here is shelter; here is a bit of support'; it is about assessing properly and working closely with those people to understand what those problems are, and possibly to take people on a number of different journeys, as well as providing secure accommodation. I think that Cymorth Cymru will say far more about that.

[66] I am sorry, I did not quite understand the question on housing benefit and education.

[67] **Mark Isherwood:** That might be for Cymorth Cymru. Homeless young people who are dependent on housing benefit to pay their rent in, say, a hostel, find that when they enter full-time education, they lose the housing benefit, which can then render them incapable of accepting the position that they have been offered at college.

[68] **Mr Puzey:** I am aware of that phenomenon. It is an issue about benefit levels and regulations. I am not entirely sure what we can do about that at the moment in Wales. It is not an issue that my organisation deals with a lot. However, I am aware of that phenomenon. It is an issue about what we can do in terms of, in some way, manipulating regulation and benefits in Wales in the future. It has been a difficult issue. I do not think that Westminster will particularly want to let go of that area of responsibility. However, it is important, because we can say and do what we like in terms of a housing strategy, but the carpet will be pulled away from under it if the benefit regulations change.

[69] We know that the housing benefit will change to the local housing allowance. In most

cases, the allowance will pay rent directly to the tenant and not to the landlord. Our research shows that there is some fear among landlords about the impact of that and about whether people who are struggling and who are having difficulties paying for other things, such as food, electricity, and so on, will sometimes, as people do, use some of the rent to pay those bills instead of paying the landlord. The message from landlords is that there is some fear about that. Carl may say something later about the impact in Pembroke, which is one of the pathfinder areas, which has already experienced that. It might be better for me to leave it to Carl to explain a bit more about that. However, there is certainly a worry that there could be a significant withdrawal from the market for tenants on housing benefits, although not necessarily from the market as a whole. We could see a drop in the market for those on housing benefits, which could create even more problems. There has already been some experience of that in the pathfinder areas.

[70] I am not clear, off the top of my head, about the voids situation. Local authorities tell us that it is getting tighter. I was talking to someone from Neath Port Talbot last night who reckoned that the area only has 20 vacancies and very few voids. The fact that an awful lot of people are unable to buy homes in Wales now has meant a massive increase in the demand for social rental housing. The message from local authorities is that voids are rapidly filling. The issue about empty housing relates more to the private sector. The Assembly is encouraging empty homes strategies, and I know that quite a few local authorities are looking at that as an option.

[71] On whether the level of homelessness is going up, down, sideways or whatever, that is difficult to answer. Local authorities tell us that the demand for their services is increasing. So, despite the fall in the official figures, the demand for those services from people who are experiencing homelessness or who are in acute housing need and who may become homeless in the short to medium-term appears to be increasing. Our own workload is increasing, although I am not sure whether that is because homelessness is increasing or because our services are developing so that there is more access to our services. It is a difficult issue to disentangle. However, there is a feeling that the level of homelessness is not falling and there is a concern that it could increase over the next few years, particularly, for example, if interest rates—as we suspect they will—start shifting again. There is a worry there anyway. This is slightly outside the issue of young people, but we have had the biggest rise in repossessions in the United Kingdom in Wales—49 per cent between 2004 and 2005. If interest rates start rising, as we suspect they will, over the next few years, we could see a rapid increase in that, which would again put more pressure on the social rental sector and create problems for those who historically look to the social rental sector for housing. There will be extra demand for limited stock.

[72] What was the last point? Sorry, my left-handed scribble is illegible.

[73] **Ms Griffiths:** It was on how well you co-operate with private landlord associations.

[74] **Mr Puzey:** I would not say that there is any particular hostility between landlord associations and my organisation; we work quite closely with some good landlords and we certainly work with some of the associations.

[75] One thing that is clear from our research is that, for many landlords, as the property is an investment or provides a form of income, the main concern is getting a good tenant. That is all that you hear from landlords, and I understand that. A landlord says, 'I want a good tenant. I do not want a problem tenant; I do not want someone who is vulnerable, who will cause problems and exhibit anti-social behaviour, or someone who will not pay me the rent when the local housing allowance comes in. All I want is a good tenant and a good tenant is someone who pays up on time, keeps the place in good order and does not annoy the neighbours'. I understand that, because it is a business. My worry is about the expectation that

the private rental sector will, in some way, start taking up the strain in terms of homelessness and vulnerable groups of people, including young people who have particular problems that need to be addressed. There is a real worry that the private rental sector is being seen as an option, whereas if you talk to landlords, they say, ‘We do not want people like that; we do not want local authorities to say to us, “Please take this 18-year-old who is bit of a problem, has a few other issues, and we need to get him some support”’. The landlord will say, ‘No, I do not want him, I just want a person who is not on housing benefit, who will pay the rent and who will not cause a problem’. That is the message that we are getting from the private rental sector.

[76] **Leanne Wood:** On the issue of local authorities dealing with people outside the system, you touched upon what is going on in Scotland with the changes to definitions of the intentionally homeless. Could you expand on that and explain what it is doing and how we may be able to introduce a similar system in Wales? Would that help to show up more people in the official figures? If people present themselves as homeless, and are found to be intentionally homeless, you can see why they may not appear in the statistics.

[77] You also talked about good practice. Could you give us some idea as to what the Welsh Assembly Government could do to try to ensure consistency of practice so that we can roll out good practice and get rid of some of the bad practice? What do you think that we could do to assist care leavers and young people who have just come out of prison, as they face particular difficulties? I know that you have called for an increase in the Supporting People budget, which would help with that; however, is there anything else that we could do on that front?

[78] For areas where council housing is about to be transferred to a new registered social landlord, is there any evidence of young people facing further difficulties in areas that have already transferred their stock? You mentioned the potential changes to equalised tenancies. Is there a danger, in your view, that those could be equalised down, rather than given the full security that many council tenants now have? Is there a danger that tenants could lose that security?

[79] Finally, the single-room rent restrictions are a real worry. I would have thought that it was a form of discrimination against young people. Do you think that there is any room in the new age discrimination legislation to challenge some of the cases that we face in Wales in this regard?

[80] **Mr Puzey:** Just to remind you, what happens now is that if someone is found to be intentionally homeless, which means that in the opinion of the local authority that person has done something, or not done something, that has led to the situation whereby they lost his or her home, the local authority’s duty is limited to providing 28 days of temporary accommodation and that is it. At the end of the 28 days, off they go. There are two problems with that. The obvious one is that that does not resolve those people’s problems. Very few people—almost nobody, actually—would do anything to lose their home intentionally, in the real sense of the word. This was always the issue, even way back in 1977 when the ‘intentionally homeless’ bit was inserted into the then new homelessness legislation. What do we mean by ‘intentional’? The first view was that if you looked at what the word meant, very few people would be captured by it. However, case law has developed the word ‘intentional’ to mean all kinds of things, such as, ‘I forgot to do something’. Therefore, many people can potentially be captured by that—I believe that about 900 households in Wales last year were found to be intentionally homeless. If the average household is 2.5 people, that is over 2,000 people.

10.20 a.m.

[81] The other problem with intentional homelessness, I am afraid, is that it is sometimes used as a threat—as in, if you do this and that, you will be found intentionally homeless, so it is hardly worth your continuing with an application. Therefore, there are many people who, in a sense, are affected by intentional homelessness who do not appear in the figures, because they will be told, ‘You have become intentionally homeless’. Intentionality is a complex area, and it is one that my organisation often challenges—and successfully so—because it can be got wrong in law. Some local authorities may assess people very quickly and say that they will be classed as intentionally homeless, but that is not necessarily so; in fact, if it is tested, you may discover that they are not intentionally homeless. Therefore, it is also being used as a threat. That is one of the issues keeping people outside the figures. This is not wide-scale stuff, but it is happening.

[82] The decision in Scotland was that it would not get rid of the intentional homelessness classification, because local authorities feel that they need to have some means by which to say, ‘Look, you have done this on purpose’. We need some kind of formal protection to safeguard public services. However, the change that has been proposed is that, instead of it being a duty—at present, local authorities have to investigate whether or not it is intentional homelessness—you make it a power. Therefore, you do not have to investigate it, and if you do not want to—if you want to work with the person coming to the authority for assistance, you can do that; you do not have to go through the process and say, ‘You are intentionally homeless; sorry, off you go’.

[83] The other important change in Scotland is that, if people are found to be intentionally homeless, then it is not simply 28 days’ accommodation and that is the end of it. I believe that it is suggested that people should be placed on what is called the Scottish shorthold, which I believe is a year. During that period, they are supported and assisted, and given the kind of support that will enable them to get into secure, longer-term housing at the end of that period. That may not be social housing, but they will be given that assistance. The aim is to assist people out of the problem, and to try to prevent repeat homelessness in the future, rather than simply saying, ‘28 days and you are off—that is it, we are finished with you’, and then, surprise, surprise, people either come back to their local authority or go elsewhere with their problem. Therefore, there is that significant change.

[84] I am simply asking whether the Assembly may be able to acquire powers through an Order in Council. I know that the aim is to have broad powers under Orders in Council, but it may be that powers can be obtained that will allow that kind of manipulation—I do not believe that you could do it through secondary legislation; I believe that you would have to have primary legislation. We are simply asking whether that would be a possible development in Wales.

[85] On your question about how the Assembly can encourage consistency in practice, in some ways, the Welsh Assembly Government is doing that. Last year, it announced additional funds for good practice grants in relation to homelessness, and I know that some of them are looking at good practice and how services can be more effectively linked, and are developing toolkits for agencies and local authorities to work more effectively together. Therefore, there has already been an important step forward by the Welsh Assembly Government in that area. We would encourage more of those kinds of funding initiatives, good practice developments, and the development of those kinds of toolkits. However, the Assembly may also want to look at stronger, tougher guidance—a few ‘musts’ instead of ‘you should do this’—to reinforce some of those areas of work.

[86] On care leavers and prisoners, these are key issues, as you pointed out, and the Supporting People grant is an important factor there. Again, the Welsh Assembly Government supports Prison Link Cymru, which operates in north and south Wales. That works with ex-offenders and people coming out of prison who face homelessness; the idea is

to try to link them into local authority services or other agencies. That is an important development. However, that service tells us—and I say ‘us’ because we run the north Wales bit of it, so it is telling me this—that there are still issues. There is a high attrition rate in respect of the number of prisoners who leave as homeless, and those who end up going to a local authority or other services; around 40 per cent get lost somewhere. We need to know why they are getting lost. We suspect that one reason is because, although that service provides good advice and assistance, it does not provide enough supported accommodation. Former prisoners often needs supported accommodation, or at least decent and suitable accommodation, and that is the missing factor, even when they go to local authorities. Authorities accept—some of them reluctantly—that they have a duty in Wales, but they still do not have appropriate accommodation for certain types of ex-offenders, which is a challenge for them. It is accommodation and supported accommodation that needs to be looked at here.

[87] We also need to investigate attrition rates. What happens to prisoners from when they are released to when they do not present themselves to local authorities because they have gone somewhere? That is an issue.

[88] Have there been difficulties with stock transfer and its effect on young homeless people? Of course, in other parts of the United Kingdom, in Scotland and Wales, transfer has gone well down the line. However, we did a bit of research last year, not looking specifically at younger homeless people, but at issues of how stock transfer has affected homeless people and people with housing needs in general, and the message was that, in some areas, stock transfer has made the situation worse for homeless people. They are having to wait longer to get into social housing, because it has been more difficult for local authorities to retain their statutory duty to negotiate enough housing from the new companies. So, that is a problem, but we also found that it has worked quite well in other parts of England and Scotland.

[89] I want to be clear that I am not making an ideological point on this; I am simply saying that the transfer experience in England and Scotland seems to demonstrate good-practice and poor-practice examples. That is probably the same for local authorities, with good and bad local authorities, and good and bad stock transfer experiences. In some senses, we have an advantage in Wales because we have not gone down that route yet, so we can learn from those experiences in England and Scotland. There are some good examples in England and Scotland of where the transfer has worked out as quite a good deal in responding to local housing need and homelessness. We need to look at those, and learn from them to build those lessons into the propositions of transfer in Wales.

[90] We could look at transfer as an opportunity. The investment packages and community redevelopment options can give real opportunities to younger people, for example, in terms of skills training, education and employment opportunities. So, if we get it right, it could respond quite effectively to the problems of young homeless people; if we get it wrong, the evidence from England and Scotland indicates that you will find that people end up in temporary accommodation for longer periods than at present. The Assembly, quite rightly, has said that we need to reduce the length of time that people spend in temporary accommodation. We could see that going into reverse if we get it wrong.

[91] There is a concern that the new social housing tenancy could be at a lower level of security than the local authority one. However, I must admit that I am not entirely up to speed on that issue, so I would not like to give any definitive responses. I should have brought one of our lawyers along, or at least someone who may have been able to help. As an organisation, we would argue that the council or secure tenancy is good, because it provides security and some succession to people, and gives people the feeling that the accommodation really is their home. We would be very much against any dilution of that kind of complete tenancy for all social housing, but I am not entirely sure where the debate is on that.

[92] On age discrimination and the single-room rent, that was the first thing that we thought about. I understand from our lawyers that the age discrimination legislation has certain opt-outs, and I think that the single-room rent is probably one of them. Someone is having a look at this, but I think that that is what I have been told. There are also one or two other exclusions, but I have a feeling that that was included in the legislation as an area that cannot be addressed under age discrimination.

[93] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you, John, for answering those quite lengthy and in-depth questions. I now invite Carl Chapple and Sam Austin from Cymorth Cymru to come to the table. Carl will give us his presentation and then, as with John, he will be invited to answer questions. You already have a list of questions that you know are coming up from sitting over there.

10.30 a.m.

[94] **Mr Chapple:** Thank for the opportunity to address the committee on this issue. Like John, we found that we had a relatively short time to put together a report, so there are, undoubtedly, gaps in the paper that we have given to you. Likewise, if there are particular issues that we can follow up or information that we can gather for you, we would be very happy to do that.

[95] Just skimming through the report, several points have already been discussed in some depth, so I will not repeat those at this stage. I will say, however, that the particular vulnerabilities that affect young people that John outlined certainly came up, as would be expected, in our members' feedback and from Rough Sleepers Cymru when we consulted it on this paper. Several people remarked on the recent developments, some of which are long-term developments, of excellent services and good practices in the area of working with homeless young people. Recently, we have seen a shift in the focus of the national homelessness strategy towards the greater use of the private rental sector. In response to that, we have seen some very good services developing in different parts of Wales, which engage with private sector landlords and give some of them the reassurances that they need to work with some young people to whom they might not otherwise have been prepared to offer accommodation.

[96] We have some very good specialist accommodation services for young people, including advocacy groups, housing advice groups and mediation services. However, we also see that a great many young people are not being supported in specialist services but are in generic homelessness services instead. There are concerns about this in some cases, particularly when young people are required to stay there for prolonged periods, because not only are they not receiving the level of support that they might receive in specialist provision perhaps, but they are also spending long periods with older people who may have more complex support needs and who may have been referred to temporary and supported accommodation by probation services, drug and alcohol services or other services that reflect their particular support needs. That situation may expose young people to 'lifestyles', shall we say, that might not be in their best interests at such a young and impressionable age.

[97] We see a particular divide between rural and urban areas, because, naturally, most specialist services tend to be in those areas where the greatest levels of homelessness are perceived to be, and often are, namely, in urban areas. However, we are seeing that this does not necessarily mean a reduced amount of homelessness in rural areas. There is more of a chicken-and-egg type of lack of provision, and so homeless people generally, certainly young homeless people, are required to move to urban areas to access the services. That is particularly troubling for us as it means that people, especially young people, are sometimes required to remove themselves from the support networks that they have in their local areas. It

also presents rather misleading figures as to where homelessness occurs.

[98] At the same time, there are also concerns that those urban areas that do provide more general specialist support are having difficulties with their capacity to manage the demand for their services. I will explain some of the reasons for that later.

[99] Part of our paper deals with the issue of local authority presentations, much of which has been discussed already this morning. However, I certainly echo the concerns that we have heard about the experiences of young people and the inconsistencies experienced when they present themselves at local authorities, as well as the variations that appear in the relationships between social services and housing departments, and whether people are referred back and forth, as John described, or, in some cases, not even referred across. It is as though the officers are saying, 'This is not our concern', even though it might be, from a housing point of view. Somebody may not be owed a duty by one department, but they may be owed a duty by another department, but that person is not necessarily referred across in every case.

[100] Intentionality is also an issue that comes up repeatedly, with people as young as 17 found to be intentionally homeless. The definition of 'intentionality' bears some examination in this regard. It is sometimes more of a culpability issue—it is not that someone intended to become homeless, but that they have become homeless somehow through their action or omission. An issue that concerns us is the degree to which cases are investigated and examined. If there is a scenario in which a young person is required to leave home by their parents, but, when the parents are contacted, they say 'No, of course my son/daughter can come home', that is the end of the matter, whereas perhaps it is not the end of the matter. Perhaps we need to look at what the young person has to say as well, and consider the consequences of their returning in more detail.

[101] On supported accommodation services, hostel services, foyers, and night shelters to a certain extent, one of the big concerns is around 'silt-up' teams, which is a rather ugly expression used to describe this work. It is difficult in some cases for people to move on. We have already discussed the difficulties around the availability of permanent accommodation, and this has a knock-on effect on those front-line services that are supporting people trying to access permanent accommodation. The implications of not being able to move people on in a timely way can be devastating. For a start, there is the impact of that on those individuals who may have been in a hostel for a number of months and who may not be ready to move on, or who may enthusiastically want to move on to access education or employment, neither of which is accessible if you have a rent well in excess of £100 a week. Yet, being unable to move on in a timely way can be demoralising, and can expose people to mental health problems and all kinds of difficulties that go with having your life put on hold. It also prevents the freeing up of beds for other people to move in. We need to bear in mind that the role of front-line hostel services is to provide temporary accommodation for people, and also to assess people's needs and move them on into the appropriate kind of accommodation for them in a timely way. In some cases, it may be perfectly appropriate for someone to be in a hostel of that kind for a prolonged period, because people sometimes have complex support needs and it may take them a long time to build relationships with people, and to move them on when accommodation becomes available. In other cases, it may be that someone has minimal support needs, and, ideally, you would want to move them on as quickly as possible, to promote their independence, to prepare them for moving on and to facilitate that as quickly as possible. When that cannot be done, it generates real problems.

[102] I will touch briefly on the issue of tenure, which was mentioned earlier, with regard to private sector accommodation. We agree entirely with the sentiments that were expressed around the need for appropriate security of tenure for people in the private sector. Similarly, we feel that we need to consider carefully the appropriate form of tenure for people in short-

term temporary accommodation where support is provided. Concerns have been raised about the use of assured shorthold tenancies in those forms of accommodation; there is very little use of such tenancies in hostel accommodation, as it is not felt to be appropriate to provide six-month tenancies when you are trying to move people on.

[103] There are a couple of issues around permanent accommodation that I would raise, which account for the move-on problems that people experience in supported accommodation. The housing benefit issue has been raised. The single-room rent is a massive concern across Wales. We undertook a brief survey, which is in our paper, of the differences between the single-room rent and realistic local rent levels, and we are seeing a variation. The minimum was £5 a week in Barry, an area of Wales that has relatively low rent in the private rental accommodation sector, and the greatest was £22 per week. When you bear in mind that you are talking about people who are in receipt of the jobseeker's allowance, which is £44 per week, you realise that you are leaving people with very limited choices if they are expected to use half of their jobseeker's allowance to subsidise their rent. That is putting people into exactly those situations that John was describing of pressure to find that money in other ways.

10.40 a.m.

[104] The lack of affordable accommodation in the private sector is the key problem, but there are real concerns about the quality of accommodation and the lack of regulation in the private sector. We have seen some regulation come in through the houses in multiple occupancy legislation, but that is generally focused on larger properties, and there is rather more discretion regarding smaller properties as to whether regulation is developed. We are seeing cases of landlords specifying that they do not want people on benefits—they want professional people in their properties. As John mentioned, the move towards the local housing allowance and away from choice regarding whether housing benefit is paid directly to landlords or to tenants will only have a negative impact on that. We expect to see landlords withdraw even further from this sector.

[105] I will comment briefly on healthcare access, which was also mentioned earlier. You will hear later from Dr Kay Saunders about her practice in Cardiff, and I think that you will hear just how effective GP services can be in engaging with homeless people, which is certainly not the case across the country. In fact, Kay's practice is unique in Wales. We also have evidence that, as well as measures taken by generic health practices to facilitate the engagement of homeless people, there is a great deal of benefit to be found in targeted specialist support, particularly in the areas of nursing and outreach support where people visit homelessness services and rough sleepers on the street, and also in terms of drug and alcohol support. We are delighted that the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee and the Health and Social Services Committee have approved the recommendation to appoint a health and homelessness co-ordinator at the Assembly. We look forward to that post being advertised and to someone being in post so that we can offer what support we can in that regard.

[106] The recommendations that we have put forward are outlined in the paper, but I will mention a couple of them. Supporting People is absolutely key to this agenda. We very much echo the points that John mentioned about safeguarding that funding stream and supporting it further. We would like to see local authorities in Wales looking at youth homelessness locally and considering whether or not their generic services are fully meeting the needs of young homeless people in their areas, or whether there is a need to develop more targeted, specialist services.

[107] John again mentioned issues around the consistency of approach by local authorities and the need, perhaps, to beef up some guidance. We had a conference last year, which was jointly held by Shelter Cymru, Homeless Link Cymru and the Welsh Assembly Government, to look at the national homelessness strategy for Wales. One of the consistent themes that

came back from delegates was the need for firm leadership from the Assembly, and the acknowledgement that, although some local authorities are embracing this agenda with enthusiasm, that is not consistently the case across Wales and that there is a need in some areas for more robust guidance.

[108] We also need to mention local homelessness fora. Such fora operate across Wales and, in some cases, they are very successfully pulling together statutory, private and voluntary sector service providers to work jointly on their local homelessness strategies. However, again, this is not consistently the case, and to use the example of health, because I happen to have some evidence on that from a study that we did earlier in the year, there is evidence that there is not a great deal of overlap between local homelessness fora and local health boards, for example. We feel that there needs to be 100 per cent overlap in terms of the representatives of those respective bodies and voluntary and local authority representation.

[109] Finally, on the local housing allowance, the Assembly really needs to monitor closely the impact of that legislation on youth homelessness. On the stock transfer issue, the issues that came up earlier are being addressed by a current piece of work that Cymorth Cymru has undertaken, which looks at the evidence from Wales, Scotland and England to try to draw up some good practice guidance in preparation for any future stock transfer. Sorry, I have also gone over the five minutes.

[110] **Janice Gregory:** That is okay, Carl. I will take questions from Members now. I would like to bring this section to a close by 11 a.m., which means that we will have run over the original time allotted, but that is not an issue. However, that is what I am aiming for. Mick will comment now, followed by Mark.

[111] **Mick Bates:** Thank you for your report. I have two pretty straightforward points. I was very interested in your comments about the movement of people from rural areas into urban areas and I will raise the point that I raised with John about data. You asked for robust leadership; I am asking you for some robust data. Can you give us an indication of that, if not the numbers? I put it to John that the official figure is one thing, but it would appear that you need a multiplier of at least three in order to gain some guidance about the services and the provision of accommodation that the Government needs to provide.

[112] The second issue is on service delivery and co-ordination. I think that that is your third recommendation point. We have known about this for an awfully long time and I would like to hear your views on whether or not we are training people who have the capacity to deal with issues across all of these portfolios. Is it a case of a lack of training or is it simply impossible to work across these boundaries?

[113] **Mr Chapple:** On the first issue of the movement of people from rural to urban areas, we certainly have a great deal of anecdotal evidence, but I do not have figures to hand in terms of particular urban areas. I would be very happy to go to talk to our members in rural areas about that and I think that it would be a quite a straightforward piece of work for them to collect the data of their current residents, for example, in hostel services and to work out what proportion of them are from their local area and what proportion are from other areas. Sam, your organisation provides services across several local authority areas in south Wales. I do not know whether you can comment on the urban areas and where your clients are coming from.

[114] **Ms Austin:** We are seeing that a lot of young people, and older people, from some areas are gravitating to Cardiff where there is a lot of hostel accommodation. So, there is some evidence already. I know that Caerphilly has spoken to Cardiff in the past and has looked at the numbers on its database in terms of people going into hostels. Quite a high percentage of people going into hostels in Cardiff come from the areas around Cardiff

because of the lack of direct-access hostels in those areas. So, there are figures out there that can be quite easily collated.

[115] **Mr Chapple:** I will work on that and try to get something to the committee by the end of next week.

[116] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you. Send it to me or the clerk and we will send it to all the Assembly Members.

[117] **Mr Chapple:** Thank you. The second point, namely the staff training issue and whether it is realistic for people to have such an array of skills, is important. People working in hostel services, for example, may be working with people with relatively low support needs, as discussed, but they may also be working with people who have quite profound emotional problems, learning difficulties or mental health, drug or alcohol problems, and you are absolutely right that it is a real issue. On the training side of it, we are seeing in Wales a real development of the training that is available for front-line workers, and Cymorth Cymru is involved in delivering some of that training. It highlights several issues, one of which is this understanding that front-line staff need to have a spectrum of training. They do not necessarily need a massively in-depth amount of training on every issue, as I do not think that it is feasible that every hostel worker should be an expert in mental health, for example, but it is reasonable that everyone working in those services should have a degree of understanding of those issues and, perhaps most importantly, should know where to get that specialist support when it is needed. It also highlights the need for close co-operation between organisations and the need for full engagement, for example, of mental health services and community mental health teams with hostel service providers, outreach services and day-centre support. This relationship is completely mutual; it works both ways. That would also include primary healthcare, drug and alcohol support, mental health support and training and education—the full gamut of care and advice that people need. So, it highlights the issue of training and the need for external support where that is needed. Before I moved to Wales, I worked with rough sleepers in the west end of London and I have worked in several hostels. The last two hostels that I worked at both had dedicated drugs and mental health workers as part of the staff team. I am not aware of any such services in Wales that work in quite that way. There are drugs workers in at least one hostel that I know of in Wales, but it is not as widespread or as common a practice in Wales as it is in other parts of the UK.

10.50 a.m.

[118] **Laura Anne Jones:** On the front-line staff, that first point of contact is very important. We cannot expect them to be experts in every field, as you rightly say, although they need to have a certain degree of understanding of all the areas. However, that first point of contact and a knowledge of where to put those people, as well as joint working with specialist services, are crucial—it is crucial that they have those in front of them so that they know where to go.

[119] As well as dealing with the health and drugs issues, some young people will want to get back to standing on their own two feet almost immediately and hopefully what you say links in to educational and job opportunities. Was that part of what you were going to say? So, in terms of support networks, they also need those opportunities laid before them.

[120] **Mr Chapple:** Yes. I think that Sam might have something to say on this.

[121] **Ms Austin:** I agree with what you say on front-line workers. Education and training is crucial for young people. The assessments that our organisation does, and other organisations throughout Wales do, need to be comprehensive and holistic. They should not only be about accommodation needs, but also about their financial, benefits and educational

needs. We look at education and training. We have young people in our projects who are still at school and are studying for their GCSEs and A-levels. It is difficult, in that sort of situation, to continue going to school. It is crucial to encourage young people to attend training or education or go to college. Unfortunately, many mainstream training providers do not make provision for young people in that type of crisis, for example, when they are homeless and cannot attend college from Monday to Friday and from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.. Therefore, their training allowance is stopped and they are on and off benefits, which makes life very difficult. In our organisation, and in many others across Wales, we have developed a pre-vocational training programme for our young people called Learning for Life, which is about getting young people interested and engaged in training again, because our young people—not exclusively, but predominantly—stopped attending school regularly at the ages of 14 and 15. So, they are disengaged from the education system and are not ready for mainstream training. This is about restoring their interest in training and they can quickly move on once they have that interest again.

[122] **Mark Isherwood:** On ex-offenders, the last time that I visited a prison, some prisoners told me that their main concern was housing, but they were also concerned that, under the priority needs allocations, they would have to return to the area that they came from. They felt that that would lead them back to where the problem started in the first place. Do you have a view on how we should tackle that versus the other complaint that we regularly receive relating to local Nimbyism, namely, ‘Why can our children not get a house when these people have moved in with all their troubled backgrounds?’ What do we need to do to overcome that attitude?

[123] You mentioned the Supporting People grant. What do you think the impact will be if the Supporting People revenue grant does not increase, at least in line with inflation, and do you think that the Supporting People grant needs to be ring-fenced? The Housing Act 1985 introduced shorthold agreements as an incentive to increase private rental housing. We have discussed many of the associated problems today and the need for longer shorthold agreements, but do you have a view on the impact that that might have on supply? Might it disincentivise landlords or would they see it as an opportunity to address some of their own issues?

[124] You have e-mailed me about housing benefit on many occasions and have highlighted some good practice models in Wales, where organisations have found some ways to help people to address the loss of housing benefit when they enter full-time education. I wonder whether you could comment on those.

[125] In terms of night shelter, again, you have e-mailed me with views on how we can turn that into more of a gateway to broader service provision. I would like your view on that.

[126] Finally, I will just mention stock transfer. As a former housing association board member, it was my experience that we never evicted anyone other than through the courts after a suspended Order had been breached. All housing associations, in my experience, are desperate to increase development and supply and have no incentive to deny people access. In many areas, as I have experienced in Merseyside, a good relationship between the local authority and the housing associations from inception ensures that the issues over the allocation of housing should not arise.

[127] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you, Mark. Carl, could you respond as briefly as possible to all those questions?

[128] **Mr Chapple:** On the prison-leaver issue, it is a concern if people are being required to move back to areas where they were previously experiencing difficulties and are trying to start afresh, as it were. There are concerns around prison leavers in any case, in terms of the

accommodation in which people are finding themselves. People leaving prison in Wales have a statutory entitlement to housing support, but I think that there are concerns about the kind of housing that people are finding themselves in when they are leaving. Quite often, it is still bed-and-breakfast accommodation at this stage. I think that the new legislation around bed-and-breakfast accommodation, which, at this stage, will apply to young people and families with young children, may have an impact of focusing attention on those particular client groups and removing the need for those particular client groups to stay in bed-and-breakfast accommodation inappropriately or for prolonged periods; that may, in fact, increase the number of prison leavers, for example, and people in other priority needs groups, using bed-and-breakfast accommodation in the short term. The local issue is an issue across the board in many ways, because the fact that people need to be able to demonstrate a local connection to an area in order to settle and to receive housing benefit, in some cases, means that, if people go to other areas, they may find themselves experiencing other difficulties.

[129] With regard to how to address that, I am slightly reluctant to speculate although I would have thought that there could be some sort of practical reciprocal arrangements established between authorities, for example. We know that this happens between people who are accessing services out of borough through social services, for example, having their accommodation paid for by their home borough. I do not know whether this is something that can also be explored with housing, but I do not have too much information on that.

[130] The Nimbyism issue is a depressing phenomenon across the country. I was recently at a residents meeting in my local area, which had been called by the police to talk about local community relations and so on. Around 20 minutes was spent on the serious concern about the drug problem in the area and then there was around 20 minutes of outrage that someone was suggesting setting up a drugs service in the area. It was depressing to witness, and we see the same with homelessness services and the assumption that homelessness services will, somehow, be detrimental to communities rather than providing a positive resource for communities. After all, it is local people who will benefit from them. Therefore, there is a need for greater education and understanding, not only within local communities but, particularly in some cases, with local authority planning departments and elected members.

[131] As John mentioned, it certainly is not the case that supporting people revenue grant services are resting on their laurels with a very comfortable level of funding. We saw a welcome increase, relatively on previous years, in the supporting people revenue grant last year. However, there is concern that if there were to be a reduction in real terms, in terms of not having the inflationary rise, we would expect to see a detrimental impact on services, staffing levels and the support that would be provided to young people in those accommodation services.

11.00 a.m.

[132] We are concerned about ring-fencing and the transfer of the supporting people revenue grant from Welsh Assembly Government control to local authority control simply because of this inconsistency in service delivery and awareness of issues within local authorities. There would be the worry that, if the supporting people revenue grant were to be transferred fully to the control of local authorities in Wales, in some areas, the money would not be spent on the areas for which it was intended. If it is unhypothecated, if it is not ring-fenced, we would have grave concerns for some parts of the country. That is why we have been campaigning for it to remain where it is, with the Welsh Assembly Government, where it can be administered without any concerns, as raised, about Nimbyism, for example.

[133] **Mark Isherwood:** Back in 1985 when the Act was introduced, the intention was to incentivise more people to enter the market and provide housing. What impact, if any, would an extension of shorthold tenure have on supply?

[134] **Mr Chapple:** That is an interesting point, and it is probably an area about which we need to speak to our members who are working with private sector landlords, in order to gauge their views. I hope that there would be enough of a run-up to the introduction of any new tenure for agencies to work with landlords to continue the good work that has been going on in some parts of the country on developing relationships with private-sector landlords and providing the support that some tenants require to sustain their tenancies. I hope that this would go some way towards alleviating landlords' concerns. It is certainly an issue that we need to talk to landlords about well in advance.

[135] On the issue of housing benefit, the scheme that I referred to when we discussed this is run by the YMCA hostel in Cardiff. The scheme seeks to encourage its residents into employment and into training in particular. It does so in several ways, one of which is to assist people with the payment of their service charges. The service charge is the money that hostel residents pay on top of their housing benefit, which is paid by the local authority. It covers lighting, heating and, if food is provided, perhaps the food. It is generally in the region of £10 to £20 a week—the higher charges are for those who receive food. It is still not a solution to the problem. It is still a tremendous barrier for people who would not, for example, be able to go into full-time employment and find themselves liable for the full housing benefit payment too.

[136] Speaking as a former project worker and hostel manager, I found that one of the most difficult things that I ever had to do was to deal with clients that I was desperately trying to move on but could not. When they are keen, they want to work, go back to school or go to university, it is difficult to have to advise them that they may find themselves in serious difficulties a few weeks or months down the line, although you cannot tell someone not to do something. If they run up arrears at the hostel it will not make things easy for them, so it is a gamble for them to go into full-time employment or training. It is a big problem for them.

[137] **Janice Gregory:** I think that that is all in response to Mark's questions.

[138] **Mr Chapple:** The final one was on stock transfer. I will just mention again that we are doing that piece of work: we are consulting our members and people in Scotland and in England to see what guidance needs to be in place and what agreements need to be negotiated prior to a transfer between local authorities and housing associations, to ensure that stock is available for local authorities to fulfil their statutory duties.

[139] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you, Carl. Leanne is next and I will then ask you to answer the questions briefly. Laura also wants to make a point.

[140] **Leanne Wood:** Some of these questions ask for quite a lot of detailed information, so perhaps you could respond in writing to some of the more difficult ones. I am conscious of the time now, Chair.

[141] **Janice Gregory:** That would be fine.

[142] **Leanne Wood:** I am concerned about the encouragement of the culture of dependency on housing benefit, which you have talked about, and the difficulties with moving on. From my experience of working in Women's Aid, I know that refuge accommodation is dependent on housing benefit and that that can prevent women who are working from going into refuge accommodation; it can also stop women who want to work from finding work because the benefit levels are quite high. You mentioned allowances in hostels, to try to cover some of those extra costs; however, is there anything that you think that we could do as a committee, perhaps in terms of making representations to the Westminster Government, to try to alleviate some of those problems? What would you

recommend on that?

[143] On your conclusions and recommendations, in the first one you talk about more provision of temporary accommodation for young people. I presume that you are talking about hostel provision and night shelter provision—is that the case?

[144] **Mr Chapple:** I was also thinking of less intensively supported projects, such as training flats and places where young people can experience a degree of independence with the assurance that support is available should they need it, as a kind of stepping stone.

[145] **Leanne Wood:** The first question that I would ask on that is whether you have a rough idea of how much provision is needed to meet the gap. How many extra hostel beds do we need? How many of those training flats would we need?

[146] On the local housing allowance—we have already talked about the under-25 rule, so I will not go into that again—I understand that there can be a situation whereby if people are designated as vulnerable, they can opt out of the system. Do you think that there is anything that the Welsh Assembly Government or this committee can do through this review to try to promote more of those opt outs or to try to change the criteria so that more people can be designated as vulnerable for those purposes? I am thinking about what we can do to protect people, to prevent them from becoming homeless later on due to difficulties with paying rent because of the poverty problems that John outlined.

[147] My final question is kind of linked to housing stock transfer, but not entirely, and concerns evictions following anti-social behaviour orders. I do not have any figures on this, but I presume that this issue affects more younger people than older people. I accept that it would be difficult to re-house people who have been evicted for anti-social behaviour under a local authority system, but do you think that it could be more difficult to re-house them after stock transfer?

[148] **Mr Chapple:** On women's refuges and housing benefit—of course, this is not a women's refuge issue entirely; it goes across a range of supported accommodation—the issues that you outlined are the same issues that we have been discussing, essentially, apart from the fact that you also talked about people who are already working and who have found that they would not be able to afford to go into a refuge. I do not know to what degree discretionary housing benefit can come into use here. That is something that we need to look at and I know that the committee commented on the need for local authorities to make better use of discretionary housing benefit about six months ago. I need to go back to our members and ask them whether they have seen any changes in that and whether there is scope for greater use of the discretionary benefit.

[149] **Janice Gregory:** It would be useful if you could put that in a letter and forward it to the committee.

[150] **Mr Chapple:** Sorry, I am aware of the time restrictions, but I wonder if Sam has any comments.

[151] **Janice Gregory:** It is all right. Do not worry; I am not beating anyone with a big stick.

11.10 a.m.

[152] **Ms Austin:** I think that that links in with Carl's point about training flats. Our organisation feels that, when you have a young person of 16 or 17 in 24-hour supported accommodation, the step then into an independent flat—perhaps a local authority flat—is

huge. If you can have interim accommodation—small steps towards that level of independence, for example, a training flat, where there is a level of support going in, but it costs less to rent it—you have more of a lever to encourage a young person to go into training, education, and employment. Therefore, you need to have all those little steps towards independence.

[153] Carl is right about the use of discretionary housing benefits. There are local authorities that do not use it well in Wales, and there are some that do use it well. However, again, I am not sure about what happens if someone is going into a hostel. In our case, because we work with young people, few people, usually, are already in employment when they come to us; we try to encourage them to go into employment. Therefore, it is about putting pressure on local authorities' housing benefit departments to use that discretionary housing benefit generously, I suppose.

[154] **Janice Gregory:** Could you answer the rest of Leanne's questions, Carl?

[155] **Mr Chapple:** On hostel beds, again, I can go to our members and try to collect some proper information on that. However, Steve Gamgee from the Wallich Clifford Community will be speaking later; the Wallich Clifford Community has recently developed new residential services, and I am sure that Steve will have some insights into the local need there. In some cases they were developed in areas where there was no or limited provision, and you will also hear later from Carol Crowther from Pembrokeshire, who will describe the situation there, where there is extraordinarily limited provision. We will try to pull that data together for you.

[156] On local housing allowance vulnerability, the new regulations will allow claimants to be exempted from the need to have their housing benefit paid directly to them if they can demonstrate that they have a particular vulnerability. Again, I am sure that Carol will be able to enlighten you on this, and on the experience in Pembrokeshire. However, our concern, essentially, is that we need to preserve choice in the same way that those of us who have mortgages, or those of us who rent accommodation will often choose to make those monthly payments by direct debit, because if we did not, sooner or later we would mess it up. People living in rented accommodation, who are in receipt of housing benefit, are no different, and we are all vulnerable to making poor decisions now and then. As you imply, we need to make it as easy as possible for people to opt out of this, and to demonstrate vulnerability. However, if there needs to be a default, I would prefer that there were a default that says that everyone is vulnerable unless you can prove that you are not, rather than the present situation, where you are not vulnerable unless you can prove that you are, which I think is the wrong balance.

[157] On ASBOs, I agree that someone with a track record of having lost accommodation because of anti-social behaviour is unlikely to experience particular ease at accessing the private rental sector. Landlords generally want to see references, and they will want to be reasonably confident that someone does not have a track record that spells trouble for them. I will ensure that we look at that as part of drawing up the guidance around stock transfer.

[158] **Janice Gregory:** You are next, Laura. Please, be brief.

[159] **Laura Anne Jones:** You have stated strongly that you want to abolish the single-room rent, and you have made clear why you would want to do that. Would you like to see the under-25s allowance in line with the over-25s allowance, or do you have another figure in mind? Do you have any figures for us of the cost of putting it up to the same level as the over-25s, for us to consider in committee, and could you forward them to us?

[160] **Mr Chapple:** Where the level is set is considerably more realistic and fairer for over-25s than under-25s, and we would welcome the abolition of this current unfair system, and

everyone being put on the same level. Whether or not that is always realistic in all parts of the country needs to be considered locally. There would be a suggestion that, as with the local housing allowance, if it were set higher, then landlords would simply put their rent up to meet that, and there will always be part of the market that will be inaccessible to people on benefits, and that is the nature of the market. The issue of what the numbers would be is something that we would need to get from local authorities, in order to find out the number of people on housing benefit who are under 25 and to collate that information. We would then factor in those people who we consider at this stage to have been excluded from that market, and who are not part of the figures. However, I do not have that information to hand, so I suggest that you speak to the Welsh Local Government Association about that.

[161] **Janice Gregory:** The WLGA is coming to committee in December.

[162] **Leanne Wood:** Perhaps you could ask them for a written response?

[163] **Janice Gregory:** After this meeting, everyone will be forwarded a list of points that you may feel that you would like to expand on. We are always happy to take anything that you think you may have overlooked during the presentation, so there is plenty of scope for you to give us additional information, which we would appreciate. Thank you for your attendance this morning.

We will now break.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 11.16 a.m. a 11.30 a.m.
The meeting adjourned between 11.16 a.m. and 11.30 a.m.*

[164] **Janice Gregory:** I apologise that time for this second part has been drastically reduced, but I think that you can see the Assembly Members' enthusiasm to glean information from our presenters. So, we make no apology for that, as that is what we are here for, but I apologise to our guests that their portion has been reduced.

[165] Before we proceed, if anyone turned on a mobile phone, BlackBerry, pager or anything else during the break, please turn it off. You all know about the arrangements with the microphones and headsets.

[166] At this juncture, I welcome a new member of the committee who was elected to our ranks yesterday. Trish Law has decided to join the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee. I am sure that you will enjoy it, Trish; we are a nice gang on occasions, and we do some really wonderful work. I am extremely proud of the work that we have done over the last three years.

[167] Without further ado, our next presenters are Steve Gamgee, chief executive of Wallich Clifford, and Babs Walsh, who is Wallich Clifford's regional manager for east Cardiff. Steve, are you going to lead this presentation?

[168] **Mr Gamgee:** Yes.

[169] **Janice Gregory:** That will be lovely. Please make your presentation, and then if those Members who wish to ask questions indicate, I will group your questions to Steve.

[170] **Mr Gamgee:** Thank you for this opportunity; I will try to keep it brief.

[171] Being the chief executive, I do not actually do any work, obviously. *[Laughter.]* Babs is the one who is more au fait with the hands-on work, so I propose to make some broad brushstrokes, and then Babs will drill down to more detailed stuff. Also, I am aware that John

and Carl are very experienced in policy matters, legislation and so on, but that is not my strong point, so I have deliberately homed in on the practicalities of running the projects and services that we run. I will not go through the paper word by word, but pick out what seem to me to be the broad brushstrokes that have relevance to a particular project.

[172] We do an awful lot of work with people who have already become homeless—we are dealing daily with people who have multiple problems. Numerically, however, more of the people who we support are people in tenancies that they are in danger of losing. We then have a third range of projects to deal with particular things such as bond boards and work with rough sleepers, and that is outside the first two project types.

[173] On the residential projects, we have a night shelter in Cardiff—night shelters were mentioned earlier—and this really does meet a need for people who have a street-based lifestyle. There are many people who are not accepted in any hostel. The night shelter works in a slightly different way and accommodates those people. Typically, there is a range of chaotic behaviours. I remember going to the night shelter once, and the names of 10 people were up on the wall. I asked, ‘What are the main issues for these 10?’, and the co-ordinator went down the list, saying ‘Heroin, heroin, heroin, heroin, heroin, alcohol, heroin, heroin, heroin, glue’. That was 10 people in one night shelter. Funnily enough, though, it works; imagine that collection of problems in one building, yet it works. In fact, people were so scared of having a night shelter that we only got planning permission for six months, and then, because there were no problems at the end of the six months, the neighbour wrote a letter in support of making the shelter permanent. So, there are difficult problems, but you can work with them. However, the crucial thing about the night shelter is that their chaotic lifestyle really does militate against those people entering mainstream provision—I am sure that Kay will elaborate on that later.

[174] Edwina Hart went to the night shelter on one occasion when there were three people there who are active intravenous drug users, and wanted a detox, but the wait at that time was about nine months. Now, in nine months’ time, they will be somewhere else.

[175] **Dr Saunders:** Or dead.

[176] **Mr Gamgee:** Yes.

[177] Slightly longer-term accommodation could, very typically, be in a hostel, and Babs is responsible for one of those. The key thing there, again, is working with drug users. We are very proud of the fact that we know how to work with drug users.

[178] We know what the law says, and we are no longer evicting people because they are drug users; we accept them as drug users, and we work with them on their drug use. At one time, 75 per cent of the 25 people in the hostel were working with us on their drug use, and we had more success through accepting their drug use than through telling them to stop it. I suggest that that is a key message that is worth taking on board. Such an ability to work with drug users could be of benefit throughout Wales, but it is not typical.

[179] Another key point that I made in my report is that, when people have reached the night shelter or the hostel, they are already in trouble. We want to have early intervention so that this type of lifestyle does not get deeply embedded. So, nip it in the bud as soon as you can. We have at least one project that deals particularly with young people, perhaps two. We have found that what works with them is activities. Typically, people are expected to sit down with a professional—a social worker, probation officer, or whatever—and talk about their problem and how they need to do something about it. We have found that, if you engage people in activities that could be unrelated to the problem—and, for instance, it is football in this place in Llanelli—they eventually feel that they do not have room for their problem, or

that something else is more important. The probation officers ask, 'How come you manage to turn up to football sober at 9 a.m., when you do not turn up sober to your appointments with me?'. It is because they like doing it. You can reflect that back by highlighting what they are achieving through their activity. I allude in the paper to solution-focused brief therapy, which is a counselling technique. That is the methodology that we use to turn around people's self-perception, so that they see that they have good qualities and abilities, rather than feeling as though they are just a problem to themselves and to others.

[180] Tenancy support projects are for when people are in a tenancy. We can work on practical things around benefit problems and drug issues. Homelessness provision used to work with the fact of homelessness. It then moved increasingly into the fact of being homeless and unemployed. I now feel as though there is another stage to which we need to go, which is building up the human relationships that people need. So many people who are homeless or are clinging on to a tenancy, do not have anyone to love them. I do, because I have a family, but there are so many people that do not have that. It is about having an important person or people in your life, and I really feel as though that is the third element that we need to bring into working with homeless people. If you can do that and point out people's positives, you will get people who feel good about themselves, and, if people feel good about themselves, they are more likely to get their life under control.

[181] The rough sleeper intervention teams used to be known as our breakfast run, and we were accused then of going out and feeding people and then just walking away from them. The whole point of going out to feed breakfast to people could be because they have nowhere else to get a breakfast, but the crucial thing is to make contact with people and then slot them into services. Interestingly, in Newport, 11.6 per cent of homeless men and 32 per cent of homeless women were under the age of 25, yet, over the age of 25, that all changes. I think that that is because women have greater skills and abilities to manage their life, accommodation and things in general, and I think that it points to a great lack of skills typically in young men, which I feel needs to be addressed pointedly.

[182] We have bond boards, and Carol will talk later about the same types of issues. They are very successful at getting people into private accommodation, but it is not so easy with the under 25s. That is the message that has come up beforehand, and we have found the same thing.

11.40 a.m.

[183] Another way of looking at our work is as though it relates not so much to issues of housing and accommodation as to issues around the human being. Often, relationship breakdown is listed as a main cause of homelessness, but that often comes about through other sets of circumstances, such as people's ability to relate to others and so on. We have other projects in which people, whatever their problem, can come to talk to someone, to work out their own solution to that problem, even though it is completely unrelated to homelessness. The fact is that, eventually, any problem can lead to homelessness.

[184] Sometimes, the skills that you need to manage accommodation and manage your life generally take a long time to acquire, especially if, for a long time throughout your childhood, you have not been acquiring those skills, but developing different sorts of coping mechanisms for school, poor parenting and so on. There is a tendency, at least in some local authorities, to judge success as the rate at which people move through a floating support scheme for tenancy support, say. We find that there is no good in people moving through quickly if they come out at the other end just to return. So, there is a quality issue about how you work with people, rather than the speed with which you move people through the system.

[185] **Janice Gregory:** I will just stop you there, Steve. Your paper was very detailed, and I

do not want you to feel as though you need to speak to every item on it. If anyone has any questions, I would rather a member of the committee asked it of you than your feeling as though you need to address every point.

[186] **Mr Gamgee:** Okay. Could I just make a couple more points?

[187] **Janice Gregory:** Yes, that is fine.

[188] **Mr Gamgee:** When I went back to the projects to ask whether there was any point that they would like to make, I asked them about problems with the clients and within the system. I will move on to the system now. It has been clear to the workers in the young persons project that, the word among the over-18 group is that it is not worth engaging with the system once you are over 18. You may not end up as a statistic, because your friends say, 'Do not bother; it is not worth it'. There is a sense in which young people feel as though they are being dismissed and not listened to, and that is a real thing to take on board.

[189] Another thing that was mentioned was assessment and the ability to work across disciplines. It is plain that housing officers in some authorities are assessing only what box you go into—priority need, intentionally homeless, or otherwise—and the actual assessment of need does not figure. What did work was when someone was referred to our emergency bed in the young persons project, as that meant that we could assess their need over a couple of days. That is when you really know what someone needs. It is understandable that housing officers cannot make that assessment, but such an assessment is necessary.

[190] **Leanne Wood:** I have two brief questions. One issue that came up earlier in Cymorth Cymru's evidence, and a recommendation that it made, was to have more hostel places, training, and intermediate housing. Could you give us a figure for what would be needed in additional night shelter hostels and training?

[191] **Janice Gregory:** I would just suggest that you write these questions down, because I will group them with those of three other Assembly Members. If you are anything like me, you will need to have something written down. Sorry, Leanne. Carry on.

[192] **Leanne Wood:** Secondly, have you noticed any recent increase in the number of people going through your breakfast run, or whatever it is called now, since the introduction of the legislation on bed-and-breakfast accommodation? I ask that because local authorities could be in the situation of having to move people out of bed-and-breakfast accommodation quicker to comply with the legislation, and people could end up being lost in the system, not being moved on into more temporary accommodation and so could end up on the streets. Do you have any evidence either to back that up or to contradict it?

[193] **Mick Bates:** Thank you for your report. I think that a theme will emerge that drug abuse plays a key role in the problems of the people you are dealing with. I have two questions. First, you made an important point about self-esteem. It is better for people to do something they like and then to build on that. That often takes some time. Can you indicate how long the transition takes when you find whatever it is that you can hook a person's life onto to build their self-esteem—rather than their sitting there being told, 'Improve your lifestyle or get out of the room'—and how that transition is managed by your team?

[194] The second point in your notes that I was interested in was the mediation project in Carmarthen. I would be interested in seeing more information on that. I am a great believer in restorative justice rather than punishment and retribution. Dealing with the individual—because these are all individual cases—is a very important aspect, and I would like more information on how that mediation project works and what you think are the main outcomes that could be learned from for other projects.

[195] **Mark Isherwood:** I thought that the most telling line of the paper was that it is crucial to make contact. We could almost call this paper, 'It is Crucial to Make Contact'. To focus on the drug-related comments as well, what are your views on the merits of residential detoxification versus detoxification in the community? To what extent are you seeing people with dual diagnostic issues, such as mental health problems, post-traumatic stress disorder, and associated substance misuse issues, and how are you addressing them, given the great paucity of statutory and voluntary provision in that area?

[196] **Janice Gregory:** Laura also has a question, so I will bring Laura in and then you can answer the questions as a whole with Babs.

[197] **Laura Anne Jones:** I just have a quick comment. I want to say how delighted I am that you are using sport and drama to give these people confidence and to bring them together, working as a team. It is the sort of thing that I keep going on about, but it does work. It is a fantastic tool for that.

[198] How are your staff trained? Do you have people coming in who have already been through the process, who have come in to you and gone on to get jobs, houses, to have families, and so on? Do those people come in and talk to the people who are still in your hostels?

[199] **Mr Gamgee:** On whether there should be more hostels, some parts of Wales could benefit from having hostels or night shelter provision. For the places that already have those hostels, the problem, as Carl mentioned earlier, is the blockage of those hostels. You then come to where you can get the move-on accommodation. I would not suggest that you need more hostels in Cardiff, for instance; however, in Pembrokeshire, where there is no hostel, I would say that you need one there. However, the big problem is in moving people through the system. When they are ready, where can they go? In Babs's hostel, there are people who are ready are just waiting for somewhere to go, but there is nowhere to go. You still have people out on the street who want a hostel place.

[200] **Ms Walsh:** There is a big blockage as regards move-on accommodation. The approach that we use is solution-focused brief therapy, working on people's strengths and positives to move them on. However, once someone is at that stage of motivation, it is really important that you can strike while the iron is hot and move people through, whether they are on a waiting list for detox or for move-on accommodation. It is a shame that there are those waiting lists, but there is also the blockage with move-on accommodation, which then results in hostel bed spaces getting blocked, and more people having to wait on the streets to access those spaces.

[201] **Mr Gamgee:** On the question of whether we have noticed any increase in the rough sleeper intervention teams, I must say that, actually, we have not. We certainly have not noticed the numbers dropping; they have stayed about the same. I do not know what that means.

[202] On working with drug users and building up their self-esteem, I suppose that the length of time it takes it differs with different people. You can see a remarkable change. We have a voluntary project, which they have decided to call their taskforce, consisting of homeless people going out to do voluntary work for charity. While some people's self-perception could be that they are a homeless drug addict, from the very first day that they go out there, they see that they are no longer a homeless drug addict; they are a volunteer, a charity worker, a painter and decorator, and so on. So, from the very first day you notice a difference. That always has to be topped up, and some people have longer periods of disadvantage and low self-esteem to overcome than others. So, there is no one answer, I am

afraid.

11.50 a.m.

[203] On mediation, I would also like Babs to talk about this, as she is responsible for one of these projects. We have found that the word 'mediation' is a buzz word, and everybody likes the idea of it. We found that full-blown mediation, whereby you have a mediator between two warring parties, is not necessarily the norm, and that intervention can work and have the desired effect before you get to that mediation point. If you broaden it out to the concept of conflict resolution, then I think that you can encompass more successful interventions. They are very successful with that broad remit. There have been numerous occasions when families have been reunited through just one person having the ability to talk through a process with the young person or with the parent. I also suggest that we steer away from a young person's mediation service because parents will then think that things are stacked up against them.

[204] **Janice Gregory:** Babs, did you want to expand on that?

[205] **Ms Walsh:** Just to say that we have a couple of projects in Monmouthshire and in Carmarthenshire on the prevention of homelessness and young people leaving home. One of the issues that we have had to work out with local authorities is that if the person who is presenting himself or herself as homeless does not go down the avenue of mediation, he or she can be classed as intentionally homeless because of not going for that option. For mediation to work appropriately, it has to be voluntary, and both people must consent to enter into that process. On what was being discussed this morning, hidden homelessness and how statistics are manipulated is one issue, but where young people and families have engaged with this process, it has been a success and we have been able to genuinely prevent homelessness and bring families back together.

[206] **Mr Gamgee:** On residential or community drug detoxification, residential detoxification does work, but you must ensure that, when people leave a detoxification programme and go back into the community, they remain detoxified. That issue is not sufficiently addressed. Anyone who is going to be detoxified would rather it were done in their home than in a hospital, but whatever works is what I would go for. Babs, do you have a view on that?

[207] **Ms Walsh:** The difference between residential detoxification and community detoxification is that, with community detoxification, the resources may not be available to help those people. It is easier to do it residentially. It is about whether those resources are there in the community for that to be successful.

[208] **Mr Gamgee:** On dual diagnosis, we have projects in Cardiff through which we are accommodating 33 people who have a dual diagnosis. They primarily have a mental health issue that is complicated by a substance misuse issue. However, it is not only there that we do come across the issue; we come across it in every single project. Rarely do you get someone presenting themselves as homeless who has just one issue.

[209] **Ms Walsh:** On young people specifically in terms of dual diagnosis, listening to part of the debate this morning, it is always a shame that local authorities do not have multidisciplinary panels before which young people would appear, which would consider their homelessness status, their mental health and educational needs and any substance misuse issues and then provide a support package there and then for them, and which would also address any issues of intentionality. If a young person has become intentionally homeless, it would be for that multidisciplinary panel to provide the support to prevent that from recurring.

[210] One of the biggest issues related to dual diagnosis and young people is that they often fall between child and adult services. Adult services will not accept them because they are a bit too young and children's services cannot effectively work with them. Coupled with that, you might have a substance misuse team that will not intervene because the young person's problem is more related to mental health than substance misuse, or vice versa. The only way to address that with young people is to have those multidisciplinary panels that consider their homelessness status, their mental health and educational needs, and their substance misuse issues.

[211] **Janice Gregory:** You have almost reached the end of the list now.

[212] **Mr Gamgee:** On how our staff are trained, we have a set number of core training requirements that we buy in, but we also choose to make it a core training requirement for people to be trained in solution-focused brief therapy, because we want to ensure that we have consistency throughout the organisation. It is no good having one member of staff meeting a client with a solution-focused approach and then the next one coming along wanting to talk about them being a problem. That would give a mixed message.

[213] Although it is not central to what we are talking about, we also ensure that we offer to staff what we would offer to clients. Therefore, all staff have access to NVQs and all of our clients have access to a City and Guilds profile of achievement. Therefore, if they were working on something or going out to play football, we would not say, 'You are a brilliant footballer'; we would say, 'Well done for turning up on time'. You build up a portfolio. Sometimes, when people get their profile of achievement, it is the first qualification that they have ever had, and their self-esteem is sky high. Therefore, you want consistency and coherence throughout the organisation to give the same message to staff and clients.

[214] **Ms Walsh:** One of the other things that is also encouraged in staff training is developing specialisms on teams. You might have a team of eight support workers working in a residential setting, and they will all have different specialisms, such as mental health, substance misuse, relationship breakdown, housing management and abuse. So, all of those specialisms are on one team. Going back to the debate this morning about how one person can have all of those specialisms, the idea is that you spread them through a team and then the team members work together on those issues.

[215] **Mr Gamgee:** I will just mention a couple of things, which have probably been mentioned before, but they are really important. In terms of the issue of intentionality, there is a philosophical debate about free will and determinism. Very rarely will you have someone saying, 'I will intentionally make myself homeless so that I can go to get a flat'. It does not happen. If people are chucked out by their parents because of their behaviour, there is a philosophical issue of free will and determinism.

[216] I am concerned about Supporting People funding being passed to local authorities without it being ring-fenced. There was a question earlier about rural homelessness versus urban homelessness. The Wallich Clifford Community has produced reports on rural homelessness that are not to do with numbers, but the experience of rural homelessness; they are coming from the client's perspective. So, we did some work on that across Powys, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion, and I can give committee members that report if you would be interested in it.

[217] **Janice Gregory:** Any further information that you would like the committee to consider as part of the review would be most gratefully accepted. Thank you very much. I know that you have to rush off now to attend an important meeting. Thank you for your time this morning and for answering the questions.

[218] We will now move on to Dr Kay Saunders. We have often discussed in this committee the lack of medical provision available to homeless people. So, I am delighted that Dr Saunders has taken the time to come to the committee meeting, although she has not come far. She is the only GP in Wales who works with homeless people. I think that she is certainly to be congratulated for that. Her surgery is just around the corner, in Butetown, so you did not have to travel a huge distance today, Dr Saunders, but thank you very much for coming. I now ask you to make your presentation. As before, we will then have grouped questions.

[219] **Dr Saunders:** Thank you for inviting me to come here today. I am not the only GP who works with the homeless; all GPs have some homeless patients, but I have made it a special interest of mine.

[220] **Janice Gregory:** I stand corrected. This committee believes that you are the only GP who works with homeless people, believe me.

[221] **Dr Saunders:** I am the only one that I can find in Wales who has been commissioned to provide the enhanced service for homeless people, which is part of the GP contract. You might find some more information about that outside the committee, and I can explain a little more about the contractual issues.

[222] I have thought about how I could truncate what I was going to say. I think that my talk comes down to time, skills and attitudes. I have a slightly unusual mainstream practice, but I do not just deal with homeless patients. Until the new contract, in April 2004, I did this without extra resources. I will explain why that causes difficulties.

[223] I hope that you have read my paper; I will not repeat what it says. After preparing the paper, we checked through my numbers and I counted that on 1 October, which is one of the payment nodes, there were 259 homeless people on my practice list, which is around 15 per cent of my patients. We had a quick look at October's consultations yesterday and of the patients whom I saw, 28 per cent were from my homeless group. They are long, complicated consultations, so probably about 50 per cent of my workload is generated by 15 per cent of my list, which gives an indication of the complexity of what we are doing.

12.00 p.m.

[224] My practice is mainstream. Many GPs are apprehensive about working with patients in this situation, because they can be aggressive; they are used to rejection so they are immediately on the defensive. They can be very difficult and unpredictable to deal with. The occurrence of violent incidents is a genuine fear, and if you are afraid of something you are not going to function very well. We are used to the people who come along; my staff are welcoming, which is unusual for many patients, but we have very clear boundaries. In fact, I am known in the hostels as Dr No because I often say, 'No, you are not having that; it is not good for you'. Sometimes people come along wondering what I will say; others come along and say that they know that I am called Dr No and that they want this, that or the other, so I say, 'Cut the crap; what do you really need?'.

[225] Confidence comes from experience, and that is something that I have gathered for myself over the 12 years that I have worked in Cardiff, having landed up in this area. It is extremely interesting work if you do it properly. One complexity is how to get a referral for someone who is homeless and moving around the hostels. So, we spend a great deal of time chasing people, using the e-roof database system that the city centre team uses, getting appointments for people to come to the surgery, trying to spoon-feed people, and ringing up the hostel staff, who are wonderful at shepherding people through the system. Even then, it can fall down. The negotiation through a system that many people who are not homeless do

not find easy is time-consuming and complicated.

[226] I did a little snapshot of the work that I prepared for a presentation that I did last year, which demonstrates the high turnover of patients, the high workload and a feel for the problems that people have. Those issues have already emerged—drugs, alcohol and mental health problems. Last week, we looked at the last 20 homeless patients who had registered with the practice. Eight of them had drug problems; that is 40 per cent. I thought that more of them would have drug problems, but, in fact, 12 of them, 60 per cent, had serious alcohol problems—dependent drinking, which invokes chaos in people’s lives. I also looked at the deaths going back about 18 months. There were 18 deaths among my homeless patients, and the average age of those patients was 47. Five of those were accidental heroin overdoses, as far as we can tell, and the people were mostly in their 30s, which goes back to my comment that, where treatment services are not available, it is a long time to wait or they will be dead by then. That is a serious observation.

[227] I have an example of a very chaotic young girl, aged 19, who is psychotic from drug use. Nobody wants to know, and I do not know quite how we are going to get her through this period of her life. She is not just missing the safety net; there is no safety net.

[228] Opiate use, and substance use in general, is usually covering something up, so it is very important to try to work out what is under the abuse. With regard to the comments about residential detoxification versus home detoxification, if someone goes to have residential detoxification, it is unreal. A great deal of money is spent sending people away for six months. I am not convinced that that is the best use of money. I would like extra resources to treat people when they need it where they are, and the work that is going on with other agencies is very beneficial.

[229] To return to the issue of drug overdoses, quite a few of those happen when people are released from prison and forget that their tolerance has dropped. Another dangerous time is when people come out of rehabilitation. The evidence for opiate users is that methadone maintenance has the best outcome. Some people have been on methadone for many years. The cohort studies show that someone taking a regular dose of methadone can lead a normal life around that and that is the model that has proven to be the most effective in keeping people alive and functioning well. I can give you the references for that sort of work if you want.

[230] On skills, abilities, attitudes and the belief that there is good in everyone, I have equipped myself to do this work by finding out what I need to know along the way. On a positive note, on Monday, I came back to the surgery after a meeting to find that someone who had been in a chaotic situation about six years ago had called in to tell us that she has just completed an honours degree in social sciences at the University of Glamorgan. She is looking for work in a hostel environment in order to give something back now that she has come through it. That is wonderful. We have enough successes with people whom we have nudged in the right direction to make us feel that the work is worth doing.

[231] To raise an important point, we often note people’s address as care of the surgery when they register, which is acceptable to the business service centre, but it is not acceptable for them to be of no fixed abode. That can be a reason why GPs do not register people. However, it is perfectly acceptable to do that. All of the correspondence comes to us and we try to find them.

[232] On resources, there are issues of time and complexity. Once again, aside from patients sometimes being scary, time is something that we do not have. We are running around trying to catch up with all of the other things that we are meant to be doing. So, from that point of view, patients are unattractive because of the workload implications.

[233] On the issue of drug misuse, at the moment it is easier to get treatment under the criminal justice system. So, if my practice expansion plans are supported, I would hope to do more of that work myself. I have the qualifications and skills to catch people before they fall into the criminal justice system. That would be much better. If I put someone on methadone, they look completely different within about three weeks. Even though they are still using a little bit, because you start at a low dose and work up and their use goes down, when they cut their dose down as the methadone goes up, they start looking physically so much better. So, it is a satisfying intervention to make for someone.

[234] The commissioning of my work is not secure. I could be given three months' notice on the enhanced work that I do if circumstances change. So, it is fairly difficult while planning the practice expansion and so on.

[235] I must mention Geraldine, who is one of my support group in the public gallery and who works in the hospital as a nurse outreach worker. The trust has agreed to provide maternity cover for her. We were worried about that a few weeks ago. That will happen, although the timing will make it difficult to have a proper handover. I provide the medical backup for that, so I will have a bit more work to do.

[236] On practice development, I want to expand what I am doing. I would like to flag up the fact that sorting out GP premises is a tortuous process, and it has taken a lot of my energy over the last six months, which I could ill afford to give to it. At the moment, I am still in limbo. The application has been sent back by the LHB for more information. That is an operational problem that I have at the moment. I could then offer attachments to GPs who want to become involved in this work, to give them the confidence to undertake this work and to pass on some of the experience that I have gained.

[237] I thought that I would put down a little wish list. It is very important for the community psychiatric nurses to work in the hostels. I have commented that mainstream psychiatry is of little value in the sort of work that I do. The personality disorder and what underlies the chaos is a difficult problem, and I am looking at the best way to address this. I think that I will shut up and let you ask me some questions.

[238] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you, Kay. Your paper was very interesting, as all of the others have been. The papers raise some questions.

[239] **Leanne Wood:** First, I am astounded by the small numbers of people doing the specialised work that you do. When you are talking about one CPN, two nurses and that sort of thing, it is pretty shocking. Therefore, I think that one of our recommendations must be that these kinds of services need to be expanded.

12.10 p.m.

[240] You talked about what lies underneath the chaotic lifestyles. I used to work as a probation officer, and I have worked with quite a lot of the types of people that you described. It seems that a high percentage of people who go through the criminal justice system have a history of abuse or have had a traumatic childhood. There seem to be few services out there for people to receive counselling or support to try to overcome those abuse issues, and they then try to mask their problems with drugs or alcohol. Can you tell us what facilities are out there for you to refer people to? You mentioned in your wish list dialectical behaviour therapy for personality disorders, which is something concrete, but are there any other services out there that people can be referred to? If there are not, what kind of services would you recommend?

[241] On the issue of prescribing methadone to people, I agree with the comments that you made: once you can get people on a stable script, there is a good chance that they can start turning their lives around. I have also read that methadone can be a particularly damaging drug—heroin users have told me that they sometimes find it more difficult to come off methadone than heroin. In your professional opinion, do you think that it would make sense for you to be able to prescribe heroin to people?

[242] **Mark Isherwood:** I will keep it to two questions. Following on from that, and with regard to maintenance-based treatment, a concern has been raised in my region that funding via substance misuse action teams and community safety partnerships tends to focus overwhelmingly on maintenance-based treatment, often to the exclusion of abstinence-based treatment. What do you think should be the balance between the two, according to the different needs of people and the stages that they may have reached in their programmes?

[243] Secondly, with the reconfiguration of primary healthcare services and the move, in many areas, to primary-care resource centres, how do you feel that your sort of specialist interest could be accommodated if it had to be delivered from a primary-care resource centre? I have found that they are often driven more by the size of the land available than the wishes and needs of vulnerable local populations.

[244] **Mick Bates:** Thank you for your report. First, I wonder if we could have a note on the GP contract. If I understood your opening remarks, there is a section in there about something to do with homelessness. I was unaware of that, and it would be helpful if you were to put that in the context of this discussion.

[245] Of your three main issues—time, skills and attitudes—I will focus on skills. An issue that I raised earlier concerned the training needs of people who deliver these services. You made an interesting comment that you have done a six-month psychiatry course, yet you found it to be of little use in your work, which seems paradoxical to me. Could you give me an insight into what skills you think are necessary, beyond the dialectical behaviour therapy, so that we can include in our recommendations the type of training that needs to be built up in establishments so that we can have greater resources?

[246] **Janice Gregory:** You have enough to do, by the sound of it, Kay; we provide the GP contracts, so do not worry about that.

[247] **Mick Bates:** I thought that the contractual issue was interesting.

[248] **Dr Saunders:** The numbers of people currently working on this are small and we could do more if we had more people. On counselling and what lies beneath the chaos, I have a very skilled counsellor in my practice, but people are not necessarily ready for counselling straight away—there is a sort of partitioning between having to bundle up the bad things that have happened, concentrating on the future and coming back to that. The sort of treatment that you need is individually tailored treatment. As a GP, knowing what the protocols are and what the advice is, every day I tailor treatment to the person sitting next to me. Part of the skill of being a GP is trying to work out what a person needs at that time; frustration arises, of course, if you do not have the things available that you need. The dialectical behaviour therapy is interesting, as it helps people to cope with regulating their emotions and with distress—all the things that children learn with good parenting, such as boundaries, how to behave towards other people and how to tolerate frustration and so on, which a lot of people who end up in these situations have never learned. If they have been through care, it has been disjointed, so it is a case of taking them from where they are and trying to teach them skills. They say, ‘I am ever so depressed; my mood swings’, and their mood swings from one minute to the next. However, it is not depression—it is just constant, variable emotion. Many of these people end up on powerful anti-psychotic drugs, and I worry about their long-term

effects. It is difficult to know what is best.

[249] Therefore, I would like an extension of the time available to talk to people. There are various counselling models, which we need to have more availability for. I sometimes refer people to the community mental health team, saying ‘This person needs to see the clinical psychologist’; the referral comes back, stating, ‘no mental health issues—back to GP’, but the personality disorder is not treatable by the GP. So, fractured personalities, as I mentioned, are a huge problem for society. I am trying to work out the best way to help, and I am getting some successes with some patients, just by asking questions and trying to get people to think about things. However, my time is limited—I have 1,750 patients to try to look after. I probably need to think about that in more detail and maybe give a considered answer to exactly what I would like to see.

[250] On methadone, as I say, the maintenance is evidence based. There is a myth that methadone is more addictive than heroin. If someone has moved on, has done a degree and is in work, it becomes a nuisance having to go and collect the methadone. You can reduce it slowly, so that they hardly notice, and it then may become, slightly, a placebo, and they can stop it when the time is right. What I do not like are programmes where they have to be off it by a set date, because that is not personalised to the patient. That might be fine for someone to do a quick Subutex detoxification, but it is not just about the detoxification—it is about the before and after.

[251] On alcohol, alcoholics go around in circles far more than opiate addicts. I find that opiate users tend to get to a time in their life—about 30—when they think, ‘What the hell have I done with my life?’. They want to be off it, and they do quite well—they may stay on the methadone, but they make a change. However, those with alcohol problems go around and around in circles—it is easier, of course, because it is legal.

[252] Therefore, for most people, it is methadone or Subutex. Subutex gives people a clearer head, so you have to be careful, what is underneath. Methadone is still a bit of a cloud. Again, my experience is with methadone, but I could easily do Subutex if I had more time. So, it comes down to tailoring it for particular patients, and what is right for them—not fitting them into some programme that sets that they are going to be off it by a certain date. The main problem with methadone is damage to the teeth. Therefore, as long as you keep reminding them that they must take proper care of their oral hygiene—

[253] **Leanne Wood:** You can get sugar-free methadone.

[254] **Dr Saunders:** Even the sugar-free methadone is not nice on the teeth.

[255] On the primary care resource centre, I want to look after people who are on my list. I do not want to be unable to prescribe antibiotics if they have an abscess from an injection site. So, if you are talking about a primary care resource centre where you are seeing other people’s patients, that is like what you do in secondary care. I do not believe that you can generalise—it depends who is in the area, and how many homeless people you have.

[256] Last year, there was talk about the homeless service being put into the Cardiff Royal Infirmary with other vulnerable groups, which I do not believe are compatible with each other. Does that mean that I will not do it any more, because this is my practice, and that is not? What will happen to my patients? Will someone look after them who knows what they are doing, or will it be a succession of locums? There is a balance between taking advantage of whoever happens to land in an area and is good at doing something, and arranging services so that they are sustainable. In terms of my practice development, I am single-handed at present, and, if something happens to me, it will stop. I want to have something set up where other people are doing it, and it is sustainable—I do not want to retire for a while, but I want

to be able to hand something on, as a secure service.

12.20 p.m.

[257] So, the primary care resource centres are a bit of an unknown. No-one is quite sure what they want to put in them, and it will vary from place to place as to what is appropriate. There needs to be proper dialogue between local health boards and the general practitioners in the area as to who is interested in what and who would like to come to do attachments to learn more. There is no set way of training.

[258] You could ask what is different about this work from general medical services; it is just a lot of GMS and then you need the psychiatric interest and the substance misuse knowledge. My mainstream psychiatry is from 22 years ago, or whenever it was, and it was interesting to learn about what ends up in an ordinary standard psychiatric hospital. However, as I have gained experience and talked to patients and so on, mainstream psychiatry has changed, and it is much less tolerant of behaviours that do not fit into categories. The dual diagnosis problem is bigger than it was 22 years ago but, maybe, in Middlesbrough, where I was at the time, there was not so much substance misuse. Psychiatry needs to mature in order to be able to cope with these complex patients. Having the psychiatric grounding was useful, but I am considering what I think is important for people and what skills we need.

[259] The personality disorder question has risen in the last 10 years or so, and the prisons are full of people who are categorised in that way. As I say, I think that it comes back to something that happened in childhood, which means that people exhibit chaotic behaviours that people cannot cope with. Therefore, somehow trying to catch people at a time when they are ready to change and to channel them in the right direction is what we need to be doing, and that applies to all ages of the homeless population.

[260] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you. I think that you have covered everything, have you not?

[261] **Dr Saunders:** You wanted more information on the contractual issues. Shall I just quickly say something about that?

[262] **Janice Gregory:** Yes, absolutely.

[263] **Dr Saunders:** The GMS contract has something called enhanced services, which resource things that are outside the main contract. There is a description of one for homeless people, as one of the appendices to the contract. I have a copy in my bag that I could give you—it is also on the British Medical Association website; it is easy to find. I will leave you a copy, as it has the website reference on it.

[264] **Janice Gregory:** That would be great. Thank you again for your presentation. We have all gleaned something from this.

[265] **Dr Saunders:** If anyone wants to spend a morning with me, you are welcome to do so.

[266] **Janice Gregory:** That is lovely. The details are in here, are they not? Your practice manager is Christine Read?

[267] **Dr Saunders:** Yes. She is sitting in today, as is Dr Edwards, who, I hope, will join me if the expansion of the premises happens. He describes working in my practice as an apprenticeship to learn about a new category of person that he has not come across before.

[268] **Janice Gregory:** We all wish you success with that. Thank you again for taking the

time to come to committee. It is certainly a new slant on everything that we have done so far.

[269] Carol's name has been mentioned a couple of times this morning, but now I will introduce her properly. Carol Crowther is the manager of the Pembrokeshire Care Society. We are delighted that you have travelled so far this morning to be with us. Thank you, Carol.

[270] **Ms Crowther:** I will take you right back to basics, because I have listened to everything that has been said today and, to be honest, it is quite embarrassing how little Pembrokeshire has. I will cut out everything that everyone else has discussed so that we can get through this, because I know that we are short on time. Therefore, I will not mention single-room rent and that sort of thing, but it is in my report.

[271] Pembrokeshire is a large rural area, with quite a few small towns and villages. Three quarters of it is coastal, so we do not really network with many other people because it just is not practical to do so. The main problem that we have in rural areas is the difficulty in accessing services. Quite often, someone cannot physically get from one end of the county to an advice surgery and back home, or back to where they are staying that night, in the same day. We have tried to do something about that, and we have a very good travel scheme that we have built and developed, but it is more the practical work, rather than the legal side of what we do.

[272] There is a strong division between towns, and people show a reluctance to travel from town to town, either for work or for accommodation. We have interviewed people who have not gone from Pembroke Dock to Milford Haven, which is 12 miles away, in their whole life—they will not do it. We have many theories for why this is that I could discuss with you, but it does happen regularly. Having said that, many older teenagers and people in their early twenties go away to university and do not come back, because there are no job prospects for them, and so we lose those skilled and professional young people.

[273] As in all local authority areas, we do not have enough social housing to meet demand. The private sector market is made up of private landlords who own one or two properties, so it does not lend itself to the leasing agreements set up in other areas. Most of the landlords in our areas have the properties for retirement purposes—they have been encouraged to do that, and they need the rent to pay the mortgage, and for their pensions. Landlords get a raw deal sometimes—we have some very good private landlords in Pembrokeshire. Unfortunately, they only have one or two properties, but they are very good as they will take people with social problems and without a huge advance on the rent, and they will take the bond guarantee schemes that we run, one of which is specifically for young people. Having said that, we also have some very poor landlords, and they are the ones who usually have the houses in multiple occupation—the bed-sit-type accommodation—which, because of the single-room rent, is the only property that these young people can go into. That does need looking at, but I do not think that we need to class all landlords as the same, because they are not all the same.

[274] Pembrokeshire misses out on Supporting People completely. It did not have a Supporting People officer in place to meet the deadlines to get the projects in. We had six projects in the door, waiting to go, which would have been similar to the Wallich Clifford Community project and other very good agency-type work. Our funding is mainly section 180 funding. We do have a little Supporting People funding that was transferred from traditional housing benefit to the Supporting People revenue grant scheme. Even with our small scheme, I would be reluctant to let our local authority have anything to do with it, because the scheme would be shut within three months. I cannot get our service level agreements agreed by our local authority on time; the authority seems to think that we have the facility to go over budget as it does, but we are a charity, so we cannot. The section 180 funding that we get now is the best thing that has ever happened. It has cut 50 per cent of my workload, because I spent 50 per cent of my time fundraising from small trusts and so on to keep the staff in place.

Staff are now far more settled, and we rarely lose any because we have such a good team, but it is housing advice that we give; it is not a support scheme. It is very different. It is a mixture of legal housing advice and practical advice, and we are finding that a higher percentage of practical work is being done now than legal work, because we are finding that it alleviates some of the problems, especially for young homeless people—we do not force them through the homeless route, but we do make sure that they are registered, so the statistics are kept correct.

[275] I could go on to tell you about our travel warrant scheme, which really is good practice. I could also mention other things, but I am conscious that we only have three minutes left.

[276] **Janice Gregory:** No, that is okay. You carry on.

[277] **Ms Crowther:** There is a pronounced problem with Nimbyism in Pembrokeshire. Many retired people and big-name people involved with planning groups live in the county, so, whenever anything is mentioned about hostels, social housing and placing people with social problems in a certain area, it is always the case that the proposed site is too near to a particular person's house, and the proposal always gets stopped. Also, such proposals always hit the press, and we never know how it is leaked.

12.30 p.m.

[278] Another disadvantage in a rural area is that, for an agency such as ours, and for the statutory sectors, we do not have easy access to network with other agencies. I am lucky in that I know John, Carl and Steve, but we do not meet very often—only about once a year. So, I do not get to become involved in the bigger picture of homelessness—I can only tell you about rural homelessness. Having said that, I get cross sometimes when an urban homeless organisation tries to push good practice onto a rural area. It will not work—different solutions are needed. We need a second tier organisation. Along with Carl, we were a bit concerned about the joining up of Cymorth and Homeless Link, but when we looked at it we realised that homelessness will remain equal to support. They are joined up, but they are different. So we are quite happy, because we need that resource and the opportunity to feed in. I do some casework and staff management, and I do not have the time to do the consultation documents—that is Carl's role. If I can feed in my information, that suits me down to the ground. I find that that works really well.

[279] Looking at our travel warrant scheme, it has taken me a good two years to get it to this stage, but I now have every local bus company and travel agency on board, and they will all accept our travel warrants. We can now get anyone from any part of the county to our main office to see a duty worker, or to our outreach areas. In an ideal world, we would have a case worker in every area, but that is not cost-effective. We can also get people to hostels if we have to, because we do not have access to a hostel—we have no direct access accommodation at all. If we get a client that will be homeless that night, the only option available is to get them to Swansea or Aberystwyth, say, and we can use our travel warrant scheme to get them there. It is not an ideal solution, but it is sometimes the only solution, and it works. We do that in partnership with many agencies, so we have all the bus companies on board and all the agencies that distribute our travel warrants for us. It has been so successful that it has been opened out to the local authority housing department. Social services, the drugs intervention programme team and the probation team have taken it up, and we will administer it for them. So, we are hoping that we can fund our part of it by running the scheme for the others.

[280] That is it, really, unless you wish to go through the recommendations, of which you have a copy.

[281] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you for that, Carol. Are there any questions for Carol? We have covered the rural issue quite a lot this morning, but it is nice to hear from you as well as someone who represents an urban constituency, in terms of the practicalities of trying to provide this type of support in such a rural setting as Pembrokeshire. I was just looking at the map of Pembrokeshire, and it is only when it is in front of you that you see the distance even between the towns, which is difficult for us to imagine—there is only 13 miles from the top of one of my valleys to Bridgend. Mick, did you want to say something, because you are our rural expert on this committee?

[282] **Mick Bates:** I would not say that—I just keep the issue alive. Thank you for your report and especially for the data that you provided in it. I am always keen that we have data, because that is the information process back into a local authority, with which you obviously have an interesting relationship. I will come to that in a minute. Powys is also very long—it is 130 miles from top to bottom. I was interested in your comments about the planning system. You obviously work through the planning system to ensure that your transport vouchers work. Access in rural areas is one of the key issues, and I would like some more information about how that scheme is funded, because very often the problem with access is that costs are so much higher. I am familiar with many transport schemes, and I would like some more information about yours.

[283] I would also like some more information about your comment on Nimbyism. It seems to me that you were describing the balance of the population, but that seems partly responsible for that attitude. Planning is meant to be an enabling system, but it seems to be standing in the way of development to meet many people's needs, particularly with regard to social housing. Can you please expand on that a little?

[284] **Ms Crowther:** The travel warrant scheme is very cost-effective. We are a housing advice agency, so what used to happen if we had someone in Saundersfoot, say, was that we had to get to see them. My case worker would have to travel many miles to Saundersfoot and, once the case worker got there, there may have been only one client to see. There were also other issues, because we also run bond schemes, so bond workers also had to go to Saundersfoot to do certain things. Now, we changed the whole structure of our organisation. Everyone is a generic worker now, although we have co-ordinators, so I have an expert bond worker and an expert advice worker, and everyone can feed in and get information from them. It is very different.

[285] With the travel warrant scheme, we say to any client who rings up, 'If we cannot advise you over the phone, because you need to see someone face to face, we can get you to our main office in Haverfordwest immediately'. All that person need to do is pick up a travel warrant from wherever he or she is, and that person will then come to our case workers rather than the case worker going out or driving to see that client. In an ideal world, we could just jump into a car and go off, but we have 800 clients to see now, so it is no longer physically possible. As we have developed, we have had to find better and more effective ways of getting to people and getting them to us. So, our travel warrant scheme is very cheap, and the other advantage is that most of the bus companies do not even bill us any more.

[286] **Mick Bates:** The costs were the bit that I was interested in.

[287] **Ms Crowther:** We provide a stamped warrant, which is cheap, because we do it through our computer system. It is designed and ready, and the names of the companies that will accept it are on it. Our partnership agencies distribute them all around the county. That could be in the careers office, the probation offices or the local authority offices. So many people are on board that there is always somewhere for clients to access them. They do not charge us for it.

[288] **Mick Bates:** There is a job for you in Government. [*Laughter.*]

[289] **Ms Crowther:** That warrant is then handed to the bus companies. Activity Wales, for example, will hand out National Express and train fares on the authorisation of our warrant, which they will all know. They will take it and bill us. If it is a bill for a train ticket, we will be billed, but with the bus companies, given that the warrant is used only once a month in some of the outreach areas, as only one bus goes from there into town twice a week, a lot of them will say, 'Oh, don't bother, it does not matter'. So, that is beneficial. However, to be honest, the cost of those travel warrants is met through section 180 funding, as they are services for homeless clients, but it still reduces the time that is spent going out and about.

[290] **Mick Bates:** Just to detail on that, Carol, could you provide us with the cost of that service?

[291] **Ms Crowther:** Certainly. I will have to send it to you.

[292] **Janice Gregory:** That is fine. I am repeating myself, but if there is anything else that you wish that you had brought up or put in the report, please feel free to send it to us.

[293] I thank all of our presenters for coming in to give us evidence this morning. We can read everything, but it is only when someone sits in front of us and takes us through it that it comes alive. As I said during the break, it poses more questions than are answered in the paperwork, so, thank you for that. We look forward to any additional information that you may want to send on.

[294] Before you all go, I remind you that we will be meeting in Newport on 23 November. Claire has sent an e-mail about the substantial roadworks going on in Newport at the moment. You are more than welcome to go on the minibus, but please tell her if you wish to do so, so that arrangements can be made. I thank you all for your attendance.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 12.39 a.m.
The meeting ended at 12.39 a.m.*