



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

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

**Dydd Iau, 2 Mawrth 2006**

**Thursday, 2 March 2006**

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

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

*Aelodau o'r Cynulliad yn bresennol: Janice Gregory (Cadeirydd), Mick Bates, Mark Isherwood, Laura Anne Jones, Huw Lewis, Leanne Wood.*

*Swyddogion yn bresennol: Steve Boyce, Gwasanaethau'r Pwyllgorau ac Ymchwil yr Aelodau; Kathryn Potter, Gwasanaethau'r Pwyllgorau ac Ymchwil yr Aelodau.*

*Eraill yn bresennol: Paul Allsopp, Awdurdod Tân ac Achub Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru; Stuart Davies, Rheolwr Gwasanaethau Cymunedol, Sefydliad Brenhinol Cenedlaethol Pobl Ddall Cymru; Chris Enness, Awdurdod Tân ac Achub Gogledd Cymru; Victoria Gregory, Awdurdod Tân ac Achub De Cymru; Janet John, Swyddfa Dai, Sefydliad Brenhinol Cenedlaethol Pobl Ddall Cymru; Sue Jones, Awdurdod Tân ac Achub Gogledd Cymru; Francesca Montemaggi, Swyddog Polisi, Cynhalwyr Cymru; Roz Williamson, Cyfarwyddwr, Cynhalwyr Cymru; Chris Woolley, Prif Erlynydd y Goron, Gwasanaeth Erlyn y Goron De Cymru.*

*Gwasanaeth Pwyllgor: Roger Chaffey, Clerc; Claire Griffiths, Dirprwy Glerc.*

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

*Officials in attendance: Steve Boyce, Members' Research and Committee Service; Kathryn Potter, Members' Research and Committee Service.*

*Others in attendance: Paul Allsopp, Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority; Stuart Davies, Community Services Manager, Royal National Institute for the Blind Cymru; Chris Enness, North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority; Victoria Gregory, South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority; Janet John, Housing Office, Royal National Institute for the Blind Cymru; Sue Jones, North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority; Francesca Montemaggi, Policy Officer, Carers Wales; Roz Williamson, Director, Carers Wales; Chris Woolley, Chief Crown Prosecutor, South Wales Crown Prosecution Service.*

*Committee Service: Roger Chaffey, Clerc; Claire Griffiths, Deputy Clerk.*

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.32 a.m.  
The meeting began at 9.32 a.m.*

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

[1] **Janice Gregory:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to this morning's Social Justice and Regeneration Committee meeting. Before we start, I will run through some housekeeping issues with you all, including those who are not committee members, who are welcome here this morning.

[2] The National Assembly for Wales operates through the media of the Welsh and English languages. If anyone speaks in Welsh, and you need simultaneous translation, you need to use the headsets; if you have a problem, indicate to the ushers, who will come to help you out. The headsets also amplify sound, which is useful if someone is speaking softly, which will not be me, I must say.

[3] I understand that there is no fire drill today. Therefore, if the fire alarm sounds, I recommend that you follow the expert instructions of our ushers, who will see you out of the building safely. If you have a mobile phone, a pager, or a BlackBerry, please ensure that it is

switched off and not set to silent, as it interferes with the sensitive broadcasting equipment.

[4] We will break for coffee at some point during the agenda; I am not sure where—we will see how we go. Tea and coffee are available in the milling area for anyone who wants it.

[5] I have received some apologies, but we have no substitutions. I am sure that the rest of the committee members will be along forthwith.

[6] There are a few papers to note, which have all been circulated. I also bring to Members' attention the issue of the police force restructuring, into which the Minister has asked us to undertake a further review. You will recall that a consultation should have been launched on 1 March; I am given to understand that that consultation has not gone out yet, has it, Roger?

[7] **Mr Chaffey:** No.

[8] **Janice Gregory:** Therefore, we have until the end of June, do we?

[9] **Mr Chaffey:** That consultation was supposed to end at the end of June. It has not started yet, and we have not seen the draft consultation paper. We understand that it is to be issued shortly.

[10] **Janice Gregory:** It will probably be in the next day or two, I would have thought—I hope so, anyway. Therefore, we need to decide what our timetable will be for the consultation. We will need to have concluded our deliberations and reported to Plenary by the end of June. So, it is a tight timetable, but I have no doubt that we can do it. Therefore, we need to start gathering the oral evidence as soon as possible. Members kindly allowed me to look at this with the clerk at the last meeting. If Members will allow us to continue to do that, we can work it into our agendas. We must also consider who we will need to hear from again. Roger and I have discussed this, and we think that we should hear from the police chiefs, the police authorities and the Welsh Local Government Association, obviously. If it is possible—which it was not last time—I would like representatives from community councils to come to the committee. If we are looking at grass-roots policing, we need to hear from those.

[11] Helpfully, last time, Members gave me a list of people who they thought should come to the committee. If you can have a think about whom you would like to see, we can invite them to give oral evidence. Even for them, the timetable will be tight. Roger has just reminded me that there may be a need for additional meetings, although only as a last resort.

[12] **Mark Isherwood:** Could we re-invoke the previous list, which I believe that you still have? I would like to emphasise the importance of receiving evidence from the police superintendents. My local superintendents have expressed a strong wish to give evidence.

[13] **Janice Gregory:** That is fine. We will look at the list again, but perhaps Members can think about people whom we did not see or people whom we would like to see again. I have mentioned the obvious—the police chiefs, the police authorities, the WLGA and the community councils. Roger circulated a consultation letter to all the organisations that were party to the original consultation, so they have been contacted.

[14] **Laura Anne Jones:** Will we see people from the civil service side of the WLGA or the political leader of the WLGA?

[15] **Janice Gregory:** I think that we will see Steve Thomas.

[16] **Mr Chaffey:** I think that it will be both.

[17] **Janice Gregory:** We could have both. We could see Derek Vaughan, who is the leader, and Steve, who is the chief executive.

[18] **Mick Bates:** Thank you for the information. We all appreciate how tight the timescale is. However, given the controversy surrounding the financial issues and recent correspondence relating to that, should we look at making a more detailed analysis of the financial impact and looking to direct one of our witnesses—possibly the WLGA—to provide a full evidence session on the financial implications and the options available? A great deal of the impact—outside of what it means for policing—will be in the financial areas. It may be useful to do that.

[19] **Janice Gregory:** That is fine.

[20] **Laura Anne Jones:** I would have thought that that is what they would do.

[21] **Janice Gregory:** They can come to the committee and talk about a whole host of issues. They can talk about all the ways that it will affect them and their members. However, concentrating with one presenter on a single area, rather than on the whole scope, would be quite useful for them too. I see that Members are content with that. I would be grateful if you could pass any thoughts or suggestions on to me or the clerk as soon as possible.

9.39 a.m.

### **Cofnodion y Cyfarfod Blaenorol Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

[22] **Janice Gregory:** Moving on to the short minutes of 9 February, does anyone have any comments? I signed them off, so I obviously do not have any. I see that Members are happy with them.

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

9.40a.m.

### **Deddfwriaeth yr UE EU Legislation**

[23] **Janice Gregory:** It is proposed that the committee should receive a paper, once a term, on progress with areas identified as being of interest to social justice and regeneration. At the moment, that list includes the rights of the child, drugs policy, alcohol-related crime and postal services. Steve, do you have anything to say on this matter?

[24] **Mr Boyce:** No, I do not think that there is anything to add. If you remember, at the last meeting, Members asked for some more background information on how we could engage with European legislation, so really it is just a matter of whether Members would like us to keep them updated on those four issues.

[25] **Janice Gregory:** I think that that would be very useful and I see that everyone agrees on that.

9.40 a.m.

## **Y Fasnach Mewn Pobl Human Trafficking**

[26] **Janice Gregory:** I was hoping that we would have had more people here for this item. If you remember, I brought to your attention the Home Office consultation on human trafficking. We have been helpfully given a paper on this from the Members' research service and we have the Home Office and Scottish Executive paper, 'Tackling Human Trafficking—Consultation on Proposals for a UK Action Plan'. Does anyone have any points on this matter?

[27] **Laura Anne Jones:** We can have input to this from the National Assembly for Wales. Significant work has been done in the area, but we could help out by raising awareness in Wales in particular. On stricter border controls and so on, which are essential, we could point out the target areas that we think are most significant, using our knowledge of Wales.

[28] **Mick Bates:** Further to Laura's point, we should be recommending that we need more detailed information on the study that has taken place, in order to give us details on the situation in Wales. That would then obviously be the benchmark from which we could make decisions to fit into the consultation.

[29] **Janice Gregory:** I think that it is important that we have some type of input. Reading through the documents you see that the situation is incredible.

[30] **Ms Potter:** It was important to note that the consultation, and any actions that follow, will be for the National Assembly for Wales to pick up at some later point, so this seems to be a good opportunity to raise any issues. From point 6 onwards, in the briefing paper I prepared, those seem to be some of the more obvious areas that Members may wish to comment on.

[31] **Janice Gregory:** Can someone remind me of the date that the response to the consultation is due?

[32] **Ms Potter:** It is due by 5 April.

[33] **Janice Gregory:** Therefore, we do not have much time. If anyone has any specific comments that they wish to make, they should channel them through the clerk or me, and we can work them up into a paper. The response will be circulated and then we can look at it in one of our meetings before the end date of the consultation. We can include a brief item on the agenda on this. Is everyone happy with that? I see that they are.

9.43 a.m.

## **Cyflwyniad gan Wasanaeth Erlyn y Goron Presentation from Crown Prosecution Service**

[34] **Janice Gregory:** We are really ahead of ourselves now in terms of time. On the Crown Prosecution Service, Members who were on the committee at the time may recall that it was Jocelyn who raised this issue. We are going to have a presentation from the CPS, but we need to know whether its representatives are here yet. We are having a presentation from the CPS, are we not?

[35] **Ms Griffiths:** Yes, but the gentleman has not yet arrived. Perhaps we should move on to the next item.

[36] **Janice Gregory:** That would not be a problem. We can do that; we are very flexible on this committee. I knew that the meeting would be like this today.

9.44 a.m.

**Cyflwyniad ar Gynlluniau Cydraddoldeb Gwasanaeth Tân ac Achub Cymru  
Presentation on Welsh Fire and Rescue Services Equality Schemes**

[37] **Janice Gregory:** I am sorry about this; I ask the representatives from the fire and rescue service to join us at the table. For everyone to know, we are on item 6. Our next presenters have arrived well within the time, for which I am extremely grateful. We will receive a presentation on the equality scheme, which was recently agreed following work with the Commission for Racial Equality.

[38] We have with us Victoria Gregory—no relation—from South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority, Sue Jones from North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority and Paul Allsopp from the Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority. I am sure that Chris Myant will be here on time—he is usually very good. I also welcome Chris Enness from North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority. We are very well represented in terms of the whole of Wales, so thank you all for coming to committee this morning. Once the PowerPoint is up and running, fingers crossed—

[39] **Ms Griffiths:** It does not seem to be working—it was working this morning.

[40] **Janice Gregory:** That is all right. It is not a problem. We have received background papers anyway and hard copies of the PowerPoint presentation. I am sorry, Sue, I know that this is putting you on the spot, but we have all received copies of the PowerPoint presentation.

[41] **Mr Allsopp:** We will go through it—that is perfectly all right.

[42] **Janice Gregory:** It saves us sitting and twiddling our thumbs. I am sure that the Assembly's technology will work. We have also received a background briefing on this, so we are all pretty up with the issues. Chris, are you leading on this?

[43] **Mr Allsopp:** No, I am leading on it. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. In this presentation, we want to give you an overview of our experience in producing compliant race equality schemes for each of the fire services in Wales, and to describe how we got to that position in consultation with the Commission for Racial Equality. The presentation that you will receive today has been put together by Vicky, Sue and myself, and each of us has responsibility for equality and diversity in our respective fire and rescue services.

[44] If we go back to the period running up to the deadline of 31 May 2005, where we needed to have a reviewed and updated race equality scheme, it is true to say that we were all working independently. In fact, we do meet quarterly and have formal meetings with agendas, but we tended to concentrate on the general issues in the legislation as opposed to the detail of the schemes that we were putting together. Each of us attended seminars relating to the production of the race equality schemes, and we also referred to the statutory codes of conduct, which were published beforehand. However, at that stage, we had very little direct contact with the Commission for Racial Equality.

[45] With hindsight, it is fair to say that this very structured approach resulted in the three of us producing very large schemes that were very aspirational, and which were not too focused on results. In effect, at that stage we were trying to hit all the buttons at once and to be fair, realistically, we could not have achieved everything that we had in those schemes in the timescale.

[46] In June 2005, the CRE circulated to all public authorities a draft press release which related to the performance of these bodies in relation to the employment duty in a section of the Act. This stated that, to a greater or lesser degree, none of the public bodies were fully meeting their responsibilities in this area. At this stage, each of us requested a meeting with the CRE to discuss the shortfalls and what we needed to put in place, because, historically, we have collected a lot of employment data, and, as part of the statistics gathering that goes through to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, there is extensive data that we use in that regard. We thought that the data that we were supplying covered our responsibility.

9.50 a.m.

[47] However, the range of data did not fully cover everything that was required, and the areas in which we were lacking were in relation to the take-up of training and the use of grievance procedures and so on. It became clear to us at that stage that the problems that we had with regard to employment duty were the same for each of the fire and rescue services, and, clearly, the solutions would be the same as well. As I said, the impetus behind our original meeting with the CRE was to clarify non-compliance, but it became clear that there would be a lot of value in carrying on that consultation and to cover the full draft race equality schemes.

[48] It was then agreed that the CRE would provide joint feedback to our schemes. So, from each of us individually meeting, we then had a working group, if you like, which we could take forward and from which, hopefully, we could get the feedback that we wanted. The value of doing this was that we were able to put forward the issues that were particularly relevant to the fire service, whereas, where we had been attending seminars and other presentations before, it was a much more general approach that covered all the aspects of public authorities. This gave us an ideal opportunity to focus on the environment that we are working in and on what we could do. Although Chris is not here, I think that he would probably also agree that it has also given the CRE a greater appreciation of the environment in which we were working.

[49] So, we reached the stage where we had submitted our draft race equality schemes, and the CRE gave us feedback. The main thrust of its guidance was that the schemes needed to be much simpler. As I said at the beginning, we were trying to hit all the buttons at once, and we were putting together schemes that were far too broad. The commission's advice with regard to the objectives was that we needed to be more focused and produce a more realistic and achievable plan—that is, it needed SMART objectives. At the meetings that took place to discuss the three schemes, it was clear that three significant areas had been identified by each of the three fire and rescue services through their initial impact assessment process. Of these three, first is that the employment profiles of the three services show a disproportionate predominance of white male employees. Secondly, there was the disparity between the race relations legislation and the employment monitoring data, which we gathered and submitted to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Thirdly, there was the lack of minority ethnic monitoring on the fire data recording form, which is the form used at incidents to collate details to provide a useful database for guiding the service. As it stood then, and although changes are coming into place, there is no ethnic minority monitoring. That could be particularly useful to inform better, more targeted delivery.

[50] Those were the three areas that all three of us concluded were the most important aspects that we needed to concentrate on. The Commission for Racial Equality agreed that this should form the basis of the work for the three services in the 2005-08 schemes. As a result, we all went back separately, we modified the schemes that we had in place and resubmitted them to the CRE.



[51] Returning to the first aspect, the employment profiles, we have put in place a system of equality impact assessment for the recruitment processes. That has been helped by the fact that, for the first time, in 2005, the three services had collaborated on a recruitment campaign. This is at the sharp end of it with regard to the initial media advertising, the dispatch and receipt of application forms and the initial shortlisting. At the same time, new point-of-entry selection tests were introduced for the fire service, and two of the three services utilised those in their campaigns for the later testing stage. So, the review that all three of us will undertake will give very useful information on the equality impact of the new test and on how it compares with the old test, which one of the services continued using. This review will not only benefit each of our individual services, but will feed back information to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the consultancy companies that it has used to develop the new test, namely Water for Fish and Optimal Performance Ltd. We have contacted the ODPM and Water for Fish, and they are very anxious to see the results of our review.

[52] To summarise, from a start where we felt a little under fire and which was a little uncomfortable, we have benefited considerably from the meetings that we have had with the Commission for Racial Equality. The experience has proved positive. It is clear that we had misconceptions in terms of addressing every aspect of our work at once, which would not have been possible realistically. It has also shown us a way to ensure that we get an appreciation to advisory and monetary bodies of the issues that are relevant to fire and rescue services. We now find ourselves in a more realistic position of concentrating and focusing on what the key issues are and what we can achieve with the resources that we have available, and I believe that we all have schemes that can deliver real and valuable results.

[53] Leading on from our consultation with the Commission for Racial Equality, we are now at the early stages of, hopefully, establishing similar relationships with the Disability Rights Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission to aid in the production of our disability and gender equality schemes, and the work that we will be undertaking with regard to the recruitment system will also cover gender and disability at this stage, before the schemes go live. So, that takes you from a point where we were all working separately to a point where we will all agree that we have schemes that are workable and are of value.

[54] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you for that, Paul. Does anyone want to add anything? PowerPoint is working now but thank you for providing us with a hard copy.

[55] **Laura Anne Jones:** With regard to recruitment and employment rates and getting people into the fire and rescue service, have you done any work on, say, going out to schools, making people aware of what you do and of the many jobs that are available in your service and, in particular, going to schools where there is a high percentage of children from ethnic minorities and raising awareness of what you do and also saying, 'Look, these jobs are available'?

[56] **Ms Gregory:** We are beginning to do that. We are also focusing on going to community events in Newport and Cardiff, and that is raising our profile in the ethnic minority communities. We are going into different schools, and obviously there are different issues for the different areas of Wales, so, hopefully, with the joint recruitment process tapping into different communities in south Wales, we will change the profile in the other two areas.

[57] **Mick Bates:** Thank you for the presentation. I am sure that we all welcome the aspirational bit and we look forward to seeing more details, because that was the point that the CRE made.

[58] You have talked in very general terms. Do you have any statistics that you could give us in terms of current figures for employees and the gender base, so that we could have a little

more of a benchmark on which to base our questioning?

[59] **Mr Allsopp:** With regard to mid and west Wales, we have a total of, I think, 1,200 retained and whole-time firefighters, of which 32 are female, and we have three firefighters from a black and minority ethnic background.

[60] **Ms Jones:** We are slightly different, in that we have just over 1,000 employees. Eighteen of those are female, and they are retained staff. There are seven whole-time female staff, and five of different ethnic origin.

10.00 a.m.

[61] **Janice Gregory:** Victoria, do you have the figures for south Wales?

[62] **Ms Gregory:** Yes. We have 1,700 staff altogether, and approximately 1,200 are firefighters. We have nine BME firefighters. However, our aspirations are to reflect the community that we serve, but we are trying to think about that in a different way. Once you have collected the information and know who is involved in fires and in road-traffic collisions, we should then have the staff proportionate to address those needs, rather than reflecting the communities that we serve. We also have about 15 female firefighters.

[63] **Mick Bates:** Thank you for that information. When were you first aware of those statistics? When did you start to collect them? It was pretty obvious from the figures that there was a large discrepancy, and I take the point about working in proportion to the communities that you serve. However, when did these sorts of figures first emerge?

[64] **Mr Allsopp:** As I said before, we submit employment statistics, which were originally requested by the Home Office. From the formation of all three services, we were aware of the problem, and we have been trying to work to change that situation. In respect of mid and west Wales, in 1996, if my memory serves me right, I think that we had three female firefighters, and we have improved that situation. In 1996, I think that we had one firefighter from a black and minority ethnic background. As you can tell from these statistics, the amount of white male firefighters far outweighs all the others. This is an aspect of our employment profile that we have tried to address. Although it does not sound much, we have made substantial inroads in certain areas, and this is an ongoing task.

[65] **Mick Bates:** We all appreciate that you get the benchmarking and then build up from that.

[66] Secondly, is there a difference between—

[67] **Janice Gregory:** I am sorry to interrupt, Mick, but I think that Chris wants to come in on that point.

[68] **Mr Enness:** I just wanted to say that national groups are working very hard throughout all the fire and rescue services in the UK to raise awareness. The issue is mainly about raising awareness and saying, 'These jobs are for you'. There are national groups. I would hate for this committee to think that this is a Wales problem, because it is not. This is a UK-wide problem, and there are groups working hard to address that issue.

[69] **Mick Bates:** That will lead me on to another question. Is there a difference in the figures that you have given us between the full-time and the retained fire service? Is there any differentiation?

[70] **Mr Allsopp:** There are more retained female firefighters than there are whole-time

ones, and that is the case throughout.

[71] **Ms Jones:** It is the same with us. That is possibly because we recruit more often from the retained service, so you are able to go out more often and try to reverse that figure. On the whole-time service, we have not recruited for about four years in north Wales. You only get a chance to change that when you go out and recruit, and I think that that is a case of considering taking more positive action prior to recruitment.

[72] **Mick Bates:** Given your answer, what consideration have you given to the impact of the new integrated management plans, which suggest that we are moving away from a retained fire service to a whole-time fire service? There was a female retained firefighter at my local station; would it be a disincentive to become whole-time?

[73] **Mr Enness:** For my clarity, is your question posed around the fact that it is a disincentive to join the retained service if you worry about becoming whole-time? Is that your question?

[74] **Mick Bates:** That is one of the undercurrents.

[75] **Mr Enness:** Okay. The issues surrounding risk reduction plans, integrated risk management plans, or action plans are all about how the three fire services can best serve their communities by identifying the risks and resourcing their service in accordance with the risk in addressing those. I think that there is more of an incentive to join the fire service now. We are having a real impact in communities and we are identifying the risks. Every fire station in Wales plays a major part in getting in touch with their local communities to make a difference, so I think that there is more of an incentive to join the fire and rescue service now.

[76] **Mick Bates:** That is a useful point.

[77] **Janice Gregory:** Mick, can Laura come in now, because she wanted to speak on the previous point?

[78] **Mick Bates:** Yes. There are only three of us today.

[79] **Janice Gregory:** I know. We are very relaxed here today.

[80] **Laura Anne Jones:** To follow up on what Mick said about women, what sort of flexibility do you offer women to attract them to the fire service, given that they may have family commitments? What maternity leave do you offer, and what packages do you offer people? Do you make women aware that the conditions are attractive and that you take their position into consideration?

[81] **Ms Jones:** We have a lot of policies in place. We offer flexible working. We provide maternity leave, obviously, as well as extended leave and career breaks. We make it clear that we provide those. The retained positions offer a bit more flexibility. We are looking at what is required by each station, and there appears to be a shortfall during the day, which is generally when more women are available to work. Therefore, they can provide cover during the day, and we have cover for the night.

[82] **Janice Gregory:** Is that made clear during the recruitment drive? Are all the packages set out for people?

[83] **Ms Jones:** Yes.

[84] **Mick Bates:** It is an important point, and it would be useful, when we get a further

update, to see how the difference has an impact on the retained staff and the whole-time fire staff. My impression is that there is greater flexibility within the retained fire service to answer some of these issues. We shall see how that develops.

[85] The point was made about working at the UK level. How do you interact at a UK level in order to further some of the issues that were highlighted by the CRE?

[86] **Mr Enness:** All three fire and rescue services have a major part to play in all the issues. For example, the chief of the Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service is the Chief Fire Officers Association's lead for equality and diversity across the whole of the UK. The three fire and rescue services, in conjunction with the Welsh Assembly Government, are sponsoring Networking Women in the Fire Service this coming year. So, we are taking a high-profile, proactive approach to supporting these groups. We welcome working with them and we enjoy doing so.

[87] **Mick Bates:** My constituency is on the border with England. Do you work cross-border on recruitment to further the issues identified in these reports?

[88] **Mr Enness:** We have not worked in partnership cross-border as yet. The first partnership working on recruitment was a pretty full partnership on the first part of recruitment, which happened at the tail end of last year—in October. That was the first time that we had dipped our toe in the water of partnership working. On reflection, it had some very positive outcomes. However, when you work in partnership with others there are learning points, and these need to be worked through so that we can hone our practices.

[89] **Mick Bates:** I would like a bit more detail on that. The expression that you used was that you dipped your toe in the water. What did that entail?

[90] **Mr Enness:** It meant that the three fire and rescue services joined completely in the first part of recruitment, which covers advertising, raising awareness and sending out application forms. There is a new firefighter selection test, and this was an ideal opportunity for some of us to trial it while someone else used the old test. We were then able to talk about what we found from that. We found that there was about a 60 per cent take-up rate from applications requested to applications submitted. That is an average figure across the UK.

[91] **Mick Bates:** You have spoken about partnership working across the brigades. What about working with the Fire Brigades Union? I think that there is another organisation that represents firefighters.

10.10 a.m.

[92] **Mr Enness:** The Retained Firefighters' Union.

[93] **Mick Bates:** Yes. How did you work with that union? What partnership did you establish with it in order to improve recruitment?

[94] **Mr Enness:** I can talk only for north Wales on this issue, but the Fire Brigades Union is supportive of what we do. We meet regularly and discuss what we are going to do. The Fire Brigades Union is made up of people in ordinary whole-time posts who represent the needs, wants and desires of the union's members, and do so mostly in their spare time. To encourage people from the Fire Brigades Union to come in and do extra work would probably be a little onerous, but we kept them involved through information and consultation throughout the process.

[95] **Mick Bates:** Further to that, it seems to me that the unions' principles would be well

met by furthering these equality issues. I am a bit surprised that you have not made greater contact on those ethical issues in order to improve the balance, from the figures that you have given us.

[96] **Janice Gregory:** Surely the unions would have been heavily involved in all of this.

[97] **Mr Allsopp:** With regard to the new point-of-entry selection test, the unions were involved at the consultation level. In Mid and West Wales, they certainly viewed and attended meetings at some stages. Would it be useful if I went through the stages of the recruitment process so that you can see where we collaborated and used the new selection tests?

[98] **Mick Bates:** We are in the hands of the Chair.

[99] **Janice Gregory:** Yes. That would be fine.

[100] **Mr Allsopp:** The new point-of-entry selection tests involve a changed application form. From that application, you can shortlist using the answers given and you then move on to a set of written tests, which assess spatial awareness and the use of numbers and so on. There is then a physical test, with practical examples of the types of physical situations in which applicants will find themselves, and then there is an interview. We collaborated until the end of the shortlisting process, and we parted ways when it came to the written test, the physical test and the interviews.

[101] North Wales and Mid and West Wales trialled the new point-of-entry selection test and South Wales has its own systems that it retained on this example. On your question with regard to the unions, yes, they saw each of the tests and my understanding is that they were involved in the consultations that actually drew up the tests. On our collaboration with the FBU, certainly with regard to our quarterly meetings, its representatives have attended to give input on particular policy issues that we are discussing at the time. We retain a fairly close relationship with certain aspects of individual organisations within the FBU, such as B&EMM, the black and ethnic minority members group, the gay and lesbian group and, as has already been mentioned, networking women in the fire service. There is a lot of collaboration.

[102] **Mick Bates:** Chair—

[103] **Janice Gregory:** Victoria wanted to come in on that point and I would rather take it point by point.

[104] **Ms Gregory:** On the partnership work nationally, we consulted the black and ethnic minority Fire Brigades Union quite a lot in the development of our race equality scheme and it helped us to establish our objectives. We do work on a national level and we link in with the chair of B&EMM. Our Wales-wide representative is based in south Wales and he also does a lot of outreach work for us and helps to give us some real input. The same is happening with the female representatives of the Fire Brigades Union in developing our gender equality scheme.

[105] **Janice Gregory:** Knowing the Fire Brigades Union as I do, I am sure that it would make sure that they were all completely involved.

[106] **Mick Bates:** It is just that, in looking at the presentation, I did not see any mention that you had undertaken the whole process that you have now outlined.

[107] **Janice Gregory:** It is a good job that they are here making a presentation, Mick, so that you can draw it out.

[108] **Mick Bates:** Absolutely; that is what is so good about this.

[109] **Janice Gregory:** Laura, did you have a point on this issue?

[110] **Laura Anne Jones:** It has more or less been raised, but you said that the problem is a UK problem, but that areas are clearly different and you want to focus on the communities, and what is best for them. However, there must be some examples of best practice where some areas of the UK are doing better than others in recruiting from black minority and ethnic communities and women and so on. Are you working in partnership with those people as well as outside groups to learn from them and see why they are better at recruiting those people than we are?

[111] **Mr Enness:** That is part of what the national groups do. They get together and talk about the issues, they share best practice and they discuss the pitfalls of what they have tried, because not every incentive works first time. So, we do discuss and share with those, and we take on board some of the lessons learned. We try to implement them, but you quite rightly identified at the beginning of your question that each area has its own peculiarities and challenges.

[112] **Janice Gregory:** Back to Mick. Are you done, Mick?

[113] **Mick Bates:** Not quite. I am still suffering from too much Wagner last night. On the last issue about statistics collected from incidents, I have a similar question to my first question: can you give us any statistics now on the breakdown of the BME issues with incidents?

[114] **Mr Allsopp:** That is the problem that we have identified and are addressing as part of this particular race equality scheme. The fact that we do not collect the ethnicity data is a problem that needs to be addressed nationally, because it is a standard form that is used throughout the fire service.

[115] **Mick Bates:** Do you now have a method of data collection that covers that point?

[116] **Mr Allsopp:** We know what we want, but it is not in place yet.

[117] **Mick Bates:** When will it be in place?

[118] **Mr Enness:** The issue about data collection on the fire data report form is that the forms go back some time and it is a form that is nationally supplied. It has just gone through a process of being re-evaluated, and I believe that this part was missed off again from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister after re-evaluating it. So, we are applying pressure on the national form—it is a UK-wide form—and we have identified it. It is fair to say that we, in collaboration with the Commission for Racial Equality, are leading the UK on that. We are the first people to do that and find out exactly what we can and cannot do with them, through working in partnership. So, we are putting the pressure on to change the form. We do not have the form in place if we use the national form, but we can put our practices in place, but that is not addressing the problem nationally, which is what the Commission for Racial Equality would like to see.

[119] **Janice Gregory:** Chris Myant is in the Local Government and Public Services Committee meeting in the new building and, because we started this item early, Chris is over there giving a presentation to that committee, so it is a shame that he is not here. However, I am sure that Chris will come back and talk about this item if we ask him to do so. I am sorry to interrupt you, but I just wanted to say that.

[120] **Mick Bates:** This is all very interesting, but is there a target date to get that form completed so that you can address this third issue?

[121] **Ms Jones:** As part of what we said we would do, within the timescale of the race equality scheme, we will need to put something in place to have some figures within the next year. We will have to include a supplementary form that will give us those data until the issue is addressed nationally.

[122] **Mr Allsopp:** With regard to its being addressed nationally, as I said, we meet on a quarterly basis. A representative from our group is on the national professionals' forum for equalities, and that is the method for us to get the issues that we have raised onto a national level, and that body also includes representatives from the ODPM. So, that is the methodology that we will use to make some changes nationally.

[123] **Mick Bates:** I hope that you get them.

[124] **Janice Gregory:** I am sure that they will. They seem determined.

10.20 a.m.

[125] **Huw Lewis:** I want to explore the idea of gathering the evidence base a little more. Has any thought been given to what happens inside someone's head, if you like, prior to ever getting to a point-of-entry selection? That is, walking in the door, so to speak. People who are thinking about taking on a job or profession as particular as that of firefighting go through a process of asking themselves, 'Does that fit me? Do I identify with that? Is that something that I could see myself involved with?'. Has any thought been given to how the current workforce gets to that point? Were there family connections, friendship groups, or was it something that happened at school? How do you break through that into new groups of people who have never put themselves mentally in the firefighters' clothes, as it were? It has just never occurred to them that that could be an option for them.

[126] I know that the police service and the armed forces have done work on that, because similar arithmetical profiles have been drawn in those areas. I have read articles in which it is claimed that things such as police graduate entry for accelerated promotion and so on have helped to provide role models within the service to which people can aspire.

[127] First, will the evidence base take a look at how the current workforce ended up with you? Is there something different about the fire service that you should look at? Secondly, I do not know whether there is a graduate entry process for the fire service. I have read articles in which it was claimed that the police's process was helpful in terms of BME recruitment.

[128] **Mr Enness:** What you have encapsulated there is our challenge of positive action. That is, how do we get inside the minds of people? One of the pitfalls that we need to bear in mind is that, if we use the heads of current firefighters, they are predominantly white males, so our challenge is to find out what attracts people and how we can get people to realise that this is a job for them and a job that anyone can do. We work in teams, and we welcome diversity in all its forms.

[129] With regard to graduate entry, we are currently consulting on leadership development in the fire service. This is a UK-wide initiative again, and it takes the form of accelerated promotion by which you would achieve the role of middle manager within five years. That is under consultation. There is a great debate as to whether you should have a graduate entry scheme, and whether that supports even the people who have had the opportunity to go to university, or whether you should set a test as the basis for entry so that you test to find which

people have the potential. That debate is ongoing, and consultation is under way on that matter. We expect that consultation to end this month.

[130] **Huw Lewis:** I would be very interested in the outcome of that. Without any kind of delving into the issues, I would have thought that graduate entry would potentially provide you with an enormous and far more diverse pool of people, whereas with test entry that hurdle of the mentality must be crossed before you sit the test. Recruitment fairs at universities, further education colleges and so on would provide the service with a far wider pool of people to go fishing in, if you like. It is good that that works.

[131] **Mark Isherwood:** Thank you for your presentations. Much of what you referred to in the key areas that you need to address at this stage is about gathering information, so that you have a foundation on which to work. Presumably, the objective is to turn that into a living system, a cultural shift, so that you achieve the outcomes that you seek to achieve. Much of that is based on communication—and we have heard a reference to this—which has to be a two-way process.

[132] In the context of the Assembly's race equality scheme, about a year ago, a member of staff in the Assembly, who happened to belong to a black minority ethnic community, approached me and said that, from his perspective, the biggest problem was that we were not very good at targeting the communities where the skills exist but the communication systems do not. We communicate with people in the way that we always have done, namely through advertisements in the *Western Mail* or what have you, rather than asking them how best to engage people within their communities who might not otherwise have considered this as a career option, for the reasons that Huw mentioned. I fully support the idea of going along to fairs and community events and telling people about the career opportunities available but what about the ask aspect? Was there a degree of asking people in the communities how best you can communicate the message that you wish to communicate to them? You could then build upon that.

[133] On recruitment, there is no reference here—although you made some reference to this, following Huw's question—to career development. Having recruited the people whom you wished to recruit, how do you also implement this culturally and within that development internally? Again, we are having to address direct and indirect internal barriers in the Assembly and the Assembly Government. Often it is just a case of cultural misunderstanding. What thought have you given to that?

[134] You mentioned that there was a lot of joint working between the three services in Wales. What consideration have you given to joint working with the other emergency services? You work jointly on joint incidents, control centres and in other areas. The pilot of your corresponding schemes is about to roll out; what consideration have you given to specific cultural requirements that might arise there?

[135] **Ms Gregory:** On the first question regarding linking—I think that I understood you—with ethnic minority communities and so on, we have a community liaison officer in south Wales, who establishes focus groups in Newport and Cardiff, asking for the information that you have outlined—how best they would like to be communicated with and how their communities can best be reached. We also advertise in the BME press, such as *The Voice* and *Eastern Eye*, and we have all established quite strong links with race equality councils across Wales and there are networks that are already established that we can link into, and we have quite a close relationship with the RECs. We are also looking at translating an executive summary of our schemes into community languages so that people have access to that information. So we try to use that evidence-based approach in communications in south Wales.



[136] I can add one bit on joint working. We link in with the ambulance service and the police and, on an equality level, we are establishing quite good relationships. For example, we are talking to the ambulance service about collecting data about people involved in road traffic collisions, because it collects the profile of patients, and sharing that information with us so we have the profile of people involved in the work that we are dealing with. That relationship and discussion only started last week, and that could be quite fruitful.

[137] **Mr Allsopp:** We also participate in consultation exercises. We are doing a specifically targeted consultation exercise at present with the City and County of Swansea Council and the college and university. That is another facet.

[138] **Mr Enness:** Career development is one of the busiest and most active areas in the fire and rescue service. I take it that you are aware of the integrated personal development scheme, which is the big scheme that we have looked at across all of the fire and rescue services. I think that you used the words ‘cultural shift’, and it is a cultural shift. Where we would pick a group of people and say, ‘Right, you will need these skills and this training’, we now look at the individual and ask, ‘What do you need to best be able to do your job?’. So we look at the individual, and the individual has a measurement to reach in a national occupational standard, which has been agreed across the UK. It is down to the individual, in relationship with their manager, how best they can achieve that. A lot of investment goes into developing our staff. It is fair to say that the only people who train more than the fire service are professional sports people who are actively competing, and the armed forces.

10.30 a.m.

[139] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you very much for that. There are no other questions.

[140] Thank you for coming to present to committee. I am sorry about the shaky start—that sometimes happens. Perhaps we could look at timetabling this item again. I am sure that we would love to have an update at some point in the future—we do not expect you to come back in a month and tell us how it is all panning out. We could then invite Chris Myant as well, and we could fit in perhaps better with other committee timetables. Thank you very much indeed for coming to committee—it has been a pleasure.

10.31 a.m.

### **Cyflwyniad gan Wasanaeth Erlyn y Goron Presentation from Crown Prosecution Service**

[141] **Janice Gregory:** We now move back to what was item 5 on the agenda—a presentation from the Crown Prosecution Service. Chris Woolley joins us at the table. Members have been circulated some paperwork on this—it is paper 3.

[142] Thank you for attending this morning, Chris. Chris is here from the Crown Prosecution Service. He is the chief Crown prosecutor for south Wales. Members may recall that this item was asked for by Jocelyn Davies when she was subbing for Leanne, who was on maternity leave last year. We have received the background paper. Chris will make a presentation—but not on PowerPoint, hopefully.

[143] **Mr Woolley:** No.

[144] **Janice Gregory:** Okay, that is great.

[145] **Mr Woolley:** Bore da. Diolch i chi am eich gwahoddiad heddiw. [146] **Mr Woolley:** Good morning. Thank you for your invitation today.

[147] I am Chris Woolley, the chief Crown prosecutor for south Wales. I am also acting chief Crown prosecutor for Gwent. Although the paper that you have before you concerns Gwent, with the committee's leave, I would prefer to talk about the situation across Wales—I am in a position to do that—and answer questions about that.

[148] **Janice Gregory:** That is fine. Thank you.

[149] **Mr Woolley:** It might help the committee to know what the situation was with witnesses only a few years ago. Some of you may have been witnesses or victims of crime yourselves, or you will certainly have known people who were victims or witnesses of crime. It is fair to say that the situation then was dire. Witnesses were treated like fodder. There was no respect for their needs, their personal health or feelings. They were treated as commodities by, it is fair to say, all the criminal justice agencies; they were told, 'Come to court, tell us what you saw, go away'. There was no 'thank you' and no information throughout the process.

[150] The effect was that witnesses did not like coming to court. There was poor attendance and they were not in a fit state to give their evidence when they came to court. They left court confused and not knowing what the situation was, frequently not giving of their best evidence, and, as a result, justice suffered. In fact, the witnesses and victims also suffered. The victims of crime saw their cases being lost, and, conversely, the defendants frequently saw their cases being won through the lack of witness participation and attendance.

[151] Therefore, the whole system was costly, and was not working. The problem was, in essence, that witnesses were passed from one agency to another—the police interviewed witnesses to crime, or victims of crime, but the police did not know anything about the court process. Therefore, as soon as the police had finished their business, there was a void. The Crown Prosecution Service then took matters up, and warned witnesses, but as it did not know what had happened before, it could not tell the witness much about what would happen at court. They would just be told, 'Come to court on this day'. Then the court took over, and, frequently, at very short notice by telephone, they would often say, 'We have changed the court date; you thought that you were coming in two weeks' time, but you have to come tomorrow', with consequent disruption to their personal lives and damage to the quality of their evidence. When it was all over, they were just shown the door. No-one said thank you, no-one told them the result of the cases, and they were left in a void. That is why many witnesses said that they would never be witnesses again, and that if they saw another crime, they would turn the other way. It was recognised locally and nationally that this situation could not be allowed to continue.

[152] I am happy to say that Gwent was one of the first areas to decide to do something about it. I was very proud of that, as I was chief Crown prosecutor for Gwent at the time. We were keen to push a new approach to dealing with witnesses and victims. We asked why we were working in silos and decided that we should create one unit, with Crown Prosecution Service staff and police staff working together, with the help of voluntary agencies. Victim Support and the witness service was very supportive and came in on this. So, in Gwent, we were able to create a nucleus of about 15 people, who, for the first time, could tell witnesses and victims what was happening from the point of charge and who could provide a developed service when the defendant pleaded not guilty.

[153] After a crime is committed, the police assess the needs of the victim and the witness and a witness care officer speaks to them. This is covered by paragraphs 9, 10 and 11 of my paper. The witness care officer could be a police officer or a CPS officer. It makes no difference. We do not say 'I am from the CPS' or 'I am from the police'; we say 'I am from the witness care unit; I am a witness care officer, here to support you'. The witness is spoken

to. That sounds obvious; it was revolutionary at the time. The witness is asked what their needs are; whether they have hearing difficulties; whether they have pets or children who need to be looked after while they are in court; whether they are worried about the process; whether they want more information about what is going to happen to them and how they will be treated; and whether they want to visit the court before they give evidence. Unsurprisingly, witness rates have improved, and, more importantly, witness satisfaction has improved. The quality of evidence that witnesses give has improved no end.

[154] So, from the point of charge, to the end of the case, the witness is looked after. They are phoned when there is a significant development in the case. For example, they will be told if the defendant has pleaded not guilty, meaning that they will have to come to court. However, it is so much better to know that six weeks in advance, rather than two days before. It means that people can plan their lives, know when they will have to come to court and prepare themselves for that. More importantly, witnesses are now aware of what is expected of them when they come to court.

[155] Witnesses can come to the court, have their needs assessed, and, if they are particularly concerned about seeing the defendant they will be told that they can come in by another or secret entrance. They will be told that their pets and children will be looked after on the day. They will be asked whether they need help with transport. There is a wonderful example of the way that public and private agencies can work in partnership in Gwent. We spoke to the bus companies, which agreed to provide free bus passes to witnesses and victims to enable them to come to court. That removes the concern about getting to court. In really difficult cases we will send a taxi or police car. At the end of the day, witnesses are told the result and they are thanked for their efforts.

[156] The single point of contact, referred to in paragraph 10 of my paper, is so important. Rather than falling into the gaps between the various agencies, the witness or victim now has a single point of contact to use throughout the case. In paragraph 11, you will see that there was a full Government review. I am pleased to say that Gwent was one of the three pilot sites across England and Wales that inspired the UK Government to produce money. We received £36 million from the Treasury for three years, from 2005 to 2008, to provide the same sort of level of service that we were providing in Gwent.

10.40 a.m.

[157] Turning to the position in Wales, the CPS in south Wales followed after Gwent, and we established three witness care units, which are in Merthyr, Swansea and Cardiff. Those are all in operation now, working with the police. There are about 12 people in each unit, and there are about 20 people in the Newport unit. The CPS in north Wales and in Dyfed Powys has followed suit. There is one witness care unit in Dyfed Powys with 10 staff and two witness care units in north Wales—one in Wrexham and one in Colwyn Bay—with seven staff each. When we recruited staff into these posts, we recognised the need for diversity, so we have ensured a healthy mix of male and female staff, and we have employed Welsh speakers, particularly in the North and West. We have a high proportion of Welsh speakers in Swansea, because there is a need for that, and we have Welsh speakers in Cardiff and Newport—they are not called upon so often, but we have them there, if there is a need for them. Across Wales, we have around 80 staff, working full time on this important work. They are a mixture of police and CPS staff and there is a good level of co-operation from all the voluntary, public and private sector agencies, such as women's safety units, Victim Support and the witness service. In fact, a member of the witness service is stationed in the Cardiff and Newport witness care units. We provided funding for that through the local criminal justice board because we recognised the need for the whole criminal justice system to come together and support this important initiative.

[158] Before coming here today, I spoke to one or two witness care officers to collect some anecdotes, so that you could see the effect that this new approach of speaking to witnesses and keeping them informed has had. The universal realisation is that not only does witness attendance improve significantly—across Wales, witness attendance has improved from 60 per cent to around 80 per cent or 90 per cent, which is a huge increase in the numbers turning up to court—but, more importantly, witnesses are far better prepared to give their evidence when they come to court. I have been a prosecutor for many years and I know how distressing it is for the witness, for me, and the court, to have a witness who is so scared that he or she is not giving of their best. We still have witnesses who experience trepidation, but they are coming to court and giving evidence well. The witness care officers explain what is involved, ask if the witness wants to have a pre-court visit, and, interestingly enough, the level of take-up of pre-court visits has gone up to around 50 per cent of witnesses. That is not only in the serious cases—the homicides, the rapes and serious sexual offences—but also in cases involving more minor offences. They are saying, ‘I am still scared about this process, so I want to come to court’.

[159] I have one heart-warming anecdote to share with you. There was a high profile rape and abduction trial heard last year in Cardiff. The defendant was once Wales’s most wanted criminal. The woman victim was all right until the Friday before the Monday of the trial. She woke up on the Friday absolutely terrified about the process because there it was: she was due to come to court on the Monday. What could she do? She phoned our witness care officer, who happened to be a man. It is interesting that women rape victims do not always relate to women—they often like to speak to men to get their perspective. She phoned up in a blind panic, wanting to speak to somebody. The witness care officer saw that she was in a terrible state, so he asked, ‘Why don’t you come in and see us and we can take you through this?’ She came in to our offices, and he spent about an hour with her, taking her through the process, and she felt much better. She came to give evidence on the Monday and the defendant was convicted and received a life sentence. Only a few years ago, that would not have been picked up because, interestingly, the officer on this case was on leave at the time. Therefore, even if she had tried to contact someone on the Friday, there would not have been anybody in the police service who could have helped her. However, because we maintain the service five days a week, we were able to pick up the problem. She came to court and gave evidence, and got a conviction when, a few years ago, that defendant may have walked free and been a danger to yet more women.

[160] There are many such stories. In Newport, in the early days, we had a horrendous prostitution ring operating around the market, involving under-age prostitutes. We just would not have been able to get them to court a few years ago, but we engaged with them and spent huge amounts of time and energy on them, and they came to court and gave evidence. I will give another example from Gwent, involving not such a serious offence. There was a woman who had just had a baby who did not feel like coming to court at all. Our witness care officer, who had just come back from maternity leave, said, ‘Well, I have just had a baby’, and they spoke for two hours. However, that was money well spent, because the witness came to court and we got a conviction. So, £36 million may seem a lot of money across the whole country, but it is not when you realise how much is wasted in terms of court failures when witnesses do not come to court, thus resulting in ineffective trials.

[161] One unexpected by-product of engaging with witnesses—in some ways, it is not unexpected, although we did not expect this—is that we get much more information. Gems of information come out because we are speaking to victims and witnesses. Other potential witnesses come to court, because the witness will say to our witness care officer, ‘How about my friend, Janet? She was there.’ The witness care officer will look through the list and see that we do not have a Janet on the list of witnesses, but will then ask the police to take the evidence. Such people can often have crucial evidence to give. There was a lovely example of that a few weeks ago. The witness care officer was speaking to a sister of a victim in a

domestic violence case. The sister was not called as a witness, but she said that the victim had lent her mobile phone to her and that she kept getting text messages from the defendant saying, 'What can I do to persuade you not to give evidence?'. That would never have come to knowledge previously, but it did and we were able to go back to the police and got a conviction for attempting to pervert the course of justice out of that. So, not only are the witnesses improved, but justice is improved in terms of getting more evidence.

[162] The benefits are enormous and the witnesses are told the results at speed—24 hours after the case has been held. Victim personal statements are being far more regularly obtained by the police, because witness care officers are prompting the witness to give personal statements, asking whether one has been taken, and, if not, getting the witness to give one to the police. That statement is then read out to the court, and the court is given a far better picture of the effects of the crime upon the victim, and can sentence accordingly.

[163] We identify special needs. It may not have been picked up that the witness has a hearing problem or is a vulnerable witness, and therefore needs the protection of screens or a video link. We can pick that up by speaking to the victims. We monitor and assess the benefits of this. As I said, attendance has significantly improved: we are getting 80 to 90 per cent of witnesses in court, and they are far happier at the end of the process, and far more likely to be witnesses in the future. We are conducting an England-and-Wales survey, called the witness and victim evaluation survey, which asks detailed questions about witnesses' and victims' experiences at court. We are reviewing the process of the witness care units—a national steering group comes to investigate and approves us onto the next stage, and I am happy to say that those assessments are going well across Wales.

[164] There are risks, of course. This can be very stressful for our staff, both police and CPS staff, because they are engaging with the witnesses first hand, and hearing about the effects of the crime in the rawest of details. We are no longer sitting in our ivory tower—in Cardiff, the Capital tower—looking down on the world and issuing a written notice to someone to come to court on Monday. We are engaging with witnesses, but with that we are engaging with real life. It can be stressful for staff, so we need to support our staff in this vital work.

[165] I do not come here with a begging bowl, but the UK Government has given us £36 million over three years, and that funding runs out in 2008. I am determined that this will continue in south Wales, because it is a vital service to the people of Wales, so we will find the money for it. However, so that the committee is aware, the funding comes to an end in 2008 and I will have to find alternative ways of funding this. I am determined to do that, but that is a risk. So, that is my presentation and I would be very happy to answer questions that you may have.

[166] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you, Chris, for a very interesting presentation.

[167] **Laura Anne Jones:** I am sure that giving evidence would be an extremely daunting experience, and it would be scary for some and/or traumatic. The fact that you are taking a hands-on approach and giving a personal touch is common sense, almost.

10.50 a.m.

[168] The fact that you are now doing it is very welcome and encouraging, because I know many people who would not come forward otherwise. A friend has just been through a case. I cannot go into it, obviously, but she was petrified of going. She had not done anything, but she had seen something, and she was scared about the impact of giving evidence. However, she was talked through it and she realised that it would make a difference if she did give evidence, and so she did, and it all worked out in the end.

[169] Towards the end of your presentation, you touched on your support for your staff, who have to hear atrocious things. What counselling and so on is available to them? Also, you said that there are support agencies for witnesses. Do you say to witnesses, 'Look, go into that, and that counselling is available at such and such a place'?

[170] **Mr Woolley:** Thank you for raising that point, as it is a vital part of the service. I said that we have 80 people or so working in the units, but this spreads out far wider than that, as we have links with witness care and women's support groups. We have a contact directory and, if we identify that a witness has a special need, we know which agency—voluntary, public, private sector or whatever—that person can be sent to. It is like a web: we can direct witnesses to the services that they need, and that is important.

[171] **Laura Anne Jones:** I also want to pursue something that I scribbled down when you came in this morning, which is about the work that you do with children, child witnesses and so on, and the video link thing that you now do.

[172] **Mr Woolley:** That is vital, because children are so vulnerable, and I would say that 100 per cent of child witnesses take up the offer to come to see the courts beforehand. Special measures apply automatically to child witnesses. They give evidence by video link, and many child witnesses will give pre-recorded video evidence; that will be their evidence in chief, as we say, that is, the first part of their evidence, so they do not have to worry about delivering the goods, as it were. They will then be exposed to cross-examination, but that will be via video link, so they are not face to face with their abusers, in many cases.

[173] **Laura Anne Jones:** When children come forward, it is sometimes with adults encouraging them to do so, but what about information in schools telling children that they could contact a certain number, say, and so on, so that children are aware that they can go to you and talk to you?

[174] **Mr Woolley:** That is a very good point. I do not think that we have our contact details in schools yet, but that is a valuable suggestion. Thank you.

[175] **Mark Isherwood:** I have been a witness twice: once in a corporate crime case and once as a victim, and, on both occasions, the witness support was atrocious and very much along the lines that you described prior to this initiative. So, I understand fully where you are coming from in that regard.

[176] In vulnerable cases, such as those involving child abuse, for example, what liaison and training might you have with the police?

[177] **Mr Woolley:** There is a lot of training. One of the minimum standards that we refer to concerns the adequate and proper training of witness care officers for this work. It is fair to say that they gain in experience all the time. I was speaking to them just this week, and they say that they are far better at this now than they were last year. However, we do give them special training, and we send them away on courses to deal with vulnerable witnesses, particularly aspects of witness care.

[178] **Mark Isherwood:** There was a particular case in north Wales a few years ago in which I was, to an extent, involved. A witness arrived to give evidence, and the defendants—I think that there were three or four defendants—had all prepared an identical story. The witness's CPS prosecutor did not turn up that day, and a barrister who had not been briefed was appointed at very short notice, and although that barrister had evidence to disprove what the defendants were saying, it was never produced. The defendants produced their story, they were not cross-examined, the witness was made to appear to be the culprit, and no advice was

then given to the witness as to what he or she should do, so the witness stayed in the court until the end of the proceedings and was then bound over with the defendants. That person then took what I believe was a largely unprecedented step, of successfully appealing against the binding over order in Chester Crown Court. Clearly, that situation should never have arisen wherein, first, a barrister who was not briefed turned up at what seemed like two hours' notice and with no awareness of the evidence to disprove what the defendants were saying, and secondly, there was a lack of advice to the witness, who should not have stayed in that court room in the circumstances, because that witness could not have been bound over if he or she had not been there.

[179] I gave evidence in a case of harassment and intimidation against a neighbourhood, and, when I arrived, one of the main defendants, who had convictions for grievous bodily harm and threatening behaviour, was at the only entrance to the building, looking straight at me. So, I had to ring the police, who took a long time to arrive, to escort me into the building. I then had to walk by the defendants and sit very close to them prior to being called, which, again, was very worrying. I have a hearing problem and the defendants in this case exploited that, as did the defending barrister by asking questions so quietly that I had to say, 'Pardon?', and nobody intervened. The issue in this case was over whether I had heard somebody shouting. As a prosecutor, would you now seek to intervene when hearing issues are referred to?

[180] You mentioned working with various victim groups; you did not mention Victim Support. Perhaps you will confirm that that would include Victim Support.

[181] **Mr Woolley:** Yes.

[182] **Mark Isherwood:** On community safety partnerships, I know that you are not one of the statutory partners, but would you comment on using your expertise and knowledge to inform and tackle the causes of crime as well as the consequences?

[183] **Mr Woolley:** There were many points there and I will respond to them in turn. I do not know the individual cases so I cannot comment on them in detail, but I can comment in general. It is inexcusable to send counsel to court to prosecute at two hours' notice without counsel being fully briefed and having an understanding of the case. There is an increased emphasis in the Crown Prosecution Service on sending our own advocates to do trials rather than brief out to the independent bar, because we recognise that our in-house lawyers have a far better grasp of witness care issues and of the case, so that point is well made.

[184] On the point about your arriving at court and the defendant's being there, it is fair to say that not only have the CPS and the police responded to the increased realisation that victims and witnesses have needs, but the court service has also responded. I mentioned the local criminal justice board earlier, which is a partner in improving the services to victims and witnesses, and members of the committee should find that, across Wales, there are separate waiting rooms for prosecution witnesses and for defendants and defence witnesses. I cannot speak for the whole of Wales, but I think that it is the general push to have separate entrances for prosecution witnesses and defence witnesses, and, certainly, separate waiting rooms should now be universal across Wales. With regard to your experience and the way that that was exploited, hopefully the witness care unit would pick up a special need like that so that you would not turn up to an unprepared court; everything would be ready with hearing assistance so that no-one could take advantage of that, as appeared to happen in your case.

[185] On the community safety partnerships, we recognise that this is a problem wider than just witness care. I chair the South Wales Criminal Justice Board, and there is no real link between the work that we, the criminal justice service, do and the work of the community safety partnerships. That is recognised nationally as a problem because there is a distinct gap

between the workings of these organisations. As chair of the South Wales Criminal Justice Board, I visit each community safety partnership to tell them about our work and to foster links. I also attend the overarching leadership group, which is chaired by the chief executive of Neath Port Talbot council, and which brings together the community safety partnerships and enables me to give them a voice on criminal justice issues. However, it is a bigger problem than just that of the witness care units and it is by no means solved, so that was a very apposite point.

11.00 a.m.

[186] **Huw Lewis:** The worth of this is clear and it is exciting to hear the strength of the system as you describe it, but I want to play devil's advocate for a moment. I am sure that, just occasionally, a defendant is innocent and a witness is malicious. In that case, would you not be concerned that the level of support being offered through the criminal justice system to such a witness might actually impose a burden of expectation upon that malicious witness, which would reassure them almost that their malicious evidence would be the thing that would be expected? Of course, the system would not actually say that, but, within their own mind, they might draw that false conclusion. Secondly, I wondered whether defence witnesses are availing themselves of the same type of support, because, of course, they might, in some cases, be the witnesses who are coming to the court with the truth.

[187] **Mr Woolley:** We have to regard every witness who has provided a sworn statement at face value. If they have given a statement and signed the oath stating that it is true, we have to regard what they say as being true. Therefore, we cannot distinguish between witnesses who will undoubtedly be witnesses of truth and the few malicious witnesses who may be out there. We have to treat them equally. We have to rely on the court process to winnow out the truthful witnesses from the malicious ones. We cannot gainsay or prejudge that. We have to rely on the court process, and the testing, the cross-examination and the forensic techniques employed in court, to wheedle those witnesses out. However, it is a fair point, and I acknowledge that not every witness who gives evidence is necessarily truthful. If we find that a witness has not been truthful and has perjured himself or herself, we do take proceedings against him or her. That is particularly so in the tragic cases where false allegations are made, particularly with regard to sexual conduct, when a defendant may be harried through the courts. We take that very seriously indeed.

[188] You made a very valid point about defence witnesses. They do not come within this scheme; this is purely for prosecution witnesses. Nevertheless, defence witnesses are entitled to the same level of protection in the court as prosecution witnesses. So, the full panoply of special measures, such as screens and video links, is available to defence witnesses just as much as to prosecution witnesses. However, again, we have to rely on defence solicitors to identify those needs and to make the applications. I have no jurisdiction over defence solicitors; I just rely on them to do their job properly. However, taking up your point, I think that prosecution witnesses are getting a better deal than defence witnesses in all this.

[189] **Janice Gregory:** Yes. Going back to Mark's point about the hearing issue, if that is not picked up by a very sharp defence solicitor, then you would have a defence witness who would be subjected to the same thing that Mark was subjected to.

[190] Thank you. That was interesting.

[191] **Mick Bates:** Thank you for your informative and interesting presentation. I am sure that we all look forward to seeing you get your extra money to ensure that this whole project continues. I will come back to that in a moment. First, on the evidence base and the statistics, do you have any further statistics to show us the amount of warnings and dewarnings that are issued?



[192] **Mr Woolley:** I do not have them with me, although we have a very sophisticated witness management system that will show that. So, if the committee is interested in that sort of information, I can go back and prepared a note for you on that.

[193] **Janice Gregory:** That would be fine; I will circulate it.

[194] **Mick Bates:** That would be very useful, because, obviously, at some stage, the time impact, as well as the financial impact, will be considered. I think that you said that you had eight full-time staff.

[195] **Mr Woolley:** There are 80 full-time staff across Wales. We have around 40 in south Wales, 20 in Gwent, 10 in Dyfed-Powys and 14 in north Wales.

[196] **Mick Bates:** How does that sort of work impact on police time? They are obviously part of the process, and you talked about the greater partnership working. What is the impact on the police forces?

[197] **Mr Woolley:** You might think that it would save the police a lot of time. However, in fact, the police have so many extra duties now under the victims code that they are not noticing any difference. The police, when they first take a statement, are supposed to do an assessment of a witness's needs and take a personal statement from the victim. We are saving the police from the harassment that individual police officers may have faced from witnesses regarding their case. The poor police officer, who was nothing to do with the court system, would have no knowledge of what stage the case was at. So, it is more efficient in that way. It is undoubtedly saving police time in terms of repeated adjournments. Previously, witnesses were not coming to court and we had to apply for adjournments. If we were granted an adjournment then we had to go through the process again.

[198] **Mick Bates:** Presumably, you are saying that this is a three-year funded project?

[199] **Mr Woolley:** Yes.

[200] **Mick Bates:** Therefore, in terms of the evaluation, these issues will be the most important in order to justify further costs.

[201] **Mr Woolley:** They will, yes.

[202] **Mick Bates:** Moving on to the costs and the £36 million granted by the Home Office, are there any budgetary implications for the Welsh Assembly Government ?

[203] **Mr Woolley:** No, there are not. This was new money from the UK Government—from the Treasury—which was convinced by Gwent in particular regarding the value of the funding.

[204] **Mick Bates:** When will you start your negotiations on the basis of the evaluation that your theory has worked?

[205] **Mr Woolley:** The theory, which you as politicians will have heard before, is that this would become cost-neutral after three years, as witnesses will come to court now, and there will, therefore, be less need for court hearings. There will, therefore, be savings in the court service that can be rerouted into this work.

[206] **Mick Bates:** This is a critical issue for me. What evaluations have you done in order to say to the Home Office, 'It will cost £36 million'? You are saying that it is cost-neutral.

What effort has been made to identify the specific savings that would encourage the continuation of the jobs of these 80 staff, for example?

[207] **Mr Woolley:** There are effective cost measures, and the witness management system that I mentioned before will affect that. We can cost out how much a witness care officer costs per day, and we can cost out how much it costs for an ineffective trial. All of these can be put into the balance. I think that the £36 million can be saved.

[208] **Mick Bates:** I am slightly sceptical about the process and the idea that this will be cost-neutral after the initial investment. I am sure that many of us see this in other areas.

[209] **Mr Woolley:** I have lived with a civil servant for the past 20 years, so I too am familiar with that.

[210] **Mick Bates:** There have been many instances where there has been a tremendous concept, as you have pointed out here. I think that you say here that you are up to a witness appearance figure of around 80 per cent or 90 per cent now, so there is only a short distance to travel to get closer to the 100 per cent. However, that justification is often blocked by the need to find the money within a budget so that the savings that you find are not necessarily the mechanism by which the money is identified.

[211] **Mr Woolley:** This is more complex as we are looking for another agency to surrender part of its budget to come into my budget and police budgets. That is very difficult, especially when we have different departments in charge of the budgets.

[212] **Mick Bates:** Absolutely. So, we are getting to the nitty-gritty now. We talk about the evaluation process, but there will presumably be ongoing monitoring, whatever happens after the three years. Who will undertake that monitoring to ensure that no moneys are being withdrawn from other budgets in order to fund what is obviously good work?

[213] **Mr Woolley:** This is ultimately being managed by the National Criminal Justice Board, which has links to the national project, which is a joint CPS and police project overlooking the witness care units across England and Wales. It reports to a very high level, because Ministers sit on the National Criminal Justice Board. It is chaired by the Attorney-General or the Home Secretary. It is, therefore, brought up to the highest level. However, like you, I am concerned about the funding. This is an essential initiative that we must find funding for, and, come 2008, I have to find the moneys for 20 CPS staff. The police have to find moneys for 20 police staff in south Wales. How will we do that overnight? Your point is valid, and we are pressing for guarantees of funding after 2008, but this is the process by which it has to be done.

[214] **Janice Gregory:** Mick, please make this your final point as Leanne wants to come in and we are now overrunning.

[215] **Mick Bates:** Given the nature and importance of this work, it appears to me that there may be a role for the committee to write to the appropriate authority to support this work.

11.10 a.m.

[216] **Mr Woolley:** I would be grateful to the committee for that support.

[217] **Mick Bates:** May I make that suggestion?

[218] **Janice Gregory:** Yes, I do not have a problem with that.

[219] **Mick Bates:** We all understand the implications of saying that this is cost-neutral, and someone will suffer if we are not careful.

[220] **Leanne Wood:** I support that. If we could write to the Home Office and press the case for continued funding after 2008, that would be good.

[221] How many specialist rape and domestic abuse prosecutors do you have in Wales? Conviction rates go up where those specialist services are in place. Secondly, what ongoing support is available to people? You say that people can have support for the coming 12 months, but what does that mean concretely? If, say, a domestic abuse victim needed rehousing, would that form part of the support? Who does that? Do you do that in partnership with social services or other agencies? How does that all work?

[222] **Mr Woolley:** I will address the rape and domestic violence issue first. We acknowledge that rape and domestic violence specialists improve the service. Every one of my officers in south Wales has a rape specialist and a domestic violence specialist. I have an area-wide co-ordinator for rape and domestic violence. So, we see the importance and significance of that. We are also retraining all our lawyer staff, and many of our administrative staff, on how to handle domestic violence cases.

[223] Going back to the witness care unit, we have a special emphasis on domestic violence victims within the unit, and we apply the 14 standards to them.

[224] **Leanne Wood:** Does that include children?

[225] **Mr Woolley:** That will include children in these cases.

[226] On the ongoing support, I am entirely with you that we need to expand the work of the unit. At present, we run from the point of charge to sentence, but we recognise that victims' and witnesses' needs go far beyond that. A good example is when a defendant is released on licence, many years down the line; the victim—or witness, indeed—needs to know that. At present, that responsibility lies with the probation service. My dream is to expand the work of this witness care unit so that it encompasses all the issues that are likely to affect the victim or witness throughout the history of the case, which may extend many years beyond the actual sentence.

[227] **Leanne Wood:** It is important that that ongoing support is offered in these cases. I used to work with Women's Aid, and I know of many cases of women who have been afraid to go to court because they know that although their abuser might get a prison sentence, but that he will come out eventually. There is no support there. Men often torture women through the prison sentence by writing to them, and so on. If there is nothing there at the end, that will put the woman off coming forward at the very beginning.

[228] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you, Chris, for your attendance at committee today. I am sure that we will welcome you back at some point in the future.

[229] **Mr Woolley:** I hope so.

[230] **Janice Gregory:** We are now over time—it always happens, does it not? We will have a 10-minute break. Please be back at 11.20 a.m..

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 11.13 a.m. a 11.27 a.m.  
The meeting adjourned between 11.13 a.m. and 11.27 a.m.*

**Cyflwyniad gan Gynhalwyr Cymru**  
**Presentation from Carers Wales**

[231] **Janice Gregory:** Welcome back to the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee. If anyone has turned on a mobile phone, BlackBerry or a pager during the break, please check that it is now switched off, because it affects the sensitive broadcasting equipment. I will run through some housekeeping tips. There is no fire drill, so if the alarm sounds you will be asked to vacate the building. Please be directed by the ushers. If you have a problem hearing, please use the headsets to amplify sound. If anyone wishes to speak through the medium of the Welsh language, a simultaneous translation can be heard using the headphones.

[232] I am delighted to welcome Roz Williamson and Francesca Montemaggi, whom we know from her time as a researcher for Peter Black, I think. She was definitely working on my floor. I am delighted to welcome you both to committee. They are from Carers Wales. Members are keen to have a presentation from you, and I am sure that they will drift in in a minute or two. Our time is not restricted as such, but I need to be more strict about time for this part of the meeting. Therefore, I ask you to make your presentation now, and Members will then ask questions.

[233] **Ms Williamson:** Thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation about carers and social exclusion. I know that there is wide cross-party support in the Assembly for supporting carers, and that many Assembly Members are strong personal champions for carers here and in their constituencies.

[234] Since the introduction of the carers' strategy six years ago, there have been many improvements at national and local levels, in the recognition of the role that carers play and their needs, and of the support that is offered to them. However, as I am sure you would expect me to say, there is still a great deal left to do.

11.30 a.m.

[235] Traditionally, carers have been seen as part of the health and social care brief, either as part of the 'supply side', an unpaid workforce—though one that, unfortunately, does not have any of the benefits and protections of a contract of employment—or they are seen as a subsidiary client group. We want to shift that mindset to see carers as people with rights of their own, and the right to a life of their own. The way in which health and social services are planned and delivered is of vital importance to carers, but there are many other policy areas within government, notably social justice, economic development, lifelong learning and equalities, which are important as well. In this presentation, I want to concentrate on those areas that are particularly relevant to this committee, but, inevitably, there will be some cross-referencing.

[236] First of all, who are carers? A lot of these statistics will be familiar to you, because they are used frequently, but it is worth remembering what a large group of people carers are. There are 6 million carers in the UK, more than 350,000 of whom are in Wales, and 90,000 people in Wales combine work with care for more than 50 hours a week. The social care workforce in Wales is only 70,000 people, so, there are more carers providing unpaid care than there are social work professionals. Some 50 per cent of carers combine caring with paid work, and that is one of the key issues that brings carers well into the remit of this committee—50 per cent are trying and struggling to combine work and care, 50 per cent quite often cannot combine work and care.

[237] The figure that we use, which is now very out of date and will need to be updated soon, but is still staggering enough, is that carers in Wales save the state £3.5 billion. It is nearly five years since we compiled those figures, so they need to be updated, but it is still a

significant amount. So, carers are major contributors to the economy of Wales, both the social economy and in the ordinary economic activity of Wales. They contribute directly to the wellbeing of thousands of people who are disabled, seriously ill or frail. They provide the bulk of care in the community. We have to remember that. Carers are the main workforce, but, as I said, without many of the protections that other people have.

[238] Despite this, many carers face poverty, social exclusion, isolation and poor health. They are not given real choices. They do not have the right to an ordinary life, which remains a pipe dream for those with substantial caring responsibility. The peak ages for caring are 45 to 64. That is a time when people quite often have a lot of experience and high levels of responsibility in their jobs, and that is also the time when they are most likely to become carers. So, they make a major contribution to the economy of Wales, not only because of the value of their unpaid work, but because, as I said, half of all carers are combining paid employment with caring. However, as probably most of you know—some of you from personal experience—combining paid work with caring is not easy, particularly for those who look after people with serious or unpredictable conditions. These are the carers who are most at risk of serious and long-term social exclusion.

[239] I will look briefly at the financial impact of caring. A Carers UK report from 2000—again, a long time ago, but still valid—called ‘Caring on the Breadline’, was based on a large sample of carers who had significant caring responsibilities. That report showed that the financial struggles faced by carers were quite daunting. Almost all of the respondents were caring for more than 50 hours a week, 60 per cent of them had had to give up work to care, one in three of the carers were in receipt of income support, and one in three had no savings at all, were in debt and had to cut back on things such as food and heating. More recent surveys reinforce those findings. Although it is an older report, all recent research shows that poverty is still a major issue for carers. One of the main causes of that is economic inactivity and underactivity, which is a real issue for carers.

[240] Carers have to give up work because of the stress of juggling work with substantial levels of care; the unsuitability, inflexibility and cost of care services create a second huge barrier; low pay and the benefits trap are a third reason; and inflexibility in the workplace is a fourth. As I have said, the peak age for caring is between 45 and 64 years of age. Caring responsibilities often push these people with high levels of skill and experience out of the labour market altogether, or trap them in low-paid, part-time jobs. That has a serious financial impact on carers and on the economy at large. I think that with the skills shortage in Wales, this is becoming an increasing problem.

[241] The negative impact is greatest for women with caring responsibilities. Of working-age carers, women are still most likely to be the primary carers. Women who have caring responsibilities are more likely to seek part-time work in order to have the flexibility that they need. However, due to the lack of well-paid and skilled part-time work, women often have to step off the career ladder altogether, perhaps for a second time, having taken time out for childcare. As a result, they have to watch their pay, their prospects and their pensions suffer. Gender inequality in pay and employment opportunities is still a major issue for all women, and the Women and Work Commission reinforced that message this week. This is exacerbated for carers and it is a particularly serious issue for the mothers of disabled children.

[242] We have had some interesting statistics from Contact a Family in Wales: 60 per cent of women with children who have children who are not disabled are in some form of work, but only 16 per cent of women with disabled children are in work and, of these, only 3 per cent are in full-time employment and 13 per cent are in part-time work. The comparators are 22 per cent full time and 39 per cent part time. For younger women with disabled children it is a serious issue and they also make up the group of women who are most keen to combine

paid work and care.

[243] Other factors that contribute to carer poverty and the linked social exclusion are the additional costs associated with disability and caring, which are not fully covered by the benefits system. What can be done to promote social inclusion for carers? Obviously, some of the key factors related to poverty and social exclusion lie outside the remit of the Assembly, notably the level of carers' allowance and the tax and benefits system. However, there are significant areas where the Assembly can promote the change that is needed to encourage the necessary cultural shift in how carers are viewed. The Assembly must develop and implement policies that will enable carers to have real choices. One key area is in helping to reduce the barriers that carers face in relation to returning to work or staying in paid work. Apart from the benefits trap, which I mentioned earlier, there are other key factors, such as the lack of suitable, affordable, alternative care services. Major long-term investment in social care is needed if Wales is properly to support the many people with long-term conditions and disabilities and their carers.

[244] There is also an issue around employers and the promotion of flexible working practices. Many employers still feel that this is an unfair and unworkable requirement of them. Fortunately, there appears to be a growing number of employers who are happy to adopt flexible working practices and are convinced that there is a sound business case. Some good examples are given in the paper of a couple of employers in Wales who have adopted those working practices and have said that the bottom line is that they have improved their productivity. That is a message that Carers Wales and the ACE National policy partnership try to get across, and we hope that the Assembly will also try to get the message across and encourage more employers to adopt flexible working practices.

11.40 a.m.

[245] Carers Wales and Carers UK have fought over the last 40 years for carers' rights, and there are three Acts of Parliament that give carers tangible rights enshrined in legislation. Unfortunately, these rights have yet to be made real for most carers. The Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 gave local government the power to provide services to carers, and the most recent act—the Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004—marks a shift away from seeing carers simply as unpaid providers of care to seeing them as people with their own rights and with the right to a life outside caring. That Act says that local government now has to think about the needs and the rights of carers for paid employment, leisure and learning activities, which is a huge step forward.

[246] Members will know from their own constituents that the needs of carers, particularly in terms of employment, are quite often not considered. It is assumed, if someone suddenly becomes ill, or an elderly parent becomes frail, that the carer will be there, and does not have those kinds of employment responsibilities. If people give up work in those initial few months when a tragedy hits a family, it is very difficult for them to get back into paid employment. We would like to see the support go in immediately so that people are not forced to give up work when they could, with a little support, continue in paid work and take on a substantial caring role.

[247] Therefore, what can the Assembly do? We would like to offer a number of recommendations for action. First, for this particular committee, we would like to ensure that carers are recognised formally as a socially excluded group, and are therefore included in the criteria and target groups for initiatives that promote regeneration and social inclusion. We ask the committee collectively and individually to act as champions for a fair deal for carers, and to use your influence across all the Assembly's work.

[248] We also ask you to promote and monitor the implementation of the Carers (Equal

Opportunities) Act 2004. As I said, this Act aims to ensure that carers have the right to have their needs for employment, leisure and lifelong learning taken into account when assessments are carried out. We know that that is not happening, and we hope that you will use your influence to monitor what is happening and to try to change things.

[249] Most importantly for this committee, we ask that you put all your energies behind promoting flexible working. Flexible working provides benefits to everyone who is in paid employment, but it is of particular value to carers and it makes a real difference in allowing them to develop paid work and their caring role. The Work and Families Bill, which is currently going through the Westminster Parliament, will be implemented in Wales, and we hope that the Welsh regulations and guidance will promote the most inclusive and flexible definition of carers. The big debate in Westminster currently is that the Department of Health wants a very narrow definition of carers, and we think that that would be unnecessarily restrictive. We hope that we can be more inclusive in Wales.

[250] On a small point, we hope that the Assembly will perhaps consider sponsoring and promoting an Employers for Carers award ceremony. There is a group called Employers for Carers, which we support, and at our recent meeting there were over 40 employers from across Wales who want to promote flexible working for carers, and we would hope that there would be some way in which their efforts can be marked.

[251] As I mentioned, on the fight for improved care services, there is another possibility that you might not be asked about, but if you were, we hope that you will support it. The current White Paper in England on the future of health and social care talks about a national helpline for carers. If a little extra money was needed that would mean that carers in Wales could receive tailored advice on the situation in Wales, we hope that the Assembly could support that particular initiative. Thank you.

[252] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you, Roz. Leanne has the first question. However, before we move on to that, I thank you very much for your thought-provoking presentation. A member of my family has been a carer since she was 21. She is now 43 and there are those issues about her employment, so I know exactly what you mean in that regard.

[253] In terms of the requests that you have made of the committee, we would need to think about those. Some of your requests would be better made of Ministers. Perhaps you have done so, perhaps you have not—you can tell me—but I think that the Economic Development and Transport Committee should hear this presentation as well with regard to the employment issues. I have no doubt that the Committee on Equality of Opportunity would be another good vehicle for you. Perhaps you can have a word with Roger afterwards about that.

[254] **Leanne Wood:** How confident are you that you are reaching out to all carers? I am aware that there are a certain number of hidden carers out there who are very difficult to access, particularly if they are trying to hide the illness of the person that they are caring for. That often happens, in some cases, where children are carers, because the parents might fear that the children could be taken into care if that comes to light. In some cases, they are also the most vulnerable carers.

[255] You mentioned the carers' assessment and the fact that, under the new Act, all needs must be considered. Something that people have said to me frequently is that it is all very well having the assessment, but what happens after that if needs are identified for which the services often do not exist? Are you campaigning on that? Also, as an organisation, where you get your funding from?

[256] **Ms Williamson:** Carers Wales gets substantial support from the Welsh Assembly Government through section 64 funding. So, the majority of our funding in Wales comes

from the Assembly. Carers UK, of which we are a part, gets a full range. It gets some money from section 64 in England, but there are also trusts and all kinds of charitable avenues as well.

[257] **Leanne Wood:** A concern that has been raised with me by carers who are constituents is that when organisations such as yours are funded by Government, it is very difficult to run targeted campaigns against that Government. Do you have a comment on that?

[258] **Ms Williamson:** I think that that is a dilemma for all charitable organisations, and ours is a charitable organisation. I would hope that the records of Carers Wales and Carers UK speaks for themselves in that we have challenged Governments of whatever hue over the last 40 years; we have pushed very hard, and we will continue to do so. However, we also recognise that you have to get the balance right between continually bombarding and criticising initiatives and working supportively to develop policy. So, we try to work to create an arena in which we can discuss policy options, and one of the things about our organisation is that we try to come up with workable solutions for Government, of whatever hue. We do not see our role purely as standing on a soapbox and criticising; we will criticise if we have to. We have criticised recent decisions in the last week or so, and we will continue to do so. However, at the same time, we would always want to work with Governments, not only in Wales, but across the UK, as well as with other parties, to look at workable policy options. That is the key thing.

[259] Returning to your first point about reaching out to hidden carers, I am absolutely confident that we do not reach out to all carers, and I do not know of any organisation that can. The average length of time that it takes somebody who comes into a caring role to think of themselves as a carer is three years. Some 2 million people become carers every year, and with many people it creeps up gradually, so it might be that an elderly parent just starts to get a little bit more frail and you do a little bit more for him or her, and over five years, that becomes a major role, whereas for other people it can happen overnight. Getting information out to carers that they are carers and that there are services that might support and help them is a huge challenge.

11.50 a.m.

[260] Fortunately there are now many local care projects in Wales that do it and probably do it much better than we could at local level. They have a key role to play at local level, and we can only really operate at the national level. We are a very small organisation; there are only five and a half members of staff to work across Wales, but we do what we can and work with local partners to ensure that the message gets out locally. I am afraid that I have forgotten the following question.

[261] **Leanne Wood:** It was about carers' assessments

[262] **Ms Williamson:** One of the big disincentives for people to go through an assessment is that, often, they are told right at the beginning that there are not any services out there and that is appalling. A good assessment should always be looking at what the needs of the person who needs the help are and what the carer can offer and then what the gap that needs to be filled is, but carers are often not going for assessments because they are being told that there are not any services. That is an inequity.

[263] **Janice Gregory:** That is also an issue for local authorities to address. Mick, you have a question?

[264] **Mick Bates:** Thank you for the presentation. One of the frightening aspects of this, apart from the information that you provided, is that the age of our population is increasing,



so the demand on caring services will increase proportionately. I am often faced with the issue of respite care for carers. I cannot see a direct reference in your notes to that. As a national organisation, how are you addressing this issue? Often, people want to do the caring but moments of great anxiety and stress arise, which mean that they need a break. I believe that the whole service could be more effective—if I can call caring a service—if there were a very good and robust respite structure that everyone had a right to tap into. What are you doing at a national level to engage with that and to ensure that the Government understands it and funds it properly?

[265] **Ms Williamson:** We have been doing that. Some of this is filtering through in the White Paper for England in that at least emergency and contingency care is being promised by Government in England and, obviously, we would want to see that rolled out and brought into Wales.

[266] In the paper, we talk about alternative care services. Respite is a key part of that but people need the whole range of services to be flexible. At present, day centres operate between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. and, for working carers, that is of no use. People need to know that they can get good-quality care services from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m., in the evenings, at weekends and, if they need it, a two-week holiday. So, the challenge for the providers of services is huge. We have to be realistic about the costs, but, without this, you are in effect saying that carers have no right to time off or breaks from caring and that, because paid care staff can only work a 35-hour week, a carer has to work a 75 or 80-hour week. That is inequitable. So, that is the challenge for society as a whole. Are we prepared to pay the costs to provide good-quality care services? Families, friends and partners will still want to do the bulk of the caring but they do not want to be run into the ground or to have their own physical and mental health jeopardised, which is what happens to many people.

[267] **Mick Bates:** I express my gratitude to you for the paper. The fourth bullet point about sponsoring and promoting an Employers for Carers award and ceremony would assist the whole process of raising the profile and enhancing the flexibility in working practice that you desire. As a committee, we could support that.

[268] **Janice Gregory:** We can certainly consider that. I think that it is an excellent idea and we can explore it. However, much of what Roz asked us for needs to be addressed, either by another committee or by the Ministers directly.

[269] **Ms Montemaggi:** The main shift is not really within the remit of this committee; it is to recognise carers as partners in the delivery of the service. This has been done in Scotland, and it really should be recognised in Wales. It would have enormous consequences, and it would also mean that we could reach out to carers much more effectively through the help of health professionals, such as GPs and pharmacists. However, again, I realise that this committee does not have the right remit.

[270] **Janice Gregory:** That just goes to prove the cross-cutting nature of this issue; it cuts across every Assembly committee. The Culture, Welsh Language and Sport Committee comes to mind as a possible exception, but it may not be. It may be an idea for us to take this forward and look at it. We cannot do it now because we have time constraints and we will eat into the time for the item on the Royal National Institute for the Blind Cymru, which I am sure none of us wants. If you give me your list of requests, if I may call them that, we can then look at it. I just spoke to the clerk while you were answering a question, and I am happy to write to the Chairs of the Economic Development and Transport Committee, the Committee on Equality of Opportunity and the Health and Social Services Committee to recommend that they find time in their timetable to take a presentation. I am happy to do that. Leanne, do have something to add?

[271] **Leanne Wood:** I just wish to raise one more point on the carers' allowance. It has been put to me by carers that no-one would work for £45 a week, and you said that they work for more than 75 hours a week. There has been a suggestion that, unless their needs are recognised, they will withdraw their labour and go on strike. I do not know whether you have come across that argument and whether you would support such a strike.

[272] **Janice Gregory:** Sorry, but I thought that you had a point on what I was saying, otherwise I would have stopped you, because you have had a go, and I have Huw and Mark to bring in. Can you hold that thought, Roz, and certainly address it, but I would like to bring Huw in and then Mark, and then you can sweep up at the end and take all the questions together.

[273] **Huw Lewis:** I have a general point that I wish to bounce into the discussion. The sheer scale of what we are talking about demands honesty. As you mentioned, however rough the figure of £3.5 billion is, it is getting towards being a fifth of the Assembly's entire public expenditure. If we were to wake up tomorrow morning and have that kind of contribution by carers fully complemented by the state, or whoever, that would involve a massive restructuring of public expenditure. It would be so massive that in order to get towards that—and I hope that we will start this work—it would require a negotiation with the electorate about what it is expected to support. You would have to have that debate and argument, and it would require the permission of the people of Wales in general to shift that amount of money from one place to another, or to make raising that amount of money a priori, if you like. Let us be honest about it. I do not think that it gets carers or anyone any further down the track if we lose sight of the fact that the issue here has such enormous financial implications. It requires honesty with carers and the electorate in general.

[274] We also have to recognise—and I am getting to the point of my question here—that the state alone in this regard is very far away from being in a position to engage as a solo effort, and it should not have to be in such a position. There are many carers out there who would want to continue to have a caring role. I am intrigued by your mention of Employers for Carers, and I am really pleased that you mentioned that there are 40 employers involved so far. I think that this is intriguing, interesting and quite exciting. Can you roughly break down for us who those 40 are?

12.00 p.m.

[275] Are you also, within that group, looking at public sector employers, which would potentially have an enormous impact? The NHS and the education services should be wired up for flexible working, and they are very big employers—I think that there are a third of a million public sector workers in Wales. Also, is the Wales Trades Union Congress engaged with employers' organisations in taking a look at how we could drive that agenda forward?

[276] **Ms Williamson:** If I take the last question first, yes, the Wales TUC has been immensely supportive all the way through. We have been working on carers and employment issues with Chwarae Teg and the TUC and all kinds of partners for a long time. In fact, the Employers for Carers group includes some of the unions. Also, it is public sector employers as well as private sector employers. The first formal meeting of the group was held this month, and there were probably slightly more public sector employers, but they are the ones with which we have had the traditional links. We were very heartened by the fact that we had private sector employers there at all, and there were a substantial number, including some big employers, such as BT and British Gas, and banks.

[277] On the first question, it is important to recognise that carers would not want the state to be the sole provider; they want to care. The financial cost to the state will never be that, because not all carers will say, 'we will give up'. The experience in Scotland with the

introduction of free personal care was that there was very little substitution of care. Carers continued to care, but they were better supported and their role became more sustainable. They did not stop caring, they were just able to do it better, and the people that they cared for were cared for better. It is not that we are saying that carers will withdraw and the state has to fill that gap; the state could not. The workforce retention issues for social care and health staff is already monumental. However, as Francesca said, one of the key things that carers would like is to be seen as the key partners in the provision of care and that they, therefore, get some recognition and support, that they are not asked to do it blindfolded with their arms tied behind their backs. They want support and they will continue to deliver the bulk of the care. That is what they want; they just do not want to give up their whole lives.

[278] **Mark Isherwood:** I have seen a series of reports, particularly over the last year, from different counties, caring organisations, and on behalf of county councils, which indicated that care, in the broadest sense and across all types, can often be provided to a higher standard and at a more efficient cost by the voluntary sector rather than the state sector. Do you think that we should be focusing on outcomes in this sense, whether it is private, voluntary, or public, working together to ensure that we get that maximum efficiency based on these independent reports?

[279] Leading on from that, two weeks ago Care Forum Wales was in the Assembly. It produced a report for Members expressing concern at the decline in the provision of nursing care, primarily by voluntary and private sector providers. Has that had an impact on the people that you represent? The paper that it produced had some issues of concern for us all. You refer to things like the benefits trap, and you also refer to the fact that care services are often inflexible, unreliable and unaffordable. There is no time now, but in the information provided to the clerk, can you specify any proposals for solutions to address that, if you have any? We all share your concerns, but we need to look at how to make that better and more reflective of the needs of the people in the community.

[280] You refer to lifelong learning and the fact that carers are often unable to stay in or return to paid employment. How effective is learning in the community—outreach learning and lifelong learning? How is that beginning to reach people in order to keep them employable now or in the future? Mick referred to respite care. I have worked with a number of different organisations providing respite care, from those offering services for HIV/AIDS sufferers or traumatised ex-servicemen, to hospices and others, but they often find that rules, often legislation, prevent them from providing care to people in Wales, although they are providing care to people from England who are coming into Wales to take advantage of their facilities. Do you have a view on that, and do you feel that we could be more flexible, at Government level, in focusing on those outcomes, where we know it works well for other people?

[281] Finally, in terms of flexible employment, in my previous working experience, I found that it worked very well in head offices and larger departments, but in smaller teams, perhaps in shops or branches focused on customer service, it was often far more difficult because of the need to have people on duty when customers needed them. From your negotiations and discussions with organisations, large and small, do you have a view on how we overcome the type of employment barriers that can exist in those circumstances?

[282] **Ms Williamson:** Again, because of the way my brain works, I will tackle the last question first. I think that it is quite often easier for larger employers, but one of the good things that has happened as a result of the Employers for Carers group that existed in England and which is now being mirrored in Wales is that small and medium-sized enterprises, with the right sort of attitudes, work as well. There are always going to be circumstances where people cannot afford those very flexible practices, but, by and large, if they let the workforce negotiate between themselves, people will cover for each other, and it does work. So, it is a

lot to do with attitude and cultures within organisations, and where there is an open and flexible culture, it seems to work extremely well to the benefit of both the employer and the employees.

[283] In terms of the other formal residential care settings, I cannot comment in any great detail on that because it is not something that we know an awful lot about. For example, on lifelong learning, we know of some very good examples where carers are accessing courses and getting skills and moving on, but it is still finding the alternative care to allow them to have the afternoon off, the evening off or whatever that is the biggest barrier. So, the courses may be there and they may be very valuable, but if people cannot get to them because there is nobody to sit at home in their place, then it is a real problem. However, I think that the voluntary sector is a key provider, as is the public sector, in the whole range of services that are needed.

[284] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you. Can you address Leanne's point about the level of benefit please?

[285] **Ms Williamson:** Yes. We have consistently said that it is an obscenely low benefit. I do not think that most carers will go on strike; it might be something that some of them are thinking about, and we know of people who feel very strongly that they are being exploited, but I think that the reality is that most people will not because of the very nature of their relationship with the people that they are looking after. However, I think that it is a moral issue to say that people need money and support—they need both.

[286] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you, and thank you both very much indeed for your presentations. If you speak to Roger afterwards, we can do something about your going to the other committees. It is important that they receive this presentation in the way that we have. Thank you very much.

12.09 p.m.

**Sefydliad Cenedlaethol Brenhinol Pobl Ddall Cymru  
Royal National Institute for the Blind Cymru**

[287] **Janice Gregory:** I now welcome to the table representatives from the Royal National Institute for the Blind Cymru. Presenting to us today will be Janet John and Stuart Davies. Welcome to you both. You will be giving a presentation on the work that you have done on housing adaptations, so we look forward to that. As usual, I will ask you to start with your presentation, and Members will then ask questions. Janet, are you leading on this?

[288] **Ms John:** Stuart is.

[289] **Janice Gregory:** Okay, and he obviously has supporters in the public gallery. You may start when you are ready, Stuart.

[290] **Mr Davies:** There is no pressure—my boss is over there.

[291] **Janice Gregory:** No pressure, then.

12.10 p.m.

[292] **Mr Davies:** When I wrote my speech, I included 'good morning', but it is 'good afternoon' now.

[293] So, good afternoon to you all. My name is Stuart Davies. I am the community

services manager for the Royal National Institute for the Blind Cymru. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you on RNIB Cymru's housing project, which is funded by the Welsh Assembly Government. My presentation will cover a summary of the work that we have undertaken to date, some of the achievements, and a look at the challenges that we face, and possible future developments. My colleague, Janet John, is our housing training and development officer. Both of us will be pleased to answer any questions that you have on the project after the short presentation.

[294] RNIB Cymru is the largest organisation providing services to people with sight loss in Wales. Our aim is to see blind and partially sighted people having the same rights, responsibilities, freedoms and quality of life as people who are fully sighted. Over 120,000 people in Wales have a serious eye condition, the majority of whom are over the age of 60. One committee member mentioned that, with an ageing population in Wales, we could see a 35 per cent increase in the prevalence of sight loss over the next two decades.

[295] The majority of older people with sight loss live in their own homes, many in older properties. More than a third of homes in Wales were built before 1918, and we know that most are in a poor condition. The risk of having an accident in a pre-1918 house is significantly higher than in a modern house, with three out of four falls on staircases being in pre-1918 housing. Every year in Wales, more than 4,200 people suffer hip fractures—the majority being older people, with the risk more than double for people with poor sight. One quarter will die within the first six months of this injury, and half the survivors never regain their independence. Much of this evidence that was linked to poor-sight falls and housing conditions, as well as other feedback from people with sight loss, led us to approach the Assembly with our concerns.

[296] In 2002, the Assembly provided RNIB Cymru with funding to research the barriers and to develop good practice guidelines around housing for people with sight loss. 'Housing Sight' was published in December 2003 and was developed as a guide to building accessible homes for people with sight loss. It created complementary design guidance to the lifetime homes standards, which have already been adopted by the Assembly.

[297] We took these guidelines even further. By working in partnership with Wales and West Housing Association, we implemented all the recommendations in a house that it built in the Ely area of Cardiff. Additionally, the Assembly adopted many aspects of the 'Housing Sight' guidance in the design quality requirement standards last year. The implementation of the design quality requirement standards will make a major difference not just for people with sight loss now, but for those people who will develop sight loss in the future and will not have to move house because of this.

[298] 'Adapting Homes' was produced in 2004. This was developed as a guide to the adaptation of existing housing for people with sight loss, and was endorsed by the College of Occupational Therapists. It aimed to develop a checklist for housing professionals—housing officers and occupational therapists—when planning adaptations. 'Housing Sight' and 'Adapting Homes' were the first of their kind, not just in the UK, but worldwide. They are now seen as the definitive guides for building and adapting housing for people with sight loss. These world-class publications have been requested by professionals in over 35 countries. We have also received requests from statutory bodies in England and Scotland, and from the Northern Ireland Assembly, to use 'Housing Sight' and 'Adapting Homes', which were funded by the Assembly, as the basis for positive change throughout the UK.

[299] Good practice guidelines are just a starting point in a process that should ultimately end in accessible housing for all people with sight loss. However, these guidelines alone will not be able to overcome the barriers that prevent people with sight loss getting this support. Recognising this, as well as the inherent flaws in the systems for adapting the homes of

people with disabilities, RNIB Cymru targeted these barriers and issues. Following extensive research and consultation with housing professionals, including Care and Repair Cymru and people with sight loss, we developed 'In Sight of Homes'. It provided good practice guidelines and was a benchmarking toolkit for local authorities and housing associations throughout Wales. 'In Sight of Homes' looked at the processes, practices and procedures used by local authorities and housing associations that prevent people with sight loss gaining equal access to housing services. These included factors such as the referral process, joint working, criteria for housing allocation and the processes for adaptations.

[300] The National Assembly provided additional funding in 2005 to develop a training pack based on the guidance that we developed from 'Housing Sight', 'Adapting Homes' and 'In Sight of Homes'. This training has received accreditation from the Royal College of Occupational Therapists and the Chartered Institute of Housing. That is a first for any training pack in the UK.

[301] The guidance is specifically designed to promote better housing design, as well as a wider interpretation and application of the disabled facilities grant and physical adaptations grant. It also examines the locally produced barriers in the current housing system. We have been involved in the comprehensive delivery of this training since March 2005, and we are on target to have trained more than 600 housing professionals by the end of the project.

[302] The housing sector has never been more dynamic, and the key issues in the sector are creating a setting for the promotion and development of high-quality services, which includes the application of the Welsh housing quality standards and the review of the DFGs, as well as the rise in homelessness presentations and the recognition of the effect that housing has on the health and wellbeing of individuals. RNIB Cymru needs to be involved in these challenges to ensure that housing issues for people with sight loss are addressed.

[303] Even with the success of the guidance and the development and subsequent implementation of the training for Wales, RNIB Cymru must recognise that the initial 12 months of providing training on the guidelines has been challenging to say the least. Among the challenges is the fact that few people with sight loss gain access to disabled facilities grants. Until we started to provide the training, we did not realise how huge and widespread the problems were and the barriers that people with sight loss face. I have two quotations, of many, from professionals in the field that demonstrate this. A senior occupational therapist said, 'In my 30 years' experience, I have only worked with two visually impaired people regarding a housing adaptation', and a rehabilitation officer for the blind said, 'I cannot think of any clients who have had a major adaptation to their house due to their visual needs'.

[304] Despite delivering a carefully constructed training programme, it may be more difficult to bring about change than was first hoped. Although we may achieve all expected outputs on the project, even with the highest quality training possible, there are barriers in the attitudes, systems and procedures in the local organisations that could eventually negate anything that we hope to achieve.

[305] In the evaluation of a recent training session, the question was asked, 'What, if anything, presented a barrier to your learning?'. One housing officer responded by saying, 'Other housing professionals not wanting to change areas of work when they know, with a little change of the processes, it can make such a huge difference.'

[306] Some authorities are experiencing such difficulty with working relationships across the housing disciplines that joint working is impossible. In other authorities, communications between social services and housing departments are non-existent. This is not the only area where that problem exists. We have examples of adapted homes registers that are excluding people with sight loss. One authority had not even considered this to be a significant issue. It

took intervention on our part at a much higher level even to get it on the agenda.

[307] Many of the issues and barriers now go way beyond ignorance; they constitute systematic discrimination against people with sight loss with regard to housing. It is not all bad news, and I am glad to say that we have worked with many organisations where we have seen positive changes, including one south Wales housing association that saw the issue as far too important to be covered in a small training session. It booked a local theatre yesterday for an event with about 60 people, including front-line staff and senior managers. This one housing association has now requested further training and support.

12.20 p.m.

[308] Additionally, following a meeting with the local authority falls officer, we were able to note shared areas of interest and responsibility. As a result, RNIB Cymru has received a request to train social service and health staff involved in the setting up of care packages to those who have been recently discharged from hospital. That is significant when you consider the issues of risk assessment, as sight loss is a major factor in the risk of injury through falling in the house.

[309] The Welsh Federation of Housing Associations is working directly with us to develop large-scale training sessions for housing associations and local government officers in each quarter of Wales. It recognises the importance of what we are doing, which, in a way, matches the current agendas in housing. However positive, these issues highlight the need for more significant development work in addition to the training to take on these additional issues. The Royal National Institute of the Blind Cymru has recognised this, and, over the past six months, we have looked at revisions to the project's emphasis to ensure flexible and relevant development work prior to the training, which we will be discussing with the Assembly's Housing Directorate later this month.

[310] RNIB Cymru's work has highlighted many more areas of concern outside the scope of the project, including homelessness. As a result, with the support of Shelter Cymru and Homeless Link, it has applied to the good practice in homelessness grant, initially to research the extent of the problem. RNIB Cymru is keenly aware that its work in housing is badly needed, and it is becoming clear that, even though we have made some unbelievable leaps forwards, not just in Wales, but in research and knowledge worldwide, a great deal more work remains to be done.

[311] We thank the Assembly for its support and the way in which it has provided not just funding, but many policy and regulation changes over the past four years. We hope that this partnership will continue into the future, which will help to overcome the many challenges that still present themselves to people who are blind or partially sighted. We would be interested in updating this committee on housing, as well as the wider areas of our work in social justice and regeneration in future.

[312] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you very much, Stuart. There were some really thought-provoking statistics in there and issues about collaborative working within organisations, which is absolutely vital when people are facing these challenges to living in their own homes. Are there any questions? I have one, so I will start—no, actually, Mick should go first. I do not want to abuse my position as Chair.

[313] **Mick Bates:** Thank you very much for your comprehensive report. We should congratulate you on your successes, which have been tremendous achievements. There are just two issues. One is that we have heard mention many times of the implementation of care plans. Have you any monitoring or figures to show what happens when assessments are undertaken and the infrastructure, staff or capacity are not there to implement a care plan?

This, to me, seems to be one of the gaps that we still have.

[314] **Mr Davies:** We do not have any specific issues on care plans, because there is not a huge emphasis on that within the project. As I said, there are many other issues outside of the adaptations and the allocations within the project that we cannot focus on continually.

[315] With regard to assessments for disabled facilities grants, there are huge problems and they come about because occupational therapists do not have the knowledge of visual impairments to be able to assess properly. There is also a misunderstanding of what the disabled facility grants are for. The common phrase for disabled facilities grants is 'ramps and showers'. They look at the physical barriers rather than the sensory barriers. If someone came in and painted a house and made it more colour contrasted, it could save the life of someone who has severe sight loss. The problem is that not a single officer in the whole of Wales would put forward a disabled facilities grant for painting someone's home to make it more colour contrasted.

[316] **Mick Bates:** That is a very interesting point. Thank you for that reply. The other issue is that, in rural areas, we often have access issues and a lack of staff—you mentioned occupational therapists—so there is often a capacity issue. In the research that you have undertaken, have you identified any capacity issues that relate particularly to rural authorities?

[317] **Ms John:** On one of the capacity issues that you mentioned with regard to OTs, one of the recommendations that we put forward was to use the rehabilitation service more effectively. As Stuart mentioned, occupational therapists have a limited understanding of issues to do with sight loss, mostly due to their training. If they are newly qualified, they will have covered it for only one morning during training. We recommend that the rehabilitation officers in the county are used more extensively to provide the information that is needed.

[318] **Janice Gregory:** I will ask my questions now, otherwise I will forget them. You talked about OTs and we have talked quite a bit in this committee about disabled facilities grants—we are quite keen on keeping a close eye on that particular ball. We know, from the last committee meeting, that there are some serious concerns that local authorities are not spending their allocation on DFGs. There is a range of issues about OTs and the recognition of what can be provided. What work are you doing, as an organisation, with OTs? Are you doing any work? Is there any joint working between you or do you have joint meetings to educate them about the need for them to recognise the requirements of people who have this difficulty?

[319] **Ms John:** The training has been split into five modules that target different professional groups, so that they can look at the learning outcomes that they require from the training and appropriately select the module that suits them best. Two modules are specifically designed to meet the needs of OTs. We have had many of them come on the training. Some of them have used it as a top-up to their own professional knowledge, but some have come on the training to use it specifically to develop relationships across the county with other housing professionals. The training that I do is structured. Each module is structured differently. Some of them are very much taught modules while others involve a seminar approach, where there are around-the-table discussions. We are therefore able to hold appropriate discussions to try to encourage more effective joint working.

[320] **Janice Gregory:** The brief that we have been given says that people with sight loss, in general, do not know their rights. What work is being done on that in terms of clinics in hospitals, when someone is identified with a significant loss of sight and diagnosed by the relevant consultant? Is any work being done with trusts across Wales to educate them to educate their consultants to inform people, once they are given a diagnosis, of what help and advice is available to them and, indeed, what help is available to them with regard to just



filling in the forms?

[321] **Mr Davies:** May I just add a further point in answer to your previous question before we go on to that one?

[322] **Janice Gregory:** Certainly.

[323] **Mr Davies:** One of the major problems, which I mentioned in the presentation, is the fact that although the target is to train every occupational therapist in Wales over the next two years, the response that has come back from much of our training is, 'Yes, the training is fantastic, but I will not use it tomorrow when I go back to work'. This goes back to the systems, practices and procedures that have developed. I will give you an example from one authority, which I will not name, but it happens across a lot of authorities. There is a criteria basis for the disabled facilities grants and the therapists told us, when they were going through the criteria with us, that visually impaired people would not get through that process. They will not even be able to make an application. It does not matter what the occupational therapist is trained to do, because they would never be able to access disabled facilities grants for people with sight loss.

12.30 p.m.

[324] **Janice Gregory:** Is that also authority by authority then?

[325] **Mr Davies:** It is, because it is based on—

[326] **Janice Gregory:** It is the interpretation of the guidance that they give.

[327] **Mr Davies:** It is the interpretation, but it is also based on the occupational therapists. We have seen some assessment forms that are up to 10 pages long. It is as though they have found a photocopied sheet from another authority and thrown that in, and then thrown another bit in. It is all aimed around the physical rather than the sensory disabilities.

[328] Going back to your point, RNIB Cymru is always looking to ensure that individuals are made aware of the rights of people with sight loss. It is a difficult process, because 90 per cent of our client group is over 60 years old, and 70 per cent is aged over 75. A lot of the information that is in front of you today is inaccessible to people with sight loss, but it is the standard way to advertise information. It is extremely difficult. Currently, there is no set project to work with the trusts on making this information accessible, or maybe developing self-advocacy rights packs on what benefits people can gain. It is very dependent upon the area in which you live. For instance, the service in Cardiff is quite good because Cardiff Institute for the Blind has a service based in the local hospital. However, the institute is a very strong organisation. If you go to Rhondda Cynon Taf, you will find that there is no local society for the blind and therefore the information that you receive is very ad hoc.

[329] **Janice Gregory:** That is a challenge. Perhaps we need a receptive trust to look at it as a pilot.

[330] **Mr Davies:** A pilot in that area would be excellent. We held a members' forum, because the RNIB is no longer a forum organisation, and that was one of the major issues that people were bringing up: 'I have been registered blind for 10 years, yet no-one has given me a pack of information to tell me what I am entitled to, or people whom I can phone or turn to for help'. So, even before you look at whether there are enough advocates, there is a lack of information in an accessible format.

[331] **Ms John:** There is also a lack of accessible signposting. This is an issue that has

featured in our application for the homelessness grant. We would want to produce a pack for people with sight loss, effectively to signpost them to housing services to prevent them from becoming homeless in the first place.

[332] **Leanne Wood:** I want to pick up on the point that you raised about the training, and that sometimes people say that the training was very useful, but that they would not put it into practice when they went back to work. Is the reason for that identified as being a lack of funding back in work, or is it around resource prioritisation and such things? Sometimes, adaptations can be quite small but they can make a huge difference to people's quality of life. I remember a case that I dealt with in which the garden was completely overgrown. The council would not do it, so the probation service ended up coming to do it with community service volunteers, and that made a huge difference to that person's quality of life. We need some kind of organisation to intervene with the local authorities to fight for people's rights, and I do not know what kind of resources you would have as an organisation to do that intervention work, should a case come up.

[333] **Mr Davies:** I will start and let Janet finish this one. I totally agree with you. Many people, older people especially, see their garden and their house as an extension of their wellbeing, because they may have lived there all of their life, and they have looked after it. When your sight is deteriorating, the garden suddenly becomes a danger zone, and perhaps you cannot see whether your net curtains or your windows are clean anymore, and the depression and anxiety that can set in from that is huge.

[334] I will now pass on to Janet with regard to the case studies in advocacy, but I would say that we cannot do it within this current project. Janet can tell you the problems that have been associated by the case studies that we have developed from that.

[335] **Ms John:** I will speak about the case studies in a moment. In answer to the first part of your question about people saying that the training is excellent—and they have rated it very highly—but they cannot necessarily put it into practice, I do not believe that it is a resource issue. It is to do with the way in which the systems are organised within the housing authority or organisation. We identified that issue very early in the training, which we piloted last year in two authorities, and, in trying to make changes, in the training work we were constantly having the response that we had the wrong people sitting around the table. As a result, we developed module 5, which is getting the right people around the table and dealing directly with those who can make policy changes. However, having said that, if people come in cold to the training, very often they are defensive, and the answers are 'No. No. No. Can't change that. No. Won't change that'. As Stuart mentioned in his presentation, the approach that seems to work best is for me to do a lot of development work in the first place to develop a positive relationship with the people and make them realise that I am being reasonable and that I am not asking for something bizarre. People are then very much more receptive. A case that Stuart cited was that of the housing association that now wants enormous amounts of work done in its organisation.

[336] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you. I call Mark.

[337] **Mr Davies:** There were the case studies, Chair.

[338] **Janice Gregory:** I beg your pardon; carry on.

[339] **Mr Davies:** With regard to the case studies, we use them to find out issues and what is happening in certain areas. We thought that we would have difficulties in finding case studies, because it is difficult to find people who are blind and partially sighted who will talk to us. However, we have been inundated by case studies, which is a concern. They are distressing, but it is even more distressing for Janet in that we do not have the time to deal

with them. The project is not about advocacy or advice and support; it is about changing the underlying problems that have caused this situation. We can send some of the case studies through to you. One of them sounded like it was from war-torn Bosnia in the 1990s rather than from the South Glamorgan area in 2006. It was horrendous. Advocacy is a major issue, and this, again, is down partly to a lack of accessible information, the right gateways and the right referral processes.

[340] **Ms John:** It is also down to inappropriate and inaccessible systems, which are just too difficult to navigate if you are a vulnerable individual.

[341] **Janice Gregory:** In terms of the minor adaptations that Leanne mentioned, we in the committee have been delighted to hear the Minister announce the money that she is putting into care and repair services. I note one comment from Care and Repair Cymru that it has worked with only one visually impaired person in the last nine years. That is, obviously, a local care and repair service, and not Care and Repair Cymru as a whole. There is a role there for the minor adaptations to be undertaken.

[342] **Mr Davies:** I do not think that that is Care and Repair Cymru's fault.

[343] **Janice Gregory:** Oh no, I am not saying for a second that it is.

[344] **Mr Davies:** This goes back to the systems and the processes.

[345] **Janice Gregory:** And the interpretations of the guidance.

[346] **Mr Davies:** And the interpretation, yes. Most authorities now think that their interpretation and their application forms are to do with the legislation, but they are not. If you go back to the original disabled facilities grant, it is there to ensure people's safety and independence in their homes.

[347] **Janice Gregory:** Absolutely. It is down to the interpretation, is it not?

[348] **Mr Davies:** All the things that we talked about—colour contrast and minor adaptations to lighting and so on, which are a lot less expensive than ramps and showers—are not being looked at.

[349] **Mark Isherwood:** Shelter Cymru says that 225,000 people are living in unfit accommodation in Wales, and that would have to include people with sight issues if their accommodation is unsuitable. I hope that I read into this your belief that housing is a key weapon in this matter if we are to tackle causes as well as effects, because, too often, we deal with symptoms rather than root causes.

[350] Care and repair services are not currently available to council tenants, although they are available to private tenants. So, in addition to the points raised, I would like to know how we can focus more in that area.

12.40 p.m.

[351] You mentioned concerns about turning the training into practice, particularly where you cannot necessarily reach the right people who make the decisions, and regionally—I am a Member for North Wales—to what extent have you been able to open doors in north Wales as well as in other parts of Wales? I am particularly concerned by a particular council. I have been contacted by constituents who tell me that the council has recently written to its tenants, saying that, for funding reasons, repairs to council properties will only be considered if there is a risk of death or serious injury. The council would need to understand that that should

include these issues. How do we communicate that? Similarly, I have had letters from constituents concerning authorities that are narrowing their definitions of the disabled facilities grant and wider repairs grants, because they have been exceeding their budget for those areas. Do we need to be giving these areas perhaps more priority in order to save in other areas further down the line?

[352] **Ms John:** Care and Repair is part of the professional group that we are training—just to allay your fears there. Next week, I will be training 30 officers in west Wales, 15 of whom are Care and Repair officers. So they are certainly included in the loop. I would hope that they will be able to take the training and undertake minor adaptations confidently as a result of the training.

[353] I went to north Wales last week and had discussions in one authority to begin the development work that, as I mentioned earlier, I find works best. I spent some time talking to housing, care and repair and social service officers about issues in that authority related to housing so that I could get an understanding of the context that they were dealing with. So, I am starting to go up there.

[354] On the work that I will be doing with the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations, we will be running training courses in each quarter. I fully appreciate that north Wales sometimes feels a little out of the loop, as the professionals mentioned to me when I was up there, and, because of that, I will be targeting training courses specifically in the north. There will be two in the north, in the north-east and north-west, and two in the south, and, hopefully, I will bring them in in that way.

[355] You mentioned that constituents were letting you know that repairs to council houses were being stopped and the definition of the disabled facilities grant is being narrowed, and that concerns me enormously. I would like to talk to you about that later and get some further information. I would not mind meeting these individuals personally in my development work to take it further and to see how I can prevent this from developing further. It concerns me, so I would be interested in talking with you further on that.

[356] **Mark Isherwood:** I will show you a few documents afterwards.

[357] **Ms John:** Excellent.

[358] **Mr Davies:** With regard to the economic question—and this goes back to the statistic that I mentioned of 4,200 hip fractures—off the top of my head, I do not have an idea how much that would cost, but we could all guess that would be into the tens of millions, if not hundreds of millions of pounds, with regard to beds and so on and the care packages that have to come into place afterwards. That is regardless of the reduction in the quality of life and, in many cases, the fatalities that are caused by this, as half of those injured will not have survived within six months of an injury. So, there are economic arguments for our getting the house painted and the lighting improved slightly, which will probably cost much less than £1,000, to ensure that that person can stay in that house.

[359] If we are talking about older people per se, the majority of people with sight loss are aged over 60 or 70. If adaptations are being done to a house, it may be worthwhile, at that stage, to also redecorate the house and make it more accessible, because there is a huge chance that that person will develop sight loss within the next five or 10 years.

[360] **Janice Gregory:** I agree. They seem to most of us to be such simple changes that make such a huge difference. That is what Care and Repair Cymru is so good at doing, among other things.

[361] **Mr Davies:** When the house was built by Wales and West Housing Association and opened by Rhodri Morgan, many people came to visit it. I remember one director of a housing association saying that he thought that it was going to be like Teletubbyland, with different colours and flashing lights and everything, and he could not identify any of the adaptations. That was because, in the guidance, we had taken into account all of these issues at the very first stage. When you are looking at building new houses, there is very little additional cost in making a house accessible for people with sight loss so that any person can move into the house rather than having a specific house for someone who is blind or partially sighted, which is not very inclusive at all.

[362] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you both for coming and for giving the presentation. I mentioned to the clerk just now that I do not think that you sing your own praises enough. You have guidance that is used worldwide and is being requested by all sorts of organisations. I did not know about it and I do not think that the other Members knew about it. I think that you should be singing your own praises far louder than you do. Thank you for coming to committee.

[363] There is nothing else to report. Our next meeting will be on Wednesday, 15 March. I think that we will be in the new building by then, which will be good. As usual, if you have any briefings that you want from the Members' Research Service please make it known to those officials or to Roger or Claire. Thank you for your attendance today. I declare the meeting closed.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 12.46 p.m.*  
*The meeting ended at 12.46 p.m.*