



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

**Y Pwyllgor Cyfle Cyfartal
The Committee on Equality of Opportunity**

**Dydd Iau, 20 Tachwedd 2008
Thursday, 20 November 2008**

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

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

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Eleanor Burnham	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Bethan Jenkins	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Irene James	Llafur Labour
Ann Jones	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Lorraine Barrett	Aelod Cynulliad, Llafur (Y Comisiynydd ar gyfer Cynulliad Cynaliadwy) Assembly Member, Labour (Commissioner for the Sustainable Assembly)
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Swyddogion Gwasanaeth Seneddol y Cynulliad yn bresennol
Assembly Parliamentary Service officials in attendance

Tom Jackson	Clerc Clerk
Holly Pembridge	Rheolwr Cydraddoldebau Equalities Manager
Rita Phillips	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Helen Roberts	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser
Iwan Williams	Rheolwr y Wasg, y We a Chyhoeddiadau Media, Publications and Website Content Manager

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 10.31 a.m.
The meeting began at 10.31 a.m.

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

[1] **Ann Jones:** Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the meeting. First, I ask Members to switch off their mobile phones, pagers and so on. I also remind you that you can speak in either Welsh or English, and that we have translation facilities available. You can also access the verbatim proceedings on channel 0 of your headsets.

[2] We have received apologies for absence from Joyce Watson and Nick Ramsay, both of whom are with the Finance Committee on a study visit to Sweden. Irene James has agreed to join us later this morning, as she currently has another engagement.

10.32 a.m.

Hygyrchedd Gwybodaeth Accessibility of Information

[3] **Ann Jones:** Members will remember that we took evidence from Deafblind UK in July. We agreed to write to the Assembly Commission to highlight areas for improvement on the website. We wrote to the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government requesting information about how many Welsh local authorities have an accessible information policy. We also wrote to the Minister for Health and Social Services asking for the same information regarding Welsh health authorities. We have a report with that information, so it is now a matter for us to decide what we do with this information. Do we want to take it any further? Does anyone have any comments to make?

[4] **Bethan Jenkins:** Has the RNIB made any comments on what we received?

[5] **Ann Jones:** Annex 3 of the report is the RNIB's response; it is delighted that the committee has looked into this issue.

[6] **Eleanor Burnham:** What are you hoping that we will decide now?

[7] **Ann Jones:** It is a matter of whether we actually use this now. The Assembly Commission is coming in later this morning, and we can ask the Commission whether it has made any changes. When Deafblind UK came here, we were quite anxious that we gave everyone an opportunity to be able to access information that Government, local authorities and health boards were putting out. A lot of information is provided via websites, and it is very difficult to access if you have an impairment.

[8] **Eleanor Burnham:** I agree with you. It is not just a matter of voting; it is actually about the period leading up to an election and all the information about everything that people need for an election. It is not just about where people should go, but who is standing and so on.

[9] **Ann Jones:** The response from the Minister for Health and Social Services, Edwina Hart, is quite detailed. It is good to know that that is happening. Edwina assures us that she will make sure that that does not slip.

[10] **Eleanor Burnham:** With regard to the audit of each local authority's needs, one thing that came through very strongly was the training needed for all the personnel involved on polling day, because it seems to vary in quality. Do local authorities have the funds and the proper training in place to ensure that everything is right?

[11] **Ann Jones:** That is a valid point about polling day. We constantly mention this when we look at the accessibility of polling stations. Deafblind UK was looking at this in the wider sense, rather than just thinking about polling day. It is about the accessibility of information. Political parties are among the world's worst in that we like nice colours and we like to write fancy words on fancy materials. That is an issue. The RNIB is saying that it wants clear print.

[12] **Eleanor Burnham:** That is a very big issue, because, after all, there is not a level playing field in terms of funding for elections. Some political parties have difficulty getting enough cash to do all of this. It is okay for the two big parties in UK terms perhaps, but not for the other parties. So, perhaps we should look at funding—

[13] **Ann Jones:** I do not think that it is matter of cash—

[14] **Eleanor Burnham:** I think that it is a lot to do with that.

[15] **Ann Jones:** I think that it is a matter of design. We all fall foul of it, because we all want nice designs on shiny paper and, if you have a visual impairment, the use of those kinds of materials can mean that the information is difficult to read.

[16] **Bethan Jenkins:** Are we happy that there are only two local authorities that have a policy in this area?

[17] **Ann Jones:** No.

[18] **Bethan Jenkins:** Can we follow this up, and say that more work needs to be done? We could thank them for giving us the information but say that there could be much more development in these areas. Three have said that they are going to update their policies, but the other authorities are doing the minimum required of them.

[19] **Ann Jones:** We could write to the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government and ask him to actively pursue this issue.

[20] **Bethan Jenkins:** Yes, so that we do not let the concerns of Deafblind UK and the RNIB drop off the agenda. There is still a lot to be done.

[21] **Ann Jones:** Yes, that is a good point. We could ask the Welsh Local Government Association for copies of the policies of the two local authorities that have them, and then we could ask it to look at extending best practice. Is that all right with everyone? I see that it is.

[22] Does anyone want to raise anything else on this paper?

[23] **Bethan Jenkins:** It states that the Minister has asked for information about the fact that many people do not receive their GP appointment cards in an accessible way. Could we get an update on that?

[24] **Ann Jones:** Yes, we could.

[25] **Eleanor Burnham:** Are we discussing something beyond—

[26] **Ann Jones:** No, it is in point 12 in the paper:

[27] ‘The Minister also informed the Committee, further to the findings...that 58%...did not receive appointment cards in accessible formats, that she has asked NHS organisations in Wales to provide details of communication practices’.

[28] We could ask whether there has been a marked improvement since the trawl was done, or whether it has stayed the same. If it has stayed the same, we need to do something about it.

[29] **Mr Jackson:** Would you want to do that immediately?

[30] **Ann Jones:** I think so.

[31] **Bethan Jenkins:** What is the alternative?

[32] **Mr Jackson:** I suppose that the other option would be to provide a delay of, say, one or two months in order to provide a larger data sample.

[33] **Eleanor Burnham:** We could bring it to the Minister’s attention now and then look

at it again further down the line.

[34] **Bethan Jenkins:** I am flexible either way.

[35] **Ann Jones:** Shall we write and point out our concerns to the Minister and see what she comes back with? If she says that she needs more time, we can give her the time to go away and get the sample.

[36] Is there anything else on this paper? I think that you are right that we have to keep the issue on the front burner. I see that there are no further points on that. We will move on.

10.40 a.m.

Crynodeb o Gyflawniadau'r Pwyllgor Cyfle Cyfartal yn 2008 Summary of Equality of Opportunity Committee Achievements 2008

[37] **Ann Jones:** This is a paper summarising the committee's activity in 2008. We have one more meeting left in 2008, on 4 December. The committee secretariat has produced a paper giving an overview of what we have done, which is handy if people ask you to say briefly what the committee is doing. Are there any views on it? Do you think that we have fulfilled our remit?

[38] **Bethan Jenkins:** It is fine.

[39] **Eleanor Burnham:** It seems to cover what we have been up to.

[40] **Ann Jones:** I think that there has been a good balance: I was just looking at the paper to make sure that we had given everyone an opportunity. We have covered young people, older people, migrant workers, and closing the pay gap.

[41] **Bethan Jenkins:** I have raised this issue in various meetings. Perhaps, when we are planning ahead, there is a way in which we could consult more widely on the topics that we want to discuss in future. I know that we all have our own ideas arising from constituency issues and the organisations that we are involved in, and from the new equalities body, but perhaps there are topics that we do not know about. Perhaps we could look at new ways of gathering ideas for discussion or for investigations to undertake as a committee. I would like to see that.

[42] **Ann Jones:** Do you have any suggestions? If you do, perhaps you could pass them on to the committee secretariat.

[43] **Bethan Jenkins:** I was just thinking about how to do that in a more inclusive way, perhaps using the web to get groups that may not know much about the committee or what we do to feed in ideas. I can have a think about that and bring something to the table. Sometimes, we just pluck things out of the air, and I would like us to be more strategic.

[44] **Ann Jones:** I think that you are right. It is always the case when you say that you are going to look at a piece of work that everyone just throws in ideas, which can sometimes be off the top of their heads.

[45] **Eleanor Burnham:** I do not think that that is a criticism.

[46] **Bethan Jenkins:** It is not a criticism, but we can do things in different ways.

[47] **Eleanor Burnham:** I suppose that everyone uses the web, but is it possible to remind

people, through information points such as libraries, GP surgeries, dental practices, and so on, that we have the ability to look at issues? That could be done through all kinds of organisations.

[48] **Ann Jones:** We tend to do that as part of a consultation when we have picked a topic. I think that Bethan wants to do it before we have picked a topic.

[49] **Eleanor Burnham:** That is what I am saying. We could use all of these bodies and organisations that the public see.

[50] **Ann Jones:** We could perhaps look at that.

[51] **Bethan Jenkins:** We could do more work on engaging with people who may not know about the Assembly. Perhaps we could use the petitions system, or debates in Chamber and statements of opinion, and look at what comes up quite often, and then do an investigation based on that, because you know that people are interested in those issues. Perhaps we should look at more creative ways of choosing a new topic. I can come up with some ideas for that.

[52] **Ann Jones:** That is fine; I do not have a problem with that.

[53] **Mr Jackson:** Do you want me to briefly say something about petitions, Chair?

[54] **Ann Jones:** Yes.

[55] **Mr Jackson:** Bethan is on the Petitions Committee and so will be aware that it has established links with all of the other committee secretariats so if there are petitions that may be of interest to other committees, they will be highlighted to those committees.

[56] **Ann Jones:** That is good. Is there anything else on that paper?

[57] **Bethan Jenkins:** I have one further point. There were reports last week that the pay gap had increased in Wales. Is it worth contacting the Minister to ask about his reaction to that and what additional efforts he will be putting in to address the situation in the light of that fact? We were championing the fact that we had a lower pay gap than in England, but it has risen, so can we do something on that, as we have scrutinised him before on that issue?

[58] **Ann Jones:** Yes, that is fine.

[59] **Mr Jackson:** Would you want to write to the Minister on that?

[60] **Ann Jones:** We will write to him in the first instance, and see what he says. I am always conscious that the Minister seems to almost be a permanent member of this committee.

[61] **Eleanor Burnham:** That is very apt—social justice and equality are part of the same remit, and he is always extremely helpful and informative.

[62] **Ann Jones:** Yes, absolutely. However, we will write to him in the first instance. After writing to him, he will probably realise that he will end up coming to committee.

[63] Is there anything else on this paper? It almost sounds as though we are congratulating ourselves on what we have done, and I am always wary of self-congratulation. However, I think that it is a good paper. Are there any other comments?

[64] **Bethan Jenkins:** I have a point on the Disabled Children Matter Wales campaign. It might be worth our asking whether the children and young people are happy with what has been done in relation to the budgets and the announcement. I do not know whether we are doing that with this paper.

[65] **Ann Jones:** On service provision for disabled young people in Wales, the reference group has been disbanded. It was agreed that it would run for 12 months, would do a review, and then be disbanded. Disabled Children Matter Wales is still very much to the fore, and quite a few of us have made representations during the budget round. We still have the final budget to do, so there is still that opportunity. That is not to say that, perhaps, after the budget is settled, we will not ask Disabled Children Matter Wales to come in and tell us whether it is happy with that. We might do that next term. Is everyone happy with that? I see that you are.

[66] Our next item is scheduled for 11 a.m., as the Assembly Commissioner cannot get here until then. Standing Order No. 10.25 states that I can suspend a meeting for a specified time. Therefore, I will suspend the meeting until 11 a.m..

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10.48 a.m. a 10.58 a.m.
The meeting adjourned between 10.48 a.m. and 10.58 a.m.*

Polisi Gwybodaeth Hygyrch Comisiwn y Cynulliad Assembly Commission Accessible Information Policy

[67] **Ann Jones:** I thank Members for their patience. We now move to the substantive item on our agenda, which is scrutiny of the Assembly Commission's accessible information policy. I am delighted that we are joined by Lorraine Barrett, who is the Commissioner for the Sustainable Assembly. Lorraine has hoofed out of another committee to be here, so we are grateful to you for that, Lorraine. I also extend a welcome to Iwan Williams, who is the Assembly media, publications and website content manager, which is quite a long title, and to Holly Pembridge, who is the Assembly equalities manager. You are more than welcome. You have produced a paper for us. Lorraine, Iwan or Holly, do you want to say anything about the paper?

11.00 a.m.

[68] **Lorraine Barrett:** Yes, I would like to say a few words of introduction. Thank you for the invitation to be here. I was held hostage in the Sustainability Committee meeting and could not leave until now, so I apologise for that.

[69] At your meeting on 2 July, Chair, your committee was provided with the Assembly Commission's draft accessibility policy and we undertook to come back to you, this term, with an update on progress. As a result of the establishment of further staffing across the Assembly, there is now an approach that ensures that the principles of accessibility are fully integrated across all communications activities. It is, therefore, quite timely to take this opportunity to update you on this.

[70] Holly Pembridge is our equalities manager and she will update you on our commitment to all citizens, whether they are from Wales or the wider world—they come here from all corners of the earth. She will provide us with a statement of intent on how the Assembly will undertake to provide appropriate information in a format that is fully accessible. I know that you, Chair, take a big interest in this and often communicate issues to me that have been raised by members of the public and Assembly Members. Iwan Williams is from external communications and is our media, publications and website content manager. He will give us an overview of how these considerations will be incorporated into the

Assembly's main communications channels, which are growing by the day—with modern technology, there are so many means of communication.

[71] In looking at this work, we want to achieve the following outcomes and we would be interested in Members' comments and views on this. Members of the public and staff should be made aware of our commitment to provide accessible information, including the provision of alternative formats, and we intend to make sure that that is publicised widely. I think that you will know, Chair, from the work that you have been involved with in the deaf community, that it is fair to say that it is often difficult to communicate to people how they can communicate with us. I know that it is also the same with visually impaired people. It is often difficult to access them to get the message across.

[72] We also want to ensure that our staff in the Assembly are aware of their responsibilities in terms of providing accessible information and that our customers—as we like to think of them—receive a timely and effective service. I will sort of throw this one in here, Chair, in that we talk about how the Assembly can provide appropriate information, but it might be useful for us, at some point, to think about Assembly Members as well and how we, as Members, provide our services in alternative formats, and not just think about how the official Assembly does that. However, that could be for another day—maybe you and I could have a chat about that.

[73] **Ann Jones:** Yes, we could.

[74] **Lorraine Barrett:** Do you want me to hand over now to Holly and Iwan?

[75] **Ann Jones:** Yes, and then we can question them.

[76] **Ms Pembridge:** As Lorraine mentioned, on 2 July we provided a draft accessible information policy, which was then very much a work in progress. Since then, we have taken a step back and, in conjunction with external communications, we want to ensure that the policy covers all the Assembly's information outputs, so that we can put accessibility considerations at the heart of everything that we produce. Our team is tapping in to the expertise of those in the organisation that produce information so that the policy will encompass all the media channels that Iwan will discuss in a minute.

[77] I am really keen for the policy itself to be accessible in terms of its language, its content and how and where it is made available. From the equality team's point of view, we have three main objectives in relation to the development and implementation of this policy. The first is that it must work and be effective. I think that we need further awareness raising sessions for staff, and probably Members as well, about our responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to make reasonable adjustments and subsequently produce accessible information, and, from our point of view, to make sure that the systems are in place to enable that to happen efficiently, with minimum inconvenience to customers. To this end, our team is developing a staff toolkit that we could extend to include Members, which will sit alongside the policy to enable staff and Members to produce successful information if it is required. Secondly, we want the policy to contribute to positive and measurable outcomes, and we want to improve the expediency of the service that we provide for the public by producing accessible information. We also need to measure take-up, but that is a difficult issue if customers are not aware, in the first place, that information can be accessed easily. I would like to get a monitoring system in place for that. Thirdly, it is vital that the policy has been formulated or refined by the people who it will directly affect. To that end, we have had initial feedback, which has been acted upon by our external disabled users' forum.

[78] We have received lots of feedback from staff, Members and service users, we have

used the impact assessment process, we have gathered a lot of evidence from our equality scheme consultation process, and we have looked at the evidence that has been provided to this committee. We fed into the iChange process and I have met with the consultant to talk about access issues. We have sought best practice from outside sources, and we are developing an in-house language style guide, which will inform this work. Importantly, on the issue of the website, we are due to appoint a web content manager, and we will award a design contract where accessibility issues will be an underlying consideration.

[79] Before I finish, I would like to assure the committee that, while we are developing this policy, we are, nonetheless, currently providing accessible information. One example is that, for our equalities scheme, the consultation produced a summary document in Braille, audio, British Sign Language and some community languages. The result was that we had some really good feedback and a good response rate. On a related issue, we have offered British Sign Language meet-and-greet and deaf awareness training to staff and Assembly Members, which will contribute to staff and Members being able to communicate with deaf people. Lastly, officials, when planning events or consultations, are mindful of the audiences that they are trying to reach, and try to seek out what their requirements might be. I will now pass on to Iwan to explain the different channels of information.

[80] **Lorraine Barrett:** Can we include Assembly Members' support staff in the staff training, because a lot of our front-line staff meet and greet our constituents?

[81] **Ann Jones:** I think that the meet-and-greet tester courses are open to everyone, including Assembly Members' support staff.

[82] **Ms Pembridge:** Yes, they are aimed at everyone.

[83] **Mr Williams:** What I would like to do is to give you a quick overview of the main channels that we use to communicate with external customers and stakeholders of every denomination. My remit covers the web, publications and the media. Since my appointment earlier this year, I have been working closely with Holly to ensure that, in everything that we do—and we are holding a wholesale root and branch review of the communications channels that we use—accessibility and the principles of accessibility are marbled throughout, so that it is embedded from the word go, rather than shoehorned in or retrofitted in at the end of a process. For example, on the redevelopment of the website information architecture and the redevelopment of the publication suite for the Assembly, Holly and her team will be working closely with my team and with a design agency, which she mentioned earlier, that will be appointed later this month, so that the principles of accessibility run through everything that we do.

[84] One important point to make is that, while we will ensure that accessibility underpins our work, we also need to ensure that the quality of that work is fit for purpose. Having looked at a lot of work that the Assembly has undertaken, arguably, perhaps, a lot of it is not exactly accessible in terms of the language that is used. For example, some pages on the website would be baffling for non-experts, at first glimpse. So, we really need to turn everything on its head—if you think of it as a pyramid, we need to start with the assumption that there is zero knowledge of who we are and what we do. There is a lot of confusion over what the Assembly is. So, I am looking at accessibility in the broadest possible sense, from getting understanding and engagement in the democratic process through the provision of information that is suitable for our target audience—the public.

11.10 a.m.

[85] **Ann Jones:** Thank you. I will use the Chair's licence to start the questions. You talked about accessibility, and I was going to say that the Assembly should be proud that we

were one of the first institutions to use BSL, which was a great achievement in terms of the Assembly's accessibility. So, we should never take away from the fact that it is there, and that more people will see it.

[86] On the website's accessibility, many people have said to me that the website is in 12 point font, but if you have vision impairment, a 12 point font can be slightly difficult to read. Some websites will include PDF files that can be adapted to the size that you want, so you can have a 12, 16 or 18 point font, rather than the user having to 'select all', change the font and wait for it all to come back up. Is that happening on our website at the moment?

[87] **Lorraine Barrett:** On that point, Chair, you have raised many issues with me on the website, which made me look again at the website from a different viewpoint. I forwarded all of the issues that you raised with me to the team, and perhaps Iwan will run through some issues with the accessibility option on the navigation bar and the opportunity for a plain layout. A lot of work went into the new website, and I and quite a few Members were involved in that. When you pointed out some of the issues to me, I thought, 'Oh, my gosh—how did we miss that one?', because a lot of work went into it and many people and partners were involved.

[88] **Ann Jones:** Do not beat yourself up about it; everyone has something to learn, and we are constantly learning. The only people that we can learn from are the people who tell us about the particular difficulties that they have found when accessing the website. I do not think that we need to beat ourselves up, as long as we respond to it, which I know that you are doing.

[89] **Lorraine Barrett:** Absolutely. So many people, of all ages, use the website now to get their information—there is no barrier these days. However, we want to get it right. Iwan, could you go through the details?

[90] **Mr Williams:** As Holly mentioned, we are appointing a web content manager—the interviews are being held today, in fact. It is an ongoing issue. There are technological developments that mean that accessibility can become more mainstream on the web. When the website was built, it was built to comply with W3CAA standards—that is just some jargon to baffle you. It means that, in terms of Government websites, it adheres to new Cabinet Office guidelines, but they are constantly evolving. One thing that will be at the heart of the new web content manager's role is to ensure that we are completely up to speed with any new developments, whether they are technological or in terms of guidance from the Cabinet Office. So, everything that you have mentioned will be revisited. The information that the committee passed on in late summer has been kept on file. Where we can, we are making changes, but some of the changes are so fundamental that they require a wholesale reinvigoration of some of the settings. So, rather than do those changes incrementally, a large majority of them have been kept back and will be done over the next two months.

[91] **Ann Jones:** Okay. I could go on, but I will bring in Eleanor.

[92] **Eleanor Burnham:** I think that you are doing a brilliant job.

[93] Yr wyf yn gwybod eich bod yn datblygu'r wefan a bod pethau yn edrych yn llawer gwell nag oeddynt, ond mae gennyf ychydig bwyntiau. Yr wyf yn eistedd ar y Pwyllgor Is-ddeddfwriaeth, ac er nad oes pwyntiau negyddol wedi'u gwneud amdanoch chi, mae llawer o gyrff wedi sôn wrthym bod angen i gynnwys y we fod yn I know that you are developing the website and that things are looking much better than they were, but I have a few points. I sit on the Subordinate Legislation Committee, and although no negative points have been made about you, many bodies have mentioned that the web content needs to be much better, particularly in terms of consultation.

llawer gwell, yn enwedig o ran ymgynghori.

[94] Sut yn union ydych am wella'r wybodaeth am ymgynghoriadau a yrrir ymlaen? Ar un golwg, yr ydym yn byw mewn oes sydd â gormod o wybodaeth, a'r cyfan sydd ei eisiau yw mynediad i wybodaeth.

How exactly will you improve the information about consultations that is sent out? In a way, we live in an age of information overload, when all we want is access to information.

[95] I fod yn fwy cyffredinol, a yw'n bosibl defnyddio ffyrdd hen ffasiwn o ddenu pobl i weld yr hyn yr ydym yn ei wneud, er enghraifft drwy osod posteri mewn llyfrgelloedd, meddygfeydd, deintyddfeydd a lleoedd cyhoeddus eraill? Efallai y bydd y ffyrdd hynny yn denu mwy o bobl. Yr wyf yn derbyn pwynt da iawn Lorraine. Mae pobl llawer hŷn na fi sydd dipyn well yn defnyddio'r we na fi. Fodd bynnag, cofiaf yn ôl i'r amser yr oedd gennym bwyllgor rhanbarthol gogledd Cymru, er enghraifft, a lle bynnag yr aethom, teimlech nad oedd pobl yn deall eich bod chi yno hanner yr amser. Mae pethau wedi gwella, mi wn.

Speaking more generally, is it possible to use old-fashioned methods of attracting people to see what we are doing, for example by putting up posters in libraries, doctors' surgeries, dental surgeries and other public places? Those methods might attract more people. I accept Lorraine's point, which was well made. There are people much older than me who are much better at using the web than me. However, I recall when we had the North Wales Regional Committee, for example, that wherever we went, you would feel that, half the time, people did not realise that you were there. Things have improved since then, I know.

[96] Yr wyf am grybwyll yn fyr fws gogledd Cymru a'r adran addysg, ill dau'n wych. Yr oedd Sandy, Brynle a mi gyda grŵp o bobl ifanc o ogledd Cymru y bore yma, ac yr oedd hynny'n wych.

I wish to briefly mention the north Wales bus and the education department, both of which are excellent. Sandy, Brynle and I were with a group of young people from north Wales this morning, and that was excellent.

[97] Mae mater y papurau newydd yn anodd gan eu bod am gael storïau hyll, brwnt a negyddol. Pa drafodaethau ydych yn eu cael ynglŷn â hynny? Beth ydych yn gwneud am y bobl sy'n anodd eu cyrraedd, pobl hŷn a phobl nad ydynt mewn cysylltiad ag unrhyw fath o asiantaeth neu gorff lleol?

The issue with newspapers is difficult, because they want ugly, sordid and negative stories. What discussions have you had about that issue? What are you doing about hard-to-reach people, older people and those who are not in contact with any local agencies or organisations?

[98] Yr wyf yn cyd-fynd yn llwyr â'r hyn a ddywedodd Lorraine. Mae lle inni fel Aelodau wella ein cysylltiad gyda phobl. A oes posibilrwydd inni gael yr un drefn â honno sydd gan Aelodau Seneddol o ddefnyddio arian penodol i anfon adroddiad blynyddol i bob person yn ein hetholaeth neu yn ein rhanbarth? Yr wyf yn cyd-fynd yn llwyr fod eisiau inni gael yr un cyfle â'r hyn sydd gan Aelodau Seneddol. Yr wyf yn falch bod y Cadeirydd yn cyd-fynd â mi. Mae pobl wastad yn dweud wrthyf, 'Wel, 'rwyf wedi clywed gan yr Aelod Seneddol; pam nad wyf wedi clywed gennych chi?'. Fel llawer ohonom, yr wyf yn anfon beth yr wyf i'n ei wneud ar ffurf adroddiad i'r llyfrgelloedd,

I agree completely with what Lorraine said. We as Members could improve our links with people. Is there any possibility of our having the same system as that used by Members of Parliament, whereby allocated funding is used to send annual reports to everyone in our constituencies or regions? I concur completely that we need to have the same opportunity as that afforded to Members of Parliament. I am glad that the Chair agrees with me. People always ask me, 'Well, I have heard from the MP; why haven't I heard from you?'. Like many of us, I send what I have been up to in the form of a report to libraries, but half the time you do not know whether people see those documents. So, there would

ond hanner yr amser, nid ydych yn gwybod a be great advantage in having something like
yw pobl yn gweld y dogfennau hynny. Felly, that.
byddai cael rhywbeth felly o fantais fawr.

[99] **Ann Jones:** That was quite a canter through the points. Lorraine, could you pick up on the points?

[100] **Lorraine Barrett:** The MPs' communication budget is a very controversial issue and there are tight guidelines on what it can be used for. We discussed it in the former House Committee and in the commission. As the Assembly has a different set-up with its regional Members, such an allowance could cause complications. Some regional Members have said that, in effect, they do not want it—they ask how on earth they would be able to deliver to however many people you have in a region. Those living in any given region would end up—and maybe there is nothing wrong with this—with three or four different reports from the different AMs. It is not that simple; there is a huge budget implication. I think that we will set it aside for now, but I take on board what you say.

[101] **Ann Jones:** You can raise it again, Eleanor.

[102] **Lorraine Barrett:** I am glad that you have welcomed the great innovations such as the north Wales bus, and the education department here is second to none. We have an outreach team—I do not know whether Holly or Iwan can say something about that, but I know that some of the teams that go out from here to speak to Women's Institute groups or other community groups do a very good job. Everyone around the table will know that when committees go outside Cardiff, the staff will deliver leaflets in the area—this happened with the old regional committees—and notices will go up in libraries and in doctors' surgeries, and although you might only get four members of the public, at least you will have tried. I do not know how you would get around that.

[103] We must not forget the old-fashioned ways, and that is a point that we could take away with us, because it would be easy to get posters and flyers produced. However, if those posters are taken down after six months, it would be difficult to keep a check on it. We now have Senedd.tv—and I know that we are getting back on to computers here—and online petition facilities. I do not know whether Iwan or Holly have any sparkling ideas to throw into the equation.

11.20 a.m.

[104] **Mr Williams:** We are not adopting new technology to the detriment of the old, traditional, tried-and-tested ways of communicating; we are looking for a holistic mix. We have just appointed new outreach managers for the four regions in Wales, so there will a reinvigorated presence on the ground to support all the communications work that is undertaken—everything from roadshows to the provision of information on Members' behalf, and so on.

[105] My second point relates to Eleanor's comment about the content of the website. We are looking to reinvigorate that, because the information architecture of the website is not particularly intuitive, and it does not lead a beginner who might know nothing about the Assembly through so that he or she can get a depth of understanding of it. So, work is under way to look at ensuring that the beginnings of understanding on behalf of the public are carried through to a depth of understanding.

[106] **Bethan Jenkins:** You mentioned that you are consulting with the external disabled users forum. Will you be promoting an online forum so that we can become more accessible and groups can feed in on a regular basis? Are there any other new forms of communication

that would help with that?

[107] We attended the e-democracy conference in London the other week, where there was a discussion about videos, including YouTube video clips, and about having transcripts of those. The Petitions Committee has organised a few evening events that have been put on the website, but I am not sure whether there are transcripts of those events. Perhaps you could consider that as part of any new communications strategy.

[108] To pick up on what you said about individual Assembly Members, I have a website that I have made as accessible as I can, but we need more guidance and training as individual Members. There is no point having one hub that is accessible if individual Members are doing things that are not consistent with our policy.

[109] **Ann Jones:** Does anyone want to respond to that?

[110] **Ms Pembridge:** To address the issue of the disabled users forum, it is a very new thing for us. We have met in person a couple of times. Your idea about the use of blogs and discussion fora on the internet is a good one, and I would like to take that forward, because the feedback from the group is that several of them are big IT users. I referred earlier to the importance of considering the audience that you are trying to reach, and sometimes one particular method of communication is not inappropriate. We have used posters in public areas, but we cannot measure how that has worked. We use the forum on an e-mail basis—that is how it started. I would definitely like to offer people more options to engage, and perhaps we could use the website to widen our discussion on that. I will take that on board.

[111] **Mr Williams:** Just to add to that, the technology for discussion fora already exists on the website. Admittedly, we may not have made the best use of that so far, but we are looking to trial it with certain committees next year. The independent review panel that is looking at pay and allowances for Assembly Members is trialling a high-profile use of discussion fora on the Assembly website, so that people can feed in their information, which can then be used. It is pointless having a forum and asking people to contribute if their contributions fall into a vacuum. For example, with the committee trials next year, we need to ensure that evidence submitted through discussion fora should be admissible, even though it may not have been given in person. That is one of the important things that we need to ensure happens.

[112] **Ann Jones:** I will just come in on that before I bring Eleanor in—and she was probably about to say the same thing. I can see where you are coming from, but if someone puts on a web discussion forum something that is completely inadmissible—and there are those who would think it clever to do so, although it is a small minority—who is responsible for removing that or ensuring that that person is never allowed back on the website? There is a lot of information there, and a third party can be difficult to handle. How will you look at that? There has to be a built-in mechanism to ensure that offensive material is left on our website.

[113] **Mr Williams:** That is fairly easy to answer. Before someone can submit information, they have to register their name, address, and contact details. It is a pre-moderated discussion forum, so, before any comment appears, it is reviewed. Therefore, mischievous comments will not appear. That means that there is a slight lag before information appears, but, for the discussion forum, there will be a panel within the Assembly—on which I will probably sit, along with members of the IT department and subject matter experts—that will moderate the information and decide whether a comment was mischievous or a valid comment that should appear.

[114] **Eleanor Burnham:** I am pleased about that. Assembly Members, even when we are sitting in the Chamber, get some very odd e-mails, among them scam e-mails. We have

recently had banking scams sent to us.

[115] I have a general question. Do you have anything to do with the use of the other modern technology that we have at our disposal, such as video-conferencing, or is that a discussion for another day?

[116] **Mr Williams:** That does not really fall within my remit.

[117] **Eleanor Burnham:** Okay. That is fine.

[118] **Lorraine Barrett:** Eleanor can speak to me about that.

[119] **Ann Jones:** Fine. I am assured by the fact that we will be able to moderate what appears on the website. Will that happen 24/7?

[120] **Mr Williams:** Probably not.

[121] **Ann Jones:** I do not want you sitting at 2 a.m. in a darkened room.

[122] **Mr Williams:** The technology that we have at the moment is for pre-moderated discussion fora. If we wanted to have post-moderated discussion fora, that would mean comments appearing online, and we would have the capability to take them off. That lends itself to a far livelier and immediate discussion forum, but it is far more high maintenance. So, as a trial initially, we are going with the technology that already exists, which is the pre-moderated forum. That means that there is an onus on us to be flexible with our working arrangements. If there is a heated discussion going on at 6.30 p.m. on a Friday evening, then it is only fair to users that we do our utmost to try to keep that going until it peters out of its own accord. However, over weekends, it is not ideal. It is a resource issue more than anything else.

[123] **Ann Jones:** That is what I was thinking about: the weekend work. The weekend is when many people will use their internet and view the website.

[124] **Mr Williams:** There are plenty of people who are committed enough, including me, who would be more than happy to ensure that if a discussion is raging and the topic is particularly interesting, the discussion continues and the people are given a voice.

[125] **Ann Jones:** Okay, we might hold you to that. I will ring you up at 7 a.m. on a Sunday—

[126] **Mr Williams:** To ask, ‘Where is my comment?’. [*Laughter.*]

[127] **Ann Jones:** Yes. Does anyone have any further questions for the Assembly Commission?

[128] **Bethan Jenkins:** I would like to raise accessibility in the wider sense. I mentioned consulting on topics before we raise them in committee. I wanted to throw that into the mix and ask whether you could consider that as part of the communications strategy, so that we have more ideas coming in from the public at the outset and we discuss the topics that the public wants to discuss. Perhaps, when you have come up with the communications strategy, you could find a way for us to see how it is progressing.

11.30 a.m.

[129] **Lorraine Barrett:** That is a really good point, and it is something that we can build

in. However, in a way, that is already happening with petitions. For example, if you consider the reviews on plastic bags and on organ donation, which I have been involved with in the two committees that I sit on, those came about as a consequence of petitions. Therefore, people have the opportunity now, but they may not realise that they have that opportunity to start a debate in the Assembly. However, that is a good point—the issues that you would like the Assembly to discuss in its committees.

[130] In closing, I would like to thank you very much for this opportunity to come to committee. We have a great team, who never get defensive—they are always open and willing to listen to suggestions and to take advice. On accessibility and outreach issues, all the structures that were used when the commission took its stand out to the summer events were compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. That is true from a physical accessibility point of view, but also in the sense that all the posters were bilingual, of a minimum font size of 12, and used colours in a way that provided significant contrast between the text and the background, which I know you believe is important. We also ensured that at least one of the computer stations that the public could access was at the correct level for wheelchair users, and we had Braille and audio cassette publications available on request.

[131] Therefore, we are getting there. As you said, let us not beat ourselves up, because we are doing a great deal. However, there is always room for improvement, and we are more than willing to come back to committee at any time, to take on board any of your thoughts or advice. Thank you.

[132] **Ann Jones:** That is useful to know, and it is useful for us as a committee to be able to put our views forward and see where we are going. As I said earlier, I believe that we were one of the first administrations to accept that British Sign Language should be part of a working environment, and we should congratulate ourselves on that; there I go with self-congratulation again—I am doing a lot of that lately. However, we should be proud of that. Thank you all for coming, especially Lorraine—I know that it has been a difficult morning for you, hoofing around committees. I also thank the committee.

[133] Our next meeting is on 4 December, but I remind Members that we are meeting with colleagues from the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Scottish Parliament on 25 November, which is next Tuesday. There is also the launch of our committee report on migrant workers in Wales, their families and the communities in which they live and work on 26 November, which is next Wednesday. Therefore, we are meeting our colleagues from Northern Ireland and Scotland the day before on 25 November.

[134] **Eleanor Burnham:** Is that here?

[135] **Ann Jones:** Yes, they are meeting us here. Thank you all. I declare the meeting closed.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 11.33 a.m.
The meeting ended at 11.33 a.m.*