



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

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

**Dydd Iau, 18 Ionawr 2007  
Thursday, 18 January 2007**

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

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 Cynulliad yn bresennol**  
**Assembly Members in attendance**

Mick Bates	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Janice Gregory	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Edwina Hart	Llafur (y Gweinidog dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol ac Adfywio) Llafur (the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration)
Mark Isherwood	Ceidwadwyr Cymru Welsh Conservatives
Laura Anne Jones	Ceidwadwyr Cymru Welsh Conservatives
Huw Lewis	Llafur Labour
Sandy Mewies	Llafur Labour
Leanne Wood	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

**Swyddogion yn bresennol**  
**Officials in attendance**

Phillip Cook	Y Gyfarwyddiaeth Dai Housing Directorate
Karen Eveleigh	Pennaeth, Gwasanaethau Trin Camddefnyddio Sylweddau Head, Substance Misuse Treatment Service
Joanest Jackson	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol y Pwyllgor Legal Adviser to the Committee
Jo Jordan	Cyfarwyddwr, yr Is-adran Diogelwch Cymunedol Director, Community Safety Division
Peter Owen	Uned y Sector Gwirfoddol Voluntary Sector Unit
Dr Emyr Roberts	Cyfarwyddwr, yr Adran Cyfiawnder Cymdeithasol ac Adfywio Director, the Social Justice and Regeneration Department
François Samuel	Y Gyfarwyddiaeth Dai Housing Directorate
Anne Stephenson	Cyfarwyddwr, y Gyfarwyddiaeth Gymunedau Director, Communities Directorate
Paul Webb	Y Gyfarwyddiaeth Dai Housing Directorate
Linda Whittaker	Y Gyfarwyddiaeth Dai Housing Directorate

**Gwasanaeth y Pwyllgor**  
**Committee Service**

Dr Virginia Hawkins	Clerc Clerk
Claire Griffiths	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.29 a.m.*  
*The meeting began at 9.29 a.m.*

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

[1] **Janice Gregory:** Good morning and welcome to the first Social Justice and Regeneration Committee of the new year. A happy new year to you all. We have a very full agenda this morning, so I will go straight into it. I welcome those in the public gallery, and I will also run through some housekeeping items, as we always do. If you have a mobile phone, BlackBerry or a pager, please ensure that you have turned them off completely. As always, the National Assembly operates through the Welsh and English languages, so if anyone requires simultaneous translation, please set the translation equipment to channel 1 and use the headsets that are provided. For amplification of sound, you should use channel 0.

[2] As I said, we have a very full agenda this morning. I do not have any announcements. I have received an apology from Trish Law, who is unable to attend this morning. I remind everyone that if you are going to speak, there is no need to touch the microphones because they will come on automatically. Does anyone have any declarations of interests to make? I see not.

9.30 a.m.

## **Cofnodion y Cyfarfodydd Blaenorol Minutes of Previous Meetings**

[3] **Janice Gregory:** Are there any comments on the short minutes of the meeting of 6 December? It seems like an age ago now. I see that there are no comments.

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

## **Adroddiad y Gweinidog Minister's Report**

[4] **Janice Gregory:** I thank the Minister for the report. If Members have any questions on the report—and I am sure that you will—please precede the question with the reference number that is stated. It will make for better ease of reference for all of us.

[5] **The Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration (Edwina Hart):** Thank you. At the last committee, I agreed to provide a short note on the review of the police funding formula. This issue has been raised in the past in the much wider debate over policy restructuring, and the last review of the formula took place ahead of the 2006-07 settlement. As the whole issue of police restructuring is on hold, we have been informed that there are currently no plans to go ahead with any review until the 2008-09 settlement. I think that we need a review of the police funding formula, so that our forces can be effectively recognised in terms of the money that comes from the Home Office. I also think that we need better transparency on the formula, because we have seen that there is no question of the Home Office devolving the police to the National Assembly. Therefore, the Assembly is always in a very difficult position of having taxation without representation in these issues, so it is important that we look at some of the formula issues, and I am always happy to continue to press the Home Office that we need to look at the formula. I was with Gwent police yesterday to open a police station, and in just having a general chat I could see that people want to see how the money is coming into police forces. It is very complicated at the moment, as Emyr, as the former head of the financial planning division, will agree, but it was one of the issues that we used to look at all the time. It is important that we press for the review.

[6] I will not burden Members with other issues unless they come out, but I have a few other things that I want to update Members on. However, if it would be helpful, I will put them in writing as they only happened in the last few days.

[7] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you, Minister. Sandy, do have a question?

[8] **Sandy Mewies:** Thank you for your report, Minister, which was as comprehensive as ever. I welcome the news about the police funding formula, because in north Wales we have the lowest per capita payment in Wales for the police, and it causes dismay in terms of why that should be. If there is a review, it needs to take place as soon as possible and there needs to be real transparency about where the money comes from. I sometimes hear even people on the police authorities saying that the Assembly should be doing this or that, when it is the Home Office's responsibility and not ours. That is not to say that we should wash our hands of the police forces—of course we have responsibilities towards them—but we must be clear as to what those responsibilities are.

[9] I also feel that the difference between the police precept and the council precept needs to be cleared up, because people are still not clear about it. People tend to think that their council tax is their council tax and nothing else, so there has to be some way to explain the difference. I know that people try to do that by including notices with the council tax bill, but it does not seem to work.

[10] The Minister opened the 24-hour domestic abuse helpline, and we are all very pleased to see that. There is a Women's Aid in my area, and it is delighted with what will happen there.

[11] On No. 6 on cross-border working, I am not sure whether I have got this correct, but I assume that this is an opportunity for cross-border working with local authorities and Communities First partnerships, which may help areas such as mine where there are smaller Communities First partnerships that would benefit if they could take part in a macro scheme. Are we looking at something like that?

[12] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you, Sandy. Minister, would you like to reply?

[13] **Edwina Hart:** We are looking at our existing community of interest issues on Communities First, and it is interesting because we have communities that cross local authority borders but exist as a whole community. That is one of the key areas. We can pick up any points in terms of this review. It might be helpful for communities that are across borders but are only tiny within their local authority area to do more collaborative work. We would be happy to pick that up in the review.

[14] On the domestic abuse helpline, I was pleased that we have put in additional resources for the 24-hour service. The service is hard-pressed even now in terms of the number of calls that it receives, and it was concerned about the calls that it was missing when it only had the 12-hour service. It is an awful thing to say, but the number of calls indicates the success of the helpline, but it would be nice if the helpline was not a success, if you see what I mean, in terms of the issues that are being raised. I am also pleased that the helpline is quite well known, and we had good press publicity on it. I have said in my media issues that I would be grateful if the press would continue to highlight these issues and publicise the helpline number, so that more people can access it. I shared the platform with a lady whose daughter was murdered, and she has been helping Welsh Women's Aid. As you heard, as you were there, Janice and Mick, it was extremely emotional. She read out a letter that she had written in the night to someone else who might be a victim to say what they should do, and how they should go. She talked about the trauma of having to go to the mortuary to identify the body and other such issues, and it was very emotive. She is enormously brave and she is

prepared to come out and assist Women's Aid and be the human face of it in terms of what the family feel, so that it makes it more than statistics. So, it was particularly moving, and I thought that she was exceptionally brave to deal with it.

[15] On the police precept, I do not think that people understand council tax bills or police precepts anyway, in real terms, and although I think that we have made them more accessible and easier, there is still a mythology that it is all to do with council tax. It does not help when you have all these ongoing discussions about what the police precept will be. So, we need more transparency because it would help us in Wales if people knew what was being paid for and what was being done. Yesterday, Unison, which represents the support staff, said that there has been much concern, particularly in north Wales, about the intention to get rid of 200 support staff and to put officers into other jobs. We cannot have policing issues in the media constantly—there must be some clarity on what the funding is and what is equitable in terms of funding. The priorities in Wales must be addressed in terms of the police funding formula, and not just the priorities of the Home Office and English policing. We have agreed as a committee that we are very keen on community policing, and it is community policing that the police is assessed on in terms of what the forces are expected to do. We talk about level 2 crime and we understand all about that, but that is not something that the public understands. The public wants to know whether, if something happens to them, a police officer will call to talk about the crime, and that is the quality that we need to concentrate on in the Assembly in these discussions.

[16] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you, Minister. Laura, do you have a question?

[17] **Laura Anne Jones:** Thank you for your report, Minister. On page 1 of your report there is an update on Prescoed prison. As a local Assembly Member, I thank you for all the work that you have done on pressing the issue and pushing Gerry Sutcliffe, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Criminal Justice System and Offender Management, and the Home Office for a review into the policy to house sex offenders at open prisons. I cannot but say that I am disgusted by the response that came back from John May and Gerry Sutcliffe on this issue. It is clear from the outcome of the inquiries that they have not visited Prescoed open prison, and they clearly have not looked into its history. As someone who lives about a mile down the road from the prison, I grew up with helicopters flying over my house and the fields; it was a regular occurrence for people to escape from that open prison. If you have ever visited, Minister, you will have seen that prisoners can literally just walk out; there are no barriers and you almost just walk over a line to get out—it is quite easy. Their response has been that the prisoners have been able to abscond because there are too many restrictions on the eligibility for transfer to Prescoed, because they are quite stringent in terms of the sex offenders that they send there, apparently, and there are not enough there. So, they have come back with the response that they will try to send more there. That baffles me, because they are now going to send more sex offenders, who may not have completed the sex offender treatment programme, and are not within a year of their release dates. What sort of response is that when we know—if I was a gambler, I could lay a bet on this table—that someone else will escape in the next year? To put the community at risk by putting more people in that prison is not the answer. I ask you, Minister, to continue to press Gerry Sutcliffe on this, because it is not good enough and it is putting communities in Monmouthshire, particularly in Usk, at risk.

9.40 a.m.

[18] **Edwina Hart:** I appreciate that the community feels strongly about this issue, but Prescoed is an open prison that we understand has a maximum capacity of 178. You might be interested to know that it currently has 32 vacancies, unlike the rest of the prisons and secure units. There is probably not another vacancy across the prison service in Wales. The Assembly understands that the maximum number of sex offenders that could be held in

Prescoed is 40. That has been reaffirmed. I know that the population hoped that he would indicate that he would not house sex offenders there, but he has confirmed the previous position with regard to the Home Office. Obviously, I have an ongoing dialogue with Gerry Sutcliffe and I am likely to meet him shortly to discuss prison issues. I will once again bring to his attention the residents' concerns. With regard to open prisons, because of the very word 'open', there are fewer restrictions and, particularly in terms of prisoners who are not sex offenders, they can provide a valuable halfway position before offenders are released.

[19] **Mick Bates:** Thank you, Minister, for your full report again. First, I would like to raise a point on item 8, community regeneration figures in England. It is a question that I have asked before. In terms of employment and the local economy and how it benefits from Communities First, I note with interest that there is very little reference to encouraging people to work with the private sector. It is important that, in the context of Communities First, the economic levers are pulled to give us extra prosperity, which is always the way in which we sustain communities. I was disappointed that there was no reference to that here. However, I know that you have written to me about it, Minister, and I look forward to seeing any data that can be extracted from Communities First partnerships in order to encourage that type of activity.

[20] I have a couple of points to raise with regard to the update on post office issues. I understand that this is not a devolved issue, but the Department of Trade and Industry consultation says:

[21] 'The Government wants in the longer term to devolve greater responsibility for local decisions to a local level and to provide greater flexibility for local funding decisions. Government therefore intends to investigate what role both local authorities in England and the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland might play in influencing how the postal services are best delivered in the future'.

[22] The consultation document is a very complete one. First, does the Minister intend to undertake some form of consultative process in Wales in view of the fact that the DTI proposes that there is more local decision making? Secondly, there is great anxiety. The DTI consultation states clearly that 2,500 branches will close. In one projection, that means a loss of around 870 branches in Wales. So, these proposals would have a severe impact if they went ahead. I would like to hear how the Minister will handle that situation.

[23] Moving on to the item on fuel poverty, I know that the Minister has introduced a lot of financial support through the home energy efficiency scheme. The figures and the data show how the figures can fluctuate, but fuel poverty will remain a real issue. Yesterday, we passed more legislation to assist people to fit microgeneration devices to their properties. However, as I have said before, the issue of funding is critical to the eradication of fuel poverty. One of the main mechanisms to assist people to fit microgeneration devices, apart from the HEES programme, is the low-carbon building programme. You may be aware that the money has already run out on that, so there will be no support. Has the Minister thought of speaking with the Minister for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks to see whether there can be some joined-up thinking on this process, so that we can have a unique scheme in Wales that would assist with the eradication of fuel poverty, and have the other benefits of reducing carbon emissions and bringing extra energy security to the whole issue? I will leave it at that, but those are two interesting points.

[24] **Edwina Hart:** I understand what you are saying on your point relating to item 8 of my report, where I report on the English situation. When the statistics are available to us, I very much hope that we can develop the theme that you outlined.

[25] On post offices, there is still no clarity in my mind or in my officials' minds on this

issue. There may well be a consultation document, to which we will, of course, respond, and it would be helpful to know how other people in Wales responded, so I will have a look. I will not necessarily hold a consultation, but I may indicate to people that we would like to see their consultation responses before responding ourselves, in order to see what the feeling is in Wales. We do not have enough information at present.

[26] There were a lot of questions yesterday about the post office development fund, and what we have to do. It is clear that it has been a successful fund; even so, there are indications that people will not take it up as they do not think that it would be viable even with money from us. I was discussing with Anne Stephenson earlier that I am not hostile to giving support; I was in my constituency only on Saturday morning opening a post office. However, that is a community enterprise, including a shop and a little cafe as well as a post office. The community has bought into the idea and it is being run by volunteers. Their aim is not to make a profit, but to make enough to employ a manager. I thought that that was quite nice, and I said to Anne that we need to look at the post office development fund in the context of the developments now happening in the Post Office, and also in the context of what assistance could be given if communities wanted to take things over, rather than individuals having that burden. A lot of these sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses will go for redundancy packages, but the village and the community in which the post office is situated may well want to keep the enterprise going. So, if the committee is amenable to the suggestion, I will look at that and do some work on it in that context.

[27] Anne also said that we need to look at structural funds in the context of these enterprises. Do you want to comment, Anne?

[28] **Ms Stephenson:** We are involved in developing the new convergence programme funding for community economic development, so there may be some scope there, although European rules do not usually allow direct support to individual businesses. However, we can do some development work in that context to see how we may be able to support community enterprises, particularly involving post office activity.

[29] **Edwina Hart:** That would be quite helpful. We need to think outside the box on this, to be honest. I know that sub-postmasters are very worried, and my officials will be having further meetings in London for us to get clarity on some of these issues for the future. However, I would be happy to share how we are moving forward on this at every meeting, and I will think about how I can ask people to copy us into their responses before we draw up ours. I am also happy to take up the suggestion that you made on the low-carbon building programme.

[30] **Leanne Wood:** I welcome your comments on the need for a more transparent funding formula for the police, and I am pretty sure that there would be cross-party support for that position. Is there any merit in writing as a committee to back up any work that you are doing with Westminster on that?

[31] On the second item in your report, preventative measures for substance misuse, can you tell us whether this will be an agenda item when the strategy is published, specifically the counselling aspect?

[32] On item 3, substance misuse in Swansea, the point was that it was not necessarily specific police action in Swansea. There is a UK-wide operation at the moment to arrest UK cannabis growers, and that is what is having an impact in Swansea, but I suspect that it is happening elsewhere in Wales as well. I would question your argument that dealers are holding back their supply of cannabis to try to divert people towards taking heroin, because, traditionally, those have been two separate markets. What is particularly concerning about this development is that those markets are crossing over, and younger people are starting to



smoke heroin, which was not done in the past. So, I would be grateful if you would agree to speak with the chief constables in Wales about this issue, as it should concern us all.

9.50 a.m.

[33] Item 8 in the report, 'Community Regeneration Figures in England', aims to compare the projects in England with Communities First projects in Wales. In your report, you say that the New Deal for Communities programme has received £2 billion over 10 years. We are spending £132 million over 10 years on 100 wards. That £2 billion over 10 years is going on just 39 wards in England, so there is a huge difference between the amounts of money going into the two schemes. That is the point that I was trying to get at. The funding for our scheme is very small in comparison.

[34] On the performance indicators for the Communities First programme, we need to recognise that programme bending relies on the willingness of other agencies to work with the Communities First partnerships. So, the success or otherwise of programme bending is not necessarily evidence of the success or otherwise of the work of the partnerships. They could be trying as hard as they possibly can to form relationships and work with partnership agencies where there may be hostility towards working with Communities First partnerships. So, we just need to be careful that we are not saying that that is a measure of the success of the partnerships.

[35] On item 10 of the report, on joined-up working within the Communities First programme, I welcome this way of monitoring and evaluating the programme in Rhondda Cynon Taf, as I think that it is more focused on the economic impact and economic outcomes, and the anti-poverty outcomes of the programme. Is this likely to be rolled out across the rest of the Communities First areas if it is proven to be an effective measure?

[36] I have some more questions, I am afraid. Item 15 is the update on the post offices. As we all know, the big issue on this is the loss of Government business, which amounts to 40 per cent of post offices' previous business. I have asked questions to see whether any Government business could be diverted through post offices, and it seems that very little can be, because of the nature of Assembly business. However, there should be more avenues for local authorities to do business with post offices. Could you talk to other Ministers about that to see whether we can get more business for post offices in that way?

[37] My next question is on the publicity of the home energy efficiency scheme, which is item 19. I understand your point on cold calling, namely that it could pressurise vulnerable people, but I am also concerned that some of the most vulnerable people living in our communities are people who are unable to read. The usual way of getting information to people is in text format, so how else could those people get to know about this without some kind of face-to-face contact? There must be ways of knocking on doors that can be done far more sensibly than traditional cold-calling methods. Are you prepared to look at that?

[38] The problem with the estimated figures of the numbers of people in fuel poverty is the oldness of the data; they are not current enough. When will the figures for 2006 be available, because that is quite a key year for this?

[39] My last question is on the homelessness statistics, which is item 24. I do not think that we can be confident that homelessness figures are going down unless we know how many people are being refused assistance for being found to be intentionally homeless. It would be useful to have historic figures on the numbers of people found to be intentionally homeless, and so not helped, in a future report. Thank you.

[40] **Edwina Hart:** I will answer those questions in reverse order. The issue about the

statistical background of homelessness is raised with me by homelessness organisations, because those are the statistics that we have, and we have gone through them in some detail. Linda and I will try to do some further work, which might be helpful to committee, because I am also concerned. I am pleased that things are happening, statistically, but I am uncertain as to whether that is actually the case, having heard some anecdotal evidence when out and about as a Member. Members see quite a few examples in their casework of people saying, 'I have been refused; I have been told that I made myself intentionally homeless'. You then wonder how much that is reflected in the wider population of homeless people. So, I am happy to take up that point.

[41] On cold calling for HEES, I have been exploring whether a fire officer could cold call regarding HEES during routine fire safety checks, and pick up some other issues, too. So, I would be happy to consider that issue. Other agencies, such as Care and Repair, also pick up work, and they could make their comments at the same time. We need to take a more integrated approach, but we are currently surveying who is doing what, so we can pick up that point in the work that we are doing in that area.

[42] On the 2006 data, I do not know the exact date, but I believe that those figures will probably be available in late spring or early summer. However, I will check that with officials.

[43] I would be happy to raise the post office issues at my next meeting with Derek Vaughan. As you know, there was quite a controversy at one time in Carmarthenshire when post offices were not being used for certain things. Perhaps there is a role and function for local authorities in using the services of post offices, especially in rural and deprived urban areas. We can certainly pick that point up.

[44] On the post office side, I was talking earlier this week to Ken Hanbury from the Communication Workers Union. The union is concerned not only about the postal service issue, on which it has lobbied us before, but also about the post offices issue. It will be running a campaign and it would very much welcome an invite to attend committee to give a presentation on those issues. I do not know whether the committee would be agreeable to that, Chair. That will be in your hands.

[45] I can understand why Leanne has put a health warning on programme bending, under item 9, and we will need to take that into account. However, on item 8, it is difficult to compare figures when we have an ongoing upwards budget line on it; it is hard to make such comparisons. You mentioned point 3, on substance misuse in Swansea, and I would be happy to raise that in my next meeting with the chief constables, if that would be helpful. Point 2, preventative measures for substance misuse, will be an agenda item.

[46] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you, Minister. Did you want to come in briefly on HEES, Sandy?

[47] **Sandy Mewies:** Yes, please. The Minister made a good point about involving the fire and rescue people. They have come along when I have held my energy surgeries or clinics. They have been extremely proactive in north Wales in involving people and visiting people, because they have a list of people whom they can support. They are anxious—certainly in north Wales—to be used as that sort of resource.

[48] **Janice Gregory:** I would be happy for Ken Hanbury to come along to committee. Do we have a slot for that, Claire?

[49] **Ms Griffiths:** Yes, we could do it at our Merthyr meeting on 15 February.

[50] **Janice Gregory:** Fine. We will contact Ken today to see whether he can make that date.

[51] **Mark Isherwood:** I just want to develop the comment made on Prescoed prison. We must recognise that almost every prisoner will be released back into the community at some stage. There is a need, therefore, for some sort of intermediate stage, so that they do not go straight from complete incarceration to completely unsupported liberty on the streets. Therefore, the question should really be around how we structure that intermediate level of custody involving developing personal responsibility and a limited amount of freedom within the community. Should that be graded according to the severity or category of the original offence? We must avoid stating that prisoners should be released straight from prison back into the community; we must recognise that we need something in between.

[52] Thanks for the comments on substance misuse. Could you let us have—though probably not today—figures on what funding has been available to service helplines to combat substance misuse in Wales? Are you able to provide figures on the allocation of funds to combat substance misuse per unitary authority area, showing the separation between how much has gone to alcohol services and how much to drugs services—perhaps showing whether levels have gone up or down over the past few years?

10.00 a.m.

[53] What statistics are available to show the annual trend—whether there has been an increase or a reduction in substance misuse with drugs and alcohol—and what Assembly Government resources have been made available to particular organisations in Wales to support drug and alcohol rehabilitation?

[54] Moving on to community regeneration—obviously they are looking at England in this paper—I wonder if it would be possible to look at the broader regeneration aspects, such as some of the early examples of stock transfer in the 1980s, and see where they are now in 2007. We could also look at the use of things like the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's warden resource centres, and the broader role that they have been able to take on in many areas, at very low cost to the public purse, providing services to local authorities as well as to the community and to other voluntary and public agencies.

[55] On asylum and immigration, there is lots of useful information here, but—and I think that we have mentioned this before—we are aware that growing numbers of people are bringing children, parents, and partners to live with them in Wales, so what work has been undertaken to identify the public service provision that will have to accompany that in terms of housing, health, and education? What discussions are ongoing to plan to meet that in the future?

[56] On post offices, obviously we welcome the announcement of the tender going out on the post office card account. I am hoping, and I know that Postwatch is very keen, that bids will include add-on services for the post office card account. What consideration has been given to that? Examples would include tackling financial exclusion, perhaps involving credit unions, perhaps involving agency services, and other reputable specialist providers of services.

[57] Coming to the home energy efficiency scheme, I went—as did Mick, I think—on some visits last year and saw the excellent work that is being done and the positive effect that this is having on the people living in the homes covered. However, we passed an amendment last October, with cross-party support, where you agreed to support further research into the wider causes of excess winter deaths, and I wonder what progress has been made on that.

[58] In terms of carbon monoxide poisoning, we had a statement from the Minister in the Chamber in the last session, to which many of us contributed, and I recall that some of the useful information that we received came from the observations made by coroners' courts. Have you given any consideration to those coroners' recommendations?

[59] Regarding the homeless figures, I fully endorse what Leanne says, and I was pleased to hear the Minister's response, particularly in the context of the homeless young people report. The term 'hidden homeless' has often been raised by people and by organisations, but housing associations have told me that their experience does not match this, and Shelter said that it did not even know where the hidden homeless are going.

[60] Finally, thank you for your comments on Supporting People. Are you able to indicate yet what the current thinking is on ring fencing? As you are aware, most of the agencies are very concerned if the money goes straight to local authorities on a totally unhyponthecated basis.

[61] **Edwina Hart:** Going backwards, as regards Supporting People, the working group is still looking at various issues and, until it reports, I am not minded to give the funding directly to local government. I think that the working group will have to go some way to persuade me that that would be a satisfactory arrangement that would suit parties outside; that is probably the general view of the committee as well, because of the extensive lobbying that Members have had. However, I do not want to be unfair, because this is a genuine working group with the Welsh Local Government Association. However, I have indicated to Derek Vaughan that the WLGA will have to go some way to prove the case on this in terms of the discussions that we are having with it.

[62] In terms of homelessness, housing associations have not raised any of those points with us, although my officials have regular meetings with them. It will be interesting when I respond to the committee's report on this, and I will clearly have to tackle these issues.

[63] On carbon monoxide, we are starting with the very practical issues arising from Jocelyn's comments in the Chamber, and the practical things that we can do in Wales to make a difference. We should be in a position to be doing something shortly, covering 25 per cent of homes in Wales. It would be very good news if we could start to do that. The issues that the coroner raised are encompassed in the work that we are undertaking.

[64] You asked about the HEES position and the amendment. We have commissioned work in that area. I think that we are working with health officials on some of these issues.

[65] **Dr Roberts:** Yes, we are commissioning this work through a health programme.

[66] **Edwina Hart:** I will update you when we have any further news on that.

[67] On post offices, it is good news about the post office card account, but they need more than the card account to make some of the businesses stack up. You mentioned credit unions, but clearly the Post Office is not the primary responsibility of the Welsh Assembly Government. However, in terms of credit unions, we have supported a project by the Wales Co-operative Centre, calling for credit unions to be accessed through the post offices, where payments can be made and accounts opened and so on. I am very happy, in the context of our relationship with organisations and our devolved responsibilities, to enhance some of the issues that you raise on any programmes that I run.

[68] On refugees, a great deal of work is going on. We have a very positive relationship with the Welsh Local Government Association on this, which obviously has a vested interest in ensuring that the necessary resources are allocated. A great deal of joint working is

currently going on that is very satisfactory, which includes educational issues. Health and housing officials are also engaged with these issues. So, we are getting to grips with what will be resource issues. You only have to look at fairly basic things such as translation and so on to see that these are also issues that encompass the discussion on that.

[69] I was asked to look at the broader issues around regeneration and stock transfers taken in the past in England. I do not want to go into too much detail; the committee can do so, if it so wishes. However, I am happy to look at the evaluation of that programme and report back rather than do any more detailed work, because I have enough work relating to other portfolio matters rather than undertake a little exercise and produce an academic paper on that. However, I can do the practical thing and ask my officials to look at the evaluation of the English programme.

[70] On funding substance misuse and what we are doing, we do not allocate money for specific services, because that is determined locally, but we have good details on spend. I am more than happy to share information on the funding streams. Before Christmas, I was very pleased to accompany the Chair to Brynawel House, which is an alcohol rehabilitation centre that has new bed spaces that we helped to fund. So, the money is being used in a very practical way across Wales.

[71] You are right about Prescoed; open prison is a good mechanism that helps offenders to reach the stage of being ready to go back into the community. However, the issue with Prescoed is a sex offender issue, because the community is used to the open prison itself. As I indicated earlier, the figure is 40, but the Home Secretary's permission must be sought if more than 20 sex offenders are to be held there. However, the issue of prisons and the prison service concerns me in terms of the numbers held in prison and the possible alternatives to prison. I recently met with Rod Morgan from the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales to discuss the problem of young offenders and the space available to them and my concern that these young offenders are often children. It is very important that we recognise that in the context of the system. There are now enormous pressures in the system, which are out of our hands as they are matters of Home Office policy. None of us can be comfortable with overflowing prisons and the youth justice team is seeing more and more young offenders being locked up. We have to look at possible alternatives. All that we can do, as a devolved Government, is to continue doing what we have done, particularly in terms of my portfolio. We have put more money into youth work, as you have seen from other reports, and into engaging young people at an earlier age. More help should also be available for families that require assistance. That is not a nanny-state concept, but a question of spending wisely at the early stage in order to save on unnecessary expenditure at the end of that stage. It is a very complicated issue.

[72] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you, Minister. That concludes discussion on the Minister's report.

10.10 a.m.

### **Dyfarniad Cymhorthdal y Cyfrif Refeniw Tai Drafft a Dyfarniad Eitem 8 Drafft ar gyfer 2007-08**

### **Draft Housing Revenue Account Subsidy and Item 8 Determinations for 2007-08**

[73] **Janice Gregory:** Minister, will you introduce this item?

[74] **Edwina Hart:** Members will be familiar with this, because it is something that we have dealt with before. The papers relating to the draft housing revenue account subsidies under item 8 have been sent to you for your consideration. The consultation with local

authorities is now complete, and there have been no objections to the content of the determinations. Rhondda Cynon Taf and Wrexham particularly welcomed the increase in the management and maintenance allowance, which is quite important. The determination is that subordinate legislation is not required to be made by statutory instrument, and Standing Order No. 29 applies. No amendments have been made as a result of the consultation, and, subject to my consideration and any comments received at this meeting, it is my intention to make the directions under Standing Order No. 29.4.

[75] I also wish to make the committee aware that local government finance colleagues are currently progressing the Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2007 through legislative process, having consulted with local authorities. Those are likely to be finalised in March to come into effect on 1 April 2007 and will have an impact on the housing revenue account subsidy and item 8 determinations 2007-08. Local authorities require the determinations to be in place by the end of January 2007 in order to set their rents in the year 2007-08. Consequently, the making of the determinations could not be delayed until March to incorporate the changes required by the Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2006. Should the regulations be made, I propose that the amended HRAS and item 8 determinations be compiled to incorporate the technical changes that are necessary to ensure that the regulations and determinations are compatible. Consequently, it is my intention to agree the amended determinations without further consultation and without further recourse to committee. I am sorry if that is a bit lengthy, wordy and complex but officials in my department and in local government assure me that it is totally straightforward. I am very lucky to have the head of housing here today to answer all the technical questions that I am sure Members will have on this determination.

[76] **Janice Gregory:** Does anyone have any comments on that? I would not think that anyone would dare.

[77] **Mark Isherwood:** On rent convergence and the 1 per cent differential, when do you expect that convergence will be achieved? Assuming further progress in the stock transfer program in future, how would that be managed when the majority of the stock would be in the registered social landlord sector?

[78] **Edwina Hart:** That is very difficult. I do not think that we know, do we?

[79] **Ms Whittaker:** We anticipate that it would work in the same way once the stock is in that sector, but we may look at rents more generally before that. However, we do not have a date for convergence in the same way that England does, because we do not have the same level of problem.

[80] **Janice Gregory:** Are Members content-ish? I see that they are.

10.12 a.m.

**Adolygiad Polisi'r Pwyllgor Cyfiawnder Cymdeithasol ac Adfywio ar  
Gamddefnyddio Sylweddau  
Progress Report on the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee Policy  
Review on Substance Misuse**

[81] **Janice Gregory:** Minister, will you introduce this item?

[82] **Edwina Hart:** When I submitted the Government's written response to this review in July last year, I undertook to update the committee on implementation and progress. We have

progressed well on some of the recommendations. Many of the issues raised in the report's recommendations were already part of our work programme, and I feel that this progress report and my fourth annual report to the committee last September show the achievements that have been made in advancing the agenda of tackling substance misuse. I use the word 'advancing' rather than 'solving', if you see what I mean, because in this area it is often a case of two steps forward and one step back. Provided that you have the financial wherewithal to start support programmes and you see some genuine element of progress, it is always worthwhile.

[83] The substance misuse action fund will increase to £22 million for the coming year. This is as a result of increases of more than 30 per cent in the community safety partnerships allocations, which is quite substantial. Using this additional resource, partnerships have been asked to prioritise services for children and young people—which is particularly important—tackling waiting lists, and alcohol services. The committee was particularly keen that we should stress that with any additional moneys available.

[84] **Leanne Wood:** What is the aim of your strategy on this agenda? When Jane Hutt was in charge of this portfolio, I read that the aim of the substance misuse strategy was to reduce the number of people using particular substances. If that is the aim of the strategy, you could say that it is failing, because the number of people using various substances is increasing. I would like to know, for clarity's sake, what the aim is. We could say that the aim is to accept that some people are going to use certain substances and to decide what we can put in place to ensure that they are kept as safe as possible. That is a very different aim to the one that is in the literature.

[85] **Edwina Hart:** In fact, we have four aims, because it is quite an integrated strategy. We must not say that we do not want to try to reduce the number of people who are involved in substance misuse because that must be our overall aim and goal. At the same time, we must recognise, as you do, that the aim is to ensure that we have resources in place to increase investment and to help people with their treatment. One of the aims must be increased investment in treatment. There are also the education and prevention issues that I think are key to the strategy. We have spoken about this a lot in committee and I know that you have concerns about whether we are focusing our education and dealing with some of the issues correctly. I think that this is part of the ongoing action. We also have to tackle the availability of treatment, which is key. That is important and that is why, with the additional money, we are looking at services for children and young people and at some of the waiting lists.

[86] For me, the key is to help families and communities when there is a problem. I cannot recall Jane saying it, but I am sure that you are correct, Leanne, that at the end of the day we must do something about the numbers. I also recognise, particularly when you look at alcoholism, which is a growing problem in society that is not going to go away, that it is as much about the key element of early education. You will be thinking that if you start to educate people and you think that the education is working now, in 2007, the assessment of it should probably be made in 2017, to see what we have done in 2027. I think that we have to be more realistic. When people use such language as, 'We will stop this' and, 'We will do this', that is not realistic. As politicians, we must recognise that we have to put resources in to help people who want to be helped and I feel quite passionately about that in terms of my portfolio.

[87] I also feel that people are too judgmental about issues. You have to give far more help and assistance, and recognise that there is a genuine problem out there. When you go out and about—as you would have done as a committee when you took evidence on various subjects—it is heartbreaking to see where people have gone, but then it is wonderful to see from where they have come back in. That is why I think that it is about resources and availability. I have always said that, in an ideal world, I would like someone to be able to say

at 10 a.m. this morning, 'I have had enough of drugs' and for them to be able to walk in somewhere and for someone to say, 'Come on in, we will counsel you and start your programme'. In an ideal world, that is what I would aim for in terms of treatment; perhaps that sounds a tad idealistic, but that is the holistic approach that I would like to take to the programme that I am running.

[88] **Leanne Wood:** Can you explain the announcement that Hazel Blears made on Tuesday, when she came to Cardiff and said that there would be additional money in the crime-fighting fund to be tough on crime and to issue more anti-social behaviour orders and so on? How does that square with what you have just said about treating people with respect and treating people in this field as patients as opposed to criminals?

[89] **Edwina Hart:** When we are talking about people with alcohol and drug dependency problems, we are talking about people who are ill. It is a physical condition and I think that it is important that we respect them and put the services in place for when they want to change their lives around. In terms of crime and criminality, I think that that is slightly different; Hazel was talking about the concerns that people have in society about other people's behaviour and the way that people are not nice to each other. It is not just that they are not nice to each other, but that society does not gel together. People have a lot of concerns. People have to understand that they have to be responsible and respect others. I do not think that she was trying to link it in to this agenda. I am certainly not doing so because I see this agenda as one of helping and assisting because I see addiction as an illness. All of us who have ever given up smoking know what it is like in terms of addiction. I look at you, Chair, and remember when you heroically gave up, and were biting your nails for months on end. There are issues around that. Hazel was making an announcement in terms of public concerns about law and order issues.

[90] In terms of ASBOs, we have the views of our chief constables about their effectiveness, particularly with regard to young people. It is interesting that I was at an opening of a police station yesterday and they were talking about ASBOs and local people, and there were just as many adults involved as young people, which is quite interesting. I suppose that ASBOs do have a place in the criminal justice system, and people identify with them in terms of what they can do, because there have been some successes. However, we have to be mindful of the evidence that the chiefs of police gave to the Welsh Affairs Select Committee on this matter.

10.20 a.m.

[91] **Mick Bates:** I have just three comments. My first is about rehabilitation and the formation of a stakeholder group that is meeting later this month, I believe. That is very much welcome. It may be difficult to say, but is there a timetable for any work that may be undertaken by that stakeholder group in order to come forward with a national rehabilitation service?

[92] **Edwina Hart:** Jo, what is the timescale?

[93] **Ms Jordan:** We are putting in a draft timescale to the group when it meets next. We are hoping that it will have completed its deliberations and issue an assessment of it all by September. But that is to be discussed with the group to check that that is realistic.

[94] **Mick Bates:** Fine. The second issue is on recommendation 8, and this business of the balance between funding for drugs and alcohol. One of the emerging issues is that the drinks industry is not playing a large enough role in the work being undertaken. I have had contact with the Portman Group, which is the drinks industry body. In terms of the educational process to try to prevent abuse of drink, there is an important role to engage with the industry



and use its resource to help this agenda. I did not mention that when we discussed this, but I think that it is an important driver, and I wonder whether, in relation to the work being undertaken with community safety partnerships, there is any recommendation that the Portman Group, for example, should be more engaged in that process.

[95] My third point is that, when you look the financial implications of the recommendations, it is often stated that there are none. Many of those recommendations are about increased integrated working. It can be very easy to write 'none', but having talked to many of the workers who have to work together with other organisations, there is obviously the matter of their time. We hope that there will be more effective outcomes from greater integration, but it should be recognised that, sometimes, there is a cost implication when we sit here and say, 'Go and work together'. It can be little flippant to say that there are not any cost implications.

[96] **Edwina Hart:** With my voluntary sector Minister hat on, I must say that that is one of the complaints of small voluntary sector organisations. When I ask them about partnership working, they say that it is lovely, but it might mean the cost of a rail fare, which is quite a lot for them. There are issues such as that. We did not go through this flippantly at all—we did not think that there were any costs, and we are, of course, increasing the cash all the time, which is quite helpful in terms of the budget.

[97] With regard to your points on the drinks industry, I concur with you. We could do a lot more with the drinks industry. It is a very wealthy industry, making a nice lot of money, and some of that could be utilised to help with particular issues. We would want to look at developing a new strategy—we would have to do that nationally with the drinks industry, which is quite important. However, I also think that we have to have clarity about alcohol, alcohol advertising and similar issues if we are to engage with the drinks industry. We need to engage with it about other issues that stem from alcohol, such as alcohol-related violence, for example. Plastic glasses have been used very successfully, and the industry is looking at the prospect of brewers using plastic bottles. There needs to be more engagement at that level for that side of the equation when people go out to enjoy themselves. We have to look at that. Some members of the industry are good at engaging, but others are reluctant to do so.

[98] The other area that we need to look at is where alcohol is sold, and offers on alcohol and so on. These deals definitely encourage people to purchase. We have to get serious at a national level about tackling what seems to be constantly on the rise. I do not know about your experience, but I seem to meet more people with alcohol problems than I did a few years ago. That might not be statistically the case; it might be that people are more open about their problems, I do not know, but you have to tackle this head-on, nationally, to achieve what you want. It is not a matter of stopping people's choice, but starting to restrict things, rather like tobacco and other things, that you realise are dangerous to health. You can still buy tobacco, but it costs you. You need to look at all these issues, and we need a wider, more open discussion about it all following on from this, because I feel that, if you have done your report, and I am doing my agenda, I could do with a bit more help from somewhere else with regard to tackling some of it. My feeling as a Minister is that I would like engagement on other issues. I think that there is a lot of support for some things, such as in relation to advertising. I am not sure what effect it would have, but I think that it will have an impact somewhere along the line.

[99] **Mick Bates:** I welcome what the Minister had to say in response to my point about engaging with the drinks industry, because we are aware that there is a cost to this. There is a direct relationship between excessive drinking and most abuse and domestic violence. I am concerned about this. I have written to the Portman Group and talked to the Licensed Vintners' Association. As we move towards implementation I wonder whether we should—in whatever form we meet after May—recommend that we also engage with the drinks industry.

As you said, it is a wealthy industry and, although it produces educational material, it is not engaging with this type of strategic approach from the Government in order to answer some of the issues that arise from excessive drinking. I would like us to do that.

[100] **Janice Gregory:** Leanne, you wanted to make a point?

[101] **Leanne Wood:** Yes. On this point, have you given any consideration, Minister, to the potential increase in alcohol problems which may result from the smoking ban? I am thinking about people who choose to drink at home because they do not want to go to the pub. Could we perhaps have a report on that before 2 April?

[102] **Edwina Hart:** We would have to wait until the smoking ban comes into force. If there is a social justice committee and portfolio after May, I think that that is something for it. We would have to look at it a later stage. Jo, were you going to suggest something?

[103] **Ms Jordan:** I was just going to suggest that it might be possible to look at whether there is evidence from some places where a ban is already in place. I am not sure that we would be able to do anything here in advance, but we could see if any work is going on elsewhere.

[104] **Edwina Hart:** We will see whether there is anything around and I can report back. I am sure that a researcher somewhere has done some work on it and has published a learned paper.

[105] **Janice Gregory:** There has to be something.

[106] **Laura Anne Jones:** I would like to raise something that you have already touched upon, Minister, and something that I feel is key to all of this, namely education. I am not just talking about the education of young children, but of people of all ages in terms of what drug is what, the effects of alcohol and drug misuse, and where to turn if they have a problem, want to find out more, or have a spouse or other relation who has a problem. How are we progressing with the process of getting the information out there to the people of Wales and how are you working with Jane Davidson, as the Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, to get the message out to children—with the emphasis on where to go if they think that they have a problem, want to know more, or if someone in their family has a problem?

[107] **Edwina Hart:** You made a good point about access to information about services and where people can go. Some people would not want to be seen looking for information. It is not like the domestic abuse helpline; some people would not want to go. There might be a victim in Swansea, but he might want to talk to a voice on the phone and not do anything. We feel that we are quite successful in advertising services across the piece.

[108] **Ms Jordan:** Yes, we now have the national helpline, which has been widely publicised. That is not only for substance misusers, but for their families and members of the community. That signposts them to services and helps them to get appointments and so on. The education programme is running in 98 per cent of primary and secondary schools, so that consistent message is going out.

[109] **Edwina Hart:** I take the point that Laura made about how we will evaluate our success in getting at people through the helpline. With the domestic abuse helpline, it was obvious that we had to go to 24 hours and we could see patterns emerging. Perhaps we need to do more work. The number for the domestic abuse helpline appears in ladies' loos and in other places. Perhaps we should be doing more, as Laura said, for this to be marketed more and put in places such as pubs, shops and post offices. I will look at that, because you do not want people having to hunt for the number; you want them to be able to see it quickly and not

show that they are picking it up.

[110] **Ms Jordan:** That is right, Minister. The helpline has not been in existence for very long; you will remember the launch a few months ago. However, on the back of that, we are already starting to evaluate how that is working, whether it is working effectively, and whether it has enough resources. We are also developing a communication strategy on the back of that to try to promote it and to push it more and ensure that it links up with campaigns that cover both England and Wales, like the Frank campaign and so on.

10.30 a.m.

[111] **Laura Anne Jones:** The marketing of it is key, is it not? How are you marketing it, exactly? What media are you using?

[112] **Ms Jordan:** Community safety partnerships put out a whole range of information in terms of local newsletters and local papers, there is website advertising and beer mats are being printed for clubs. It is marketed in schools through the all-Wales schools programme that I just mentioned. Those were the sorts of things that kicked it off, but we are now looking to see how we can take it further.

[113] **Laura Anne Jones:** I have been doing some research for the Conservative Party. The things that hit people most come from the television. People always watch television and that is where they get most of their information from. Are you going to invest money into television advertisements in this respect?

[114] **Ms Jordan:** We are looking at that.

[115] **Laura Anne Jones:** I know that it has worked in other areas.

[116] **Edwina Hart:** Yes, but it is a massive expense. I acknowledge that the smoking campaign has been hard-hitting, but it has taken up a lot of resources and I am conscious of the fact that they were diverted from other purposes. However, I will ask Jo to pick up all those points with the officials as they review it, and perhaps we could give an update to committee in our last meeting in March, before we go into our purdah period, or whatever it is.

[117] **Mark Isherwood:** On the first item, referring to the steering group on residential rehabilitation and detox, will the group consider having the two together? Last year, I went with Denbighshire County Council officers and a cross-party group to see what the Irish were doing. There is a system there that is run in partnership between the Catholic church and the Government, which is obviously not the sort of model that we would follow, but which has large-scale and long-term residential detox and rehabilitation projects. Could consideration be given to that model, possibly working with Denbighshire, which is also looking at it at the moment?

[118] You also referred to commissioning needle exchange services. Could we have an indication of how progress on that is developing with pharmacies? I know that there is increasing provision in many areas, but there are still gaps. How can that be taken forward as an alternative to some of the less popular schemes that have received lots of publicity recently?

[119] What consideration has been given to the dual diagnostic potential provision? I am regularly contacted—as I am sure that all of us are—by people who are concerned about a family member who has a dual diagnostic problem in terms of mental health problems, learning difficulties and also, a growing problem that I keep raising, post-traumatic stress

disorder. There is no appropriate residential provision for them. There is also an ongoing issue that substance misusers regularly raise: it is their perception—and this seems to be borne out by the facts—that those who have been through the criminal justice system get a greater allocation of resource than those who have not.

[120] There are just a couple more things. Under section 6, you refer to evaluation and business support services. Organisations have raised concerns with me around the bidding process and have said that they want assistance with filling out the forms properly and to be able to engage with Assembly Government officials to explain the things that the form does not always allow them to explain. Will this allow them to do that?

[121] In terms of what Laura said about schools and education, I will just mention the example of the Choose Life project, which came out of Walton prison, which most of you visited and saw. It has been relying on funding from England, but is now doing a lot more work across the border in north Wales. I was with the project members in a school in Llangollen in November and the feedback from the young people and school staff there showed that it was very successful. So, what consideration can be given to projects of that type—the best-practice models—so that we could have coverage throughout the whole of Wales?

[122] Finally, on the smoking ban impact, perhaps a good trigger point would be the drinks industry figures on home trade. The figures already show that home trade has risen from something like 20 per cent to 50 per cent over the last 20 years. No doubt, if that rose again as anticipated, it would be a trigger to consider whether work would need to be done.

[123] **Edwina Hart:** We will obviously pick up the research point on that. The Scots and the Irish have probably done some work on this if it has triggered a situation where people are drinking more at home.

[124] We work with all groups through our partnerships if they want to look for funding for resources, and it is a question of prioritisation at local level if the project stacks up. However, in terms of engagement with my officials, I know that my officials and the teams outside Cardiff and in the centre spend their entire lives engaging with organisations. It is sometimes quite difficult, because organisations might think that they have the best project since white, sliced bread but it may not fulfil what we and the local partnerships want, our priorities for treatment and the needs of the communities. So, it is difficult to comment on individual organisations, but, in terms of form filling and so on, a lot of assistance is given, and I have had that at first hand from organisations that I have visited. They are very appreciative of the fact that the teams out there are so helpful in terms of telling them what the issues are and what they should be looking at in terms of our provision.

[125] I accept that people think that if you have been in the criminal justice system you have better access to treatment. Of course, I acknowledge that there is the Home Office and how it funds things to consider. However, we have always tried to ensure that there is equity in treatment. It would be madness if someone had been through the criminal justice system and had been treated for alcohol and drug dependency there and I could not provide something, when they came out, to allow them not to re-offend. So, you also have to look at those linkages. I accept the point that the Home Office has featured a lot in the issues of the criminal justice system, but we are getting a balance into our work in terms of how we allocate resources.

[126] On needle exchange services, we have made some progress with pharmacies and, obviously, we have to make more progress. However, there is a lot of innovation about, and, to be frank, I do not want to comment on any individual decisions made, but I am disappointed by the amount of opposition that we get when we try to deal with issues like

needle exchanges. At the end of the day, would people prefer needles on the streets and in playgrounds? Where would they prefer them to be? If we had proper systems set up and proper facilities, it would help everyone, because we are fighting against Hepatitis C, AIDS, and all these issues. It is very important that people recognise that drugs are not a problem in someone else's community; they are a problem in their community. It is not a problem with other people's children and families; it is a problem with their children and families. So, we take what I think is quite a moral approach to this. We have to be united on this or we will not get the required facilities in place. People are being extremely abusive to staff, people in north Wales who work on the front line, when they are out and about and doing their business, helping addicts and so on. I find that totally unacceptable. I hope that the committee agrees with me on that. We have been very good in this committee, cross-party, about saying what the aims should be. It is help and assistance that people require, and it is important that people understand that they might not always like something but it is being done for the greater good, and they should perhaps accept it a bit more. I understand how people feel, and I know how my neighbours would feel if anything came near our community, but I hope that I would try to behave responsibly as a politician and get the necessary balance.

[127] You spoke about the Irish model; we always like to look at any model that is available, especially if drawn to our attention by providers who want to work in that way. I also accept that there are still problems on the mental health side. Do officials want to comment on that?

[128] **Ms Jordan:** Clearly that is a big problem. We have issued guidance on how those with dual-diagnosis problems should pass through the treatment system, to ensure that mental health services are supporting substance misuse services. However, we are not sure whether we have got it right yet, and we are going to re-launch the guidance and will run further workshops to try to get the health professionals, who are dealing with the mental health agenda, properly linked in with other health professionals who are dealing with substance misuse, to try to get that right, because it is not right at the moment.

[129] You also mentioned the lack of residential facilities for people with dual-diagnosis problems. The working group will need to look at that, because it will be looking to assess the needs of individuals across Wales, and what is currently available in Wales and outside to meet the needs of those individuals. So we will need to pick that up in the working group.

[130] **Edwina Hart:** We are worried about mental health issues, Mark, and making the linkages, because we are talking about an extremely vulnerable group, which needs proper services provided for it. However, I hope that the working group's ongoing work will identify placements, because there is a need for placements for people, in suitable accommodation, where they can be helped. It is bad enough to have an alcohol and drug dependency without having mental health issues on top of that. Therefore, this is an area of concern, but we are trying to tackle it, and we are bringing other partners on board.

[131] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you for that, Minister.

10.40 a.m.

### **Is-ddeddfwriaeth Secondary Legislation**

[132] **Janice Gregory:** Does anyone have any comments on this item? Has anyone identified any pieces of legislation? I see that they have not. We will therefore break now, and we will return at 11 a.m..

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10.41 a.m. ac 11.01 a.m.  
The meeting adjourned between 10.41 a.m. and 11.01 a.m.*

### **Deddf Arbed Ynni Cartref Home Energy Conservation Act**

[133] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you all for coming back almost on time, and welcome to our visitors in the public gallery. If you switched on your mobiles, pagers or BlackBerrys during the break, I remind you to switch them off again, please. We will now move to item 7, and the Minister will introduce this paper again.

[134] **Edwina Hart:** The policy agreement target of 12 per cent improvement within 10 years is expected to be achieved by the majority of local authorities, but I must say that one would have hoped that it would be achieved by them all. However, that is not the case, and, after two years of the policy agreements, the overall improvement up until 2006 was 8.59 per cent. So, there are issues for us on this agenda. Progress has been slow against these targets and, if policy agreements are not going to work, we will just have to look at what we can do with local government. Let us be frank: climate change is on everybody's lips now, and the wind and rain outside today make it all the more obvious. So, tackling home energy efficiency will be increasingly difficult, I think. The home energy efficiency scheme has a pilot scheme on renewables, in which I know Mick is interested, and that will be very useful. There is investment in the system, but, at the end of the day, for me, the involvement of local government has been quite disappointing as regards the targets.

[135] **Mick Bates:** I think that we all share the Minister's sentiments on this, but that will not help us to get to the target. What I found particularly disappointing was the fact that four authorities had not even sent in a report. When we discussed this issue previously, I suppose that people considered the 30 per cent target to be ambitious, but the one thing about targets is that they are made to provide a fairly secure framework for investment so that local authorities know where they are going, as do the people who are providing materials, labour training, and all the things that are attached to such a programme. What analysis has been undertaken to establish why progress is so slow, and what action is the Minister willing to take on this, whether in the form of a letter to authorities, or even extra funding, which may be applicable in some cases? There are people who would say that no matter how generous the funding streams may appear, they are not sufficient to reach the 30 per cent target. So, to go back to my main question, what analysis has been undertaken of this to find out why progress is so slow, and what action is the Minister willing to take to try to put us back on course to reach the 30 per cent target, rather than the 8 per cent or so that we have reached?

[136] **Edwina Hart:** We have given quite a lot of assistance to local authorities—guidance, software to help them to collate information, and so on—and so for four not even to provide us with a report is exceptionally disappointing. I had rather hoped that all this discussion on joined-up Government with the Beecham agenda and so on would forge a way forward in our dealings with local government. There is a lot of interest in this issue among the professional officers in local government, when we deal directly with them. I am sure that François can comment further on this.

[137] **Mr Samuel:** You asked what analysis had been undertaken. What was not mentioned in this report, because the work is ongoing and will probably not produce any information until March, was the fact that the Wales Audit Office has looked at, and discussed with individual authorities, the impact of the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 and progress against those targets. We have yet to see what that will produce. That analysis is ongoing and my understanding is that, unfortunately, it will not be reported until around March.

[138] The Minister mentioned Beecham and delivering ‘Beyond Boundaries’ and, in some ways, perhaps the Home Energy Conservation Act has been overtaken by things such as the climate change declaration by local authorities. Do not forget that this provision dates back to 1997, to a time before climate change was a major issue for everyone to consider. It will be for us to discuss with local government how ‘Beyond Boundaries’ takes up issues of climate change generally, and builds on the experience of the policy agreements. I would not use the word ‘significant’ to describe the improvement, but there has been an improvement, and lessons have been learned, which we would feed into the process of delivering ‘Beyond Boundaries’.

[139] **Edwina Hart:** You talk about targets, and there have been changes. The figure was 1 per cent in 2003-04, and it was up to 1.71 per cent in 2005-06. I think that people appreciate that some of the investment is outside authorities’ control, which is a key issue. We must also look at other issues that will help to get some of this online, such as the refurbishment of authorities’ housing stock. So, it is quite a complex picture, even though we are disappointed with it. I had hoped that the Wales Audit Office report would be completed so that we could look at that information, but it is not likely that it will be the subject of discussion until after the election. I think that it might make very interesting reading, and it may also help us to make further decisions on what we need to do.

[140] On Mick’s earlier point, I do not ignore investment, but there are issues to do with investment that should be prioritised and considered. However, many of these issues have been overtaken by events, and any new committee that discusses this—indeed, any new Minister who is responsible for it—will have to take a fresh look at some of these issues in May.

[141] **Mr Samuel:** To be clear, HECA does not set a target to be achieved by local authorities; it sets a target on the potential for improvement. The law calls only for a report on progress, which could be zero. The 30 per cent target covers many areas for which local authorities are not directly responsible. So, in some ways, there is a synergy with local service boards and the thinking behind the Beecham agenda, namely the idea that local authorities act as a hub, but that has always been the difficulty with HECA. That 30 per cent target represents the potential for improvement within a local authority area.

[142] **Mick Bates:** I just want to comment on the quite rational things that have been said by François. Going back to the four authorities that did not report, what I find disappointing is that they are displaying a significant amount of disdain for what is a critical, albeit potential, target. I want to see some action on that from the Minister, if she is willing, or from the committee. I would like to know which authorities they are, for a start, and for a general letter to be sent to them. I accept François’s point on the 30 per cent target being only a potential target, but it is the investment issue that most people bring to my attention when I talk about progress on this target—and that is since 1997.

11.10 a.m.

[143] The Minister repeats the mantra of working with other departments; however, as I pointed out earlier, the first tranche of one of the main sources of funding, the low-carbon building programme, has already finished, and if there is to be significant progress throughout all authorities, other mechanisms are needed to establish where the funding is coming from. If I may, I will point to an example. I know of a community that prepared a large grant application to Europe, to the Concerto initiative, to bid for money to achieve a very significant target in energy conservation. That community received very little support from the Government, although I brought it to the attention of the relevant Minister. I am afraid that there needs to be stronger political will to move the agenda forward. I accept the Minister’s comments that it is a popular agenda at the moment, based on climate change and

carbon reduction and so on, but we are talking here about saving a great deal of money as well, because the investment is significant, both economically—in the sense of saving money—and in energy security at the end of the day. Therefore, there are strategic issues involved, but there is no significant investment to reach a 30 per cent target.

[144] **Mr Samuel:** In previous reports, we identified those councils that did not make progress, so we can provide that information.

[145] **Edwina Hart:** Do you have that information to hand?

[146] **Mr Samuel:** I do not; I just have the numerical data.

[147] **Edwina Hart:** With regard to the point that arose in relation to local authorities, I have my regular meeting with Derek Vaughan, and I would be happy to take these points up with him. I shall also take forward the further points about joint working.

[148] **Mick Bates:** There are also some comments to be made on how the need will be met. I am concerned that, in future, there will be other targets for carbon reduction, possibly through a climate change Bill, which will suffer equally from funding pressures.

[149] **Edwina Hart:** Yes, we will have a look at this in the context of any further budget discussions.

[150] **Sandy Mewies:** On the identification process, we should know not only the councils that did not make progress but also those that did. I am not clear whether I have got this absolutely correct, so perhaps you can tell me, but would this have an impact on a local authority reaching any sort of target? For example, we know that during the last financial year, many of the utility companies pulled out of the insulation programmes. My local authority had signed up loads of people in a sort of co-operative scheme, but, as soon as the utility company reached the target, it pulled out. Something needs to be done about that, because it seems that what is really being tackled is energy conservation for people who can afford to pay for it. Those who cannot afford it—those who are in fuel poverty—are not getting the same sort of support, because the targets are different. The energy conservation target is a very soft target, and as soon as it is reached, companies pull out. So, is that having an impact on the targets that the authorities should be reaching, because you say that the 30 per cent is global? If it is, something must be done about that. I have said many times that my view is that there are far too many funding sources under different organisations' control that can start and finish willy-nilly, and that should not be the case. It is a waste of resources.

[151] **Edwina Hart:** I have written about this. Ofgem is the regulator in this area, is it not?

[152] **Mr Samuel:** Ofgem is the regulator, and you did write to Scottish Power about the Flint-sulphate scheme.

[153] **Edwina Hart:** We are aware of these issues, and I can understand Sandy's frustration and concern. The utilities reach a certain point, and then that is it. That is always the worry with regard to property and doing anything in relation to home energy. Those who can afford it will pay to have it done, and so have the consequent benefit of reduced bills and a range of other benefits, while others cannot afford it. It is quite a difficult area. Do you want to comment at all, François?

[154] **Mr Samuel:** As the Minister said, that issue was taken up with Scottish Power. It has been pointed out to the energy companies that the amount of investment that they are making is now so great that it has to be integrated with our and local authorities' activities. The energy efficiency commitment from 2008 is set to double again, so it will exceed the budget



for the home energy efficiency scheme. It involves such a high level of investment that planning and integration are needed. This message has been repeated to Ofgem, and we will be feeding similar comments into the consultation that will take place starting in February, for energy efficiency commitment 3.

[155] **Edwina Hart:** They could put a paper in to that consultation, if they wished to do so; I would have thought that they would want to do so, because of the interest in it.

[156] **Sandy Mewies:** My personal view, although I am sure that none of the companies would like it, is that the levy should come straight to us. It is a real waste of resources to have different companies administering schemes and letting people down, because that is what happened in Flintshire recently: people were lined up, thinking that they were going to have some work done, and it was not done for them. It is not about empire building; I feel that, when you have schemes that overlap and people are being paid to do the same job, that is a real waste of resources. That money should not only be put into energy conservation, but into dealing with fuel poverty.

[157] **Dr Roberts:** From just listening to this conversation, I think that we need to have a discussion with them. From what you are saying, it seems that the work is not joined up and it ought to be, if it involves such a massive resource. We are happy to take that back, as officials, to try to make the system work better.

[158] **Mark Isherwood:** I think that you referred to targets and reporting—I think that it was mentioned before I came into the room—but, of course, they are voluntary. I have mentioned this matter before. Des Wilson had a private Member's Bill with all-party support, which did not go through, to introduce some sort of mandatory targets. There are also now discussions about whether we should have mandatory reporting, whether we should consider it, whether it would have to be done through Westminster or whether we could consider doing it ourselves in the future. I highlight a comment made at the North Wales Regional Committee by a local authority officer, in Amlwch, that, from the officers' perspective, if they had statutory targets, their lives would be a lot easier in this respect and they would be able to do the job with a lot more authority.

[159] You have mentioned lots of other linkages and one area is, of course, the new housing health and safety rating system. I will not name any individual cases, but in one case that I have been involved with thus far, there has been reluctance among local authorities because of the fear of costs and setting precedents. I know that they are working through the advice resource that is being put in place in England, but is also accessible to Welsh authorities. Do you have a mechanism to monitor the implementation of the authorities' general statutory duty to help to develop good practice that they can share with each other, particularly on effective enforcement action? Are they able to take it? Are they taking it? What is resulting from it?

[160] The legal advice that I received, through the Members' research service, was that, although it was targeted at private landlords, it would also apply to home owners, because a local authority could be subject to a legal challenge if it treated them differently to private landlords. Are authorities aware of that? What mechanisms are we considering to help people who own a house but who may not have any assets? They may not have any money and may not be able to access borrowing. In the past, we have talked about the Welsh home improvement lending agency and you stated that you would set up a couple of small pilot schemes, separate from that. What happened with that? Are the schemes progressing and what have we learnt from them? Will the pilot scheme be rolled out so that low-income homeowners can access cheap and reputable credit for essential repairs to their homes?

[161] Finally, there is now a duty on local authorities, if they require a home owner to

contribute to home improvements, to assess their financial position and ability to pay, rather than simply demand that they make a contribution. However, in my experience, not all local authorities and their legal departments fully appreciate that.

[162] **Edwina Hart:** Some of Mark's points go to the heart of what powers we have. If it would be helpful, I will deal with Mark's contribution and the various points that he has raised in my next ministerial report, because we will be able to explore the issues about powers and some of the other points that he has made. I wonder if Mark would be happy to share with my officials and me the copy of the legal opinion that he received from the Members' research service, so that we can feed that into my report at the next meeting. I think that there will be an opportunity to look at what we can do post May in this area. The only thing that I will say is that the reports are currently mandatory; we do have the reports from local authorities—they must give them to us. However, Mark makes a valid point about what strengthening mechanisms there might be and how we can look at a framework in those areas. Of course, there are always private individuals in those issues, and I will pick that point up when I report back. If you could share what you have with us, I would be grateful.

[163] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you.

11.20 a.m.

### **Cynllun Gweithredu Strategol Drafft—Cynllun y Sector Gwirfoddol Draft Strategic Action Plan—Voluntary Sector Scheme**

[164] **Janice Gregory:** The draft plan is out for public consultation until 4 April. Minister, you are introducing this item.

[165] **Edwina Hart:** This is a very ambitious and challenging plan, and I think that the voluntary sector will broadly welcome what we are doing. However, the issue that I will raise first with you is that I would like for all Assembly Members to be involved in consultation on this matter. I was considering holding an event for all Assembly Members at which they could go through the consultation. Peter, do you want to outline what we were thinking of doing for Assembly Members, so that I will have the committee's take on it before I go ahead? I do not think that it is just a matter for us. It would be nice to say, 'Please go to your local events', but we are all rather chopsy, and I actually want the view of the voluntary sector from the local events that we are holding across Wales. I am not being discourteous, but I know that it would be a great temptation for me to say, 'Well, hang on a second, I think this or that', so I thought that I would hold a separate event for AMs. Peter, do you want to explain what we are thinking of doing?

[166] **Mr Owen:** We are proposing to hold an event for perhaps a couple of hours on the morning of one of the Plenary days in late February or early March. The Minister will write to you with a series of possible dates, and then, if you would, you can indicate whether you wish to attend and which of the dates would be most convenient.

[167] **Edwina Hart:** I thought that I would probably have to hold two consultation events, because of the committee meetings held on Wednesdays, to give people an opportunity to attend. We have plenty of time for the consultation, so if we have to go a bit later, we would have to do so. I am particularly keen for Assembly Members to contribute, because the accompanying consultation paper asks a series of questions to help guide responses. It would also be very useful for Assembly Members to go through that. I know that you can respond individually, but it would also be nice for me to have a sense of the collective response. It would be very helpful in this context not only to have the documents, but also to have officials and others there, including perhaps people from the voluntary sector, to take you through it, so that Assembly Members, before they submit their individual responses, have a

good opportunity to talk it through. That would be quite nice as there is a lot of interest across the piece in the voluntary sector, and across committees particularly—I know that David Melding, as former Chair of the Health and Social Services Committee, will want to be involved. If you are amenable, Chair, I will write to people with this suggestion. I do not think that it should just be my officials; I should have a more diverse group, perhaps, just to introduce the paper, as it were, and to take us through some of the associated issues.

[168] We have consultation events in February and March all across Wales, and I will let Members have full details of them so that they are aware that they are going on. However, I would, in the main, like for Members to be engaged at the Assembly, because I am really keen—and I have said this to officials—for us to target at these events some of the smaller groups that we are always talking about. If we can do that locally enough for them in their areas, I think that they will attend and have their voices heard. It is very easy for the large voluntary sector organisations to have a full-time policy officer respond to my document, which means that we will not then hear the voice that talks about the funding issues and the problems at the local level. We know that that is going on, especially on occasion in relationships with local government given the lack of a real compact and so on. We want that to come through.

[169] I think that we are getting a very clear agenda on this matter, and Dr Caldwell has undertaken extensive pre-consultation before he did this, holding interviews with officials from all departments, and selective interviews with sector practitioners. He also held meetings with the voluntary sector partnership working group and he has met Cabinet Office and Treasury officials. So, he has gone into this, and I know that the voluntary sector has confidence in what he has done.

[170] Some of the substantial new actions will require money—there is no doubt about that—and that will be subject to how whatever Government is formed after May 2007 responds to this consultation and to budget planning rounds. So, we have to recognise that we are at a very strange stage, because Neil Caldwell has prepared the report, the partnership council is happy for this to go forward for consultation, but the implementation will lie with others and we might not even discuss it at this committee. So, I want to try to maximise the involvement of people in this process, because it is a giant step forward. During this process, I also feel that I am picking up things that I would not pick up as a Minister. However, I still think that you have to let it go forward; it shows that we want to work with the voluntary sector after May, because, as you know, it was extremely concerned about its working arrangements. It had rights under the Government of Wales Act 1998. The approach that we are outlining and the way that we are working strategically with the voluntary sector also helps in that respect. So, I would be grateful if Members could ensure when they go back to their groups that, when I send out details, they encourage as much participation as possible. It will be enormously helpful, because we want to have genuine engagement on this consultation.

[171] **Janice Gregory:** Would anyone else like to comment?

[172] **Mark Isherwood:** I have a short comment. It is up to them; they will respond and, hopefully, the majority view will prevail. A stool with three legs—that is not my analogy, but perhaps you could tell me who came up with it—means that they are equal; without one of the legs, the stool would fall over. The third sector could sound like a ranking. You have the first sector, second sector, third sector. That is just an observation.

[173] **Edwina Hart:** There is a question on that in the consultation document. Language is quite important with regard to some of these issues. We know what we think and understand, but there is a language issue. I am not sure that I am comfortable with the term 'third sector'. It is as if you have had the bronze medal. I can understand why it is used, because it takes it

away from the Government. I think that you are right and we will probably have an interesting response to that question. We would probably have more of a response on the use of language than on some of the key issues involving expenditure.

[174] **Janice Gregory:** Undoubtedly. Thank you.

11.27 a.m.

### **Cyfle Cyfartal Equality of Opportunity**

[175] **Janice Gregory:** Minister, are you introducing this item?

[176] **Edwina Hart:** This paper provides an update on the progress. The independent equality audit of social justice and regeneration policies demonstrates that we are making progress in delivering equality. The report will be considered later this month by the Committee on Equality of Opportunity. There have been good developments with our commitments on the race equality scheme and we support the disability equality scheme and the gender equality scheme. I welcome Members' comments. The audit has to have a legacy in the Assembly with regard to what it will achieve. There is no point undertaking this as a paper exercise. My department has tried to take it forward as a genuine exercise and one which will complement how we develop policy if we look at what happens in the department and take it through.

[177] It is also important to look at the impact of training officials, because that should have an enormous benefit on the development of policy and the understanding of equality issues. It is important that this is monitored in the future, because it has to be possible to apply an equality audit to the policies created after all of this training to see if there have been improvements and if there is a greater understanding. It is not only about the use of language; it is about genuinely mainstreaming equality. We have talked about mainstreaming equality for as long as I have been involved in equality issues. When Teresa Rees used to speak about it early on, people would wonder what she was talking about. However, it becomes apparent the more basic work you do, such as the training of staff and looking at your policies, that you can start to mainstream equality. You are talking about the focus on the individual, however diverse they may be, and how you integrate equality issues. So, there has been some good progress, but there is also a lot more to do if we are genuinely to ensure that our policies reflect our commitment.

[178] Some of the work that I have been particularly interested in doing here relates to Gypsies and Travellers. That comes within my portfolio and is something that I will discuss at the Committee on Equality of Opportunity. The Niner report has been beneficial across departments, for both civil servants and politicians in Government, with regard to how you can deliver a difficult agenda and how you can test your own equality principles while you try to deliver it in terms of the policy agenda.

11.30 a.m.

[179] Work was done early on on Gypsy/Travellers. That work was identified in the first term of the Assembly Government. I remember Helen Mary Jones and me sitting on the Committee on Equality of Opportunity and starting to kick off some of these issues. Although this has taken time, that shows that we have grown up on equality issues and have started to take through difficult subjects and had the support of officials on difficult subjects and, also, have brought in other groups in Welsh public life to understand the issues. So, that is quite positive.

[180] We have a strong foundation, but we have to build on it and watch it all the time. There was a time when if anyone spoke about equality it was about gender equality, but I recognise that, in the last 10 years, gender equality has gone down the agenda, as other equalities have come online. We must always be pricking ourselves to ensure that we do not slip back in any area when other issues become more popular. That is a key issue, and that is why I think that the way that it has been developed across the department in terms of training and what we are trying to do on individual policy agendas will lead to a much more solid foundation.

[181] **Laura Anne Jones:** As someone who sits on the Committee on Equality of Opportunity, I commend the Minister on the work that she has done. This committee is one of the leading committees in the Assembly in the work that it does in encompassing the important work of the Committee on Equality of Opportunity. Equality needs to be embedded in everything that we do, and should not be something about which we say, 'Right, we have got to include equality'. It has to be there at the beginning, before we think of what we are going to do. It needs to be at the forefront. You are doing that, Minister, but it is wise for us to keep an eye on the whole department and even on ourselves, to ensure that we do put it at the forefront and keep an eye on it in the way that you have set out in these papers. That is the right way to do it. It is important that we do not just use warm words about equality and that we are proactive in this respect.

[182] I also sit on the Gypsy and Travellers sub-committee, and the work that we are doing there is very interesting. I look forward to hearing your comments when you come to visit us in that committee. What is missing here—and I do not know whether I am just failing to see it—is fuel poverty. We discussed that in the Committee on Equality of Opportunity—*[Interruption.]* Is it there?

[183] **Mark Isherwood:** No, it is not.

[184] **Laura Anne Jones:** We discussed it in the Committee on Equality of Opportunity in respect of people who are disabled—

[185] **Edwina Hart:** You were probably thinking specifically about what work had been done on the issues around fuel poverty and its relationship to women, ethnic minorities and families and what work can be done in that area. There is a reference, but far more detailed work could be done in that area in the future, Paul, because I do not think that we have gone into that type of detail at this stage.

[186] **Mr Webb:** In terms of the development of the action plans, the action plans have selected a number of specific topics. There is obviously a larger bedrock of equality work that is happening underneath those action plans. So, fuel poverty does not figure in the action plans, but it will figure in the annual report, because that will report on the delivery of equality across the whole of the department. However, there are a number of areas, like fuel poverty, where there is work going on to mainstream the equality issues that is not reflected in the action plans and, therefore, the whole audit process, and, therefore, in this report.

[187] **Edwina Hart:** This is about how we impact on policy and so on, but Laura's point addressing fuel poverty was well made, because there are interesting issues there. I was reading something about the impact of women managing fuel poverty, which is a dimension outside this report, but it is certainly something that I will be mindful of when I look at the equality issues around the home energy efficiency scheme, if that is helpful.

[188] **Dr Roberts:** One of the things that we still have not done enough of is evaluating the impacts of our policies and programmes on equalities issues. I was talking to the head of research yesterday, and we will put that into our planning for next year to ensure that, when

we collect information, we are picking up the equalities issues and whether the programmes are making a difference in that area as well.

[189] **Janice Gregory:** Laura, did you have anything else to add?

[190] **Laura Anne Jones:** There is still a long way to go, as we are all aware, and it is good that you are aware of that. Other committees could take heed of this committee. How often will we be updated on progress on how this is going?

[191] **Edwina Hart:** That will be for the future committee to decide, but I think that six-monthly updates would be entirely appropriate and you can put that in your legacy document, can you not? This is something that you can view regularly in terms of what you are doing. It is useful for committee members to know what is going on within departments, on how we are equality proofing what we are doing, and how we are taking the agenda forward. It keeps everyone on their toes.

[192] **Mark Isherwood:** There has been concern over the years in the Committee on Equality of Opportunity—it has progressively improved, but concerns still exist—that collective Assembly Government reporting, as opposed to individual departmental reporting, has tended to be action reporting rather than action planning. Instead of seeing a plan and action-point outcomes, it has been, ‘We are nearly at the end of the year, let us run around and check all the different things that we are doing, and see what bits of it have an equality aspect that we can report on’.

[193] In section 12 of the equality audit section, it says that,

[194] ‘In most documents a commitment to pursuing equality objectives/outcomes and to measuring progress against identified measures existed, whilst in others there was a lack of evidence’.

[195] So, that is just to make the point that we need a strategic departmental action plan, with outcomes measurable against that.

[196] **Edwina Hart:** That is one area where I think you are absolutely right. I used to complain about the same thing myself when I was on the committee. You could always identify that you had the right words in your documents—that is what you got, effectively—but then what is the objective of what you are doing? It is something that we understand and have taken on board.

[197] **Dr Roberts:** Indeed, and, in fact, the way in which the schemes have developed have been quite incremental. They started off with gender, then race and then disability. The plan is that there is a single departmental action plan for all equalities for the coming financial year, which will help to bring out the issues about what is happening across the board, which is quite right.

[198] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you. I see that no-one else wishes to comment.

11.36 a.m.

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

[199] **Janice Gregory:** First, I thank you all for reading the report after it was sent out by the secretariat and for coming back to us with your comments. That has been useful in

enabling us to agree, hopefully, on the report today. I need to mention that if we are unable to reach agreement today, as you have been informed in the e-mail, I have arranged a room for an informal meeting on Tuesday. However, given the fullness of everyone's diaries, especially on a Tuesday and Wednesday, I hope that we will be able to reach agreement today. However, we will meet on Tuesday if we need to in order to agree any remaining issues. I am grateful to you all for looking at this and for coming back with your comments.

[200] Leanne, do you have a comment on this?

[201] **Leanne Wood:** I want to check whether I am working from the same document as everyone else, because we have had a few different versions of this. The copy that I have ends at paragraph 3.21, and it only goes up to recommendation 19. Are we meant to be looking at more than that today?

[202] **Ms Griffiths:** We are looking at the one that was sent out on Tuesday with tracked changes.

[203] **Leanne Wood:** It seems to have tracked changes in it.

[204] **Janice Gregory:** We are looking at the one that ends with 4.22, with recommendation 25 as the last one.

[205] **Ms Griffiths:** Yes, that should be the one.

[206] **Janice Gregory:** Are you okay with that, Leanne?

[207] **Leanne Wood:** Yes.

[208] **Janice Gregory:** Two copies went out—

[209] **Ms Griffiths:** I think it is just that the printer ran out halfway through.

[210] **Janice Gregory:** Okay. That has happened to me before.

[211] There are 25 recommendations in the report, and we have all had a chance to have a look at these in depth. Does anyone have any burning issues that they want to raise now so that we can discuss them here in committee, or is everyone is happy with this? While you are all mulling that over, I will just give you an idea of the timetable. We will debate this in Plenary on 7 February, so we have to lay it by 31 January, but you may be aware that there could be a day of action on 31 January.

11.40 a.m.

[212] I do not want to go into that particularly, but that would have implications for the tabling; it would have to be laid on 30 January—that is just to give you a time frame for this. However, we will be debating it in Plenary on 7 February, when Members will be able to make whatever points they feel are relevant at the time. I thank you all again for going out and seeking the basis for this and for the in-depth information from all the visits. Like everything else we do on this committee, this has been a good piece of work that we will leave for any committee that follows us. We will be interested in the Minister's response to all this, but there is a process to be gone through for that.

[213] I do not have any comments on it; Leanne, do you have a comment?

[214] **Leanne Wood:** I have some small comments. We are asked whether the committee

wishes to make a recommendation—

[215] **Janice Gregory:** Where is that?

[216] **Leanne Wood:** It is between paragraphs 2.18 and 2.19. The section talks about Swansea. When I went to visit voluntary organisations in Swansea, I found that they primarily address youth homelessness from the focus of the Children Act 2004; it does not seem that all local authorities are doing that, although they should be. Therefore, could we make it a basic requirement that local authorities work primarily through the Children Act when dealing with people under the age of 25 who are presenting themselves as homeless?

[217] **Janice Gregory:** I do not see that that is a problem. Do you want to make it recommendation 26?

[218] **Leanne Wood:** I would like a recommendation in there, but with the agreement of other committee members.

[219] **Sandy Mewies:** How does that impact on young adults—the people who leave children's services, and so on? I have not thought this through, but one thing that we came across was that, once young adults are in the transitional stage, they are abandoned.

[220] **Leanne Wood:** If you classed a child as someone up to the age of 25, that would overcome that problem.

[221] **Sandy Mewies:** Right—as long as we are clear about what we are doing.

[222] **Leanne Wood:** That was suggested to, I believe, the Bays project in Swansea, that young people should be treated as children up until they reach the age of 25.

[223] **Sandy Mewies:** That is fine, as long as we know what we are talking about; it would be of grave concern if it was only up to 18, because they are already abandoned.

[224] **Leanne Wood:** Yes, I accept your point.

[225] **Janice Gregory:** Fine. You took account of what they did in Swansea, Leanne, and felt that it was good and that it was worth looking at.

[226] **Leanne Wood:** It is also a multi-agency approach.

[227] **Janice Gregory:** This is our only opportunity to tweak this. I do not have any objections to including that as a recommendation—does anyone else? I just wonder where to put it—will we put it at the end, as recommendation 26?

[228] **Leanne Wood:** It could be just where it is, and renumber.

[229] **Mick Bates:** Just for clarity, could you repeat what you want to do now?

[230] **Leanne Wood:** I did not give a wording of an amendment, I am sorry.

[231] **Janice Gregory:** Virginia has done a formal version:

[232] 'Local authorities in Wales should explore treating young people under the Children Act 2004, rather than under the homelessness regulations'.

[233] **Sandy Mewies:** But will we be sure that that goes far enough? If it goes up to 16 and



17-year-olds only—that is, under-18s—that is a huge problem for me.

[234] **Leanne Wood:** We need to include that in the final report, do we not?

[235] **Mick Bates:** The Swansea issue is raised in the report, is it not?

[236] **Leanne Wood:** Yes, but it is not in a recommendation, is it?

[237] **Janice Gregory:** It is not a recommendation, and Leanne's point is that, after 2.18, in bold, we say,

[238] 'Does the committee wish to make a recommendation?'

[239] That is on the whole Swansea thing. The one thing that I am not clear about, looking around the table, is what age is specified in the Children Act?

[240] **Sandy Mewies:** It is 16 to 17.

[241] **Mick Bates:** Yes, it is.

[242] **Janice Gregory:** That is my understanding. The problem is that we cannot change the specification in the Children Act to the age of 25, and we would like to see it at 25.

[243] **Leanne Wood:** But in Swansea, they work with young people up to the age of 25.

[244] **Sandy Mewies:** But we cannot alter the Act—the Act is as it is.

[245] **Janice Gregory:** We cannot alter primary legislation. We can suggest in a recommendation that the Swansea model—and this is just me thinking aloud as a member of the committee—works with children up to the age of 25—[*Interruption.*] But Leanne is saying—[*Interruption.*] Shall we dispense with this conversation?

[246] **Leanne Wood:** No, I think that we should still have a recommendation in there, along the lines of the one that you were just about to suggest, about using the Swansea model, because the primary focus is the Children Act rather than homelessness, and it does make a difference in the way in which young people are treated.

[247] **Janice Gregory:** Sandy has a problem with that.

[248] **Sandy Mewies:** It is on this primary focus on the Children Act, because I think that Mark and I saw older young people, and my experiences with care leavers and so on suggest that the transitional period is always extremely difficult, and it is at that stage that so many young people fall off the radar as far as agencies are concerned. That was one reason why I asked in recommendation 7, I think, that multi-agency reviews be held at stages throughout a child to young adult's life, to see where they go next, because that is missing, there is no doubt about that. If you say 'the primary focus'—and I do not want to be too cynical about this—and people did not want to go into the 18 to 25-year-old age group, they could use the Children Act as a get-out clause. That worries me slightly. Perhaps we could recommend that the Swansea model be held up as an exemplar of good practice. I think that we are tying people down otherwise.

[249] **Janice Gregory:** How can we word it so that it is not the primary focus but it is certainly taken into account when looking at this?

[250] **Sandy Mewies:** 'Fully take into account'—that is all that you have to say.

[251] **Mick Bates:** Coming back to recommendation 11 of the report, that asks that all options are looked at to deal with young people up to 25. Does that not cover the point that Leanne is trying to make here?

[252] **Leanne Wood:** Recommendation 11 is only in relation to housing options.

[253] **Mick Bates:** It does end by saying ‘a cross-sectoral approach’.

[254] **Leanne Wood:** I think that the point that Sandy made is really important, because that point was made to me a number of times. Care leavers, when they come out of the care system, feel as if they have been completely abandoned. So good practice would mean that social services departments have responsibility for those people right up until the age of 25. I do not know whether we need legislation for that, or whether it could be issued in the form of guidance to social services departments.

[255] **Janice Gregory:** To force them to do it, we would need legislation, but we could ask them to do it as good practice. We could put it in as a recommendation. We could ask them to do it. But where will we put it? Can we strengthen recommendation 11 to—*[Interruption.]* Shall we alter the wording slightly, or are you happy just to have ‘the cross-sectoral approach’? I would not like anybody to use ‘cross-sectoral’ as a get-out. Perhaps we could look at another form of words and take out—

[256] **Sandy Mewies:** Can we ask for another form of words to be circulated and then comment on it?

[257] **Janice Gregory:** I am just trying to strengthen recommendation 11.

[258] **Mick Bates:** To make it more descriptive, rather than just ‘cross-sectoral’—is that what you are saying?

[259] **Janice Gregory:** Yes.

[260] **Leanne Wood:** Have a look at whether it works with recommendation 11, because that looks as though it relates specifically to housing options.

[261] **Janice Gregory:** We may need to tag something onto the end.

[262] **Leanne Wood:** We may need a new recommendation.

[263] **Janice Gregory:** Are we happy with a new recommendation? It is either/or, then. I see that we are happy with that. So, we will circulate that. Please come back to us as soon as possible on that, once you have seen the form of words.

[264] **Leanne Wood:** I have another one there. After recommendation 13, the question of whether we want to make a further recommendation about intentional homelessness is asked again. Again, this gets into the sticky area of legislation, but from the evidence that we received I think that it would be fair to say that there is a strength of feeling out there in favour of abolishing intentionality for people aged under 25. I am not sure whether that would require a legislative change—

[265] **Sandy Mewies:** I think that it could do.

[266] **Leanne Wood:** I do not know whether it could be done through guidance to local authorities, through Assembly Measures after May, or whether it would be Westminster

legislation, but can we have a recommendation stating that that is what we want to achieve and asking the Government to go away and find a way of doing it?

11.50 a.m.

[267] **Sandy Mewies:** It would be done through legislation.

[268] **Janice Gregory:** I am positive that it would be.

[269] **Sandy Mewies:** What we came across was that the interpretation of 'intentional homelessness' is very loose and is used against young people. We are saying that we need to monitor this to ensure that that does not happen. I guess that, to do that, the Welsh Assembly Government would have to look very closely at decisions where young people are said to be intentionally homeless like the lad that Mark and I met who had to leave his college campus because of an accident and was forced to return to the family home, which was where he had problems. Now, if he did not go, I guess that he would be intentionally homeless, but he had a very good reason for being homeless.

[270] **Leanne Wood:** Going back to the discussion that we just had on the Children Act, surely any child without a home should not be considered to be intentionally homeless. That point was made forcefully to us by several organisations and I would like to see a recommendation that reflects that. Even we cannot do anything about it, we should ask the Assembly Government to put pressure on Westminster to change it.

[271] **Janice Gregory:** On a point of clarity, Virginia has just indicated that if you look at point 2.30, you will see that Scotland had to use the Homelessness Act 2002, so it does look very much as though it would be primary legislation. I am happy to leave something behind that means that they reconsider this, because I do not think that any of us is happy with this 'intentionally homeless' business and how that can be interpreted by local authorities, and that is not just in terms of young people because I have concerns about this in terms of many groups.

[272] So, I have written down that the Welsh Assembly Government should explore with colleagues in Westminster gaining similar powers to Scotland for intentional homelessness.

[273] **Mark Isherwood:** Another young person, whom Sandy and I met, was a disabled young woman who stated that she had been deemed intentionally homeless when she reported herself as being a victim of violence for the second time. We do not know how much of an investigation had gone into that, but she was adamant that she was correct. So, there are aspects of the Scottish model in terms of housing support services on which we could make a recommendation. What came out of that group, and others, was the perceived lack of support. Young women could go to Cymdeithas Tai Hafan in Rhyl, which had a limited number of places with appropriate individual programmes for each person, but that provision was very sparse and most of them did not receive it. So, perhaps we need something for this most vulnerable category, in particular. There is a need to address the supported housing provision with individual plans like Scotland does.

[274] **Janice Gregory:** That is a further issue.

[275] **Sandy Mewies:** Could we say that the Welsh Assembly Government should examine the principles by which young people are declared intentionally homeless to ensure that unfairness and inequalities do not, and cannot, occur, with special reference to the Scottish model?

[276] **Janice Gregory:** I think that we need to be specific that this needs to be explored

with colleagues in Westminster.

[277] **Sandy Mewies:** I suggest that you circulate it. It is too difficult. You are not going to come up with the right form of words like this.

[278] **Leanne Wood:** We cannot come up with an exact form of words, but we can agree on the principles. I would like to see a recommendation stating that we are clearly against anyone under 25 being found intentionally homeless and that we want the Government to explore a way of ending that practice.

[279] **Janice Gregory:** We will circulate a form of words. I think that we are all signed up to the principle of this; it is just a question of how we word that recommendation. Mark, you want to come in again. Is it on this point?

[280] **Mark Isherwood:** On this point, whether we call them intentionally homeless or something different, it is a question of what we do about it. One of the young women whom we met told us that when she went into Cymdeithas Tai Hafan, the contact with her social worker stopped. She could have walked out the next day and they would not have known. Once someone is in that predicament, we need to have a unified approach to identifying the underlying problems and we need to address them on a cross-sector basis.

[281] **Janice Gregory:** I am reluctant to start chopping and changing words at the moment. I think that what we need is a bit of consistency. I do not like the term ‘intentionally homeless’—I absolutely hate it.

[282] **Leanne Wood:** It is a legal definition.

[283] **Sandy Mewies:** I do not think that we can start pulling all the evidence around now.

[284] **Janice Gregory:** No, we cannot; however, I certainly take the point.

[285] **Sandy Mewies:** It is right, but surely the most important thing here is to look at the term ‘intentionally homeless’ to see what we can do about getting a revision of that.

[286] **Mick Bates:** Chair, I think that recommendation 13 says ‘monitor’, with a view to changing the system—[*Interruption.*] You say ‘abolish’, and I would go along with that.

[287] **Janice Gregory:** Yes, that is the one that we are going to look at.

[288] **Mick Bates:** It is mentioned in recommendation 13.

[289] **Sandy Mewies:** I do not think that we can say ‘monitor with a view to abolish’ because that rather—

[290] **Mick Bates:** It gives us the outcome.

[291] **Sandy Mewies:** It says, ‘This is where we want to go and this is how we are going to do it’.

[292] **Janice Gregory:** So, we are all right on that point.

[293] **Leanne Wood:** I have one last point to make. The same question has been asked of us again:

[294] ‘Does the Committee wish to make any recommendations about chaotic lifestyles?’.

[295] That is after point 4.18.

[296] **Janice Gregory:** You did not have that, did you?

[297] **Leanne Wood:** I did not, but I have it now. On chaotic lifestyles, the evidence from Dr Kay Saunders was compelling. I think that she does superb work. We should be thinking about how we can get those kinds of services rolled out further than just in Cardiff. Could one of the recommendations be for the Government to explore ways of providing funding for specialist homeless health services?

[298] **Janice Gregory:** Virginia, are you okay with that? I see that you are; that is fine. Mark, do you have a comment?

[299] **Mark Isherwood:** First, I would like to thank the clerk and deputy clerk who found time on Tuesday morning to come to see me about various matters in this report.

[300] **Janice Gregory:** They are just fabulous, are they not?

[301] **Mark Isherwood:** Do I need to repeat those matters today or is it sufficient that I have seen you?

[302] **Janice Gregory:** No, there is no need to repeat them as they are all in the report.

[303] **Mark Isherwood:** That is great. I was going to raise the points that Leanne raised, but now I will not because they have been sorted. However, I have two points. On recommendation 5, a further recommendation was made to us by the group that Sandy and I met. The same recommendation was then made to me by another group that I met just before Christmas, at a housing association event for young people with whom they were working, namely that they would like regional youth homeless fora. I do not know whether we have a view on that. They said that they would find such fora very helpful.

[304] **Sandy Mewies:** Do you not think that recommendation 5 covers that, as everyone—the Welsh Assembly Government and local authorities—will be asked to involve service users? Everyone is being asked to include service users in the planning of what services they get. A forum might not always be the most appropriate mechanism; it might be a smaller group. It is horses for courses really, is it not? I thought that the recommendation covered that.

[305] **Mark Isherwood:** It does; I just wanted to raise it as they made a specific point about it. What about including it as a ‘for example’?

[306] **Janice Gregory:** I think that there is some merit in that idea; I would just be concerned about the areas that do not have them. However, I see what you mean and we could include it as a ‘for example’.

[307] **Mark Isherwood:** It could be facilitated by the likes of NACRO or the other stakeholders whom we met, who attended the meetings that most of us had in different parts of the country.

[308] **Janice Gregory:** My concern is that if we start to include examples, we will leave someone out who will be particularly miffed about it. You could make that point in the debate, Mark, could you not, so that it is clear that you have raised it? I am not saying that the idea is without merit, I am just concerned that—like when you give a speech—when you start to name people, if you leave some people out, they never forgive you.

[309] **Leanne Wood:** Will all the evidence that we received be in the form of appendices at the end of the report, so that all these points will be included?

[310] **Janice Gregory:** They will all be in there.

[311] I am not saying that the idea is without merit, but I just do not—

[312] **Mark Isherwood:** In recommendation 5, we refer to local authorities and the voluntary sector, but I am not sure whether we need to mention a regional element in that, if nothing else. It should also involve all aspects of the local and the regional.

12.00 p.m.

[313] **Janice Gregory:** It should involve service users in all aspects of planning and policy-making for services for homeless young people. Where do you want that?

[314] **Mark Isherwood:** We know, for example, that young people are thinking very much in terms of the services that they could access, ranging from Ynys Môn through to Chester. They had their own network, and they said, ‘Tonight, there may be a bed in Rhyl’ or what have you. Wrexham has just opened a temporary night shelter, and it anticipates service users turning up from outside Wrexham.

[315] **Janice Gregory:** Then they would have interworking between the agencies on a regional basis, surely, would they not? Do we need to specify it?

[316] **Sandy Mewies:** Again, I totally agree, but I think that it is quite difficult to say, because what structures are you talking about? In future, during the third Assembly, there will be much more regional working and interconnectivity, hopefully. What do you talk about? It is a bit vague if you just put in a reference to regional working.

[317] **Janice Gregory:** Yes, which region? How do you identify the region?

[318] **Sandy Mewies:** Some of the regions in south Wales are big enough not to need to work on a regional basis; they will have enough to do in their own areas. That is my difficulty with that.

[319] **Mark Isherwood:** From private discussions with people in certain local authorities, I am conscious of the fact—as I am sure are you—that what they say publicly about the regional collaboration model and what they say privately are sometimes—

[320] **Janice Gregory:** Two different things.

[321] **Mark Isherwood:** Sometimes they need a bit of a firmer line.

[322] **Sandy Mewies:** I suspect that these are points that we ought to make in the debate rather than in committee, because we are starting to muddy the waters a little.

[323] **Janice Gregory:** Not only that, we are also expecting the Minister to come back with responses. We are all hoping that the more positive responses and acceptance we get, the better. If we start being a bit too prescriptive, we may encounter difficulties. While I take your point, I would make it in the debate.

[324] **Mark Isherwood:** Okay. One single other point, which you probably all anticipated I would make and hoped I would not, is the fact that we could not endorse the wording in

recommendation 14.

[325] **Janice Gregory:** I do not have a problem with it, personally.

[326] **Mick Bates:** It is on the right to buy.

[327] **Janice Gregory:** Yes, it is. Mick, I am impressed. You know all these recommendations, and you know which is which.

[328] **Mick Bates:** I read the report.

[329] **Sandy Mewies:** And you were right, Mark.

[330] **Mick Bates:** I want that in.

[331] **Janice Gregory:** Right, Mick wants it in, and I do not have a problem with the wording of it. Does anybody else?

[332] **Leanne Wood:** Shall we take a vote?

[333] **Mark Isherwood:** The issue in law, since 1985—and it has not changed since—is the supply of affordable housing through social housing providers. There is a capacity issue, and the shortage of affordable housing and its link to homelessness has been endorsed in a Wales Audit Office report this week. Setting the political bits aside, independent research tells us that if we scrap the right to buy now, a house will not become available for an average of 10 years anyway. The problem is today, and the issue is with the supply and quality of affordable housing.

[334] **Laura Anne Jones:** It is not as simple as just doing that, quite frankly. There are many other factors.

[335] **Mark Isherwood:** It is a wallpaper issue.

[336] **Janice Gregory:** However, it did come through in the evidence that we took, and these recommendations are about that evidence.

[337] **Laura Anne Jones:** It is something that we, as a group, are taking from the evidence and putting forward, and so if not all of us agree with it—

[338] **Janice Gregory:** I hate putting things to a vote in committee, and I am looking at Leanne, as I remember her having a very strong objection to one recommendation in a previous report, but she was happy just to have her objection noted by the committee without the matter going to a vote. If you want to push it to a vote, though, that is your right.

[339] **Laura Anne Jones:** You cannot really have a vote on something that is quite clearly a party—

[340] **Janice Gregory:** I was hoping that we could do this on a consensual basis.

[341] **Mark Isherwood:** It is absolutely right to record the body of evidence that we have been given in this matter, and there were those who made this comment—Shelter, for instance—who have been consistent on the matter for many years. We can acknowledge that, but this is a committee recommendation as opposed to a body of evidence, and so we have to acknowledge in some way that the committee was not united on that single recommendation. I would be happy for you to note that.

[342] **Leanne Wood:** The committee is united, apart from one party, so we can keep the recommendation as it is but include somewhere in the report the fact that the Conservative members of this committee disagreed with our position.

[343] **Janice Gregory:** I do not think that any committee will ever be completely and utterly unanimous on every recommendation in something like this. I am more than happy to do that. I am sure that you will make the point in the debate.

[344] **Mark Isherwood:** I would have preferred it if you had used appropriate wording on this point. We do not disagree with the principle that there is a supply-side problem. That has been caused by many factors, and we are not pretending that there are no issues around this factor. However, it is too complex simply to put that in, so I would prefer to say that we would favour an alternative wording.

[345] **Janice Gregory:** I am happy with the words ‘alternative wording’, but I am not happy with ‘appropriate wording’, because some of us think that those words are appropriate—myself included. Shall we agree to ‘alternative wording’ for that recommendation? Are you both happy with that?

[346] **Leanne Wood:** We will need that to be circulated for it to be agreed.

[347] **Janice Gregory:** Yes. Everything that we have decided now will be circulated for you to come back on as soon as possible.

[348] **Leanne Wood:** I think that you will have problems finding a form of words on which we can all agree, because we disagree in principle.

[349] **Sandy Mewies:** I think that your original suggestion of having a minority view on one recommendation, as Leanne noted, is much better, because we will not agree.

[350] **Janice Gregory:** No, we will not.

[351] **Sandy Mewies:** It is a difference in principle and, regardless of what Mark says, these are committee recommendations made on the evidence that we received. Overwhelmingly, the evidence that we received is reflected in that recommendation. You may not agree with it, but that is the fact. There is no point in our asking people to come and give evidence, finding that there is a consensus view, and then deciding to ignore it.

[352] **Laura Anne Jones:** However, other factors contribute to the problem in addition to the one thing that you have mentioned there, and that is not mentioned in the recommendation.

[353] **Janice Gregory:** We cannot have a discussion of the principle here, much as I would love to. I would just like to clarify one thing. I was not suggesting that we provide an alternative form of wording for that recommendation; any form of words that would go into the report to reflect the fact that two Members were opposed to recommendation 14 would note that you would have preferred alternative wording. I am not seeking alternative words for that recommendation unless the committee wants to do that. We can keep it in and make the point that two Members objected to recommendation 14, so that no-one is in any doubt in perpetuity that that was the position—and I am more than happy to do that—but I am not seeking to re-word that recommendation.

[354] **Mark Isherwood:** If it went to a vote, we would lose the vote.



[355] **Janice Gregory:** We have never done that in this committee; we have never had to. Even though we are poles apart on many issues, we have never had to go to a vote. I am grateful to you for that, as I was grateful to Leanne for it previously.

[356] **Mark Isherwood:** We are not doing this in a dogmatic way; I worked in the industry for more than two decades and I am going on evidence that I have received from independent research, not on some party-political point.

[357] **Janice Gregory:** Our opinions are based on evidence as well, of course.

[358] Given that this is such an important issue, we thought that we would launch the report, as the Committee on Equality of Opportunity launched its report on Tuesday. We will launch it at lunchtime on Wednesday, 7 February before the Plenary debate in the afternoon. After all the work that you have done, I would be grateful if—

[359] **Leanne Wood:** Will you be inviting those who have given evidence?

[360] **Janice Gregory:** The world and his dog will be invited, because this is really important. If any of the media are listening, which I am sure they are, it would be lovely if they could give this the coverage that it deserves. We have done a lot of work and have yet again come up with what I consider to be a good report, and it would be great for the young people out there who have this problem to think that politicians and the responsible media in Wales are interested in what they have to say and in their problem.

[361] **Sandy Mewies:** On that point—and I think that Mark would agree with me on this—I would be keen if the young people to whom we spoke, along with all those who gave evidence, could have a copy of the report and the recommendations so that they know what is going on, that they have been listened to, and that action will be taken.

12.10 p.m.

[362] **Janice Gregory:** Given the problems that they would have in getting from north to south Wales, because of our geography, it would be nice if we could make a recording of the day, along with the debate in Plenary. Perhaps we could have a DVD made that we can distribute.

[363] **Sandy Mewies:** We have video links, so it is worth thinking about.

[364] **Janice Gregory:** So, we could do something that they may be interested in. That is great. Thank you all for that. Mark, I will speak to you outside the committee; that is not a problem. The next meeting is on 31 March.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 12.10 p.m.  
The meeting ended at 12.10 p.m.*