

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Cyfiawnder Cymdeithasol ac Adfywio

The National Assembly for Wales
The Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

Dydd Iau, 22 Mawrth 2007
Thursday, 22 March 2007

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

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
Jocelyn Davies	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Janice Gregory	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Edwina Hart	Llafur (y Gweinidog dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol ac Adfywio) Labour (the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration)
Mark Isherwood	Ceidwadwyr Cymru Welsh Conservatives
Laura Anne Jones	Ceidwadwyr Cymru Welsh Conservatives
Trish Law	Annibynnol Independent

Swyddogion yn bresennol **Officials in attendance**

Tara Croxton	Y Sector Gwirfoddol a'r Uned Cynhwysiant Voluntary Sector & Inclusion Unit
Peter Jones	Yr Is-adran Diogelwch Cymunedol Community Safety Division
Jo Jordan	Cyfarwyddwr, yr Is-adran Diogelwch Cymunedol Director, Community Safety Division
Dr Emyr Roberts	Cyfarwyddwr, Adran Cyfiawnder Cymdeithasol ac Adfywio Director, Social Justice and Regeneration Department
Anne Stephenson	Cyfarwyddwr, y Gyfarwyddiaeth Cymunedau Director, Communities Directorate

Linda Whittaker

Cyfarwyddwr Tai, y Gyfarwyddiaeth Dai
Director of Housing, Housing Directorate

**Gwasanaeth y Pwyllgor
Committee Service**

Dr Virginia Hawkins

Clerc
Clerk

Claire Griffiths

Dirprwy Glerc
Deputy Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.30 a.m.

The meeting began at 9.30 a.m.

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

[1] **Janice Gregory:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee. This is the committee's last meeting of this Assembly. I welcome those in the public gallery; it is lovely to see a full gallery.

[2] I will run through the usual housekeeping issues. There is no fire drill this morning, so, if the alarm sounds, please be guided by our security staff and ushers who will lead you from the building safely. I ask you to adhere to their instructions strictly.

[3] I am sure that everyone is aware that the National Assembly for Wales operates through the media of the Welsh and English languages and, if you need simultaneous translation, please use the headsets that you have been supplied with. Amplification of sound can be found on channel 0 and the simultaneous translation can be found on channel 1.

[4] I ask everyone to switch off BlackBerrys, mobile phones, pagers, and anything of an electronic nature, as they interfere with our sensitive recording equipment. There will be a break at some point, hopefully, at around the allotted time of 10.45 a.m., when tea and coffee will be available for our visitors on the Oriol level, upstairs in the coffee shop. I remind Members that we do not need to operate the microphone system, as microphones come on automatically.

[5] We have a very full agenda, as you would expect for the last meeting. I have received apologies for absence from Sandy Mewies, Huw Lewis and Leanne Wood. I welcome Jocelyn who is substituting for Leanne. If anyone has any declarations of interest, I invite them to make them now. I see that there are none.

9.32 a.m.

**Cofnodion y Cyfarfod Diwethaf
Minutes of Previous Meetings**

[6] **Janice Gregory:** Does anyone have any comments under this item? I see that they do not.

Cadarnhawyd cofnodion y cyfarfod blaenorol.

The minutes of the previous meeting were ratified.

**Adroddiad y Gweinidog
Minister's Report**

[7] **Janice Gregory:** As we would expect, this is a very comprehensive report from the Minister for this last meeting. If Members are going to ask questions on the report, please precede them with a reference number, as that makes it much easier for everyone. Minister, would you like to make any comments?

[8] **The Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration (Edwina Hart):** I will update committee on several issues and I will put them in writing this afternoon so that Members have a written record. In my committee report of 23 November 2006, I included an update on the fire and rescue services' risk-reduction planning process following concerns raised by the public and Assembly Members. Members will know that many of those concerns were in relation to a specific proposal by Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service to change crewing arrangements at the Haverfordwest fire station. Following my representations to Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service, I have gained its agreement to an independent review of the process relating to the crewing changes. I have agreed to fund the review, which will be undertaken by Sir Graham Meldrum, who has recently retired as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire Services after a very long and distinguished career. I have also ensured that a representative of the Fire Brigades Union will be offered the opportunity to observe this process. Sir Graham's professionalism and the involvement of service representatives will, I hope, ensure impartiality and transparency in the process. Many concerns about terrorism risks and about the pipeline developments in mid and west Wales have been raised with me by several community councils and Assembly Members.

[9] To update you on the Offender Management Bill, this Bill makes provision for new arrangements in probation, strengthens legislation on the smuggling of contraband into prisons, removes inconsistencies between the legal powers of private and public sector prison staff and will hopefully improve the delivery of youth justice. The Bill will enable the Home Secretary to commission services from the best available provider, whether that is in the public, private or voluntary sector. I know that a number of Members share my concerns about the issue of contestability, which is a matter that I have raised with the Home Office on a number of occasions. The Bill already included an obligation on the Home Secretary to consult such persons as he thinks fit in relation to probation trusts, but did not refer specifically to the Assembly. However, it has now been agreed that the National Assembly, as the body responsible for many of the services with which the trusts need to interact, should be reflected in the Bill. The intention is to amend the Bill prior to discussion in the House of Lords, which will enable formal mechanisms for the Welsh Assembly Government to raise any concerns about the provision of probation services in Wales. I trust that Members will welcome the amendment that will go through the House of Lords. However, I still have concerns about the whole of issue of contestability and the privatisation of the services, on which I am not in agreement with the UK Government.

[10] On heroin and cannabis markets, in the committee meeting on 18 January I undertook to speak to police chief constables about whether or not drug dealers are selling heroin and cannabis. I have received an update from the police liaison officer, who has informed me about a two-week operation last autumn involving 19 of the 43 police forces in England and Wales which targeted cannabis farms or factories. There is no evidence to indicate that this operation has caused an increased number of young people across Wales to switch from smoking cannabis to smoking heroin. Similarly, there is no evidence to suggest that the ongoing targeting of cannabis growers across England and Wales is having such an impact. Tackling cannabis cultivation is an increasing problem nationally, and the police service continues to identify and close factories every day. The police also continue to retain their tough focus on class A drugs, and remain alert to any changing trends in drug misuse.

[11] Turning to the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, in December 2006 I extended the financial agreement between the Welsh Assembly Government and the trust by one year to 31 March 2008 with an award of £1.42 million. I have been asked to approve a new three-year funding agreement from April 2007 to March 2010 based on the review of the trust's activities in Wales undertaken from May to December 2006, and a draft outline three-year business plan from the trust. I was unable to agree to this without detailed information about the trust's performance across the former coalfield areas in different parts of Wales. I expect a report on the performance evaluation of the trust in the next few days, and I will consider it very carefully before coming to a decision. I will advise the Chair of the committee in writing of my decision.

[12] I will inform the committee of an in-year financial matter within the social justice and regeneration main expenditure group, which the Finance Minister has approved. An identified underspend of £5 million within the MEG has been used to accelerate the extra care programme. This will increase the budget provision in 2006-07 from £13.242 million to £18.242 million. This £5 million equates to approximately 50 units, so 50 units will be delivered at least a year in advance which, in turn, will reduce the burden on future budgets, enabling future provision to be expanded accordingly. That is good news.

[13] I also wish to update the committee on my difficulties in certain areas regarding the regional affordable housing enablers for south-east Wales. I wish to update you on the proposal to fund two regional affordable housing enablers in south-east Wales to assist in combating some of the affordable housing issues in this area. There was a meeting in Newport on 15 November, after which I brought a discussion proposal to the south-east Wales local authority leaders in December. The two regional affordable housing enablers were proposed to increase the supply of affordable housing over a two-year period—one in the north of the region, in the Heads of the Valley area, for example, and one in the south, in the area of the M4 corridor. The posts were to be jointly funded by the authorities and the Assembly Government. The south-east Wales councils responded to me on the proposal, and I was very disappointed by their response. Two authorities felt that it was difficult to support the proposal at all, four councils could not support the proposal in its current form and other authorities stated that they would prefer the south-east regional housing forum to be the mechanism for discussion. That indicates the scale of difficulties that we sometimes have in our discussions with local government. Where the Assembly Government is prepared to be innovative and to provide funding, local authorities can take a very different view. We have given priority to affordable housing, but one wonders where the priority for it lies in local government in some areas.

9.40 a.m.

[14] On the sustainability of the social enterprise fund following European funding, on 15 February I undertook to consider, with the Welsh European Funding Office, whether or not social enterprises that received European funding achieved sustainability as a result; I believe that this question came from Mick. Although WEFO has carried out substantial research to establish the benefits derived from funding that it has given to community groups, it has not undertaken any specific research on social enterprises. However, the social justice and regeneration research unit is planning to carry out a mapping exercise later this year, which will provide us with more information about Welsh social enterprises. The question of whether or not individual enterprises have benefited from European funding will be addressed as part of that exercise. I suggest that Members who return watch that space.

[15] That covers various points, but I also wish to mention the court service. As you know, in terms of the north Wales and Cheshire court service, we have heard that there will be a Wales circuit. I have taken the opportunity to write to Lord Falconer about my concern about ensuring that there are sufficient financial resources available if this is to come about and we are to have a proper circuit within Wales. I will update Members on any responses to that.

[16] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you for that detailed oral update.

[17] **Laura Anne Jones:** Thank you for your report. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the refreshing way in which you have dealt with all your reports in this committee. I hope that all other Ministers follow your lead in the future. You have answered our queries when needed, and you have been an example to me, as a young person coming to this Assembly.

[18] Your comments about affordable housing in south-east Wales are disappointing. I am not sure which parties run the councils that you are talking about, but, on the whole, their reactions are disgusting and this is not the way to go forward. It is crucial that we get affordable housing in all parts of south-east Wales. We are seeing a mass movement of people from rural areas to towns, which cannot cope with the number of young people who are moving there because they cannot afford to buy houses in their communities. It is so important that we sort that out. I am sure that everyone on this committee will help you to lobby the councils in that respect.

[19] On point 2 of your report, it is very encouraging that you are going to put £20,000 into a marketing plan for the drug and alcohol helpline that focuses on the use of television, cinema and radio. I think that that is fantastic. Those are clearly media that many young people use, and that is how you will get the biggest audience. That is very encouraging.

[20] On point 8, it is fantastic to see that you have answered the question that I asked you in the Chamber on 1 February 2007 about rural crime and the problem that police have in trying to locate farms, for example, and about using geographical information systems. I will continue to monitor that. You suggest that people with specific problems should write to the police so that they can sort it out, so I intend to write about the cases in my constituency.

[21] Finally, on raising the profile of post offices, post offices are the only places offering services in many rural areas, particularly in my area of south-east Wales. I welcome the fact that you are trying to work with the WLGA to try to bring back services to post offices and utilise them as hubs in communities, which they are. That is very important, particularly for disabled and older people who cannot travel far, and particularly given the poor transport system that we have in Wales. I hope that the next Welsh Assembly Government takes that forward and I look forward to monitoring the situation.

[22] **Edwina Hart:** Thank you for your kind comments, Laura. On point 2, I think that the marketing of the all-Wales drug and alcohol helpline is essential if we are to get to the audience that we need to reach in terms of these issues. I am grateful for the committee's support on all the issues that we have dealt with in terms of drugs and alcohol, particularly its support for the schools programme and other issues, because we have to get the message out quite keenly to young people.

[23] On point 8 on rural crime, I know that farmers' unions have made many representations on this because there is a lot of concern in rural areas about what sometimes appears to be low-level crime when, in fact, various patterns are emerging. I urge Assembly Members and the rural community to report such crimes, because it is essential that we get an indication of what the issues are in rural Wales, particularly in relation to farming equipment and the various things that are happening. There is currently a lot of discussion on this matter.

[24] On point 26, there is a role and function for local government in raising the profile of post offices. If it is keen to ensure that there is activity within communities, it should look at how it can use post offices as a hub for its services. We have these businesses on the ground, and these premises, and it does not take much imagination to see how they can be utilised to improve public access to local government services. I hope that these points will be taken forward.

[25] On the housing issue, Laura, it was an excellent opportunity for those 10 councils to demonstrate their ability and their commitment to working jointly. They have all welcomed the 'Making the Connections' agenda and cross-authority working, but the reality seems to be somewhat different when we talk about being constructive on affordable housing. I have written to Derek Vaughan, the chair of the Welsh Local Government Association, to ask him to pass on formally my concerns to the south-east Wales authorities. I have asked my officials to engage with the housing forum in south-east Wales. However, the lack of enthusiasm and the slow uptake indicate that we will have to have a regional delivery mechanism, because they will have to come together and understand the needs of their region. There is enormous pressure on affordable housing in south-east Wales. You would have thought that the local authorities would have welcomed the opportunity to have additional resources coming in and expertise to help them to look at regional development. It is exceptionally disappointing. It comes back to the point that I have made previously in committee, which I know the committee has supported, that housing has gone too far down the political agenda in local government, whether with regard to the provision of council housing, the standards, the stock, or these issues. It has gone down the agenda because it is a difficult issue to crack. The local authorities have to make different spending decisions if they are to crack some of these issues. There is a reluctance to take on these issues. Whatever happens during the third Assembly, we have to ensure that local authorities take their responsibility seriously in this area. We go back to the thorny issue of planning, but we have issued all of the guidance and the rules are in place for the planners to use, but they are not being used to their full extent. They are not using section 106 agreements properly, nor are they using everything that they have to deliver in the marketplace to its full potential. They are letting people down by not doing it.

[26] **Mick Bates:** Hoffwn ddweud gair o ddiolch i'r Gweinidog am ei gwaith gyda'r pwyllgor.

Mick Bates: I would like to say a word in thanks to the Minister for her work with the committee.

[27] **Janice Gregory:** The translation equipment is not working.

[28] **Mick Bates:** Yr oedd ar fin deffro. [*Chwerthin.*]

Mick Bates: It was just waking up. [*Laughter.*]

[29] Yn y pwyllgor olaf, hoffwn ddiolch i'r Gweinidog am ei gwaith. Mae'r Gweinidog wedi bod yn onest iawn yn ei hatebion i gwestiynau pawb. Mae'r Gweinidog, y Cadeirydd a phawb arall wedi gweithio gyda'i gilydd i wneud y pwyllgor hwn yn arbennig. Diolch yn fawr, Weinidog. Parhaf yn Saesneg yn awr.

In the final committee meeting, I would like to thank the Minister for her work. The Minister has been very honest in her responses to everyone's questions. The Minister, the Chair, and everyone else has worked together to make this committee special. Thank you, Minister. I will now continue in English.

[30] Thank you, Minister for your report and for all of your work. I particularly welcome your investigation into social enterprises and the use of European funding. We will discuss the legacy paper later, but it is important that we recognise that, in Wales, 54 per cent of our GDP depends on the public sector. As such, the use of European funding to encourage social enterprises to start and to bring an enterprise culture to start up new businesses is extremely important. So, I look forward to seeing that work move forward. Equally, I thank you for your work with the Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service, particularly the review that will be undertaken in Haverfordwest. However, I remind the Minister that there are issues about the retained fire service that are still to be resolved. As you are well aware, in rural areas, there is a long-term relationship between the retained fire service and businesses. There is a good rota system which enables rural fire services to act effectively. However, unfortunately, the move to using full-time firefighters will be an unwelcome one, in many areas, because it will not enable us to turn out full crews.

9.50 a.m.

[31] In your report, what you have to say under the rural crime item is very welcome, as are the comments that you made in reply to Laura about the significance of people reporting crime. However, when we are dealing with such large areas I would add that we need to use modern technology to ensure that we have measures such as the roadside automatic number plate recognition cameras, which help a great deal in rural areas. They bring confidence to people who sometimes feel that they are unprotected. It enables a tracing mechanism because vehicles coming in and out of rural areas are easier to spot than the large numbers of vehicles in conurbations. Recently, I have had discussions with the police force about installing these cameras. They are quite expensive to install, but they are very effective given the number of police that serve rural areas, so that is something to note.

[32] Moving on to item 14, on the low carbon building programme, I am grateful for the information that you have produced. However, following yesterday's budget, can you provide an update on the extra amount of money that would be available for the low carbon building programme? As I mentioned in the last meeting, this is an extremely important part of the process of reducing carbon emissions, but also of combating fuel poverty. Everything on the list that you provided is very useful, if the money is available to encourage people to do those things.

[33] On item 15, I welcome the report, because we lack the capacity in Wales to have exemplar projects and exemplar planning advice for our 22 authorities on what is meant by sustainable construction. This will be an extremely important step forward, so that, when we talk about regeneration, we can see companies starting up around the whole concept of having sustainable construction in Wales. I am thinking in particular of the timber industry, which imports masses of timber. People tell us that the timber that we grow here grows too fast, and that it is not strong enough, but I know that Coed Cymru, based in Tregynon, has developed a technique for using locally grown timber, which is not strong enough as it is, to make beams that meet our needs very well. Therefore, I am certain we can do more on that.

[34] On item 21, on the housing waiting lists, I mentioned to you yesterday that I am still concerned that we do not possess the data that identify who is waiting and what the need for affordable housing is in certain areas. Recently, I received a reply about the up-to-date position in local authorities, which are meant to put forward data to the Government to identify the number of properties required. It appeared that none of them had done this; what action is the Minister going to take to ensure that local authorities will bring their returns forward? I am sure that the situation may have altered.

[35] I would join Laura in expressing some concern about what appears to be reticence on the part of local authorities to employ an affordable housing officer. The work that you have done in this respect has been very good; the toolkit is in place. However, there are still some planning issues and issues concerning the release of Government land in order to assist the process. I am disappointed that, as far as I am aware at this moment, no Government land has been released to assist the building of affordable housing. I know that the Minister is interested in this. Does she have an update on the release of Government land to assist people in building affordable housing?

[36] **Edwina Hart:** On the issue of land, we have been doing a considerable amount of work, looking at the Welsh Assembly Government estate. Next week, I am taking a paper to Cabinet on the issue, and I hope that there will be some announcements as a result. We have liaised closely with our colleagues elsewhere, but it is essential that we get our act together on this. It is not just the land that we have received from the former ASPBs; there is the whole issue, which Emyr is looking at, of health estate land and availability. There are vast tracts of land in the health estate that could be put to good use.

[37] On the housing waiting list, local authorities have to get the information to us by 1 April. However, we will certainly chivvy them, and let you have a note on this when we know about it. There will probably be a tendency, I would think, Linda, for those to be late returns; they hope that we go away for a few weeks from 1 April and that we will not be nagging housing departments. You make a good point on the sustainability issues, and the link with Coed Cymru will be quite important in that regard. You are right about the wood that we need to produce and what we need to do on that.

[38] On the budget position, we will have to seek clarity on some of the announcements. There is stamp duty relief for zero carbon homes from 1 October 2007; all new zero-carbon homes costing up to £500,000 will pay no stamp duty, whereas zero-carbon homes costing in excess of £500,000 receive a reduction in the stamp duty bill of £15,000. There are implications for us, because he is looking at new build and additional funds for the low carbon building programme, but we will have to see if that is actually new money or money that is within other departments. We will have to flesh out the details when we have the information down from the Treasury, and I will send a little note out then, Chair, about those points, if that helps.

[39] I take your point about modern technology and policing, but the issue for me will be the balance with neighbourhood policing as well and our priority for neighbourhood policing. The only way that we will tackle some of these issues in urban and in rural areas is having police officers on the ground doing neighbourhood policing. There is a correct balance to strike in what is funded, and that is essential.

[40] On the Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service, there are issues around retained firefighters, although that is less of an issue for south Wales. The fire chiefs keep me apprised of this, and I am more than happy to take further points and any concerns up with them, as I am meeting them next week.

[41] In terms of the legacy paper, having the social enterprise stuff flagged up is a very good idea, because we would not want for that to get lost in all the excitement of elections, new administrations and so on.

[42] **Jocelyn Davies:** As a Member from the south east, I am very disappointed with the housing authorities' attitude, because I can tell you from the people who come to see me in the constituency office that some of the waiting lists are incredibly long. Anything that has any impact on affordable housing should be welcomed. When I see the state of some of the housing stock, I wonder why people are waiting so long to get into those houses; they must be absolutely desperate. I am very disappointed that the new initiative has not been taken up.

[43] On point 6, the anti-social behaviour co-ordinators, there is a list of interventions. I assume that there are other interventions as well, but you have just made a list of some of them. Obviously, we would all like to see more youth provision in our communities so that young people would have things to do other than hang around on the streets and cause trouble.

[44] I am very concerned about this last one about the possession proceedings against tenants. Owner-occupiers do not run the same risks as tenants do of losing their homes. However, new information has come out of the British Institute for Brain Injured Children, which says that 35 per cent of under-18-year-olds with ASBOs have some sort of mental health problem or learning difficulty. We have to take that on board, because none of these interventions give any consideration to that fact, and to threaten a family with eviction because one of the family has a mental health problem that is the root cause of the trouble is not really justified. Do you have any statistical information on those possession proceedings?

[45] Turning to point 13, which is the energy suppliers advice service, I did raise in the Chamber on one occasion the possibility of using energy companies to spot those individuals who could do with welfare benefit health checks, Minister, because those energy companies will, know the people who are struggling, and they could offer to ensure that those customers are claiming all the welfare benefits that they are entitled to. I know that that is happening in Scotland. Andrew Davies said that he would take the matter up, but I have not heard anything since then, so something may be going on in the background.

[46] I see that the Consumers, Estate Agents and Redress Bill is currently going through Westminster. Have you had any discussions about that Bill, and can you tell us what the outcome is?

[47] On point 14, the one just underneath that, has there been an energy audit of Welsh Assembly Government buildings? Some people complain to me that the lights are on all night in some Government buildings, which is perhaps not sending quite the right message. If they are on all night, we need to ensure that they are using the least amount of energy possible.

10.00 a.m.

[48] On point 15, which is on the centre for sustainable construction, I, like Mick, welcome this very much, and I note your comments earlier about planners. Some people tell me that new designs for sustainable buildings are being turned down by planners because, believe it or not, they are out of character with the buildings that we have already constructed, which are not environmentally friendly. Of course they are out of character; it is ridiculous, is it not, that planners are saying, 'Sorry, that does not quite look right', because the planned building is environmentally friendly? So, maybe you could give them a nudge—though I know that planners do not welcome nudges very often.

[49] On item 18, which is on the Supporting People grant, we all have concerns about that, and organisations in the field are a bit worried about the redistribution, as you can imagine. So I wonder whether you can give an assurance that no project that is currently in demand will be cut.

[50] **Edwina Hart:** I fully appreciate Jocelyn's comments on the Supporting People grant, as it is something that we are very aware of. I have been lobbied by Assembly Members and the groups, and we are taking an interest in what is going on. We are particularly concerned that any changes in the formula should not disadvantage anyone. That work is ongoing, and there will be a report back to the relevant committee in due course. Emyr will probably know more than me about the energy audit of Government buildings; they have done some work in Cathays, so Emyr can cover that, and then I will come back to the other points.

[51] **Dr Roberts:** As far as I know, Cathays park is the only Government building that has had a full energy audit, and we track that each year, so I think that that information is available. On Merthyr, which may be where the issue of lights has cropped up, we have had similar reports, but we do not think that they are quite right because, as I think you saw when you visited, the lights there are triggered by people's movements, so it may be that there was work ongoing at the time. However, we are looking into that, and, in fact, as a project group, we are working to get to Green Dragon level 5 at Merthyr, so we are very conscious of energy use in the Welsh estate.

[52] **Edwina Hart:** On point 15 about planners, I think that we have all had experience of people wanting to build quite innovative buildings and being told that they are not in keeping with the character locally. You are quite right—as modern design develops there will be improvements and planners will have to change their attitudes as well. When you think about it, some people have some very peculiar views about buildings. I am all for innovation, especially if it helps with the energy agenda.

[53] On the point you raised about paragraph 13, I will make inquiries with my colleague, Andrew Davies, but I will be more than happy to look at the Scottish model, which you raised with Andrew in the Chamber, because power companies are able to give advice when people come to them about staging their bills and payments. We will see if we can get that enhanced in any way, and I think that it will be quite useful.

[54] I concur with your comments on some of the ASBO issues. There is no doubt that there are attention deficit issues in relation to some of the youngsters involved. Though we do not keep statistics on this, we think that probably the majority of people are affected in terms of rent arrears issues. However, on the wider issue of youth, I have funded over 370 youth crime diversion and prevention projects within my portfolio. I was looking recently at what we were doing in Communities First, Anne, and I receive continual requests from the Communities First partnership to help with increased youth provision, because there is not sufficient provision out there. So, quite a sizeable chunk of my portfolio is concentrated on those diversionary activities, which I think that we will have to continue with. However, I do share the concerns about ASBOs and what is happening on this issue, and we will see if we can do any more work in that area. You are quite right to say that if you are in a private house, almost nothing can be done about you. Many of the complaints that I get as an Assembly Member—and it is probably the same for all of us—are about people in private housing causing difficulties where there is no registered social landlord to take any action, and that causes a lot of difficulty for the neighbouring residents. I will be happy to pick up those points.

[55] **Mark Isherwood:** To start with point 1, I welcome talk of a national long-term approach and the establishment of an all-Wales network. At a recent meeting that I held with a major service provider in this area, it used the term 'revolving-door approach'. It felt that there should be a national long-term approach to the whole issue in order to get better multi-agency working and value for money. What are your views on that? It is not just about the counselling, but about regional delivery through the partnerships.

[56] How will the counselling proposals affect dual-diagnostic situations, in general and in terms of the growing problem highlighted last week at a UK level of many service personnel returning from active service, now and in the past, with mental health problems because of their experiences? Many start to take substances as a result of that. As you are probably aware, I am in regular contact with a group of ex-service personnel who are very concerned about the gaps in service that they are experiencing.

[57] On your comments about the court service, I welcome your approach to the UK Government about financial resources. What assessment has been made of the differential costs of the work that will remain in Chester, which you mentioned in your last report, and the work that will now come to Wales?

[58] I very much endorse your comments on affordable housing in south-east Wales. You said that councils want this to be referred to the regional housing forum. I understand their desire to retain ownership of this, but how do we ensure ownership of the problem so that they exercise the regional ownership of the solution?

[59] On your comments about WEFO and social enterprise, is there any comparative work in other parts of the UK that we could be looking at in the meantime as an indicator of what is being, or could be, achieved?

[60] I welcome your comments about the five pilot sites for the misuse of drugs interventions. I, or my successors, I am sure, would be very interested in seeing the results of that. We know that lack of early intervention in the home, and possibly in school, is one of the gaps identified by young people.

[61] I welcome the money secured for CAIS Ltd until December. I hope that we will then be able to develop more sustainable funding beyond that, on a longer-term basis, as you say. What consideration has been given to CAIS being supported to deliver some of that pure diagnostic and post-traumatic stress disorder counselling? I know that it has considered this and that a lack of resources stopped it progressing with it. In terms of its detox work, the report that you commissioned indicated an ongoing need for residential detox and detox in the community. CAIS is concerned that the current bed cuts are generating a greater need in Wales and that in south Wales, as well as north Wales, residential providers are bringing in people from England and sending them to Wrexham for their detox. So, the service is increasingly being occupied by English service users at the expense of Welsh service users.

[62] I welcome much of what you said about anti-social behaviour co-ordinators, and I very much endorse the comments about the British Institute for Brain Injured Children. What work could be incorporated with the voluntary sector? I am sure that you are aware that there are some very good practice models, such as the Flintshire neighbourhood watch group and certain local warden schemes, which are intervening at source and often generating a change in behaviour that is good for the community and the young people, although I appreciate that it is not always young people who display anti-social behaviour.

[63] On community support officers, I note that north Wales has not provided its figures for 2007-08. Do you know why that is the case? Has any consideration been given to the wider impact of withdrawing community beat managers and transferring them to administration jobs, and the impact on some warden schemes, such as that in Wrexham, where the reconfiguration of CSO funding has led to a withdrawal of police subsidies?

10.10 a.m.

[64] You have referred to partnership working on the home energy efficiency scheme and post office services, which I welcome. Could the work of the Energy Saving Trust be promoted in a similar way alongside that? I note and welcome your comments about the Home Heat Helpline, which, to a certain extent, parallels some of the other work going on, but it gives direct access to utility service providers. I heard the comments about Energywatch and the reconfiguration following the Department of Trade and Industry legislation, which will lead to Consumer Direct and Consumer Voice providing three-tier services. When we took evidence a little while ago from Consumer Direct in Cardiff, we were told that it was sceptical about meeting the deadline for having the relevant organisational structure and utility expertise in place by the deadline. I am sure that we would all agree that the priority must be the wellbeing of consumers. What is being done to ensure that implementation does not disadvantage those consumers, especially the most vulnerable, who are perhaps those who will have the greatest difficulty in accessing a three-tier system rather than a one-stop service? How can we meet the concerns of Energywatch and others and ensure that that group is not disadvantaged?

[65] I endorse the comments made about the Centre for Sustainable Construction. I hope that this will work not only as you described, but with developers who are proposing innovative schemes and with non-conventional construction providers. I am sure that you, like me, are being contacted regularly by people who, for example, produce timber housing, and who want to be a part of this agenda, but feel that no-one is listening to them at the present time.

[66] Once again, I endorse the comments made with regard to the Supporting People grant. I will not repeat what has been said, but will simply endorse what has been said, particularly on the Supporting People revenue grants and the need to ensure that existing service provision is not compromised.

[67] On housing waiting lists, I welcome the fact that you have been able to obtain an indication of current figures. Could that be regularised, instead of being a one-off? Could there be annual reporting, or even quarterly reporting, so that we can keep tabs on how this is moving?

[68] Finally, in terms of raising the profile of post offices, you referred to working with the WLGA and your request for it to examine the delivery of other local government services. What was the response to that request? What integration and working might happen with the National Federation of SubPostmasters, as it has many proposals to bring to the table?

[69] **Edwina Hart:** I am conscious that the responsibility for post offices is not devolved. However, I have taken a great deal of interest in what we can do to help, as have all of my colleagues here. Obviously, the federation will make representations on the business needs and requirements of its individual members, which I fully understand. It has been a difficult time for postmasters and postmistresses, because some of them feel that they need to take up the offer that has been made in order to secure their financial future. At the same time, they may want to continue the business in their communities. It has been a difficult time for them. I have discussed the matter of post office provision with Derek Vaughan, and he will have to consult the 22 local authorities. They will hopefully come back in due course with a view that is applicable to all of them. There may be differences between the authorities, so I wait with interest to hear what Derek will say on those issues.

[70] On the housing list, will we have the information, Linda?

[71] **Ms Whittaker:** Yes, as a performance indicator at the end of the year.

[72] **Edwina Hart:** So, we will be able to publish it, if Members would like a report on the housing list.

[73] I take the point on the Energy Saving Trust, which we support. It is important that we have streamlined services for individuals in this area. That follows on from some of the points that Jocelyn raised with me.

[74] I turn to some of the wider issues that Mark raised. There have been some issues in north Wales and, as he is aware, on detox beds, I have informed you before that an all-Wales group is looking at this issue and will report back to me on how to deal with matters. I think that I reported that a couple of committee meetings ago. There have been issues around CAIS and the Hafan Wen detoxification unit, which is based in Wrexham and provides services for people in north Wales. Of the 20 beds purchased by the North Wales Community Safety Partnership, four were decommissioned by Wrexham Local Health Board on behalf of the north Wales local health boards during 2005. This appeared to be a unilateral decision taken without consultation, which resulted in the commissioning of a needs analysis by the north Wales drugs intervention programme board. There were significant delays in the publication of this report; it was due out last September, and we finally received it in January. Is that right, Jo?

[75] **Ms Jordan:** It was a little later than that.

[76] **Edwina Hart:** I advised the committee in January that we needed to know what was happening in the report, but that it should be considered in conjunction with the outcomes of the waiting times audit, which was designed to tease out the problems with the tier 4 services. The partnerships are now considering the options, and our regional advisory team in north Wales is working with the partnerships to ensure that an appropriate number of beds is commissioned for Welsh clients. So, those matters and concerns are in hand.

[77] On some of the issues regarding counselling, we will be developing that as part of our next strategy. The work in this area is ongoing. Every time you think that you have put one section of work to bed, you realise that there is more to be undertaken in the area, and that more guidance and discussion are needed. There are providers who feel that they should be the sole providers of services for us, and that they should be getting the cash from the partnerships. However, at the end of the day, the partnerships are best placed to balance out the commissioning of services and where we are going to do that across Wales.

[78] I am very aware of some of the problems of ex-service personnel. I can assure you that Mark is not the only person who meets groups across Wales. I have responsibility for veterans' issues in Wales, and I have taken a very active role and interest in the problems of veterans with some of these issues. So, I can assure Mark that all the necessary work is being done on that.

[79] On the Welsh European Funding Office, I am not aware of any comparative work done in the UK, but my officials would have been aware of any as they have regular UK-wide meetings on this. We are not aware of anything at the moment, so it is very important that we do the work in Wales on the social enterprise mapping initiative.

[80] On the courts services issue, the Chester Civil Justice Centre is to have a Welsh court with a Welsh judge, administered from north Wales. It will hear civil and family cases from north Wales. This arrangement will be an improvement, as cases will be heard only in this court. Before, as you were probably aware, they were heard in Warrington and in Crewe. Cases will be from areas of north-east Wales to keep the inconvenience to litigants to a minimum. So, we are making good progress. It is important that HM Courts Service puts in the necessary resources for this work to be undertaken, because there is no point in changing the arrangements to bring justice closer to people if the resources are not going to be put in by the appropriate Government department. There are quite a lot of issues connected to that, and we will have to keep a watching brief on the position of the courts service.

[81] I welcome your comments about the position in south-east Wales. The problem is that there is not common ownership, and we have faced that problem all along. Local authorities see this very much as their individual responsibility. It is too narrowly focused, and I think that we are going to have to break it. The only way to do that is by applying pressure from the centre.

[82] **Trish Law:** As the newest member of the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee, I wish to thank you, because the love and commitment that you show to this committee shines out like a beacon, and you are most ably assisted by Janice and the two clerks.

[83] Turning to item 19, the additional funding for extra care housing is great news for Blaenau Gwent, where, as you are probably aware, this is a big issue. My only concern is that the Welsh Assembly Government guidelines be followed on where the new housing should be built. It should not be in the back of beyond; it should be in the community and close to facilities.

[84] **Edwina Hart:** That is an important point. Linda, do we know anything about the discussions on the locations?

[85] **Ms Whittaker:** I do not know the location for Blaenau Gwent, but I would say that very close work has been done on all of the extra care schemes, not only with the local authority, but also with the local health authority. So, the housing is located where the need exists.

[86] **Edwina Hart:** We can keep you updated. Perhaps we can make some further inquiries, and I can provide a note on that.

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

10.19 a.m.

Strategaeth Trais yn y Cartref The Domestic Abuse Strategy

[88] **Janice Gregory:** This paper provides us with an update on progress on the delivery of the Welsh Assembly Government's document, 'Tackling Domestic Abuse: The All Wales National Strategy', which was launched in March 2005. I understand that you are introducing this paper, Minister.

[89] **Edwina Hart:** We have made good progress on the delivery of the strategy, but there is still a great deal of work to be done; it is ongoing. Peter, did you not go to Morrision Hospital recently?

[90] **Mr Jones:** I am going this afternoon.

[91] **Edwina Hart:** There was an initiative there over Christmas with the police getting involved with the hospital. We are now going to pick up the strands to see how useful that was, whether it should be mirrored elsewhere, and whether the health staff found it helpful and so on.

10.20 a.m.

[92] This strategy is ongoing, in every facet. However, it needs to be made clear that all agencies work together far more, and there needs to be a greater pooling of expertise with some of them. The community safety partnerships have been responsible for steering this collaboration, but we need a bit more effort in some areas to get that clarity that we require in the response to this particular agenda.

[93] I still have clear concerns about how we are dealing with the issue of domestic abuse in the education system as well as the issue of respect for individuals and associated matters. I think that we perhaps need more of a focus on those matters in the coming 12 months.

[94] **Jocelyn Davies:** I welcome all the good work done in this area, and I look forward to the roll-out of good practice and the sharing of expertise; whereas it is easy to say, it is not always easy to do.

[95] I have one or two concerns, however. I am interested in your point about education, because there probably is a lack of direct services to children. Teenagers sometimes display very aggressive behaviour owing to the fact that they have experienced or have seen domestic violence. Your point about education is welcome, but it will of course take a long time to make a big difference. I look forward to that.

[96] There is also the matter of the needs of children in refuges. Could you look at that? I know that you cannot do everything overnight, Minister, but we would all like to see direct services provided to children who are affected by domestic abuse.

[97] **Edwina Hart:** I take on board Jocelyn's point about how we will deal with greater awareness of domestic abuse among young people. We have the all-Wales programme now, and that includes a model on domestic abuse. It will be interesting to see how that is being used. It is all very well having it, but who is teaching it, who is dealing with it, and how is it being used? That would make useful further research to see whether it is having a direct impact.

[98] I share your concerns about the needs of children in refuges, because they are rushed in to the refuge, and they are all there, but sometimes there are specific problems with regard to the children's educational needs, but they are fearful and they feel threatened. What type of counselling is available to them? As we know, there is a shortage of specialist children's counselling services, and children may need to be counselled separately from their parents so that they can raise issues that they do not want to bring up in front of their parents. I know that we have done some work in that area, but is there anything else that we can report on, Peter?

[99] **Mr Jones:** In the final part of the future plans, we will put proposals to the Minister in the next fortnight for increasing provision for children in refuges. We do not have the firm details yet, but the committee will be kept up to date about it.

[100] In terms of education provision, apart from the all-Wales schools programme, which is mentioned in the paper, there are other excellent projects going on, an example of which is the Tai Hafan project, with its spectrum packs. We are looking to see what more we can do to support that. The Minister has not cleared all this yet, but she has asked us to look at this very closely.

[101] **Edwina Hart:** So, hopefully, that will develop the programme.

[102] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you. Laura is next.

[103] **Laura Anne Jones:** Some of my questions have already been answered, obviously, as this is so very important. An education focus is needed, and we need to push information and the availability of access to information as much as we can. With regard to the helpline, it says in the document that, in the very month of its launch in 2007, some 2,031 calls were taken. Clearly, it is reaching a lot of people, but how is the helpline being advertised? What work has been done with regard to ensuring that people with disabilities can contact the helpline?

[104] **Edwina Hart:** We are advertising the helpline quite widely through all our organisations and partnership organisations. The police have put up notices about it, and you will sometimes see notices in ladies' lavatories and so on. We are doing quite a good job, I think, on advertising the helpline, and that can be seen from the level of calls that it has received. We want to make it accessible for all people, and so your concerns are noted about people with a disability and their difficulty in getting to a public telephone, perhaps. We will have a word with Welsh Women's Aid, which is running the helpline, to see whether there have been any specific problems in that area. There are many difficulties, and many disabled women suffer quite a lot of abuse. I am not sure whether there is any further work that we can do in that regard to make the helpline even more accessible perhaps to other organisations that it uses and is involved in. So, I will look at that.

[105] **Janice Gregory:** I know that posters were produced, as I have a large one up in my constituency office. In fact, we flooded most of the villages in my constituency with them. If they are small enough, shops will be prepared to put them up, and that is one way in which we can, quite confidentially for women, advertise this. However, we as Assembly Members have a responsibility to get this information out. Mick, do you want to comment?

[106] **Mick Bates:** I thank the Minister for the report. On the all-Wales school programme, producing more modules for schools is great, but the curriculum is very full. I would encourage using the voluntary sector to go into schools. I assume that the Cymdeithas Tai Hafan project does that, but the voluntary sector has expertise that could be used to deliver this in schools, rather than asking the teaching profession to deliver a module during whatever the curriculum time for it is. You all know of the pressures in schools, and sometimes there is almost a negativity towards bringing in more things.

[107] Whenever transition takes place in schools, from infant to junior school and so on, that is the ideal opportunity to give all the information about the helpline, the child's rights and so on. I know that it is done but, on transition, it has to be repeated, because you cannot do that just once; the information has to be given time and again, and I wonder whether that is happening.

[108] On the community safety partnerships' figures on domestic abuse, I am concerned that these cases are often alcohol related. We should make contact with the industry, perhaps through the Portman Group, to ensure that it is doing its fair share and is doing educational work to reduce the incidences of domestic abuse. I cannot remember the figures, but there is a massively strong link between alcohol and domestic abuse—I think that more than 50 per cent of domestic abuse cases are aggravated by alcohol abuse.

[109] **Edwina Hart:** That is a good point. Mick also makes a good point about the involvement of the voluntary sector in schools. We understand that there is a very mixed response. Some Women's Aid groups have very good relationships with secondary schools particularly, which they go into to talk about these issues, but that is not necessarily true across the piece. So, you are right: more work could probably be done. Listening to a victim of domestic abuse talking about what has happened to them is a good way to educate young people about the issues. At a launch recently, a woman spoke about her experiences. When people looked at her, they were thinking, 'This confident, articulate woman could not possibly have put up with any of this'. Mick makes a very good point about the involvement of the voluntary sector.

[110] **Mark Isherwood:** On the national helpline, which of course I hugely support, have we seen any geographical patterns emerging, or is there now representative reporting from across the whole of Wales? Originally, there was concern that there may be greater cultural barriers to coming forward in certain areas than in others, and it was hoped that they would be overcome by the establishment of the helpline.

[111] I had a meeting a couple of weeks ago with, among others, the staff of a local Women's Aid drop-in centre. The centre has had a huge increase in rent and service charge, which could make it uneconomical to remain where it is. Is any assistance or intervention available that could help Women's Aid drop-in centres in those sorts of circumstances? The landlord there is the local authority.

[112] I welcome the comments about the Tai Hafan project. I know that it has some frightening statistics about the women, and particularly the young women, whom it helps, not to mention the backgrounds that they come from and the experiences that they have had in their lives. That reflects the figures in the youth justice system, in which large numbers of young men and women have been subjected to either general violence or sexual abuse.

10.30 a.m.

[113] We were talking about young people in refuges, which ties in with the broader discussions that we have all been having about independent advocacy for looked-after children. That need for independence in such circumstances is crucial. What consideration is being given to that? Only last Friday, I met someone who was counselling one of the victims in north Wales up to the day before he committed suicide and that counsellor had tears rolling down their face. I am aware of other victims in north Wales, who I am still meeting, for whom the intervention came from the local authority and those people ended up being dragged through the courts and being cleared. So, we need to prioritise this for everyone, particularly younger people who are least able to represent themselves.

[114] **Edwina Hart:** On the helpline, we will make further inquiries when they report, as normal, on breakdowns and so on. We can look at that for the future, if it would be helpful. We think that we are getting a good number of calls from across Wales—I have had no indications to the contrary. We have found that the bilingual service has also been enormously helpful, although other language issues are now emerging for that service. This is a relatively new service that we are funding for 365 days, 24 hours a day and obviously, it will develop further. So, we are always happy to look at emerging patterns on that.

[115] The drop-in centres are a matter for local authorities if they are local authority buildings. Local authorities are generally very good at helping voluntary organisations, if they can and they have to take that up. We do not provide direct funding for that, but it is important that such matters are taken up locally. When there are budgetary issues, my other concern is who gets knocked out? What organisations in the voluntary sector get knocked out? What agreements are not upheld when local authorities look at their budget positions? It is very important that we hold the line that local authorities should be honest in their dealings with the voluntary sector and fair in terms of their funding priorities.

[116] Counselling for young people is a big issue and we are aware of the problems relating to the domestic abuse agenda. We are very focused on young people when they are in refuges and on what we can do to help and assist. So, I will not accept criticism of this portfolio in terms of taking these issues seriously. However, on counselling for young people in general, there will probably never be enough services to go around. No matter how much cash is invested, there will always be people who get pushed out, but we must do the best that we can within our system and with the necessary resources.

[117] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you, Minister.

10.32 a.m.

Is-ddeddfwriaeth Secondary Legislation

[118] **Janice Gregory:** You have before you paper 3 and an attached Schedule. There are no new items on the Schedule and we have not identified anything previously nor have I been advised that a Member wishes to raise anything. So, we will move on to the next item.

10.33 a.m.

Deddfwriaeth Ewropeaidd European Legislation

[119] **Janice Gregory:** The European legislation is in paper 4. You will recall that we were given a paper on 1 February, inviting us to note the main aspects of the forward work programme. There is an update in the paper on the three areas that we highlighted at that time, namely social reality stocktaking, the Green Paper on the establishment of the second phase of the common European asylum system and a proposal for a decision on the European Parliament and the European Council designating 2010 as the European year for combating poverty and social exclusion. No-one has indicated that they wanted to discuss this, so I ask you note the paper.

[120] **Mick Bates:** On this legislation and looking at issues such as postal services, there is quite a lot of information out there. In the Environment, Planning and Countryside Committee, we have regular video links with the responsible directorates. So, if there is a social justice committee in the next Assembly, could we look at linking with the European Commission to discuss some of these issues? It is important to understand the drivers based in European legislation that impact on us, and postal services is the most obvious example of that. I wanted to float the idea for the next session.

[121] **Janice Gregory:** Yes, perhaps we should have been a bit more switched on about this six months ago in terms of linking with others. We could include that in the legacy paper. The clerk will have heard what you said and will take that forward and mention it to whoever and whatever will succeed us, post May.

[122] **Mark Isherwood:** On a similar note, could there be better direct communication with our collective Members of the European Parliament, so that we can request that they take an interest in affairs that we have concerns about?

[123] **Janice Gregory:** Again, that is something that we will leave for the next committee.

[124] If we went to a break now, we would be breaking early, so I am just wondering whether we should do another item. I would be happy to do so, if the Minister is in agreement. I see that she is.

10.35 a.m.

Strategaeth Cynnwys Ffoaduriaid Refugee Inclusion Strategy

[125] **Janice Gregory:** Will you introduce this item, Minister?

[126] **Edwina Hart:** The refugee inclusion strategy sets out the Welsh Assembly Government's vision for achieving refugee inclusion and the core principles that underpin the work. The strategy went out to consultation on 3 November and I agreed to an extension to the closing date, from 3 February to 28 February. That was due to the massive interest in the strategy. We had to have additional consultation events for the refugee communities, so I think that that is a good sign. Due to the extension, it has not been possible to provide a full summary of responses on the consultation, but the paper broadly covers the issues. The issues around refugees and asylum seekers cover many different areas of the Assembly's work. The committee will wish to note the contents of the paper and I would welcome any comments.

[127] We were very pleased with how the consultation events went. We have had massive input from refugee groups and everyone has felt really included. They have enjoyed the events that we have organised and I think that it is an example of good practice for the future, in terms of how we have dealt with quite a difficult matter.

[128] Members will be aware that the migrant workers' pack that I launched very successfully yesterday has been very well received. It was launched in 17 languages and I understand that the Chinese version is to come. The Polish consulate said that it was one of the best things that it had seen in terms of making migrant workers welcome. All the issues that we covered in it, including health and education, were very welcome. You can see that the work is coming together on these various strands. I know that employers are pleased about the approach that we have taken to migrant workers because employers are keen for these workers to settle into their employment well across Wales.

[129] **Laura Anne Jones:** It is fantastic. I welcome the work that you have done, Minister, but also welcome the greater emphasis on children's rights in this regard, which I think is of utmost importance.

[130] **Mark Isherwood:** What consideration has been given to the need for mediation services in communities for neighbour disputes? The North Wales Race Equality Network raised concerns with me that it is aware of more and more issues between neighbours that could escalate, but which, with effective early mediation, could be addressed before they result in something more serious.

[131] **Edwina Hart:** Members of race equality councils and the Commission for Racial Equality are the best-placed people to help and advise local authorities and others about disputes, because there are always issues arising, be they around migrant workers or other people. We have not had any specific matters referred to us over and above the normal course of events. Interestingly, when I was in Llanelli yesterday, Jeff Hopkins was there, who has been actively involved with the work on the Polish centre. He has been concerned about the way that some stories have been run in the press about Polish workers, which have stirred matters up. Apparently it says on a railway bridge, 'Poles go home', or something like that, and no-one recognises it, because it is way out in the countryside. Issues are being stirred up that are not borne out by the facts. We have to be mindful, Mark, of some of these issues. Anne, do you want to comment on that?

[132] **Ms Stephenson:** I just wanted to say that, of the two events that we held, the one in south Wales was obviously very well attended, but we were very surprised by how many people came to the Wrexham-based event for north Wales. It is fair to say that a lot of people representing statutory and voluntary organisations came up to us afterwards and said how they had not appreciated the breadth of the issues until we took the strategy to them. I am quite confident that a lot of new connections were made in north Wales on that day and that it is the start of better working between all the organisations.

[133] **Mick Bates:** I very much welcome this work. I am pleased that there has been such deep interest in these issues. Many of us have to deal with many prejudicial statements. You mentioned somebody writing a slogan on a bridge, and, although you might think that this is a bit flippant, I often remind people that there are many thousands of British people living in Spain and other places. We work throughout Europe and the world has changed so much; it is well worth recognising that British citizens live in other places.

10.40 a.m.

[134] I have come across an issue on two occasions that has caused me some concern. It is to do with migrant workers who have vehicles. I have had cause to represent a few constituents when these cars have been sold and something has gone wrong. No-one can identify who owns the car, and it sometimes appears that it is difficult to identify whether these cars, when they are brought over, are registered and have road tax. Has the Minister ever come across this? Is there a system whereby identification could be given to assure other road users that these cars have a current licence, and, often more importantly, insurance?

[135] **Edwina Hart:** We can have a word with the liaison officer.

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

10.40 a.m.

Cymunedau yn Gyntaf Communities First

[137] **Janice Gregory:** If you are happy to do so, we will go on to item 8, paper 6. Minister, will you introduce the paper?

[138] **Edwina Hart:** The paper provides an update on the key developments, following on from the interim evaluation of Communities First—reviews of both Communities First trust funds and the Communities First network are planned to ensure that the programme's evidence base is current. We are continuing the work on mainstreaming this agenda, which is an issue that I know has been of concern to the committee, looking at its core budgets and so on. There has been excellent progress on youth work between my department and the Department of Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills. Two conferences are taking place in March and April to explore good practice and to determine a way forward on the links between statutory, voluntary and Communities First youth work. That is a key area that arose again in this morning's discussions about anti-social behaviour and so on. Youth work is fundamental in the partnerships, because we want young people to be involved in the partnerships and to feel part of their community. That is important.

[139] The deadline for applications from new areas for Communities First programmes is at the end of March. Work will then be done on bedding in the new areas. I do not want to underestimate the amount of work that will be required in this area.

[140] Progress has been made very recently on the new Communities First support arrangements—that is not in the paper, but it is going on quite well. Following the review into the current Communities First national support fund arrangements, I have decided that future funds in this area should be allocated to Communities First partnerships, so that they can look at the requirements in relation to excluded groups—I have to bring it as close to the communities as I can. That will also apply to groups such as partially sighted or blind people, because you will know that there have been issues about the funding of that project that are in the public domain.

[141] That is in line with the main principle of the Communities First programme, which is to empower communities to take responsibility for their actions. It is hard to let go, because part of you wants to give some direction in this area, but this is the right way to do it. New proposals for support requirements for partnerships are a natural follow-through of this empowerment philosophy and we must be brave enough to do it. The new support arrangements will allow partnerships to commission support from relevant organisations with the necessary expertise, giving them that leeway as well. We do not want partnerships to work in isolation, and we envisage that there will be potential to offer incentives for partnerships to start to work together a bit more in particular areas. The working group is meeting in the future to provide advice and support on the types of activities and on the ways in which the work should be funded. Obviously, I welcome the committee's views on these particular issues.

[142] We are now starting to see that things are evolving quite quickly, and even though we have got to different stages in partnerships, there are still some that are new to it all. Others have been up and running for a while and are sophisticated in terms of what they are starting to deliver. We must ensure that we adhere to our philosophy of taking a bottom-up approach and of empowerment, or this will not work in terms of the Government programme.

[143] **Laura Anne Jones:** I would also encourage joint working across these areas. I am thinking of my sports portfolio and how sports and leisure facilities in these areas could be shared or how initiatives could be set up to share them; arrangements could be made with transport and so on. Therefore, I welcome that being pushed forward.

[144] I also welcome the new areas that are coming in. Areas in my constituency—particularly in Monmouthshire—were often overlooked in the original index, and parts of it suffer severe deprivation. Therefore, I am grateful that this is going forward, and I look forward to monitoring it, and hope that we see regeneration in these areas.

[145] **Edwina Hart:** It will be difficult with the new areas, and it will require a lot of work—I am looking at Anne here—in terms of how this will bed down and will be dealt with. However, Laura's point is important; there needs to be more joint working between some of these partnerships, because they are keen. On their geographical relation to each other, they could do much more in terms of the strength of developing work together, particularly in accessing mainstream programmes and money, to bring strands together. Everyone likes a skateboard park, or everyone likes this or that, but not every community can have one. However, if you look at the geography, and partnerships working together, particularly on recreational and youth facilities, you will see that there might be a drawing together if they can work jointly as partnerships and they can perhaps access different strands of money. We must also recognise that there will be different skills in these partnerships, which can then be used to help each other.

[146] **Mick Bates:** Thank you for the updates, Minister. I will start with a negative—I still do not like this term 'programme bending'; it sounds as if something is going wrong somewhere, so we have to bend it. I cannot think immediately of something better, and I could not last time, but I wish you could find another term for that.

[147] I agree entirely with the Minister's approach—it must remain an empowering principle embodied into Communities First. That means that it is truly from the bottom up. Building the capacity for communities to develop and then regenerate is a long task, I accept that. One fear that I have—and I have mentioned this before—is that it is becoming a very youth-orientated process, with facilities in places. That in turn diminishes the local authority's responsibility to deliver many things. I note that only because, often, with other programmes, once the programme itself disappears, there is a hole in local service provision, because the local authority's responsibility was diminished by it. I mention it because we need to monitor this if there is ever an exit strategy. I am not sure whether people are looking at exit strategies, or are ensuring that, when they see that facilities are built, there are revenue streams in a local authority budget to maintain the facility. Often, it is the revenue budget, after the capital, that is critical.

[148] It is in that context that I have raised the issue before of looking for public-private partnerships to develop this enterprise ethic. Earlier, I mentioned social enterprise companies. If we are truly to bring some continuity to programmes such as Communities First, we have to grow an enterprise ethic within it. That is a massive challenge. However, as I mentioned on the previous report on abuse, the voluntary sector has a lot of skill here. I will mention the Prince's Trust, in particular, which we used to help with enterprise. Is it possible that, in this interim evaluation, part of that could be to look at how we combine social enterprise within a Communities First area, so that we see the establishment of businesses, which help to bring sustainability and viability to communities?

[149] **Edwina Hart:** You are absolutely correct, Mick; that work needs to be undertaken. We have a good relationship with the Prince's Trust, in the work that we have undertaken with it, but your warning note is correct. I believe that I am now funding over 100 youth workers in community projects. I am concerned—and we have made our views known to education colleagues—that local authorities could use this as an excuse not to carry on with their own funding for youth work, because we are doing it via Communities First. However, I see Communities First as an enhancement of provision, not as the core provision.

[150] I have some concerns, and, in recent months, I have been critical. When I have received submissions about youth workers, I have asked, 'Where is the local authority; where is the budget here?'. If it was a partnership in some areas, and they were putting in money as well, I would not be so uneasy about it. However, it turns out quite often that it is us doing the running in developing youth work and providing resources in some of these areas. My concern is that, even though Communities First takes a generational approach, there may be a time when it will not be a requirement in an area. What happens then to all these programmes and so on? They would have to be mainstreamed by the local authority. We must be vigilant on this particular issue.

10.50 a.m.

[151] We have put in additional money, but it is not a lot of money; we are talking about a lot of posts, really, and so I would not say that it was megabucks. However, authorities should not be taking money away from their responsibilities, because, in the short term, someone else is providing the funding. I am very worried about this, because I have seen a pattern emerging over the past 12 months where people have gone to local authorities and have ended up coming to us because we are the only ones able to provide funding. It is essential if you are doing anything in terms of community development and ensuring that communities have the things that they want. So, we cannot turn our back on it. On the other hand, where does the responsibility lie?

[152] **Mark Isherwood:** You rightly stressed the point that it is about bottom-up empowerment if it is going to work on a long-standing basis, and not just temporarily. We have discussed this many times, and it was highlighted in the evaluation report last year that one of the barriers to bottom-up ownership is the refusal of local politicians to let go. Have you undertaken any further actions or given any consideration to how we will tackle this? I am aware of some partnerships where it is not much of a problem, but it is a massive problem in other partnerships, and I receive complaints about that.

[153] The same evaluation report raised issues about the initial lack of training for the co-ordinators. How is that being addressed to ensure that people on the front line are not only committed, which I am sure they all are, but also have a full understanding of what they are being asked to do? I am not criticising them generally, but I am aware of certain complaints where co-ordinators develop a comfort group around themselves, instead of continuously reaching out to the broader community, so that the rest begin to think that it is only about that group and not all of us.

[154] You mentioned RNID and RNIB and sensory impairment issues. Is there any work that can be done, or is being done, within this agenda on the digital IT inclusion networks, which RNID and RNIB are raising concerns about at the moment?

[155] What, if anything, is being done about the streamlining of corporate services? Clearly, front-line service delivery has to be within the community but are there services that could be delivered more cost effectively with better co-ordination? Has anything being done about that, or is any consideration being given to that?

[156] I endorse Mick's comments about voluntary sector social enterprise. For example, there is a group called STARS in west Rhyl, which recently held a very encouraging event attended by cross-party politicians, promoting the work that it does with older people as well as expanding its warden team. The objective is to engage in a broader range of community services that are directly in touch with people and reflect their needs, but on a revenue-generating basis: selling services to local authorities or other agencies. It is a model that can be rolled out, and I know that it is being used in the warden resource centres in England.

[157] Finally, what consideration is being given to integration with stock transfer, where the tenant trust model ties in with the community mutual idea, which has been very successful in certain parts of England? How can we integrate that tenant empowerment with the broader empowerment message that we are trying to turn into reality?

[158] **Edwina Hart:** I have had strong words with individuals and local authorities about the whole issue of the bottom-up approach, and how there is no need to be fearful of it. It is important to recognise that the empowerment of individuals in communities is the key to community regeneration in all shapes and forms, and that there must be a balance. We have done much work in this area, which is coming to fruition. We are receiving fewer complaints about these issues than we were 12 months ago, because it has settled down and people have realised that they all have a role and function. The function of elected members is to get help and advice and to steer people in the right direction. Getting that balance was difficult in some areas in the early stages, but it has definitely improved. I am not sure whether it is because the communities have become more confident or because people have realised that you must have a balance in some of the discussions. Mick does not like the term 'programme bending', but programme bending is key to some of the issues that you have raised.

[159] Mark made the point about co-ordinators, but we feel that we have a good training programme for co-ordinators. They have different strengths and weaknesses, but when they come together as a team, we think that they do a very admirable job. Some of them are good at identifying funding streams, while others are much better at doing on-the-ground activity, encouraging people to do things. It is a matter of getting the right balance. Of course, co-ordinators are employed locally; we do not have a central role or any control in this matter. Partnerships themselves are acutely aware of what skills they want in the co-ordinators.

[160] Mark, Communities First is a mean and lean operation, because we try to get as much money as we can into the projects that we require and back into the communities, with the building up of the expertise in capacity building and so on. Local authorities are involved in the partnerships; they streamline things, draw up terms and conditions for us and look after the payroll and so on, so I am happy that, on that side of the house, we have the necessary economies of scale.

[161] Communities@One has been a marvellous initiative that has taken off well. In fact, I am going to visit some projects this afternoon. We are looking at how we can expand Communities@One across Wales, as it has been very successful where it is, and we will look at the next tranche of European funding in that area to see how that can be well used.

[162] In terms of the Communities First programme, there are housing issues, because there are environment and estates issues that come up. It is up to individual communities to discuss these particular issues if they are interested, but I do not really want to end on a sour note by talking about stock transfer today, if you do not mind, Mark.

[163] **Laura Anne Jones:** I have brief question on Communities First, which I have asked you before, Minister. It concerns my visit to Pill in Newport. Can you reassure the committee once more, and all the project managers and workers, as we are talking about this issue, that funding will be continued for those projects?

[164] **Edwina Hart:** Absolutely. There is nothing to worry about on that score.

[165] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you very much. We end this part of the meeting on a very positive note.

[166] **Edwina Hart:** On a further positive note, Chair, Anne Stephenson is finishing with us in the department, and moving on to other things. I would like to put on record my thanks to Anne for the way that she has helped with the further development of this programme. I know that the committee has appreciated Anne's contribution as well. I just wanted to put that on record and give all our best wishes to Anne at what is her last meeting, as well as ours.

[167] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Anne, from the committee, for the way that you have always kept us updated. It is greatly appreciated by people outside the Assembly as well, certainly in the Communities First areas.

[168] We will now break for refreshments and for a comfort break. We will return at 11.15 a.m..

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10.58 a.m. a 11.17 a.m.
The meeting adjourned between 10.58 a.m. and 11.17 a.m.*

[169] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you for returning. If Members have switched on a mobile phone, a pager, a BlackBerry or anything else during the break, I remind them to switch it off now. We are going to finish committee very early today, for one of only a few times in four years.

11.17 a.m.

Adroddiad Blynyddol Annual Report

[170] **Janice Gregory:** There is very little that I can say about this. It is our annual report and it was circulated to all Members so that Members could issue me and the secretariat with any comments. I emphasised at that time that that was the opportunity to comment on the annual report and, because of the constraints of time, it is not possible to accept any amendments now, and I doubt that Members have any because I am sure that I would have been informed before now if they did. So, I invite you to agree the annual report. Does anyone have a comment on it? I think that it is a very good annual report and I am grateful to Members for their input into it.

[171] I see that Mark has just arrived. Mark, no-one had any comments on the annual report and I did not wait for you to come in before moving on to this item because I know that you would have let me know if you had any comments on it.

[172] **Mark Isherwood:** That is fine.

[173] **Janice Gregory:** I see that you are all happy with that, so we will take it as an agreed paper.

11.19 a.m.

Papur i'w Drosglwyddo i'r Trydydd Cynulliad Legacy Report

[174] **Janice Gregory:** Obviously we laboured on this paper because it is important to leave a legacy—that is why it is called a legacy paper no doubt—for whatever committee comes after us post May. I was going to keep this until my closing remarks and it is unfortunate that we are not all here, but I would like to say that this has been a really good committee. It has been very well conducted and the legacy paper shows the work that we have undertaken in this committee over the past four years. So, if everyone is happy, you have seen the legacy report—

11.20 a.m.

[175] **Laura Anne Jones:** On the poverty part and rural indebtedness, could we extend that and look at increasing education?

[176] **Janice Gregory:** This is a bit like the annual report in that it is difficult to make amendments now because this is what we are leaving behind, from next week.

[177] **Laura Anne Jones:** The most important thing that I want put forward is the review into open prisons. I know that this has the Minister's approval because she has written letters on this on the Assembly's behalf. We have included,

[178] 'UK and WAG policy on prisoner rehabilitation and social support',

[179] but I would like to see something saying that we want to continue to press the Westminster Government on its open prisons in Wales or whatever, because we all agree on this and it should be looked into.

[180] Also, on the Welsh language issues in prisons, we do not have enough equality of opportunity stuff here.

[181] **Janice Gregory:** Okay, I will take one issue at a time. I accept what you say and we have discussed it in committee, but the difficulty is that responsibility for open prisons is not devolved to us.

[182] **Laura Anne Jones:** Are they not?

[183] **Janice Gregory:** No, so we need to trust the Minister to continue with this, and, whatever happens in May, there will not only be a legacy from us but also from Westminster. All of what has been said, particularly about open prisons, has been heard. I am very reluctant to include that now because when we sent out the legacy paper, as with the annual report, it was made clear that any amendments should have been made when the paper was circulated for consideration by Members.

[184] **Laura Anne Jones:** I am very sorry about that.

[185] **Janice Gregory:** I am not criticising you; I am just saying that we made that point and so, it is difficult for us to say now, 'Fine, we will allow amendments'. This paper was considered in depth before it was sent out and I accept what you say, particularly in terms of the Welsh language issues. I will defer to the clerk to see whether or not we can include an amendment. Personally, I think that it is difficult.

[186] **Ms Hawkins:** This needs to be agreed.

[187] **Laura Anne Jones:** I am not criticising anything in this report, but I just want to make it more comprehensive.

[188] **Janice Gregory:** I think that it is a very comprehensive legacy paper. If you compare it with what other committees will leave, you will see that this paper is very open and comprehensive.

[189] **Laura Anne Jones:** So, where is the line about equality of opportunity?

[190] **Janice Gregory:** Equality of opportunity is covered on the last page. I will not read it out because you can read it for yourself.

[191] **Laura Anne Jones:** The wording should be a bit stronger; it should say 'an essential part of'. Do you see what I mean? I am sorry that I did not pick up on that before.

[192] **Janice Gregory:** I do see what you mean, but these comments should have been made—

[193] **Laura Anne Jones:** Is it already printed then? Is there no way of amending anything?

[194] **Janice Gregory:** I made it quite clear when the document was issued to everyone—

[195] **Laura Anne Jones:** I know you did and I am sorry, but I have only just picked up on two things now. Is there no way of amending those if the whole committee agrees?

[196] **Janice Gregory:** If the committee agrees, we can do so, but I would have preferred to have done this by now.

[197] **Laura Anne Jones:** I know and I am genuinely sorry about that. Can we make that last point stronger?

[198] **Janice Gregory:** I understand what you say about open prisons, but the Minister is not here to say, 'Yes, fine'.

[199] **Laura Anne Jones:** You do not have to elaborate, but just include 'open prisons'.

[200] **Janice Gregory:** Just the words 'open prisons'?

[201] **Laura Anne Jones:** It says:

[202] 'We also consider the following issues to be important:'.

[203] Could we include, 'open prisons' and leave it at that, so that the next committee is aware that it needs to look into it?

[204] **Janice Gregory:** I think that you have a point about the Welsh language issue. That could go in the first sentence, which would read, 'The improvement of literacy and numeracy skills amongst people serving custodial sentences, and Welsh language issues'. We also need to mention open prisons somewhere, if the committee agrees.

[205] **Jocelyn Davies:** I would like to know where it is going.

[206] **Janice Gregory:** What do you mean? Are you asking where the reference to open prisons will be?

[207] **Jocelyn Davies:** Yes. If you want me to agree it, it would be nice to know exactly what it is I am agreeing to.

[208] **Laura Anne Jones:** We are putting it in for the next committee.

[209] **Jocelyn Davies:** I understand why; I just want to know where it will be included.

[210] **Mick Bates:** If people are willing for it to be in the minutes, I would prefer for it to be included in the third bullet point, because it is a UK issue.

[211] **Janice Gregory:** So, it would read, 'UK and WAG policy regarding prisoner rehabilitation, open prisons and social support'.

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

[213] **Laura Anne Jones:** Yes, that would make sense.

[214] **Janice Gregory:** We have to understand that we are not saying anything about them.

[215] **Laura Anne Jones:** You are not; I am not making it an issue.

[216] **Jocelyn Davies:** So, in effect, it will read, 'policy regarding prison rehabilitation, open prisons and social support'.

[217] **Laura Anne Jones:** Yes.

[218] **Jocelyn Davies:** I do not mind if it goes in there.

[219] **Janice Gregory:** Is everyone happy with that? I see that you are.

[220] **Jocelyn Davies:** What about the Welsh language?

[221] **Janice Gregory:** That will be included in the first bullet point, which will read, 'The improvement of literacy and numeracy skills amongst people serving custodial sentences, and the use of the Welsh language'.

[222] **Laura Anne Jones:** The problem regarding the Welsh language and prisons was raised in the last meeting, by Leanne, I think. There is no prison in north Wales, so many people have to go over to the north of England, and they cannot use the Welsh language in those prisons.

[223] **Mark Isherwood:** The Minister also referred to this.

[224] **Laura Anne Jones:** Yes, and Mark also referred to it.

[225] **Janice Gregory:** Okay. Are you alright with that, Jocelyn?

[226] **Jocelyn Davies:** So, it will read, ‘The improvement of literacy and numeracy skills amongst people serving custodial sentences’, and then what?

[227] **Janice Gregory:** It will say, ‘and the use of the Welsh language’.

[228] **Jocelyn Davies:** I am saying ‘okay’.

[229] **Janice Gregory:** The difficulty now is that we are trying to do this in a meeting—

[230] **Jocelyn Davies:** I am not sure; I am not that comfortable with putting the Welsh language with illiteracy and innumeracy, as though it is an education issue.

[231] **Trish Law:** I think that it is a bit unfair that this is coming to light now. Are you setting a precedent? Other people may think that something should have been included, but that we had to get it in by a certain time. This is quite difficult.

[232] **Jocelyn Davies:** Do you think that the language issue is covered by the middle point, which says, ‘including Welsh prisoners held in English prisons’?

[233] **Laura Anne Jones:** It could be covered by that bullet point, yes. Just leave it then.

[234] **Jocelyn Davies:** I do not think that people’s ability to use the Welsh language comes with being illiterate and innumerate; that is an education issue.

[235] **Janice Gregory:** Mark, do you have anything useful to add?

[236] **Mark Isherwood:** At the risk of getting my wrist slapped, justifiably, I wish to say that there are a couple of omissions. On housing, there is no reference to the Welsh housing quality standard—

[237] **Janice Gregory:** No, sorry; we are not opening this up. I would have liked to have avoided this in the last meeting. Everyone else realises that this came out—when did we send it, Claire?

[238] **Ms Griffiths:** Around 10 days ago.

[239] **Janice Gregory:** I am not going through this point by point now to add to it. I think that I have been very lenient, if that is the word to use, with Laura. This went out on 13 March, so this did not go out the day before yesterday for you to agree. I am sorry, Mark; we know about the issues that you have because you have voiced them in committee previously. This is a legacy paper that we are leaving, and, obviously, there is not consensus around the table that we should be adding things here, there and everywhere, willy-nilly. So, we will include the reference to open prisons; we have agreed on that.

[240] The Welsh language issue is important, but, in terms of the wording, I would have preferred it if someone had come back to me on that within a couple of days, or even within a week, of receiving this paper.

11.30 a.m.

[241] **Jocelyn Davies:** I think that this is covered by the phrase, ‘including Welsh prisoners held in English prisons’. I do not think that there is an issue when they are in Welsh prisons, so I think that it is probably covered, Chair. I do not think that we need worry ourselves about an amendment on that one.

[242] **Janice Gregory:** No, okay. I will put it to you now. Do we agree this with the single amendment from Laura, and do we then accept the legacy report? If you look at this legacy report, and then at other committees’ legacy reports, I think that you will see that we have covered virtually everything, if not everything. I have issues myself, but if I had wanted to make them known I would have sent myself an e-mail when the paper came out. So, I will move on from the legacy report, and I am sorry if you are not all happy. We have agreed that legacy report, and it will now be tabled.

[243] On that rather sour note, I am afraid, we will finish this committee meeting very early. Let me just check that we have not missed anything, given the speed with which we have proceeded this morning.

11.32 a.m.

Sylwadau Wrth Gloi Closing Remarks

[244] **Janice Gregory:** I now want to make some closing remarks. Obviously, I would like to thank all Members who have sat on the committee—and I have a list here, but I do not think that I will read out all the names on it, as we know who they are. However, I will mention Jocelyn, who I think substituted for the longest time, while she was covering Leanne’s maternity leave, and who took part in one of our policy reviews. I think that the committee has worked very well, and with the exception of today we have reached consensus on virtually everything. We have had very little political point-scoring in this committee. I can remember saying four years ago, when the committee was formed, that we should keep the political point-scoring for the Chamber, as we had a tremendous amount of work to do. I do not think that we realised quite how much work we had to do, or the issues that we would face, although I think that everyone who put their names down for this committee realised that it would cover a pretty vast area affecting the day-to-day lives of the people whom we represent.

[245] I think that we have done a tremendous job with the policy reviews, especially with the two that popped up in the middle of the second Assembly. One was the restructuring of the constabulary, although it did not come to anything in the end because of decisions taken in another place, but I think that we all enjoyed and learned a lot from that review; I certainly did. The other was the review of housing for older people, which was the first that we undertook, and it was a real experience. I will not mention a certain transport cafe in Bournemouth, but if you would like to have a word with William Graham, I am sure that he will fill you in on the details. I think that he is still dining out on that one, actually.

[246] **Jocelyn Davies:** Is that in the legacy paper?

[247] **Janice Gregory:** No, but perhaps it should be—or certainly in a report somewhere. That was a wonderful story, and I think that it just goes to show that we did very serious work on our reviews, but that there were some lighter moments as well. Claire and I visited a home for people with dementia in Ireland, and the conversation that I had with Eileen Ford who ran that home will probably stay with me for the rest of my life. It was just around little things that we do not think of day to day, but, when somebody talks to you about them in that context, it makes such a huge difference. A lot of this is not rocket science. In the complex that we saw in Belfast, people with dementia had their own rooms, each with a front door, but they could not remember their room numbers, so staff put a memory box outside the doors showing photographs and little mementoes. It is just things like that that make you think ‘Yes’. I know that the conversations that we had with her will stay with us for the rest of our lives.

[248] It has been a privilege to chair this committee. Nobody knows what will happen post May, but I hope that there will be a son—or daughter—of the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee. If I am returned in the election, I will certainly put my name down to be a member of the successor committee. Wherever I have gone, and wherever I have made a speech, I have always said that this is the most interesting committee in the Assembly. My colleagues—and yours—who sit on other committees would not necessarily agree with that, but I think that it is, and I think that we have had a wonderful relationship with the Minister, who, unfortunately, is no longer present. We have often come up with issues and we have pushed at a very open door. I know that her priorities have also been our priorities—maybe not with the same passion as some of us, because she has her own passions. However, it has been a pleasure to work with Edwina as Minister. This week, on a difficult review of youth homelessness, she accepted all of our recommendations, some unequivocally and others with slight reservation. However, they were all accepted. That shows the quality of the work of this committee.

[249] I thank everyone involved with the committee: the translation staff, who have had to do something today. I am sure that they are in the booth, and, Mick, you caught everyone on the hop, so thank you very much for that. I would also like to thank everyone else, including our security staff, and the members of the public who take the time to come to see us in committee. That, to me, is the icing on the cake. When we take the committee out and about all over Wales, especially to north Wales, we are warmly welcomed; people welcome the fact that we have left Cardiff bay. I wanted to do that from the very beginning, and we have succeeded in that.

[250] Last but certainly not least, I thank our secretariat: Virginia, who did not come in at the beginning, but escaped from the Local Government and Public Services Committee; our previous clerk, Roger Chaffey, who is still golfing like mad in Caerphilly, I understand; Claire Griffiths; and Claire and Virginia's assistants, namely Debbie latterly, Dan Collier, Alun Davidson, and Richard Miltiadis. So, I extend my deep and sincere thanks to everyone for making my life fairly easy on a Wednesday and Thursday, when committee sits. A big thank you to you all for the work that we have done as a committee. We should give ourselves a big pat on the back. We can go from the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee safe in the knowledge that we have done some excellent work for the people of Wales. Thank you all very much indeed.

[251] **Laura Anne Jones:** I am sure that the other Members will all want to say something, but I would like to thank you, Chair, for being fair and often very patient. I am sorry for any inconvenience that I have caused you. Thank you for all of the hard work that you have put in. I would also like to extend my thanks to the clerk, the deputy clerk and everyone involved, whom you have mentioned already. It is a fascinating committee to be a member of, and is my favourite committee. I think that the Minister has helped a lot in that, because she listens to what you have to say and is very practical in the steps that she takes after she has listened to you. That is very much to be welcomed. Thank you, Chair.

[252] **Mick Bates:** I endorse Laura's words. This committee has worked really well. It is a terrible admission, but it is my favourite committee above all others on which I have served, because I feel that you have moulded us into a team, Chair. Your leadership is, in no small measure, the reason why it has worked so well. I would also like to put on record my thanks to the staff—Virginia, Claire, and Roger—for all of their hard work, which has meant that everything has been done efficiently and effectively, and we have all been kept happy. No-one has mentioned the Deputy Minister, who is not here today. Huw's work on overindebtedness has been very much appreciated by us all. I hope that the next Assembly will pick up and take forward so many of the issues that, through your leadership, we have now brought to the attention of the Government. I hope to see further improvement in the quality of people's lives in Wales thanks to your work.

[253] **Janice Gregory:** Thank you, Mick. Thank you all very much indeed. I declare the last meeting of the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee for this second Assembly closed. I will see you all at 12 p.m..

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 11.40 a.m.
The meeting ended at 11.40 a.m.*