



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

## **Y Pwyllgor Cymunedau, Cydraddoldeb a Llywodraeth Leol The Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee**

**Dydd Mercher, 19 Tachwedd 2014  
Wednesday, 19 November 2014**

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Cofnodir y trafodion yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir  
trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd.

The proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee. In addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation is included.

**Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol**  
**Committee members in attendance**

Peter Black	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Christine Chapman	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Alun Davies	Llafur Labour
Jocelyn Davies	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Janet Finch-Saunders	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Mike Hedges	Llafur Labour
Mark Isherwood	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Gwyn R. Price	Llafur Labour
Rhodri Glyn Thomas	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

**Eraill yn bresennol**  
**Others in attendance**

Dr Sam Clutton	Cyfarwyddwr Polisi Cynorthwyol, Barnardo's Cymru ar ran y Rhwydwaith Dileu Tlodi Plant Assistant Director Policy, Barnardo's Cymru on behalf of End Child Poverty Network (ECPN)
Adrian Curtis	Cyfarwyddwr y DU, the Trussell Trust UK Director, the Trussell Trust
Natasha Davies	Partner Polisi, Chwarae Teg Policy Partner, Chwarae Teg
Tony Graham	Rheolwr Rhwydwaith Banc Bwyd (Cymru), the Trussell Trust Foodbank Network Manager (Wales), the Trussell Trust
Miriam Merkova	Rheolwr Gwasanaeth, Gwasanaethau Cymorth i Fenywod (Women's Turnaround Services), Newid Bywydau Service Manager, Women's Turnaround Service, Changing Lives
Christine O'Byrne	Arweinydd Polisi a Gwaith Ymchwil, Chwarae Teg Policy and Research Lead, Chwarae Teg
Mary Powell-Chandler	Pennaeth Achub y Plant Head of Save the Children
Catriona Williams OBE	Prif weithredwr, Plant yng Nghymru/Rhwydwaith Dileu Tlodi Plant Cymru a Chomisiynydd ar Gomisiwn Symudedd Cymdeithasol a Thlodi Plant Chief Executive, Children in Wales/End Child Poverty Network Cymru and Commissioner on the UK Social Mobility Child Poverty Commission

**Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol**  
**National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance**

Sarah Beasley	Clerc
	Clerc
Chloe Davies	Dirprwy Glerc
	Deputy Clerk
Hannah Johnson	Y Gwasanaeth Ymchwil
	Research Service

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:14.  
The meeting began at 09:14.*

### **Cyflwyniadau, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon Introductions, Apologies and Substitutions**

[1] **Christine Chapman:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the National Assembly for Wales's Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee. We have had an apology this morning from Gwenda Thomas.

09:15

### **Ymchwiliad i Dlodi yng Nghymru—Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 4: Sefydliadau Plant Inquiry into Poverty in Wales—Evidence Session 4: Children's Organisations**

[2] **Christine Chapman:** The first item today is the fourth evidence session on strand one of our inquiry into poverty in Wales, which focuses on poverty and inequality. I give a warm welcome to our first panel. I welcome Mary Powell-Chandler, head of Save the Children, Dr Sam Clutton, assistant director policy Barnardo's Cymru, on behalf of the End Child Poverty Network Cymru, and Catriona Williams, Children in Wales, End Child Poverty Network Cymru, and commissioner on the UK Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission. I welcome all of you here today. I thank you for your written evidence. If you are happy, we will go straight into questions; we have quite a lot of questions that Members want to ask you on this particular theme.

[3] I will start off with a very broad question. We had a stakeholder session a few weeks ago. It was a very interesting session, because we could try to understand what things we really needed to be looking at. From your perspective, do you think that the Welsh Government needs to rethink its overall approach to tackling poverty? I do not know who would like to start.

[4] **Ms Williams:** Of course, the day after that session, the revised child poverty strategy came out. One of the key things for us from the children's sector was revisiting children's rights and a focus on child poverty. I think that what we felt previously, being wrapped up within the tackling poverty work, was that people out in the field did not actually think that the child poverty strategy was still there. So, we are very pleased that it is being made clear that focusing on child poverty is important. I think that colleagues will elaborate on that, but I would like to say that, from the UK Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission's perspective, the key priorities in the tackling poverty action plan are still important, and it is relevant to improving poverty in Wales. However, there are obviously a lot of issues, not just for Wales, but for the UK as a whole, about the overall trend now towards more poverty.

[5] **Christine Chapman:** Do you think, Catriona, that there needs to be a radical shift in approach, or do you think that it should just continue?

[6] **Ms Williams:** No. I think that the big issue is the implementation. Perhaps the one shift that we looked at in the commission, and not just for Wales—Wales has to be praised for having a Minister for tackling poverty; that is important—was that the cross-Government work, which we might come on to later, needs to be implemented. We need that because we are the worst. We need to have a focus on poverty. The shift that we want to see in the commission is to invest more in children, and not just from separate programmes like Families First, Flying Start et cetera. The whole focus has to be redirected towards investing in children and young people, because their educational outcomes are not going to be achieved if we do not invest in very young children. The whole of society benefits, because as well as improving the wellbeing of those children and young people as individuals, the whole of society will be depending on those children when they are adults to be looking after them because of the increasing demography of the elderly population.

[7] Also, one does not want to say that it is one section of society versus another, but what has happened is that children and families with children have been the least protected. So, there needs to be a refocusing towards children and families.

[8] **Christine Chapman:** Alun, did you want to come in, or was it answered earlier on?

[9] **Alun Davies:** I am interested, Ms Williams, in your response to the question. You say that you do not want to see any fundamental changes in the approach that the Welsh Government is taking, but we know that poverty is not falling; it is probably increasing, in fact. So, would that not indicate that what we are doing is not working?

[10] **Ms Williams:** I think that the focus on reducing the number of families in workless households is really important. If you look at a couple of authorities in Wales where you have lone parents, perhaps 44% or 45% are not in employment. So, that is still a very big issue. Improving the skills of parents and young people in low-income households so that they can secure well-paid employment, is still a big issue. The other priority is reducing the inequalities that exist in health, education and economic outcomes for children by improving the outcomes of the poorest. So, I think that, overall, those three still apply. So, it is not a radical shift—it is an improvement on implementation, and focusing on making sure that it works.

[11] **Alun Davies:** I understand those points, and I think that the points are well made. I do not think that there would be any disagreement here in the committee on that. However, the hard reality is that there are as many, if not more, people living in poverty in Wales today as there was 15 years ago.

[12] **Ms Williams:** Yes.

[13] **Alun Davies:** Now, is it not the case that, if something is not working, you do something different, or you do it differently?

[14] **Ms Williams:** I think that there are a few issues around that. I think that how we measure how we are proving what is working, and what is not working, leaves a bit to be desired. We need better baselines, so that we know exactly what is happening. You are correct about the increased number of families with children living in poverty, and children living in poverty. The trend was decreasing, and we were stabilising a bit. However, the overall situation for children, across the whole of the UK—and that is where there is the link across to the welfare reform issues—and the impact on children and young people of those changes, and on their families, is something for Welsh Government to work more strongly with the UK Government on, to say, ‘This is the impact on our families and children in Wales’. What we have to do is to have the concrete evidence to say, ‘This is actually what is happening’, so that we can prove it.

[15] **Christine Chapman:** Jocelyn Davies and Mark Isherwood want to come in. I was just wondering whether you, Sam, and then perhaps you, Mary, would like to add to this part of the questioning.

[16] **Dr Clutton:** From my perspective, we have lost a lot of the structures and focus in relation to children and young people, specifically, as Catriona mentioned. So, we had the Welsh Government child poverty strategy back in 2005, which was directly related to the seven core aims for children and young people, which was directly related to the UNCRC. We had a draft version of a new child poverty strategy, which went out for consultation in 2010. That was very widely consulted on, and, again, that was directly related to the seven core aims, and to the UNCRC. That had aligned to it a delivery plan, which would look at the need for implementation. In addition, we had children and young people's partnerships, which, as chapter 7, usually, of the children and young people's plans, would fulfil the child poverty duty contained in the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010.

[17] So, the structures were in place for delivery. It looked at children's rights across the board. We know that there is strong evidence that children living in poverty have special difficulties in accessing and realising their rights. The 2011 child poverty strategy that was actually published bore very little relevance to the consultation document, or to the delivery plan. We lost the delivery plan, and got the tackling poverty action plan instead, which was age inclusive. The rights focus within the strategy that was issued in 2011 was lost. At the same time, we moved to single integrated planning at a local authority level. We know that a lot of authorities have already stopped children and young people's partnerships, and children and young people's plans. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill means that they will no longer be required to have a children and young people's plan, and they will satisfy that through local wellbeing plans.

[18] I know that the office of the children's commissioner did a piece of work on looking at single integrated plans, and not all authorities had a focus specifically on child poverty. Those that did usually looked at education and health inequalities. So, there is a certain amount of lost ground at a time when we really need to focus on implementation, because of the impact of welfare reform in increasing child poverty. I would say that the revised child poverty strategy that has just been issued for consultation is stronger in tying back to children's rights. However, a lot of the language, which reflects the financial climate, is, 'We will work to', 'We will consider', 'We will look at'. Now, it is related directly to the tackling poverty action plan, which has deliverables and indicators, and that makes sense in terms of co-ordination.

[19] However, as Catriona said, if we do not invest in the children who are poor today, they will be poor adults and they will have poor children and we will not be able to break this cycle. So, the focus that the Welsh Government had and the commitment specifically on child poverty, where at one point we appeared to be leaders, has been diluted and although we have gained a little bit of ground with the revised strategy, we need to refocus. The wellbeing of future generations Bill has woefully little specifically on child poverty contained within it. Local authorities have local tackling poverty champions in place. I am not sure what their remit is or what they are doing—I understand that they are elected members—but those structures to have a local child poverty strategy under a public duty, scrutinised by the Welsh Government, have been diluted and lost.

[20] **Christine Chapman:** Mary, did you want come in?

[21] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** Yes. It is nice to go third, because I do not disagree with a single word from either Catriona or Sam. So, I will just add something different, if I can. The question was about the overall approach to tackling poverty and I think that in terms of the

approach, as Catriona said, we are quite proud—I am part of a London-centric organisation really—of the strategies and so on that we have in Wales and that the UNCRC is part of our primary legislation. However, I think in terms of the implementation of it and the approach to the implementation, it is not right. I agree with Alun that we just keep on doing the same things and are expecting to get different results, which I think was Einstein’s definition of madness. So, I really do think that we need to look at that middle tier and lower tier in terms of how we are actually making these things happen.

[22] As an example, I went to the anti-poverty regional event in Cardiff on Monday of this week and all of my notes about what I would say today went out of the window, because I felt that that would be useful feedback. However, for one thing, of the anti-poverty champions from the local authorities—an elected member and an official; I am sure that you know that—not one was present at that event. When we broke into working groups—it was a great event, so all praise to everyone who organised it; it was mostly work groups feeding back and they were fascinating because we stayed in the same work group—we had a case study and the question was very simply: what would you do to help this family? The duplication around the table was frightening. The fact that people did not know that another organisation was doing this completely exemplified what we have felt for some time, working on the poverty agenda.

[23] So, the approach does need to change. If I had the answer, I am sure that I would be really rich. One thing that Save the Children is looking at is a model called ‘children’s communities’, which is looking at a community size. The local authority would seem to be too big when we look at local service boards; it is about looking at a community-size approach, where all of the partners in that particular community are co-ordinated and it centres on the family—from pre-birth to career. It is about making sure that any one family knows and gets the interventions that they need on that journey. Sitting in that conference on Monday, I thought about the professionals who did not know who was doing what and I thought: what chance does the family actually have of knowing where to get the best help? However, that is not to say that there are not great things happening in Wales. It is joining it up.

[24] **Christine Chapman:** I need to move on to other questions, but Catriona, do you want to come in?

[25] **Ms Williams:** Just to add to that, I think that the End Child Poverty Network has been pushing and pushing for better co-ordination. We have two examples that are beginning to happen. One is the Welsh Government’s early years partnership board that the previous Deputy Minister set up to bring all players together around the table at a national level in terms of how we can join up for the early years. The other is, I understand, beginning to happen to look at integrating Communities First, Families First and Flying Start, because the End Child Poverty Network has always recognised that there has been so much confusion and duplication. I think, going back, if there was a direction of travel for all of the resources in a local authority, and not just the programmes, that would be a significant step forward.

09:30

[26] **Christine Chapman:** I think that that is a strong message then. Jocelyn is next.

[27] **Jocelyn Davies:** I wondered about your view on why the strategy that resulted from the consultation bore no resemblance to the consultation document. Was it as a result of the consultation responses?

[28] **Dr Clutton:** I do not think so. I think that it was as a result of decisions that were made by officials.

[29] **Jocelyn Davies:** I see. Right, okay, thank you. Catriona, you did mention lone parents not working, but we heard last week, of course, that work is no longer the route out of poverty and that in fact persistent poverty among those who work is well known now. As you mentioned, if you come from a poor household, you are much more likely to be poor as an adult and to have poor children. Are you aware of any successful implementation? I am interested in how all these different strategies—. It is kind of difficult—it sounded very complicated—to follow it. Even when you are in the loop, it is difficult to follow it. There seem to be a lot of action plans, a lot of strategies and a lot of legislation, but they do not seem to be linking together. Would you say that they do not link together well?

[30] **Ms Williams:** Do you want to start?

[31] **Dr Clutton:** There has been work done to make the revised child poverty strategy talk directly to the tackling poverty action plan. When the first tackling poverty action plan came out there was a lot of concern from the children's sector that it lacked a real focus on children's issues and on issues like childcare, for example. That has been remedied in revised versions of the tackling poverty action plan, because it is refreshed each year, and there has been work done to get more synergy between these and to get shared objectives, indicators and outcomes between the revised child poverty strategy and the tackling poverty action plan. As Catriona and Mary have said, it is about how that plays out on the ground in terms of different programmes within communities as well as those families living in areas that do not qualify for programmes and families in in-work poverty as well.

[32] Some of it is about unintended consequences or is tied in with the economic climate. So, for example, the free school breakfasts programme is based on really good evidence of educational attainment in children where they got breakfast. We then knew that families were using the breakfast club as childcare, and there was an acceptance that that was okay because it helps to alleviate in-work poverty and helps families to be able to work. I understand that the free school meals grant has ended and gone into the revenue support grant and that a number of breakfast clubs are closing as a result because the costs are being passed on to local government. However, I also understand that a number of breakfast clubs are opening later, which means that it does not work as childcare any more. It provides a free breakfast but it does not work as childcare. Add to that the fact that, six years after the programme was introduced, nearly a third of schools still do not have free breakfast clubs. Now, that is a really practical and essentially low-cost way of providing pre-school childcare to alleviate in-work poverty that it seems is going to stop working for families.

[33] **Jocelyn Davies:** It is not just families in poverty who use it. We heard an Assembly Member yesterday in the Chamber say that she needs to use it. Catriona wants to come in.

[34] **Ms Williams:** Yes, just building on the issue of childcare, it is a huge area for us in Wales. In rural areas, when the Daycare Trust looked at this, it found that no authority thought it had sufficient childcare, and that is for everybody. Going back to the issue of in-work poverty, the commission identified that in its first annual report as a major issue in England, less so in Wales, but it is there. I think that, over the past 12 months, the reality on the ground for families is that this is not just about whether you are working but what sort of work you are doing. We need to be a living wage economy. That is the target that we should have in Wales. One of the anti-poverty programmes we have got to do is to engage everybody. It is not just about the public sector. We have to get employers to pay the right wage, because the other thing that has been happening is that housing costs have gone up so much that there has been a move into the private rental market, which tends to be worse quality. We also have the overall use of food banks, as you will know, by people who are in very low-paid, intermittent, short-hours work. So, it is complex. The one thing in Wales that we do know is that we have certain geographical areas where there are huge levels of deeply entrenched poverty, where people are not working. So, for Wales, the biggest issue is still

worklessness; that is not the case in the rest of the UK.

[35] **Dr Clutton:** May I add to that, very quickly, a point in terms of the childcare issue. Full-time pre-school childcare costs about £600 to £700 a month—after school club costs, full time, £125 a month, at least—so, that is a big asset in terms of people being able to afford to work. Also, on the childcare issue, childcare was one of the strands that was looked at back when children and young people’s plans and partnerships were first introduced, and childcare assessments and sufficiency assessments. I think, of all the issues that we have moved the least on, childcare is still up there in terms of making work affordable and tackling in-work poverty. Where families cannot depend on family members to provide childcare, it makes getting into the labour market and surviving in work very difficult.

[36] **Ms Williams:** Also, if you have a disabled child, you are very unlikely to be able to find a childcare facility—

[37] **Jocelyn Davies:** Never mind afford it.

[38] **Ms Williams:** Never mind afford it. They are just not there.

[39] **Christine Chapman:** Mary wants to come in to respond, and then I have questions from Mark and Mike.

[40] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** I will try to be quick. I just wanted to give an example of a family where there is in-work poverty that we worked with in May of this year. In May, we produced a report called, ‘A Fair Start for Every Child’, which is relevant to a lot of what Catriona and Sam said at the beginning. It was about the fact that you have to intervene early in a child’s life to make a real difference, because a poor child will grow up disadvantaged health-wise, education-wise and so on. The family that we found had received an Eat, Sleep, Learn, Play! grant from us, which is a crisis intervention grant. There were very touching circumstances around that. The father is on low pay at a call centre and, with the shifts that he is expected to work, there is very little time that they can spend together as a family. The mother was crocheting blankets, this was back in May, ready for the winter—and when you think that this is on our doorstep, in Cardiff—because they cannot afford the heating, they really cannot. We hear that, but here was a family saying, ‘We’re crocheting blankets to put over our knees in the evening’. They talked about the bills that they had received, and I think that we have all heard about the poverty premium, which features quite strongly in our report, which says that poor families pay up to £1,600 a year over and above what we pay for goods and services, and an important part of that is paying for fuel and energy. This family absolutely typified that, because they wanted to get taken off the pre-payment meter, but there was a lump sum that had to be paid to enable them to do that, so they went back to crocheting blankets. She explained how they do their shopping. She ensures that the children have the healthy meals, and that they get as much fruit as they can, but the parents do not—they go without. To me, it seemed absolutely shocking that this is somebody whose husband is going out to work. It dispels the myth that people have about poverty and in-work poverty. I attended the—. It sounds like I am always going to conferences, but these last two weeks have been unusual, actually. I went to the Joseph Rowntree and Bevan Foundation event, and was very interested in the Ipsos MORI report about how people in poverty are perceived. Of course, they do not like the word ‘poverty’ or do not, essentially, see themselves as being in poverty, but the fact that the general public’s view is softening towards this tells us that there has been a complete shift, even in the period that I have been working in this field, as to who is in poverty and who needs help.

[41] **Christine Chapman:** So, there is that confusion. Very quickly, Jocelyn.

[42] **Jocelyn Davies:** We are talking a lot about people in work, but I feel very strongly



that people ought to be able to feed themselves and be warm whether they are in work or not. If we only value people who work, what are we saying about people who do not work? As it is no longer the route out of poverty, it is hardly the holy grail anymore.

[43] **Christine Chapman:** We need to move on, because I know other Members want to come in. Mark, did you want to come in?

[44] **Mark Isherwood:** Yes, thank you.

[45] **Christine Chapman:** I will then bring in Alun and then Gwyn. Sorry, Mike. It is Mark, Mike, Alun and then Gwyn.

[46] **Mark Isherwood:** I am first, okay. You have all, I think, referred to the need to have a children and families approach, and, of course, the Measure implemented the due-regard duty in respect of children and young people. The UK Government has now, I understand, announced a whole-family approach, which means that Ministers must consider the impact on families of any actions that they might take. Do we need something similar here or would it not be effective? I know that Barnardo's piloted the Families Matter project brilliantly in north-east Wales. It really helped with taking a whole-family approach—built around the child, supporting parents, et cetera—and that was a blueprint for what came forward from Government following that, but it was handed to local authorities to deliver. Would you have been, as you had already proved, a better delivery agent, at least in part, for those programmes, rather than having it taken off you and seeing your teams partly recruited by the local authorities to deliver?

[47] Finally, in terms of identifying need, it was some years ago that I went to a National Childminding Association event in north Wales, and it was asking, 'Why do not governments, nationally and locally, use the local networks that we are part of to identify families in need, who may not fall within a geographical area receiving extra support, but we often know where they are?' Do you have any comments on that?

[48] **Dr Clutton:** Barnardo's Cymru is delivering Families First services in authorities in Wales, and parts of Families First services as well. It represents a team-around-the-family approach. We know that that is effective as long as you remember that the child is a member of the family as well, and that it is not just about working with parents. It is about meeting a child's individual needs. That is something we need to maintain a focus on, as it can be lost in a family approach. It is another reason why we need to think about child poverty specifically, because, although child poverty is the result of family poverty, child poverty is different and is about a loss of rights and being able to access rights, because children obviously cannot go to work to secure their social rights in the way adults can.

[49] In terms of the delivery of those programmes, the team-around-the-family approach is very effective. We know it is starting to see some outcomes now. It is about it being done in a way where individuals understand community needs, as you say. There are some good pieces of work being done within education, et cetera, on looking at vulnerability and there are also needs assessments carried out at local authority level. Part of the issue is to do with—'conflict' is the wrong word—the pull between the child poverty agenda and the child in need agenda. When I was a member of the child poverty expert group, the idea for Families First was presented to that group. At that time, we had a discussion and said, 'This is not a child poverty programme, this is a child in need programme, and we need a child in need programme, but there are 20,000 children in need and 200,000 children in poverty'. I think, because of reduced budgets and because of burgeoning demands on social services and children's services within Wales, in a lot of areas, Families First is about meeting the child in need and delivering on child in need work that, in the past, would have been delivered by social services, working with others. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014

introduces the duty to bring in preventative services and that may help in that regard, and I am not arguing that the majority of children in need are not also children in poverty, but we cannot pretend that a programme aimed at 20,000 children will reduce and impact on poverty for 200,000 children. One of the things that having a children and young people's partnership and plan did was to look at all children and young people, as well as having a specific focus on poverty. I think that that is some lost ground.

[50] **Ms Williams:** I would like to reinforce what Sam has said. We are talking about a large proportion of children living in poverty in Wales. The targeted programmes that are there are very important and effective if there is no duplication and if they are at the right level for the families. However, if you look at the educational outcomes around five good GCSEs for children eligible for free school meals compared with children not eligible, there is a huge difference that needs to be addressed. So, that is at a higher level across large numbers of children strategies. There is a challenge about how these come together, though, because, in terms of Government, they are within different ministerial portfolios and there is a cohort of children and families in both camps, quite clearly.

09:45

[51] **Christine Chapman:** May I just say that we half an hour left? The discussion has been great and these are really good questions today, but I want to make sure that all Members have the opportunity to—

[52] **Ms Williams:** Yes, I am sorry.

[53] **Christine Chapman:** No, you are here to give your responses. I want to make sure that all Members have the opportunity, so I will take Mike, then Gwyn, then Alun. So, Mike is first.

[54] **Mike Hedges:** I was very pleased to hear you say something that I say very regularly, which is that it is very expensive to be poor. It is far more expensive than it is to be comfortably off. However, I have two questions. Do you come across, as I do in my constituency, the excellent work done by schools, especially headteachers, in supporting children who are in poverty? In many cases, the headteacher is the only professional person who the parent meets who is not unkind to them or perceived to be unkind to them.

[55] My second question is that free breakfasts and free school lunches are brilliant, and then you come to July and August. Do you come across what I come across, which is that parents then find that they are having to feed children at those times of day when they have not had to feed them for the rest of the year and face the financial effect that that has? I will give a plug to an organisation in my own constituency, Faith in Families, which feeds children during the summer as well, but certainly not the five breakfasts and five lunches that they get in school. Do you come across those sorts of things as well?

[56] **Christine Chapman:** Mary, do you want to come in?

[57] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** Yes, definitely. On your first point, it is expensive to be poor, yes. That is what the research has shown us in terms of the poverty premium, as we call it, which has increased—I cannot remember the exact figures, now—phenomenally over the last 10 years. So, it costs even more to be poor now. In terms of schools, with our work in Save the Children, the schools are integral to what we have been doing. Taking that earlier point about the whole-family approach, one of the programmes that we run—every time I come here I mention it, so I will not say too much about it today—namely Families and Schools Together, is about building links and social capital within the community with the school at the centre of that. I think that the successes that we have seen from that, running it here now

since about 2011, are growing. So, I think you are absolutely right; the school is a really important place. For that particular programme, although the focus child needs to be between three and five years old, the whole family goes along, so you have grandparents there as well. One of the headteachers' quotes back was that it was a revelation to see what had been achieved. So, that is absolutely the case.

[58] The second point that you mentioned about families struggling to feed their children during the school holidays was very obvious during my time as a Communities First programme manager in Cardiff. A lot of the Communities First work that we did then was around making sure that there was some sort of provision, especially in Ely and Caerau, at the time, which worked pretty well. Again, that is part of that flagship anti-poverty programme, and my point, I think, with Communities First and Families First—and not so much Flying Start—is about ensuring that we fund the things that we know work really well and not fund things that perhaps are not evidence based. The fact that Communities First has been going for over 10 years now shows that we do know what works; well, we should know what works. I am really heartened to see that there is a piece of research—

[59] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** [*Inaudible.*]

[60] **Christine Chapman:** Janet, I will bring you in afterwards.

[61] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Okay.

[62] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** I was just saying that there is a really exciting piece of research now being commissioned by the Public Policy Institute for Wales, which is an analysis of poverty and vulnerability in Wales. I think that that will be really key to helping us to deliver the services for people in poverty, because they are not a homogenous group.

[63] **Christine Chapman:** Sam or Catriona, do you want to add anything to Mary's comments?

[64] **Dr Clutton:** Well, in relation to schools, we have been talking about community-focused schools throughout the time that we have been looking at child poverty, specifically. I completely agree that there are some excellent examples of practice where headteachers are acting as champions and are bringing family services in around the school. That is sometimes being driven by local authorities and sometimes by individual headteachers, using the pupil deprivation grant in many innovative and flexible ways et cetera, and doing everything from having food distribution on the site and uniform recycling to actually teaching basic skills to young parents on site as well. We have strong evidence from Estyn that if you focus on education and wellbeing for disadvantaged, poor children you will improve attainment. We really need to focus our efforts in relation to that. We are seeing some really effective outcomes in terms of educational outcomes, but also in terms of tackling poverty within the community, with the school as the hub that we have to pay for.

[65] Related to that, actually, is the struggle of feeding children during the school holidays when you are eligible for free school meals. The Children's Commissioner for Wales visited a number of Communities First partnerships, and one of the things that really struck him was children saying, 'I like coming here in the holidays because it means that I get some lunch when there is no school', because they had set up lunch clubs et cetera. Keith raised this in the ministerial group on the impact of welfare reform. At the time, Leighton Andrews was Minister for education, and he charged his officials with looking at the role of schools in providing food during the school holidays. Basically he said, 'We have these buildings in communities. What could be their role?', and officials were charged with going in and looking at that, but nothing ever came out at the other end. I did chase up on it a number of times, but nothing has really come out of that.

[66] **Jocelyn Davies:** You do not like Government officials, do you, Sam?

[67] **Dr Clutton:** No. I must say that the poverty unit has very good officials to work with. ECPN has a very good relationship with them.

[68] **Christine Chapman:** Obviously, the Ministers are accountable to the committee, so we need to pursue that. Sorry, Catriona, did you want to add anything?

[69] **Ms Williams:** I have just two quick points. I think that schools have a critical role. A few years ago, we did a report on how schools could help children and parents feel not stigmatised in relation to poverty around all sorts of simple things, such as cheaper school uniforms, not being in a separate queue for free school meals, and all of these sorts of soft things. The other thing is being aware of the hardest to reach—those in the deepest poverty may well be the most disengaged from schools—and the critical role in educational outcomes of parents. The recent Institute of Education's millennium cohort study showed that parents were 80% the contributors to good educational outcomes and the schools were 20%. I was quite shocked at that statistic. Supporting the parents around a school—as I think that we are all agreed on—is really important.

[70] **Christine Chapman:** Gwyn, Alun and Janet wish to come in.

[71] **Gwyn R. Price:** Good morning. Do you think that the Welsh Government's approach to tackling poverty has adequate leadership, and what do you think the impact of the removal of a specific Deputy Minister for tackling poverty has had, if any?

[72] **Christine Chapman:** Who would like to start? It could be very straightforward.

[73] **Dr Clutton:** I think that it is difficult to say at the moment because we have just lost the Deputy Minister. It was nice to have a strong focus and to have a portfolio there, which was specifically on tackling poverty. The Minister has a very broad portfolio now, including poverty, in terms of maintaining that focus. I would say—and going back to Jocelyn's point—that, at the moment, we have some very engaged officials within the poverty unit, who are working hard and are looking at the ways in which the new portfolio can be used to good effect in terms of housing regeneration et cetera. However, as a children sector, we would argue for a Minister for children and young people anyway, and that could include child poverty. At a time when we have such strong evidence on increased child poverty, and given the fact that we have not moved—things are worse than they were in 2005 when we had the baseline data for the original child poverty strategy—it would appear to make sense to have a Minister or a Deputy Minister with a clear focus on this area.

[74] **Ms Williams:** I totally agree. The issue for us is having that holistic focus on children and young people. We have only recently lost the Minister for children. I think our best years were when we had a Minister for children and a Cabinet sub-committee that looked at children's issues across the piece. It is going back to the overall direction of the whole of the spend in Wales and how children and young people are invested in. So, it is about all the different ministerial portfolios, and it was very helpful to have a driver. The early years partnership board would not have happened without a Deputy Minister pushing that in relation to tackling poverty. However, child poverty is within the context of all children and young people. So, I think that would certainly be my personal direction, to co-ordinate across all departments. When money is so tight, there needs to be a direction given to local authorities about their spend on children and investing in children and young people, because those services are an easy target. Those early intervention services for children and young people are the ones that seem to be going first.

[75] **Christine Chapman:** Mary, do you want to add anything?

[76] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** I will be quick, given that time is marching on. In terms of adequate leadership, I mentioned earlier being part of a UK-wide—I think I said London-centric—organisation, and I am quite proud to talk about Wales and about the commitment from the First Minister downwards on eradicating child poverty and about poverty featuring so highly and prominently in all our policies and programmes et cetera. However, in terms of leadership, I cannot help thinking that continuing to say, ‘We will eradicate child poverty by 2020’, while knowing full well that the evidence says that we will not, does not help. In terms of leadership, if I am expecting my team to deliver results, I have to give them SMART objectives, which means realistic and achievable objectives. I just feel that, perhaps, the time has come to say, ‘Look, we’re not going to do this’. I understand this happened with the Welsh housing quality standard, which was expected to be completed by 2012 but it is now 2020. I heard an official say on Monday, ‘And it will be achieved by 2020’, and I think that is what we need to hear, because none of us are confidently saying that we can make that difference by 2020. So, I think, leadership-wise, it is about saying, ‘Look, this is the situation, this is the case, this is how things have changed and this is what we need to do now to address that.’ So, I do admire this, and I am proud to say that we have this running through all our policies et cetera, but it is beginning to feel a bit nebulous and therefore nobody feels absolutely responsible.

[77] **Christine Chapman:** We have got about a quarter of an hour left, so what I am going to do is to turn to Alun, then Janet, Peter and Rhodri Glyn, so that I can make sure that everybody has had an opportunity. I know that we have covered quite a lot of ground, but I want to make that clear. So, Alun is first, then Janet.

[78] **Alun Davies:** Thank you very much.

[79] You seem to be saying to different things: first, that the Welsh Government is providing some leadership and doing all the things that you have all described; and then all three of you, in different ways, have said that there is duplication of effort, that you do not have a delivery plan, that it is nebulous and that you do not know where you are going. That, to me, does not describe leadership; it describes confusion. I was wondering whether you could perhaps go a bit further, or certainly answer these questions, because I think they might be linked in some way. Is the fact, Dr Clutton, that we have lost a delivery plan critical? Does that lead, Ms Powell-Chandler, to the duplication of effort that you have described, and is the fact that we are not achieving our objectives due to this confusion? You know, if we put all our objectives back by eight years, we would eventually meet them. However, I would not think that it would be a triumph—I certainly would not describe it as such. So, is there a direction, is there leadership, or is there the confusion that you have described for most of the last 45 minutes?

[80] **Christine Chapman:** Mary, do you want to start?

[81] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** I am trying to be polite about leadership, to be honest with you.

[82] **Alun Davies:** We do not want you to be polite. We want you to be honest.

10:00

[83] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** I am being honest as well; I would never not be honest. What I mean is that it is so much better, compared with what my colleagues from the other nations tell me, that we do have this commitment in our Government. That is at the top and the leadership probably thinks, ‘Great. We’ve got our strategies and we’ve got our plans—go do’.

I think it is at that next level, or perhaps even a level further down, that all the confusion reigns. I would say that even, perhaps, among Welsh Government officials from different departments, because poverty cuts across everything, I do not think that everybody understands the part that they can play in helping on this. So, there needs to be a change, as I said earlier, and things probably need to be scrutinised more closely. I think that we should be funding only the things that we know are working and making a difference. We should be making sure that all the different organisations and associations that work out there in the field are joined up and that someone is co-ordinating that activity so that families are at the centre of it, families know where they can go and that they get all the interventions that they need. So, it is confusing; it is a bit of a dichotomy. It is out there, is it not? It is from the top and we know that it is important. Poverty appears everywhere. It appears in the three educational strategic objectives as well. However, it is about the implementation of it, and it is not easy.

[84] **Alun Davies:** So, the Ministers are not running the Government.

[85] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** I did not say that. *[Laughter.]*

[86] **Alun Davies:** It sounds like it.

[87] **Dr Clutton:** The child poverty strategy that is currently out for consultation looks at all the different strands of programmes of delivery and policies et cetera, and brings them together around a picture of child poverty. There could be more detail about how that would be implemented, but that is to follow. However, I would still go back to the loss of this structure where we had the child poverty duty in the 2010 Measure, we had public bodies with a duty to deliver on that, they delivered on it through a children and young people's partnership and the Welsh Government scrutinised whether that was being delivered not. That is what we have lost in terms of that picture.

[88] I also know that work is being done to bring together a common outcomes framework for Flying Start, Families First and Communities First, and that makes a lot of sense as well. We are not sure when that outcomes framework is going to become available. However, again, going back to unintended consequences, for example, for a school-based piece of work in the community in one area, the extension of Flying Start means that a Flying Start provider has come in and said, 'You can't work with them; they are Flying Start families, and you can't work with them under Families First because we have got to work with these additional numbers and we have extended our geographical area, and now our geographical area is in your geographical area, and this is a Flying Start family, not a Families First family.' That has got to be wrong, because what we should be looking at is the child in a family and how we are going to deliver around them. However, that is driven by investing in Flying Start and pushing the geographical area, which we would all argue for, but it is about how that plays out at the ground level, and I think that the children and young people's plan and partnership brought all those partners around the table together—delivery partners as well as strategic partners. They knew what everybody else was doing and they knew what they were delivering on. I know that there were question marks about how robust the outcome monitoring of all that was, but, in terms of what is being asked on the ground, we have lost structures for delivery on that.

[89] **Ms Williams:** I think that the structures are the issue. Children get lost in the single integrated plan, full stop. Whether it is child poverty or anything else, they are not featuring, so leadership needs to look at the reality on the ground of how children are prioritised. There are two things that I would like to say. There is a dichotomy in what we are saying. I think that we feel very engaged with the current set of officials in the Welsh Government who have refocused on children. We feel that that has been good and it is a collaborative endeavour. They have their challenges in Government, I believe, across departments. However, I think

that there are some big leadership issues in terms of aligning, for instance, the foundation phase and the Flying Start outcomes. Education and major programmes need to come together, and that is a leadership issue.

[90] I think that the other thing from the social mobility commission's perspective is that we need to have leadership and an aspiration for our young people in Wales that we are not always going to be entirely dependent on public sector employment. We have not mentioned the role of really pushing role-models and of young people believing in themselves. Many have very low self-esteem. So, some of the apprenticeship programmes are good, but we need to have the whole of the Welsh population engaged on this, and that needs to be done at a high level, getting employers not to have zero-hours contracts, et cetera, so that the wealth of families improves.

[91] **Christine Chapman:** We have 10 minutes left, and a number of Members need to come in. I call on Janet first, then Peter and Rhodri.

[92] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I suppose, for me, it is about trying to work through that fog that appears to be there, with all the help. As a politician, I find it quite frustrating, frankly, so goodness knows how you are working on the front line trying to deal with it. I think it is fair to say that, over the years, there has been a significant amount of money for schemes, initiatives, policies, strategies and agencies, all working towards the poverty agenda, and yet when you try to tease out whether it is working, how it is working and whether we can see definite outcomes, that is when everybody piles in and there is confusion and duplication. I just wonder, really, how effective you feel the Welsh Government is in really working on outcomes as regards the poverty agenda. I picked up on your comments about Communities First, because I have a dickens of a job to find out in my own constituency how that is scrutinised and how successful the outcomes are.

[93] Schemes keep changing. You made the point about Flying Start and Home-Start, and who qualifies for this, that and the other, but, at the end of the day, if people need help, they need help, and it is about how quickly you can get that help to someone. The more we take evidence—and it is not just on the poverty agenda—the more we seem to be spinning from the Welsh Government lots of new schemes, lots of strategies, lots of resource going into it, and yet we really do not know whether any of that is working. So, you can imagine the frustration. However, if you had a magic wand or you could really say, 'This is what the Welsh Government should be doing', how would you sum up what needs to be done? There is little point in us writing up another report that goes to Plenary, which we all discuss and we all put our five minutes' worth of contribution in, and then for me to see that report—how does it influence policy? Does it just get put on a shelf with all the others? There is a tendency, sometimes, to feel that. Really, I want you to tell me, 'No, we need this radical approach, or the Welsh Government should be doing this'. As I said, there is no shortage of resources going there, but we need to know whether that money is well spent and what more we can do to help those who are really suffering with poverty.

[94] **Christine Chapman:** I think that what Janet is saying is the nub of the discussion, really. There does seem to be a huge amount of confusion. I am not sure whether it is a will that people do not want to work, because I would not think that for a minute, but what we are picking up today—and Mary used the word 'nebulous', and I would agree with that—is the question of how we can clear up this confusion. What would be the recommendation—very briefly, because other Members want to come in? Could you be very focused on what other recommendations this committee in this inquiry should look at? What should we be telling the Welsh Government to do to try to address this confusion?

[95] **Dr Clutton:** I think that outcome structures have been put in place now, and Communities First has been completely looked at afresh in terms of new objectives in relation

to that and evidencing those. What I am concerned about is that we do not throw out the baby with the bathwater—if you will pardon the pun—because if you go into a Communities First and you meet children there, you see the impact that that work is having on their self-esteem, on the fact that they have had something to eat for the day, and on things like community safety, which is what children and young people talk about. We are talking about the same issues that we have been talking about for 15 years, and we are not getting a lot closer, which is very frustrating. However, I would not want to lose what is good about things like community-focused schools, Communities First partnerships, the good Families First work, et cetera. So, it is about how all of those things are brought together. I often sit in committee and give evidence on how one piece of legislation does not talk to another as well, and it is about that co-ordination across the piece, which is another reason why, as a sector, we are interested in having a children and young people’s Minister who could observe that across the sector in relation to child poverty, as well as other issues.

[96] **Christine Chapman:** Before I bring Catriona in, we have only about five minutes left, but I want to bring in Peter and then Rhodri Glyn. I will ask Catriona and Mary if you want to make any additional comments to what the rest of the panel has said. Peter, do you want to ask your question?

[97] **Peter Black:** I just want to make a quick observation, which is that the 2012 Welsh housing quality standard was finally acknowledged as not being achievable in 2013, and I suspect that the 2020 target will be roughly the same but that they will acknowledge that in 2021. What role does the private sector have to play in tackling child poverty?

[98] **Christine Chapman:** Would Catriona or Mary like to start, and then I will bring in Rhodri? Catriona, do you want to start?

[99] **Ms Williams:** This is actually where the social mobility commission UK-wide has done much more work than we have in Wales. There are two or three things. Particularly on the opportunities for children to have work experience, we have done work in the commission with all the different professions to ask, ‘How do you get your staff ultimately? Are they friends of friends who do work experience, are they contacts or are you deliberately targeting?’ So, we have actually gone through accountancy, law and various other professions and companies to try to look at their practice. There is a business compact, so one thing that we could do in Wales is to say that, with leadership from Welsh Government, businesses in Wales should adhere to that sort of programme so that it enables children from the most deprived families or who are living in poverty to have a chance that they would never have otherwise.

[100] The other areas are about getting the agreement to have a living wage. That is really important. It is about getting the hearts and minds of businesses that it is important for the Welsh economy that we have children and young people who are aspiring to be involved in developing their own futures. There are models all over the place; I can send you some information from the commission on the whole of that area, which we in Wales have been so preoccupied with, namely the deep poverty—

[101] **Christine Chapman:** If you could do that, that would be helpful.

[102] **Peter Black:** Is part of the problem that we do not have the big social entrepreneurs like Cadbury and Rowntree anymore?

[103] **Ms Williams:** I think this is where we have to work with the UK, because we have to make sure that the companies that have sub-offices in Wales have policies that we can benefit from.



[104] **Peter Black:** Okay. In terms of the Welsh Government, we have talked a lot about what the Welsh Government is doing with the existing powers. Is there anything we should feed into the Silk process to say that Welsh Government needs an additional power that is going to make a difference in terms of child poverty?

[105] **Christine Chapman:** I will ask Mary to come in as well.

[106] **Ms Williams:** In terms of the benefits, we need to have much more influence in that respect.

[107] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** I would like to say something, but it is not a direct answer to that question, as it was part of everything else, because I am assuming that it is my last little bit.

[108] **Christine Chapman:** We have Rhodri to come in as well.

[109] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** Right. I just want to mention CBI's report 'A better off Britain', which said that growth on its own will not be a miracle cure. It said as part of that, although it was talking about extension of free childcare and extending maternity leave, that paying the living wage wherever possible was part of it. In Wales, the fact that 200,000 children are living in poverty is everybody's problem. At the moment, it does not feel like it is the private sector's problem. So, I think we need to do more on that.

[110] I just want to say that if I had a magic wand and I was with you, I would get to know what the problem really is, and part of that is getting to hear the voices of the families themselves. I know that you did some stakeholder engagement. However, that piece of research is going to take time, of course; we cannot do this overnight. There needs to be a piece of research about what a community living in poverty looks like and all the different parts of it. We then need to robustly monitor, because there are some great things going on at the moment in programmes such as Communities First and Families First, and Flying Start is great; what a pity it is not everywhere. So, I think it is about robust monitoring and not being scared to say, 'We're not going to fund this anymore; it doesn't work', and to just make sure that we are sharing best practice and doing everything effectively in a co-ordinated manner. So, I would kind of say, 'Let's start again; let's really look at this problem'. Poverty today is different to poverty 10 years ago, so we need different solutions.

10:15

[111] **Christine Chapman:** You will be pleased to know that, next week, Members will be attending different locations across Wales, to speak to, maybe, families, so we are going to look at this, as well.

[112] I am very conscious that we need to finish now, but, Rhodri, did you want to come in? You have a final question. Then, perhaps, we can give you all a minute each.

[113] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Mae'n siŵr bod yn rhaid derbyn, yn y lle cyntaf, bod llawer iawn o'r pethau sy'n effeithio ar dlodi plant y tu hwnt i Lywodraeth Cymru. Hynny yw, mae'r newidiadau yn y wladwriaeth les yn mynd i gael effaith enfawr ar dlodi plant. Fodd bynnag, o ddilyn eich pwynt chi ynglŷn â diffyg cyfrifoldeb ac arweiniad o fewn Llywodraeth, a gaf fi ofyn cwestiwn penodol ynglŷn â pholisi economaidd y Llywodraeth?

**Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** I am sure that we have to accept, in the first place, that many of the things that affect child poverty are beyond the Welsh Government. That is to say, the changes to the welfare system are going to have a huge impact on child poverty. However, following your point about the lack of responsibility and leadership within Government, can I ask a specific question about the Government's economic policy? To

I ba raddau y mae'r polisi economaidd yn what extent does the economic policy assist  
cynorthwyo teuluoedd un rhiant, sy'n lone-parent families, who face very difficult  
wynebu sefyllfaoedd ariannol anodd iawn ar financial situations at the moment?  
hyn o bryd?

[114] **Christine Chapman:** Sorry, Rhodri, is this the only question that you have?

[115] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Yes.

[116] **Christine Chapman:** Okay, that is fine.

[117] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** I can think of others, if you want. [*Laughter.*]

[118] **Christine Chapman:** That is all right. Catriona, do you want to start?

[119] **Ms Williams:** Yes. I think—and this is not the Catriona Williams response but it was the social mobility commission as a whole that said this—that Wales is actually too passive in terms of trying to generate jobs that are appropriate for families in Wales. So, that was a very strong message from the commission's report, and it contrasts with Scotland. So, I think that that is something that I took away as a message: we need to empower our children and young people. Their self-esteem is critical, and so coming from the education system and going back, the economic policies could be driven by those young people, if we were investing in them, in the education system. It is the educational outcomes that are critical for the future of the Welsh economy, in a sense, because the ideas, et cetera, can come from them.

[120] With things like appropriate shift patterns and changes, what is the reality on the ground? We did a report, which we could also circulate, where we interviewed people who were going through Assembly Member and MPs' surgeries, asking them, 'What is the reality?'. So, the reality on the ground is the real-life struggles of childcare and working patterns. To make the economy work, and to get people able to work and in employment, it has all got to work for them. So do shift patterns.

[121] There is also how pay progression could be improved in companies for people who are on very low wages. Businesses have to support people to be able to achieve when they go to work, so that work becomes something that is more dynamic, instead of just a drudge, and mundane, and with no future.

[122] End unpaid internships. Those are the sorts of issues for all employers. Actually, we had a recommendation from the commission that half the establishments in Wales with over 10 employees should take on an apprentice by 2020. Now, that is not specifically answering the question about the economy as a whole, but there has got to be investment in the young to get the economy going, and there has got to be some aspiration, or vision, for the future, for the young people.

[123] **Christine Chapman:** Obviously, on that report, we can perhaps tell Members that we can have a look at that, because there is some fascinating stuff in there. Okay. Sam?

[124] **Dr Clutton:** There is a little bit of a catch-22 situation. An aim, or outcome, for the tackling poverty agenda is about skilling the workforce: we cannot attract the employers into Wales because we do not have the skilled workforce. At what point do we get the skilled workforce, and then have no jobs for them to go into? How do those two pieces of the jigsaw come together, so that, at the point that we have young people who are skilled to the point that we can attract the kind of employers that we think will work for the economy of Wales, those jobs are waiting there for those young people. I also do not think that that is the answer for all children and young people. Children and young people sometimes need employment that is

not highly skilled. We invest in them and they come out the other end, and their potential and their strengths are not in relation to getting high-level qualifications and working in high-skilled employment. We have to be careful that we do not write those young people off because they do not fit into our economic picture.

[125] **Ms Powell-Chandler:** I missed a little part of that, I am afraid, so I am just going to pick up on something that Catriona said. When we were doing some work around literacy in Save the Children fairly recently, I was looking at the PISA results, which, of course, everyone groans about and says, 'Oh God; they're terrible'. However, it was interesting that, while Wales was not looking so clever in terms of numeracy and literacy, cognitive development was actually quite good. To me, that said that we have young people who are the entrepreneurs of tomorrow. They are creative, and they think about things differently. It just made me think that, in some way, if we could harness that and bring up the numeracy and literacy, as well, that eventually would make a big change to the economy in Wales.

[126] **Christine Chapman:** Rhodri, did you want another question, or are you happy to conclude?

[127] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** No, I think the point is that all those things should be happening, but it appears that they are not happening. The question is why are they not happening? Is it because they do not have a designated Minister any more, and is it because, across portfolios, Ministers have not been taking responsibility for this?

[128] **Christine Chapman:** I think that that is a good point at which to leave this session. I must say that it has been a fascinating session. I am sure that Members have really appreciated your contributions and responses today. This will really help in our inquiry. I thank the three of you for attending. We will send you a transcript of the meeting so that you can check it for factual accuracy. Thank you very much.

[129] I am just going to close the meeting now until around 10.30 a.m., when we will hold our next session.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10:22 a 10:35.  
The meeting adjourned between 10:22 and 10:35.*

### **Ymchwiliad i Dlodi yng Nghymru—Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 5: Sefydliadau Menywod Inquiry into Poverty in Wales—Evidence Session 5: Women's Organisations**

[130] **Christine Chapman:** Welcome back, everyone. This item is the fifth evidence session on strand 1 of our own inquiry into poverty in Wales. May I give a warm welcome to our panel this morning? First of all, we have Natasha Davies, policy partner for Chwarae Teg. We also have Christine O'Byrne, policy and research lead for Chwarae Teg, and Miriam Merkova, who is service manager for the women's turnaround service at Changing Lives. I welcome you all.

[131] Members will have read the evidence that you have sent in, so, if you are happy, we will go straight into questions. We have got a number of questions on this. We have got a certain time slot for this, so we will go straight into questions.

[132] I just want to start off. Do you think that the Welsh Government needs to rethink its approach to tackling poverty, or do you think we should just continue as it is? Who would like to start?

[133] **Ms O'Byrne:** Thanks very much, first of all, for inviting us. We welcome the

opportunity to contribute to such an important inquiry. We are particularly pleased that gender is being recognised as something to focus on.

[134] Does the Welsh Government need a new approach? We know that poverty is an increasing problem in Wales. The Fawcett Society pointed out that austerity measures have brought a triple whammy for women, with cuts to welfare, cuts to jobs and cuts to services affecting women more than men. On welfare alone, 75% of the cuts are coming out of women's pockets, so that is very much a cause for concern and will have an impact on poverty levels in Wales.

[135] One of the key things we think needs to be recognised is that there is a feminisation of poverty. Women are more likely than men to live in poverty. They face a greater risk of falling into poverty if they lose their job—and women's jobs are at risk right now, given the public cuts—and their income makes the difference between whether the family lives in poverty or not, because it is the woman bringing home the income that is either a supporting income into the household or, in the case of lone parents, the only income into the household.

[136] **Christine Chapman:** Christine, could I just ask you something, and perhaps the others may want to come in as well? Obviously, the Government's approach is the tackling poverty action plan. Some people have said that it may need improvements, but others say that, no, we actually need to start again. So, how would you view this? Should the Government start again, should it improve it, or is it okay as it is?

[137] **Ms O'Byrne:** The main thing we have to say about that is that, currently, it is gender neutral. To be successful and to have the best outcomes on tackling poverty, the feminisation of poverty needs to be recognised from the outset.

[138] **Christine Chapman:** It is not recognised, do you think, at the moment? In the Government's plan, is it recognised?

[139] **Ms O'Byrne:** The current plan is gender neutral. We welcome the fact that, in the progress report, there has been an inclusion of a paragraph that recognises that equalities are important and that targeting equalities groups is important. However, in tackling this problem overall, and getting the best outcomes, it is particularly important that gender be built in from the beginning.

[140] **Christine Chapman:** So, your answer, then, would be that there does need to be a change in the action plan. Miriam, do you want to add anything?

[141] **Ms Merkova:** I just want to comment on the fact that there is a lot of action that is preventative and that is really welcomed. A lot of the clients we work with have been through the care system, or have been disadvantaged from a very early age, so it is very encouraging that, at this time of austerity, the Welsh Government is still considering prevention, where you might have to wait for years to see the outcomes of that. However, I would agree with Christine that it does feel quite gender-neutral and, at times, it might feel a little bit disjointed. For example, you might be looking at children, and then at those who are not in education, employment or training, and then the labour market, but, actually, sometimes it is the whole family that is affected. So, for example, the fact that young people might not be in education, training or employment might have an impact on their family as well, especially in a single parent household. Again, that is something that we were quite surprised about when we were looking at gathering the evidence for the response, that, actually, a number of our clients are exploited by their children, who are in a very disadvantaged position. However, overall, I found the plan to be quite good, and—

[142] **Christine Chapman:** So, basically, it is not a question of—I do not know whether

Natasha wants to add to this—scrapping the action plan; it is about improvement. We will come on to the specifics. Jocelyn, shall I bring you in now?

[143] **Jocelyn Davies:** Yes, okay. Do you think that there is adequate leadership and do you have a view on the removal of the specific Deputy Minister for tackling poverty? Do you have a view on that?

[144] **Ms O’Byrne:** We welcome the Welsh Government’s commitment to tackling poverty, especially given challenging times; it is not moving away from that commitment. I think that it is important for the Welsh Government and the Minister to recognise gender equality within that and the importance of targeting the plan at supporting women, because that will have better outcomes because it does not impact just the woman, but the whole family and the community as well.

[145] **Christine Chapman:** Is that happening at the moment, would you say?

[146] **Ms O’Byrne:** We think that it needs more of a gender focus. We think that there could be better outcomes. Take, for example, Jobs Growth Wales. At the moment, I believe that gender take-up is about equal, but it still tends to be females going into administrative and care roles. Again, the focus on getting people into work is very important, but, for women in particular, they tend to be in the low-skilled, low-paid jobs, even though they are not necessarily low skilled themselves. We know at the moment that around 55% of undergraduates are women, but then they end up working in low-skilled, low-paid roles because they want, quite often, flexibility to manage their other responsibilities. So, I think there are ways to get better outcomes by targeting actions on women.

[147] In terms of the Minister, we are pleased that the Welsh Government has a Minister for poverty and we think that it is positive that housing, regeneration, equalities and poverty have been brought together in one portfolio because we think that those things working together can have an impact.

[148] **Christine Chapman:** Jocelyn, did you want to—?

[149] **Jocelyn Davies:** I just wondered whether you are prepared to say on the record whether you are funded by the Welsh Government.

[150] **Ms O’Byrne:** We are.

[151] **Jocelyn Davies:** You are.

[152] **Ms Merkova:** We are funded by the National Offender Management Service.

[153] **Jocelyn Davies:** Okay. Do you think that there is adequate leadership from the Welsh Government? You say that you have read the action plan and that you kind of like it and that there are some good things in it. Do you think that—?

[154] **Ms Merkova:** I would agree that it is encouraging that there is a Minister and that those portfolios are brought together. Again, I can only talk about my clients’ experiences. We do not have a policy officer or anything like that, but those issues do seem to come together and it is quite encouraging that there is somebody leading on it because, often—.

[155] **Jocelyn Davies:** Well, we have lost that role now, but you think that having somebody leading—. It does not have to be a Deputy Minister, I suppose you would say, as long as there is somebody who co-ordinates across.

[156] **Ms Merkova:** That is right, yes.

[157] **Jocelyn Davies:** We heard from the children's groups, obviously, that there should be more focus on children. However, if you focus on everything, you are not focusing on anything.

[158] **Ms Davies:** I think what is really important is digging down and looking at who is experiencing poverty and the reasons that they are experiencing poverty. In terms of women, the root causes of poverty can be quite different from those experienced by men. It is quite closely related to their position in the home and in the labour market. So, the approach that is needed to tackle poverty for women can be quite different on the ground, I think.

[159] **Jocelyn Davies:** I see. Right. Okay.

10:45

[160] **Ms O'Byrne:** If I can just make another point on that, one of the areas of work within our Agile Nation project is the Fair Foundations programme, which works with primary schools. We support teaching practitioners to look at how they may reinforce gender stereotypes and how they can encourage girls to think about all of the opportunities available to them. I think that that is an important part of tackling child poverty and poverty in the longer term because it helps girls to realise the wide range of jobs that are available to them and could perhaps encourage them to consider higher-paid roles like those in engineering and science and things like that.

[161] **Christine Chapman:** Miriam, do you want to comment?

[162] **Ms Merkova:** As I said, it does need to be a whole-family approach, because children are, effectively, disadvantaged by the fact that their parents are living in poverty. It is the same for us. Last year our clients had 425 children between them, but only half of them were living with the women themselves. Some of them were permanently removed and some of them were living with other family members. So, it is about looking at who they are and how they are disadvantaged.

[163] **Jocelyn Davies:** So, you work with the hardest-to-reach group that we often hear about.

[164] **Ms Merkova:** Yes. When we think of poverty, some of the actions often do not even touch our clients because they are so vulnerable and disadvantaged. We just try to maintain their stability, really. What I am trying to say as well is that there is potentially a lot of hidden poverty, because the fact is that grandparents might be looking after the children of women who are in custody, and where does that feature anywhere?

[165] **Christine Chapman:** Gwyn, did you want to come in?

[166] **Gwyn R. Price:** Do you believe that there is a tension in relation to integrated, cross-Government approaches to tackling poverty? The last witness said she was at a round-table event and there were people in the room or on her table who were not talking to each other—they did not realise that you and you existed, or they might have realised that you existed, but they did not realise what the input was, so there is no joined-up writing, as we say. Do you find that?

[167] **Ms O'Byrne:** I think that more could be done to get departments to work more closely together and also I think that there could be greater awareness of what support is available, so, for example, we can provide advice and support around gender lending strategy,

as an example, and I am not certain that everybody is aware that we can offer that.

[168] **Gwyn R. Price:** Do you think that you should make them aware, then?

[169] **Ms O’Byrne:** Well, we work hard to increase engagement, but I just think that departments could talk more to each other, particularly on the equalities agenda, because it is across all portfolios.

[170] **Gwyn R. Price:** Do any of you other ladies want to comment on that?

[171] **Christine Chapman:** Natasha, do you want to come in?

[172] **Ms Davies:** I would just say that yes, we would like to see more working together and a better collaborative approach, but I think that it is important that we have that cross-Government approach to tackling poverty and to tackling inequality because, as Christine said, they are both cross-cutting themes and the only chance that we have, really, of tackling both of those issues is if each Government department is doing their bit in order to achieve that.

[173] **Christine Chapman:** So, what you are saying is—I do not know whether you agree or not—that there should be improvement in the cross-Government approach to this.

[174] **Ms O’Byrne:** Yes. There could be improvement on that.

[175] **Christine Chapman:** Miriam, do you want to add to that?

[176] **Ms Merkova:** I would agree with that, especially as it is such an important issue. I think that there needs to be a cross-party commitment to it. This is not really something for political conflict, because we are talking about people’s lives and it is such an important subject.

[177] **Christine Chapman:** The purpose of our inquiry is to use your expertise and your perspective so that we know where the weaknesses or strengths are so that we can then alert Welsh Government to some of these things, which, as you said, will, hopefully, feed back to the families that are in poverty. Christine, do you want to come in?

[178] **Ms O’Byrne:** I was just going to say that I think that one of the things to be aware of, or for policymakers to be aware of, is that women often face multiple disadvantage, so, sometimes, when gender figures are considered, they are looked at on average, but when you drill down into equalities groups such as older people and disabled people there are often more women and that is where the importance of gender comes in.

[179] **Christine Chapman:** Natasha, you have a comment.

[180] **Ms Davies continues:** I just wanted to say that, in terms of a cross-Government approach, what is really important is an understanding of how poverty and gender interact with one another, and how gender affects the experience and causes of poverty, and that that awareness is cascaded across every Government department and at all Welsh-Government levels. If that understanding is embedded, it will, obviously, help guide policy and spending decisions, just to make sure that any interventions or actions are truly effective. It will also help to assess more accurately the impact of those actions, policies and spending decisions.

[181] **Christine Chapman:** Are you saying that there needs to be some improvement, again, across portfolios in that respect?

[182] **Ms Davies:** I think that there is room to strengthen the understanding of how poverty and inequality interact with one another.

[183] **Christine Chapman:** Alun, do you want to come in on this? Sorry, Gwyn, have you finished your questions?

[184] **Gwyn R. Price:** Yes, I have.

[185] **Christine Chapman:** Right. Alun is next.

[186] **Alun Davies:** I am interested in what you say about that, because the Government, of course, would argue that that sort of co-ordination does occur and that the equality impact assessments, for example, of the budgets would demonstrate that it is working well. So, I would be interested if you could outline to us where you have seen failures in cross-departmental working, and, also, how you believe that the Government should improve the way that it works. You know, it is the easiest thing in the world, with all due respect, to say, 'There should be more cross-departmental working, blah, blah, blah', but what does that actually mean, in your view, and how would you see that working?

[187] **Ms O'Byrne:** We welcome the Welsh Government's commitment to equality impact assessment; that is really important. One of the things, I think—. Sometimes there could be, perhaps, a little more attention paid to that. There needs to be a consistent approach. It is not always consistent, that is what I am trying to say. However, it is really positive that the Welsh Government is committed to it and we are very supportive of that. I think that one of the things that would maybe make that more effective—and what we would like to see—is a kind of analysis of the gender impacts. We have been looking at gender budgeting, so, basically, we would like to see the Welsh Government understanding the differences in how men and women are affected by the budget, especially at the moment with budget cuts. So, let us take, for example, cuts to the local government budget right now; that is going to affect women more than men. What we would like to see is for there then to be some sort of mitigating action, and for Government to be really clear, 'These are decisions we are making, this is why we are making them; we know women will be affected more and this is what we will do to support them.'

[188] **Christine Chapman:** Are there any other comments, or shall we move on? Miriam, did you want to make a point?

[189] **Ms Merkova:** I do not really have a comment on the cross-departmental work, but perhaps the gender proofing would be important, because it does feel that there is not a consideration of how women are impacted by different policies. As Christine was saying, women are affected more by the cuts, for example; they are more vulnerable. I am just thinking about housing, for example, and a lot of our clients come to us and tell us that they are sexually exploited because they have no housing, which is something that it is more likely for women to experience. We have women who might be involved in prostitution controlled by their partners, or so-called partners. Three quarters of our clients experience some form of violence against women. So, even though the Welsh Government has, for example, taken very strong action to tackle violence against women with the recent Gender-based Violence, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Bill, it is just about making sure that gender is considered in all policies, in terms of how women are affected.

[190] **Ms Davies:** I would just add to that, in terms of what the Welsh Government could do, that there are issues around data, obviously. If you do not know where you are starting from, it is very difficult to know where to go and when you will get there. So, there are problems around how poverty is measured at the moment; with its being measured at a household level, there is a chance that the true extent of women's poverty is actually hidden



from us at the moment. So, if we can look within households and get a clearer understanding of the levels of poverty among women and the reasons why they are in poverty, obviously, policy can be a lot more targeted and focused, and equality impact assessments will probably be a little bit more accurate and robust.

[191] **Christine Chapman:** Peter, I shall move on to you.

[192] **Peter Black:** Thank you, Chair. How can the Welsh Government create a labour market that helps to tackle poverty and what role does the private sector have in this?

[193] **Ms Davies:** I suppose the key thing is that we come from a place that understands the causes of women's poverty and, as I said earlier, that is very much tied to a woman's position in the home and in the labour market. We still see women taking on primary caring roles in the home, so, making sure that those caring responsibilities are not acting as a barrier to work is very important. I think that making sure that the right infrastructure is in place to enable people to work is key, and the top priorities really have to be affordable and accessible childcare and transport. In terms of the workplace, as Christine said, women are still dominating in low-paid part-time work, in part as a result of limitations on their employment opportunities because of caring responsibilities. I think that there is a very important role for employers to play there, in terms of looking at modern workplace practices and putting in place ways of working that better enable their employees to balance work and home life—the Welsh Government, obviously, can encourage employers to do that and encourage the sharing of best practice, I think that is a very important role. It is also really important to think about the issue of low pay. In-work poverty is on the rise; we know that over half of households in poverty have at least one adult in work. That is why we would say that exploring how to implement the living wage should be a really important part of any move to create a labour market that will better tackle poverty and better support women to move out of poverty.

[194] **Peter Black:** So, when you have a situation where most of the public sector does not have the living wage, and the Welsh Government does not even insist on the living wage with its own contractors, how do you get the private sector to adopt that?

[195] **Christine Chapman:** Would you like to come in, Natasha, or Christine?

[196] **Ms O'Byrne:** We would like to see Wales become a living wage nation. In terms of modern working women, we are very keen to see more flexibility in the workplace to help women to really reach their potential. Through our Agile Nation project, we are working with employers to try to help them to do that.

[197] **Ms Merkova:** I want to give an example that we have. Changing Lives' head office is in Newcastle and we have projects across the UK. We have a project in the north-east where an organisation's Government grant was matched by the charity. We have bought a number of empty homes, we have a social enterprise that trains our service users to be in the construction industry, and we have renovated a number of homes, which are then let to homeless people. So, it is about being creative and innovative; it does not always have to be about spending a lot of money. We have the clients there who need the work, we give that to them, and they create homes, and we are hitting two of things that are talked about in your action plan.

[198] **Jocelyn Davies:** On Peter's question, do you think that the Welsh Government should have, as part of its core contract, a requirement that the employer pays the living wage?

[199] **Ms Merkova:** I think so, yes. Ultimately, the cost of not having a living wage will go back to the Welsh Government. So, it is a false economy. I wanted to comment, in terms of

the labour market for women, and especially with regard to our clients, that there is a push for people to go back to employment, which is, of course, the right thing for the economy but also for individuals. Employment gives confidence to people, it gives them independence, but, again, a lot of our clients are not at that place—they are not ready for employment—and we feel that often they are left out and let down by statutory services because they are seen as not going to deliver the outcomes that people want to see and achieve. We work sometimes with women who suffer with such anxieties that they do not want to leave their own homes, never mind consider employment and volunteering. We are concerned about some of the practices introduced by the jobcentre and the Work Programme that do not give people a choice—that push people and sanction people when they are not able to meet targets that, really, they are not ready for.

11:00

[200] In a sense, we would like more of an understanding of people's circumstances and vulnerabilities. Ultimately, it is a false economy. A lot of our clients who are not appropriately supported will turn back to custody. That is a huge cost on budgets that could be avoided if we were actually able to provide people with the long-term support they need. Again, commissioning can be quite target-driven, rather than looking at individuals and the support they may need. As I said, a lot of our clients have been disadvantaged from a very young age. The cost of not supporting them to become independent is huge.

[201] **Ms O'Byrne:** I would just say that, in our manifesto, which many of you may have seen, we have called for Wales to become a living wage nation. I would also mention that all of the calls set out here would have a positive impact on poverty because they are aimed at creating a Wales where women achieve and prosper.

[202] **Alun Davies:** In terms of the equal procurement contract, would you support a living wage as part of that?

[203] **Ms O'Byrne:** Yes.

[204] **Christine Chapman:** Shall we move on? Peter, have you finished?

[205] **Peter Black:** I have, Chair.

[206] **Christine Chapman:** Rhodri, do you want to come in?

[207] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Rydych chi wedi cyflwyno dadansoddiad o'r sefyllfa sy'n wynebu menywod o fewn y farchnad lafur a'r problemau sy'n bodoli—a yw'r cyfieithu'n gweithio nawr?—a'r problemau sy'n wynebu menywod sydd ar gyflogau isel ac sy'n wynebu tlodi. Yr hyn nad wyf yn ei glywed yw beth yn union y mae Llywodraeth Cymru yn ei wneud i wella'r farchnad lafur i'r menywod hynny.

**Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** You have presented an analysis of the situation facing women in the labour market and the problems that exist—is the translation equipment working now?—and the problems facing women on low incomes and in poverty. What I am not hearing is what exactly the Welsh Government is doing to improve the labour market for those women.

[208] **Christine Chapman:** Christine, do you want to start on that one?

[209] **Ms O'Byrne:** Yes, okay. One of the key things the Welsh Government is doing to support women in the labour market is funding Chwarae Teg and supporting our Agile Nation project, which has a number of strands. So, first of all, we are helping women—. It is part funded through the Welsh Government and the European social fund, and is all about

supporting women in areas that are most deprived and helping them to progress their careers. We provide management training for them or team leader training, so that the women who work at the lowest levels can move on to the next level where, perhaps, they would not be able to fund that training for themselves. Through the project, we also work with employers around equality and diversity policies and flexible working. We support them to put them in place and to help them to understand the impact that that has on women and how they can fully utilise the female workforce.

[210] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** So, how many women does that directly affect?

[211] **Ms O'Byrne:** I do not know the figures off the top of my head, but I can send you information about that.

[212] **Christine Chapman:** You can send it to us.

[213] **Ms O'Byrne:** I do know that, through the project, the latest figures we had showed that the Agile Nations project had helped women and had put an extra over £400,000 into women's pockets in the most deprived areas of Wales.

[214] **Jocelyn Davies:** That was because they got a promotion.

[215] **Ms O'Byrne:** Yes.

[216] **Ms Davies:** In terms of Welsh Government approach, it was very welcome to see, as an inclusion in the tackling poverty action plan annual report this year, a page on in-work poverty and an awareness of the need to look at what can be done to support second earners into work, and to look at how part-time workers can be encouraged to increase their hours, which will have an obvious benefit for a lot of women who might be on low incomes and struggling with poverty.

[217] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** It is clear that there are a lot of good intentions there, but what I am asking is: what is actually happening?

[218] **Ms O'Byrne:** I think that we are having an impact. There is more we can do and we are working hard to try to do that. We have just started a network where we work with industry. We have already had some positive results with BT in particular. We gender-lensed a job advertisement for it, which was for apprenticeships. Before we looked at the ad, they were 4% female and, after we looked at the ad, they were 17% female. So, it is clear that we can make a difference, and we are doing everything that we can to reach as many employers as possible.

[219] **Christine Chapman:** Miriam, did you want to come in, or shall I move on?

[220] **Ms Merkova:** No.

[221] **Jocelyn Davies:** I guess what Miriam would like is for women not to go to prison to start with. When we have those powers, we will think about that.

[222] **Mike Hedges:** Christine agrees with you.

[223] **Alun Davies:** Could I just follow up on Rhodri's point? I do not think that anybody questions good intentions, ambitions and visions and the rest of it, but we have a place to question the implementation, delivery and achievements and what the outcomes are of all of these good intentions. Do you believe that the economic approach being pursued by the Welsh Government is sufficiently attuned, first of all, to gender and, secondly, to women in

poverty? Do you believe that that economic policy is part of delivering that at the moment, or is this one of the areas you described earlier where there is something of a disconnect?

[224] **Ms O’Byrne:** We know that the priority sectors on the whole are those in which women are under-represented or, if they are not, they are low paid—tourism, for example. As a result of that and the economic strategy, we have prioritised women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills, so we are trying to support the Welsh Government to help women to achieve in that way. That is where the economic priority is and that is where investment is going and we would like women to be able to contribute to that and benefit from that in a way that helps themselves, their families and the community. So, yes, we are trying to support women into those roles. I think that industry wants that as well. Certainly, that is what we hear from the partners we work with. We know that figures show that the areas where there are the most skills gaps are the areas where women are under-represented. So, I think that women can play a key role in trying to tackle those issues in the workforce.

[225] **Alun Davies:** We all agree with that, but the question was: is the Welsh Government achieving it?

[226] **Ms Davies:** I think, as with a lot of work across departments, there is an awareness of gender impacts and there is an awareness of the need to try to mitigate the impact of any policy on women, but, as ever, there is scope to strengthen it—of course there is. However, when we are talking about women, particularly women in poverty, it is a wide-reaching issue and we need to be looking at long-term goals as well, not just in the immediacy. So, we are still at the beginning of work to increase the representation of women in STEM sectors but, in the long term, we will see a massive impact as a result of those efforts. So, yes, I would say that there is room to strengthen them.

[227] **Ms O’Byrne:** I would like to add to that. Natasha mentioned data earlier, and it is very difficult—there is a lack of workforce data that is disaggregated by gender. I could take apprenticeships as an example. To really tackle this and to know whether we are making an impact on gender equality in apprenticeships, we need to know which apprenticeships they are going into. So, we need to have that data by occupation and by sector so that we have a benchmark and we can see where we need to focus our efforts and that we are making some progress.

[228] **Christine Chapman:** Obviously, I come from a careers background, but, for many years, the destination statistics were published every year with precisely that data. I am not sure whether that is happening now, but does it help if you have this data?

[229] **Ms O’Byrne:** Yes. I worked for Careers Wales as well; I was the labour market researcher for Careers Wales west and I drafted the 2008 destinations report on where people go at 16 years old. It looks at those who go into work-based learning at 16, and I think that we need to have more robust gender data around that.

[230] **Christine Chapman:** Alun, did you want to come back on that?

[231] **Alun Davies:** I just wonder whether there are any numbers at all that you could give us in terms of outcomes, because what you are describing is not bad at all—they are very good things—but what I am concerned about is, in my constituency of Blaenau Gwent, the impact on women living in poverty in that place, or in those places elsewhere. I am concerned about outcomes. What are the changes that are taking place as a consequence of policy? I know what the policy is and we are content with what you have said about the policy in terms of the narrative—that is all fine—but what we are looking at is the outcomes. I think that that is where I am still missing.

[232] **Ms O’Byrne:** Merthyr is within our south-east region of the Agile Nation project. I do not have the figures for the project, but I can get them for you.

[233] **Christine Chapman:** You can do that. Jocelyn is next, and then we need to move on.

[234] **Jocelyn Davies:** On the back of Alun’s question about what the Government is doing, you mentioned the priority sectors. I think that tourism was one of those that you said was a priority sector, but women are hugely under-represented there. Does the Government attach any equality conditions to the support that it gives to the tourism industry? Obviously, if it is one of its sectors, there will be money, support and other help. Does the Government say, ‘Well, you can only have this support if there is an equality kind of thing’?

[235] **Ms O’Byrne:** We would really like that to happen.

[236] **Jocelyn Davies:** It does not happen.

[237] **Ms O’Byrne:** Not as far as I am aware. I do know that the Welsh Government is looking at—it has an event coming up—women within the anchor companies and the regionally important companies. I know that it is starting to think about that and then starting to help these companies to think about what more they could do and the support that they are looking for.

[238] **Jocelyn Davies:** May I just ask Miriam a question? The women that you help lose their children because they go into prison; they lose their homes because they go into prison. So, when they come out and you are trying to help them, they do not have a home. Is the fact that their children are not with them taken into consideration in the offer of a home, or do they have to get a home and then fight for the children?

[239] **Ms Merkova:** It depends. Some of our clients have lost their children prior to going into prison, because they have gone into care. Sometimes, if their children have been looked after by a family member, that is taken into consideration in seeking a new home for them. Sometimes, they have to find the house and then fight to get the children back.

[240] **Jocelyn Davies:** When men go into prison they do not lose their homes, because the woman is usually left there with the children. So, there is quite a startling statistic on that.

[241] **Ms Merkova:** That is right.

[242] **Jocelyn Davies:** I have gone on a diversion now.

[243] **Ms Merkova:** A lot of the aspirational actions to tackle poverty are very financial—it is about looking at either how we can get people into the labour market or how we can get more money into their pockets. For me, women are disadvantaged in many other ways. So, the poverty is not just financial; it is about lack of aspirations, and that could be starting—as Christine said about stereotyping—at a young age, in that girls might not have the same aspirations as young boys. It might be the fact that they are more likely to experience abuse and violence. Even when we talk about our clients, because there is no female prison in Wales, they are further away from their homes than men. They are more likely to be primary carers. So, it is more likely, as you have said, that if a woman goes into prison the partner will not continue to look after the child. It is more likely if it is a man than the other way around. The emotional impact of separation on women is huge. As I said, sometimes women will come out and feel very insecure in terms of securing housing for them. With the new housing Bill, women will lose the priority for housing. So, it is not just about finances; it is about making people feel secure and safe in the communities that they live in. I think that that should be taken into consideration: that it is not just about putting more money into people’s

pockets. It is about making them feel that they can achieve things.

[244] **Christine Chapman:** We have about a quarter of an hour left, but I want to make sure that Members who have not come in get their questions in first. I have Mike, Mark and then Janet. Mike can start.

11:15

[245] **Mike Hedges:** I think that the living wage is incredibly important, but it will only work if people are guaranteed hours as well, alongside it. With zero-hours contracts or five or six-hour contracts, the living wage will not deal with poverty. People need reasonable numbers of hours to go with the living wage. I was very impressed with Miriam's paper, if only because it said things like, 'I recognise'. You mentioned financial exploitation, and you also talked about the debt cycle. Could I ask you two questions on financial exploitation? From my experience, a lot of financial exploitation takes place in families, often with grandchildren, some of whom are substance misusers and who exploit their grandparents. As you described here, they leave them in complete destitution in order to keep them going. The other one is the cycle of debt when people do get sanctioned on benefits or get their benefits late—many of them do not have family who are able to financially support them—therefore, the only thing they can do is get into debt, and that only makes matters worse.

[246] **Ms Merkova:** That is right.

[247] **Mike Hedges:** Do you know of any sources from which people can get loans to tide them over but without being charged the sorts of rates that people are paying in the private sector in order to get them through this.

[248] **Ms Merkova:** I wish I did.

[249] **Mike Hedges:** Otherwise, people will just end up in a cycle of debt, and some of your clients end up re-criminalising themselves as the only way of getting out of that debt? Do you recognise those things?

[250] **Ms Merkova:** Yes, absolutely. We do not have so much experience with grandparents, but we do with parents who are being exploited by their children. As you said, we have found people in complete destitution. We had one client who, when a support worker visited her, said that she only had the butter in her fridge and that was it.

[251] In terms of loan companies, we have had clients who have taken pay-day loans, even though they are not in employment—but we know how those companies operate. We welcome the Welsh Government's discretionary payments with the removal of the crisis loan, but, again, there are a number of assumptions, for example that people have to apply via telephone. So, as a charity, we had huge telephone bills for making applications. There is now talk about things being done electronically, but, again, a lot of people are digitally excluded, so they are not going to be able to do that. Telephones have been removed from where people used to be able to go to use them in the job centre. So, those telephones have been removed. It is little things like that that could help people to address issues when they are in an emergency. We also obviously apply for grants from charitable trusts where possible. So, for example where people's properties have been vandalised when they have been in custody, we have been able to secure money for them. So, you are right.

[252] With housing, but not so much with finances, we have had women who have returned into custody because they had nowhere else to go. We understand that people need to meet eligibility criteria, and I am not making excuses for our clients—some of our clients have exhibited behaviour that, perhaps, have made them lose their properties, because of rent

arrears or anti-social behaviour—but, ultimately, custody is more expensive for Government budgets and also in terms of the emotional cost for the client.

[253] **Mike Hedges:** Also, if somebody was getting £47 to last them for 20 days, they would certainly be moving into a situation where either crime or borrowing was the only way in which they could survive.

[254] **Ms Merkova:** Absolutely. Women in particular are more likely to return to relationships that might be abusive, because they feel that they are safer there than on the street.

[255] **Christine Chapman:** Mark, did you have a question?

[256] **Mark Isherwood:** This reinforces the importance of both UK and Welsh Government programmes to expand and deliver sustainable credit unions, because until they get that critical mass of investors, the middle-income or higher-income investors cannot start filling the gap. Community Housing Cymru brought in Moneyline Cymru to help fill that gap. It has shops in Wrexham as well as south Wales. So, there is some work going on and I wanted to put that on the record.

[257] More broadly, you have already talked about the need for Welsh Government policies to align to tackle poverty, and particularly gender-based poverty—poverty among women. However, how well do you feel that the Welsh Government's budget poverty-proofs situations affecting women—situations that put or keep women in poverty? I am thinking, for example, of the cuts to the post-16 education and Careers Wales budgets.

[258] **Christine Chapman:** Shall I start with Christine on that one?

[259] **Ms O'Byrne:** What we are calling for is a process of gender budgeting, so we would like, when budgets are being considered, for the impacts of spending decisions on men and women to have been considered and for some mitigating action to have been taken where women, in particular, are disadvantaged. We have concerns over cuts to careers advice. We strongly believe that girls, in particular, need to have really robust careers advice and be encouraged to consider all of their options.

[260] **Christine Chapman:** Natasha, do you want to add anything?

[261] **Ms Davies:** I suppose that the only thing that I would add to that is that I think that a lot of good work goes on in terms of trying to assess the impacts of Welsh Government budgets. I know that there has been a move to the strategic integrated impact assessment this year, and I think that it is useful to try to get a more comprehensive view of how those spending decisions are going to affect different protected groups, but also how that interacts with other frameworks like the tackling poverty action plan and child poverty strategy. I think that it is important that, as we move into a more integrated assessment, we still keep a certain level of detail there around the impact on protected characteristics and the impact on women, and also do not lose sight of the big picture. If a policy is not gender specific, it does not mean that it is not necessarily going to have a gender impact. So, it is just about making sure that, when the impact of a budget is being assessed, we are keeping a view of the big picture.

[262] **Christine Chapman:** Miriam, did you have any comments on that?

[263] **Ms Merkova:** No.

[264] **Christine Chapman:** Are there any further questions from Members? No. I thank our panel this morning for attending and providing evidence for our inquiry. We will send

you a transcript of the meeting, so that you can check it for factual accuracy. Thank you very much.

11:24

**Ymchwiliad i Ddodi yng Nghymru—Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 6: The Trussell Trust  
Inquiry into Poverty in Wales—Evidence Session 6: The Trussell Trust**

[265] **Christine Chapman:** This is the sixth evidence session on strand 1 of our inquiry into poverty in Wales. May I give a warm welcome to our panel? We have Tony Graham, foodbank network manager for Wales, and Adrian Curtis, UK director. Welcome to you both. Members will have read the evidence that you have sent, so we will go straight into questions.

[266] I just want to start off. I know that, in your evidence, you say that food poverty was omitted from the 2013 tackling poverty action plan. Do you think that the strategic direction of the plan is effective or does the Welsh Government need to refocus this to recognise issues such as food poverty?

[267] **Mr Graham:** I think that, like the rest of the sector, we obviously welcomed the action plan. We definitely welcomed the appointment of a Minister to deal with these issues. There was a little bit of surprise because at that time, in 2012, the issues around food poverty and the numbers that were being reported were really starting to shoot up. So, for us, it came as something of a surprise to see no mention of food poverty in the original report. Then, when the refresh came out a little bit later, again, even though we had made representations about the numbers and the issues, we were once again quite surprised, and a number of people in the sector contacted us and said, ‘Did you make any representations? Did you talk to anyone?’, and we had done. The encouraging thing for us, I suppose, is that, in the revised child poverty strategy, there is a very distinct recognition of the issue now. So, as we begin to see that coming up, we are beginning to feel like the issue is now being heard—

[268] **Christine Chapman:** But only in the child poverty aspect of it—

[269] **Mr Graham:** That is absolutely right. So, if we are going forward with any revised versions of the action plan, it seems to us an inevitable consequence of the revision of the child poverty strategy that it should align and this whole issue of food poverty should be addressed.

[270] **Christine Chapman:** Shall I move on? Adrian, do you want to add anything?

[271] **Mr Curtis:** No. I mean, thank you very much for inviting us here today is what I would like to say. Also, I would just support Tony in what he has just said. We are delighted to see that written into the new child poverty strategy, and we would just like to have more of a constructive dialogue, I think, with the Welsh Government.

[272] **Christine Chapman:** Obviously, the purpose of our inquiry today is to take on board your evidence so that we can possibly give strong messages to Welsh Government.

[273] **Mr Curtis:** Absolutely.

[274] **Christine Chapman:** So, obviously, use the opportunity. Jocelyn, do you want to come in?

[275] **Jocelyn Davies:** Yes, thank you. I just wondered about the approach of Welsh Government and local authorities and whether you think the approach to tackling poverty is consistent and coherent between the two.



[276] **Mr Curtis:** Working with local authorities in Wales, I have seen clear evidence of local authority strategies mirroring those of the Welsh Government, which is good to see, notwithstanding what Tony just said about food poverty as a specific issue not being mentioned in the tackling poverty strategy. However, what we would like to do is enhance our relationship with both local authorities and the Welsh Government so that we can better explain and talk about the issues that many of our clients are facing. What we have seen in Wales over the last few years is a huge rise in the numbers of people, as you will all be familiar with, being referred to food banks. These are families and individuals who have no access to food to be able to feed their families for a short period of time. It takes good co-operation between local authorities and the Welsh Government to begin to mitigate some of the reasons why people are coming to food banks. So, we would like to build up more of a relationship with both local authorities and the Welsh Government. I think that Tony could give us some examples of where that is working well in Wales.

[277] **Mr Graham:** Yes. I have the privilege of travelling all over Wales, meeting lots of different people who are on the front line trying to deal with this. At local authority level, the interaction with charities like ours is very sporadic. Obviously, there are unique problems and challenges with budgets and all of those issues. However, there are some authorities that are doing extremely well. I actually live in Caerphilly, and that is not the reason that I am bigging it up, but Caerphilly County Borough Council, every couple of months, brings together local supermarkets, all of our food banks, of which we have three in the authority area, the independent non-Trussell Trust food bank that is also in the unitary authority, and all of the financial inclusion agencies. It gets us all round a table like this and we have an incredibly constructive dialogue. So, that is probably the best example. It has some challenges as we go forward because its funding for those meetings has been cut, so it is trying to work out how we can continue that. In other authorities, such as Rhondda Cynon Taf and Swansea, there is sporadic interaction, but certainly not as much as we would like. In Denbighshire—

11:30

[278] **Jocelyn Davies:** So, at that meeting—

[279] **Mr Graham:** Yes, the Caerphilly meeting.

[280] **Jocelyn Davies:** You say that is very constructive—the Caerphilly meeting—and a good example—

[281] **Mr Graham:** It is the best example.

[282] **Jocelyn Davies:** What comes out of that? What do you get and what do they get that makes it worth while you turning up next time for that?

[283] **Mr Graham:** First of all, there is interaction between private business, the supermarkets, and other businesses that are interested in this area. That is the first thing. We, as a charity in the third sector, and the local authority are not, between us, going to be able to address the scale of this problem. We need the supermarkets. We have a wonderful relationship with a lot of supermarkets. What they are able to do is enable us; they are the conduit, if you like, for the relationship. They get us all in the same room, because otherwise we would not be there. So, there is that.

[284] There is interaction with other services and independent food banks. The interaction there is invaluable, because they are outside our network, but we are able to have a dialogue with them as well about what they are doing and how we can help each other. So, those are some of the examples.

[285] There are also financial inclusion people and debt advisers, who are able to have conversations with us. We are already talking about how we can develop what we are calling 'More Than Food', which is food bank mark 2, if you like. How do we get behind some of the issues that our clients are finding? It is all very well an individual coming in with an issue, but how do we help them to address—

[286] **Jocelyn Davies:** Because they could be facing rent arrears, or other things.

[287] **Mr Graham:** Yes, exactly right. We look at what are the issues that underlie their having to come into the food bank. So, being around the table with agencies like that enables us to open and begin this dialogue. We just wish that more local authorities were able to do that.

[288] **Jocelyn Davies:** With some, you do not have any contact at all.

[289] **Mr Graham:** No.

[290] **Jocelyn Davies:** Okay, thank you.

[291] **Christine Chapman:** Gwyn wants to come in; I know that you have other questions as well.

[292] **Gwyn R. Price:** I agree that Caerphilly council is one of the better examples. [*Laughter.*] Does the private sector have a role to play in tackling poverty?

[293] **Mr Graham:** Well, I think that I have just referenced a very evident example of that. One of the ways in which we are seeking to make food banks sustainable, going forward, is by developing those relationships. We have to be very careful. Why would a supermarket want to associate with us? It gets a certain kudos from that, and while this is not the place for that conversation, on the flip side, it is a very welcome relationship as well, because it enables members of the public to donate food to food banks directly, and they feel like they are assisting people in their community—people who are desperately in need.

[294] We have wonderful relationships with a lot of businesses. I do not know whether I am allowed to name names, but BT is a wonderful partner for us, particularly in south Wales, and particularly in Cardiff and Swansea. It gives its employees lots of days off to come to volunteer. They come in to stack shelves and mark tins, doing all of the stuff that goes on in the background. So, there is definitely room for improvement. There is good synergy there.

[295] **Christine Chapman:** Peter, do you want to come in?

[296] **Peter Black:** Yes. We have concentrated a lot in terms of what the Welsh Government can do to try to tackle poverty, but of course there is a process going on in terms of looking at the powers of the Assembly through Silk. Is there anything in particular that you feel the Welsh Government should be looking to gain in terms of extra powers that would aid this particular crusade?

[297] **Mr Curtis:** I think that, when you look at the underlying reasons why people come to our food banks—and about 79,000 people were referred to Trussell Trust food banks in Wales last year, which was around 122% more than the previous year—you see that around half of them were referred because the welfare system had, in some way, let them down—either there was a delay in their claim being processed or a sudden change to the level of payments they were receiving. Clearly, for those people, politicians play an important role in developing policy that will better address those issues and prevent those people from coming

to our food banks in the first place.

[298] Those powers currently fall outside the remit of the Welsh Government. Where some areas of welfare provision have been devolved, for example, in Scotland, the cap that was placed on discretionary housing payments was devolved, the Scottish Parliament could set its own cap and that has greatly helped our clients, because the Scottish Government was able to give more money to mitigate the effects of the implementation of welfare reforms on people in Scotland. So, we would certainly support the devolution of similar powers where it will help our clients and mitigate some of the effects of welfare reform, notwithstanding the differences in the Barnett formula and the resources that are available in Wales. However, we would certainly welcome more devolved powers that will help to address the local issues that drive people to come to food banks.

[299] **Peter Black:** Are the resources not the key here? Scotland gets £1 billion more than Wales.

[300] **Mr Curtis:** Yes, absolutely.

[301] **Peter Black:** If those powers were devolved to Wales, is there anything to indicate that we would have more resources available than the UK Government in terms of trying to mitigate those impacts?

[302] **Mr Curtis:** We have outlined our more holistic thoughts on the devolution of the welfare system to the commission in Scotland, and we would be happy to forward our full thoughts on that to you. That should explain more about that. We understand the limitations around resources, but what we would like to say is that the problems in Wales are very different to the problems in areas of England. We are faced with very big challenges, particularly around welfare dependency in Wales. That poses unique challenges for Wales. I believe that that needs some unique solutions, so we would certainly support the devolution of any policies that will help us to tackle those issues in Wales.

[303] **Peter Black:** In tackling welfare dependency, would you not say that more economic development powers might be more beneficial to Wales?

[304] **Mr Curtis:** Yes. We are encouraged to see strategies that tackle upskilling the workforce to encourage more economic prosperity in areas such as the Valleys and things like this, but what we are seeing across our food banks is more people being referred to us because they have problems being on a low income as well. So, just moving people into employment—. Unfortunately, at the moment a lot of people are being moved to very low-paid employment, and when you look at the reasons why people enter into a sudden short-term crisis, which is what food banks deal with and not necessarily long-term poverty issues, that does not necessarily prevent people from needing to use food banks.

[305] **Christine Chapman:** I have a number of Members who want to ask a supplementary on this issue: Alun, Jocelyn and then Mark. Alun is first.

[306] **Mr Curtis:** Hello, Alun.

[307] **Alun Davies:** The 79,000 figure is a very striking figure. Is welfare reform the main driver of the increases in those numbers?

[308] **Mr Curtis:** I think it is the implementation of welfare reform policy that is causing more people to turn to food banks. In fact, a report called 'Emergency Use Only: Understanding and reducing the use of food banks in the UK' published today by Oxfam, the Church of England, the Child Poverty Action Group and the Trussell Trust includes an in-

depth study of seven of our food banks across the UK, and in-depth interviews with around 40 of our clients. The report also collects more holistic data on about 900 users of food banks. It shows that for around two thirds of food bank users that were surveyed, issues around welfare payments and social security were the cause of them coming to food banks. However, one thing was also clear, as people have very complicated lives, that there are also lots underlying reasons why people need food banks. People use food banks as a last resort when friends and family are unable to help them anymore and the welfare system has been slow to respond. As a very last resort, they are turning up at our food banks often in tears with nowhere else to turn. It is fantastic to see churches and communities in Wales rallying around and pulling together to do something constructive to help feed their hungry neighbour, but it genuinely saddens us, Alun, to see 79,000 people in Wales having to turn to emergency food aid because there is no other help available to them.

[309] **Alun Davies:** It is an extraordinarily striking figure, and, of course, those issues, as we have discussed, are not devolved—they are matters for the United Kingdom Government. Do you see the tackling poverty action plan and the policies of the Government here in Wales having a very real impact on those people? Do you see the outcomes that Ministers here will be talking about in terms of tackling that poverty that we are both very familiar with?

[310] **Mr Curtis:** Throughout the last year, we have continued to see a rise in the numbers of people coming to food banks. It is difficult to comment on specific areas of policy necessarily, but what we are seeing across our food banks is more people entering into a short-term crisis. We need to draw a distinction between long-term poverty issues and the short-term crisis that many of our clients face. Issues around long-term poverty are entrenched in many communities in Wales and require very challenging solutions to be able to overcome some of the hurdles and barriers that people face to a more prosperous life. However, in terms of our food bank use, many people, even people in work, can find themselves suddenly and unexpectedly in a crisis. As we have seen rising fuel prices and food prices and salaries generally stagnating or falling, that squeeze on disposable income is making it more difficult for more people in Wales. We would call for politicians in the Welsh Assembly, of all parties, to be able to talk to us so that we can share the stories of some of these people living in extreme poverty in Wales and who are experiencing a sudden, unexpected crisis, so that policy makers can understand better what has led those people to that crisis and so that policies can be developed to mitigate some of those reasons and make it less likely that people come to food banks. I do not know whether you have anything to add to that, Tony?

[311] **Mr Graham:** The only observation would be that, of course, we welcome all of the moves to improve access to advice services, digital inclusion and all of those issues that are included in the latest action plan. One thing that is a question for us is that the whole debate around food poverty is a very heated debate. Often, the rhetoric and the passion do not allow a meaningful—. Mark and I met and talked about this, that one of the things that we would like to see is a just much calmer debate on this whole issue. I have to say that, here in Wales, we do have a calmer debate than happens in London, and that is encouraging, but it is still a fairly minimal debate on this issue. So, having met with Welsh Government officials in the tackling poverty division, they have informed us that they plan to hold some sort of seminar or conference in March next year. We would really urge this committee to make sure that that happens. They want to bring together all of the people that I was talking about earlier; they want to bring all of those people together to make sure that there is a much calmer, informed debate, so that we can perhaps look at some of the issues that the tackling poverty action plan could include to address these specific issues.

[312] **Christine Chapman:** Jocelyn is next.

[313] **Jocelyn Davies:** You mentioned Scotland and the lifting of the cap. You have some

evidence there that your clients were choosing between paying the rent and eating, I suppose. Would you have any figures that would allow us to estimate what proportion of people were helped in Scotland by the lifting of that cap?

[314] **Mr Curtis:** We would not have any direct numbers around that, but it is clear, anecdotally, from our food banks in Scotland, that the reality for many people referred to food banks is that the reason they were referred, by a variety of voucher-holding partners who refer those in crisis to us, is because they have had to juggle between paying bills and putting food on the table. That would include rental payments. So, clearly, where the Scottish Parliament was able to give more resources, or devote more of its resources, to be able to help mitigate the effects of the bedroom tax on some families in Scotland, that would naturally lead to fewer people needing to use food banks. So, we would welcome such a move.

[315] **Christine Chapman:** I have Mark next.

[316] **Mark Isherwood:** Through Community Housing Cymru, I recently facilitated and attended a meeting with social housing landlords in Shotton, where universal credit is being rolled out and piloted in Wales. Through cross-party groups that I chair, there is communication directly with people like Capita, which is delivering personal independent payments. Atos has just been replaced by a new provider, and the new provider says that it will take 18 months to keep up with the backlog. So, to what extent are you as an organisation communicating directly with those organisations, and to what extent do you feel that Welsh Government should be doing so to overcome the political barriers and ensure that systems work as smoothly as they possibly can?

[317] **Mr Curtis:** Nationally, we do not have a relationship with those organisations. We do, however, work very, very hard to talk to policy makers both in Westminster and in the Welsh Government, the Scottish Parliament and other devolved parliaments about the issues that our clients are experiencing. That includes a significant proportion—. As I said, around half of our clients in Wales experience problems with the welfare system. That is clearly creating a hardship for many. I think that what grieves us most is that, for those people, we see those as principally preventable reasons. If there was a more efficient welfare system, and if changes were made to improve the speed of decision making on people's welfare payments, then these people would not need to use food banks. The welfare system should be there to support those people in need and food banks should not be seen as a replacement to that in any way. So, we will continue to tell the clients' stories and talk to policymakers about the stories and we would welcome a similar dialogue in Wales. However, we do not necessarily have a relationship with those organisations such as Atos or Capita.

11:45

[318] **Christine Chapman:** Rhodri, did you want to come in?

[319] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Yn eich papur, rydych yn cyfeirio at y gwaith ymchwil yr ydych wedi'i wneud, a'r arolygon gyda Netmums i'r trawstoriad o'r boblogaeth sy'n defnyddio banciau bwyd, ond rydych yn cyfeirio'n benodol at y problemau sy'n wynebu pobl yng nghefn gwlad a'i fod yn anoddach o ran cael mynediad at fanciau bwyd ac yn y blaen. A ydych yn gwneud unrhyw beth i fynd i'r afael â'r problemau hynny a cheisio sicrhau bod y bobl sydd ar y lefel hwnnw o dlodi yng

**Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** In your paper, you refer to the research that you have carried out, and the surveys with Netmums on the cross-section of individuals using food banks, but you refer specifically to the problems facing people in rural areas and that it is more difficult to access food banks and so on. Are you doing anything to address those problems and to try to ensure that people who are in that level of poverty in rural areas can access this support?

nghefn gwlad yn gallu cael mynediad at y cymorth hwn?

[320] **Mr Curtis:** Rydym yn helpu ein banciau bwyd i helpu pobl yng nghefn gwlad trwy roi'r pcedi bwyd i mewn i *vehicle* a gyrru i dai pobl i'w helpu, ond efallai gall Tony ddweud mwy am sut yr ydym yn gweithio yng nghefn gwlad Cymru. Mae gennym fanciau bwyd yng nghefn gwlad ac yn y dinasoedd hefyd, ond gall Tony siarad amdanynt.

**Mr Curtis:** We help our food banks to help people in rural areas by putting the food packages in a vehicle and driving to people's homes to help them, but perhaps Tony can say a little bit more about how we work in rural Wales. We have food banks in rural areas and also in urban areas, but Tony can talk about those.

[321] **Mr Graham:** We have a food bank in Powys, in Llandrindod Wells and Welshpool. This is a unique challenge for it. We have a county-wide foodbank in Flintshire and, again, it has unique challenges in getting out to various communities. At the beginning of the year, we opened a county-wide food bank in Pembrokeshire. So, we have an increasing amount of experience with more rural areas. One of the things that we are seeking to develop is a food bank on the move: having in each of these rural communities what we are calling 'community champions', that is, individuals in the post office or the pub or whatever—this is particularly in Flintshire—who are able to highlight people who have a challenge, need or an emergency and they are the ones who are contacting and referring in. We are still in the early stages of that and we are a little cautious about it because one of the reasons why the Trussell Trust foodbanks have a level of credibility is because of the referral system, because we only take referrals from frontline care agencies and people who are trained in needs assessment. So, we are still a little cautious about how we develop that. However, we are growing in our experience and we are seeking to make sure that the food banks are more mobile in rural areas. Flintshire had some funding for a van to be able to take food out to the more rural communities rather than expecting those people to come in. So, we are seeking to address those issues, but we are still in the early stages of trying to understand what is the best thing that we could do.

[322] **Mr Curtis:** I think that the other thing to mention is that we realise that poverty in rural communities is very real and is, in some ways, different from the poverty that you see in urban areas, but we try to address that through our operating models. So, in many of our food banks that operate in more urban areas, we have seen a significant growth in the number of food bank centres that they have developed. So, although we have around 35 food banks in Wales, we have a great deal more of our food bank centres, which are the places that clients come to with their emergency food vouchers and we offer a listening ear and signposting to a range of local support services. In rural communities, we are opening more of those closer to where people live so that food banks are more accessible to people living in rural communities.

[323] **Mr Graham:** Just to add one final point, I think that that is a really important point, because when we talk about 35 food banks, you might think, 'Oh, 35; that is not that many', but, actually, we have approaching 90 different distribution centres, which are in just about every significant population centre, and what is happening now is that that is where the real growth is: it is not in the number of food bank hubs or centres, but in those distribution centres. So, we would expect the number of those to be over 100 by the end of this year, because they are opening every week now.

[324] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Rydych yn awgrymu hefyd ei fod yn anoddach i ddadansoddi tloidi yng nghefn gwlad nag yw mewn ardaloedd trefol. A oes unrhyw

**Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** You also suggest that it is more difficult to analyse poverty in rural areas than it is in urban areas. Is there any suggestion that people in rural areas are less

awgrym fod pobl yng nghefn gwlad yn llai parod i wneud defnydd o gymorth fel banciau bwyd a'u bod yn llai parod i gydnabod eu tloidi nhw eu hunain?

willing to make use of support such as food banks and are less ready to acknowledge their poverty?

[325] **Mr Curtis:** Nac oes. Nid wyf yn credu mai'r *case* yw nad yw pobl yng nghefn gwlad yn cael yr help sydd ar gael trwy fanciau bwyd. Mae pobl weithiau'n methu mynd at fanc bwyd, gan eu bod yn byw *further away* o fanc bwyd nag yw pobl yng Nghaerdydd neu yn un o ddinasoedd Cymru, ond mae'r problemau yn *different* yng nghefn gwlad. Nid yw pobl yn cael yr *access* i'r *services* maen nhw'n ei gael mewn ardaloedd lle mae mwy o *services* o'u cwmpas.

**Mr Curtis:** No, I do not think that it is the case that people in rural areas do not access the help available through food banks. People sometimes cannot get to a food bank, because they live further away from a food bank than they would if they were in Cardiff or any other city in Wales, but the problems are different in rural areas. People do not have the access to services that they have in areas where there are more services available around them.

[326] Rydym hefyd wedi gweld bod prisiau *transport* yng nghefn gwlad yn fwy ac mae'n anoddach i bobl teithio i asiantaethau lle y gallent gael yr help. Dyna le, weithiau, mae banciau bwyd yn gwneud *rural distribution service*, lle rydym yn gallu rhoi bwyd i mewn i fan ac yn ei yrru at y bobl a'i helpu felly, ond nid yw hynny'n digwydd llawer iawn yng Nghymru. Mae ychydig o'n banciau bwyd yn gwneud hynny, ond *access* i'r *services* ac i'r help yw'r broblem yng nghefn gwlad.

We have also seen that transport prices in rural areas are higher and it is more difficult for people to travel to agencies where they can get that support. That is where, sometimes, food banks offer rural distribution service, where we can put food in a van and drive it to the people and help them in that way, but that does not happen very much in Wales. A few of our food banks do that, but access to the services and to the support is the problem in rural areas.

[327] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Diolch yn fawr.

**Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** Thank you.

[328] **Christine Chapman:** We have just less than 10 minutes now and I know that some Members have not had the opportunity yet to ask questions, so I want to check who wants to come in. I know that Mike does and Janet. Is there anybody else? Obviously, we will pick up as we go along. Mike is first.

[329] **Mike Hedges:** If we were having this conversation 10 years ago, we would be talking about employment being the route out of poverty. Looking at paragraph 21 and the table underneath it in the paper that you produced, you show that roughly 20% come to you from low-income households and pushing 10% come from to you because of debt. I want to ask you two questions. It is not only about zero-hours contracts, is it? It is about a low number of guaranteed hours, like five or six a week: hours can then be increased or decreased, which means that people do not have any idea at the end of each week how much money they will earn. Also, you say 'debt', is that debt from what we would describe as high-cost, short-term loans?

[330] **Mr Graham:** I think that in-work poverty is definitely becoming much more of an issue. You have had evidence from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Bevan Foundation that highlighted this challenge. There is no doubt that more and more of our users are people who have that insecurity of employment—zero-hours contracts, minimum wage and all of those examples. We have given an example of two employees on the minimum wage who suffered a crisis. We have another example of a gentleman near Llanelli who is working and earning the minimum wage. He has a baby who was born prematurely and has to

go to Swansea hospital, and, as a consequence of the cost of the additional petrol to go to visit their premature baby, they have to make choices as to whether they are going to have food on the table or not. So, these low-income levels, when additional crises arise, cause a massive problem. So, when we talk about—. In the report, we have given the survey that we did with Netmums. We surveyed over 2,000 families, back in March, in which at least one person was in work. One in five of those families have to miss meals on a regular basis. You have really tough choices being made, even when people are in work. So, it is an issue. There is a whole political debate, and I know that we have to seriously look at the type of work that people are being offered at the moment. That is for bigger brains and more important people than me, but I think we have the evidence that this is still causing significant problems for those who are on the edge; those who are living on the cusp of a problem.

[331] **Mr Curtis:** I would agree. We are calling for a move towards a living wage and an increase in the minimum wage. These things will certainly help people in Wales to overcome some of those barriers. They are not the answer to all of the problems, but they will certainly help.

[332] We find issues around zero-hour contract working and irregular forms of employment to be a particular problem because people lack that stability of employment that family budgets need in order to be able to budget on a week-by-week basis. In terms of how foodbanks are planning to help that process, we are planning to work with other organisations in Wales to be able to bring some of the advice that is offered in communities through debt advisers, citizens advice bureaux and other organisations in-house into our food bank centres. So, we are not talking about reinventing the wheel and replicating those services; we are talking about bringing existing services and communities into the food bank centres so that, rather than just having to signpost someone with a debt issue or someone who has experienced a particular crisis to another agency and for them to have the barrier of having to go and ask for help a second time, we find that, by having that support within our 100 food bank centres in Wales, people are more likely to take up that help, and we can begin the process of empowering them to overcome some of those issues that have led them to the crisis that they are in. That is the More Than Food project that we will be developing throughout Wales. We are working with Martin Lewis, the money-saving expert, to place debt advisers in Cardiff food bank as one of our six trials across the UK. We will learn best practice from that in 2015 and then develop that more as we progress through the year.

[333] We also want to help run some educational courses that help to train our clients with budgeting skills, financial awareness, how to cook healthily and shop on a tight budget. We will continue to work with our partners in Wales to roll out some of these services to communities. We hope that that will build resilience but, at the end of the day, you can build lots of resilience in people's livelihoods, but if they just simply do not have access to any money for a short period of time, they have no money to budget with. That is an incredible challenge facing, unfortunately, so many people in Wales.

[334] **Christine Chapman:** Thank you. Did you have a question, Janet?

[335] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Yes, I will go with this one, actually. Could the Welsh Government collect more data to understand and address how people experience poverty, for example by taking into account debt, fuel and food costs rather than just measuring the household income? Before you answer that one, just touching on what was said earlier, Bethan Jenkins of Plaid Cymru, of course, is bringing forward the Bill on financial inclusion. Sometimes, I am aware within my own constituency of people who actually do receive adequate income but they are not well informed on how to budget, how to save and what have you. Do you think that Bills coming forward, such as that one, are instrumental in helping us to help people in that regard?



[336] **Mr Curtis:** Absolutely. Some people will find it a challenge to budget. We are trialling a course called Eat Well, Spend Less that helps people run their household budgets and cook healthily. We are finding that, for some of our clients who participate in that course, it is the first time that they have ever cooked for themselves. This boosts their confidence and self-esteem and helps them to become far more resilient to future crises that may occur. I do not think that it is the answer to everything, but it will certainly help a number of people to make better and more informed choices that will, hopefully, make them more resilient and less likely to face a crisis in the future. We are, kind of, an odd charity, where we are trying to do ourselves out of a job, really. In an ideal world it would be fantastic to see that there would be no need for a food bank. Unfortunately, being a realist, I believe that there is always going to be a need for some form of emergency food provision because people just simply fall through the safety net and people's lives are very complicated, and there are lots of issues to address. Perhaps Tony could answer the next question.

[337] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Following on from that, I asked whether the Welsh Government could be doing more to collect data.

[338] **Mr Curtis:** Yes.

[339] **Mr Graham:** I alluded earlier to what I perceive to be a relatively weak relationship between the Welsh Government and us, and some charities like us. I do not want to generalise. There is the third sector partnership council and there are lots of very strong relationships. I sit on the third sector anti-poverty taskforce and we regularly have interaction with Welsh Government officials. However, certainly from our perspective, we collect a lot of raw data. Even on the issue of in-work poverty, we are amending our vouchers now so that we can begin to collate that data as well, so that, when someone comes into the food bank, we can ask them, 'Are you in work or not?'. So, as that data starts to grow, we will be able to offer some meaningful information on the whole issue of in-work poverty and the use of food banks. The simple point that I would make is that there is room for improvement of relationship and, therefore, on the gathering of statistics and evidence for Welsh Government from organisations like ours, there is a lot of room for improvement.

12:00

[340] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I know that agencies can be a little precious about the data that they collect. So, are you saying that Welsh Government could do more to interact with you as regards your data or do you think that there needs to be a far more strategic approach to the data? There is a lot of data collecting going on out there, but there are agencies that are trying to work hard to support the poverty agenda that do not have the wherewithal to do data collection. Do you think that some agencies are too precious or too possessive of their own data? Do you think that Welsh Government could really play an integral part in ensuring that, where public money is going on collecting data, those data are then fed into it, so that people are not hanging onto it, so that it is shared and actually then helps to form policy? To me, Welsh Government is well placed to be able to do that. Should it be doing that?

[341] **Mr Graham:** Well, yes and no.

[342] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** There is a lot of duplication.

[343] **Mr Graham:** Yes, there is.

[344] **Christine Chapman:** Is it actually happening? Is it using the data?

[345] **Mr Graham:** Certainly not as far as the Welsh Government's relationship with the Trussell Trust is concerned, which is the one we can speak to. That is not to say that there is

not any relationship. That is not to say that there is not an improving relationship. I am meeting James Burgess from the Tackling Poverty Division next week and we are going to be addressing this, because I raised the observation that, when Vaughan Gething, in his previous role, stood up in front of the Assembly the last time and spoke about food banks, the information he gave was slightly out of date. It was not wildly inaccurate or anything like that; we simply had not had a conversation with them for a number of months, and the situation does move on very rapidly. The numbers change. So, it was not a criticism of anyone. I was simply highlighting the fact that, if there had been a regular dialogue, the Assembly and the Welsh Government would have had much more up-to-date information. I do not think that we are precious. We have to be careful because the media can sometimes get hold of our data—it has happened this morning. It has got hold of some of the information in this report and it has highlighted and blown up the welfare issues and forgotten a whole bunch of other stuff. But that is the media—it is good and it is bad.

[346] **Rhodri Glyn Thomas:** I do not think you need to tell us that. [*Laughter.*]

[347] **Mr Graham:** You suffer more than we do, I guess. [*Laughter.*] My point there is simply that we have to be cautious with data. However, when it comes to interacting with the Tackling Poverty Division, we would be more than happy to share data and up-to-date information on a regular basis. We think that that would help in addressing and making new policy.

[348] **Mr Curtis:** As far as where we are going with the data, we are going to be enhancing our data system. Especially as we are delivering More Than Food, we are going to need to capture more data from our clients to be able to deliver advice or host advice sessions within our food banks. What we want to be able to measure is the impact of that advice, the impact of financial advice at the point of crisis and how that affects the likelihood of those people re-entering a crisis in future. Our ultimate aim is to see fewer people and fewer referrals to the food bank.

[349] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** My final point is that I see you as playing a really integral part of the poverty agenda, and well done for doing that. However, I would expect Government departments or officials to be really easily accessible—more so to you. We go through the Minister. They are not as easily accessible to us. Are they easily accessible to you so that you can almost push things under their noses if you have to, to say, ‘This is what the reality is’?

[350] **Mr Curtis:** I think that Tony has alluded to the fact that it is more accessible in Wales than it is perhaps in other areas of the United Kingdom.

[351] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** That is what we are aiming for.

[352] **Mr Curtis:** That is certainly my perspective, but I think that there is always room for improvement. What we are trying to say is that we are extremely keen to work very closely with policy makers. We are certainly not precious about our data. The whole point of our collecting data is in order to explain why people are coming to food banks. We do not want to make a political point about it. This is about telling the story of people who are in extreme crisis, and it is the responsibility of businesses, it is the responsibility of policy makers, and it is the responsibility of communities and the third sector to respond to that need that they see around them. We would like to do that constructively with all of those people so that we can make life better for people in Wales and help inform more of the issues—the day-to-day reality of life for many people in Wales and the struggles that they face. By doing that, we will provide more information that will help in making more informed decisions and better policies that are better for people in Wales.

[353] **Christine Chapman:** Thank you. I think we will have to draw this session to a close. Could I thank both of you for attending? Obviously, this will help us with our inquiry. We will send you a transcript of the meeting so that you can check it for factual accuracy. Thank you very much.

[354] **Mr Curtis:** Thank you, all.

12:05

**Papurau i'w Nodi  
Papers to Note**

[355] **Christine Chapman:** There are a number of papers that the committee needs to note.

[356] Also, I would just like to say something about next week's meeting, which is that the committee will not be meeting formally next week, because we have arranged a number of visits as part of our inquiry into poverty in Wales. The next meeting will take place on 3 December.

12:06

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r  
Cyfarfod  
Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from the  
Meeting**

[357] **Christine Chapman:** I move that

*in accordance with Standing Order 17.42(vi), the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting, and from item 1 of the meeting on 3 December 2014 in order to give further consideration to the legislative consent memorandum on the Modern Slavery Bill.*

[358] I see that the committee is in agreement.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.  
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 12:06.  
The public part of the meeting ended at 12:06.*