



Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales

Cofnod y Trafodion The Record of Proceedings

[Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb, Llywodraeth Leol a
Chymunedau](#)

[The Equality, Local Government and
Communities Committee](#)

19/01/2017

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from the Meeting

Cofnodir y trafodion yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd. Lle y mae cyfranwyr wedi darparu cywiriadau i'w tystiolaeth, nodir y rheini yn y trawsgrifiad.

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. Where contributors have supplied corrections to their evidence, these are noted in the transcript.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Gareth Bennett	UKIP Cymru
Bywgraffiad Biography	UKIP Wales
Janet Finch–Saunders	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig
Bywgraffiad Biography	Welsh Conservatives
John Griffiths	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor)
Bywgraffiad Biography	Labour (Committee Chair)
Sian Gwenllian	Plaid Cymru
Bywgraffiad Biography	The Party of Wales
Bethan Jenkins	Plaid Cymru
Bywgraffiad Biography	The Party of Wales
Rhianon Passmore	Llafur
Bywgraffiad Biography	Labour
Jenny Rathbone	Llafur
Bywgraffiad Biography	Labour
Joyce Watson	Llafur
Bywgraffiad Biography	Labour

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Alistair Davey	Dirprwy Gyfarwyddwr, yr Is–adran Galluogi Pobl Deputy Director, Enabling People Division
John Davies	Uwch Rheolwr Cynhwysiant, yr Is Adran Cydraddoldeb a Ffyniant Senior Inclusion Manager, Equality and Prosperity Division
Maureen Howell	Dirprwy Gyfarwyddwr, yr Is Adran Cydraddoldeb a Ffyniant Deputy Director, Equality and Prosperity Division
Carl Sargeant	Aelod Cynulliad (Llafur), Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gymunedau a Phlant Assembly Member (Labour), the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children

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

Chloe Davies	Dirprwy Clerc Deputy Clerk
Hannah Johnson	Y Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Research Service
Chris Warner	Clerc Clerk

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

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

[1] **John Griffiths:** I'm very pleased to welcome everybody to this meeting of the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee. Item 1 is introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest.

*Nid oes recordiad ar gael o'r cyfarfod rhwng 09:15 a 09:16.
No recording is available of the meeting between 09:15 and 09:16.*

Ymchwiliad i Ffoaduriaid a Cheiswyr Lloches yng Nghymru: Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 10 Inquiry into Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Wales: Evidence Session 10

[2] **John Griffiths:** [*Inaudible.*]*—*the committee requesting information on the contractual arrangements that they are subject to and some other aspects. And you have been forwarded a copy of that letter, Cabinet Secretary, which I know you have before you today, and similarly all the members of this committee, and it is also on the website. Okay, well, if we can, we'll move into questions and start off with Welsh Government policy. Could I ask you initially then, Cabinet Secretary, why you have decided to revise the refugee and asylum seeker delivery plan in 2017, and what the timescales are for consultation and publication?

[3] **The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children (Carl Sargeant):** Thank you, Chair. Certainly over the last 12 months there's been a lot of very quick movement in the system. I believe our policies are rapidly going out of date, particularly after the closure of the Calais jungle. There is a lot of displacement of refugees and asylum seekers coming into the UK and our

policies have got to be fit for purpose and that's why we've triggered a review of that strategy. I'm hopeful that we can consult and deliver a new strategy by later this year.

[4] **John Griffiths:** Okay, thanks very much. I think Bethan Jenkins has some follow-up questions in terms of strategic leadership and some of the housing issues.

[5] **Bethan Jenkins:** This is in relation to the discussion over understanding where the accountability lies in relation to the accommodation of asylum seekers and refugees that are not part of the Syrian process. You may have seen that there's been some concern about the quality of the housing provided by the contractors, Clear Springs, and we've had a letter here today saying that each property is approved by the local authority and the police prior to it being procured and that they should be following the Housing Act 2004 standards because they aren't part of Rent Smart Wales. But I've visited many houses lately in Swansea and actually some of them are appallingly bad, and I want to understand where you see your role in intervening in relation to this, should there be ongoing problems with this contract. Would you be minded to have a view on whether this responsibility should be fully devolved because, of course, the Home Office runs it at the moment? Would you raise those concerns with the Home Office and would you then have a view on the contract and who should take over that contract and how?

[6] **Carl Sargeant:** Okay, there are a number of questions there. My view is that everybody's got a right to a safe home, whether you're a refugee or a local person of Cardiff. Everybody deserves a safe environment and it concerns me if the evidence that you've received is suggesting that that is not the case for any individual. The responsibility is a contract with the Home Office and directly with the housing providers. I am not aware that these are not subject to Rent Smart Wales. I will ask my team to have a look at that process, because I actually think the process is there for a landlord relationship with a tenant and I don't see why that shouldn't be included in the Rent Smart Wales programme. I will ask for further advice on that and then inform committee of where we are with that.

[7] With regard to ownership of this, I don't see why the—. What's our relationship in the whole of this, really? We are sort of the middle person in this. Our responsibilities are an indirect consequence of this. So, the Home Office has direct responsibility, local authorities provide services, and we

provide the overarching principle of health, education et cetera, so the indirect consequences of asylum and refugees. So, our position on this is limited. The responsibility does lie with the Home Office. Notwithstanding that, when there are issues in the system that are Welsh related, I have had contact with senior Ministers in Westminster, and they've been resolved. So, we do have leverage there. So, I'd be very interested in the very specific cases you talk about, in terms of the housing allocations that are unfit—in your opinion—for purpose. I'd be happy to take that up with the Home Office directly.

[8] **Bethan Jenkins:** You didn't really reply to me in relation to whether it should be devolved, and whether the contract could be part of the Welsh Government. Some people have been saying it should be a not-for-profit, run from Wales. And just on your comment regarding not being aware of the Rent Smart Wales issue, from the research I've had back from our researchers, it's to do with the fact that it isn't a domestic tenancy, and, therefore, it would not be covered by Rent Smart Wales, but it would come under the Housing Act 2004. So, when you say that your powers are limited, I wouldn't say that was the case either, because, obviously, you'd have a view on, if we were breaking Welsh Government legislation, then, surely, you would be able to intervene.

[9] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes, certainly, and that's why I'm saying to you—I could tell you what I think, but I'm not sure of the actual legal position of this, and that's why I'd like to see clarity from my housing division and my legal team about exactly what that is. If it means amending regulations, to ensure that we are able to capture this—I think it's a loophole in the system, and I think, actually, I can't see why we shouldn't have some regulation and inspection around this principle. If we think it's okay for landlord-tenant relationships in other cases, why we don't see that this is appropriate for this is something that I would like to explore further.

[10] Your first point, in terms of where this should lie, I'm still—. The complexities of some people doing part of a job, and another—you either do it all or nothing. And at the moment, this rests with the Home Office, and we just pick up the end bits. I wouldn't have a problem with an RSL or a housing community association looking at providing a contract—we do try to influence the contract—but it ultimately rests with the Home Office.

[11] **Bethan Jenkins:** But would you be making—sorry, my final question: would you be making representations? Because they've extended it to two

years, and, obviously, that's a chance for us here in Wales to say what we have as our views as to who should take that contract up. Would you—as you probably could do with the train franchise and so forth—have a view then, and say, 'Well, actually, we think we could do this. In Wales, we have the capacity in the system, please let us take this over'?

[12] **Carl Sargeant:** Well, capacity is one thing, paying for it is another. And we know that the UK Government are careful with the way that they support finances when they devolve functions. I would be wanting to be absolutely convinced that, if the function was to come to Wales, we were fully funded, to enable us to do that properly.

[13] **Bethan Jenkins:** Thank you. Diolch.

[14] **John Griffiths:** Thanks for that. Are there any other points on housing issues? Jenny Rathbone.

[15] **Jenny Rathbone:** We've just had a letter from Clearsprings put on the table this morning. Of concern to me is that, in relation to the health screening that takes place, we've heard earlier witnesses say that they didn't think that every asylum seeker went to the initial health screening run by the Cardiff Health Access Practice. Clearsprings confirmed there's no contractual requirement for them to ensure that health screening takes place, which is obviously a complete loophole in the contract. They give us warm words about working closely with CHAP to ensure that the health screening is offered to all asylum seekers. CHAP won't know who's arriving, and they will obviously give a consultation to people who do turn up, but, surely, it has to be Clearsprings, or the Home Office, who are ensuring that every single asylum seeker is getting the health screening. And I just wondered whether that's something you'd be able to take up with the Home Office.

[16] **Carl Sargeant:** I'm grateful for the copy of the letter provided. I haven't had time to go through that yet, but, of course, if that's one of the issues, then I agree with the Member that health screening is an important part for the individual but also for the national and public health, and it is something that I will look at carefully and make representation on if that's needed.

[17] Can I just say, Chair, it's really important though, and notwithstanding that I know you've had lots of sessions and lots of evidence given, that we have correct, factual evidence and not just anecdotal? Because I think it's really important to back that up with statistics, otherwise when I talk to the

Home Office, they're saying, 'When, where and how?', and it's a really difficult conversation unless I've got something solid. Like Bethan was saying earlier, she visited X, Y and Z and the properties were, in her opinion, not functional—exactly the same goes for the issue around health as well and other elements of this process.

[18] **John Griffiths:** Yes, we fully appreciate that, Cabinet Secretary.

[19] **Jenny Rathbone:** The other issue—I just want to understand further the relationship: if in the dispersed accommodation, if it's not a domestic tenancy, under which law, then, is that housing regulated? Because, clearly, local authorities have an obligation to ensure that all properties are fit for human habitation and comply with health and safety. Is there anything you can say about that?

[20] **Carl Sargeant:** That will come under the housing Act and local authorities are able to check that. I do recall, when we were introducing the housing Act, around standards, that wasn't included in that in the Rent Smart process, but there was a registration process. I wasn't aware that these properties weren't within that scope and, as I've said to committee, I will go back to my housing division to see what that loophole is, to ensure—. But I'm with committee, I believe that we shouldn't have substandard accommodation, if that's the case, for anybody in Wales, irrespective of their status.

[21] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay, thank you for that. Just moving on to some of the issues that have been raised by witnesses, there's concern that there is a two-tier structure developing and that there's a Rolls-Royce service for Syrian refugees who are being resettled here, who already have refugee status, and a much poorer service for those arriving spontaneously. I just wondered if you could say a little bit about how the Government is approaching that issue.

[22] **Carl Sargeant:** I can assure Members that we don't see any of this as a two-tier system. I would certainly not suggest that the Syrian refugee programme was a Rolls-Royce system. These people entering the country are from often troubled areas that are very sensitive. We seek to act appropriately for all migrants and our services—while there is a taskforce for Syrian refugees, that was a pressure point that we thought we had to act on and have something very specific to support that process—but we don't see this as a two-tier system at all. We treat all the same. I have a working group

around the Syrian refugees that was set up by the First Minister and the previous Minister. I'm looking to expand that provision, so therefore it looks at a broader principle of asylum seekers and refugees, which I hope may ease your concerns of what may be perceived as a service for one but not another. I think it's really important that we are fair to all, irrespective—. We've got a long history of refugee migration into Wales for many, many years and I think what I said at the start of this meeting, Chair—things moved on very quickly last year, particularly around the closure of the Calais camp and the Syrian refugee crisis—we had to do something at the time, but I am prepared, with the support of the working group, to expand that provision to start to understand how we can service that better.

[23] **Jenny Rathbone:** So, you're considering it but you haven't yet decided to do that.

[24] **Carl Sargeant:** I haven't, because it's unfair on—. I could make a statement, but I think it's really important we talk to the working group, and I'll do that—the next meeting is in early February. I'll raise that with the board. I don't see that being particularly a problem, but it's only fair that I work with them, as opposed to doing something to them.

09:30

[25] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay.

[26] **John Griffiths:** So, all refugees and asylum seekers coming to Wales might be the subject of the work of the taskforce and board—

[27] **Carl Sargeant:** Quite possibly.

[28] **John Griffiths:** Quite possibly. Sian, you want to come in on this particular point.

[29] **Sian Gwenllian:** Mae yna **Sian Gwenllian:** There is some quite dystiolaeth eithaf clir wedi cael ei clear evidence that's been provided chyflwyno i'r pwyllgor bod yna to the committee that there is a two-system ddwy haen yn bodoli yng tier system in existence in Wales, and Nghymru, a bod y rhaglen gefnogi that the support programme for ffoaduriaid Syria wedi bod yn Syrian refugees has been very llwyddiannus iawn, ond mae yna successful, but there is huge concern bryder mawr ynglŷn â'r grwpiau about the other groups. I'm pleased

eraill. Rwy'n falch o weld bod gennyh chi rai syniadau ynglŷn â sut i wella'r sefyllfa yna. A ydy hynny'n rhywbeth y gallwch fod yn edrych arno fo rŵan wrth ddiwygio'r strategaeth, wrth edrych ar y cynllun gweithredu, a bod yr agwedd yna yn sicr angen cael ei dynnu mewn yn gliriach yna, a bod yna ffocws penodol yn cael ei roi rŵan ar bawb arall, fel ein bod ni'n dod yn fwy clir ein bod ni'n cael gwared ar y system ddwy haen yma, achos rwy'n siŵr eich bod yn cytuno efo fi nad ydy hynny'n ffordd deg o symud pethau ymlaen, ac nad ydy o chwaith yn cyfrannu at y drafodaeth gyhoeddus, lle mae yna, efallai, gefnogaeth i'r ffoaduriaid o Syria, ond efallai nad ydy'r canfyddiad yr un peth ynglŷn â ffoaduriaid o'r gwledydd eraill? Ac mae angen gwella'r canfyddiad yna, ac mi fyddai, efallai, cynnwys mwy o gefnogaeth ac arweiniad ynghylch hynny yn strategol yn helpu i gael gwared ar y canfyddiad hefyd.

to hear that you have some ideas as to how that situation could be improved. Is that something that you could now be looking at as you reform the strategy and look at the action plan, and that that aspect of this needs to be drawn in more clearly into those areas, and that there should be a specific focus now placed on the other groups, so that we can have greater clarity that we are actually scrapping this two-tier system, because I am sure that you would agree with me that that isn't a fair way of dealing with people and moving things forward, and neither does it contribute to the public debate and discourse where, perhaps, there is support for the Syrian refugees, but that the perception perhaps isn't the same about refugees from other nations? And we need to improve that perception, and perhaps providing greater support, and providing guidance on that strategically would assist in actually scrapping that perception, too.

[30] **Carl Sargeant:** Well, I don't disagree with the Member wholesale, but I still don't recognise the fact that we think there is two-tier system, and, again, notwithstanding that there will be evidence that you will have received from individuals who may allude to that. And I'd like to see more detail of what they may perceive as being a two-tier structure. What I can say is that, in our experience with the Home Office, because there are lots of different schemes, there are different processes and I think that's something that I raised with Nick Bourne when I met him earlier this year, about how we have some consistency in these services that are sought for individuals and provided by local authorities or, indeed, by ourselves through education or otherwise. I'm pleased that for children, particularly the three schemes around children—they're trying to bring those together to start to have a

consistent service of support. There are, obviously, cultural differences between refugees and asylum seekers that are coming in to the UK. And, again, the interpretation of services is something that might add to the issue of what is perceived as a different service for one or another. But I'd be very interested to see why people think there is a different standard of service for one and for another. But, as I said, I am seeking to address some clarity around our offer, where we have competence around that. This is a function of the Home Office—I'm sure you don't forget that—and we just touch the edges of services—they're important ones, but we are seeking to make sure we don't have a two-tier service. That's not what we're seeking in Wales.

[31] **John Griffiths:** Okay. Rhianon, on this point.

[32] **Rhianon Passmore:** Thank you. I very much welcome that overview in terms of the necessity of setting up the original taskforce around the very dynamic issues, and I can fully understand that but very much welcome that there'll be a look at how we can now integrate the wider scene moving forward. In terms of the two-tier system that has been discussed this morning, the witnesses that we've had have been rightly referred to this morning, and they were very, very clear in their articulation of the fact that there is perception that, for instance, if you are under the Syrian resettlement scheme with local authorities, that Home Office money attached to you is very much a passport to accessing local authority services. So, as well as the perception, we can state quite clearly that there is a firm helping hand there, as it needs to be done properly. So, I very much welcome that we look at the fact that, strategically, we're now looking at everything in the round because it's in nobody's interests that there is that perception out there. So, I welcome that.

[33] **Carl Sargeant continues:** I'm supportive of the Member's comments, and, as I said, I think part of that is because of the different schemes that are available from the UK. I've already addressed that with the Minister, saying, 'How do we align these schemes better?' I don't think it is with intent; if there is a two-tier system, it's not intentional.

[34] **John Griffiths:** Again on this point, Jenny?

[35] **Jenny Rathbone:** On this point, there are two specific issues, one of which is on an asylum seeker who's arrived spontaneously. If they get refugee status, they have 28 days to get out of the Clearsprings-provided accommodation, and that requires them in that time to get a national

insurance number and many other issues. The services are very, very thin on the ground to actually assist them in the very difficult process of finding somewhere to live, and there are delays in getting a national insurance number that the Syrian refugee programme people are getting almost within 48 hours.

[36] That's one, and then, of course, the other one is that those who are deemed not to meet the threshold for being given refugee status have no recourse to public funds when that decision is made. It rather assumes that even though they don't have the bus fare to get to Croydon, they're somehow going to make their own way back to the place they originally came from, which feels a little optimistic to me. So, I think those are two areas where there is massive disproportion in the way that resources are allocated.

[37] **Carl Sargeant:** I welcome the comments of the committee on that process, and if there is anything that I feel in my response to that that I need to do with the Home Office, then I will act accordingly.

[38] **John Griffiths:** Thanks for that, Cabinet Secretary. Obviously, in due course, in the committee's report, we will be setting out the evidence we've received on these matters and others. Could I just conclude, perhaps, this section on the Welsh Government's policy and strategic leadership by asking you what a number of people have put to us, really—so, to ask you whether you consider this to be fair? It's been said to us by a number of witnesses that the Welsh Government has a responsibility to enforce the human rights of all people living in Wales, obviously including all refugees and asylum seekers. Would you accept that that is a responsibility of the Welsh Government?

[39] **Carl Sargeant:** There are two parts to that, and both answers are 'yes'. I absolutely think that we should support that principle. Indeed, we introduced the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in Wales as well, which has a regulatory response to that about people, responsibilities and the global responsibilities of Wales. The only other point that I would suggest is that this is a non-devolved function. So, yes, we will act in the spirit of what we are supposed to do, but we can't get away from the fact that this is controlled by the UK Government. I would seek for our position to be very clear on working within those parameters, but I would also ensure that the UK Government has a responsibility to also be in that space.

[40] **John Griffiths:** Okay. Jenny.

[41] **Jenny Rathbone:** Where does that, then, leave people who've been deemed not eligible for refugee status, who then have no recourse to public funds?

[42] **Carl Sargeant:** This is a matter for the UK Government, and that's why the spirit of the actions and interpretation of the comments—. Local authorities and the Welsh Government cannot be held responsible for a service that is deemed to be the responsibility of another. You cannot just passport services across because it says it's the right thing to do. I absolutely agree with the principles of this, and I will push those principles appropriately, but they are the responsibility of the UK Government. If they are our responsibilities, then we would have to fund that process, and morally rightly so. This is a matter for the UK Government.

[43] **Jenny Rathbone:** Thank you.

[44] **John Griffiths:** Okay, thanks very much for that. We'll move on, then, to the provision of English for speakers of other languages, which has been a very important part of the committee's work up to now and the evidence that we've received. Rhianon, you have some initial questions.

[45] **Rhianon Passmore:** Thank you, Chair. With regard to the witness statements to committee and, obviously, written evidence as well, the importance of access to English-language provision is absolutely integral to the resettlement and integration of those who are new. So, what I would ask is—perhaps the panel can answer as well—in terms of the split of responsibility between Welsh Government and the United Kingdom Government in terms of where that responsibility lies to provide English for speakers of other languages, you mentioned the number of different schemes, but, as it is absolutely important to be able to earn as we go forward, do we feel that we've got that mix right at the moment in Wales, bearing in mind the governmental noise that's come out around this from the UK Government as well?

[46] **Carl Sargeant:** I think it is a pressured service, again because of capacity and the increasing numbers in need of support of ESOL, and indeed the Welsh element of that as well, because we are integrating refugees and asylum seekers into communities that are Welsh-speaking, and therefore we should support them in that process too. The Casey review is very clear that

the two elements certainly—the ability to speak English and community integration—are important parts of acceptance into community cohesion, and I accept that. Therefore, the responsibility for ESOL is with the Welsh Government, and we are working with volunteer partners, with the colleges and voluntary organisations to increase support for this. Notwithstanding that, it is a very pressured service and I acknowledge that.

[47] **Rhianon Passmore:** So, do we have any plans further to increase capacity around this absolutely vital issue? In particular, we took evidence from a witness who wanted a much higher level than the very, very basic vocabulary in order to be able to continue as a professional in her field. We are missing something if we're not capturing the very high-level skills, due to English language skills, which could be easily tuned in, and I was informed, and the committee was informed, of waiting lists et cetera. So, if we're going to make maximum usage and gain everything that we need to gain, then it's very important that we get that right.

[48] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes. As I said earlier, I acknowledge that the system is under pressure. The issue is to recognise that many of the refugees and asylum seekers have great skills, which we could be absorbing, with the ability to have the correct language skills in place. I visited the Trinity Centre, I think it's called, in Cardiff only a few weeks ago, and I saw some excellent work going on there by volunteers, and some students from the local university also helping as part of their personal development as well, in terms of delivering these services. I am looking at this in terms of what we can do. We did have some additional funding from the UK Government on the back of the Syrian refugee programme to introduce a co-ordinator. The co-ordinator is looking at services that are out there in volunteer and professional services and how they can be better used. So, hopefully we'll start to see an increase in performance of services.

[49] **Rhianon Passmore:** And in that regard, just to press the point for a little longer, in terms of how we make best use of our higher education sector and further education sector, whether it's building it into the Welsh baccalaureate or something, there's so much out there that we can actually utilise effectively that's already there in terms of the capacity issue. So, I would welcome that co-ordinator's strategic action plan.

[50] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes. That's what part of the co-ordinator's role is.

[51] **Rhianon Passmore:** Okay, thank you.

[52] **John Griffiths:** Okay. Sian.

[53] **Sian Gwenllian:** Ar y pwynt yma, mae'n dod yn glir o'r dystiolaeth rydym ni'n ei chael, fod merched yn benodol, felly, yn dioddef yn sgil diffyg darpariaeth a rhestrau aros hir, ond hefyd nad ydyn nhw'n gallu mynd i'r gwersi ac i'r cyrsiau oherwydd diffyg gofal plant. A fydddech chi fel Llywodraeth yn gallu rhoi rhywfaint o arweiniad, neu awgrymu beth bynnag, os ydy'r colegau yn medru darparu mwy o gyrsiau, eu bod nhw'n edrych yn benodol ar ddarpariaeth gofal plant a sut i gael mwy o ferched i ddysgu Cymraeg a Saesneg?

Sian Gwenllian: On this point, it is becoming clear from the evidence that we've received that women, specifically, are suffering as a result of a lack of provision and long waiting times, but also that they are unable to attend these classes and courses because of shortage of childcare. Will you as Government be able to give some guidance, or to suggest at least, that if the colleges are able to provide more courses, that they do look specifically at the provision of childcare in order to encourage more women to learn Welsh and English?

[54] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes. I think that's a fair comment and, on my visit to the Trinity Centre, they do have the ESOL class and a crèche facility at the side of that as well. So, they do some fantastic work there, and it would be great to see that replicated across the country as well. Childcare is often a barrier to many services, and we're introducing the childcare pledge, but I will give that further consideration within our views around what ESOL is doing currently and how we can maximise that.

09:45

[55] **Sian Gwenllian:** Diolch.

[56] **John Griffiths:** One piece of evidence that we heard on these matters, Cabinet Secretary, was that there can be considerable waiting times to get into formal ESOL classes and that that isn't helped by having entry points in September and not at other times of the year. Are those matters that you recognise and are considering?

[57] **Carl Sargeant:** I do, but it's the same for many courses. You know, they're statutory courses that are a length in time, and people's abilities are all variable as well. Some people have a limited amount of English that they

start with and some have none at all. Sometimes, learning a new language in a new country isn't as easy as it seems. So, the system is challenged, but I am committed to looking at how we can maximise the opportunities there because, as Casey says, integration into communities is predicated on your language skills and your ability to integrate. I think they are two key areas that we must consider.

[58] **John Griffiths:** The final point on this, at least from me, Cabinet Secretary, is that one suggestion is that there might be a requirement for collaboration between higher and further education institutions and local authorities to deliver ESOL to newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees. Is that something that you've been considering, or will consider?

[59] **Carl Sargeant:** That's what the co-ordinators are in place for, and that was funded by the Home Office in terms of the Syrian refugee support, and we'll be getting feedback on that to see how that is able to increase capacity.

[60] **John Griffiths:** So, might that be extended, then, beyond the Syrians being dispersed through the particular UK Government scheme?

[61] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes. As I said earlier, I don't see that this is purely for Syrian refugees, as ESOL is a holistic approach to delivery of better language skills. I will be looking at that carefully to see how we get a better service all round. I recognise that ESOL is pressured.

[62] **John Griffiths:** Okay. Bethan.

[63] **Bethan Jenkins:** I just wanted to ask quickly—you say 'consider' quite a lot, but is there any way that you can tell us how you will consider it, and what that means? Is it going to mean that the ESOL provision will change? Will you make a statement? Will you add it to the strategy changes? We heard evidence that there are volunteers in areas like Pontypridd having to do this outside of their jobs, and, really, I don't think it's for people to have to do that. They are doing it because they want to do it, but we're in a situation of crisis with ESOL, I think, where people can't get on to university courses because they're not able to speak English, and, in the meantime, they're becoming much more isolated in their communities.

[64] **Carl Sargeant:** Well, I certainly don't recognise the word 'crisis'. I said the system was pressured. I've met lots of people who volunteer to deliver ESOL because they want to, and I think we should enable them to do so.

Volunteering is of that nature. When I say, 'I'll consider this', I need to fully understand the facts of where the pressures are. The evidence from your committee will be important to me to consider how we move forward on that. We are introducing, as I said earlier, a co-ordinator to look at the systems that are in place between voluntary third sector organisations and the statutory sector in schools and sixth-form colleges and higher education, to see how they're better co-ordinated. So, I certainly don't recognise the issue around crisis, but I do recognise that the system is pressured, and it could operate better.

[65] **John Griffiths:** Okay, thank you very much. We'll move on, then, to advice services, homelessness and destitution issues. Again, I think, Rhianon, you have an initial question or two.

[66] **Rhianon Passmore:** Thank you, Chair. I think Jenny Rathbone has already mentioned and highlighted the issues around delay from England, I would say, and the UK, around national insurance, and the knock-on effect that that then has in terms of delivering destitution, and that can be magnified in different areas. In regard to how we assist in Wales around advocacy, what is your view, Cabinet Secretary, in terms of how we provide that currently, and what more can we do to provide the correct advice within a very limited 28-day period, where, if you have no, or little, effective language skill, then you are left at the mercy of being in a strange place without the ability to understand? So, what are we actually doing around advocacy?

[67] **Carl Sargeant:** There are several elements to this, if the Member will allow me. First, around housing, we provide the Welsh Refugee Council, through the homeless prevention grant, with an amount of funding for support to give advice services on housing solutions for moving on after 28 days, which, we believe, works well—they operate that effectively. In terms of advocacy and advice services, certainly for unaccompanied children, we introduced the social services Act, which provides an opportunity for all children in Wales, irrespective of their status—refugee or local—to be able to access advocacy services. I think that is right. We are able to look at specific—we've got a programme that we've recently launched about advocacy services for looked-after children. I'm considering whether refugee or asylum-seeking children are, and should be, considered a vulnerable group and whether that should be extended to that with a positive advocacy service. We've got to remember that these families, these individuals that come to the UK, have often been through very traumatic times, and I think

that we have to have appropriate services for them. Advocacy and support early on is a prevention process for us, which saves the public purse funding in the long term. So, it is something that this Government is very keen to ensure that we get right.

[68] **Rhianon Passmore:** Thank you.

[69] **John Griffiths:** Joyce.

[70] **Joyce Watson:** Only because you've touched on children; I'll be asking other questions later about unaccompanied minors. I went to see a group of non-Syrian refugees in the Llanelli area last Friday and the advocacy for those— and they were all unaccompanied minors—is critical, because you're quite to say that they have come through trauma. They all had families, they all had homes and they all had a country. None of those things belong to them anymore, apart from the fact that they've also been traumatised by what they've seen before they've had to flee. So, I'm really heartened to hear that you are thinking about how you can extend advocacy to them because— and I think this is the real issue in terms of that advocacy—it's about letting them know, or those who are trying to support them, how to do that best. Otherwise, we will not help them avoid further trauma in trying to deal with the trauma that they've already been through.

[71] **Carl Sargeant:** As I said earlier, Chair, the proposal of this Government is to embed the principles of the future generations Act about planning for the future. There is, I believe, a moral obligation to support people, but also it's a fiscal issue as well. We invest early on in prevention and intervention around the programmes such as economic regeneration, well-being and the ACE programme that we're following, supporting people that are in need now. That will reap benefits in the longer term, but it does take time and I recognise—. Again, I was aware of your visits on Friday and I think you were able to glean from real life experiences about what people's life chances and life processes have been. And we learn a lot from that; I encourage my team to look at live cases—about the fact that we have strategies for all sorts of things, but actually do they really work? Let's test that system. So, the advocacy service and the advice services are important, and the support mechanism. That's why we also have our community cohesion co-ordinators across all of Wales, who work actively to seek and embed cohesion within our communities, supporting individuals and families across Wales.

[72] **John Griffiths:** I know you've said, in terms of the new service that is

due to launch in April—the new advice and advocacy service for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants—that there will be a requirement for advocacy for children coming to Wales in those circumstances. Do you see that provision as dealing with many of these issues?

[73] **Carl Sargeant:** Well, that would be a very specialist service, but as I said earlier on, the social services and well-being Act already covers all children in Wales, irrespective of status. So, I think we're in a very strong position here, but that will just add value to the service that is already available.

[74] **John Griffiths:** How significant will it be, then?

[75] **Carl Sargeant:** Financially?

[76] **John Griffiths:** No, in terms of the improvement of services.

[77] **Carl Sargeant:** It will be very specific to the background and information that is known about the refugee processes. So, it will be more of a process where the advocates understand the issues around asylum seeking and refugee issues, as Joyce Watson alluded to when she met three young people on Friday.

[78] **John Griffiths:** Okay. And just in terms of the 28-day move-on period, which we've covered to some extent, we did hear that the provision of advice around housing, employment and education should be provided as early as possible within that 28-day move-on period. I think that's something that you've accepted, Cabinet Secretary. Are you confident that you'll be able to deliver that, and that that advice will be delivered as early as possible within that 28-day period for all those affected?

[79] **Carl Sargeant:** That is our intention, and again, it is a very fluid situation. The increase in provision requirements over the last 12 months was significant, and that's why we've sought to amend our strategy so that we can deal with the sudden increase. The big pressures come in when there are emergency placements. That's where it's challenging for authorities to try to deal with the situation. But we recently had a request from the UK Government to support some young people, at the back end of last year, on an emergency process, and I pay tribute to Cardiff council and the other authorities that helped us support the transition of the families through the system. It was a very last-minute process, but necessary. It worked

effectively despite it being an emergency situation. So, we can deal with these things, but it's more pressure in the system.

[80] **John Griffiths:** Okay. Rhianon.

[81] **Rhianon Passmore:** Chair, on that particular point, with regard to your comments about it being an emergency and last-minute situation, in terms of protocols with the UK Government around these types of issues, has there been any progress made with regard to how, or the notice that—

[82] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes, lots of progress. While this is a non-devolved function, again I welcome the relationship we have with the Home Office team and with the Ministers involved in this. I am able to pick the phone up to the UK Government, the Ministers, to say when things aren't going quite as they should, and they alter them accordingly. And we've had great success, actually. I would say that one of the biggest challenges we've faced with this, being that middle person in all of this, has been the communication issue. But that has been addressed by Nick Bourne, who has been very effective in recognising the challenges we've had here, particularly around the emergency placement stuff. It is important that we have as much advanced notice as possible of people arriving in our communities so that we're able to deal with them effectively. And Nick, to be fair, has acted on those issues that we've raised.

[83] **Rhianon Passmore:** Okay. Thank you.

[84] **John Griffiths:** Okay. I just wanted to ask a further question on this section in relation to destitution and those without recourse to public funds. In Northern Ireland, they've set up a particular fund to deal with these issues, and it has been suggested to us that Welsh Government might do something similar, or indeed expand the discretionary assistance fund to deal with the need that exists. Are these matters that you've given consideration to?

10:00

[85] **Carl Sargeant:** I have. The current discretionary assistance fund isn't eligible for this process, but we are seeking a new contract, and we have put in with that contract to look at how this may cover some destitution issues, which we'll be discussing over the next few weeks, because that contract is about to be let. Once I've done that, Chair, I'd be happy to write to the committee. I have not sought, through my budget provision, to provide an

additional, separate fund for this. My budgets just don't allow me to do that.

[86] **John Griffiths:** Okay. Thank you very much for that. We'd be very interested in an update as soon as it's possible to do so. Okay, we move on then to UK Government policy, and on the immigration Act, I think, Rhianon, you have a question.

[87] **Rhianon Passmore:** Thank you. With regard to impacts of the immigration Act in England, and commencement of similar in Wales, there has been evidence collated around the fact that it is impacting in BME communities around the right-to-rent check—whether it's indirect or direct potential for discrimination—and that's very concerning. So, what is your thinking around how that is implemented, and when it will be implemented in Wales, if at all?

[88] **Carl Sargeant:** Well, we haven't done an awful lot of work on the immigration Act in Wales, as it is, again, a non-devolved function, but it does have indirect consequences on what happens here in Wales. We are monitoring that very carefully to see what that may or may not mean. I said earlier on about making representations to the Ministers around specific programmes and trying to align them better so that we have clarity and people have clarity about where they sit in a system, and who has responsibility within that system to act. The UK Government is recognising the complexity of the current systems, and is seeking to address that, which I'm grateful for.

[89] In terms of some of the actions from that and the right-to-rent checks that are happening, we're not aware of any specific date that that will be introduced into Wales. It will be something that I will perhaps try to get some clarity from the Home Office on for the committee, but at the moment, we are not aware of that being introduced here in Wales any time soon.

[90] **Rhianon Passmore:** Okay. And with regard to community cohesion, there is growing concern in England around what the impacts of it are meaning for those who are asking for tenancies. Just to be cognisant—I'm sure your team are cognisant of what is happening and collating the information that's necessary in that regard.

[91] **Carl Sargeant:** Indeed. I don't know whether it's helpful, but we had a recent inspection by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who spent several days in Wales, talking to refugees around that very issue

about integration and community cohesion. I met with him and met for a feedback session. He was very pleased with the progress that's happening in Wales. He was very complimentary of local authorities, and particularly the Welsh communities and how welcoming they were. So, when he left, I was very pleased that the systems that we have in place here in Wales, inspected by UN commissioners, evidence that, actually, on the ground, we are doing the right things here. So, notwithstanding the stuff that's in the Casey review—I recognise some of those issues—as I said earlier on, the language skills and not being isolated certainly play a key part in integration and community cohesion. And, again, we pay a significant amount of money to the regional working of community cohesion operations, and we'll continue to do that.

[92] **Rhianon Passmore:** Is there any concern with regard to what's coming to light, whereby landlords can ask for the status of anybody applying for that tenancy, and is there concern that that could cause an issue in terms of perfectly eligible people being turned away from tenancies because that landlord would fear—a perception—that that person is an illegal immigrant? And even if there is no case to be answered, the evidence that is coming out from England is that that is increasingly happening, and that, in itself, is causing issues.

[93] **Carl Sargeant:** That is the case. Certainly, there is evidence that that is happening in England. We're not aware of that being here in Wales. We have statutory guidance, through Rent Smart Wales, for landlords in regard to this, and around integration we have the 'Welcome to Wales' pack for individuals to understand the Welsh culture. So, we're working, we believe, very closely with communities and individuals to try to make sure that their integration process is good. But, as I said, what I say or what you say is one thing, but, actually, the proof of the pudding is the fact that, when we have an inspection by an independent United Nations commissioner, he says that it's actually doing really well in Wales. So, it's something that we should be incredibly proud of.

[94] **Rhianon Passmore:** Okay, thank you.

[95] **John Griffiths:** In terms of that United Nations commissioner visit, Cabinet Secretary, will anything be produced from that visit in documentary terms because we'd be, I think, very interested as a committee in receiving that? Or, if not, possibly, if you give us contact details, we might contact the UN and see if we could get some details of what the visit produced.

[96] **Carl Sargeant:** I'm not sure about—there may be an interim report, or a report that they may be developing. I forget the response that I got, to be honest with you. But I do have his contact details on my desk, actually, which I will pass on to committee for you to make direct contact with them.

[97] **John Griffiths:** Okay. Thanks very much for that. And, in terms of the immigration Act generally, would you have made any assessment of its likely impact here in Wales?

[98] **Carl Sargeant:** We're conscious of the Act, but, as I said, we're looking at how that may operate here in Wales and we're not seeing any significant changes to how things are working on the ground. But we will continue to monitor that.

[99] **John Griffiths:** You'll continue to monitor

[100] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes.

[101] **John Griffiths:** Okay. If we move on, then, to inter-governmental working, which we've touched upon at various points already, we're quite interested as a committee, Cabinet Secretary, in the situation in Wales beyond the four current dispersal areas, because, obviously, there are particular issues, particular challenges, and maybe particular opportunities, in those areas. So, have you had any conversation with the Home Office about those matters and how those areas, with our previous experience in these areas, are helped, supported, and prepared to meet the challenges involved?

[102] **Carl Sargeant:** I have had discussions with the Home Office. I've had discussions with the Welsh Local Government Association. Dyfed Edwards is the lead member for this in the WLGA, and an ex-schoolteacher of mine, which is very interesting. But I'm really impressed at the ability of our local authorities seeking to support these programmes. I'm also impressed, may I say, with our relationship with the Home Office as well. I've had lots of experiences with the UK Government, in many departments, but, on this particular issue, we are certainly having a good relationship, and I think, partly, that is down to a former Member of this Assembly, Nick Bourne; I pay tribute to his work. I met with the other administrations as well. The Scottish and Northern Ireland and Nick and I met in London just after Christmas, and we discussed some of these issues, and we were very open and honest about

challenges that we all face. And I raised the issue of communication and being open with us about what we could expect and what would happen, and he's taken that on board and is making changes to the way my team of officials work with his, and we've got, in this case, a very good relationship.

[103] **John Griffiths:** Okay. Thank you for that. Sian.

[104] **Sian Gwenllian:** Mae gen i Sian Gwenllian: I'm specifically ddi-ddordeb penodol yn yr ardaloedd interested in those areas outwith the tu allan i'r ardaloedd gwasgaru, ac fel dispersal areas, and, as you said, a rydych yn ei ddweud, mae yna welcome has been given in groeso'n cael ei ddangos yng Ceredigion and in Gwynedd. But do Ngheredigion ac yng Ngwynedd. Ond you see it as a challenge for more a ydych chi'n gweld e'n her i rural areas to provide the services ardaloedd mwy gwledig i ddarparu'r that are necessary for refugees and gwasanaethau sydd eu hangen ar asylum seekers, or do you see the gyfer ceiswyr lloches, neu a ydych rural areas as having something chi'n gweld yr ardaloedd gwledig efo specific that they can offer in this rhywbeth penodol y gallan nhw ei regard? Certainly, there is a desire gynnig ar gyfer hyn? Achos yn sicr there to welcome more than are mae yna awydd yna, onid oes, i fod currently actually being taken in. yn croesawu mwy na sydd ar hyn o bryd yn cael eu derbyn.

[105] **Carl Sargeant:** I think broadly, in our nature of being Welsh, we are very welcoming anyway. We're a very welcoming community wherever we are. I think rural lifestyles present their own problems, as we are very aware of anyway, with the limited amount of services, sometimes, and I would say some of the refugees and asylum seekers that are placed in areas certainly need access to services quickly, and in a rural community that's not always the case. So, I think it causes a challenge, but it's certainly not something that couldn't be overcome. I think, even though we have rural authorities, there are, within those rural authorities, some very large towns. So, I don't see a problem for any authority having the ability to be inclusive in this way, and the approach to welcome people into their communities.

[106] **John Griffiths:** Joyce.

[107] **Joyce Watson:** If I can just pick up on that issue about access to services, and if I can come back to a conversation I had last Friday with some of the young people, they actually were made to feel very welcome, and some

of them were living in rural communities, and they quite liked that, because some of them come from rural communities as well, so it's not new to them. But what was a real challenge for them was outside of school or outside of college, where they felt really isolated because they didn't know anybody else. If you put that alongside limited English-language skills—although some of them had pretty good language—they then weren't able to access maybe the local football team or sporting network or cultural activities. So, my question to you is, recognising that, how are we going to try and address it? Because that will only in the near future affect their mental and physical well-being.

[108] **Carl Sargeant:** As I said to Sian earlier, I think it is important to recognise that the earlier the knowledge of individuals coming into our communities, the better planning that we can have, and local authorities can plan better for that situation, and therefore try to overcome some of the issues that an urban and rural environment have, which are different. There are football teams in some of our rural communities as well, but I absolutely respect that fact that, through the advocacy services, through the advice services, placement of individuals who are vulnerable is an important part of that, and the longer lead-in time we have, the better we're able to plan. That's why I said to you earlier on that some of our emergency placements are often challenging. But our local authorities are very nimble in the way that they are reacting to this.

[109] **John Griffiths:** Okay. Thank you very much for that, Cabinet Secretary. I think, Joyce, if we move on to unaccompanied asylum-seeker children, you have some questions.

[110] **Joyce Watson:** I do. You've already said that you're looking at the guardianship service being extended, so I won't rehearse that one, but I want to ask if you have any idea of the numbers of unaccompanied minors who are currently either seeking accommodation in Wales or who have accommodation in Wales.

[111] **Carl Sargeant:** Specifically children were you talking about there?

[112] **Joyce Watson:** Yes.

[113] **Carl Sargeant:** Twenty-seven, I think, but that number is really flexible, because it changes all the time. Some are based here but will move on very quickly. We'll introduce more, but the current number that I'm aware

of today is 27.

[114] **Joyce Watson:** Twenty-seven—which seems incredibly low, I have to say, which could lead me to a whole raft of other questions, and I have to ask the obvious one: why is it so low?

[115] **Carl Sargeant:** Our local authorities have been very clear to make offers, but the UK Government just haven't been able to take up the ability to offer young people to come to Wales. It's not that at this end we're being restrictive. It's just that there's nothing coming through the system. But that number does vary. I agree with the Member, it is quite low.

10:15

[116] **Joyce Watson:** I'm absolutely staggered that it is only 27. I have to say that, especially when I consider all that we've seen. We've mentioned here the dispersal from Calais that's happening, and the offer to take the minors from those situations. I suppose what I would say in terms of moving forward is whether you'll be asking further questions of the UK Government in terms of why they haven't actually taken up on our offer—because I'm assuming we've made it—to help the most vulnerable people in society at the moment. It's sort of, somehow, stymied all the other questions that I was going to ask.

[117] **Carl Sargeant:** The responsibility for transfer of individuals is a matter for the UK Government. We have said that we are ready for individuals to come to Wales. The UK Government have obviously got enough capacity elsewhere that they're happy to use, but the system is ready in Wales if that is required.

[118] **Joyce Watson:** So, I suppose the obvious thing that I could make a comment on and ask you about is, if we've only got 27 children, then they ought to be having really good experiences, but it also follows on to the earlier question that I said about the isolation and understanding that, if they are one of 27 in the whole of Wales, it's somehow more challenging then for them to settle in because they are dispersed, and then to find somebody else, another peer, who would understand their situation. I did find three—so, I know where three are—and I spoke to them. So, what are we doing to help an even more isolated number of children than any of us imagined would be the case to help to support each other through that trauma, and, of course, recognising, as I do know, the cultural differences, although the young people I spoke to actually were not challenged by those cultural

differences?

[119] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes. I think young people are generally very adaptable. We have some great services here in Wales for all our children, particularly our advocacy services as well. I recognise all of the issues that the Member raises about how we make sure that we support these highly vulnerable young people. I am not aware that the 27 people aren't getting a good service in Wales, and I'd be surprised if they're not.

[120] **Joyce Watson:** They are. I said they are.

[121] **Carl Sargeant:** Therefore, we stand ready to accommodate more, but it's a matter for the UK Government. I can't say to the UK Government 'you must send me more people'. It's a matter for them.

[122] **Joyce Watson:** Can I, Chair—? I didn't actually say that they weren't receiving—. They are receiving very good—. They said that the Welsh people are excellent, and their placements were superb.

[123] **Carl Sargeant:** Sorry.

[124] **Joyce Watson:** What I asked—maybe not clearly enough—was how, as a collective group, they could be supported by each other and whether we've looked at that in terms of sharing their experience and giving a little bit of peer support to each other.

[125] **Carl Sargeant:** I am grateful. Sorry, I misunderstood the question and misunderstood your comments. I think the Member raises an interesting point about integration. Often, these young people aren't connected at all from where they have lived previously. Therefore, this adventure is something that is challenging. It may be something that I'll ask my community cohesion co-ordinators to think about, in terms of what access, if any, is required to look about a peer group that may help them settle in a foreign country. But it's something that I will follow up.

[126] **John Griffiths:** Okay. Sian.

[127] **Sian Gwenllian:** I fynd yn ôl at **Sian Gwenllian:** To return to that very y nifer bychan iawn o blant rydym yn small number of children that we're sôn amdanynt yn fan hyn, ac mae discussing here, and this concerns hwn yn fy mhoeni i yn fawr iawn. me hugely. We are here talking about

Rydym yn fan hyn yn sôn am rai o blant mwyaf bregus y byd, ac mae Cymru yn awyddus iawn i'w croesawu nhw ac i roi cefnogaeth iddyn nhw, ac eto mae yna rwystr yn rhywle. Faint o ymdrech sydd wedi cael ei wneud gan Lywodraeth Cymru i gael gwared ar y rhwystr yna, a pha mor *proactive* ydych chi wedi bod fel Llywodraeth yn eich trafodaethau? Mae'n ymddangos bod yr Alban yn gallu derbyn llawer iawn mwy; efallai bod y rhwystr ddim yna yn yr un ffordd. Os nad ydych chi wedi gallu bod yn *proactive* hyd yma, a fedrwch chi fod yn *proactive* wrth symud ymlaen i gael gwared ar y rhwystr yma? Mae yna awydd i helpu yn fan hyn, ac mae yna blant sydd angen y gefnogaeth.

some of the most vulnerable children in the world, and Wales is very eager to welcome them and to support them, and yet there seems to be a barrier in place somewhere. How much effort has been made by the Welsh Government to actually remove that barrier, and how proactive have you been as a Government in your discussions? Because it appears that Scotland are taking far more; perhaps that barrier isn't in place in the same way there. If you haven't been able to be proactive to date, can you be proactive moving forward so that we can remove this barrier that seems to be in place? Because there is a desire to help here, and there are children that certainly need our support.

[128] **Carl Sargeant:** Well, I'm slightly surprised at the tone of the question that the Member raises. I'm not sure that was intentional, but the fact is that suggesting that we are presenting barriers here in Wales is something that—

[129] **Sian Gwenllian:** No, no, not—

[130] **Carl Sargeant:** If you let me finish—.

[131] **Sian Gwenllian:** There is a block. What I'm saying is that there is a block somewhere in the system, and I'm suggesting that maybe there is a responsibility on Welsh Government to understand what that block is, and to try its best to remove that block, so that the passage is much smoother. What I'm saying is that not being proactive may be at fault here.

[132] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes, well, we absolutely are proactive in terms of the offer to the UK Government to say, 'Look, welcome to Wales.' We've introduced a welcome to Wales pack on the basis that we are ready for people to come here, to understand what we can do—we have great services in place. I'll ask Alistair to come in on very specific issues on this, but there is certainly not a Welsh element that we see as a provision that's stopping people coming to Wales. We've made the offer, the UK Government are the

body that place people across the UK, and they've chosen to place in Scotland as opposed to Wales. I don't know why that is the case. I don't think it's a specific issue, it's just the case that they have—. I can't answer the question; I don't know why they're choosing Scotland as opposed to Wales. But, it is—.

[133] **Sian Gwenllian:** That's what I was asking. Can you try and find out what the answer is to the question? Why is there a block? Because then, if we knew why there was a block, we could move things along.

[134] **Carl Sargeant:** Alistair, I don't know if you've got anything to add.

[135] **Mr Davey:** Thank you, Cabinet Secretary. It's quite a fluid situation. I chair the children's sub-group and we've done a lot of work over the last, probably, eight or nine months on this. The Cabinet Secretary just agreed funding of £350,000, which will go out across Wales to regions to support how we build capacity and capability, because I think this does vary across Wales. There are some areas that have a tradition and have, over the years, taken a number of children, particularly around Cardiff and Newport, and it's about building on that expertise, building the expertise of social workers across Wales, about further recruitment of foster carers. So, I wouldn't say there's a blockage, I think there's something about how we build our capacity and capability. The Welsh Government has also recently recruited a strategic lead to help us do this, and I know the Home Office have also provided funding of £60,000 to the WLGA to support a national co-ordinator. I think part of this is a fluid situation, part of it is about how we build capacity.

[136] We continually have spontaneous arrivals across Wales, and it's not always easy for us. That 27 figure is a snapshot; those numbers rise, children come in and they can quickly be disbursed elsewhere across the UK. So it's an issue about, we have responded, we're working with all the key players—with local government, with health—to make sure that we are ready in Wales. We have made offers, sometimes these offers haven't been taken up because the type of children that they want to send to us suddenly changes, and then we have to look at our offer about whether we can respond to that age group that might suddenly require those services. So, we're working now on a more strategic approach across Wales, a regional approach, about how we build that capacity and how we share that knowledge to substantially increase the numbers in the future.

[137] **Carl Sargeant:** Can John just add a piece on that as well, Chair?

[138] **Mr Davies:** Just to expand on that, there was also, obviously, an emergency situation with the Calais children in particular. I think that, roughly, 700 children were repatriated to Britain, but there was a pause in that process when the French Government moved people from the camp to other centres within France. My understanding is that that process has meant that, from then on, there hasn't really been the repatriation of children. So, there is a blockage there in France, if that makes sense. The UK Government is waiting for more children to be settled in Britain.

[139] That could be one of the reasons why the Home Office hasn't taken up offers of placements in Wales, but of course, there continues to be the situation where local children in Wales also need placements within local authorities. So, Welsh local authorities aren't able to keep those placements open indefinitely; there are local children who need them as well. So, where local authorities have made those offers, if they've not been taken up in a reasonable amount of time, they've had to then offer them out to other people. It's a situation where we're reliant on the UK Government to respond as quickly as they can to an offer of a place, and that's been an issue in some cases.

[140] **John Griffiths:** Bethan.

[141] **Bethan Jenkins:** Can I comment on this, quickly? It just seems to me that the Cabinet Secretary is saying something a little bit different to your colleague, because you've said, Mr Davey, about the fact that there may not be the capacity in certain areas, whereas it seems to me that the Cabinet Secretary is saying, 'Well, there isn't an issue, but we were just waiting for the UK Government.' So, is it the case that there may be some circumstances where you wouldn't be able to take on a certain child because of their individual challenges and that that, then, would mean that the UK Government would decide to send them to Scotland or another place, because of that situation, but with the new money that may change?

[142] **Carl Sargeant:** My comments were very general and they're based upon the evidence that was given by the WLGA to me when I met them: there are 22 authorities that are openly and willingly able and wishing to take young people across Wales. I think Alistair's points were very specific about the fact that some of the needs of the children who are seeking replacement sometimes are very specialist. We've recently had a case where there has

been a young person with a very serious heart defect, and that is something that we have to consider—the ability to manage that and where the placement is. These are considerations that we have, but as I said earlier, I stand by that principle that Wales is open and ready for business. It's all defined by what the throughput from the UK Government is. And the additionality of the additional support—the £350,000 for additional support for social workers and training—gives us more capacity in the system to be able to deliver more, as and when that's required.

[143] **Bethan Jenkins:** Okay, thanks. We'll keep an eye on that. My second question was with regard to mental health, because we had one witness who was saying, quite shockingly, that many of the children who arrive here have sexually transmitted diseases because of the way in which they've been treated along the way. They've allegedly been with caring people, but obviously they've found out that they haven't been and that's been really destructive to those young people. So, obviously we've had discussions in other committees about child and adolescent mental health services and how pressured they are; how are you then dealing with these severe mental health problems that some of these children will present with, upon arriving in Wales, and how can they then be helped and treated accordingly?

[144] **Carl Sargeant:** My earlier point was about the lead-in time for this and understanding who is coming to Wales, what their needs are, socially, physically and mentally, and how we can define the right placement for that person. I think that what we try to do is ensure that, when we receive some very vulnerable young people here, in a new country, on their own, we're able to wrap around the provision of services for them. And that's why it's really important that the UK Government is able to signpost, early on, which provisions are required.

[145] Going back to my earlier comment about the ability of Wales to take in young people, the general principle is that we're ready, across Wales. But when we have some very specific cases that are very high need, some of those cases that you perhaps refer to may not be suitable for a placement in a very rural environment, because access to mental health services or to clinical services quickly is more pressured.

10:30

[146] So, we have to understand who's coming and where's the best placement for that individual. That's something that the co-ordinators, the

team, are working on with the additional funding, with the UK Government, as and when the UK Government have potential young people coming to our communities. But I recognise that these young people—

[147] **Bethan Jenkins:** So that the money would go into mental health as well, or just—

[148] **Carl Sargeant:** Well, the £350,000 is a matter for the local authorities, about how they wish to—

[149] **Bethan Jenkins:** So they can decide.

[150] **Carl Sargeant:** —how they wish to spend that. That's what this working group is for. So, we believe that we provided funding for that process, but it is trying to understand who's coming. That's a really important feature, and in particular, as much detail as we can, or as possible—so, papers, understanding who they are and where they're from, what their journey and life experience has been. These are really important factors, but when they're missing, that's a huge challenge for our teams across Wales, or across the UK, about how we support these young people who are often very severely traumatised by their experience.

[151] **Bethan Jenkins:** Quickly, what's the £60,000 for?

[152] **Carl Sargeant:** The £60,000—

[153] **Bethan Jenkins:** The £60,000 you said was from the Home Office. What's that specifically for? Does it just go into the pot on top of the—?

[154] **Carl Sargeant:** Alastair.

[155] **Mr Davey:** That specifically will go to the WLGA, and that's for the appointment of a US national co-ordinator for Wales. That money's gone straight to local government.

[156] **Bethan Jenkins:** US?

[157] **Mr Davey:** Oh, UASC—unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Apologies.

[158] **Bethan Jenkins:** I had some vision of American intervention there as

well. Okay. Thanks for that.

[159] **John Griffiths:** Okay. Just a further couple of questions on these issues from me, Cabinet Secretary. A guardianship service has been suggested to us as a valuable way of dealing with the issues involved, and indeed in Scotland, when we visited there, it seemed to be working very well. Is that something that you've considered for Wales?

[160] **Carl Sargeant:** We're conscious of the Scottish guardianship scheme. Two elements of this: we've got the advocacy programme, which we have here in Wales. Also, we are one of the test areas for the independent child trafficking advocates service, which is funded by the Home Office, which does some very similar work. It's not directly related to unaccompanied asylum seekers, but there is some work that is closely aligned, and we're just seeing how that pans out, really—whether those two pieces of work with the advocacy service and the ICTA work closely enough together that we don't need a guardianship scheme. It's something that I haven't written off, but it's something that I'll give further consideration to as we move forward. It's understanding whether what we've got is working or not.

[161] **John Griffiths:** Okay, and finally from me, you mentioned capacity to deal with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children coming to Wales and social workers, for example. We heard evidence that, as far as age assessments are concerned, there are issues inasmuch as social workers might not have the necessary experience and expertise to carry out those assessments. Is that something that you recognise and, if so, will it be addressed?

[162] **Carl Sargeant:** Well, the funding that we've provided—the £350,000 that's gone into the system—will be operated by the WLGA, the Wales strategic migration partnership. Again, if they think there is a deficiency in the skills allowing people to look at age definition, then they could use that funding to support them in that process. I certainly don't support the process that Andrew R.—what was his name?

[163] **John Griffiths:** David Davies.

[164] **Carl Sargeant:** That he referred to in recent press correspondence.

[165] **John Griffiths:** Indeed. Okay. We move on, then, to community cohesion and integration, and Janet Finch-Saunders has a question.

[166] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** Yes. What are your views on the Casey review, first of all? There's been good practice in Scotland.

[167] **Carl Sargeant:** Well, our review of our policies currently, through our strategic plan, will take evidence on the basis of your committee, what you come up with in your recommendations, and our evidence of understanding what's actually happening on the ground. I've seen the Casey review. We'll feed into the recommendations of that and our responses to that. I think there are two elements that I agree with. I said earlier on that the English language is an important one, and certainly the one around the ability to not be isolated. So, integration is an important one too. But we work in Welsh Government on the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, about the ability to plan for the future for all people who live in Wales, and that's something that we will pursue. I think Casey said some very obvious things, and we have to deal with that. But, as I said earlier also, I think Wales is in a very different place to what's happening in other parts of the country as well. We are, generally, a very welcoming community across Wales, and we should be very proud of that.

[168] **Janet Finch–Saunders:** A query and a concern I have at the moment is clearly the two-tier system. We've heard it so often from people working to support people coming in. But if we're going to do this, I want to do it where we all welcome and we do it in a transparent, open manner, and brave, and we're not ashamed in any way to be supporting refugees. I've written to my local authority to ask—because each local authority is taking a number—how many refugees. I've had no response. And I've asked what support and what assurances I can have that they are able to access—. No response. And I just find—. Really, we should all be upfront and honest about what we're doing, because we talk about perception and how people are welcomed into a community, but it has to be very open and transparent. And I shall be writing back to the head of service today to ask the question again, because I think those are questions that could be posed in the community, they could be posed in the—and we should be upfront and say, 'Yes, these people are receiving—. There are no barriers; we're proud and pleased to be supporting these refugees.' Otherwise, they're not going to be integrated into society—well, certainly not as I would expect.

[169] **Carl Sargeant:** I can't respond as to why your local authority hasn't responded to you, but I'll just—. We have to have an air of caution as well, because there are some very vulnerable people in our communities, and

refugees and asylum seekers are of them. I absolutely agree: integration at the appropriate time and support for them is an important process, but it is a lot about mixed messages and often about media hype and individuals who will say something that's inflammatory, which is really unhelpful. The difference between economic migrants and refugees is huge, and I think we should be very careful about the language that individuals use when describing people who are seeking refuge in a different country because of the persecution, often, that's happened in their own life. What I wouldn't want to do, for the sake of openness and transparency, is put vulnerable people at risk, so it would be with caution.

[170] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** No, no, I think you're misunderstanding the point I'm trying to make. It's about—we should be seen to be upfront and supporting them and actually saying that we're supporting them, not—. I think, at the moment, there is a bit of—. Could you tell me how many families or how many individuals have been—that Conwy County Borough Council—? The numbers are supposed to be there and distributed.

[171] **Carl Sargeant:** I don't have those numbers in front of me, but I will be able to provide them.

[172] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I'm sure you could let me know.

[173] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes, but I'm not sure why your local authority won't tell you.

[174] **John Griffiths:** Could I just come in at this point, Cabinet Secretary, just to ask about how public perception might be shaped, because when we were up in Scotland, we heard that there was quite effective media coverage for asylum seeker and refugee issues, and there was some proactivity amongst different agencies and so on in Scotland to try to help shape public perception and get the positive messages over? Is this something Welsh Government is considering: a media strategy of some sort, to get the right messages and factual information over?

[175] **Carl Sargeant:** Well, there is a sub-group of the board that looks at communication plans, to make sure that we are articulating the right messages. We do not have control over the media; often, our media outlets are controlled by some of the London press, which is interesting. I think it's incumbent on us all, as Janet said earlier, to be positive about the experiences that other cultures can bring to Wales, and, again, we've got a

long history of this. We invest an amount of money in the Welsh Refugee Council to do work with us on a programme. This year, I think they've exceeded the outputs we were seeking. I think we asked for three programmes and I think they've done five, which is impressive. But it is incumbent on our communities to be, as they have been and as demonstrated by the United Nations commissioner, very welcoming, very open, but there are certainly still some individuals who seek to perpetuate hate and unwelcoming comments to individuals who are highly vulnerable.

[176] **John Griffiths:** I think what we heard to some extent in terms of media coverage, Cabinet Secretary, is that there may well be difficulties with UK national media but, of course, there are local newspapers, there are Welsh-based media of different types, and it is possible to be proactive and to get the right messages over. Perhaps you might, after today, furnish the committee with some details as to the sort of work that's going on, and perhaps what the outputs have been from the Welsh Refugee Council programmes.

[177] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes, happy to do that, Chair. I think it is about the media outlets and how they see this. I must say, we've had some very good coverage from the *Western Mail* and the reporting that's happened in that about positive comments about how the integration of families and individuals has happened in Wales. Again, I pay tribute to the reporting of that.

[178] **John Griffiths:** Okay. And Jenny.

[179] **Jenny Rathbone:** There does seem to be some difference of approach there between different voluntary organisations, because Oxfam told us in their evidence that they thought that there was more we could do to promote the positive role that asylum seekers and refugees can play in our society, whereas Trinity church said that although they produced this excellent little brochure that describes the journey that people had had to go on in order to come here, they decided not to even have a press launch in any way because they were nervous about malevolent coverage, if you like. So, I think there's a less confident approach in Wales by some of the organisations, including possibly the Welsh Refugee Council compared with the Scottish Refugee Council. I think it would be interesting to see exactly what the Welsh Refugee Council is being asked to do here, because they've got this good practice guide and I just wondered how well it has been promoted and given people the hand-holding they need to be confident.

[180] **Carl Sargeant:** I'll try and—. Well, I will give the committee some more details following this evidence session, Chair, about the work of the Welsh Refugee Council. I think it's in our nature—it's how Welsh we are—we naturally get on with it. We just do these things, and I think that's what happens in our communities. We see each other as human beings, irrespective of our colour, race, creed, and I think that's a very unique Welsh feeling. Again, the proof is in the pudding here. When we get inspectors coming in to ask what's happening on the ground, we're doing okay.

[181] **Jenny Rathbone:** I agree, we are doing okay. It's interesting that Robert Goodwill in his letter admits that in England, certainly from the Government perspective, they do not make any attempt to integrate people until they've got refugee status, which is a completely different approach than in the devolved administrations.

[182] **John Griffiths:** I think just before you go on, Jenny, I think one of your officials, Cabinet Secretary, wanted to come in at this point.

[183] **Ms Howell:** I just wanted to add that we have been working with the communications sub-group, particularly around a positive statement for Wales. This is something that we'll be issuing shortly, once the Cabinet Secretary's had an opportunity to look at it, and also some work around some positive case studies that we can disseminate as to work in Wales. So, that just gives you a flavour of some of the work that we're taking forward at the moment.

[184] **Jenny Rathbone:** That's excellent. I look forward to that. I just wanted to ask about something different, which is the work in progress to enable Wales to commit to be a nation of sanctuary. Aled Edwards told us about the seven steps to sanctuary manifesto that the Welsh refugee—so many of these different organisations have similar names—but, anyway, a coalition, have issued. And I just wondered if you could tell us where you think we are on that journey.

10:45

[185] **Carl Sargeant:** I would really like to positively say that we absolutely agree with this principle. The principles are fine, but the problem is within the detail, because some of these functions are non-devolved to us, so we can't have that status. If there's any way that we can take some of those

steps out and have the status, then I'd be happy to celebrate that with you, because I think we actually are a nation of sanctuary, but the details in the document are prohibitive because some of those functions aren't devolved and are not a responsibility of ours, so we're unable to act on them.

[186] **Jenny Randerson:** So, as far as you're concerned, all the ones where you do have powers, you feel that we're embracing the issues—

[187] **Carl Sargeant:** The principles, absolutely.

[188] **Jenny Randerson:** The principles, yes. Thank you.

[189] **John Griffiths:** Okay. Rhianon, did you have a question?

[190] **Rhianon Passmore:** I really want to ask something that's probably passed, but in terms of community cohesion—if I link it to that—we talked about that 27 number of looked-after children and unaccompanied asylum seekers. It's really about the tracking around that in terms of them being a very vulnerable group, if I may, Chair. We talked about the Calais dispersal and the numbers, the huge numbers of children, who have just disappeared. Are we confident in Wales that our systems are fit for purpose, in terms of how we manage that tiny amount of known unaccompanied asylum-seeker children? And are we confident, in terms of our knowledge that looked-after children do abscond, that this particular group is not going to be targeted? So, are our systems fit for purpose?

[191] **Carl Sargeant:** I'm not going to say that I'm absolutely confident that nothing's going to happen here. I can say that we are doing our utmost with all the organisations. Indeed, I met with the police and crime commissioner and the assistant chief constable, who has an all-Wales responsibility for missing persons, this week, to talk about the systems we have in place. I've got David Melding who is looking at looked-after children for me. I said to you earlier that I see unaccompanied asylum-seeking children as potentially a vulnerable group. I may ask David to include a piece of work, just making sure that we are confident that we have got that covered as well. There's work to be done around missing children and occurrences—we're onto that. But I don't see that these young vulnerable people are any different to our other local young vulnerable people, and I would expect the same service to be applied.

[192] **John Griffiths:** Okay. Cabinet Secretary, thank you for that. One final

question in terms of community cohesion and the co-ordinators: they're supporting the Syrian refugee resettlement programme—we note from your evidence—do they support integration for those who arrive spontaneously?

[193] **Carl Sargeant:** They don't. There's no direct action for them to take place, but once the spontaneous introductions have been made, that's when they would start to use their knowledge around what their community cohesion processes are. They spread best practice across our communities, so they're not early intervention officers, but they work on a more strategic basis across our regions.

[194] **John Griffiths:** Okay. Thank you very much for that. Joyce, finally.

[195] **Joyce Watson:** Just one final question, really. We all know we're in an election year in terms of local government. We've also seen the misuse of refugees by UKIP in their electioneering last year. So, I suppose my question to you is: I'm old enough to remember the very first image of a child in Vietnam, and how that changed perception, and how suddenly people opened their arms and welcomed people, and realised, for the very first time, that people were in need, and people were compassionate. And we will all remember that dreadful image of that child on the beach in Greece, but they've been superseded—this is the problem—by the misuse and abuse of people queuing up on our borders by UKIP.

[196] So, I suppose my question to you, Minister, is whether you will have a word with your colleague in local government, in this election year, to try to spread the good messages we've heard about today widely, when people are out campaigning, because that's a real opportunity to do that, rather than taking the opposite opportunity to be negative about people who are absolutely desperately in need.

[197] **Carl Sargeant:** I don't think I need to add anything to that, Chair. I note the Member's comments and I will, obviously, talk to my colleagues. There is great cross-party support for the issues around refugees and asylum seekers, in most parts. There is no room for hate in politics, and we should all, collectively, irrespective of our political persuasion, support that principle. But I'm very grateful for the Member's comments.

[198] **Joyce Watson:** Thank you.

[199] **John Griffiths:** Thank you very much, Cabinet Secretary, to you and

your officials for giving evidence to the committee today, and for answering our questions. You will be sent a record of your evidence to check for factual accuracy, in the usual way. Thank you very much indeed.

10:52

Papurau i'w Nodi Papers to Note

[200] **John Griffiths:** Okay. Our next item, then, item 3, is papers to note. We have a number of papers to note. Is committee happy to note them all? Jenny.

[201] **Jenny Rathbone:** Could I ask about item 3.1, which is additional information from Siân Summers-Rees of City of Sanctuary? Could you just tell us how that information was provided? Because it's a bit vague, the information—it doesn't provide us with the detail that the Cabinet Secretary quite rightly asked for.

[202] **John Griffiths:** By e-mail, I'm told.

[203] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay, but it's no use saying there was an issue of bedbugs—it's like, when, on what date? And when you say it's too long to clear it up, you know—

[204] **John Griffiths:** Shall we follow it up, and ask for further information?

[205] **Jenny Rathbone:** Yes. I just think, otherwise, we're in danger of letting hares run and, instead, we need to be completely precise. Because I think that it was helpful to have Clearsprings's response before the meeting today, and I think precision and accuracy is essential in all of this.

[206] **John Griffiths:** Okay. We'll go back to them and seek that further information, Jenny. And, if you want to liaise with the committee clerks, as to exactly what further information you'd like, that's fine.

[207] **Jenny Rathbone:** Yes, thanks.

[208] **John Griffiths:** Okay. Any other issues on any of the other papers to note, or is committee happy to note all the others? Joyce.

[209] **Joyce Watson:** Was the Clearsprings response that we had this morning—is that one of the ones?

[210] **John Griffiths:** No, it's not included in papers.

[211] **Joyce Watson:** No, no, I've got it—I've printed it. Because the thing in there that I've noted is on the last page, second sentence—I was trying to show it to you, Jenny, when you were asking the question.

[212] **John Griffiths:** Perhaps, Joyce, as it's not listed in our papers to note, which we're dealing with under this item, we could deal with it in the informal meeting later. Is that okay?

[213] **Joyce Watson:** Okay. That will be fine.

[214] **John Griffiths:** Okay. Thanks very much for that then.

10:53

**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**

Cynnig:

Motion:

*bod y pwyllgor yn penderfynu that the committee resolves to
gwahardd y cyhoedd o weddill y exclude the public from the
cyfarfod yn unol â Rheol Sefydlog remainder of the meeting in
17.42(vi).*

*accordance with Standing Order
17.42(vi).*

Cynigiwyd y cynnig.

Motion moved.

[215] **John Griffiths:** Item 4, then, is the motion to resolve to exclude the public for the remainder of the meeting under Standing Order 17.42. Is committee happy to do so? Thank you very much. Okay, we will move into private session.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 10:54.
The public part of the meeting ended at 10:54.*