

TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL EVIDENCE

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN BEFORE
FINANCIAL INCLUSION COMMISSION

THE NORWEGIAN CHURCH ARTS CENTRE, HARBOUR DRIVE, CARDIFF CF10 4PA

FRIDAY 9 JANUARY 2015

MS RACHEL DODGE AND MS CLARE JAMES

Oral Evidence

Taken before the Financial Inclusion Commission

Members present

Chris Pond MP (In the Chair)

Laurie Edmans

Dame Mary Marsh

Jennifer Duncan and Lisa Stidle, in attendance from the Commission

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Ms Rachel Dodge**, Financial Capability Project Manager, Colleges Wales, and **Ms Clare James**, Senior Money Advisor, Community Housing Cymru, gave evidence.

Chairman: Thank you both for joining us. We really appreciate it. My name is Chris Pond and I am acting as the Vice Chair of the Financial Inclusion Commission. I have Dame Mary Marsh and Laurie Edmans here as the other commissioners.

[Housekeeping remarks]

Let me give you some context. The Financial Inclusion Commission has been set up as an independent, non-party-political commission. We have representatives from the three main UK political parties represented, together with some experts, who are sitting either side of me here. The purpose is really to try to get the whole issue of financial inclusion up the agenda and onto the radar screen in the run-up to the May 2015 General Election, with the context that the Financial Inclusion Taskforce, which came to an end in 2011, achieved a lot in taking this forward this agenda. Quite a lot of has happened since 2011, much of it not necessarily beneficial, and our concern is that, while a lot has been achieved – particularly in the area of basic bank accounts – in other respects the problem of financial exclusion has got worse.

That, then, is our agenda. It is generously funded by MasterCard but with no influence whatsoever from a commercial basis. It is totally independent. That is the context and I have to say that our focus is very much at this stage, because we are galloping up to that election, so we want to have

some really hard, punchy proposals to try to get into the manifestos. Our focus is very much on what we do about the problem and a bit less in terms of trying to go over the old ground of what the problem is, which many of us recognise although it does vary from one part of the UK to the other.

Could I ask you first, if you would not mind, to briefly give us your perspective on the issue and what we should be doing about it? We then have some questions for you.

Ms Dodge: I am the Financial Wellbeing Consultant for Colleges Wales. Colleges Wales is a representative body for 15 further-education colleges in Wales, but the main part of my role is that I am the Project Manager for the Money for Life programme for Wales. Money for Life is a UK-wide money-management programme. The programme has two aspects to it: Money for Life qualifications and the Money for Life Challenge. We offer fully funded money-management qualifications to community support workers, and we are committed to accrediting 4,000 individuals by 2017 across the UK. The Money for Life Challenge gives grants of £500 to 16-14-year-olds to run money-management projects within their communities.

Research has shown that low levels of financial inclusion are associated with low levels of financial capability; therefore, College Wales is committed to offering support in financial capability to our organisations as well as the wider community. That, then, is the angle that I am coming from: that financial capability is very much linked to financial inclusion.

Ms James: I am slightly worried because I have utilised my full five minutes.

Ms Dodge: That is fine, Clare. You can do all the talking today – I would really appreciate that.

Ms James: I am from Community Housing Cymru. I am a Policy Officer. I was initially brought in six or eight years as a Financial Inclusion Officer. We are the membership body for housing associations in Wales. Our members provide over 155,000 homes across Wales and work closely with local government, third-sector organisations and the Welsh Government to provide a range of services in communities across Wales. In 2010, we formed a group structure with Care & Repair Cymru and CREW to jointly champion not-for-profit housing care and regeneration.

Our members provide homes to some of the most vulnerable people in our communities, many of whom are financially excluded and at risk of homelessness and social exclusion. Our members undertake huge amounts of preventative work, which is often core funded. They run many anti-poverty and financial-inclusion programmes. They work in partnership with local authorities,

credit unions, Moneyline Cymru, the Your Benefits are Changing campaign, Citizens Advice Bureaux and NIACE Cymru, to mention just a few, to deliver well-rounded accessible services.

We estimate that social-housing tenants make up around 60% of all financial excluded individuals, who are, therefore, likely to have low levels of financial capability. We would say that we see ourselves very much as key partners in tackling financial exclusion. Members offer things like in-house money advice, digital skills and training and equipment, and financial capability, employment and skills programmes, many of which are delivered within highly creative programmes. For example, we know that under-25s are more likely to experience tenancy failure than any other age group, so there is a project called MyPad, which includes all of the housing associations in Newport, plus the local authority. It trains young people to mentor other young people to make informed decisions about their finances and about their living situation.

The issue that has recently brought the level of financial exclusion in Wales into sharp focus for stakeholders and service-users is welfare reform and Universal Credit. This is demanding a much greater level of financial capability from benefit recipients now, which we recognise. As an organisation, we have used the changes brought about by welfare reform to engage with people. We set up the Your Benefits are Changing campaign, which is an awareness-raising campaign with a phone line that offers support and advice that underpins that awareness-raising. We target the most vulnerable and use change as a lever for engagement. We very much see this as our formula going forward.

We attended many community days last year, and our aims now are to run a Wales-wide communications campaign to provide geographical consistency and reach the hardest-to-reach communities. In a lot of rural communities, it is not just about transport but there is a whole range of issues, including digital exclusion. It is the most excluded that we are reaching, and we were very successful.

I have some recommendations, but maybe I will hang on, unless you want them now.

Q. Chairman: Let us have them now, perhaps from both of you, and then we can open it up to a wider discussion.

Ms James: What we are finding, especially with more people moving into work, work poverty is a real, growing concern for us. We need more funding to target those people, because there is probably a perception that those people in work are more financially capable. The fact of the matter

is that, with Universal Credit and with their income, they are managing two income streams. It could be a recipe for a disaster.

Rural areas are a massive issue for us. One of our suggested solutions is recreating the hubs that are in many towns and cities now, and using a bus to do that. We have already started doing that with Your Benefits and, this year, we want to link in with more partners to try to deliver a broader range of services. It could include health and all sorts of things.

A Wales Audit Office report was released yesterday, and we were partners in that. We knew it anyway but it confirmed that Wales is disproportionately impacted by welfare reform, so we would ask that we have more devolved powers to enable us to deal with that, so that we can really tailor that more towards Welsh communities.

Ms Dodge: The main recommendation is that further education should not be a forgotten sector. A lot of the financial-capability projects that we see across the UK, not only in Wales, focus mainly on primary- and secondary-school students, and I think it is really important not to forget that there is a big wealth of students out there who should not be forgotten.

One of the things that we are very grateful for is the work that we are able to undertake, because it is funded by Lloyds Banking Group. That is a major part of their corporate responsibility but, without that support, we would not be able to do the creative work that we are doing with young people. The Money Advice Service's recent report around young people really highlighted that, for young people, being good with their money is not seen as 'cool', although I do not think that 'cool' is the word that they would use these days.

Mr Edmans: It is probably 'sick'.

Ms Dodge: Well done, Laurie. I am very impressed with your knowledge. I think that programmes like Money for Life allow young people to engage with money management in a more creative way. Teaching financial capability in a classroom is not always the best way to engage with young people. I was out at a project yesterday, for example, with Charter Housing, where their young people are using their Money for Life grant to go into local tenants' houses to fit reflective panels behind their radiators. They were talking to them about how to be energy-efficient. Those young people who I spoke to yesterday might not realise that they were learning about financial capability, so being able to do it in a creative way is an extremely important way to engage with that age group. Like I said, however, we are able to do that only because the funding that we get for that

comes from corporate banks.

Chairman: Are you aware of the Student Money Manual?

Ms Dodge: Yes. There are wonderful things out there. I work very closely with the Money Advice Service, and I was on their working party for children and young people when they were looking to do their Financial Strategy, which is a really important document moving forward. It is amazing what is out there, and it may be a recommendation to really demonstrate what is available for young people to learn about financial capability and maybe have a site where you can look at everything that is available. There are fantastic projects out there that are working with lots of different age groups, so maybe drawing that knowledge together in one place would be really useful.

Q. Chairman: As a general question, before I throw it open to Laurie and Mary, one of the things has emerged from all of the sessions is that there is a bit of an irony here that the UK is a leader in financial services – it is a major part of our economy – yet we have such a big proportion of our population who cannot access those financial services. Would you agree with the proposition that the UK should aspire to be a leader in financial inclusion, just as it is a leader in the provision of financial services?

Ms James: Yes, I would agree with that, definitely.

Ms Dodge: Yes.

Chairman: It is a really tricky question.

Ms James: Yes. I will show my hand now: I was talking to Bill Hudson before I came in, and you will be speaking to him later on. I think we agree that, while banks may not be able to deal with financially excluded people themselves, the funding should be going to organisations that can. I do feel that, with a mainstream banker, there is a risk involved, and this could be dealt with by credit unions and organisations like Moneyline, which provides affordable loans.

Q. Chairman: In terms of that delivery mechanism, however, your belief is that the housing associations are an important mechanism for doing that. Is it because they are trusted or is it simply because they have the mechanisms for doing it?

Ms James: I think we have the customers. We definitely have the customer base. I think we are

trusted, for sure; however, there is still a huge gap there. One of the problems in promoting credit unions, which our members do, is one of consistency. I know that this is something that is being worked on, but it is a massive problem for us. We need to be able to promote a brand. We have members who work over several local-authority areas and their relationship is going to be different with each credit union. The services on offer often vary quite a bit. When they are publishing their newsletters, they need to be able to offer their tenants something consistent. It is a big problem.

Ms Dodge: I think it is about having choice and having knowledge about what choice is out there. Going back to the point on credit unions, I have been doing quite a lot of work with the Money Advice Service. We have been looking at how to promote credit unions and what they do a little more. Like Clare said, there is no consistency so there is not a standard offer from a credit union. It is maybe about doing it more on a localised basis. I have been encouraging local credit unions to work closely with their FE colleges, because that is a time when students are starting to think about financial products. They might not necessarily want to go to a bank, and there are other places that they can go to. It is all about starting to promote saving. It is not only about loans but about encouraging a nation of savers. Our FE students are most probably at the ideal age to be starting to think about things like that too.

Ms James: Hopefully, you will already know or you will find out that there is a Credit Unions Wales brand out there, and there was a credit union advert too. I think it was called Front of the Queue. It is only in its infancy at the moment but it could take off quite well. It gives an umbrella to that shop front for people who might be confused about it.

With regard to savings, I have to mention Moneyline Cymru, which has been very successful at getting people to save. It fits in with this question of whether it is financial capability or financial inclusion. We have tailored a product, which has required very little capability from somebody to fall in with this, by using a crucial point of sale and tying up the loan payment with a small savings element. These are people who have never saved before. They get to the end of their loan repayment and they have some savings, which gives them another alternative to a loan option.

Mr Edmans: That is really interesting, because there are people out there who say, 'If people are in debt, they ought not to be saving.' By the sounds of it, you would not agree with that.

Ms James: No, I would not agree with that because I think that all of us here around the table are quite financially included and capable. We will have an emergency situation at some point in our

lives and perhaps it is necessary to get into debt. Is it okay for us to do that? If somebody's washing machine breaks down, or the children need a new pair of shoes, is it right to make that judgment? There is good and bad debt. It is about money management.

Ms Dodge: I think it is about having those open discussions about money, and I would say that that is a real challenge for us in this nation – and in many other nations – in terms of getting people to talk about that. Students have a really conflicting viewpoint when they want to go to university, because they are being told that that debt is good debt. We are trying to educate them about thinking around making an informed decision about taking that route within education. It is opening up a discussion. We have had quite a big increase in credit unions coming to us for our Money for Life qualifications, because they see that point of contact with a customer as a really good opportunity to be able to do some financial-capability discussions, even in the short term and talking about budgeting and asking, 'Have you considered looking at a budgeting plan?' I know that credit unions have seen that they needed something. I think they have talked about it as financial-capability first aid. They do not want to take the place of advice centres, where people who are in real trouble need to go and get qualified advice from people, but they do not see it as an opportunity, when they have a customer in front of them, to try to include some financial capability within that session too.

Q. Dame Marsh: I am interested in FE not being the forgotten sector, and you are winding your challenge across the whole of the UK, in Scotland and Northern Ireland as well as in England and Wales. A significant proportion of young people are connected to FE, even if it is part-time rather than full-time, so you have quite a considerable reach.

Ms Dodge: Fantastic reach, because we are even talking about people who do evening classes.

Dame Marsh: It is not just 16-18, but all ages.

Ms Dodge: That has a lot to do with it. I think people get a little confused about what FE is. A number of people will assume that FE is A-levels, and students going to college just to do A-levels. FE's reach, however, is massive.

Dame Marsh: There is a lot of vocational.

Ms Dodge: In many of our colleges in Wales, we have HE provision, so it is an expanding sector.

Dame Marsh: Do you have links with apprenticeships through FE?

Ms Dodge: Yes. We work very closely with the National Training Federation for Wales, which does a lot of workplace learning as well. A lot of our colleges cross over quite a lot of different work streams.

Q. Chairman: Maybe the evening-class model is an important one. There is a lot of focus in the policy and political debate about financial education in schools to some extent, and in colleges and in universities. What happens with those who have not gone through that process? Is there a way – maybe it is through the housing associations – in which you can reach people who have not had the opportunity of that financial education in schools? Is there something that could be done to try to reach out to the rest of the population?

Ms Dodge: I am very lucky within my role that I do a lot of work with housing associations and Community First groups in lots of different communities. I am very lucky that my employer allows me to have that outreach, because it is very important. I think we need to do a lot more joined-up thinking in terms of working together across sectors.

Ms James: We have excellent Community Engagement Officers and networks across Wales, which are always looking for that trigger. In terms of adult learning or any learning, there are the same issues for people who have poor skills levels. Life events tend to take over. Just because the great and the good have decided, ‘This is a good thing for you to learn and we think this is the right time for you to learn it’, it does not mean that the motivation or the time is there. It comes back to finding those triggers in terms of what the situation is, welfare reform being the current one. While we talk to people, they realise that they will have to go online. People are starting to go to the library, that being another story altogether in terms of funding for libraries.

Q. Chairman: It is the issue of teachable moments: when can you grab people’s attention?

Ms Dodge: If you put up a poster that says that you are going to run a money-management session, nobody will come. It is about thinking creatively around how you get people on board when talking about money.

Mr Edmans: I could not agree more. One of the other things I do is I chair the pension scheme for the Trinity Mirror Group. We hold our trustee meetings out in the locations where the people are. After we have a trustee meeting, we have a Meet the Trustees section. We had one in London

recently, where Trinity Mirror has 800 people. Four turned up for our Meet the Trustees session. Typically, this is worth 12-15% of their salary that we are looking after for them, and four people turned up. This is in a group that has the Maxwell legacy, so, if anybody is going to be interested in pensions, you would expect it would be the *Mirror*, but they do not even turn up and ask, ‘You really do have our money, don’t you?’ That is the question I would ask, but it is astonishing.

Ms James: You do have to move the mountain sometimes, I think.

Mr Edmans: It is getting people through the door in the first place.

Ms Dodge: Or going to them.

Mr Edmans: I would love to have more time to explore that because, once you have somebody talking about it, you are three quarters of the way to solving the problem.

Ms James: Moneyline is very effective at getting people through the door, because they want a loan, which is a huge incentive. They come and they may or may not get the loan, but, certainly if they do, they are then very receptive to new ideas, such as savings. Also, there is a Welsh Water scheme that they are able to get customers onto, if they are eligible, and that could mean an immediate arrears write-off of thousands of pounds that has been hanging over them for a number of years, and also an immediate reduction in their monthly outgoings. It is about finding the trigger. Going back to what you said about the debt situation, and good and bad debt, I do feel that, for many people who have come in to Moneyline, a loan has been probably one of the best things that they have ever done. They have had their income maximised. Some of them have found out that they do not need a loan, because they were entitled to disability benefits.

Q. Mr Edmans: You are providers, so you have to run a viable financial entity, so you are putting the effort into doing financial inclusion. You must believe that that is cost-effective to do. Around this table, we all believe in it; otherwise, we would not be here. There are an awful lot of people who do not, and who think that this is nice-to-do stuff that do-gooders do. Do you have any metrics that would give a hardnosed businessperson or Treasury official evidence that –

Ms James: That this is working? I am not sure that we do now, and the reason for that is welfare reform and direct rent payments. The pilots have thrown things quite a bit. There are results from the demonstration projects that show things like staff ratios that came out from the reports, but something that we are working on as a sector is try to gather that data. At the moment, because

direct payments are not fully in place, we do not necessarily have that data. We are beginning to gather that data. What we want to be able to say to members is, 'If you invest this, you will get this out.'

Chairman: In the back of my mind, I think Mick McAteer, who runs The Financial Inclusion Centre, did a really useful piece of work on the benefits to housing associations of providing this financial-capability and financial-inclusion work.

Ms James: I think that was a little while ago.

Chairman: I think it was about two years ago.

Ms James: Yes. I think there is going to be interesting stuff around Universal Credit now, because, of course, this is a massive risk for the sector. It is fair to say that housing associations do work with the wider community as well, not just with their own tenants.

Q. Chairman: That is an interesting point. Do housing associations act as catalysts to provide a range of different services? We talked about hubs earlier on. Is that what is efficiently happening? Could there be more that is done on a consistent basis across the country?

Ms James: I think that that is happening. It is definitely happening in partnership with local authorities. The MyPad thing that I talked about is an example of that, so that is all social-housing providers coming together plus Supporting People. The hubs and buses that I talked about are run by housing associations, but they go out to whole communities. Moneyline Cymru was an innovative set up by housing associations, and Your Benefits are Changing. They are open to everybody and targeted at vulnerable communities rather than just housing-association tenants. There is, then, a lot of work going on and there is a lot more potential too for that to happen.

Q. Chairman: One of the issues here, it strikes me, is one of sustainability. The Lloyds programme – Money for Life – began when I was at the FSA, so it is some time ago. They have stuck with it and all credit to them for doing so. Are you confident that that funding will continue or are there other lifeboats out there? I do not want to raise a question about it if it is –

Ms Dodge: I think that they are highly committed to the programme. I do not have the figures here on the amount of money that they have invested. It is part of their Helping Britain Prosper plan, and the qualifications especially are a major part of that plan. As Clare said, we have been very good in

the past at gathering data on impact, but it has been very qualitative. It has been very much case-study work and people talking about the skills that they have, and we as programmers trying to get much more quantitative data about the impact of that. In terms of measuring impact across the board, more organisations are looking much more deeply into that and into ways that we can show how we are measuring impact. It is a challenge to organisations to do that well.

In terms of what we do try to do with the qualifications, if somebody from a housing association undertakes the Teach Others qualification, which is around trying to teach them how to put together money-management sessions for groups of people, we require them to monitor how many people they go out to and support with that. We are trying to look at that wider reach and at the impact on end-user, but that is always a delicate thing to do, because that end-user has not found out about that session through us as a programme, but down the line. We would like to find out a little more about the impact that we are having on that.

Mr Edmans: It is very difficult to do. If somebody changes their pattern, you do not exactly what –

Ms Dodge: We are, however, very committed to looking into how we measure impact as part of our programme.

Q. Dame Marsh: With your accreditation and training, a lot of Community Support Workers will be linked with housing associations. Where are the other sources of people who come for that training?

Ms Dodge: We have lots of volunteers from lots of different charities. We have members from Citizens Advice Bureaux and credit unions. This year, there has been a real interest from universities, with money-advice people within universities wanting to get that training too. It is getting a much wider reach. Traditionally, the bulk of our work was with housing associations, but it is changing an awful lot, because I think that people are finding that they have the opportunity to deliver financial capability within their own work. There is a wide reach of organisations that are doing that.

Q. Dame Marsh: Do you think is partly too because people are cautious about providing financial advice without feeling that they have adequate training and accreditation to do it?

Ms Dodge: Absolutely. It sounds a terrible thing to say but I think people tend to fall into finding that, as part of their role, they are doing that. It is people looking for that extra confidence. I think

the qualifications give them the confidence to be able to do that. We also have an online course called Teach Me, which is completely about financial capability, financial inclusion and financial exclusion. It is open access, so it can be used as a resource bank, not just as a qualification.

Dame Marsh: Do you do a top-up course for people who have been accredited? These things change all the time.

Ms Dodge: No, we have not yet. One of the things that we would really like to look into is helping parents. There is a real gap at the moment in terms of trying to help parents support their children with financial capability. The work with the Money Advice Service and the children and young people committee was fascinating because, for the first time, they started to look at that from a psychological point of view. They were seeing that financial capability needs to match the developmental stage that a child is at. Teaching a primary-school student about insurance or credit cards is pointless because, at that stage in their development, it is not going to be worthwhile to them. I think it is a really fresh way of looking at when the right time is to be teaching certain elements of financial capability.

Chairman: You talked about working with other organisations, including charities, and the FSA used to do some great work with Macmillan, for instance, with people living with cancer, or with their careers, and with MIND.

Ms Dodge: Absolutely. MIND is another one that is becoming very interested in the courses. Hafal, a Welsh mental-health association, ran three courses across Wales last year, in North Wales, Mid Wales and South Wales. They saw it as important for their employees to have that knowledge.

Chairman: It partly answers your question, Laurie, about what the payback on this. We know the relationship between debt and mental-health challenges, but we do not necessarily know in which direction that runs, and whether it is the debt that has pushed people into it or the other way around. We do know, however, that, if you can provide some sort of support, the cost of those mental-health problems diminishes significantly.

Ms James: What you said about roles was interesting, and about tagging a role onto a role. We recently went out to the sector, not long before Christmas, and asking Housing Officers what additional roles they were doing. We gave them things like welfare advice, basic money advice and debt advice. We had quite a good response and everybody said that they were doing in excess of three additional roles to their Housing Officer role. There was a report out from CIH earlier in the

year about the changing role of the Housing Officer, which is worth reading, but it is with welfare reform.

Q. Mr Edmans: I wonder if I could pick up a theme from that, which had not occurred to me before. I have made the admission that I have spent most of life in financial services, but I have tried to be a good person apart from that. I spent the most important part of my career doing pension schemes for small employers and people who worked for them, and spent a lot of time talking to the people who were members or potential members of the schemes. What I found – and I think the thing that brings me here with this interest today – is that I might have gone through the door wearing a hat saying ‘I am here to talk about pensions’ but, when I was sat in a room like this, with perhaps half a dozen people from a small business of whatever nature, you cannot have a conversation about pensions without talking about other things that are related to money. I think that that is just what I have heard is happening with you. If they are talking about housing, it does not happen in a vacuum. It happens in the context of their rest of their life, and the rest of their financial life. I do not know quite how we could bring this out from the Commission, but so many discussions about people’s finances are done in the silo of the mortgage, the pension or the debt, but people’s lives are not in those silos. That is why I asked the question about the debt thing and I was so pleased to hear your answer. It is just money.

Ms James: Interestingly, a lot of our members train their maintenance staff to pick up on issues too. If you know the Housing Officer or debt person is coming, that is your focus and that is your conversation. Some people might be a bit cagey about what they would say. Maintenance officers, however, are probably there when people are little more laidback and some of those problems are in evidence – the kids with no shoes or whatever it is. We have a number of housing associations who have done that.

Ms Dodge: I would say it is the same in education. I was a teacher for 18 years. Just because I was labelled as a psychology teacher did not mean that that was the only role that I did. I think that it is about ensuring that individuals can signpost. That individual might not have the expert knowledge to help that individual directly, but as long as they have the knowledge to be able to signpost who can, and I think that that is what is really important.

Q. Chairman: Is this not an issue about the requirement for inclusion in the curriculum? I know that, in Wales, you are much further ahead than England on this issue, but there is a question about whether teachers feel confident. We have the PFEG model, which is providing the training for the

teaching, and the Money Charity model, which is about sending people into schools and doing it.

Ms James: Bringing the experts in has to be the model. I know some of our members have done that. It is about sustainable tenancies. Personally, I think that that is a much better model, rather than a teacher who perhaps does not want to be teaching that subject.

Dame Marsh: To your point, Rachel, of, as a teacher, being alert to knowing where to refer to people who you know need help and support, I have lived in the world of safeguarding children, you do not expect the teacher to deal with that. You expect them to know where to send them to, and the same thing could apply in this case.

Ms Dodge: I was a Safeguarding Officer as well. Where do you stop with teacher education? I could have a very long list of things that I would like teachers to have a knowledge of. Mental health would probably be one of my top areas. I am also doing my PhD in Wellbeing, so that are lots of things that I would like to list, but I do not know if that is possible. It is about me ensuring that, within FE, my teachers and lecturers know about what Student Services have to offer, and that Student Services have that link to Citizens Advice Bureaux and other agencies out there. I do not think that we can assume or expect individuals to have all the answers to everything, because that is putting too much pressure on people and they would not have that specialist knowledge. I would agree with Clare that having people who can come in with that knowledge and, for young people, having a guest speaker is sometimes the best thing that you can do within that session.

The other project that I have worked on was the Barclays Money Skills project. There was a really lovely link there around having volunteers from Barclays visit the colleges while sessions were being undertaken. It did a real favour to the image of banks and people who work for them just having somebody from the local branch or somebody who was a Business Advisor. I remember meeting my bank manager. He came out to the college where I was working when we were doing our Barclays Money Skills week, and there was this ridiculous thought process of, 'Will he know what is in my bank account?' Of course he will not know what is in my bank account, but it is about the relationship that individuals have with banks. It was wonderful, and the knowledge that those individuals had really gave wealth to that session. The teachers were very grateful to have somebody who had that exact knowledge.

Ms James: It is also current. It is what happening right now.

Mr Edmans: How do you think the supply of that sort of resource compares with the level of need

for it?

Ms Dodge: For a business, how much can you commit to doing that?

Mr Edmans: It does link back to the question of what the ultimate financial benefit is. If you had one session like that, that would have been a great session. If you needed a million, it would not get you very far.

Ms Dodge: I think we need to be brave enough to realise that this is around prevention rather than waiting for people to be in trouble. It is going to take us a long time for us to get the data back from that brave decision to put the money into prevention, because that is not going to give an instant financial gain. Long term, I believe, it really will.

Mr Edmans: Do you think that there is enough of that? Lloyds, Barclays and other organisations are doing good things. What is the level of adequacy? Is it tokenism or is it more than tokenism?

Ms Dodge: I think it varies, but there is an awful lot available out there that people might not be aware of. It is about communicating what is available to different groups and ensuring that we have provision across everybody, not just specifically targeted to certain groups. Everybody will need that support at different points in life, so it is about ensuring that there is good coverage.

Mr Edmans: The time and money spent making people aware of that would not necessarily be wasted.

Q. Chairman: I wonder whether or not, Clare, that model you have talked about, where someone comes into schools or colleges, works for groups of tenants, where somebody comes in and talks about making the most of your money, as we used to call it. That was in workplaces, but what it work among groups of tenants?

Ms James: That is interesting, because that is something that we would like to do with Your Benefits are Changing: going to workplaces and speaking to those in work poverty about the changes. In terms of whether or not this works, I would say that housing associations are doing this all of the time. If I asked them what their number one issue with engagement was, they might say that they tend to see the same people, a little like parents' evening. It is not the well-behaved children's parents that you want to see. I think that that would be the main issue. There are more and more creative ways in which housing associations are engaging with people, and within the

sector we have people whose remit and role it is to do that. Monmouthshire Housing Association has done some fantastic work. Were you involved in that?

Ms Dodge: They do amazing stuff.

Ms James: The Financial Inclusion Officer, who went into post about the same time as me, started off doing the general financial-inclusion stuff and has just developed this whole programme now, right the way from basic skills and literacy into employment. There is a whole route that has been mapped, through skills in employment, education and volunteering. It has worked really well. She is working with NYAS on this.

Q. Chairman: You talked there about the role of the Financial Inclusion Officer, and we have heard that a number of other local authorities have those. If one of our recommendations were to be that every local authority should have a Financial Inclusion Officer, and perhaps, therefore, a Financial Inclusion Strategy, is that something that you think is workable and you would welcome?

Ms James: For housing associations that are already well-engaged with the process and who have already been doing that for many years, it would be really a most welcome development. That is because, in many areas, the financial-inclusion work is led by housing associations. It is going to be a lot easier to engage partners if the local authority is seen to be leading on it.

Q. Dame Marsh: Your focus is community housing. What is your connection with the wider housing sector?

Ms James: Social housing in general, and private.

Dame Marsh: Social housing first and then private second.

Ms James: We work in partnership with all of the local authorities that have not transferred their stock – many did. We are working in partnership with local authorities irrespective of whether they have transferred. There is a broad range of things: technical things for housing services to supply. We work with them on all these areas. In the private housing sector, it tends to be the good landlords who are already doing the work and who we are able to reach through the landlord network. This is a very big problem with financial inclusion, financial capability and poverty in general: reaching those landlords who are not engaging and who are probably bad landlords. If we could reach that sector, that would be great. We do try and we do work in partnership with Lee

Cecil, for example, to try to reach people.

Q. Mr Edmans: Could I connect that to something you said a moment ago? You said that the number one problem with engagement is that the Financial Inclusion Officers always see the same people. The question I would ask from that is: what would you do to increase the number of people? Trying to get through to disengaged landlords is one thing; are there other things that you would do?

Ms James: One of the places where we always engage and where people are very keen is tenancy sign-up. That is a really good way to engage with people. There are other very well-established routes, where it is absolutely necessary to engage with the Association and there is no way around it. It is more about the prevention side to things where we need to be –

Mr Edmans: What could you do to get more people –

Ms Dodge: I think Clare made a really good point. It is about being creative as well. One of our projects last year was from Cadwyn Housing in Cardiff. It was young tenants who had decided that they would put together a video about being good for money. They felt that that was a more effective way of communicating with people their own age. Maybe it was much more effective than putting together a workshop and inviting people in, and having only two people turn up. I think it is a good point that we have to try lots of different ways and be creative around how we try to engage with certain people.

Q. Mr Edmans: Where are you on digital? The English way to generate stuff is to put it on digital, but the problem is getting people to click on it and read it.

Chairman: It might be a different answer from each of you on that.

Ms Dodge: I would say that the young people I work with are much more digitally savvy than I am, most probably. I think Twitter has been one of the most useful tools within my job in terms of engagement. Young people seem to find that a useful way to engage. I cannot guarantee that, five years down the line, it is going to be the same, so it is about keeping up with what is current and useful. We get a lot of engagement through social media.

Ms James: We are finding the same with Your Benefits are Changing. It is now a really useful way to get to people. Trying to measure digital inclusion is quite tricky. One of the questions we ask

people is, 'Are you accessing the internet?' 'No'. 'Are you accessing Facebook?' 'Yes'. It may be about transferrable skills. We work on that basis.

Q. Chairman: Is that true in rural areas as well as in urban areas in terms of access to the internet?

Ms James: No, possibly not. I have some statistics here from my colleague who deals with digital exclusion, and she tells me that 73% of rural communities do not have community internet facilities. 79% do not have a library. I went to the library for the first time in years last night. I have such a choice of libraries to go to, plus a car to get to them. I was stood in reception asking, 'Which library is open and which one is staffed?' I cannot imagine not having those facilities. It is a big difference.

Q. Dame Marsh: To the point earlier about having multiple access to things like mobile advice centres and linking with health, there must be some smart ways of using where there are public services other than libraries – schools or health centres, for example. I do not know how you do it and how you overcome all the confidentiality issues that people worry about with open points of access.

Ms James: It would potentially still be a mobile or pop-up service, but it is possible.

Q. Chairman: I think we had better draw it to a close there, unless there are any other questions. This has been a really good session – thank you so much. You have given us a lot of food for thought. If there are other issues that you think you should have raised, or points you should have made, or specific data that you could pass on to us, that would be terribly helpful. It has been really useful. Is there anything else that you would like to say to us finally?

Ms James: Just to say that, if there is anything that you need clarification on, please let me know.

Chairman: Thank you.